

Get the Most from Your Bible

In verbal conversations you can ask others for clarification and elaboration so you can be sure you understand what they're trying to communicate. Books are more difficult to interpret. You can go only by what the author has committed to print. The Bible demands your full interpretive energies if you are to get the meaning just right.

When you read the Bible you are in a dialogue with a wide variety of human authors, but more important, with God. It is important to understand God's full intention.

How to get the real meaning:

- 1. Look for the author's intended meaning.** Each Biblical passage has an objective meaning intended by its author. Know who the author is and understand the time period and setting for his writing. The meaning of a text finally resides in the intention of God, its ultimate author. Don't try to stretch the text to fit your intent.
- 2. Get a grasp of the whole passage.** Don't treat a Biblical book as a collection of isolated passages. The meaning of the individual verses can be discovered only in the flow of the whole literary piece. If you are reading only a small passage of a particular book, make sure that you have a basic understanding of how the passage fits into the message of the whole book. When you read little bits and pieces of Scripture, you should exercise caution, otherwise, you might distort God's message. The ultimate context of any particular passage is the whole Bible. Learn to read in context by reading whole books of the Bible rather than just snippets. If you can sit down for two or three hours to read a novel, try doing the same with Isaiah or Acts.
- 3. Identify the genre.** The Bible is a cornucopia of literary types. There is history, law, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, gospels, epistles, and apocalyptic literature. When you know the type of literature you can understand it better and read it with that style in mind.
- 4. Consider the historical and cultural background of the Bible.** You need to read each book as if you were one of the author's contemporaries. Commentaries can fill in the blanks in terms of customs of that time period.
- 5. Pay attention to the grammar and structure within a passage.** Read each passage closely, noting how the thought of the author progresses. Serious grammatical and syntactical (structural) study must be based on the original languages. For this reason, it's helpful to have a copy of a literal translation, such as the New American Standard Bible, for serious study.
- 6. Interpret experiences in the light of Scripture, not vice versa.** It's easy to distort the Bible's meaning by allowing your experiences to shape your understanding of a passage rather than the other way around.
- 7. Always seek the full counsel of Scripture.** Even though the Bible is many books, it is also one book, with one story. Don't base doctrine or moral teaching on an obscure passage. If one passage seems to teach something, but another passage clearly teaches something else, seek to understand the difficult passage in light of the one that is easier to understand.
- 8. Scripture is CHRISTOCENTRIC ...** *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself.” (Luke 24:27)*