

## Tips for Reading the Bible\*

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- Before opening the Bible, always pray to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and guidance. Ask for help in accepting the Truth, particularly those truths that seem to conflict with your personal values and beliefs. The Holy Spirit loves to do this. It's His job. But you and I must be open to His movement within us.

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill us with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom.  
Strengthen us with Your heavenly grace, so that we may grasp with our  
minds, treasure in our hearts, and carry out in our lives all the teachings  
of Your Holy Book and Your Church that lead to salvation. Amen.*

- At first put aside the commentaries and books that tell you what the Bible means; read the Bible itself. The Bible is the most interesting book ever written, but many books about it are the duller books ever written.
- Read repeatedly. You can never exhaust the riches you will find in the Bible. The greatest theologians, the greatest saints, and the greatest philosophers never exhaust it; neither will you.
- First read quickly, to get an overall idea of the particular book or chapter. Then go back and read more slowly and carefully. Don't rush. Ponder, relish, meditate, think, question, and wade slowly into the verses that seem to invite you to swim in them.
- Try to read without prejudice. Don't impose your ideas and preconceptions on the author; let the author speak to *you*. Listen first; then respond.
- Once you've listened, do respond. Enter into a dialog with the author as if he were living and seated there with you. Ask him questions, and then return to his book to find the answers. Ask God questions. He's the greatest of teachers, and loves His students to ask questions.
- Don't confuse understanding with evaluating; that is, don't confuse interpreting with criticizing. First understand, then evaluate. This is not easy to do. For example, many people interpret the miracles described in the Bible as myths because they don't believe in miracles. This is bad interpretation. Whether or not miracles really happened, the first question is: what is the author trying to say? Is he telling a parable, a fable, or a myth? Or is he telling a story that he claims really happened? The second question is: do I agree with him? Don't let the second question come first. For instance, don't say, "I don't agree that Jesus really rose from the dead, therefore I interpret the resurrection as a myth." The Gospel writers did not intend to write myth, but fact. If the resurrection didn't happen, it's not a myth. It's a lie.
- Approach each passage by asking the following questions, in this order:
  1. What does this passage mean? How do I understand or interpret its meaning?
  2. Is it true? Do I believe it?
  3. So what? What difference does this make to me, to my life? What should I do about it?
- Look for the big picture, the main point. Don't get hung up on a few specific passages or points. Interpret each message in its context. [Note: this is where some commentaries can be especially useful; that is, placing the author and his words in context of time and place.]
- After you've read a passage, go back and analyze it. Outline it. Get it clear. Don't be satisfied with a vague sense of its meaning. Try to find and understand the structures of thought.
- Be honest! The Bible makes some great claims on you, more than any other book. There is only one honest reason for believing the Bible: because it's true – not because it's comforting or challenging or up-to-date or useful or relevant. If it were all those things but not true, you shouldn't believe it, if you are honest. Seek the truth. "Seek and you will find..." [Mt 7:7]. That's a promise!
  - Let the Bible speak to you and it will show you both God and yourself. To those He met, Jesus revealed both Himself and themselves. In the same way, when we read the Bible, it reveals both God and ourselves. We call the Bible the "Word of God," not only because God speaks to us through it, but also because it points beyond itself to the "Word of God," Jesus Christ. Only God's Word is the Living Word, His Son, Jesus Christ, and meeting Him is the point of the whole Bible (John 5:39), indeed, the point of our lives.