

Principles for Bible Study: Four Key Components

By: Greg Herrick Th.M., Ph.D.

1. The Issue of Receptivity: “The One Who Trembles at My Word”

On one occasion, while Jesus was speaking a message about the essential nature of the kingdom of God, he concluded with these cryptic words: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Mark 4:9). He said essentially the same thing as well to his churches in Revelation 2-3. He also complained that Israel had turned a deaf ear to his claims and ministry (Matt 13:15). As fallen people with a bent for evil we do not naturally listen well, in spite of the fact that we have been given two ears. We are even worse when we are asked to listen to a message which indicts us for sin, even if it offers restitution after repentance. We must humble ourselves deeply and thoroughly if we are ever to really experience the life transforming presence of God through his word. WE must be receptive to his message.

2. The Issue of Reading: “By Reading You May Have Insight”

In his letter to the Ephesians Paul encourages the churches to read what he has written so that “through reading they might understand his insight into the mystery of Christ” (3:4). The inference I wish to draw from this text is that the Bible is a book and as such must be read. While we must have a vital relationship with God through Christ to understand it properly, poor reading skills will hinder our comprehension of what God is saying. We should, as Christians and committed to Holy Scripture, develop our reading skills. The literacy rate among North Americans is woefully low, to say nothing of the paucity of good readers.¹¹

3. The Issue of Reflection: “And The Lord Will Give You Insight”

The key to transformation is meditation which means prolonged reflection on a passage(s) or truth in order to penetrate its meaning, relating it to other doctrines and life, and hearing God’s voice in it. Meditation is the bridge to meaningful obedience. Paul told Timothy to think seriously about what he [Paul] said and that the Lord would give him insight into it (2 Tim 2:7). Unfortunately, just about everything in our driven society mitigates against investing time in prayerful meditation. Nevertheless, God commanded Joshua to meditate on his word so that he could obey it and enjoy the blessing of success (Joshua 1:8).

4. The Issue of Relating: The “So What” Question

The issue is really one of blessing. The Bible was meant to be lived not just “figured out.” We must relate what we have learned—what the Lord has spoken to us about in meditation—to our lives and the lives of others. As James says, “Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says” (James 1:22).