

Required Reading

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One of the best ways to start studying Scripture is learning to read with an intent to understand. Many people read through a passage with the goal of getting it finished rather than taking the time to understand what they are reading. When we read to interpret or study, we should take our time, read and re-read to make sure we find all of the important details. Sometimes it helps to hear Scripture spoken as well as reading it because this gives us a different perspective. This can be done through another person or having the Scriptures on audio tape or CD.

One of the simplest and most effective ways of ensuring we understand a passage is to ask the questions common to a news reporter: who, what, when, where, why, and how. The process of answering these questions bring out the facts and the details needed to understand the passage. These basic questions can give us a rich supply of other questions to ask. What is the author's purpose in stating a point? Why was a certain example or illustration used? Which words are most important in a passage?

Another important outlook is what type of text one is reading. The Scriptures contain poetry, parables, contracts, history, commandments, prophecy, and more. How we read, interpret, and understand a passage will vary depending on the type of text being read.

Perhaps the most important aspect of reading to understand is making sure we find the proper start and end of the passage being studied. Misunderstandings and false doctrine go directly together with taking a small piece of Scripture out of context. Toward this end, we must keep in mind that the chapter and verse divisions in the modern bible are created by man and often do not line up with the thought(s) being given by the writer of the book. Furthermore, it is worth noting what the topics of discussion are just prior to and just after the passage being looked at as they may shed some light on where the author is taking the entire section as a whole. If the passage is being used to support a larger point, one may have to read a large section to understand how it relates to that point. Or if it is a primary theme, one may have to read the secondary themes that come under it to see how it is supported in it's entirety. If questions still persist, we can look to other passages of Scripture that talk of the same topic to see how other authors have dealt with the issue.