

## Reading the Bible Correctly: A Simple Guide for Thoughtful Readers

---

**"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a worker who...interprets the message of truth correctly." —2 Timothy 2:15**

If the Apostle Paul felt the need to give this counsel to Timothy—a young pastor who had traveled and worked alongside him—then this guidance matters for us too. The very fact that Paul spoke of interpreting truth *correctly* implies that there are also *incorrect* ways to interpret the Bible.

---

### The Bible is a Library, Not a Single Book

Before we open any page, it helps to remember what we're holding:

- **66 books** bound together as one
- Written by **more than 40 different people**
- Composed over **1,200 to 1,500 years**, ending around 90–100 A.D.
- Every book **originally addressed to people other than us**, in settings far different from our own

This simple recognition shapes how we read. We're not the first audience—we're reading mail written to someone else, by God's design preserved for us as well.

---

### Three Questions That Guide Faithful Reading

This isn't a new method we invented. Wise Bible students across the centuries have used some version of these questions to read Scripture with care.

#### 1. What did it mean to the writer and first readers?

This is where the work begins. God, who created our minds, didn't choose to teach us through bumper-sticker slogans. Understanding context takes effort—but that effort is part of how God shapes us. *John 3:16 means even more when we read the rest of John 3.*

#### 2. In what ways are we the same? How is my situation different?

Once we understand the original meaning, we can honestly ask: What human experiences, struggles, and hopes do I share with the original audience? Where does my context differ in ways that matter?

### **3. How can this story, prayer, or message apply to me?**

Only now can we faithfully bridge the ancient text to our present lives.

---

#### **Why the Sequence Matters**

We're often in a hurry. We want to jump straight to question 3—*What does this mean for me?*—without doing the work of questions 1 and 2.

But skipping ahead creates real risk: we might end up reading the message of truth **incorrectly**, hearing what we want to hear rather than what God inspired the human writers to communicate.

The three questions, taken in order, are simple. They're just not always easy. But they're worth the work.

---

*"Open my eyes so I can examine the wonders of your Instruction!" —Psalm 119:18*