

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE  
LESSON #2  
Teacher's Tip

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**Handouts:** Read section from *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* pgs. 212-215 - The Student, the Fish, and Agassiz.

David valued the Word more than gold. What would the martyrs have given for a leaf of the Bible! The Word is the field where Christ the pearl of price is hid. In this sacred mine we dig, not for a wedge of gold, but for a weight of glory. The Scripture is a sacred eye-salve to illuminate us. "The commandment is a lamp, and the law is light" (Prov. 6:23). The Scripture is the chart and compass by which we sail to the new Jerusalem. It is a sovereign cordial in all distresses. What are the promises but the water of life to renew fainting spirits? (Thomas Watson, *Body of Divinity*, pgs. 35-36)

**Outlining Ezra 7:10**

For **(Reason the Good Hand of the Lord Was upon Ezra)**

Ezra had set his heart	<b>(Key to Having God's Blessing Begins with the Heart)</b>
to study the law of the Lord,	<b>(Set Your Heart to Study)</b>
and to practice it [the law of the Lord],	<b>(Set Your Heart to Practice)</b>
and to teach His statutes and [His] ordinances in Israel.	<b>(Set Your Heart to Teach)</b>

**TEACHING OUTLINE FOR EZRA 7:10:**

**THREE THINGS YOU CAN DO IN ORDER TO RECEIVE GOD'S BLESSING**

- I. SET YOUR HEART TO STUDY GOD'S WORD**
- II. SET YOUR HEART TO PRACTICE GOD'S WORD**
- III. SET YOUR HEART TO TEACH GOD'S WORD**

# HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

## Lesson Two

### Context is King!

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In the first lesson we discussed the importance of determining the **literary type** or **genre** of any given passage we are studying. We also talked about the **historical context and setting** of the book i.e., the historical, social, and political times in which the book was written. We saw that discovering the **theme** of a book is also a valuable tool in helping us arrive at the right interpretation. We noted that the individual parts of a book are building blocks of the theme. We also talked about looking at an **outline of the book**. Outlines help you see how the book is structured and how your passage fits into that structure. In this lesson we will learn the crucial principles of **far and near context**.

#### I. THE IMPORTANCE OF "CONTEXT"

A. **Far Context** is similar to the theme but narrows down the field of study a little more. By "**context**" we mean what comes before and after a passage. The far context tells you:

1. How your passage fits into the overall theme of the book
2. How your passage fits into a larger section which fits into the theme
3. It may help you understand your passage by showing you what leads up to it or what comes after it
4. It may give you clues to how your passage might be interpreted more accurately

B. Examples:

1. The theme of **Genesis 12-50** is the sovereignty of God in the making of the nation Israel. God's sovereignty can be seen in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. The story of Joseph is found in **chapters 37-50**.
2. If you were studying, let's say **chapter 42**, your far context would be **chapters 37-50**. It would be very helpful to examine the entire section on Joseph before studying a smaller section within the Joseph section.
3. If you were studying **Eph. 5:18** your far context would be **chapters 4-6**, which all deal with the believer's walk. You would then be able to see how the Spirit filled life in **5:18** relates to the far context of the believer's walk found in **chs. 4-6**.

## II. NEAR CONTEXT

Near context is similar to far context but only those verses in the direct vicinity of the passage you're studying are considered. Near context is **CRUCIAL** to interpreting **ANY** passage correctly !!! If you were to rate all the Bible study principles from most important to least important, near context would be at the top as the most important hermeneutical (Bible study) principle. It is the King of all principles. It is to be given the most weight in interpreting any text.

### A. Examples:

1. The Mormons will try and tell you that Joseph Smith saw God the Father and Jesus in the forest. For a proof text they would refer you to **Ex. 33:11** which says, "***Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.***" That verse seems to clearly say that Moses saw God and spoke to him. But upon examination of the context and closer observation of what exactly is said, you discover something quite different.
  - a. First you notice the phrase "**just as**" and realize that this is a simile that is a comparison of something similar.
  - b. Second, you notice that the text doesn't say anything about "seeing" but the emphasis is on "speaking." The text never says "Moses saw God face to face."
  - c. Third you notice the near context of **verse 20** of the **same chapter** where God says, "***You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live.***" You conclude from this that Moses "spoke to God as a man speaks to his friend," but Moses did not "see God as a man sees his friend" because no man can see God and live. So it is clear that **verse 11** is talking about direct conversation between God and Moses not a visual face to face appearance of God.
2. We have all heard the songs which talk about that "*if two or three are gathered together in Jesus' name He is in their midst.*" This saying is taken from **Mt. 18:20**. Some assume this verse teaches that if we gather together in Jesus name His special presence is there with us. Yet, upon closer examination of **Mt. 18:20** you discover something quite different. You discover that Jesus is talking about church discipline and how to deal with an unrepentant sinning brother. What Jesus is saying is when the church has followed the steps of church discipline and the person in sin still doesn't repent, and the leaders remove the unrepentant person from fellowship i.e., excommunicate them, Christ will be there in their midst to back up their decision, for it is His will that unrepentant professing believers be removed from His Church. Since Jesus is God and everywhere present and since He dwells in us, and we in Him, He is always in our midst – even if there is just one!

### III. TESTING YOUR PREVIOUS COMMITMENT TO CONTEXT

Almost everyone who has been a Christian for any length of time has been encouraged, exhorted, or admonished to observe the context when studying the Bible. When dealing with the cults you have to become a champion of context in order to show them why what they are saying is not true. Below are list of **ten well known verses**. See which ones you know the context of.

- A. **John 3:16** "*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.*" Who is speaking to whom? What is being discussed? When is this happening?
- B. **Eph. 2:8-9** "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast.*" Who is the author? What has he just said in the previous 7 verses? What does vs. 10 say?
- C. **Psa. 118:24** "*This is the day which the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it.*" Who is speaking? What is he speaking about?
- D. **Prov. 23:7** "*For as he thinks within himself, so he is.*" Who is speaking about what situation?
- E. **Matt. 22:14** "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" Who is speaking to whom about what? How does this verse fit with the preceding context?
- F. **II Chron. 7:14** "*[if] and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*" Who is speaking to whom, about what, and when?
- G. **Prov. 37:4** "*Delight yourself in the Lord; And He will give you the desires of your heart.*" What is the near context both before and after this text talking about?
- H. **Mt. 7:1** "*Do not judge so that you will not be judged.*" Who is speaking? What is He speaking about? Is this a universal command never to judge?
- I. **Rom. 8:28** "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*" What is the preceding context of Rom. 8 talking about? What is the following context of Rom. 8 talking about? What does Rom. 9 talk about?
- J. **II Pet. 3:8** "*But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.*" What is the near context both before and after talking about?
  1. Eight to ten right – You are a King of Context
  2. Five to seven right – You are a Queen of Context
  3. Two to four right – You are a Servant of Context
  4. Zero to one right – You need to apply for citizenship in the country of Context

#### IV. **HOMEWORK**

The purpose of this homework is to apply what was learned in both lesson one and lesson two. You will answer the questions under point “A” concerning the genre, theme, historical context and setting, and outline. Then you will proceed to meditate and make observations on **II Tim. 2:15** as directed. It will be helpful if you first read the handout from *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, entitled “The Student, The Fish and Agassiz” before doing this lesson.

##### A. **Look at II Timothy 2:15:**

1. What kind of book is it?
2. What is the theme?
3. What was the historical context and setting?
  
4. What are the major outline points of the book of **II Timothy**?

#### V. **OBSERVATIONS OF II TIMOTHY 2:15**

- A. Using only your Bible and no other resources, write down **15 things** you can observe from **II Tim. 2:15** and its near context.
- B. ***“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a work man who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.”***
- C. Write down **15 observations** from what **II Tim. 2:15** and its near context says.
  - 1.
  - 2.

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

D. Write down **5 key observations** of what **II Tim. 2:15** does not say.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

E. Write down **10 key questions** which might be asked of the text, which if answered would help you understand the text better. (I.e. Questions that might relate to Paul's motives, words and their meaning, what we see in the text about God, what we see in the text about our relationship to God, etc.)

- 1.
- 2.

- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

## VI. Conclusion:

- A. After working through this lesson, what are some of the lessons you learned which will help you in future Bible study?
  
- B. Read the entry below by Charles Spurgeon and examine and consider how you can apply what he says.

**“Search the Scriptures” (John 5:39).** The Greek word here rendered search signifies a strict, close, diligent, curious search, such as men make when they are seeking gold, or hunters when they are in earnest after game. We must not rest content with having given a superficial reading to a chapter or two, but with the candle of the Spirit we must deliberately seek out the hidden meaning of the word. Holy Scripture requires searching—much of it can only be learned by careful study. There is milk for babes, but also meat for strong men. The rabbis wisely say that a mountain of matter hangs upon every word, yea, upon every title of Scripture. Tertullian exclaims, “I adore the fulness of the Scriptures.” No man who merely skims the book of God can profit thereby; we must dig and mine until we obtain the hid treasure. The door of the word only opens to the key of diligence. The Scriptures claim searching. They are the writings of God, bearing the divine stamp and imprimatur— who shall dare to treat them with levity? He who despises them despises the God who wrote them. God forbid that any of us should leave our Bibles to become swift witnesses against us in the great day of account. The word of God will repay searching. God does not bid us sift a mountain of chaff with here and there a grain of wheat in it, but the Bible is winnowed corn—we have but to open the granary door and find it. Scripture grows upon the student. It is full of surprises. Under the teaching of the Holy Spirit, to the searching eye it glows with splendour of revelation, like a vast temple paved with wrought gold, and roofed with rubies, emeralds, and all manner of gems. No merchandise like the merchandise of Scripture truth. Lastly, the Scriptures reveal Jesus: “They are they which testify of me.” No more powerful motive can be urged upon Bible readers than this: he who finds Jesus finds life, heaven, all things. Happy is he who, searching his Bible, discovers his Saviour.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Spurgeon, *Morning and Evening*, Evening, June 9<sup>th</sup>, Libronix Bible Software.