

QUESTIONS TO ASK AS YOU READ THE BIBLE

FROM A SHORT GUIDE TO WOMEN'S MINISTRY BY NORA ALLISON

READING THE EPISTLES

OBSERVATION

What does it say?

INTERPRETATION

What does it mean?

APPLICATION

What difference does it make?

OBSERVATION: What does it say?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth.
2. Read the passage 3 times.
3. What is the situation in the church or among the people to whom the letter is written? How does this passage reveal or address that situation?
4. Is this part of the letter a prayer? A reprimand? An encouragement? A teaching? A defense? Other?
5. Notice the passages before and after this text. How do they shed more light on the argument/idea?
6. What is the main idea of what the author is saying? Write it in one sentence, using the Bible's words where possible. (You may have to pick through an involved argument to find the subject and verb!)
7. Pay special attention to the words and the flow of the argument:
 - a. contrasts (words like "but," "however," and ideas like "death/life," "wise/foolish," and more.
 - b. conditions/cause and effect ("If...then," "because of...")
 - c. dependent ideas ("Therefore," "For this reason,")
 - d. order/sequence ("Then," "first," "finally")
 - e. repeated or key words
 - f. verb tenses (Did it happen in the past? Is it on-going? Is it a future reality?)
8. Write down any words that need defining or ideas that need explaining.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

1. Read the passage again.
2. Define any words whose meanings are unclear. Use a concordance to find other passages that might shed light on this one or a study Bible to better understand unclear ideas.
3. Now that you have clarified words and ideas, rewrite the main point of this passage and insights gained.

4. How does the author speak of Jesus Christ/God the Father/the Holy Spirit? Even if there is no explicit reference, how does the text relate to or better explain the gospel?
5. What change (thought, deed, attitude, feeling) are the readers being persuaded to make in their lives?
6. What does this passage teach us about God? (the Father, Son or Holy Spirit)
7. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?

Application: What difference does it make?

1. In light of what the author wanted his readers to know and/or how he wanted his readers to change, how is the Holy Spirit speaking to you?
2. Reflect on the character of God revealed here. How does this impact your perspective?
3. How does the truth of the gospel expressed in this text effect how you think about yourself? Others? Life?

READING NARRATIVE

OBSERVATION

What does it say?

INTERPRETATION

What does it mean?

APPLICATION

What difference does it make?

Observation: What does it say?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth.
2. Read the passage 3 times.
3. Summarize the main idea of the story in a sentence or two.
4. List the main characters in the order that they appear, and describe them in the Bible's own words.
5. What did the characters do and how did they interact with each other? Is there a "main character"?
6. Describe the scene/surroundings. Notice where the people are located in relation to one another.
7. Write out the main parts of the story: Beginning, middle, end. Notice cause and effect, sequence of events, emphases, repeated or key words, verb tenses.
8. What is the conflict (or turning point or climax)? What is the resolution in the text?
9. What surprises, if any, are in the story? Does anyone behave in an unexpected way?
10. Notice the passages before and after this text. How do they fit together with this passage?
11. Write down any words that need defining or ideas that need explaining.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

1. Reread the passage.
2. Define any words whose meanings are unclear. Use a concordance or study Bible to better understand unclear ideas.
3. Is this story and/or the behavior of the characters written for us to imitate? To avoid? To learn a lesson?
4. How does this text anticipate, illustrate or explain the Gospel? How does it point to Jesus or the need for him?
5. How is the gospel the answer to the issues and questions raised by this text?
6. What does this passage teach us about God? (the Father, Son or Holy Spirit)
7. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?

Application: What difference does it make?

1. What is the main point that the characters are supposed to be learning in light of the gospel?

2. How might this main point be relevant to your life?
3. Reflect on the character of God revealed here. How does this impact your perspective?
4. Write what you will believe/do as a result of the truths revealed in this passage.

READING WISDOM LITERATURE / POETRY

OBSERVATION

What does it say?

INTERPRETATION

What does it mean?

APPLICATION

What difference does it make?

REMINDER: The poetry sections of the Bible serve mainly to speak *in relation* to the action, not *advance* it.

Observation: What does it say?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth.
2. Read the passage 3 times.
3. Can you discern the situation of the writer? How does this shed light on the poem/writing?
4. Are there specific instructions/imperatives in the text?
5. Are there parallel phrases or similar ideas within the text? What do these repetitions indicate about its emphasis?
6. What is the main idea expressed by the author?
7. What images and metaphors are used by the author? Pause and take time to contemplate the pictures: What do they indicate about God or the people in the text? What is God communicating?
8. Pay special attention to the emotion and the flow of the poem/writing: What feelings/mood is the author expressing? Does it change or evolve? What is/are the reasons for the change?
9. Write down any words that need defining or ideas that need explaining.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

1. Reread the passage.
2. Define any words whose meanings are unclear. Use a concordance to find other passages that might shed light on this one or a study Bible to better understand unclear ideas.
3. How is this passage, if at all, related to circumstances of the author's or other's lives in the Old Testament?
4. Think more about the metaphors and images. Have you gained any additional insight?
5. How is this text related to the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are the life, death and resurrection of Jesus anticipated in any way?
6. Is this text referenced in the New Testament? If so, what is its significance?

7. What does this passage teach us about God? (the Father, Son or Holy Spirit)
8. What does this passage teach us about ourselves?

Application: What difference does it make...Change?

1. What emotions does this text evoke in us? How does God want to motivate you through this emotion?
2. What consequences can be anticipated if we reject God's teaching in this text?
3. Identify your emotions in the situation in which you find yourself. Do they reflect a right relationship to the God written about in this poem/writing? How might an accurate view of God change them?

READING PROPHETIC LITERATURE

OBSERVATION	INTERPRETATION	APPLICATION
What does it say?	What does it mean?	What difference does it make?

Note: Old Testament prophets spoke *into* history more than they wrote *about* it.
The O.T. prophets from Isaiah – Malachi (8th – 6th Century B.C.) wrote during the time Israel and Judah declined, were conquered, were driven into exile and then returned as a remnant to their land.

Observation: What does it say?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth.
2. Read the passage 3 times.
3. Who is writing this and what is the historical context in which it is written? (I.e., Is this during the decline, conquering, exile or return of the people of Israel or Judah?) Over how long of a time span?
4. What is the specific situation among the people at the time of prophet's message? (Are they sinning? If so, specifically how? Are they suffering? How? Are they enjoying God's favor? Something else?)
5. Notice the passages before and after this text. How do they shed more light on the message?
6. What is the main idea of the text? Write it out using the Bible's own words, when possible.
7. By paying close attention to what the prophet says, what do we learn about God's plans? About God?
8. Look at the imagery used. How is the writer alluding to other parts of the Old Testament in this text?
9. How is this text related to the gospel? Is Jesus anticipated in any way?
10. Write down any words that need defining or ideas that need explaining.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

1. Read the passage again.
2. Define any words or ideas whose meanings are unclear. Use a concordance to find other passages that might shed light on this or a study Bible to better understand unclear ideas.

3. Now that you have clarified words and ideas, rewrite the main idea of this passage if necessary.
4. How would you categorize this message? Is it one of conviction of sin? Comfort? Hope? Promise?
5. What change (thought, deed, attitude, feeling) are the readers being told to make in their lives?
6. Reflecting on how God addressed his people in light of their circumstances/behavior/attitude, delve into what this passage teaches us about God's character. What does he love? Hate? Praise? Enjoy? Desire?
7. What does this passage teach us about people/mankind?

Application: What difference does it make?

1. Read the passage.
2. We are not Israel or Judah and not in their identical situation, but God is the same yesterday, today and forever. How are you similar to the original readers? How does the immutability of God (that God doesn't change) and the truth of the gospel inform your application of this text?
3. How is the Holy Spirit speaking to you in light of these words of conviction/comfort?

READING APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

OBSERVATION

What does it say?

INTERPRETATION

What does it mean?

APPLICATION

What difference does it make?

“Apocalyptic” means “revelation,” revealing present and future invisible realities.

Observation: What does it say?

1. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide you into the truth.
2. Read the passage 3 times.
3. Who is writing this? What is the situation or what are the conditions among the people to whom the apocalypse is written? How does the text reveal the situation?
4. Notice the passages before and after this text. How do they shed more light on the message?
5. Is this a view of the invisible, the future or both?
6. Write out the main idea of the author’s message or summarize the event(s) described. (You may want to change this after further study!)
7. What images and symbols are used in the text? Try to draw any images described by the author.
8. Where do these symbols appear elsewhere in the Bible and what if any connection does the author intend for us to make?
9. Notice contrasts, cause and effect, sequence of events, key words and verb tenses.
10. Write down any words that need defining or ideas that need explaining.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

1. Read the passage again.
2. Define any words whose meanings are unclear. Use a concordance to find other passages that might shed light on this one or a study Bible to better understand unclear ideas.
3. Now that you have clarified words and ideas, rewrite the main idea/storyline of this passage if necessary.
4. What in the text demonstrates that we are reading about events from God’s vantage point of history? What insight does this provide for our human perspective of history?
5. How does this text anticipate or recall the death, resurrection, and reign of Jesus Christ?
6. What is the conflict or tension in the text and how does it relate to the original readers?

7. What does this passage teach us about God? About people? About the future?

Application: What difference does it make?

1. What type of reaction does this glimpse into the invisible/future evoke in you? Hope? Comfort? Fear? Amazement? Change in outlook or behavior? Other? Reflect on the reason for your reaction.
2. How does this passage compel you to respond to the death, resurrection and reign of Jesus Christ?
3. Write down any changes in thought, action or attitude that the Holy Spirit is prompting in you.

Compiled by Nora Allison. Many of these questions have been adapted from "Genre Specific Study Questions," by David Helm as quoted in the appendix of *Bible Study, Following the Ways of the Word* by Kathleen Buswell Nielson.