

Scripture Reflection and Study: Suggested Questions

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Here is a simple, flexible framework for reflecting on Scripture as individuals and also within study groups.

- Begin by offering a prayer acknowledging God's Presence and asking for His guidance.
- Then read the passage you have chosen a couple of times slowly, asking:
 - ~ What is the topic of this passage?
 - ~ What is being said about this topic?
- Next, go through the passage again with the questions below in mind.
 - ~ Jotting down your thoughts will help you concentrate and will provide seed thoughts for reflection.
 - ~ If you also include your prayers of adoration, thanksgiving, confession, intercession, etc., that arise from the passage then your notes will be something of a journal as well.
 - ~ These questions can be answered for ourselves as individuals or in terms of our communities, including our church, family, town and/or world.
 - ~ They are designed to weave together our own very personal listening to the text with what we learn through study.
 - ~ These questions are interrelated. For example, a passage may recount an action of God (ques. 3) that reveals something about His character (ques. 4), giving us something to believe about Him (ques. 2) that offers us comfort and/or challenge (ques. 1).

The First Set of Questions

1. A. How does this passage offer comfort?
B. How does this passage challenge?

The first set of questions starts with our own gut-level reactions. This is a very good place to start, though we must recognize that our answers may come more from our own experience than from what the text itself is trying to say. These questions help us bring the text into contact with our own lives and not merely play intellectual games. Other questions, on the other hand, will help us avoid merely hearing our own voice in the Bible rather than God's.

The Second Set of Questions

2. A. How does this passage encourage faith?
- B. How does this passage encourage hope?
- C. How does this passage encourage love?

This second set of questions focuses on the three “principal virtues,” faith, hope and love. St. Paul says these three are eternal (1 Cor. 13:13) — they are what we *can* “take with us.” It makes sense, therefore, to build these qualities into our lives as much as possible. The way to do so is by focusing on God, revealed in Scripture and in our lives. So in this section we are not just looking at these virtues as such, but using them as filters for reflecting on our response to the God revealed in the Scripture passage.

These questions are more specific than the first set. They help us focus on the content of the passage while continuing to bring the text into direct contact with our lives. Each of these terms refers to two distinct ideas:

- *Faith* — Faith here refers to trust and belief.
 - ~ Does this passage give us something to trust God for?
 - ~ Does it give us reason for trusting God?
 - ~ Does it give us some truth to believe?
- *Hope* — Hope here refers to future expectations and to expectation of help now.
 - ~ Does the passage give us something to look forward to?
 - ~ Does it offer us encouragement in the midst of difficulty?
- *Love* — Love here refers to heartfelt concern and to sacrificial self-denial.
 - ~ In this passage do we see God’s love?
 - ~ Do we see examples of people loving one another?
 - ~ Does the passage stimulate devotion to God and care for people, helping us lay down our lives for God and for one another through sacrifice and self-denial?

The Third Question

3. What details in this passage seem especially important for understanding its message?
 - What are the key words in this passage?
 - ~ Which words are repeated, point to the main topic, or are unclear?
 - What is the flow of thought through the passage?
 - ~ How does the thought of the passage develop sentence by sentence?
 - How is the passage itself related to what comes before and after it in its book?
 - ~ Is the passage part of a larger discussion in its context, or does it start a new thought or event?
 - Are there historical or cultural details that are important in this passage?
 - ~ Are there names of people, places, events, institutions, customs, or practices that are especially significant or puzzling?
 - Are there other places in Scripture that help interpret this passage, or help fill out our understanding of its themes and details?
 - ~ Are the key words in this passage used elsewhere in the Bible, providing help in understanding them?
 - ~ Are the key topics developed elsewhere in a way that adds insight?
 - ~ Are there passages that modify or limit what this passage is saying, showing us that the topic is more complex than what is said in this one passage?

Reference works like a good study Bible are helpful at this point, providing notes and cross references for solid study, so our understanding is well-grounded.

The Fourth Question

4. What does this passage reveal of God's delightful beauty.

This question focuses on God Himself, whom to know is eternal life (John 17:3).

- What is taught about the Father, the Son and/or the Holy Spirit?
- What do we learn of God's character? His heart, i.e., what He loves and hates?
- What do we learn about His ways of dealing with us?

This question is the most significant of all, though the answers may be only a list of attributes. Scripture reveals God and His ways to us. The Bible is a glorious means to a yet more glorious end, the personal knowledge of God Himself through union with the Father in the Son through the Holy Spirit within the covenant People of God.

The Big Themes of Scripture

These four study questions help us keep in mind the three major themes in Scripture when we are reading any part of the Bible.

- The **Person** of God
 - ~ Everything in the Bible flows from who God is and what He is like.
- The **Plan** of God
 - ~ God's plan is unfolding from Creation to New Creation by way of Redemption.
 - ~ Each part of Scripture needs to be understood in relation to where it comes in the Story, noting especially both the changes that take place as the drama of redemption progresses from stage to stage and what remains constant throughout the Story.
 - ~ Each part of Scripture needs to be understood in relation to how it relates to the ultimate revelation in Jesus and the central events of the Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, and outpouring of the Holy Spirit.
- The **Pattern** of Life in Keeping with God and His Plan
 - ~ There is a way of life that is in sync with God and His will. This way of life is a major part of what it means to share in God's life in Christ.
 - ~ The pattern of the life of discipleship is an expression in human life of the character of God and His work of redemption as His plan unfolds.

Application to Prayer and Life

Reflection and study should be done prayerfully, and lead naturally into prayer by revealing God for adoration, His blessings for thanksgiving, and our sin for confession. All of this will also guide our prayer for ourselves and our intercession for others.

Reflection and study must also have an impact on our attitudes and actions, guiding our daily life by showing us through prayer and the Spirit things to do and to leave undone. Usually this will be a reminder of common features of Christian discipleship.

Difficulties in Scripture

At times we will find things that are unclear or controversial. The most important general guideline is that any specific part of Scripture must make sense in the light of Christ and the whole of Scripture interpreted through Christ. The input of the covenant People throughout history is also significant. Trust and obedience to what *is* clear should be our primary concern as we continue to study and pray over areas of uncertainty.