Instructions

Hearing from God in His Word Weeks 1-4

For this next month the content you will be studying will come directly from Scripture. The desire is that we all spend good time in the Word together. There will be two months throughout the course of this curriculum and each time you will have freedom to choose which book or portion you’d like to read. For example, you could choose specific Psalms, a portion of a book (Genesis 1-12 or the Sermon on the Mount-Matthew 5-7), or a smaller book such as Malachi or Titus.

Read the following article, 8 Questions to Help You Understand and Apply the Bible from the Gospel Coalition (October 11, 2017) by Matthew Harmon. These eight questions will be included in the Truth and Equipping sections.

8 Questions to Help You Understand and Apply the Bible

Sometimes the most important things in the Christian life can be the most difficult. That can certainly be true of understanding and applying the Bible.

As believers we know that reading Scripture is essential to following Jesus. But if we’re honest, we often find it difficult to understand and apply. The Bible talks about so many different things; how do we know what to focus on? It’s set in a world very different from ours; how do we apply it to our lives today?

One simple and effective tool is asking good questions. The questions we ask when we read the Bible largely determine how we understand and apply the Bible. So we need to make sure we are asking the right questions, the kind of questions the Bible was designed to answer. But how do we know what those questions are?

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The Bible is first and foremost a story about God displaying his glory through creating and redeeming humans. It makes sense, then, that the Bible is designed to answer questions connected to this central theme. Jesus confirms this dual focus on God and humanity. When asked what the greatest commandment is, he replied, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind” (Matt 22:37). But Jesus wasn’t done. He continued, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). Love God. Love others. This is the heart of what God wants from his people.

Based on this foundation, there are four questions for understanding any passage, and four questions for applying any passage.
Four Questions for Interpretation

1. What do I learn about God?

God is the main character of the Bible, so he should be our starting point. Every passage of Scripture reveals something about God, even if he’s not specifically mentioned. Look for his character (Rev. 4:8), his conduct (Ps. 23:1–6), and his concerns (Exod. 22:21–22). Also pay attention to all three persons of the Trinity (Matt. 28:18–20; 2 Cor. 13:14).

2. What do I learn about people?

As the pinnacle of God’s creation, humans are at the center of his purposes. Think through what the passage reveals about our identity as divine image-bearers (Eccl. 3:11). Look for the fallen condition—the sinful beliefs, attitudes, feelings, actions, or tendencies mentioned or implied in the text (Prov. 6:16–19). Consider what the passage reveals about living as those who’ve been redeemed through the work of Christ (Rom. 12:9–13).

3. What do I learn about relating to God?

Loving God with our whole being expresses itself in a variety of ways. Start by looking for reasons to praise God (1 Pet. 1:3–5). Consider what sin you need to confess and repent of (1 John 1:5–10). Identify any promises God calls us to believe (1 Pet. 2:4–12).

4. What do I learn about relating to others?

God created us to be in community with one another. When he saves us from our sins, he makes us part of the body of Christ. Start by considering what the passage shows about interacting with others—family, friends, roommates, coworkers, classmates, neighbors, fellow believers, non-Christians, etc. (Eph. 4:25–5:2). Look for what the passage teaches about pursuing reconciliation with others (Rom. 12:18). Reflect on what the passage teaches about loving, serving, and caring well for others (Luke 10:25–37).

Based on that foundation, we can then ask four simple questions to help us apply the passage to our lives.

Four Questions for Application

When it comes to applying the Bible, we tend to gravitate toward what we should do in response. But since the goal of reading the Bible is being transformed into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 4:20–24), we must ask a set of questions that lead to more holistic application.

1. What does God want me to understand/think?

God has given us the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16), but we are still tempted to think the way we did before we knew Christ (Eph. 4:17–19). Deep and lasting transformation begins with the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:1–2). Reflect on any wrong ways of thinking that the passage exposes.
2. **What does God want me to believe?**

We may understand a truth at an intellectual level without letting it shape how we live. Jesus makes this distinction in the parable of the soils; those who initially receive God’s Word with joy but have no root will subsequently fall away from the gospel, since they fail to “hold it fast in an honest and good heart” (Luke 8:15). Consider what false beliefs the passage reveals and what gospel promises you need to believe.

3. **What does God want me to desire?**

This question targets the affections—the combination of desires, inclinations, feelings, and will that are the spring of our actions. God calls us to desire him above all else (Ps. 42:1–2), but apart from the work of the gospel we will desire what’s evil (Prov. 24:1–2). Reflect on how you see the sinful desires mentioned or implied in the passage show up in your own life, as well as the kind of godly desires you should be cultivating.

4. **What does God want me to do?**

When God’s Word changes how we think, what we functionally believe, and what we desire, it will produce tangible change in what we do and don’t do. Sometimes a passage gives us direct commands (Rom. 12:9–17). But many are far less straightforward, requiring us to think carefully about specific actions in light of our current place in redemptive history. Think through what sinful actions the passage exposes in your own life as well as what godly actions you should pursue.

Armed with these eight questions, we put ourselves in a position where God’s Spirit can take God’s Word to transform us into the image of God’s Son. Why not open your Bible and try them today?


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