



BIBLE STUDY

Read Curiously

The first step toward immersive reading of the Bible is to know the story well. Read and re-read a story from cover to cover aloud and in one seating. For longer books, think about a main break (or main breaks) in the story, and read multiple times until you become familiar with the story. When you have familiarized yourself with the story, re-engage it with the journalist's best friends: Who, What, Why, When, Where, How? Use these to ask open ended questions for the text; they will help you as you begin studying Scripture.

Know the stories behind the story

The second step is to know the story (or stories) behind the story. This is about intertextuality. When a text says, "it is written" or alludes to another text, take time to learn the story that is being referred to. Pay attention to how the story is being used. The writer who is quoting an earlier text sometimes makes changes, contextualizes the earlier story to fit his contemporary message. Often the New Testament quotes the Old Testament, but the Old Testament also quotes/alludes the Old Testament (e.g., Isaiah alludes to Exodus). Familiarity with the Old Testament will help you better understand the New Testament. A reference or a study Bible can help with identifying intertextual issues and references. Use multiple English versions, too, to help you begin to identify nuances in the translations, as well as nuances in meanings.

Try on new lenses

A third step is to pay attention to narrative perspectives and story dynamics. There is the perspective of the author, and what he is trying to convey. There is the perspective of the characters. Read, and re-read the text through the lens of different actors in the narrative and try to walk in their shoes, how do they feel? How do you experience the story through different lens? For example: in Abraham's story with Hagar, how does one's understanding of the story change when read from Hagar's perspective, Sarah's perspective, or Abraham's perspective? What would it look like to read Joseph's story through the lens of his brothers? Finally, there is the reader's perspective. How does your own experience influence what you see, emphasize, or skip over?



When it comes to story dynamics, there is a difference between event time, story time, and narration time. Jesus' ministry lasted three years (event time). Mark condensed it to almost one year, while John signals a three year ministry [three passover celebrations] (story time). It takes about 2 hours to read Mark's Gospel (narration time). We sometimes make the mistake of thinking something happened as quickly as we read it. Slow down and reflect, e.g., on why John devotes a third of the Gospel to Jesus' final week.

Background information helps with immersive reading. Research about the geography and topography of the land to get a sense of the travel time and distance Jesus and his disciple, or Paul would have covered in their ministry. How does that impact your knowledge and interpretation of the story?

Conclusion

Nothing replaces knowing the story. It takes time, a lifetime! It takes careful observation. It takes asking the right questions. Immersive reading invites readers to enter the world of the story. It is less about applying, and more about embodying the message of the text. Don't take the Bible for granted. Pray to the Holy Spirit to give you eyes to see and ears to hear each time to read the text. For more information about practice, refer to the practice guide that accompanies this video. I trust that you will find it helpful.