

Bon Appetit Week 1: Course 1 – Appetizer (Read) Phil 2:12-16 **David Bawks - Pathway Community Church (Feb 7, 2021)**

Good morning everyone! Welcome to church today. Today is the last day of our fast! How has the last 21 days gone for you? Please send me any testimonies or ways you've been hearing from God over the last few weeks. I love to hear stories of how God has been working through this time of prayer and fasting.

Since I've been doing a Daniel fast, I am looking forward to returning to more of my usual food, especially coffee and muffins, and meat, and dairy. Pretty much everything. And I'm glad the fast is ending, because this month we are starting a new sermon series called Bon Appétit, focused on eating! The reason it's called that is that I am comparing the experience of having a four course meal with our experience in reading the Bible. All that really means for us is an appetizer, a salad, a main course and then a take away we bring home to eat later if we were eating out somewhere.

Last month we focused on building and strengthening our foundations so that we can go into the year strong. One foundation that we did not talk about was the foundation of God's Word. In many ways, this is the foundation that holds all others together because it gives us a blueprint for our faith. The Bible is one of the main ways that God reveals Himself to us and it through reading it that we discover His will for our lives and the world.

This month, we're going to focus on how we read the Bible. Over the next four weeks, we're going to walk through how these **four courses** of a meal match with **four steps** in studying the Bible – 1) reading, 2) understanding, 3) explaining, 4) applying. The appetizer corresponds with reading, the first initial step, the very beginning both of an elaborate meal and the process of studying and living out the message of the Bible. During a meal, think of an appetizer like chicken wings or mozzarella stick - something light and that takes a very short time to get through. When it comes to reading the Bible, unfortunately, many of us never get beyond this first step. We may enjoy the appetizer but we never get to experience the **health benefits** of the salad, and the **substance** and **nourishment** of the main course. This month I hope we can change that and explore what each course looks like as we pursue the Bible on a deeper level.

The next course, **the salad**, corresponds with the **second step of understanding**. This step involves a lot of questions, and some difficult work in answering them, but it important and necessary to explain and apply well, the next two steps. I'm sure not all of us enjoy salads, and they are not the most exciting food, but they do have significant benefits and are important.

The third course is the **main course**, our entrée, and this is **explaining**. Once we have done the ground work of figuring out what our passage is saying, exploring the words, the structure, the purpose and so on, then we have deeper questions to answer about what the passage means. We need to explain what the main point is, how it fits into the Bible's overall message, and what general truths we can learn from a passage. This is where a lot of the meat and the substance of a meal comes, and the same is true in studying the Bible.

Finally, we have our **fourth course**, which is technically not really a course on its own, but is a **take-away**. This is the **application for our lives today**, and this is in some ways the most important step. It is also one of the easiest steps to mess up. The take-away is what affects our day to day life, it is what informs our choices and our behavior, and that is why we need to do it well. To apply the Bible well, we need to do all four steps carefully. Often we are tempted to just take an appetizer, read quickly, and then try to come up with a few application points, a quick take-away, missing all the rest of the meal – and in the same way it is easy to miss what the text is really saying when we do that.

What challenges do you have in reading the Bible? Even if you have read the Bible for some time, many of us still struggle in reading and understanding the Bible. Honestly, it is often not easy, and even after I have studied the Bible for years I still find it difficult in some ways. I'm not saying it is impossible, or that only people with a PhD can read and live out the scripture, that's not true, but it is ok for us to be honest and open with each other to recognize and admit that is a demanding task and requires thought and effort.

Some of us may try each year to read more of the Bible, and often we start in January and we're so committed, ready to go all the way through, and we begin in **Genesis**, and some parts are a bit odd but still interesting so we make it through, and then we hit Exodus, and these are interesting stories with the plagues and Pharaoh and Moses, still going strong but then we hit Leviticus, and then it just gets weird, and the laws are so boring and so confusing, and even Numbers isn't much better, and then we begin to miss days and eventually we give up, only to start again the next year. Has this ever happened to any of you?

There are a couple things that can help us with this:

- 1) Understand the overall story of the Bible, what the story is about
- 2) How to read the Bible, what questions to ask, and what approach to take

I hope that in future we can explore the first one in more detail as a church, but for this month we will focus on number 2, how we read the Bible, and we'll go through a basic method of biblical study that we can use in a small group, sometimes in our devotional time, and if we are wrestling with a particular passage and seeking to understand it on a deeper level.

Before we get there, however, it is important to take a step back and ask what exactly the Bible is, and what it is intended to do, and not to do. That can inform the approach we take as we read and seek to understand the Bible.

What is the Bible?

- The Bible is the account of what God has done and continues to do in our world.
- We call the Bible "revelation", which means God's communication to us.
- Most of the Bible takes the form of a story, or a narrative.
 - It is the story of the children of Israel, culminating in the coming of the Messiah and subsequent growth of the church, looking forward to the Messiah's return in glory.

If you think about it, you'll realize that God could have communicated to us in different ways – he could have come down to earth to teach us a heavenly language, and then written to us in that language – but he didn't choose to do that. Instead, God chose to speak to us using our own language, originally Hebrew and Greek, but also in way that it could be translated to all of our native languages or mother tongues. God even spoke using our own figure of speech, and through people who wrote it down in ways that make sense to us, in images and descriptions that we can easily relate to. The Bible is meant to be understood and lived out by everyone.

Why should we read the Bible? A related question is why we should even bother with reading the Bible. Maybe you've heard your whole life that you need to read the Bible, every day, but you've never really fully understand why it matters, why it is important. Here are a couple reasons – 1) first is that God made us, and the Bible tells us about how and why God made us – which gives us **the purpose for our lives**. All of us desire to know and live out our purpose, and the Bible is the best way to understand our **origin**, where we came from, and our **destination**, where we are headed to.

2) As Christians, the Bible is also **God's love letter to us** – his explanation of how and why he saved us. We can learn about the life and death of Jesus, and what that means for our lives today. As Christians, the Bible is a unique and special book for us, unlike any other book.

Please turn with me to 2 Tim 3:16-17, which clearly describes for us the value the Bible offers to us:

¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. ESV

Challenge of Understanding - However, although the Bible is certainly valuable and worth studying, that doesn't mean that it is easy. While the scriptures **do apply to us today**, they were **not originally addressed to us today** and as such we cannot read them uncritically in the sense of direct, literal application to our lives.

Rather, we must discern as best as possible the **original intent and function of a passage in its original context before we take this meaning and apply it to our current situation**. Today, as we read the scriptures, we are far removed from the world of the Bible in such diverse aspects as language, lifestyle, cultural habits, economic structure, and politics. Such conventions we take for granted such as the meaning of words and other cultural assumptions are sometimes entirely different in the Bible.

Because of this, our understanding of the Bible can be made richer with the aid of certain tools. It can be very helpful to know more details such as background information, learning from what others have found, and reading commentaries and seeing how others have studied the scripture

For this month, we are going to do an example of how to approach the Bible by exploring Paul's letter to the Philippians, looking in particular at Philippians 2:12-16. I want to show you how using these steps can look in a particular section of scripture. Each Sunday this month, we will look at the same passage, but going in order through each of our four courses or four steps in study.

Before we read that passage, let's look at some **background information** about Philippians. We learn about it from a few places in the Bible, the letter of course, but also the book of Acts that gives the story of how Paul first came to visit the city of Philippi on his second missionary journey. Philippi is the first city in Europe where Paul visited and started a church.

Here is a map to show you where it is, in modern-day Greece, north of Corinth and Ephesus. Here is a map of Paul's second missionary journey, starting from Antioch and moving to the West through a number of cities, back to Jerusalem and then back up to Antioch. Here is a picture of Philippi, so you can see the beautiful scenery, with the hills in the background.

One of the resources that I have found helpful in understanding Bible books and topics is the Bible project, which is a series of animated videos released for free online. As we're going through the letter to the Philippians, I've put the Bible project overview of Philippians on the home page of our website, so please check out that video to get a great explanation of what Philippians is about.

Today we are focusing on course one, our appetizer, which I said is the initial process of reading, and just the first taste of full meal. Each course has a few parts, and this one has three that I have broken down. Please note that this is not a perfect process, and I know I have missed things and left them out, so use this as a guide, but it is not perfect and I'm sure I'll be modifying it over time.

Steps of Studying the Bible

Course 1 – Appetizer – Read! Spend time with the passage.

- 1.1 Pray before you begin this process. Ask God to open your eyes and your heart to receive.
- 1.2 Read the passage slowly and carefully. Read it more than once.
- 1.3 Read several different Bible translations, if possible.

The first step is to pray, and I would encourage you to do that every time you read and study the Bible. Let's take some time now to pause and pray over our time and over this series and this process of figuring out how to study the Bible together.

Passage

Let's read the passage we'll focus on over the next few weeks. Philippians 2:12-16

¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

¹⁴ Do everything without grumbling or arguing, ¹⁵ so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky ¹⁶ as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. NIV

To really dig deep into a passage, I recommend using at least two different translations. If you have the YouVersion Bible app on your phone, it is really easy to compare different translations. You can also find them online on a number of Bible websites.

I have found the Contemporary English Version to be very refreshing, and very simple in its use of language. I find it very helpful to read in a new translation that sounds different from what I am used to. Here's the CEV version.

My dear friends, you always obeyed when I was with you. Now that I am away, you should obey even more. So work with fear and trembling to discover what it really means to be saved. God is working in you to make you willing and able to obey him.

Do everything without grumbling or arguing. Then you will be the pure and innocent children of God. You live among people who are crooked and evil, but you must not do anything that they can say is wrong. Try to shine as lights among the people of this world, as you hold firmly to the message that gives life. Then on the day when Christ returns, I can take pride in you. I can also know that my work and efforts were not useless. CEV

Finally, let's look at quite a different translation – Young's Literal Translation, which is basically word for word from the original Greek, which means it is very hard to follow and does not flow well in English. To capture the original, it can be helpful; otherwise, it is not the best to read normally. Here it is.

So that, my beloved, as ye always obey, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, with fear and trembling your own salvation work out, for God it is who is working in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

All things do without murmurings and reasonings, that ye may become blameless and harmless, children of God, unblemished in the midst of a generation crooked and perverse, among whom ye do appear as luminaries in the world, the word of life holding forth, for rejoicing to me in regard to a day of Christ, that not in vain did I run, nor in vain did I labour; YLT

Looking at two or three translations gives us quite a solid picture of the original passage. Looking at two or three translations gives us quite a solid picture of the original passage, and helps us to figure out the possible meaning of some of the words, and how the sentences can be put together. We'll explore this much more next week.

Coming up: we have our **annual meeting** on Feb 21 at 4 pm. We'll be doing this on Zoom, and will give a 2020 update, share our 2021 goals and budget, and our plans and vision going forward. Please mark your calendars and check your email for the Zoom link. Then on Friday Feb 26 we'll have our online movie night, watching Just Mercy.

Please also remember to fill out our **church survey**. So far, we're heard from 11 of you, and I'd love to get at least 30 in order to get a good picture. Please take a few minutes to fill that out, and you can find a link to that page from our homepage.

Next week we'll do communion during our service, so please remember to prepare for that. We move to our salad course, the second of our four courses, which is the work of understanding what this passage is saying. After that we will have courses 3 and 4 to finish the series. I have some homework for us: by next week, please read all four chapters of Philippians. It is quite short, and then next week as we move to course 2 we will also look more at the context and structure of the letter to the Philippians. Let's close in prayer.