

21T12 An Engineer’s Guide to Bible Study Fundamentals

Hello my friends. Thanks for joining me at the PUNLA coffee table. So, get your coffee or tea and Get comfortable so we can talk.

Before we start. If anything I say today is useful to you then I thank God, if I say anything that is folly, then that’s all me. I’m human and I am flawed.

I’m an engineer and a scientist professionally. I spent years doing research and investigations. I have had to use the fundamentals of discovery professionally.

- Understand the circumstances of an event
- No preconceived ideas
- Let evidence lead where it leads
- Increase level of detail as needed for understanding.

As a young Christian, I grew up letting others tell me what I should think and understand about the Bible.

However, I have grown to believe truth is truth and opinion is opinion. If the fundamentals of discovery work in the secular world to discover the truth, then of course these fundamentals will work in the Christian realm to understand the Bible.

I believe in Bible Study. Reading the words and allowing the Holy Spirit to guide my understanding. But beyond this basic principle, I believe my research fundamentals of discovery can be applied to bible study. So here is my fundamentals of discovery or An Engineers Guide to Bible Study Fundamentals which can be stated like this,

- Understand the Context
- No Preconceived Ideas
- Read the Bible as a Child
- Increase level of detail of study as needed for understanding

I cannot stress enough how important it is to understand the Context of scripture when studying the Bible. Context meaning who, when, what, and why;

- **Who** wrote and to who was it written.
- **When** was it written.
 - Know History (What was the author and those written to experiencing)
 - Understand culture, symbolism, etc.
- **What**, type of literature is it.
- **Why**, what is the purpose (the writer had for writing).

For most of my life, I did not understand this fundamental. My understanding of the Bible was incomplete because I had no understanding of the history surrounding the author and events being discussed.

If you know about the author, you should know what they have done and what experiences they had, who they have been with, who taught them. You can discover the author’s way of writing and describing things. Their typical word usage. This helps you to understand the perspective they are writing with and from. An example might be me, if I’m writing about wide open places, cows and corn. And you know that I grew up in rural Nebraska in the 70’s & 80’s. I grew up with corn fields on two sides of my house and in my home town cows out-numbered people by several hundred cows to every person. So based this background you could understand symbolism I’d use about agriculture or rural areas. Or even word usage from the 70’s or 80’s.

If you know who the author was writing to, then you can discover cultural things that would influence their interpretation of the words. How they would understand symbolism and words. For example if I was writing to someone who graduated with me from the University of Nebraska. I might tell them, “remember the time at a Cornhusker game when it was raining cats & dogs, it was bad”. Well you may or may not understand. If you’d done your research on me and who I was writing to, then you would know 1) Cornhuskers is the football team mascot, so I am talking about a college football game, 2) Cats& Dogs is a common metaphor for heavy rain, and 3) “bad” was used in 90’s to describe something good or really good. Translated, “remember the time we watched a Nebraska Football game in the heavy rain, it was so much fun”. So, knowing the author and audience helps us understand the text through their eyes from their perspective as it was intended to be read by the writer and their audience.

Now you should understand getting this background information is not always easy. Some study bibles have some information and online resources are great. But as Christians, we need to learn extra-biblical histories and the cultures of biblical times to gain the background knowledge we need. I’m so thankful to God, that I live in this era of technologies which allow someone like me to research and learn so much with a few key strokes and mouse clicks.

What type of literature is also important. Poetry or Apocalyptic literature will have a lots of metaphors and symbolism. Historical and teaching literatures will be more plain language with literal meanings. Of course a given text may incorporate several types of texts. You need to be able to discern which but knowing the author and audience will help with this also. The author will write with methods they understand and that were typical to their time period.

Last is the PURPOSE. To understand any writing you have to understand the purpose it was written for. This is essential to understanding the Bible. Not every book or every scripture tells the complete story of God. So, don’t read scripture in

isolation from the full picture of scripture. An example might be if you read Matthew 16:23, the story when Jesus told Peter, “*get me behind me Satan*”. You might think Jesus disliked Peter or cast him out. Yet, Peter was one of Jesus’ most faithful friends. This is just one example of why you should not read any part of the bible out of context or without understanding the intended purpose of the story. Single verse memory verses are great for highlighting a topic but we should be careful to always understand the purpose that verse had within the context it was written.

My next fundamental is No Preconceived Ideas. Now many may disagree with me, but I personally try not to use commentaries or the understandings others have of scriptures when studying a topic, or scripture. I want to read it for myself and allow the text and the Holy Spirit to speak to me as Jesus promised. I want to rely on God to give me wisdom to understand, just as James told us in James 1:5 (NKJV) *If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.*

Of course, I read commentaries and we listen to many preachers and teachers on YouTube and in person at the churches our family attends. When I say “no preconceived ideas”, I mean when we read and study the bible, we should not think we know the story before we read it. Even if you have read it a thousand times, read the words as they are written don’t anticipate the next word or phrase. Your memory or ideas, may be incomplete or even wrong. This is one of the reasons, I often read from various translations so the exact words are not the same as my memory. I’ve even taken this to an extreme by listening to one translation while reading in a different translation or translations.

My next fundamental is to read the Bible as a Child. What I mean by this is read the words for what they say. Don’t begin your study looking for deeper meanings or as some people say reading between the lines. Don’t do this. This may be difficult for us because we are often looking for meanings or verses to support our opinions. Please don’t do this. When you read the Bible, just read the words for what it says. Once you understand this, then you can search for deeper meanings but I doubt you will when the plain language is clear to you.

My last fundamental is increasing the level of detail as needed for understanding. This is for those times when you just don’t understand or what you read differs from what your past knowledge told you. Or if two of you have slightly different or significantly different interpretations. Now we have to increase our study level or depth.

There are more than 400 English translations, this slide just shows some of them. I personally use King James (KJV), New Living Translation (NLT), New King James (NKJV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), New International Version (NIV), Amplified (AMP) on a regular basis in my own studies but I sometimes look at more than 20 different translations including ESV, RSV, Wycliffe, Tyndale, Coverdale, Geneva, MEV and others. I’m a bible nerd and a translation geek, so I’m not

recommending this extreme but using the KJV and one or two modern translations can be very useful. One reason I use the KJV is it used the Greek Textus Receptus of Erasmus in the translation but most modern bibles use the UBS compiled Greek manuscripts. It just gives you a view from different angles to answer your questions. There are some great online resources where you can see multiple translations in parallel, like biblehub, biblegateway, blueletterbible, or I have several apps on my phone like zionsoft or youversion bibles. Seeing the texts side by side, I find to be very enlightened when studying scriptures, especially those which vary from translation to translation.

I do want to add something here. There are many translation methods and most translations will tell you the methodology they use. Word for word, contextual, etc. I strongly encourage you not to use a so called “word-for-word” translation as your primary bible. My reason is this is a very poor way to translate language to language, since one language may have one word that can be translated into several words in the other language. Or even worse the original language may have words that don’t have an equivalent in the new language. Translating contextually is the most effective method to capture the full understanding of the text from one language to another.

But sometimes this is not enough or might even raise more questions. In those cases, dig deeper. Study in more depth or increased level of complexity. For example you can look to a Greek LEXICON, many of them are readily available on the internet. Here are just a few of the available online resources.

- www.biblehub.com,
- www.blueletterbible.org,
- www.logosapostolic.org,
- www.Textusreceptusbibles.com

You can see the Greek and Hebrew texts. This allows you to see the original language words. But be careful, these are not original manuscripts but compilations of many manuscripts with many many variations. But despite these complications, I personally see value in looking at the original language words. You can look up the meanings and other words that might have been used by translators. I often find English phrases in these lexicons which broaden my understandings of the word use and intent.

But despite this, as I’ve said there are discrepancies in the ancient manuscripts we have on hand today. So the next level of research might be to examine more than one source of Greek online for example Textus Receptus and UBS or other. This level of study takes a lot of discerning and should be done with caution. Even the most schooled and knowledgeable people have heated discussion on this topic and selections.

But you can keep going deeper and deeper if you feel the need. The objective is understanding of the text. Don’t get lost in the individual words because you will doubtfully be able to solve every issue. But you can get a firm grip on the intended message the author was writing to their audience. I am confident God will help you discern and understand. However please remember God is not obligated to answer all of our questions. There are times when He reveals it later when we are ready for that truth and there are times when you might not get the answers to your questions in this lifetime. But we can trust that the Lord will allow you to know the things you need to know when He deems it is right time for you.

So I told you I am a bible geek. I take my discovery and research activities pretty seriously. I love the bible and how God has painted His portrait with so many authors through millenniums. It’s a beautiful picture and God shared it with us. For me studying the bible is exciting and always reveals something new. Since I’ve started using these discovery fundamentals in my study, my life has broadened and my understanding has become richer with every new nuisance God reveals to me in the bible and history.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father. Thank you for your word the Bible. Thank you for the amazing technologies you have given us to aid in our study of your word. Help us to use these tools and your Bible to better understand You and what You are asking us to do.

Help us discern when to dig deeper and when to trust what the bible says as a child.

We pay in your name Jesus, Amen.

Thank you for joining me @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. If you liked the message, please click like. And Please Subscribe to our channel. Leave comments here, or on our website or email me.

See you next time @ the PUNLA Coffee Table. God bless.

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- www.Biblestudytools.com
- www.logosapostolic.org,
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