
EQUIP

Understanding – Small Group Session Two
Week beginning 30th April

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Is God's word understandable?

In our first session of this new term we began by asking the question, is the Bible God's word? It seemed like an obvious and simple question, but in our current culture many people doubt whether the Bible really is God's word. We saw that there are a number of reasons why we can have a deep confidence that the Bible is God's word. The supreme reason being because Jesus says it is! Jesus confirms the Old Testament and guarantees the New Testament.

Now, as we saw last session, that simple truth has some big implications. If the Bible is God's word, then what the Bible says must be true because God can not lie. Equally, what God says has authority because it is God who says it. So we need to obey the Bible's word. Also, if the Bible is God's word it is also of supreme value. But...

...just because it is God's word, that doesn't mean we can understand what He says. In fact quite often it can feel like the Bible is actually a very hard book to understand. After all, it was written hundreds and hundreds of years ago. It was written in a different culture and in different languages. Many, many books have been written about it. How can we ever expect to understand the Bible for ourselves?

But here is our conviction in our church: if the Bible is God's word then it must be clear and intelligible because God is powerful enough to communicate in clear and intelligible ways. So here is the question for us in this session - how can we understand God's word for ourselves?

Why not begin your session by praying for the session. Then think individually for a moment - when you come to a passage in the Bible (say in your quiet time or when you are reading the Bible on your own) what do you do to understand it for yourself? After three or four minutes of private thought, share your answers with others in the group before we begin.

Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord
will give you insight into all this.

2 Timothy 2:7

Them Then – Us Now

1 The nature of inspiration

What were your answers to the last question? If you are anything like me you will have said something like, "I use a guide". When we read the Bible for ourselves we often have some notes or a commentary, a sermon or guide to tell us what to think. That is good and helpful (if, and only if, the guide is good and helpful) but the risk is that we end up thinking about the guide's word rather than God's word.

In fact the best guides, commentaries, and sermons will always frustrate us by taking us back to the Bible and saying "look for yourself" - "what does it say?" - "what do you think?"

So how can we understand the Bible for ourselves? Time for some input - why not watch this week's video now.

2 Three Questions

What does it say? What does it mean? How does it apply? These three questions are a great place to start. They are simple to remember and they help us look at the Bible for ourselves. They help us grasp the main meaning and they make sure we apply it to our lives.

Time to give it a go. Read John 2:1-11 and spend time on each of the three questions. For more detailed questions for each of these steps look at the next page in this workbook.

Once you have looked at each of the three questions, try to summarise the main aim of the passage for yourself.

Finally, reflect on the experience. How is that different to what you usually might do? How might it help you understand the Bible for yourself?

3 Four Dangers

In the video we spoke about four dangers when it comes to reading the Bible.

Chocolate Box / Coat Hanger / Half-Way House / The Closed Mind

Speak about them each in turn? Are you familiar with any of these dangers? Have you seen them in action? How can we be on the look out for them?

Finally, how might we encourage each other to be people who love listening to God in His word for ourselves?

Time to wrap up. Share what you think the main lesson for you this week might be. Then pray in the light of everything you have shared.



Extra Help – Three Questions

1 What does it say?

Good questions to ask: Who is it about? What's being said? What are the main points? Are there any technical words that I don't understand? Can I summarise the passage in a sentence or two? How would I divide the passage up? Are there any surprises here? Any significant details? What questions does the passage raise?

2 What does it mean?

Good questions to ask: Why has the author selected this passage for inclusion? What would be missed out if it hadn't been included? Why is this passage at this point? Why is it after what precedes it and before what follows it? How does it fit in with the author's over all aim? What is the author's aim in this passage?

3 How does it apply?

What was the original application?

Good questions to ask: What does the author want his readers to learn from this passage? If there are specific commands, who are they made to, are they for the readers as well? What is the main principle the author wants to teach?

What is the application to me?

Good questions to ask: Am I in the same position as the original readers? How does that affect the application? Does the rest of the Bible apply this passage anywhere else? What difference does this make to my thinking? What implications will this have in my thoughts if I follow through its implications?

