

The Message About God in All '66'

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

This is the first in a series of teacher's guides for leading a group through the Bible. To fully understand the use of these teacher's guides, you need to have gone through the Bible, asking the one central question: "What does this story or section of Scripture say to me/us about God?"

Several such trips through the Bible have been recorded and are available in MP3 format on the Internet. If you have any questions about the use of these materials, contact info@theox.org.

There are many ways one can study the Scriptures. No doubt, God will be leading us to a greater understanding of the important truths of the Bible throughout eternity; however, for now, we need to do our best to understand Him on the basis of what has been revealed in Scripture. To do this, it is our belief that we need to keep the following central ideas, concepts, and questions prominently in our thoughts as we read and study.

1. **The focus should always be: What does this story or section of Scripture say to you/us about God?** If the Bible is God's book or letter to us, then we should be primarily concerned about what it says to us about Him. If God is the wonderful God of love (1 John 4:8,16) that the Scriptures collectively seem to portray, then we should expect each part of the Scripture to speak well of Him. Humans may not look good, but God should!
2. **Always remember that it is the context that determines the meaning of every passage in Scripture.** This context includes the textual context (including an understanding, as far as possible, of what the original language meant to the original writers and readers) in the local passage; the larger historical context of the times during which the books of the Bible were written; and the ultimate context which is the entire history of the great controversy between good and evil, God and Satan, since rebellion first entered, and which involves all the beings of the universe.
3. **When reading the Old Testament, remember that the God of the Old Testament is the same Jesus Christ who came and lived as a Human Being in the New Testament. (See John 5:39; Luke 24:44; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4.) For a very clear picture of what this Jesus Christ is like as a Person, read the Gospel of John.**
4. **When faced with what appears to be a contradiction or a passage which is very difficult to understand, always keep reading!** Sometimes, the local context will help. Sometimes, it seems to get worse as you read on! When you really cannot seem to understand why God did something in a certain situation, make a note of it and the question(s) that you have. Consult a commentary (They often ignore some of the most difficult problems.), talk to someone else about it, or look for other similar places in other parts of the Scripture. Often, seeing the problem in several different settings will lead one to an understanding of such problems throughout all of the Bible.
5. **It is often useful to have a Bible with cross-references in the footnotes, or the margin, to see where similar situations have occurred or other passages have dealt with the same issue.** This is particularly important for group leaders.
6. **No part of the Bible is useless or should be overlooked or ignored.** Some of the most important principles have been discovered by careful study of passages that are usually overlooked or ignored! (For example, see John 15:15; 16:25-27.)

7. **God has many reasons for doing what He does. Our feeble, finite minds can only discover and comprehend a small fraction of those reasons.** We may struggle to find even one rational explanation for an event in the Bible; but, we need to remember that God has many reasons we cannot possibly understand or grasp during this life. Many of those reasons involve the entire universe! But, if we can think of at least one explanation that makes sense, we should not have any trouble accepting the idea that God has many more explanations that we do not yet understand.
8. **The Bible is written in man’s language and not in God’s language. If God wants to communicate with us, He has to act in ways and speak in a language we can understand.** Often, this has caused God to “reach lower and lower” to communicate with us on our level. Clearly, it was not God’s plan ever to have sin, the flood, slavery, killing, the monarchy, polygamy, or idolatry; but, He had to deal with people who were involved in all of those things and much worse. Therefore, we should not assume that since God appears to act in a certain way in a certain situation, that is His ideal for all time!
9. **The central question or theme of the Bible is not whether God has greater authority or power than the Devil. The Devil admits that God has infinite power, and it scares him. (James 2:19) The grand central theme of the Bible is: “Who is telling the truth, and who can be trusted in the great controversy over God’s character and government.”** This controversy involves all the intelligent beings of the universe—not just the people living on this planet. (See Genesis 3:1-5; Job 1-2,38; Ephesians 1:9-10; 3:7-10; Colossians 1:19-20; 1 Corinthians 4:9; Revelation 12:7-12.)
10. **In some ways, the Bible is like a final examination in which we are given the answers but not the questions! In order to understand why God has given the answers that He has given, we must figure out what the questions were!**
11. **While our human minds cannot possibly comprehend all there is to know about God, our minds are, nevertheless, the only instruments we have for thinking about Him. For this reason, God always seeks to speak to us in ways that make sense to us.**

God never asks us to believe, without giving sufficient evidence upon which to base our faith. His existence, His character, the truthfulness of His Word, are all established by testimony that appeals to our reason; and this testimony is abundant. Yet God has never removed the possibility of doubt. Our faith must rest upon evidence, not demonstration. Those who wish to doubt will have opportunity; while those who really desire to know the truth, will find plenty of evidence on which to rest their faith.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* 105 (1892).
12. **When you think you have understood a given story, try to imagine what you would have done if you were God in that situation. Also, try to imagine what you would have done in that situation if you were the Devil.** It is often easy to sit back and criticize what God apparently did until you try to think of some better way to handle things in that context!

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