

# Session 2

## READING FOR INTENT

*John 5:39-40*

### Memory Verse

*You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.*

– JOHN 5:39-40, CSB



## Reading for Intent

**THEOLOGICAL THEME:** God's Word is true and was given to His people for a purpose. We should be careful to rightly interpret and apply Scripture to our lives.

Anyone who has traveled overseas where a different language is spoken or even tried to converse with someone who doesn't speak English, knows the fear of being misinterpreted or misunderstood. There are countless scenes from movies where someone is tricked into saying something that was not what they wanted, and embarrassment quickly followed.

Not understanding the culture or the language can lead to missing out on the meaning of words and phrases. Though it was originally written in different languages, Scripture was given to us from God for a purpose. It is our responsibility to learn it, know it, and live by it.



Share an instance where you experienced misinterpretation or misunderstanding due to a language barrier.

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What is your favorite scene from a movie where a misinterpretation happens? What makes these scenes entertaining?

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## Session Summary

The world we live in does all it can to keep us from knowing and living God's Word. We are constantly encouraged to believe whatever truth we choose and to find our truth inside of ourselves. This is completely counter to the absolute truth of Scripture and puts our focus on the wrong place.

As Christians we need to know how to protect ourselves from the misinterpretation of Scripture and to devote ourselves to knowing and believing the whole of God's Word. When we recognize the benefits of correctly handling God's Word, we will be more motivated to treat it in the right way.

### 1. The Word Proves True (John 5:37-42)

Think about what happens in a court of law. Two sides are trying to prove two different things. They use previous decisions and laws but ultimately what is the deciding factor comes down to witnesses—people who can swear under oath about what they saw with their own eyes or experienced in some way. Eyewitness testimony is one of the strongest presentations in a court of law and can be the thing that sways what is proven true or false.



Why do you think eyewitness testimony is considered strong evidence? Why is it significant that there were witnesses to the truth of the Bible and the truth about Jesus?

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Scripture has been given to us and is vital in the development of Christ followers. In the first chapter of John, Jesus is identified as the Word (John 1:1-5). Here in the fifth chapter of John, Jesus continued to explain His role in God's plan for the world. It's clear that there were some differing opinions and thoughts about Jesus and Scriptures that were being touted in that day. People will always come against the truth and try to sway God's people to believe lies over truth.

**?** How did Jesus show that the people He spoke to had missed the point of the Scriptures? What did He say was the point and why is this important for us today?

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John wrote what Jesus had to say about some of the different witnesses and testimonies to His role and place. In these verses, Jesus stressed that the Word of God proves the truth of Jesus, and Jesus proves the truth of the Word of God. Neither contradicts the other and both are without flaw or error. We can know and learn Scripture to know Jesus more fully.

Studying Scripture was not a new concept in that day. Religious leaders had developed a practice of reading and memorizing the Word, but Jesus pointed out that their motives were wrong. It seems odd to say that there can be wrong way to read Scripture, but Jesus made it clear. He said that when you study the Bible to find arguments to back up your own selfish motivations instead of studying to know Him better—you are missing the point.

When we search Scripture, it should bring us closer to Jesus. Jesus said the people were not willing to “come to [Him]” and find life. That is a great tragedy of religion. People can read and memorize the Word of God yet still miss out on a relationship with Jesus. We need to be challenged on how we approach Scripture. It is true and should be treated as such.

**?** Application: Why is it important that we first understand the original intent of the words of Scripture before looking for how they apply in our lives today?

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## 2. The Word Must Be Treated Correctly (2 Timothy 2:14-17; Revelation 22:18-19)

As we learn to treat God's Word correctly, we realize our responsibility regarding Scripture. Paul took the subject of the Word very seriously and wrote about it in some of his letters. He was never afraid to be direct and use strong language about important matters. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul addressed the issue of handling the Word of God. He gave some specific instructions of what to do and what not to do.

Notice that he started off by reminding us to focus on what is most important—to keep our eyes on the gospel. It is easy to get distracted by the many other things going on around us. The enemy loves to pull God's people away from what is important and get us thinking about and consumed with lesser things. Paul specifically listed the temptation to get caught up arguing about words. There is no end to people with opinions, and many want to argue and debate them all. Paul knew this was an issue and pointed out that we should refuse to get caught up arguing but instead to stand for truth. It is also vital to note that you cannot stand for what you don't know, which reinforces the need for us to be in the Word and to know the Word.



How do we get caught up arguing about words that have no profit to the gospel? How are we in danger of this if we don't understand the original intended meaning of the Scriptures?

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God's Word has been given to us as a guide for life. When we take our eyes off the truth and focus on the opinions and thoughts of people, we easily get led astray. Paul said that will be to the ruin of the hearer. Think about times in your life when you listened to or focused on the wrong things. Before long you start thinking the wrong thoughts and then acting the wrong way. Most people know someone who got caught up in wrong thinking and found themselves far from God without consciously choosing to stray. Even those who know truth can get caught up in lifestyles and habits that are far from God. When we exchange the truth for a lie it will be to our ruin.

**?** When have you or someone you know gotten caught up in sin because of believing a lie over the truth?

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Paul gave some proactive instructions to focus on the truth. We are to be diligent and focused on whose approval we are seeking. One way to keep from arguing about things that don't matter is to be diligent about how we are living our lives. Just as Timothy could choose whose approval he sought, we have the same choice today. Do we work hard for the Lord, or do we take the easy road and follow the world, seeking its approval and acceptance? Paul told the truth. He stressed that to live a life for the Lord was not going to be easy, but it would be worthwhile. When faced with something tough, having the right motivation can help. Paul pointed out that when we make the right choices with how we handle Scripture we can be those people who have nothing to be ashamed about in the end. When we work as unto the Lord and seek His approval, then we will obey the Word as we should.

Paul exhorted his readers to rightly handle the Word of Truth. Think about what that means. Do you study the Word? When you hear it preached or taught do you verify what you hear with what the Bible says? Are you learning Scripture and memorizing it so you can live by it? These are all helpful to rightly handle the truth. Paul also warned of a few things to avoid. He said to stay away for irreverent babbling because it will spread like gangrene and works against the desire to handle God's Word rightly. What we do with what we hear really matters as we seek to understand the intent of God's Word rightly.


**?** Application: How will you seek to understand the original meaning of the Scriptures? What kinds of resources does our church have to help with this?

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### 3. The Word Keeps Us from Sin (1 John 2:3-6)

Any discussion about the Word of God and how believers are responsible to treat it should also include the positive results from right understanding and application. Scripture is full of the benefits people experience when they treat God's Word correctly. From feeling safe, receiving answers, being wise, growing in godliness, or being protected, there are numerous rewards that come from knowing and obeying Scripture. Even though it can be hard to make the right choices and live like Jesus, when we see and understand the benefits of knowing and obeying God, the hard things become a little less difficult or at least worth the effort. The world will tell you to give up and not even try, but God's Word assures us that it is worth it every time.


 How have you seen positive rewards motivate behaviors either in you or someone else?

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In 1 John 2, we see that one of the rewards we experience when we choose to read Scripture with intent is fruit that comes through fellowship with the Father. These verses offer some great personal evaluation points to help believers identify where they are in their faith journey. If we love God, then we will obey His commandments that we find in His Word. No one can determine exactly where another person's relationship with the Lord is, but we can all look to see what kind of fruit is being produced in our own lives.

If the Word of God was given to us for a purpose—to know Jesus and how to live for Him—then doesn't it stand to reason that all believers should be concerned about whether they are approaching it rightly? We don't have to live in doubt or uncertainty. The Bible makes it clear that we can know we have been using Scripture correctly when we know Him the way He desires us to. Think of these verses as a good self-evaluation to check where you stand in your faith journey. You do not have to wonder, you can know.

 How does 1 John tell us we can know if we are in right relationship with Jesus and His Word?

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If you know God and love Jesus, then you will keep His commandments. This is a byproduct of being in relationship with Him. This does not mean you are perfect but that you are continually in the process of becoming more like Jesus and less like your old sinful self. We will not be completely free from sin until we get to heaven, but once we are in a real relationship with Jesus and know Him through the Word, we will see fruit in our lives that looks like Him. When we fail to know the truth of God's Word and abide in Him, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable to believing the lies of the world instead of the truth. Do you have a desire to keep God's commandments and live a fruitful life? A true Christ follower will desire to live more as Scripture commands in order to look like Jesus. It's not enough to only say you want to be like Jesus; you must live in accordance with this proclamation.

John also pointed out that those who say they are in relationship with Jesus but are not changed in any way are not living in reality. Simply being able to state some facts about God does not mean you are in relationship with Him. One of the greatest benefits of knowing Jesus and His Word is how your relationship with sin changes. No longer do you enjoy sin like you used to. Because sin separates us from God, we begin to hate sin instead of chasing it. All of this comes from abiding in Jesus and is a great way to evaluate where you are in relationship to Jesus as your Savior and the Word who was with God from the beginning.



**Application: How would intentional reading of God's Word compel you to change today? How would your life look different if you believed the Scriptures were completely true and the source of all truth?**

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## Conclusion


Reading Scripture with intent is a needed value today. As the world around us continues to push agendas that are contrary to the Word of God, we as believers need to know what we believe and learn to know His Word for ourselves. The fact that every word of Scripture is true and has been proven time and again is the foundation for the way we should respond to the Bible. We must become people who know the truth so well that we immediately recognize when we hear a lie that



opposes Scripture. The most powerful lies are ones that have a grain of truth in them but are twisted and distorted just enough to make them false. Our enemy is a master at twisting God's Word to fit his own narrative and will even use the manipulation of Scripture to lead us to sin if possible.


All Christ-followers should take seriously our responsibility to rightly handle the Word of God. This begins by understanding the intended meaning of the Scripture. We want to be those people who stay focused on the important things and not be distracted by idle chatter or babblings. When we are diligent about the Word of God, we will have nothing to be ashamed about when we stand before Him.

To move toward being unashamed before God, it is helpful to recognize where we stand currently. Some self-evaluation can be useful in revealing our true relationship with Jesus. If you truly are in relationship with Jesus and know Him through the Bible, you will see fruit of fellowship in your life. Once you know Jesus you will see sin differently. Though we won't be perfect until heaven, as we become more and more like Jesus our relationship with sin changes. The Bible was given with the purpose for us to know God and love Him. As we do, we will increasingly look less like the world and more like Jesus.

 Where do you need to grow in your understanding of Scripture? How can you seek to do that on your own? How can you seek to do that as part of our church?


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 How can we as a group encourage one another to read the Bible for intent?

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 How does a right understanding of Scripture always lead to conversations with others about the Scriptures? Whom do you need to have a conversation with today?

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# FOR NEXT WEEK

## Studying to Understand

### Main Passages

- Nehemiah 8:1-8

### Session Outline

1. Get in the Word (Nehemiah 8:1-3)
2. Receive the Word (Nehemiah 8:4-6)
3. Understand the Word (Nehemiah 8:7-8)

### Memorize

*You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. <sup>40</sup> But you are not willing to come to me so that you may have life.*

- John 5:39-40, CSB