Studying a Bible Passage

Extracts from The Catholic Bible Study Handbook by Fr. Jerome Kodell, OSB, 1985

Because the Bible includes various types of writing, no single method of approach will apply to every passage in the Old and New testaments. As a pattern for study, Fr. Kodell presents plans for one New Testament type (gospel passage) and one Old Testament type (a psalm) of biblical text. Remember, we don’t just read the Bible, we *pray* the Bible.

**A Gospel Story**

The five-step pattern outlined here is applicable to many biblical passages.

1. **Simply read the passage straight through.**
2. **Read the passage again slowly, marking down anything that needs special attention or any questions that come to mind.** This could include words you don’t fully understand, names you might not be familiar with, ideas that seem central to the passage and events that are referred to.
3. **Answer the questions** as well as you can by looking at the context of the passage in the particular gospel. The cross references/footnotes in your Bible will be a great help.
4. **Seek additional information** and insights from a Bible commentary or other Bible aid.
5. **Listen for the particular personal message** God offers you in this story.

**Studying a Psalm**

The study of the Old Testament requires some adjustments for a Christian because they were not written by Christians and do not “breathe faith in Jesus Christ.” However, the psalms were used by the New Testament writers and have remained important to Christian prayer through the centuries. When read and prayed through the lens of Jesus Christ, whom they prefigure, they are a beautiful and holy offering.

1. **Read the Psalm through** preferably aloud, in order to appreciate its poetic flavor.
2. **Summarize the meaning** of the psalm in one or two sentences. It is impossible to encompass everything, but this helps grasp the main thrust of the psalm as the Hebrew author conceived it.
3. **Study the psalm with the help of footnotes, commentary, and other aids.**
4. **Relate thoughts in the psalm to central themes of Hebrew faith,** themes such as salvation, creation, Exodus, covenant, messiah, king, sin, longing for God, thanksgiving and asking for help.
5. **Seek a Christian meaning.** With this step the Christian reading of the psalm begins. Perhaps Christ is speaking in the psalm, or He may be the one spoken about. The Christian reader may be the speaker or the one spoken about, or it may be the Church as a whole.
6. **Relate thoughts in the psalm to themes of Christian salvation.** This is the New Testament version of step 4 and will complete some of the themes discovered there. Now the Christian reader gives spiritual imagination free rein to enliven the ancient words with personal faith.
7. **Compose a prayer using the phraseology of the psalm and reflecting personal faith.**
8. **Read the psalm straight through again,** prayerfully enjoying the new resonance as a result of your study.