A TRINFINITY MINI BOOK

Trusting the Word of God

Reading Scripture with care and confidence

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About this book

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All Scripture quotations in this book use the New American Standard Bible 1995 (NASB).

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Introduction

I want to understand what God has said before I decide how to apply it. That sounds simple, but it takes care. It means reading beyond a favorite sentence, asking who is speaking, and allowing the passage to challenge what I already think. Confidence in Scripture should make me a more careful reader. My purpose here is to help us approach God's Word with faith, humility, and a willingness to learn.

1 Why Scripture matters

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:17 (NASB)

Second Timothy 3:16-17 (NASB) describes Scripture as inspired by God and useful for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. Its purpose reaches into the life we actually live. God equips His people for good work through His Word. I should expect that reading it will sometimes encourage me and sometimes correct me.

Second Peter 1:20-21 (NASB) also directs our attention to God's part in the giving of Scripture. The message did not originate simply in human will. Men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. I therefore approach the Bible as more than a collection of interesting religious opinions.

That confidence does not mean every interpretation I have heard is correct. Scripture and my interpretation of Scripture are not the same thing. I can believe the Bible is true and still need to reconsider how I have understood a passage. Humility belongs beside conviction.

When a passage makes me uncomfortable, I want to resist the urge to explain it away. I also want to resist the urge to make it say more than it says. Both habits put my preferences ahead of the text. A faithful reading begins by listening, and it continues by accepting correction when the passage calls for it.

2 Context comes first

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15 (NASB)

Before I ask what a passage means for my life, I need to understand what it is saying. Who wrote it? Who first received it? What comes before and after it? Is the writer giving a command, describing an event, presenting poetry, or explaining a promise? Those questions keep a single sentence connected to the message around it.

Exegesis means drawing out what the text communicates. Eisegesis means reading my own ideas into it. I want the first approach. A verse should not become evidence for an idea simply because a few of its words sound useful for my argument.

I read Scripture in its ordinary sense unless the context gives a reason to recognize figurative language. A figure of speech still communicates truth. The task is to understand that truth from the passage, rather than assigning a hidden meaning to every detail. Scripture should help explain Scripture.

This is why I do not build doctrine from the placement of English words, an acrostic that depends on a particular translation, or arithmetic performed on chapter and verse numbers. Those devices can make an illustration memorable, but they do not establish the meaning of the biblical author. God's Word deserves better than an argument that disappears when the wording changes.

3 From manuscripts to a printed Bible

The history of the Bible involves several questions that should be kept distinct. Inspiration concerns God's giving of Scripture. The canon concerns the books received as Scripture. Manuscript history concerns the copying and transmission of the text. Translation concerns its rendering into another language. One question should not be used as a careless substitute for another.

The Protestant Bible contains 66 books, with 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. Those are the books followed in this collection. Discussing how the church recognized the canon requires

more care than naming one meeting and claiming it created the Bible. Recognition and inspiration are different matters.

Surviving manuscripts provide evidence for studying the text's transmission. The Dead Sea Scrolls include ancient biblical manuscripts from the area near Qumran. The Smithsonian's account of the Isaiah manuscript identifies the original group of seven scrolls as having been found between late 1946 and mid-1947. That discovery belongs to manuscript history; it should not be presented as the moment the biblical books were first written.

Printing later changed how books could be produced. The Library of Congress dates the Gutenberg Bible to 1454/1455 and describes it as the first large-format typographic Bible produced in Europe. That wording is more careful than calling it the first book ever printed. Erasmus' first printed Greek New Testament was published in 1516, as the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago's collection records. That places it in the sixteenth century, not the fifteenth.

Historical evidence can deepen appreciation for the text handed down to us. It should be checked with the same care I ask people to bring to interpretation. An attractive story about the Bible is not made true merely because it is repeated in a lesson.

4 Understanding translation and textual notes

Translation involves communicating a text's meaning in another language. Different translation approaches give different weight to the original wording, grammatical form, and the way a sentence will be understood by the reader. Those differences require explanation. They do not justify assuming that every unfamiliar wording represents an attempt to remove the truth.

The Lockman Foundation describes the New American Standard Bible as following formal equivalence. Its description of the 1995 edition emphasizes literal translation together with improved clarity and readability. I use that edition consistently here. A quotation from a different edition should not be given the NASB 1995 label simply because much of it sounds the same.

Textual notes also deserve attention. They may alert a reader to a difference among manuscripts, rather than a translator's personal objection to a teaching. Before accusing a translation of dishonesty, I need to examine the evidence and understand what the note actually reports. My preference for one edition is not a substitute for that work.

A study Bible adds another layer: commentary printed beside Scripture. Those notes can be useful, but they should remain distinguishable from the biblical text. I want to know the writer's approach and check a difficult explanation against the passage and related Scriptures. The notes should help me read, not become the authority that prevents me from reading.

Consistent wording helps a reader follow an argument. Responsible reading also involves attention to language, context, and sources, so I want to understand both the wording before me and the evidence behind an explanation.

5 Using study helps wisely

A study Bible can help with background, cross-references, and difficult words. Its notes are still the work of an interpreter. I should read the biblical passage first and then use the notes as help, rather than allowing the notes to replace the passage in my mind.

For this collection I use the New American Standard Bible 1995, abbreviated NASB. Consistency matters because a quotation should be checked against the edition actually named. A familiar sentence remembered from another translation should not be printed with a different label underneath it.

When choosing study helps, I want to know who wrote them and what approach they take. A commentary can provide useful historical information while reaching an interpretation I do not share. I need to distinguish the background information from the commentator's conclusion. A confident tone does not settle the issue.

Original-language work also requires care. A dictionary entry can show several possible meanings, but context helps determine which meaning belongs in a particular verse. I should not gather every possible meaning into one English word or use a Greek term to give an unsupported claim an appearance of authority. When I cannot verify a point, it is better to leave it open than pretend it is settled.

6 Reading in order to respond

Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.

Psalm 119:105 (NASB)

A manageable reading habit is more useful than a plan I abandon because it is unrealistic. I would rather read a passage with attention than rush through several chapters without understanding what I have read. A schedule should support faithful reading, not become another way to measure my worth.

I begin by reading the passage more than once. Then I look at its place in the chapter and book. I note what is clear, what needs further study, and what response the passage calls for. If I write down a question, I can return to it without forcing a quick answer.

Application should grow out of the meaning. A command to forgive calls for more than admiring forgiveness. A warning about pride calls for examining the way I treat people. A promise about Christ's return should strengthen faithfulness while I wait. Understanding should lead to response.

I also need the help of other believers. A humble conversation can reveal an assumption I missed or a passage I overlooked. My aim is not to collect enough information to win every argument. I want to know the Lord more deeply and live more faithfully before Him. Careful reading and a willing heart belong together.

Trusting the Word of God

Where did the Bible come from, and can I trust it? This book looks at why Scripture matters, why context comes first, how the Bible came to us from manuscripts to print, and how to use translations and study helps wisely. The goal is simple. Read carefully, then respond.

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

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