

Title: Understanding Theology

Hosea 4:6 “my people are destroyed from lack of knowledge. “Because you have rejected knowledge,

Before understanding the Bible as one unified message, it is important to understand *how* the Bible should be studied. Scripture is clear, but confusion often arises when it is approached without proper study methods. Theology provides frameworks for understanding the Bible, and using the correct framework helps readers interpret Scripture accurately and responsibly.

This lesson introduces key tools used in biblical studies, including systematic theology, biblical theology, exegesis, hermeneutics, and basic Bible study methods. These tools help leaders read the Bible in its proper context, understand its meaning, and apply it correctly.

This training is designed to equip pastors, leaders, and teachers with a solid foundation for studying, teaching, and applying Scripture. The goal is to develop biblically grounded leaders who handle the Word of God with clarity, confidence, and integrity.

Why Many Believers Struggle With the Bible

Many Christians remain unsure about Scripture despite regular church attendance. This is often not due to a lack of commitment, but a lack of biblical training. While sermons provide encouragement, they do not always teach believers how to study and interpret the Bible on their own. Leadership training must address this gap by equipping leaders with proper biblical understanding and study skills.

Lesson: Three Major Approaches to Learning the Bible

Lesson Overview

There are different ways people learn and study the Bible. Each approach shapes how Scripture is understood, taught, and applied. As leaders, it is important to recognize these approaches, understand their strengths and limitations, and learn how to study the Bible responsibly. This lesson introduces three major approaches to learning the Bible and explains why this course follows the Biblical Theology approach.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Identify three major approaches to learning the Bible
 - Understand the strengths and limitations of each approach
 - Explain the importance of biblical context and authorial intent
 - Recognize why Biblical Theology provides a strong foundation for leadership training
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1. Ministry School Approach

Description

The Ministry School approach focuses primarily on practical ministry skills. Training often emphasizes outreach, prayer, healing, evangelism, leadership activation, and spiritual experiences. The goal is to prepare believers for active ministry involvement.

Strengths

- Builds confidence in ministry settings
- Encourages active faith and obedience
- Develops practical leadership and ministry skills

Limitations

While this approach is effective in activating believers, it often provides limited training in biblical interpretation. Scripture may be used devotionally or thematically without sufficient attention to context, author intent, or theological consistency. This can lead to shallow understanding or misapplication of biblical texts.

2. Seminary / Systematic Theology Approach

Description

The Seminary or Systematic Theology approach studies the Bible by organizing its teachings into structured doctrinal categories. Topics such as salvation, the Holy Spirit, the church, sin, and end times are studied by gathering related verses across Scripture.

Strengths

- Provides clear theological structure
- Helps define key doctrines and beliefs
- Supports doctrinal consistency within churches and organizations

Limitations

This approach can sometimes remove passages from their original historical and literary context. When verses are studied mainly to support doctrine, the Bible may be treated as a reference book rather than a unified narrative. This can make Scripture feel distant from everyday life and ministry practice.

3. Bible School / Biblical Theology Approach

Description

The Biblical Theology approach studies the Bible as one unified and progressive story. It focuses on understanding what each biblical author intended to communicate to the original audience within their historical and cultural context. Scripture is read in its natural flow, from Genesis to Revelation, showing how God's plan unfolds over time.

Strengths

- Preserves historical and cultural context
- Honors authorial intent and original audience
- Connects theology to real life and leadership practice
- Helps leaders see Scripture as a coherent and meaningful whole

Why This Course Follows This Approach

This course follows the Biblical Theology approach because it provides a balanced foundation for leadership. It allows leaders to:

- Interpret Scripture accurately
- Teach the Bible with clarity and confidence
- Apply biblical truth responsibly in ministry and leadership contexts

Rather than choosing between practice or doctrine, Biblical Theology integrates both by grounding ministry and leadership in a deep understanding of Scripture.

Key Takeaways

- Different approaches to Bible study shape how Scripture is understood and taught
- Ministry School emphasizes practice but may lack interpretive depth
- Systematic Theology provides structure but may overlook context
- Biblical Theology offers a comprehensive, contextual, and unified understanding of Scripture
- Effective leadership requires both biblical understanding and practical application

Reflection Questions (Optional for Training)

1. Which approach have you been most exposed to, and why?
2. How can a lack of biblical context affect leadership decisions?
3. Why is understanding authorial intent important for teaching Scripture?

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY EXPLAINED	BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
Soteriology (Salvation)	Old Testament Survey
Pneumatology (Holy Spirit)	New Testament Survey
Atonement Theory refers to the various theories and understandings of Atonement - the reconciliation of God and humankind through Jesus Christ.	Hermeneutics
Angelology and Demonology - The Study of Angel and Demons	
Eschatology - Study of endtimes	
Ecclesiology - Study of understanding the church	
Canonicity - is the Study of the formation of the Bible	

Section 1: Systematic Theology

Definition

Systematic Theology is an approach to studying the Bible that organizes biblical teachings into structured categories or systems. These categories typically include topics such as salvation, sin, angels, the Holy Spirit, the church, and end times. Scripture passages from different parts of the Bible are gathered and studied together to form a clear doctrinal understanding.

Purpose of Systematic Theology

The primary purpose of this approach is to help believers understand *what the Bible teaches* about specific theological topics. It is often used to define beliefs, establish doctrinal positions, and provide clarity on key theological issues within the church.

Strengths

- **Provides structure for learning:** Helps learners organize complex biblical information in a clear and logical way.
 - **Addresses specific questions:** Useful for answering topical or doctrinal questions, such as “What does the Bible teach about salvation?”
 - **Supports doctrinal clarity:** Helps churches and leaders articulate and defend their beliefs.
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Weaknesses

- **Risk of selective use of Scripture:** Verses may be chosen to support a doctrine without full consideration of their original context.
 - **Limited attention to context:** Historical background, authorial intent, and the progressive nature of God's revelation may be overlooked.
 - **Fragmented understanding:** Scripture can be treated as isolated statements rather than part of a unified biblical narrative.
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Analogy

Systematic Theology is similar to organizing groceries into separate cupboards. Everything is neatly arranged and easy to find, but this method does not show how the ingredients work together to create a complete meal. In the same way, doctrines may be clear, but the larger biblical story can be missed.

Biblical Reference

Acts 17:11 highlights the importance of examining Scripture carefully and responsibly. While Systematic Theology encourages study and examination, it must be practiced with care to ensure that Scripture is handled accurately and in context.

Leadership Insight

Systematic Theology is valuable for defining beliefs and providing doctrinal clarity. However, when used on its own, it can lead to ongoing debates and a fragmented understanding of Scripture. Effective leadership requires combining this approach with contextual and narrative-based study methods to ensure balanced and responsible interpretation of the Bible.

Section 2: Biblical Theology

Definition

Biblical Theology is an approach to studying the Bible that follows the unfolding storyline of Scripture as it was revealed over time. It seeks to understand what each biblical passage meant to its original audience, within its historical, cultural, and literary context. Rather than organizing Scripture by topics, this approach traces how God's message develops from Genesis to Revelation.

Purpose of Biblical Theology

The purpose of Biblical Theology is to understand Scripture as a unified and progressive revelation of God's redemptive plan. It helps leaders see how individual passages fit within the larger biblical narrative and how all Scripture ultimately points to Christ.

Strengths

- **Respects historical and cultural context:** Gives attention to the original setting, audience, and purpose of each biblical text.
 - **Recognizes progressive revelation:** Shows how God revealed His purposes gradually over time.
 - **Centers on Christ:** Highlights Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the biblical story and God's promises.
 - **Encourages faithful interpretation:** Helps leaders interpret Scripture before moving to application.
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Weaknesses

- **More challenging to organize by categories:** This approach does not easily fit into doctrinal systems or topical outlines.
 - **Requires background study:** Understanding historical and cultural context often requires additional learning and resources.
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Analogy

Biblical Theology is like watching a television series episode by episode. Each episode has its own meaning, but the full story is only understood when viewed in sequence. Skipping episodes or watching them out of order can lead to misunderstanding the overall plot.

Biblical References

- **Luke 24:27** – Jesus explains how the Scriptures point to Him, showing the unity of the biblical story.
 - **Hebrews 1:1-2** – God's revelation unfolds over time and finds its fulfillment in Christ.
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Leadership Insight

Biblical Theology begins with Scripture itself and emphasizes humility, context, and disciplined study. It trains leaders to interpret the Bible accurately before applying it to leadership and ministry situations. This approach strengthens discipleship by grounding leadership decisions in a clear and faithful understanding of God's Word.

Section 3: Exegesis vs. Eisegesis

Definition

Exegesis is the process of drawing out the original meaning of a biblical text. It seeks to understand what the author intended to communicate to the original audience by carefully examining context, language, history, and purpose.

Eisegesis is the practice of reading one's own ideas, assumptions, or modern perspectives into the biblical text. Instead of allowing Scripture to speak for itself, the interpreter imposes meaning onto the passage.

Purpose of Proper Interpretation

The goal of biblical interpretation is understanding before application. Leaders must first determine what a passage meant in its original setting before asking how it applies today. Exegesis protects the integrity of Scripture, while eisegesis often leads to misunderstanding and misuse of the Bible.

Key Differences

- **Exegesis (Correct Approach):**
 - Draws meaning from the text

- Respects historical, cultural, and literary context
 - Seeks authorial intent
 - Leads to accurate teaching and sound doctrine
 - **Eisegesis (Incorrect Approach):**
 - Inserts personal opinions or assumptions into the text
 - Ignores context and original audience
 - Often reflects modern culture more than biblical meaning
 - Can result in doctrinal confusion or misapplication
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Biblical Example

- **Exegesis:** *Jeremiah 29:11* is understood within its historical context as God's promise to Israel during their exile in Babylon. The message emphasizes hope, restoration, and God's faithfulness to His covenant people.
 - **Eisegesis:** Using *Jeremiah 29:11* solely as a personal slogan for individual success without acknowledging its original context and audience.
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Analogy

Exegesis is like carefully listening to what a friend actually said and understanding their intent. Eisegesis is like twisting their words to mean what you wanted to hear. The difference lies in listening versus projecting.

Biblical References

- **2 Timothy 2:15** – Leaders are instructed to handle the Word of God accurately and responsibly.
 - **Nehemiah 8:8** – Scripture was read clearly and explained so that the people could understand its meaning.
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Leadership Insight

Effective leadership requires guarding against eisegesis. When leaders impose personal ideas onto Scripture, confusion and division can follow. Practicing exegesis ensures that teaching remains faithful to the Bible and builds doctrinal clarity, spiritual maturity, and healthy discipleship.

Section 4: Hermeneutics – The Art of Interpretation

4.1 Definition of Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the art and science of interpreting Scripture. It focuses on how biblical texts are understood, explained, and responsibly applied in contemporary contexts.

In leadership formation, hermeneutics is essential because leaders are not only readers of Scripture but also **interpreters and teachers** of its message. Sound interpretation helps prevent misunderstanding, misapplication, and misuse of biblical texts.

At its core, hermeneutics asks an important question:

How do we faithfully understand what the Bible meant then and apply what it means now?

4.2 The Purpose of Hermeneutics in Leadership

For leaders, hermeneutics serves three primary purposes:

1. **Accuracy** – Ensuring that Scripture is taught according to its intended meaning
2. **Integrity** – Avoiding personal bias or selective interpretation
3. **Application** – Translating biblical truth into ethical, spiritual, and practical leadership decisions

Effective leadership teaching depends on interpretation that is both **faithful to the text** and **relevant to present realities**.

4.3 Core Principles of Biblical Hermeneutics

1. Context Is Essential (“Context Is King”)

Every biblical passage must be understood within its context. This includes:

- **Historical context** – When was it written?
- **Cultural context** – What customs or social realities influenced it?
- **Literary context** – What comes before and after the passage?
- **Audience context** – Who was the original audience, and why was the message given?

Ignoring context often leads to misinterpretation. Leaders must ask:

Who wrote this, to whom, and for what purpose?

2. Scripture Interprets Scripture

The Bible is internally consistent. Difficult or unclear passages should be interpreted using clearer passages on the same theme.

This principle encourages:

- Comparing texts across different books
- Allowing the broader biblical message to clarify specific verses

Leaders should avoid isolating verses without reference to the whole of Scripture.

3. Progressive Revelation

Progressive revelation refers to the idea that God revealed Himself gradually throughout biblical history.

- Earlier biblical figures did not possess the full revelation available later.
- God's purposes became clearer over time.
- Later revelation does not contradict earlier truth but **clarifies and completes it**.

Understanding this progression helps leaders teach Scripture accurately without forcing later knowledge onto earlier texts.

4. Christ-Centered Interpretation

The Bible ultimately points to **Jesus Christ**.

Christian hermeneutics recognizes Christ as the central lens through which Scripture is understood.

This does not mean every passage directly mentions Christ, but rather that:

- Scripture moves toward God's redemptive work revealed in Him
- The life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Christ provide fuller meaning to the biblical narrative

This principle aligns with Christ's own explanation of Scripture in **Luke 24:45**, where He opens the disciples' understanding of the Scriptures.

4.4 Historical-Contextual Hermeneutics

The most widely accepted and reliable interpretive method in biblical studies is **historical-contextual hermeneutics**.

This approach emphasizes understanding the text **as it was originally intended**, before applying it to modern contexts. It asks two foundational questions:

1. **What did this mean to the original author?**
2. **What did this mean to the original audience?**

Only after answering these questions can leaders responsibly ask:

- What does this mean for us today?
 - How should this shape leadership values, behavior, and teaching?
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4.5 Teaching Analogy: Reading an Old Letter

Hermeneutics can be compared to reading an old personal letter.

To understand it properly, one must know:

- Who wrote the letter
- Who received it
- The situation that prompted it
- The language and tone used

Reading the letter without this information may lead to incorrect assumptions.

Similarly, Scripture must be interpreted with awareness of its original setting before drawing modern applications.

4.6 Implications for Leadership Training

For leadership development, hermeneutics teaches leaders to:

- Handle Scripture responsibly
- Teach with clarity and humility
- Respect historical and theological depth
- Apply biblical principles wisely rather than superficially

By practicing sound hermeneutics, leaders model intellectual honesty, spiritual maturity, and faithful stewardship of Scripture.

Summary:

Hermeneutics equips leaders to interpret Scripture accurately by respecting context, recognizing progressive revelation, and viewing the Bible through a Christ-centered lens. This disciplined approach ensures that biblical teaching remains both faithful to its original meaning and relevant to contemporary leadership practice.

Section 5: Bible Study Forms

5.1 Purpose of Bible Study Forms

Bible study forms are structured approaches that help readers and leaders engage Scripture in an organized and meaningful way. Each form emphasizes a different aspect of the biblical text and serves a distinct purpose in teaching, discipleship, and leadership formation.

For leaders, understanding multiple study forms is important—not to use all of them at once, but to **choose the most appropriate method** for the teaching goal, audience, and context.

5.2 Common Forms of Bible Study

1. Topical Study

A **topical study** focuses on a specific theme, such as grace, faith, leadership, prayer, or forgiveness. Verses related to the topic are gathered from different parts of Scripture and studied together.

Strengths:

- Useful for addressing specific questions or issues
- Effective for thematic teaching and group discussions

Limitations:

- Can become misleading if verses are removed from their original context
- Requires careful attention to authorship, audience, and setting

Topical study is most effective when it is grounded in sound hermeneutics and contextual awareness.

2. Character Study

A **character study** examines the life, actions, strengths, and weaknesses of a biblical figure. This approach highlights leadership traits, moral decisions, and spiritual development.

Strengths:

- Helps learners connect biblical narratives with real-life leadership situations
- Encourages reflection on character formation

Limitations:

- Risk of oversimplifying complex individuals
- Requires balance to avoid moralizing or idealizing characters

Leaders should emphasize God's work through individuals rather than presenting biblical figures as flawless role models.

3. Book Study

A **book study** focuses on an entire biblical book, examining its structure, themes, purpose, and intended audience.

Strengths:

- Preserves literary and historical unity
- Promotes deeper theological understanding
- Helps leaders see how individual passages fit into the whole message

This form is especially valuable for leadership training because it encourages disciplined and contextual reading.

4. Chronological Study

A **chronological study** follows biblical events in the order they occurred historically rather than the order in which the books appear in the Bible.

Strengths:

- Clarifies historical development
- Helps learners understand progressive revelation
- Strengthens awareness of cause-and-effect relationships in Scripture

This approach is helpful for teaching biblical history and theological development over time.

5. Word Study

A **word study** examines the meaning of key terms in their original languages (Hebrew or Greek).

Strengths:

- Clarifies nuanced meanings
- Prevents misunderstanding caused by translation limits
- Enhances precision in teaching and preaching

Limitations:

- Requires caution to avoid overinterpretation
- Should always be connected to context, not isolated meanings

Word studies are best used to support, not replace, contextual interpretation.

5.3 Devotional Study

A **devotional study** focuses on personal encouragement, reflection, and spiritual inspiration. It often selects short passages or verses for meditation and application.

Strengths:

- Encouraging and spiritually nourishing
- Useful for personal growth and reflection

Limitations:

- Often breaks the natural flow of Scripture
- Not sufficient on its own for teaching or doctrinal formation

For leaders, devotional study should complement—not substitute—serious biblical study.

5.4 Expository Study (Recommended Approach)

Expository study seeks to explain Scripture by uncovering the original meaning of the text and applying it faithfully to contemporary life.

This approach:

- Teaches Scripture passage by passage
- Honors historical context, audience, and purpose
- Allows the message of the text to guide teaching rather than personal preference

Expository study is particularly effective for leadership training because it models disciplined interpretation and promotes theological integrity.

5.5 Biblical Foundation

The importance of disciplined and consistent engagement with Scripture is emphasized in **Joshua 1:8**, which highlights meditation on God's Word as foundational for wise leadership and faithful action.

5.6 Leader Application

Leaders trained in sound Bible study forms are encouraged to:

- Teach **context before application**
- Allow Scripture to shape sermons and lessons
- Equip believers to study the Bible with confidence and responsibility
- Develop leaders who can rightly handle and teach the Word

Effective leadership is not built on isolated verses, but on a clear and faithful understanding of Scripture.

5.7 Final Summary

- Biblical theology provides clarity
- Exegesis protects truth
- Historical context matters
- Progressive revelation prevents error
- Expository teaching builds strong and healthy churches

By understanding and applying appropriate Bible study forms, leaders are better equipped to teach accurately, lead wisely, and steward Scripture faithfully.