

Learning To Know God Through Bible Stories
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If you ever went to Sunday School as a child, you know what I mean. There were pictures of the "famous people" from the Bible thumbtacked to a bulletin board. There was Jonah and the Whale, Daniel in the lion's den, and David and Goliath. There was Moses and the Red Sea, Daniel and the fiery furnace, and Jesus in the manger.

These were "the classics!"

The stories were told with great zest! The teacher would finish with something like "now wasn't that a great story boys and girls!" And we all agreed that indeed it was!

Then the children became adults. The stories remained the same. Unfortunately, childhood patterns are often hard to break. It becomes too easy to read the stories, close the Bible and say "now wasn't that a great story!"

We often don't know how to unlock the "adult truths" that lie deep within the recesses of every historical account in the Bible. This paper will seek to provide the tools necessary to rediscover many of the common stories with new adult freshness.

It must all begin with understanding just why God gave us the Bible in the first place. Although the Bible can be looked at from many different perspectives, there is one purpose that remains supreme in the mind of God. Going beyond that of merely providing historical records or rules for living,

God gave His book so that we could get to know Him better!

Please take a moment to dwell on that last sentence. It is so very important to how you approach that book.

The Apostle Paul says it best when after accounting his search for the central issue of the Christian life, he says:

"What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord." Philippians 3:8

When we stop short of using the Bible to help us understand and know God better, we have stopped short of the purpose for which it was given. When we read a Bible story and then close the Bible with some comment about it being a nice story, we have retained a childhood pattern that will NOT bring adult satisfaction within our Christian experience!

This article will guide the reader through a process of "reading behind the lines" of Scripture so that every passage will continue to expand his or her understanding and appreciation for the Person of God.

An illustration will help us begin. Imagine for a moment that you are at a carnival standing in line waiting to buy tickets for the rides. The person in front of you is just about to buy his tickets, and you watch the process over his shoulder. The customer hands the lady in the booth a twenty dollar bill and is given his tickets. However, the change he is given is as though he handed the lady a ten dollar bill. He is not given the correct change.

The man literally explodes! He swears at and accuses the lady in the booth of all kinds of cheating, swindling, and improper motives. You even become a little embarrassed by what he says to her.

From observing his outward behavior, what could you tell about what was being felt inside the man? What could you tell about what the man was like?

Now. . . imagine that instead of exploding, you saw the man take his change, count it, recognize that a mistake had been made, but not say anything. Instead, he just hung his head and walked away. What could you say was probably true about a man exhibiting this second response?

We can tell alot about a person by observing his external behavior. The same is true about God.

By carefully observing how God handles certain situations, we can learn much about just how He thinks and behaves in keeping with his own priorities and character.

Let's use the familiar Christmas story as a place of beginning. God was getting ready for the most significant event yet in the history of the world. He was about to step into our world and live among the human race in the Person of Jesus Christ! How He chose to do this tells us much about Himself as we learn to read behind the lines.

The place to begin is to simply read the Christmas story again and to make observations. Every observation you make needs to be substantiated by a chapter and verse that indicates where you saw the facts that went into your observation. This paper contains eleven observations about the Christmas story.

Observation #1

God chose a man named John the Baptist to appear on the scene announcing the arrival of Jesus. The man dressed in camel hair clothes with a leather belt and ate locusts and wild honey (Mark 1:2-8).

Observation #2

After successfully and faithfully playing his role in getting the world ready for Jesus, John the Baptist dies by being beheaded (Matthew 14:1-12).

Observation #3

God sent Jesus to a virgin before she had married her husband (Luke 1:26-38).

Observation #4

God worked it out so that Joseph and Mary would be in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus in fulfillment of a prophecy over 700 years old in Micah 5:2 (Luke 2:1-5).

Observation #5

Joseph didn't do anything out of the ordinary in order for God to fulfill the Micah 5:2 prophecy (Luke 2:1-5).

Observation #6

God had Jesus born in a stable (Luke 2:6,7)

Observation #7

God didn't let many people know that this event was happening (Luke 2:8,9).

Observation #8

God chose shepherds to be the first one to learn about what had happened (Luke 2:8,9).

Observation #9

God used a myriad of angels to tell the shepherds His message (Luke 2:9-14).

Observation #10

God told the wisemen about the Jesus' birth through a star (Matthew 2:1-12).

Observation #11

God told only one person before allowing Herod to kill all of the male children in Bethlehem two years old or younger (Matthew 2:13-18).

A good place to begin in using a story to understand the mind of God better is simply to ask this question:

How would you have handled the event differently?

Go ahead and use the lines below to write down your speculations about your handling of this special occasion of God entering the world. How would you have done it differently based upon what you know about yourself?

As for myself, I would have wanted the WHOLE WORLD to know that I had arrived! I would have come with every last angel in heaven with me. There would have been much fanfare and celebration! My handling of the situation tells me alot about myself too!

However, God didn't do it that way at all! What does His handling of the situation tell you about Him?

Let's try Observation #2 for an example:

After successfully and faithfully preparing the way of the Lord, John the Baptist dies by being beheaded (Matthew 14:1-12, pg. 826).

Notice first of all that this observation like all of the others has a Bible verse attached to it. It is important that every observation you make have a citation noting where you saw the facts that substantiate your observation. This will prevent you from going beyond the making of observations at this stage of the process. It's important to reign yourself back from proceeding into the making of applications yet.

After listing the observation, we are ready for the next step in the process. We are ready to ask the question:

What does this observation tell me about what God is like or how He acts?

A quick understanding of God from the previous observation might be:

God doesn't necessarily reward faithful service to Him with a painless life or easy death.

After drawing our implication(s), the final stage is crucial! We must check ourselves and our understanding by asking one more question:

Are there any other Bible verses that substantiate the implication drawn from the observation?

In this situation there is a resounding YES to that question. The life of Job, Paul, and Jesus Himself show pain in the midst of faithfulness. In fact II Timothy 3:12 seems to promise persecution to the faithful.

Let's try Observations #4 & #5 together:

God worked it out so that Joseph and Mary would be in Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus in fulfillment of the Micah 5:2 prophecy (Luke 2:1-5).

Joseph didn't do anything out of the ordinary in order for God to fulfill the Micah 5:2 prophecy (Luke 2:1-5).

Pause for a moment and think about the number of details (i.e. transportation, finances, reason to go, etc.) that God had to work out for Mary and Joseph to get them to Bethlehem. List as many as you can on the lines below:

The list of the little details can go on and on.

However, God got the job done!

God can work even the smallest of details to accomplish whatever He purposes!

That's good to know about God. However, do we have indications anywhere else in the Bible to substantiate that implication drawn from our observation?

How about all of the other Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ? Or the statement made in Ephesians 1:11 about God's ability to work all things coordinated with His own will?

Furthermore, Joseph didn't even need to know what God was doing! Joseph just went about life in an ordinary mundane manner and God accomplished His purpose in the midst of it all. The miracle is that God doesn't need to work only in extraordinary ways. He weaves His purpose within the fiber of the ordinary.

This last implication can also be seen in God's working with Job in the Old Testament or the disciples in the New Testament. They went about life as God sovereignly set up a flow in their lives that culminated in them accomplishing what He had in mind all along.

Now. . . from those examples, you're ready to take some observations yourself and look behind the lines to learn about God from His handling of the situation.

Take any of the above observations from the Christmas story and complete the following: What does this observation about the way God handled the situation tell you about Him? How would you have handled it differently?

Do other verses in the Bible substantiate the implication you drew above?

After going through those questions with some of the other observations, you will gradually find yourself never looking at Bible stories quite the same way again! You will begin to use the Bible for its intended purpose -- getting to know a Person. Your spiritual life will strengthen!

Now. . . below you'll find another story along with some observations will help you practice your new found skill.

**Learning To Know God
Through Bible Stories -- Gideon
Judges 7:1-25**

Observation #1

God was very concerned with the effect that success would have on the nation Israel. therefore, God made sure that when success came, Israel would not credit herself with the victory (Judges 7:2)

What does this observation imply about what God is like?

Do you have any other Bible verses that might support the understanding of God you drew from this observation? Consider I Corinthians 1:26-31; I Corinthians 2:3-5; II Corinthians 1:8,9; II Corinthians 4:7; and II Corinthians 12:7-10.

Observation #2

God exerted no pressure on the fearful people to stay (Judges 7:2)

What does this observation imply about what God is like?

Do you have any other Bible verses that might support the understanding of God you drew from this observation? Consider Matthew 19:16-22; Matthew 26:50; and John 6:66,67.

Observation #3

God encouraged Gideon and worked with him in spite of his fear (Judges 7:9,10).

What does this observation imply about what God is like?

Do you have any other Bible verses that might support the understanding of God you drew from this observation? Consider Psalm 78:38,39 and Psalm 103:13,14.

Observation #4

God was the ultimate cause of their victory (Judges 7:22)

What does this observation imply about what God is like?

Do you have any other Bible verses that might support the understanding of God you drew from this observation? Consider Psalm 33 and Romans 8:32.

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