

# Choosing the Right Passage and Reading with Purpose

SESSION 2

SELECTION



# We All Choose What to Read



Every day we make choices about what to read—news articles, social media posts, books that interest us. Some of us even love coloring books! But when it comes to Scripture, how we choose what to read matters more than we might think.

The way we select passages shapes everything that follows.

# Where Bible Study Goes Wrong

Many Bible study problems begin before anyone starts reading. Most Christians assume confusion comes from interpretation, but far more often the problem is **selection**.

When verses are chosen at random, pulled out of context, or used to support an argument, misunderstanding is almost guaranteed. Scripture was never designed to function as a collection of independent promises or slogans.

## The Root Problem

Selection determines what questions get asked, what meaning is possible, and what application is faithful. It's not a minor step—it's the foundation for everything that follows.

# The Bible was written *for us*, but it was not written *to us*

This simple distinction changes how we select what we read. Understanding the original context and audience helps us apply Scripture faithfully to our own lives.

# The IKEA Illustration



## Dumping the Pieces

Imagine opening a large furniture box and dumping hundreds of screws, brackets, and boards onto the floor.



## Ignoring Instructions

Now imagine deciding the instruction manual is optional. You grab random pieces and hope it becomes what the picture promises.



## Inevitable Frustration

The frustration doesn't come from bad furniture—it comes from ignoring how the designer intended the pieces to work together.

# The Promise Box Problem



Years ago, many Christians used promise boxes containing individual Bible verses on cards. While the desire to get Scripture into people's lives was good, the method created a dangerous habit.

"Judas went out and hanged himself" followed by "Go and do likewise"—both verses are in the Bible. Neither was meant to function that way.

When Scripture is reduced to fragments, it can be made to say almost anything.

# How I Select Passages for Daily Reading

For over forty years, I've practiced reading the Bible through every year. The selection is already made for me —that's intentional. Every day I read an Old Testament passage and a New Testament passage.

This systematic approach gives me breadth, balance, and protection from avoiding difficult texts.

## Breadth

Not camped in one section of Scripture

## Balance

Hearing both covenant history and gospel truth

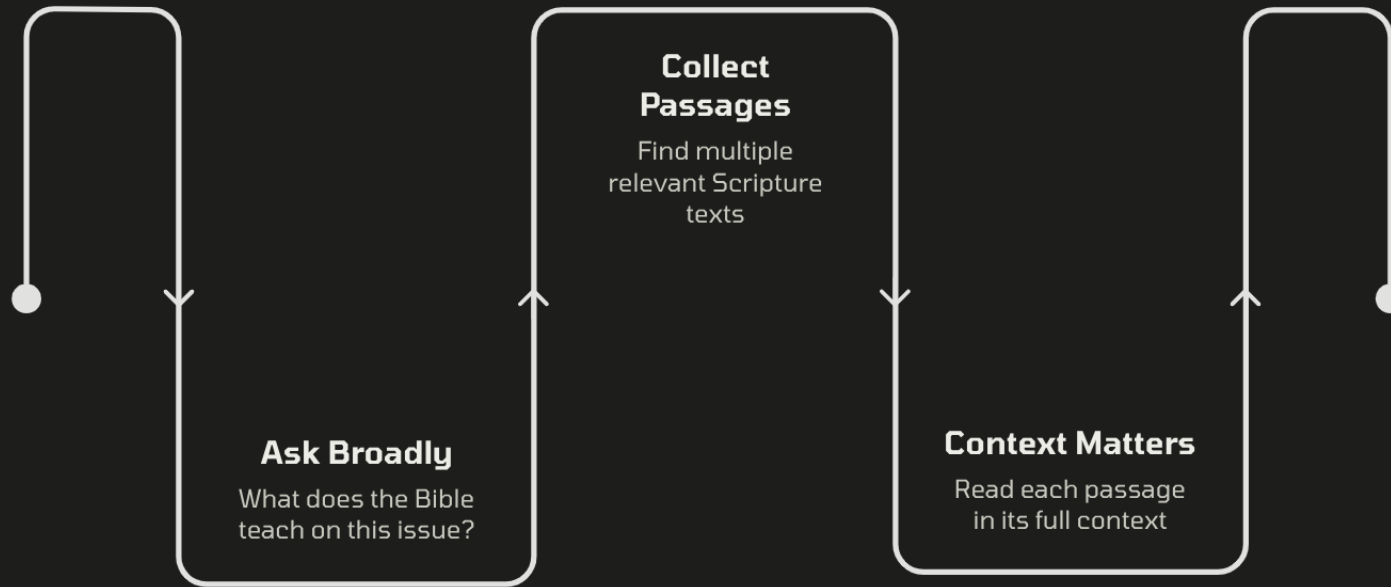
## Protection

Not avoiding difficult or uncomfortable texts

**God often speaks most clearly through passages we would not have chosen.**

A systematic reading plan guards against reading only what feels encouraging, avoiding texts that challenge or confront, and shaping Scripture around our current mood.

# Selecting Passages for Personal Issues



When walking through a personal issue, I don't go looking for a single verse to make me feel better. I go looking for the **full counsel of Scripture** on the subject.

I look for multiple passages, clear teaching, and proper context—not vague encouragement or isolated slogans.

# An Example: Addressing Fear

If the issue is fear, I don't read one verse about courage. I look at how fear is addressed in the Psalms, the prophets, the Gospels, and the epistles. I pay attention to what God says fear does, why it happens, and how faith responds.

- ☐ Scripture interprets Scripture. One verse can be misused, but patterns across Scripture reveal truth.



**The Bible rarely answers life's  
deepest questions with a  
sentence; it answers them with  
a story**

# Selecting Passages for Counseling

## Identify the Core Issue

Not just the symptom, but the heart issue underneath

## Ask What Scripture Says

What does God's Word say about this issue?

## Find Clear Passages

Look for texts that speak clearly and responsibly



# What I Don't Rely On in Counseling

## Not Good Enough

- My personal opinions
- My experience alone
- Clever insights or good advice

Good advice may help temporarily, but Scripture transforms because it speaks with God's authority.

## What I Bring Instead

- God's Word, properly understood
- Passages that speak with authority
- Scripture that both confronts and comforts

People don't need my wisdom; they need God's Word rightly handled.

# Selecting Passages for Sermons

When preparing sermons, selection becomes even more critical because I'm teaching others. I don't build sermons around a single verse pulled out of context, a catchy idea looking for biblical support, or a topic I want to argue.

That approach leads to **proof-text preaching**—one of the fastest ways to mishandle Scripture.



# Faithful Sermon Selection

1

## Start with a Passage

Not an idea looking for support

2

## Respect Author's Intent

What was the writer communicating?

3

## Follow the Text Flow

Let the passage set the agenda

# When Selection Goes Wrong



## Prosperity Teaching

Built on isolated promises pulled from context



## End-Times Speculation

Built on disconnected imagery and isolated prophecies



## Legalism

Built on selective commands without gospel context

# Heresy is rarely created by ignoring Scripture; it is created by misusing it.

Pastors who teach heresy often didn't start by rejecting the Bible—they started by **using it selectively**. This is why we must choose passages, not fragments; context, not convenience; meaning, not momentum.

# Why Selection Always Comes First



We select Scripture for many reasons —daily formation, personal struggle, counseling others, teaching and preaching. But in every case, the principle is the same.

Selection determines what questions get asked, what meaning is possible, and what application is faithful. It's not a minor step—it's the foundation for everything that follows.

# Verses vs. Passages

One of the most important skills in Bible study is learning the difference between a **verse** and a **passage**.

A verse is a navigational tool added centuries after Scripture was written. A passage is a complete unit of thought written to communicate meaning.

When verses are isolated, they stop communicating truth and start functioning as **proof texts**.

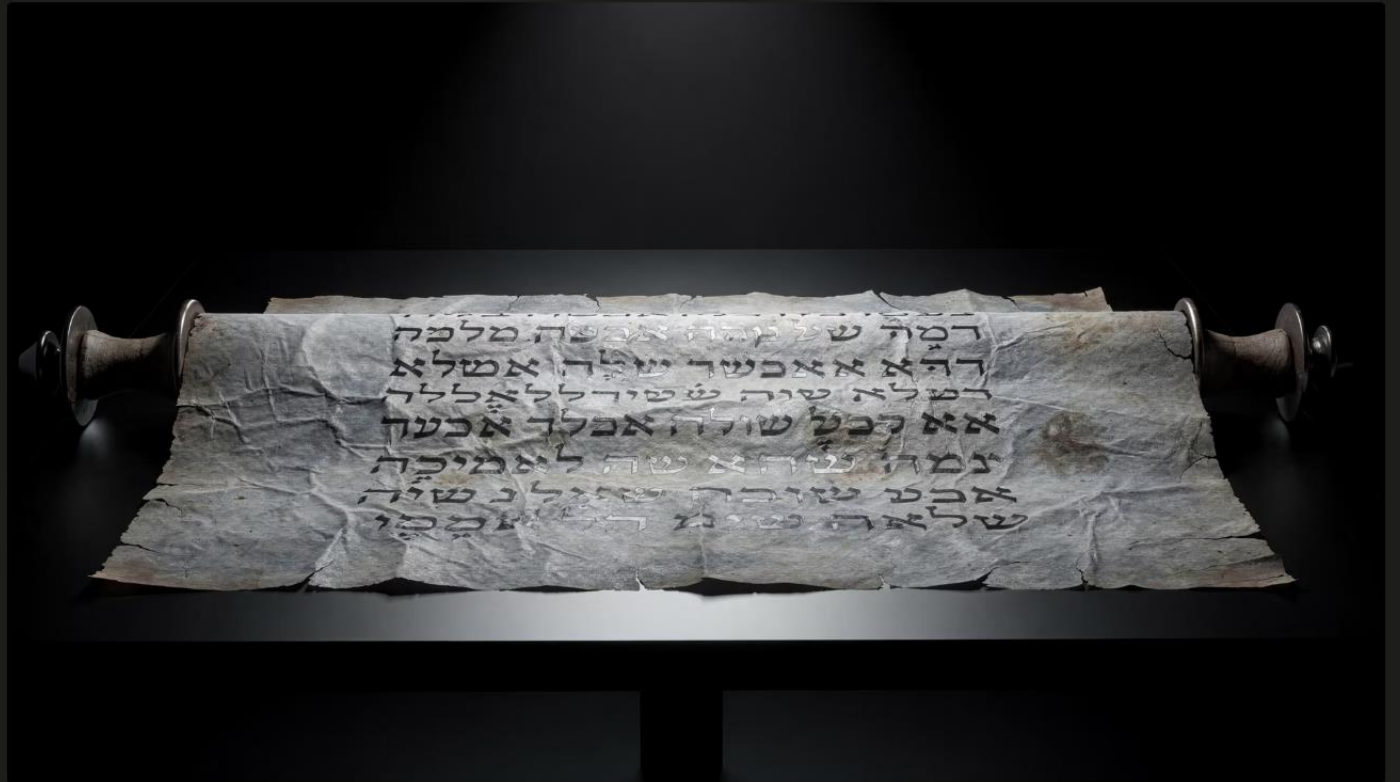
**A text without a context is a  
pretext for whatever you want it  
to say**

# Case Study: Jeremiah 29:11

Jeremiah 29:11 is frequently used as a personal promise of success, comfort, and prosperity. But when we read the full passage, a different picture emerges.

## The Full Context

- Jeremiah is writing a **letter**, not a fortune
- The audience is the **nation of Israel**, not individuals
- They're living in **Babylonian exile** as a result of disobedience
- False prophets are promising a quick return home



# What Jeremiah 29 Actually Teaches



## Long-Term Promise

The exile will last seventy years—  
not immediate relief



## Corporate, Not Individual

The promise is to the nation, not  
personal fortune



## Hope in Hardship

God's plan includes discipline  
before restoration

This passage teaches **hope in the middle of hardship**, not escape from it.

# Case Study: Philippians 4:13

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" is often quoted as a guarantee of personal victory, success, or achievement. But what was Paul actually saying?

- Historical context: Paul is writing from prison. The immediate context is financial support and gratitude. The broader context is learning contentment in suffering.



# What Philippians 4:13 Actually Means

## Common Misreading

"All things" means I can achieve any goal or dream if I have enough faith. Christ empowers my ambition and guarantees success.

This passage is about **faithful endurance**, not personal conquest.

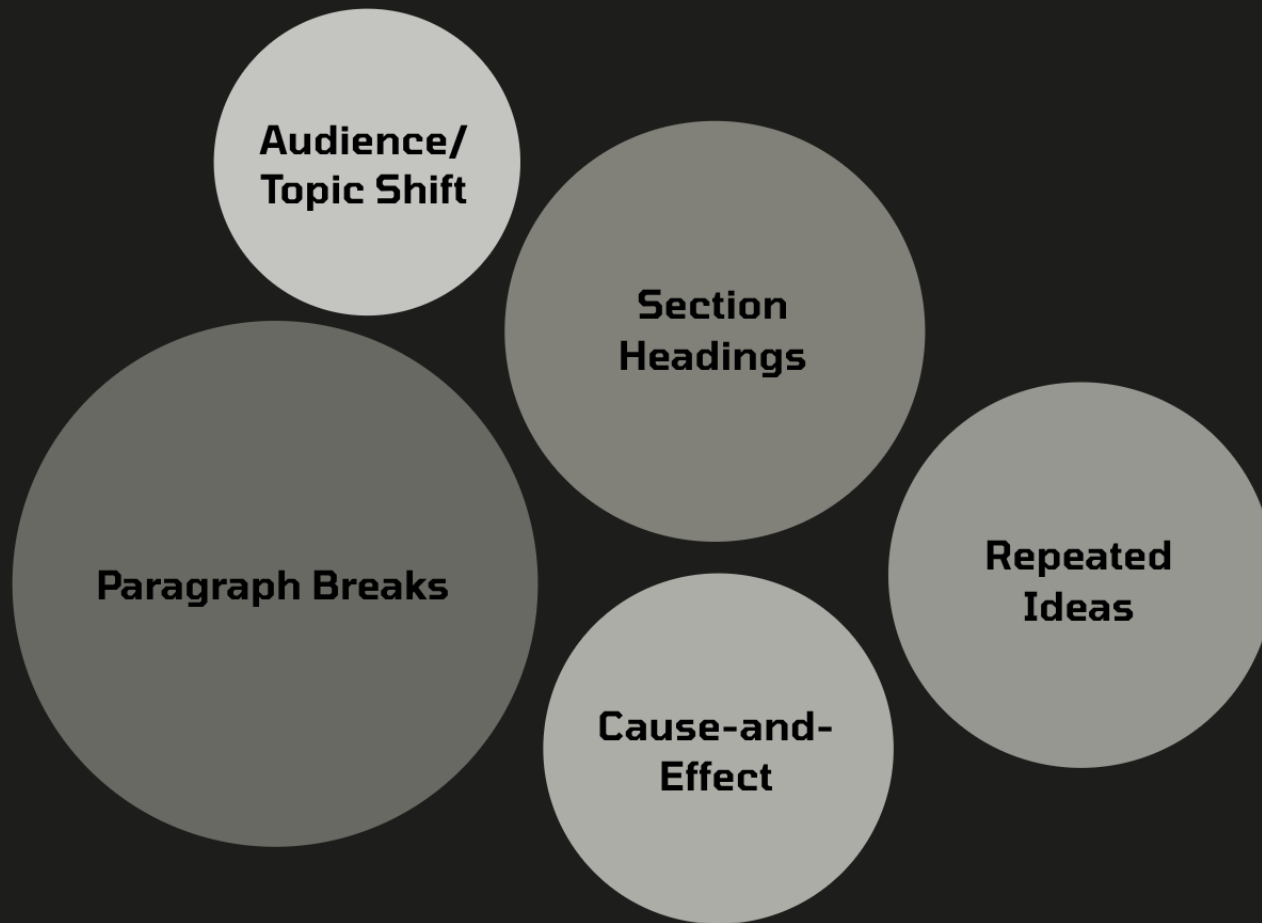
## Actual Meaning

"All things" refers to enduring need and abundance faithfully. The focus is not on achievement but on dependence. Christ sustains Paul through hardship.

**The Bible does not exist to support our arguments; it exists to reveal God's truth.**

Verses do not carry meaning by themselves. Passages carry meaning. The Bible was not written in soundbites—it was written in carefully structured units of thought.

# How to Identify a Passage



A passage is not defined by verse numbers or chapter breaks. It's defined by **thought flow**. Biblical authors wrote with intentional structure.

Scripture itself gives us clues through paragraph breaks, repeated themes, logical connectors, and shifts in topic or audience.

# Where to Start Reading



## The Gospels

Narrative-driven and accessible, centered on Jesus, establishing the lens for reading all Scripture



## The Psalms

Expressing the full range of human emotion, teaching honest prayer, read as complete units



## Genesis

Establishing creation, fall, covenant, and promise—the theological foundation for the entire Bible

# Intentional Selection in Scripture



John 20:31 explicitly tells us why John selected what he included in his Gospel: "These are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

Scripture itself models intentional selection. The authors chose material with purpose. Random reading ignores authorial intent.

If the author chose carefully what to include, we should be just as careful in how we read it.

# The Big Idea

## **Bad Interpretation Begins with Bad Selection**

When Scripture is used as a collection of proof texts, it becomes a weapon instead of a witness.

## **Good Selection Brings Clarity**

When Scripture is read as God intended—in passages, in context, and with humility—it becomes a source of clarity and transformation.



**The Bible was not given  
to win arguments, but  
to shape lives**