

Handling the Word

How to Study the Bible Faithfully

Lesson Five Leader Guide

Interpretation - What Does It Mean?

Private leader document

Use this guide alongside the participant notes. Keep the session pastoral, simple, and focused on careful listening to Scripture.

Lesson Overview

Main question	What does this passage mean?
Main idea	Faithful interpretation seeks the meaning God has given in the passage, in the context He gave it, before deciding how it applies to us today.
Key text	2 Timothy 2:15
Supporting passages	Acts 8:26-35; Judges 6:36-40; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11; Luke 24:44-47
Suggested length	60 to 75 minutes. Let Acts 8 encourage him and Judges 6 carry the main practice.

Intended outcomes

- He sees interpretation as careful listening, not academic performance.
- He understands that meaning is received, not invented.
- He connects observation and context to meaning.
- He is encouraged that needing help is not failure.
- He learns description is not always prescription.
- He keeps Christ and God's redemptive plan central.

Leader emphasis

- Keep this pastoral and simple.
- Do not make interpretation sound scholarly or out of reach.
- Affirm honest questions and slow reading.
- Use Judges 6 carefully - not to ridicule Gideon.
- Keep returning to: what does it say, what surrounds it, what does it mean?

Helpful phrase to repeat

We are not trying to make the Bible say something impressive. We are learning to listen carefully to what God has said.

Recommended Session Flow

Time	Section	Purpose
5 min	Welcome and check-in	Begin with grace and review context practice.
2 min	Opening prayer	Ask God to help you handle His Word rightly.
8 min	Question and principle	Introduce interpretation as seeking God-given meaning.
8 min	2 Timothy 2:15	Careful handling of the Word of truth.
15 min	Acts 8:26-35	Needing help to understand Scripture is not failure.
18-20 min	Judges 6:36-40	Main practice: descriptive vs prescriptive.
10 min	1 Corinthians 10 / Luke 24	Example, warning, instruction, and Christ-centred meaning.
5-8 min	Pull together and practise	Summarise and set one simple weekly practice.

Leader posture

Interpretation should feel like the next simple step: we noticed what the text says, read it in context, and now ask what it means. Begin with grace if practice was uneven.

1. Welcome, Prayer, and Check-In - 7 minutes

Aim: Begin relationally, remove pressure, and connect this lesson to observation and context.

Prompts: How has your week been? How did you go with reading Philippians 4:10-20? Did reading around a verse help anything become clearer? How did you find the Session Five pre-reading?

Listen for / draw out

Any evidence he is slowing down before applying a passage; any anxiety that interpretation sounds too hard; a thought from Acts 8 about needing help.

Suggested prayer: Father, help us handle Your Word carefully. Teach us to listen before we apply, to receive what You have said, and to see Christ more clearly. Amen.

2. Today's Question and Interpretation Principle - 8 minutes

Aim: Introduce the core question: What does this passage mean?

Ask: What do you think interpretation means? What can go wrong if we ask, "What does this mean to me?" too quickly? How do observation and context help us understand meaning?

Brief teaching summary

Interpretation means seeking to understand the meaning God has given in the passage. We do not give the Bible its meaning. We receive it carefully and faithfully.

Pastoral note

If the word interpretation feels too academic, say: "We are just asking what God meant by what He said."

3. Read 2 Timothy 2:15 - Handle the Word Carefully

Aim: Show that careful handling of Scripture matters before God.

Ask: What call is given in this verse? What does rightly dividing or handling the Word of truth suggest? What might careless handling look like?

Listen for / draw out

Diligence before God. Handling the Word rightly. Scripture is truth and should not be used carelessly. Careless handling can include ignoring context, rushing, or forcing meaning onto the text.

Pastoral note

Avoid turning this into pressure. Careful handling grows through practice, humility, and dependence on God.

4. Read Acts 8:26-35 - Help Is Not Failure

Aim: Use this as the pastoral anchor for low confidence.

Ask: What was the Ethiopian man reading? What did he not understand? How did Philip help him? How did the Scripture point to Christ? What does this teach us about asking for help?

Brief teaching summary

The Ethiopian man was reading Scripture, asking honest questions, and God provided help. Needing help to understand Scripture is not shameful. It is often part of how God teaches His people.

Pastoral note

Say clearly: "Needing help does not mean you cannot learn."

5. Main Practice - Judges 6:36-40 - Description or Command?

Aim: Practise interpretation by asking whether the passage describes what happened or commands what we should copy.

Ask: What had God already said to Gideon? What does Gideon ask God to do? What does this show about Gideon? What does this show about God? Is this giving us a method to copy, or describing God's patience with a fearful man?

Listen for / draw out

God had already spoken and promised to be with Gideon. Gideon appears fearful and hesitant. God is patient and merciful. The passage describes an event; it is not automatically a command to make decisions this way.

Pastoral note

Do not make Gideon the villain. Let the passage show both human weakness and God's mercy. The key distinction is simple: description is not always prescription.

6. Read 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11 and Luke 24:44-47

Aim: Show that Scripture teaches through examples and warnings, and that Christ shapes the Bible's message.

Ask: How does Paul say Old Testament events help us? What is the difference between learning from an example and copying everything that happened? What parts of Scripture does Jesus mention in Luke 24? How do the Scriptures point to Christ?

Brief teaching summary

Scripture teaches through commands, examples, warnings, promises, and revelation. We interpret each passage carefully within the whole Bible, which points to God's redemptive plan through Christ.

7. Pulling It Together and This Week's Practice - 8 minutes

Ask him to finish: "Interpretation helps me..." Then ask: What is one thing that makes interpretation feel less intimidating? What is one question you can ask before applying a passage?

Practice: Read Acts 8:26-35 twice this week. Write one honest sentence about what the passage shows you about needing help, Scripture, and Christ.

Closing encouragement

This week's aim is simple: read carefully, ask what the passage means, and write one honest sentence. Keep it achievable rather than heavy.

If He Gets Stuck

Situation	Gentle response	Next step
Interpretation sounds too hard.	Let us make it simple: what does this mean in context?	Return to one clear verse and read around it.
I do not understand this passage.	That is okay. Acts 8 shows that needing help is not failure.	Ask one honest question from the text.
Does this mean the Bible only has one application?	A passage may have many faithful applications, but not contradictory meanings.	Name the meaning first, then possible responses.
I thought Gideon's fleece was a model.	Many have heard that. Let us see what the passage itself shows.	Ask: is this description or command?

Key truths to reinforce

- Interpretation seeks the meaning God has given.
- Observation and context prepare us for interpretation.
- Needing help to understand Scripture is not failure.
- Not every biblical event is a command to copy.
- Scripture teaches through commands, examples, warnings, promises, and revelation.
- The whole Bible points us to Christ and God's redemptive plan.

What to avoid

- Making interpretation sound academic or out of reach.
- Jumping to application before meaning.
- Correcting every imperfect thought too quickly.
- Turning Judges 6 into a long lecture on guidance.
- Implying descriptive Old Testament narratives are irrelevant.
- Losing the Christ-centred purpose of Scripture.

Optional Extra Scriptures

Use only if the conversation naturally opens up. Do not overload Lesson Five.

- **Nehemiah 8:8** - the Word was read clearly, and the sense was given.
- **Acts 17:10-12** - the Bereans searched the Scriptures.
- **2 Peter 3:15-16** - some twist the Scriptures.
- **Romans 15:4** - Scripture gives learning, patience, comfort, and hope.

Suggested closing prayer

Father, thank You for giving us Your Word. Help us not to invent meaning, but to receive what You have said with humility and care. Teach us to observe, read in context, and understand faithfully. Thank You that needing help is not failure. Lead us to Christ more clearly and help us respond with faith and obedience. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Leader Reflection After the Session

What encouraged him? _____

Where did he seem unsure, anxious, or confused? _____

What should I follow up next time? _____

Preparation for Lesson Six

Lesson Six will focus on genre - reading each part of the Bible properly. This builds on interpretation by helping him ask what kind of passage he is reading before deciding how to understand it.