

A Bible Study Applied to the Family

The simplest way to study the Bible is to formulate some basic questions about a passage of Scripture. First ask yourself, "What is the passage talking about? What is the main idea of the passage?" Second, seek to understand what the passage is saying about the main idea by asking, "What does the passage say about this main idea?" The answers to these two questions will help you understand the basic meaning of the passage itself. Simply put, this process is termed *Bible interpretation*. At this point in your Bible study, you understand the essential meaning of the passage and then can do several things.

You might decide to explain the meaning of the passage more fully. You can do this by looking at other Biblical passages which teach the same or similar truth. Alternatively, you can look at what the whole Bible says about the truth. This method of study is called *Biblical theology*. Instead of elaborating on the meaning of the original passage, you study related passages which teach the same or similar truths across the whole of Scripture. On Sundays, I may do a little of both throughout the course of my sermons. But, the focus of my message is on *life application* from the basic meaning of a passage. While there is only one right interpretation of a Scripture passage, applications may vary. The application of the passage may be within the passage or larger context or there may be other probable or possible applications.

As an example of this principle of Bible study, take a text like Philippians 3:12-14: "*Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*" Perhaps we would like to apply this text, not to a personal context or to the church as a whole, but to the family; specifically a family or marriage in a crisis. This is entirely possible, I suggest, while maintaining the integrity of the passage's meaning. The goal is to take God's perfect, definitive Word and apply its great truths to families in crisis. Some truths that apply to families are found within this very passage.

First, Paul admits his imperfection with a commitment to change. "*Not that I have already obtained all this or have already been made perfect, but I press on...*" (Philippians 3:12). He is saying that he has not yet fully arrived spiritually. He admits that change is

necessary. I believe deeply in Christian counseling. Yet, counseling will accomplish very little without a humble attitude before God and others. Few problems in the family are resolved unless one admits that, "I am part of the problem, and I want to know how I can change in order to be a part of the solution." As Christians, we possess the changing power of God's Spirit in us. Yet first, we must take off the mask of pride and acknowledge our hurts and sin.

Second, we must put the past behind us. Paul, who before he was converted denied Christ and persecuted Christians, said, "*One thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead...*" (Philippians 3:13). How could Paul, who had the blood of Christians on his hands, say this? He fervently believed the gospel he preached. Grace is God's unmerited favor to sinners like us. God separates our sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps. 103:12). How far is this? As the Christian song "East to West" by Casting Crowns declares, east to west is the distance from "one scarred hand to the other." In Christ, the guilt of yesterday has been handed a triumphant defeat.

The Greek word Paul used, "*forgetting*," was an athletic term. Once a runner pushed ahead in a race, he forgot the runner behind him and focused on the prize. Tragically, many members of the family, particularly husbands and wives, are unable to forget. Life is lived by constantly looking in the rear view mirror. The source of much of the tension and often the distress in a marriage and family is in remembering rather than forgetting. The result is bitterness, resentment, detachment, and in countless marriages, divorce. Restoration and healing are rooted in the power of the gospel declaration, "forgetting what is behind."

Third, Paul embraced hope. "*I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me*" (Phil. 3:12). As Paul said earlier in the chapter, "*being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it to completion until the day of Jesus Christ*" (Phil. 1:6). No matter what happens in your family, it is never the end of the world because this world is not our end. You may be in a family chapter titled, "Hard Times." But, this is not the last chapter. "*Weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning*" (Ps. 30:5). In Christ, rejoicing is going to come! Embrace this hope!

Last, Paul persevered. "*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 3:14). Perseverance is the call to the Christian. We press on because our hope is in Christ and our future is glorious. We press on because

God refines us through pain and hardships. "God shouts in our pain," as C. S. Lewis wrote. Several years ago, I heard a statistic that intrigued me. The majority of those who chose divorce, when interviewed five years later, said they regretted the divorce and were presently unhappier that they were five years earlier. This should not surprise us. *"Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him"* (James 1:12). And, the promise is that the very God who calls us to persevere will preserve us even, no especially, when life falls apart. *"My comfort in my sufferings is this: Your promise preserves my life"* (Ps. 110:50).

Careful Biblical interpretation, applied to the family, can be a source of great hope and assurance that the past lies behind us, that change can take place within us, and despite current hardships, our glorious future is just ahead of us!

Great Peace in the Lord,
Eddie