

## Truthfully apply the Bible to your own life every day.

Our human self-centeredness often let us fall into a trap to misinterpret the Bible as if it was only written for me, for now. **This is a way to disguise and turn what God wants to say into what we want to hear.** And yet, without God speaking to me, to us, today, Bible reading will become a tedious task with no relevance and therefore one we would too easily neglect.

I was excited when I came across articles by David Powlison about personal application of the Bible, and I want to share the core truths of these articles with you.

The biggest challenge about Bible reading / studying preaching - is how to personally apply Bible reading to your life and your circumstances. There is a correct, good way that has the authority of God's Word for you on the day you read it. There also are ways of doing this where we make the Bible say what we want to hear, instead of what the Spirit intended it to mean to all believers. That way of interpretation has no authority as God's Word and leads to misunderstanding and misleading. Yet no believer should miss out on the miracle when the Spirit personally applies the Bible as God's Word in our lives, today.

The words written in the Holy Scriptures addressed the concerns of long-ago people in faraway places, facing specific problems, many of which no longer exist today. Yet they, the first, original readers, had no difficulty seeing the application for their lives and faith.

But nothing in the Bible was written specifically to us *in the same way as it was to the first readers and their circumstances*. In the Bible we are reading someone else's mail. **Yet, the Bible repeatedly verifies that these words are also written for us:** Rom 5: 4 says "*Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction*" (Also see Deut. 29:29, 1 Cor 10:11 and 2 Tim 3: 15 - 17.)

Application for our own help and benefit needs to discover the ways in which the Spirit applies the Scriptures in my present day to my present day needs.

Secondly we should also remember that the Bible is in the first place written to reveal God to us, and only in the second place about what this revelation practically means to us and to answer our questions.

The subject matter of the Bible is the Triune God *as fully revealed in the life and work of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

We read that when Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures" (Luke 22:45), he showed how everything written — creation, promises, commands, history, sacrificial customs, psalms, proverbs and much more — is really and ultimately, about himself.

So we are not only reading someone else's mail, but also someone else's narrative. It is God's narrative in and through Jesus Christ.

But it is also true **that whatever we read about Jesus - and the whole Bible points to him - includes a word for you and me.** It has a message for you and me. Application of the Bible for my life and questions today happens when the Spirit "rewrites" *my life's story by the revelation of who God is and what he is doing and has done through Jesus our Redeemer, by the work of the Holy Spirit.*

Personal application of the Bible has the authority of God speaking to me, today, with divine authority, when I respect and accept the above facts and principles about reading the Bible, thousands of years after it was written. It was written during various ages, in three languages and by many human authors inspired by the same Spirit, yet telling a coherent, single narrative about God and his love for us, his people.

### **Practical examples of applying God's Word to your life.**

Think, for example, about the promises of God to all believers, especially those that we know as the Gospel promises - about salvation, redemption, forgiveness, reconciliation with God in Jesus and our eternal future with Christ. They should be applied to your own life every day.

Also recognise the joys and sorrows, moral principles and commandments in the Bible *that present themselves as of everlasting and universal importance.* Apply these universal, eternal promises of God for all believers, to yourself. Or test your own life situations against the universal expectations of God for all believers.

Pay attention to how various Bible passages continuously and specifically reapply the same promises and standards over and over and how it relates to the whole Bible and its universal assurances and decrees.

Then, look for the place in such a passage where these words come to you as a Christian, as a follower of Jesus, and are therefore applied differently by you, than by a non-Christian, or someone of the Jewish and Muslim religions.

In simple terms, how do I apply this for and in my relationship with my Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Lord.

In matters of obedience, *the Bible often proclaims a general truth without mentioning any of the multitudes of possible practical applications.*

For example, when Jesus says, "You cannot serve God and money" - Luke 16:13, you are left to decide for yourself what "love for money" means in your life and in your culture.

There are multitudes of similar generalised expectations of God addressed in Scripture which we will read within the context of our own time and life, in order to daily apply it personally, as God's Word for us.

These generalised cases, where the Bible speaks in large categories, addressing many different experiences, circumstances, and actions by only stating the principle, **the universal truth must be applied to me** - to my challenge, my concern, my sin and my salvation! Understanding what it specifically means in your life, asks for self examination, prayer pondering and guidance of the Holy Spirit as to what you should take from those words in order to rewrite your life's narrative in obedience to God's Word.

**But now, how do we work out the implications for ourselves, when I read a less direct passage?**

Let's consider two examples to help us understand that every passage holds a message for us.

**The first**, an extreme challenge to personal application of the Bible, is a genealogy (names of people for generations). These are, on the face of it, irrelevant to your personal life. Your name is not on that the list of people. The reasons for the list often disappeared long ago.

You gain nothing by knowing that "*Koz fathered Anub, Zobebah, and the clans of Aharhel*"! (1 Chron. 4: 8).

But when you learn to listen with an open heart and mind you may find good and encouraging things taught, also here, for example:

- The Lord writes down personal names in his book of life - even mine.
- Families and communities matter to him.
- God remains faithful to his promises through the long history of mankind.
- He enlists individuals, like you and me, for his saving grace.
- **These genealogies form part of the history and background of Jesus. If you are in Jesus Christ, his family becomes your family** and God's promises to them become **very personal promises to you!**

The second example is Psalm 21: 1. "*O Lord, in your strength the king rejoices*"? The psalm is not talking about you. You are not a king in the way that David was. **But it does connect with you.**

David lived and wrote these words, *but Jesus Christ most fully lived, is now living, and now fulfils this entire psalm*. He is the greatest King, singing this song of deliverance; and he is also the almighty divine Lord. We know from the perspective of the New Testament that this psalm should be explicitly applied to Jesus. **And you, who are in Christ, share in the triumph of your glorious, living King.**

Having made the psalm your own, in Christ, you may now make it your personal experience too. You could adapt it into the first person, inserting "I/me/my" in place of "the king" and "he/him/his."

Learning to wisely apply the harder, less obvious passages has a surprising benefit. **Your whole Bible now "applies personally."** This Lord spoken about in the Bible, is your God - *get to know him better from his dealings with believers that lived ages ago*; that piece of history in the Bible, is also your history; these people became your

people; this Saviour has made you one of his own, to participate in who he is and be blessed by what he does. Venture out into the remotest regions of Scripture, seeking to know, love and trust God more.

The Bible, as Holy Scripture, is the only certain, unqualified source of God's Word. Paul's statement that "*all Scripture is breathed out by God*", (2 Tim3:16) means that all the words of the Bible are God's words to us. Therefore if we want to hear our Creator and Lord speaking to us, we must continually give attention to *all the passages of the Bible*, asking what it says to you personally, today.

Jesus Christ, after defeating Satan during his 40 days in the desert, with three quotations from Deuteronomy, declared, "*a person shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*"! (Matt 4: 4.)

The Holy Scriptures were spiritual food to Jesus that made him strong and faithful in his calling.

Jesus' dependence on the sufficiency and potency of God's Word during a variety of circumstances, shows us that every word God shares with us, has meaning, application, comfort and direction for our lives.

What applies to Jesus implies meaning to me, who has been saved by and in Jesus Christ, my Saviour, Redeemer and Lord.

Summary:

1. *The Bible was written to others – but speaks to you too.*
2. *And, the Bible is about God – but draws you in. We have to look for what the passage, chapter or Bible book says about God and recognise why it is straightforward to you that this passage has relevance for you personally, today.*
3. *When you recognise a passage still unknown to you as truth that applies to you personally, it will generalise or summarise God's truth and narrative in a way that it clearly invites personal application and relevance.*
4. *What applies to Jesus implies meaning to me, who has been saved by and in Jesus Christ, my Saviour, Redeemer and Lord.*