

How to Study the Bible, 11/11, 14, 2018  
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**Mastering the Message of a Bible Book**  
**Probing each paragraph**

Bible books are made up of individual paragraphs that unite to communicate a message. To understand the message of the entire book we must first understand the meaning of each individual paragraph and follow the author's thought process through the book. Each book in turn is a logical unit making a unique contribution to the message and meaning of the Bible.

**Identify the paragraphs.** Paragraphs are units of thought, they are logical units in the biblical author's thought process but they were not marked out in the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. Most study Bibles attempt to arrange the Scripture text in paragraphs. To aid the student, publishers may indent each paragraph, mark it by the letter P, or place the verse number in bold font. Some will even add a title. Those paragraphs (and titles) are not inspired but they are a helpful place to begin our study. Using the paragraph divisions you find within your study Bible read the individual paragraph repeatedly at one sitting. Be sure you understand the meaning of each word of the English text. A good dictionary is essential. Comparison with other versions is helpful. Identify all unusual words and determine their basic meaning.

**Probe each paragraph.**

1. **Locate the "pulse" of the passage.** Every passage has a "heart beat," a central idea that throbs with life, **find it!** The pulse is the subject, the central idea, the essential meaning of the passage. It is what the author had in mind when he wrote. **"How do I find the "pulse"?"**
  - a. By asking the questions, "What's it all about?" or "What is the big idea?" as you read the passage. For example—Luke 5:17-26— "*your sins are forgiven you,*" indicates that the emphasis is not on the physical healing itself but on Jesus' right to forgive sin. If you look for the pulse you will find it, but you will seldom stumble onto it by accident.
  - b. Observe important (strategic, key) words. These may have to do with God, or with human actions or responses. Luke 7:1-10— "*so great faith,*" prompts us to look for how faith is exhibited in the paragraph and why it matters. Paul's strong language regarding *the gospel* in Galatians 1:6-9 exposes the Galatian problem and the purpose for Paul's letter to the church. It focuses our attention on the gospel, what it is and why it matters.
  - c. Look for repeated words and ideas. The Bible is like our own writing in that we frequently repeat what we consider important. For example — "*comfort*" appears frequently and prominently in 2 Corinthians 1:3-7. *The gospel* is repeated and emphasized in Galatians 1:6-9.
  - d. If you question that you have the pulse located, try this, select a likely idea (your proposed "pulse") and read the passage through carefully in the light of that subject. Does the passage make sense in that light? Do all the details of the passage relate to and support that idea? If not, start over!

2. **State the central idea of the paragraph.** Look for a topic or theme sentence, that is, one sentence in which the author states the subject, the central idea he is trying to communicate through that paragraph. For example, “*The Word became flesh*” stands first and foremost in John 1:14-18. Write a brief descriptive statement of the central idea of the paragraph. It should be in your own words not a repetition of the author’s topic sentence. It should capture the essence (pulse) of the paragraph in five to eight words.

Follow the same procedure for each paragraph in the chapter or book you are studying. Each paragraph is a separate unit of thought, but they combine to communicate the author’s message. It is helpful to keep the preceding paragraph in mind when moving on to the next, especially if or when there are repeated words or related ideas.

The following are suggested theme sentences for each paragraph in Galatians:

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| 1:1-5    | -Paul’s gospel is from God not from men                   |
| 1:6-10   | -The problem stated: “another, different (non) gospel”    |
| 1:11-17  | -Paul’s gospel came by direct revelation from Christ      |
| 1:18-24  | -Paul’s gospel did not come from or through men           |
| 2:1-10   | -Paul’s gospel confirmed by the other apostles            |
| 2:11-14  | -Paul defended the truth of the gospel before Peter       |
| 2:15-21  | -the essence of the gospel: justification by faith        |
| 3:1-5    | -central issue: justification is by faith not by the Law  |
| 3:6-9    | -confirmation of the gospel: Abraham justified by faith   |
| 3:10-14  | -the gospel is contrasted with the Law                    |
| 3:15-18  | -the gospel completes the promise of God to Abraham       |
| 3:19-22  | -the gospel completes, not contradicts the Law            |
| 3:23-29  | -the gospel sets us free (Law only brings us to Christ)   |
| 4:1-7    | -culmination of the gospel: it turns slaves into sons     |
| 4:8-11   | -They are returning to slavery under the Law              |
| 4:12-20  | -They have changed toward Paul and the truth              |
| 4:21-31  | -allegory contrasting sons of free-woman and of the slave |
| 5:1-6    | -application: stand firm in your freedom in Christ        |
| 5:7-12   | -admonition: beware the enemies of freedom and of Christ  |
| 5:13-15  | -be careful not to abuse your freedom                     |
| 5:16-24  | -be controlled by the Spirit to enjoy your freedom        |
| 5:25-6:5 | -be careful to examine yourself (be self controlled)      |
| 6:6-10   | -be careful to encourage (serve) others                   |
| 6:11-16  | -Paul’s example: focused on the cross                     |
| 6:17-18  | -Paul’s closing appeal and greeting                       |

Let’s return to our study of Mark 3:1-35. Write a summary statement, a topic sentence for each paragraph (in your own words).

Mark 3:1-35 (NASB)

He entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there whose hand was withered. They were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, so that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, "Get up and come forward!" And He said to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save a life or to kill?" But they kept silent. After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately *began* conspiring with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.

Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and *also* from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the crowd, so that they would not crowd Him; for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed around Him in order to touch Him. Whenever the demons saw Him, they would fall down before Him and shout, "You are the Son of God!" And He earnestly warned them not to tell who He was.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He *could* send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder"); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot; and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him.

And He came home, and the crowd gathered again, to such an extent that they could not even eat a meal. When His own people heard *of this*, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses." The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." And He called them to Himself and began speaking to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. "If Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished! "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house. "Truly I say to you, all sins shall be forgiven the sons of men, and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"—because they were saying, "He has a demon."

Then His mother and His brothers arrived, and standing outside they sent *word* to Him and called Him. A crowd was sitting around Him, and they said to Him, "Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." Answering them, He said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother."