The Protestant Reformation put the Holy Scriptures – once only for the eyes of the “learned” – into the hands & hearts of the common man. But here’s the problem:

“Private interpretation never meant that individuals have the right to distort the Scriptures. With the right of private interpretation, comes the sober responsibility of accurate interpretation. Private interpretation gives us license to interpret, not to distort.” - R. C. Sproul, “Knowing Scripture”

“You very rarely have to go outside of the Bible to explain anything in the Bible.” - Donald Grey Barnhouse

There are 5 Keys to Interpretation:

1. **Content**
   This is the raw material or database.

2. **Context**
   Don’t simply take a verse out its context.
   What was said immediately before AND after the verse?

3. **Comparison**
   Compare Scripture with Scripture.
   The Best & Greatest interpreter of Scripture is Scripture. The more we compare Scripture with itself, the more the meaning of the Bible becomes apparent. The parts of the Bible that we are studying take on significant meaning in light of the entire Scripture.
   The use of a concordance aids in comparing Scripture with Scripture. We are able to study biblical characters as well as terms or words. We obtain more full meanings as to what God is teaching us.

4. **Culture**
   Understanding the culture in which the original text has its context, helps us to more fully understand the meaning of the text. We need to understand the background while the light of truth is shown onto the text.
   If we read the Bible according to our cultural context, that can or will distort the actual context. Result – we are unable to make proper sense of the passage.
   Understanding the original culture brings the text to life as well as adds accuracy to our interpretation.

5. **Consultation**
   Using extra-biblical tools aids our interpretation through better understanding, cultural context and increased accuracy of terms and ideas.
   Consulting tools are SECONDARY references. Always use your Bible FIRST, then refer back to these secondary references. They provide insights that “color in” the pages of
Secondary references for consultation include:

a. Study Bible
b. Concordances – an “exhaustive” concordance is best: Strong’s or Young’s are considered the best
d. Bible Handbooks – “Eerdman’s Handbook of the Bible” or “The Handbook of Life in Bible Times”
f. Commentaries – “Bible Knowledge Commentary” or “Expositor’s Bible Commentary”

Remember that these secondary references are there to help you evaluate your own personal study of the Bible. Do not use them as primary sources. Only the Bible itself is a primary source.

Write in your Bible as the Spirit leads you. The Holy Bible is not so “holy” as to not use it as God wants us to. Think of your Bible as a “textbook” or “workbook”. Writing notes and “scribbles” in our Bibles is a way of speaking back to God as He speaks to us.

A personal comment: I love pictures! Any kind of illustration in any kind of book, even if it’s on the cover, can help you form mental pictures of the people, places & things in the text. I often refer to a book’s jacket illustrations or even the photo of the author to help my mind visualize what I am reading or who is speaking to me. Men tend to be very visual, so tools such as illustrated dictionaries and handbooks and atlases are incredibly helpful – perfect when teaching young boys (& yes, even girls) the joys of reading their Bibles.

Bonus Time! Here’s some additional information that is not in the video series, but is helpful in learning how to Study the Bible.

Before we come to the Application process, let’s first look at Figurative Language: Let’s Figure Out the Figurative

How do we know when the Bible is representing reality as opposed to describing reality? We use figurative language all the time: “I could have died from embarrassment.” Be careful or you’ll have to “face the music.” What a beautiful garden, you must have a “green thumb.”

How do we know when to read our Bibles figuratively and when to read them literally?

Literal interpretation – taking the language in its normal sense; accepting it at face value. “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense.”

Ten principles to keep us out of figurative trouble:

1. Use the literal sense unless there is some good reason not to – don’t try to “spiritualize it”
2. Use the figurative sense when the passage tells you to do so – especially in dreams & visions

3. Use the figurative sense if a literal meaning is impossible or absurd – God doesn’t confound us with nonsense, but He does use symbolism to often make His points. But these are symbols not absurdities. Figurative language can be both descriptive and precise.

4. Use the figurative sense if a literal meaning would involve something immoral – for example when Jesus talks about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. Even the Pharisees understood this as being figurative language. God never violates His character.

5. Use the figurative sense if the expression is an obvious figure of speech – notice when the words “like” or “as” are used especially in the Psalms or prophetic books.

6. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation goes contrary to the context and scope of the passage – “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” in Revelation is not talking about a 4 legged beast with a mane.

7. Use the figurative if a literal interpretation goes contrary to the general character and style of the book – “the shadow of His wings”; poetic & prophetic writings; God is not a chicken.

8. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation goes contrary to the plan and purpose of the author – understand the context of the text. How does the verse compare to the rest of the paragraph and the rest of the book?

9. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation involves a contradiction of other Scripture – the Bible is unified in the entirety of its message. Comparing Scripture with Scripture puts Scripture in perspective.

10. Use the figurative sense if a literal interpretation would involve a contradiction in doctrine – our interpretation needs to be consistent with the Scriptures themselves.

Figures of speech include:

- hyperbole - exaggeration
- metaphor - comparison in which one thing represents another
- paradox - a statement that sounds absurd or self contradictory or contrary to logical thought
- similes - uses the words “like” or “as”
- rhetorical questions - questions not requiring a verbal response but causes mental consideration
- idioms - peculiar expressions to a particular people
- euphemisms - less offensive expression to indicate a more offensive one
- anthropomorphisms - having human attributes

Next week we begin to put it altogether: Observation which leads to Interpretation (understanding) which leads to Application (grasping & using in our daily lives). We'll learn what the “therefore” is there for!