

ENGAGING GOSPEL DOCTRINE (EPISODE 198)

BONUS EPISODE

Challenge and Be Challenged by the Scriptures

Hook	It seems obvious to state that scripture cannot be accessed without a reader, but the implications of this text-reader relationship prove profound and extensive.
Manual Goal	
EGD Goal	

Trying out some new software: Total Recorder, so we will see how that does

Has your specific thought process ever been discussed? What I mean by that is your personal, specific way of dissecting scripture and how you deeply engage the scriptures? It's shown in the podcasts by example, but I'm wondering if there's a podcast out there that outlines with specificity any internal formula/manner that you use. I'm a bit of an INTJ and love seeing the system you have and how it's applied in scripture. I think it's articulate and in many instances precise, to the point and enlightening. More a personal curiosity than anything on my part. Maybe there's a session where you've outlined your study skill set and how it's applied with scripture. (I'll skip the part where you spend way too long in grad school) :P

Carefully go through my process and then give advice about how to study the scriptures

My annotations function as commentary. I encourage you to write your own, keep a scripture journal.

Challenge the scriptures

Be challenged by the scriptures

- I. What the Sunday School podcast is really about (well-being, teaching in a way that can benefit the most people)
- II. How I prepare for the podcast
 - a. Look at the topic, see what comes to mind
 - b. Read carefully through the assigned scriptures
 - c. Look through my comments to see themes and main points I want to cover for the Lesson

- d. Pick the very most important points for the Two Minute Take Home
 - e. Feel and inhabit the scriptures and points as I record the podcast (it is almost always a rewarding, spiritual experience)
- III. How I read scripture (This is a process you have been observing in my Reading Notes for years!)
- a. Literary
 - i. Try to figure out as clearly as possible what the immediate text means (level of word, phrase, verse, narrative segment, chapter, book, etc)
 - ii. What is striking or moving about the narrative itself? About the characters and events?
 - iii. What are the themes?
 - iv. How does the text communicate these themes? (look at language, word choice, rhetorical tools, imagery, metaphor, etc)
 - b. Personal
 - i. What memories or associations do I have with this scripture?
 - ii. How does it make me feel?
 - iii. How does this scripture relate to the human experience and broader principles? (This is probably where my primary interest is; I often put this content in the Study Notes section)
 - c. Intertextual
 - i. How does this passage relate to the narratives around it?
 - ii. How does this passage relate to the book it is in?
 - iii. How does this passage relate to the book of scripture it is in?
 - iv. What theological puzzle pieces does this scripture provide and how do those pieces fit in with other passages? (History and theology are both reconstructions. The quest is to find the narrative that best explains all available evidence)
 - d. Historical
 - i. How did this text I am reading come to me? What is the history of each of the stages?
 - ii. What historical layers are at play with this text? (For example, with the Book of Mormon there is
 - 1. The internal Lehite history
 - 2. The 19th century historical context of the production of the Book of Mormon
 - 3. The history of how the Book of Mormon has been changed and updated
 - 4. The history of how the Book of Mormon has been used and interpreted in the Church
 - iii. What resources can I find to learn more about the historical background of this text?
 - iv. What historical questions do I have as I read?

- e. Summary: My engagement with scripture is relational, and my podcasts function as a personal commentary that I hope is helpful for others as well. I invite you to do the same.
- IV. My personal testimony of and feelings about scripture (also add in that I count other texts as scripture, anything that motivates and inspires and enlightens me)
- V. Suggestions for reading scripture
- a. Literary: Write in your scriptures! Make comments and especially ask questions. Don't be afraid not to know something. Read courageously.
 - b. Personal: Even as an academic scholar of scripture, I consider this the most important (I suppose it is my pastoral side that makes me say that though). Pay attention to how the scriptures make you feel. Look specifically for how the scripture applies to your lives, what wisdom or guidance you can find, and pay attention to the associations and ideas that come to you.
 - c. Intertextual: This will come over time... pay attention to how the passage you are reading relates to other passages, including how it challenges other passages.
 - d. Historical (As you have interest and resources, find good materials that will help you understand the scriptures historically. A Study Bible is the first place to go when it comes to the Bible).
 - i. Book of Mormon: Grant Hardy's Reader's Edition and Understanding the Book of Mormon
 - ii. Doctrine & Covenants: Steven Harper, Making Sense of the Doctrine and Covenants
 - iii. Old Testament:
 - iv. New Testament: Study Bible for both of these. Harper Collins for a more academic approach and the ESV for a more faith-centered approach.
- VI. Specific issues
- a. Scripture for everyone
 - i. The great thing is that "challenge and be challenged by the scriptures" applies to every level of belief.
 - ii. For all types of belief:
 1. Ask yourself, what is scripture? (academically, it is a *community* that makes scripture scripture. Scripture is a text considered both sacred and authoritative, and a canon is an authoritative collection of sacred, authoritative texts)
 2. Most of us can agree that scripture is both inspired and human.. it is helpful to figure out what that means to us.
 3. Reflect on your relationship with scripture. Does it engage you? Nourish you? Bore you? Trigger you? Frustrate you?
 4. When we read the scriptures, we aren't as aware of what we *bring* to the scriptures. Our associations and knowledge and experiences. Scriptures remind us of people and events in our lives, or principles we have learned. This is why reading scriptures is relational, and this is why each person's experience reading the scriptures is different.

5. What are your favorite passages of scripture and why?
 - a. Some of mine
 - i. Moses 7
 - ii. John 20
 - iii. Jacob 5
 - iv. Moroni
 - b. Challenge the scriptures (hold scripture accountable, push back, don't dismiss troubling feelings)
 - c. Be challenged by the scriptures (Look more carefully at discomfort. Are the issues in the scriptures, or in you?)
- iii. Scripture Reading down the Rabbit Hole
 1. Literal belief (my favorite benefit of literal belief is the relationships we can develop with people in the scriptures... I was homesick for Enoch and Moroni and others. Be aware that even if the scriptures are directly inspired of God and mostly historical, they remain not only products of humans, but products of a particular time and culture.)
 2. Nuanced literal belief (This might one of the healthiest approaches—you benefit from literal belief, but remain aware that scripture is very human, and so are able to reject problematic passages. One of the most important insights to internalize is that scriptures are)
 3. Belief in fundamentals (Focus on what the scriptures teach you about true principles. Find what is valuable to you, look for nuggets. Craft the narrative of the gospel that is most rewarding to you... I did this for years)
 4. Non-literal belief, value in the scriptures (What symbolic meaning do you find in the scriptures? How do they relate to your life? What ideas and principles do you resonate with?)
 5. Non-belief, struggle with/bored with the scriptures (First, remind yourself that whatever you feel about the scriptures, millions if not billions of people have strong feelings about them. They have impacted culture in uniquely powerful ways. Even Carl Sagan recommended everyone read the Bible. See what value you can still find by reading the scriptures. Introduce yourself to other scripture. Perhaps most importantly of all, find those texts that nourish and inspire and motivate you. What is your personal scripture?)

How do you turn the skeptic off? I haven't been able to crack the scriptures in ages for anything other than an occasional academic interest because they really make me angry. I took them so seriously for so many years and now I believe that they are 100% man-made BS.

Great question: How to know what parts you should challenge, and what parts you should be challenged by. Believing everything literally is terrible, only accepting the parts that you already agree with is a waste, but where do you draw that line for optimal improvement? (My initial answer is to at first suspend judgment, try to put aside prejudice and feelings, open myself to what a passage could teach me, even if it is unfamiliar or difficult... and THEN turn on my own analysis and judgment again)

Concluding thoughts on scripture after completing the podcast, and where I will go from here. (I have been very impressed by how well the scriptures hold up to intensive attention. I still find them nourishing and powerful. Mormon scripture deserves its place among world scripture. You get out what you put it, but I think we can also be gentle with ourselves and learn our personal relationship to scripture. Find what benefits you, inspires you, makes you a happier, better person)