

The following acronym (H.E.A.R.) is a helpful tool for understanding the goal of your time with God in the Scriptures:

Highlight

Any given passage of Scripture will provide a wellspring of knowledge and insight which you will never exhaust. Since you cannot learn everything, you will have to spend your time focusing in on the specific parts of the text that God, by His Spirit, is drawing you into. Start by picking out those parts that jump out to you and be willing to dig deeply into them.

Explain

After highlighting certain portions of the text, begin to study them deeply in order to determine their inherent meaning. The meaning of Scripture is not a matter of subjective opinion or personal preference. God has spoken through His Word with the intention of communicating His ideas to us. Dig into the passage in order to understand what God has intended to say through it. This will involve deep reflection, asking important questions, and possibly the use of outside resources and Christian brothers and sisters to help you understand! Some good questions to start asking are:

Why was this originally written?
To whom was it originally written?
What were the circumstances surrounding its writing?
How does this fit into the verses before and after it?
What does this teach about God?

Why does the author include this passage here?
What is the larger book primarily about?
How does this fit into the story of redemption?
How does the genre affect the meaning?
What does this teach about mankind (me)?

Apply

Once you have come to a better (albeit imperfect) understanding of what God is trying to communicate through the text, begin to reflect on how that truth is relevant to you personally. The application of biblical truth can be either *conduct-oriented* or *content-oriented*. *Conduct-oriented* application describes when the truth of Scripture guides you to act or obey in a specific way. This will lead you to change your behaviours by identifying action steps for you to take. This is a very important role that God's Word fills in our life, and it is often people's full understanding of Scriptural application. However, *content-oriented* application describes something different, namely when the truth of God's Word becomes personally relevant and causes you to believe or value something that you previously didn't believe or value to the same extent. This is the Word of God being applied to your heart by the Holy Spirit. If your time in the text doesn't lead to any specific action steps, it doesn't mean you've failed to do things properly. The real question to ask is, "Have I truly *engaged* with God in a way that is relevant to my heart and life?"

Respond

Understanding and applying the truth of Scripture is sometimes a long and hard journey. Once you have gotten to this point, however, your task is not done! If we seek to understand and apply the truth without personally *responding* to God directly, our communion with Him is incomplete. A personal response can take many different forms. It may mean going and living out the act of obedience God has revealed to you. Primarily, it means prayer. This could be a prayer of thanksgiving or praise for what God has just worked in you to believe or value. It could be

a prayer of boldness to ask for things that align with the heart of God. It could be a confession of sin and repentance before Him or others. Whatever the case may be, think about your communion with God as a two-way street. If you don't take time to sit in response to what He has spoken, that relationship won't reach its full potential.