

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

Introduction:

- God's plan and purpose for us is spiritual maturity (Col 1:28-29) - For us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son . . . (Rom 8:29)
- A disciplined approach to Studying the Word of God is one of the primary means of spiritual growth (I Pet 2:2; 2Tim 3:14-17) – We cannot grow without food
- We cannot arrive at divine truth by just following a set of rules or suggestions. God is only truly known through the revelation and illumination of the Holy Spirit. We need to distinguish between knowing “about” Him and “knowing Him intimately and experientially”. Knowing Him in the head and knowing Him in the heart are not the same.

“Study plans are no substitute for the Holy Spirit.”
(Howard Vos, **Effective Bible Study**)

- The purpose of the Scriptures is to reveal God’s plan of Salvation and Guide His children home. We get in trouble when we try to use it for other purposes.

We can learn a lot from Ezra, the Priestly Scribe in the Old Testament (Ezra 7:10) and the Apostle Paul.

“For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” (NASB)

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.” 2Tim 2:15

We need to have the Emmaus Road encounter and experience when we delve into the word of God. (Lu 24:13-49). The Spirit of God needs to open our minds to understand it (v. 45). He needs to open our eyes so that we might see Jesus (v. 31). We need to listen to it so that our hearts burn inside (32).

Two Ways Every Child of God needs to be Able to Study the Word of God:

1. Devotionally - study to feed one's own soul (Personally)
2. Studiously - study to feed the souls of others (Pastorally)

*“Give a person a fish and he will eat for a day.
Teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime!”*

- The devotional method may be effectively done by carefully studying: a word, verse, paragraph, chapter, book, character or Christ or any other topic in a portion or the entire Bible.
- “I have met no one who is stronger spiritually than their devotional habit allows.”

A Few Things to Always Keep In Mind:

1. Satan will try to prevent you from studying the Scriptures devotionally.
2. There should be a balance between the intensive and the extensive approaches - depth and breath. You don't need an inch deep and a mile wide. Neither do you need an inch drill through the earth's crust. Balance! Balance! Balance!
3. Devotional study is enhanced by memorization, meditation and journaling.
4. The devotional study needs to be done within a framework of a process and system that encompasses a variety of methods (Paragraph, Word, Topic, Chapter, and Book). If not, you can become like weak and weary sheep wandering in the wilderness. Using a variety of methods, will cause you to drink deep from the springs of spiritual life, for refreshment and nourishment. It will bring you to the banqueting table, where you may feast, rest and rejoice.
5. You will have a proportionate return on the time and effort you invest in your studies.

Each of us needs to collect our personal manna on a daily basis. We need to ask Him to, "Give us this day, our daily bread" (Matt 6:11). We will remember more readily and be benefited more profoundly from the truths we discover on our own, where God reveals and deals with us personally, privately and powerfully - customizing the solutions and diets to suit our personality, stage of maturity, situations and circumstances, etc. We are more likely to enjoy proper spiritual health, when our Heavenly Father chooses and customizes the morsels of truth for us. He desires us to partake freely and fully of the milk and the meat of His Word on a regular basis. He wants our souls to be nourished and spiritual muscles to be developed. He has made provisions for this - His Word.

Using another metaphor, by spending time daily in the Word of God, we will receive wisdom and guidance for the journey. The Bible is our Food, but it is also our Map and Compass (There are many other metaphors and imageries that reveal other aspects and values of the Word of God).

Every Child of God Should Be Able To Study:

- A Paragraph
- A Word
- A Topic
- A Book

STUDYING THE BIBLE DEVOTIONALLY: A Recipe for Mediation

- Pray for the illumination of the Holy Spirit – Ask the Author to help and guide you.
- Select a Paragraph, Chapter or Book
- Use Notebook, pens & pencils to keep track of your discovery, insights, etc.
- **Ask the following Questions:**
 - What does it say about GOD?***
 - His Names
 - His Attributes
 - His Actions

 - What does it say about JESUS?***
 - His Names
 - His Attributes
 - His Actions

 - What does it say about the HOLY SPIRIT?***
 - His Names
 - His Attributes
 - His Actions

 - What does it say about ME?
 - What does it say about OTHERS?
 - What does it tell ME to do?
 - What does it tell ME not to do?
 - What is REPEATED?
 - Words
 - Ideas
 - What is CONTRASTED? – Words and Ideas
 - WHAT ELSE does it say?
 - Are there any SPECIAL THINGS that I need to EXPLORE FURTHER?
 - Words
 - Topics
 - Doctrines,
 - Etc.

 - What other portions of Scripture do I know of that address SIMILAR ISSUES?

Application:

- Look, Listen, Learn, Love and Live
- Summarize what you discovered and learnt
- Personalize what the Lord taught you.
- Worship the God you see!
- Share what you learnt with someone else!

STUDYING A PARAGRAPH, CHAPTER or BOOK

I. Observation - *What do I see? What does it say?*

A. Questions to ask.

- Who, What, When, Where, Why and How

Six Honest Serving Men:

I keep six honest serving-men,

[They taught me all I knew]

*Their names are **How** and **What** and **Why**,*

***When** and **Where** and **Who**.*

(Attributed to Rudyard Kipling)

II. Interpretation - *What does it mean?*

A. Five Things to Consider

1. Content

- What is the text really saying

2. Context

- Ask where and how does the passage fit in the Book & the Bible?
- Two Kinds of Context
 - Immediate
 - Broad\Wide

3. Culture

- Effective Bible Study, Teaching and Preaching seek to bridge the gap between the cultures of the Biblical audience and the present day audience

4. Comparison

- Ask: Are there parallel accounts? cf. the Gospels, Kings and Chronicles, etc.
- The best commentary and testimony of the Bible, is the Bible itself

5. Consultation

- This should be pursued only after you have done your own primary study and meditation on the passage. Doing otherwise is short-changing and short-circuiting the primary purpose of studying the Word of God – Heart transformation and spiritual growth. What God teaches you and what you think are more important than what others say and write.

Helpful Tools:

- Other Bible Translations
- Bible Dictionary
- Bible Commentaries.
- Bible Concordances
- Bible Atlas
- Language Dictionaries
- Bible Software
- Etc.

III. Application - What does it mean to me?

- Now that you've discovered what God said and is saying . . . The Big Question is: **"So what?"** This is the goal of all Bible Study.
- Bible Study should not be just an intellectual or academic exercise; it should be a life transforming experience
- The Word of God is meant to reach us where we live, and take us where we should be.

Remember:

*Light obeyed increases light,
Light rejected bringeth night.*

"... If we persist in the things against which we are warned, the Bible becomes a sealed book, and we can neither know it, nor teach it."

G. Campbell Morgan

- ***Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (NKJV: Deut 8:3; Matt 4:4; Lu 4:4)***

STUDYING A WORD

- "A word study is a thorough analysis of the meaning(s) of a word, designed to arrive at its specific meaning in a given passage." (**Stewart**)
- "Words are always fascinating things." (**Wm. Barclay**).

The Value of Word Studies:

1. Doctrinal/Theological
2. Devotional
3. Practical
4. Illustrative

A Suggested Procedure:

1. Note the root of the word in a Concordance, Bible Dictionary or Lexicon.
2. Note the meaning of the word in extra-biblical literature, using Lexicons. (*Those who use English Translation only, may want to skip this step.*)
3. Note the various occurrences of the word in the Bible, using an Exhaustive Concordance.
4. Pay special attention to the first occurrence of the word in the Bible, or by the Author.
5. Note the usages of the word in a particular Book or by a particular Author.
6. Note the different nuances of the word in each particular context. There is no meaning without context.
7. Check the accuracy of your findings and conclusions against Word Study and Synonyms resources
8. Summarize your findings and implications in a paragraph or two.
9. Apply what you learn to grow spiritually
10. Share what you have discovered with others. Knowledge that is shared is multiplied. What is hoarded is diminished.

Examples:

Meditation, Fellowship, Love, Peace, Joy, Prayer, Intercession, Worship, Submission, Wrestling, Repentance, etc.

Additional Notes:

STUDYING A TOPIC

My primary method of studying a Topic is to use one of the many Topical Textbooks that are available or I use a computer software. I have also found Bible Dictionaries to be very helpful for this.

STUDYING A BOOK

This Method is similar, in many respects, to the study of a Paragraph or Chapter. However, there are some other areas that must be given diligent considerations. Some of these areas include: Author, Audience, Date, Background, Purpose, etc. This is sometimes difficult and laborious work, but a good critical commentary is a helpful friend and gold mine in these areas. Bible Dictionaries are also helpful.