

Sunday, December 22, 2024 am

## COMMUNICATING WITH GOD (39)

### Start Studying Your Bible

This year we have focused on communicating with God (prayer and Bible Study). Our focus the past few months has been Bible study – how God communicates TO us today. We have noted many elements associated with this including a study of authority. We have discussed why we ought to study the Bible, how we ought to view the Bible (as God’s inspired and accurate word), what Bible study is and how it relates to Bible reading, proper attitudes as we study the Bible, and the past 2 lessons have addressed some rules related to Bible study. These rules include: 1) We study with the intent to get out of the text what God intended to say; 2) We need to use the skills of reasoning and logic God has given us; 3) We understand that passage has an intended meaning – typically ONE intended meaning as it was written (i.e., it is not up to me to put my personal interpretation on it); 4) Context is extremely important and we noted different contexts to consider: a) the immediate context; b) the section (pericope), c) the remote context – both the purpose of the book & the theme of the Bible as a whole, d) The historical and cultural context; 5) We also ought to consider the background of a text – asking the key questions: who, what, where, when, why, etc.; 6) Never forget the Bible is filled with commands and principles; 7) Consider the type of literature is in the text – different types of literature are approached differently. It is especially important we distinguish between literal and figurative language; 8) Know the major divisions of the Bible – time periods, testaments, various covenants, etc.; 9) When interpreting a text always factor in what the author explains (this is a part of context); 10) When examining a subject, put together everything about that subject.

#### I. Some suggestions to make Bible study effective

##### a. Determine what you are going to study.

##### i. There are 4 types of Bible study –

1. Contextual - Verse by verse – this is where you go through a particular text or a book of the Bible with the goal of determining its message. This is a contextual study – You take the book a section (pericope) at a time.
2. Topical – you determine you want to fully understand a subject.
  - a. You will seek to piece together everything about that subject.
  - b. It can be a broad topic – such as salvation OR the church OR the Holy Spirit OR the parables of Jesus; Or a narrower subject – like baptism, eternal security, heaven, the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18), or the “fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:22) or the “works of the flesh” (Galatians 5:19-21), etc.
  - c. You may also have a purpose in mind – for example: Evidences – a desire to prove to others (and yourself) that the Bible IS the word of God. Something practical – the godly family (E.g., How can I be a better...? Husband, wife, father, mother, sibling, child, etc.?) What does it mean to be part of God’s family? How should I treat my brethren? What does it mean to not worry? OR you are struggling with an attitude or action – anger, gossip, forgiveness, etc.
  - d. Perhaps, a character study – you want to study the life of Jesus, Moses, Paul, Ruth, the apostles, etc.

3. Workbook – this is using a prepared guide to lead you through, either a book of the Bible or a subject. NOTE: Workbooks are prepared by men, so always use with caution. Consult someone you trust before using a workbook, especially if you just beginning your walk as a Christian. NOTE: Our Bible classes are an example of an ongoing “workbook”.
4. Our worship service – when we understand that a worship service involves learning, it is a form of study. Our goal is that it be true to God’s word. Be reminded that the songs we sing are teaching each other (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19). Our sermons are clearly focusing on a topic – either a text or a subject (or a combination). We are learning God’s word. What is taught can be a catalyst for further study on your own.
  - ii. There are strengths and weaknesses with each type of study. But regardless of which one you choose, you will be increasing your knowledge.
  - iii. Determine the type of study you want to do – topical or textual. For beginners, what is best is to begin with a book of the Bible. Perhaps a gospel – re: Luke which is then followed up by Acts.
  - iv. If you are a babe (or even later), ask for recommendations. If you are going to do a workbook – consult someone before you start. ALSO, as a beginner, you are going to “plow” the soil, but don’t plow too deep. You do not want to overwhelm yourself.
  - v. A system of study – your goal ought to be to eventually study the entire Bible (both Old and New Testaments, with an emphasis on the NT). Your goal to reach a point where you can distinguish between truth and error. Consider Hebrews 5:12-14 & Ephesians 4:11-16. Also 1 Peter 3:15.
  - vi. Finally, ALWAYS study with the intent to apply it to your life. Cf. Ezra 7:10, James 1:21-26.
- b. As with Bible reading, set aside a time and find a quiet place. Remove distractions. Get something that you can take notes with (paper/computer/etc.). Recall, that Jesus, while busy, found time to pray – Mark 1:35 – before daylight Jesus went out to pray. He also found time to teach His disciples.
- c. Verse by verse study or textual
  - i. Begin with prayer – 1 Thessalonians 5:17, James 1:5
  - ii. After determining what to study, WRITE down a title for your study.
  - iii. Begin by reading the Bible text – as we have noted this is a crucial part of the Bible study process. The more familiar you are with a text (especially a book), the better prepared you will be when you delve into a study of the text. Always start by reading the text AND context. IF you are going to study a book of the Bible, begin by reading the entire book, possibly 2-3 times (take your time if it is a longer book and requires several days). If it is a shorter letter, try to read it all in 1 sitting.  
**NOTE: A helpful tool as you read the Bible is to listen to the Bible as you read.** When you use multiple senses for a task, it is more likely to be retained (or a greater percentage retained). Most major translations have an audio version. The cost is typically minimal (or free).
  - iv. Pause and ask what you are trying to learn from what you have read. ASK the questions related to your study. Philippians 4:8 – meditate on these things.
  - v. Research the background. You can typically find short overviews of various books of the Bible in several places.

- vi. Summarize the text in a sentence or two. Write this down. WRITE IT IN PENCIL! As you study, you might change your mind.
  - vii. Start studying – find resources that will help you determine the meaning.
  - viii. IF you highlight your Bible, possibly take some brief notes.
    - 1. Underline key verses (I do this in pencil also).
    - 2. A few years back (2019), I presented some lessons about effective Bible reading. There it was suggested we follow a PATH. With each chapter you read ask the following:
      - a. Praise – is there anything in this chapter (or text) that praises God?
      - b. Admonition – is the text telling me something I need to improve.
      - c. Trust – what does the text teach to build trust (faith) in God
      - d. Hope – what in the text gives me hope, encourages me to keep going?
    - 3. Consider purchasing a Bible that has wide margins for notes. You can write some of the observations from your studies in your Bible.
  - ix. Be patient. Genuine study takes time. There is enough in God’s word to keep you going for a lifetime. Recall Paul’s admonition to Timothy – 1 Timothy 4:13, 15. 1 Peter 2:1-2 speaks of how we as babes desire the pure (sincere) milk of the word to grow thereby. Hebrew 5:12-14 speaks of babes and the mature. You will start with the “milk of the word”.
- d. Topical studies
- i. What is the topic you want to study and why? For beginners, start with a study of the steps of salvation (cf. 1 Peter 3:15), or maybe, What does it mean to be a Christian? If you need help, ask someone.
  - ii. Possibly, look for a workbook by a faithful Christian (IF you need help with this, ask).
  - iii. Secure a notebook and give your study a title (date it if you want).
  - iv. Begin each study with prayer. Psalm 25:4, *Show me Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths.* While a psalm, this is written as a request to God, thus it is a prayer. 5x in the psalms, we have the expression, “teach (or show) me Your ways.” (Inc. Psalm 119:26 & 33).
  - v. Find passages of scripture related to your subject. If a subject has multiple points, create subcategories and place the appropriate scriptures in those. Workbooks can help you with this. Study the texts IN THEIR CONTEXT!
  - vi. Be prepared to look up words, both in English and the original languages (OT – Hebrew, NT – Greek, select passages – Aramaic).
  - vii. Use various resources to help you. This will be our next lesson.
  - viii. Write down what you have learned and file it in such a way that you know where it is.
  - ix. Again, be patient.

These are some suggestions to help you study God’s word. Remember, our goal is to let God speak to us through His revealed word. And in time, if we do not grow weary (cf. Galatians 6:9), we will continue to mature in the faith. I know of many who say, “I wish I knew more”. The answer is, keep studying. The more you do, the more you will know. And you will NEVER run out things to learn. Keep desiring His word and you will grow thereby. Are you growing in His grace and knowledge? 2 Peter 3:18) Think about it!