

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE (2)

Last week, I presented a lesson dealing with how to study the Bible. We noted this is a 2 part lesson. In part 1 we noticed some reasons why we should study the Bible, and a proper attitude, which is where Bible study MUST began. We noted several attitudes that are necessary including: Our need to reverence the Bible as the word of God, a belief that we can understand it, approaching it with love for truth, an open mind and a desire to learn and get out of it its intended message, AND finally, we noted that we must study with a desire to obey what it says – apply what we have learned.

In this lesson, we want to make some practical applications that can help us to study the Bible. Again, this is on an introductory lesson, as we could devote entire lessons to each of the points I will mention here. If you need further clarification about some point, let me know and perhaps we can make arrangements to addresses what you need in greater details. Let's get started!

I. **Begin with a general overview of the Bible.**

- a. Get a good translation – one designed to help you study.
 - i. Should be a word for word Bible – KJV, NKJV, NASB, ASV, ESV, etc. While other types of Bible may be useful, they present challenges when STUDYING the Bible.
 - ii. Useful, something with wide margins if you intend to mark your Bible and take notes therein.
- b. Begin with reading your Bible. There is a difference between reading and studying. But in order to adequately study you must FIRST have a general idea of what the Bible teaches. I have charts to help you read through the entire Bible, or portion thereof, in a year.
- c. Therefore, it does good to read the Bible through the first time just trying to get an overall picture of what the Bible is about
 - i. Note the various divisions of scripture – 2 Testaments. Each divided into various sections – the OT – remember the numbers 5 & 12. They apply as follows:
 1. Genesis – Deuteronomy – the Law (aka the Pentateuch) - 5 books
 2. Joshua – Esther – books of history – 12 books
 3. Job – Song of Solomon – poetry – 5 books
 4. Isaiah – Daniel - Prophets – major (has to do with length) – 5 books
 5. Hosea – Malachi – Prophets – minor (has to do with length) – 12 books
 - ii. The New Testament –
 1. Matthew – John – the gospels – 4 books
 2. Acts – History – 1 book
 3. Letters of Paul (may or may not include Hebrews) – 13-14 letters
 4. The General letters – 7 letters
 5. Revelation – prophecy – 1 book

II. **Prepare yourself for study**

- a. Set aside a time regularly and often – consistency will help you to study more.
You will need time to not only read the text, but also to THINK about what you are reading!
- b. Secure materials to help you take notes – maybe a notebook, pencil (or pen), ruler (for underlining in your Bible), possibly colored markers if you want to do that, etc.
Effective Bible study involves taking notes.
- c. Formulate a plan – over time you need to cover substantial portions of scripture.

III. **Always begin with prayer**

- a. James 1:5 -you want to ensure that what you are studying is true to His word.
- b. This helps keep you humble and focused on God.

IV. **CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!**

- a. Context is everything in understanding meaning.
 - i. 2 Timothy 2:15 – rightly dividing the word of truth
 - ii. It has been said that you can prove anything with the Bible – if you are willing to take it out of its context. Far too many today pick out a phrase that says what they want. Often this is ok, but many times it can be misused and present false ideas.
 - iii. Consider 2 Peter 3:15-16 again – they twisted some of what Paul meant.
 - iv. For example: Romans 8:28 – all things work together for good. This is sometimes used to tell someone everything is going to work out in a given situation. But contextually, it is dealing with God's purpose or plan. That is what is not going to be stopped.
- b. Find out what background you can about the book- Ask the questions:
 - i. Who is speaking and to whom?
 - ii. What is being discussed?
 - iii. Where is it written from and to whom?
 - iv. When was it written?
 - v. Why is this being written? Problem? Answer questions?
- c. Different types of contexts –
 - i. Immediate context – the verses before and after
 - ii. The section context – what is the author trying to develop in that part of the book? How does my immediate context fit into this?
 - iii. The book context – what is the overall message of the book. HOW does my immediate context fit into this?
 - iv. The Bible as a whole – How does this book and context fit into the overall scheme of the Bible?

V. **Useful tools that can help you**

- a. A Bible concordance – a book that gives you an alphabetical list of all the significant (or all) words in a book – in this case, the Bible.
Some observations about concordances
 - i. They are language specific – there are English word concordances and there are original language concordances.
 - ii. They are version specific – because you are search the Bible based on the version you are using.
- b. Bible dictionaries – define Biblical words AS they are used in the Bible.
 - i. There are differences in the meanings of words between our language and the Bible language. We always want the Biblical definition.
 - ii. Also Bible dictionaries are really more than that. They are really more like an encyclopedia – in fact some are called encyclopedias (e.g. I.S.B.E.). First, they will define the word biblically. Most give you a more detailed explanation of its usage – including SOME references that use that word. They might give details about a specific person, place, event or concept as found in the Bible.
 - iii. There are different types of dictionaries – some that focus on different things – such as word meanings, or specific elements (e.g. A Bible atlas can be a dictionary of places found in the Bible.)
 - iv. There are 3 levels of dictionaries – compact (briefest), one volume and multivolume. Obviously with each of these the amount and length of entries increases. And again, some are specified.
- c. Other versions of the Bible –
 - i. A good way to understand the meaning of a word OR verse is to compare different Bible translations. In English, there are hundreds of translations.

- ii. This is one of my favorite ways to do word or verse studies.
- iii. There are Bibles called – parallel bibles that actually have multiple translations placed side-by-side to look at.
- d. Cross references – most Bible provide some very small notes either in the center or at the bottom of a page (or both). Pay attention to special notes. They can provide direct references to a specific phrase or verse, alternate words, or details about a specific verse, esp. as it relates to other versions and mss.
A good detailed cross reference is called the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge – it is a VERY DETAILED cross reference book that lists other verses by phrase or word in a verse.
- e. Commentaries – NOTE; Commentaries are NOT inspired - Even the ones by your favorite authors or sets. Again there are different types of commentaries.
- f. Bible software is available – you get what you pay for, though there are substantial resources and programs available for free.

VI. Engaging in a Bible study

- a. It can seem overwhelming – the Bible is a big book. But you must NOT let that stop you from studying.
- b. Just get started – and keep going.
 - i. If you wonder where to start – determine what you what type of study you want to engage
 - ii. Be patient. If you are getting started, you are not going to get it all over night.
 - iii. But no matter how you do it, something is better than nothing.
- c. Decide what you are going to study. Two types of Bible study
 - i. Textual study – studying through a book or section of book.
 - ii. Topical study – studying what the Bible says about a specific subject.
 - iii. Each type has its own approach.
- d. For a textual study – my recommended starting place - TT
 - i. Get your materials together.
 - ii. Decide where you are going to start – maybe you have a certain text in mind. Start with that book.
 - 1. IF your Bible knowledge is limited – start with something basic.
Recommended starting place – pick a gospel. The Bible centers around Jesus.
OR one of the letters – some of the simpler letters – Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 & 2 Peter, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, 1 & 2 Thessalonians.
 - 2. You can then go from there. ***DON'T start with Revelation!***
 - iii. Begin by reading the entire book – do it at a pace that you can comprehend what you are reading (this is not the time for speed reading).
 - 1. Don't get bogged down with ideas you do not understand at this point. This is about getting the overall picture of the book first. You are going to come back to this. AND as you read through, you might find answers to some of the things you do not understand.
 - 2. Some recommend reading through the book several times (2-3, and if you are a preacher or teachers – as many as 10 times, each time getting more specific in thoughts).
 - 3. If possible, read through the entire book in 1 sitting (or as few as possible with larger books).
- iv. Then come back and engage in a section-by-section study – determine the message of that section, then go to the next section.
- v. Then you can consider verse by verse, phrase by phrase and word by word. This is where you get into the more detailed studies. This is where you will utilize the tools we mentioned above.

- e. For topical studies
 - i. Get your materials together.
 - ii. Determine the topic you want to study - If you are beginning, start with the basics – first principles – grace, faith, obedience, repentance, confession, baptism, faithfulness, God, Jesus, faithfulness, love, self-control, etc.
Any of these topics contain enough material to keep you going for quite some time.
DON'T start with the end times, what are angels, etc.
 - iii. Useful tools include topical Bibles – basically a book that lists numerous scriptures associated with a topic. Examples: Nave's topical Bible, Torrey's Topical Bible, Dictionary of Bible Themes, or "Where to Find It In the Bible"
NOTE: Ask someone you trust, who is mature in the faith for recommended resources on your topic.
 - iv. Begin by reading various texts on that subject.
 - v. Take notes – write down the verses relevant to your study.
Definitions and any other observations you have.
 - vi. Consider other words that are related to your topic, including opposites. E.g. If you are studying "love", you may also want to look up "care" and "kindness", And consider the word "hate" and its companions.
- f. Always begin with prayer.
- g. Do you feel guilty because you have not studied enough – then repent and ask forgiveness. Begin where you are right now.
- h. After you have taken notes based on your study, now it is time to start thinking about what you have read up to this point (study it in your mind) – this is your application to you. Philippians 4:8.
Be careful NOT to read into the text what is not there. Your goal is to get out of the text its intended meaning.
- i. Keep going! Like anything you do – at first it will be challenging. But don't give up. The more you study, the easier it will become and the deeper your knowledge and appreciation of scripture will become.

These are a few thoughts on how to study the Bible. As I noted at the beginning, I could say so much more about each of these points. If you need further information – recommended resources or further details about a specific point, feel free to ask. I can direct you to various resources, (many of them free electronically) that have been mentioned in this lesson.

Truly Bible study is extremely important to a Christian. It is one of your lifelines that will help you get to heaven. If you have not been studying as you should, start where you are right now and continue to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). Think about it!