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How to Study the Bible
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Lesson 2

So last week I more or less gave you an introduction as To How to Study the Bible. And we talked about how knowledge of the Bible is essential to our growth and maturity as a Christian. And also how it's essential for us to learn what's right, what's not right and how to stay right. And that's the profit, if you will, we will get if we study the Bible. In other words it teaches us how to follow Christ; how to really live and function as a Christian. In other words it will bring about a change in our life.

But now, the opposite is also true. If we don't learn to study the Bible and apply what we learn to our lives then there won't be any change. We won't grow and mature and become more like Christ. We'll stay the same or probably we'll grow worse off as time goes on.

Now, in my time as a Christian, there's nothing in this world that has had a greater effect on the way I live than the Word of God. There's no sermon or book or teaching or testimony that I've encountered that has the ability to affect my life like the Bible.

And I truly believe if you'll put forth the effort to learn how to study it for yourself, you too will eventually come to that same conclusion. There is a supernatural power in this book and that supernatural power is God. And if you truly want to grow spiritually and mature spiritually and become a more effective witness for Christ, then it's essential that you learn how to study God's Word.

Now, that said, learning how to study the Bible and then putting that knowledge to good use is going to require a lot of hard work on your part. It's not going to come without spending a lot of time and a lot of effort in learning how to do so and then putting what you learn to use afterwards. That's why not many people will get the full benefits from a study like this, because, even though they go through the teaching and learn how, they just won't be willing to put forth the kind of effort that it takes to use what they learn. And so at the end of the day, what you receive from studying the Bible; will be directly proportionate to the time and the effort you're willing to put in to it.

Now, before we get started let's talk about Bibles for just a minute. And I touched on this last week. There are all kinds of Bible out there and all kinds of translations and paraphrases and colors and sizes and different covers and what have you. And it can get really confusing if you're not careful. And so I just want to suggest to you a couple of things.

First of all, the scriptures I quote and put on the board on Sundays and on Wednesdays come almost exclusively from the NKJV of the Bible. Occasionally I use the old KJV, and sometimes the NASB, and I use all these when I study, but most times when I teach or preach, I stick with the NKJV.

Now, any of those I just mentioned I believe are reliable translations. Also the ESV and the NET are okay. I'm not particularly fond of the NIV, but if you have one, don't throw it away, I would just make sure when I read it that I compared it to one of these others I just mentioned. And just be aware, there are some things in it that are different that you have to be aware of.

As for what kind of Bible, I would suggest you get a good study Bible with references and short commentaries on the individual verses. Dr. David Jeremiah makes a good one, John MacArthur is one of my favorites. The Scofield Bible is an old one a lot of people use. And there are others, but the first two are at the top of my list.

And then I'd suggest you get a good cover. A genuine leather cover is best if you can afford it, and get a large print or even a giant print if you're older. And don't be afraid to mark in your Bible or take notes. And a wide margin helps in that respect.

And then I'd suggest you get a good Bible Dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia and maybe a map book and a concordance and a set of commentaries if you can afford it.

And by the way, there's an app called Biblegateway Plus, that costs like \$5 a month and it includes a full set of Vernon McGees commentaries and some other resources that'll help you. And there may be other apps out there as well. And also John MacArthur's website, GTY.org is full of study material that's free. And of course Got Questions is another app you can download and use and trust. And so there's a world of information out there at your fingertips and most of it for free, if you'll just search for it. And if you have any questions as to whether something's a good resource, then just ask me and I'll tell you if I know. And if I don't know, I'll find out.

Now, the next thing that'll help you; and I gave you a handout to assist you in this; is to memorize the best you can all the books of the Bible.

Have you ever had the preacher tell you to turn to a particular book of the Bible and maybe it's one of those minor prophets that's hard to find and you look for it but you just find it and finally you look in the index, but by the time you get there, he's already moved on to another scripture?

Well, that's why we need to memorize the books of the Bible. And I know it's not easy, but it's also not impossible; especially if you break them down into the different categories like on the handout I just gave you.

So now that we have all that behind us, let's get started learning how to study the Bible.

Now, just like learning how to walk or swim or how to play some sport or how to do your taxes or accounting, there is a method for approaching the Word of God.

And by "method" I mean a strategy, or a plan of attack, that will yield the maximum results for your investment of time and effort. And if you lack a method, you're going to get really frustrated very quickly. Not to mention you're probably going to end up with a wrong interpretation and application.

Now, the method we're going to be learning going forward is by no means the only method out there for studying the Bible. I'm sure there are many other methods out there and some probably as good or better than the one I'm going to be teaching you. But this method is simple and it's straightforward and it can be used by anyone regardless of their level of education or spiritual maturity; and more importantly it's reliable.

It doesn't matter whether you've been in the faith five weeks or five decades—the principles remain the same. And as long as you can read, you can learn to study the Bible.

Now, I'm not saying you won't have an advantage if you know something about Greek or Hebrew or have additional education, but with all of the resources available to us today, none of that is really necessary; and you're not at much of a disadvantage without those skills or training.

Now, another plus for using this simple method is that **it can expand** as the ability of the student expands. In other words, as you grow in your knowledge and insight into the Word of God, this method will keep pace with your growth. In other words, you'll never outgrow it. You can use it for the rest of your life and it will always lead and guide you to the true meaning of God's word.

Not only that, but learning to use this method of study will give you self-confidence in your ability to handle the Scriptures. It'll give you the ability to think for yourself and confidence in your ability to interpret and apply the scriptures. And the best part is; you won't be held captive anymore to the thoughts and opinions of others. You'll be able to properly evaluate the thoughts of others. And you won't be totally dependent on somebody else to tell you what they think the scripture really means.

For instance, when you start to use commentaries to find out what a scripture means, you're going find out that not all commentators will agree on every passage of scripture. And you're going to find one that may say one thing about a verse or a scripture and another may say something totally different; or one may agree on a portion of the passage, but have a different interpretation on another portion of the passage. Or you may read two commentators that totally agree and a third that has a completely different point of view or a partial different point of view. And so at the end of the day, you're going to have to decide which one, if any, to go with.

And so the more you can learn as to how to properly dissect and observe and interpret scripture for yourself, then the better you'll become at using the scripture itself to throw light on the commentaries or help you discern the real intended meaning of the text!

In other words, if you have a method that helps you to work through the biblical text and understand what that text says, then when you go to an article or a commentary or hear someone preach, then you'll have a basis for evaluating what is being said.

So tonight, I just want to give you a quick overview of the Bible study process and tell you in general where we're going.

So let's begin with a definition. What do we mean when we talk about a **method** in Bible study?

Well, first of all, a method involves taking certain steps, in a certain order, to guarantee a certain result. Not just any steps; not just any order; and certainly not just any result.

And by the way, it's the result that governs everything. It's the final product of Bible study that's important. And so what is the aim of Bible study?

Is it just knowledge? Is it just so we can know certain things in order to teach others? What are we really after when we study the Bible?

Well, what we should really be after is life-change. Because a changed life is why God gave us this book. He gave us His word to bring about a change in our life.

When we were saved, God worked a miracle and He gave us a brand new heart and a brand new outlook on life. And He instilled in us desires we never had before and He changed our attitude and our want to and He opened the eyes of our heart that we might be able to understand His word and benefit from it like was impossible before.

But in order to receive that benefit, we have to be willing to put forth the effort. And if we want to continue to be changed and become more like Christ, then it's going to come through the study of God's word.

And so if anybody ever asks you, why should I take the time to read my Bible, or why should I learn how to study my Bible, or why should I participate in a Bible study; well, this is the reason.

So God through His own words can facilitate change in our lives.

Romans 12:2, And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

And how do we renew our mind? Through the study of God's Word!

So, how do we get there? What's the process that will lead us to that result?

Well, it's very simple. There are three steps, which have to be carried out in a particular order. Let me give them to you.

The first one is observation.

Now, in this step, you simply ask and answer the question, What do I see? In other words, when you come to the Scriptures you ask, What are the facts? You become a biblical detective, if you will. You're looking for clues and no detail is unimportant.

How many of you have ever played the game Clue? Well, it's the same process. You take good notes, ask the right questions and eventually it'll lead you to the right answer.

And then that leads to the second step which is interpretation.

And here, you ask and answer the question, What does it mean? And your central quest is for meaning.

Now, the problem a lot of people have when they come to study the Bible; is that they want to start with interpretation; and then they want to

end with interpretation. But we're going to learn as we go through this method, that's not the right way to get to where we're going.

And again we need remember where are we going? We need to remember the purpose of Bible study. And what is it? Life change! That's the whole purpose in what we're doing! Life-change.

And the third step is where that life change takes place. And that's application.

And here you ask and answer the question, How does it work? Not, Does it work? But how does it work?

You hear people say sometimes they're going to make the Bible "relevant." But if the Bible's not already relevant, then there's nothing you or I will ever do to help make it that way. The Bible is relevant, because it's a revelation from God. It's always a return to reality. And for those who read it and heed it, it will change their lives.

So, now that we know where we're are going, let's take a closer look at how we're going to get there.

So what's the first step to our process?

Observation!

And what's the question we're to ask?

What do I see? What do I see as I read this passage of scripture.

Now, there are four things we're going to be looking for:

Number one is terms. We need to look for terms.

Now, a term is more than just a word. It's a key word that is crucial to what an author has to say because it unlocks meaning. For instance, in the gospel by John, the word believe appears no less than seventy-nine times, always as a verb and never as a noun. And when you dig a little further,

you're going to find out that John uses this term "believe" very purposefully. It's a term that unlocks the meaning of the book.

And that same principle applies to every book in the Bible. Each one is filled with terms. And so you've got to learn how to recognize those terms and pay close attention to them, because they are the basic building blocks with which you'll construct the meaning.

The next thing we want to look for is structure.

And I can almost hear people moaning thinking back to their younger days in school when we had to dissect and define the parts of a sentence. Well, I hope you paid attention back then because that's partly what this means.

In fact, that's the first kind of structure we need to look for: grammatical structure. What is the subject of the sentence? What is the object? What is the main verb? And the more you know about grammar, the more you can get out of a passage.

But now, there's also literary structure. In the Bible we have questions and answers. We have climax and resolution. There's cause and effect and many other structuring devices. And we'll be learning a variety of ways in which different authors have structured their works.

And then thirdly there's literary form.

We need to be looking for and know the difference when it comes to literary form. In other words, there's a difference between the Hebrew poetry of the Psalms and the letters or the epistles that Paul wrote. There's a difference in the history books of Genesis and Exodus, and the parables told by Jesus in the Gospels. There's allegory and love poetry, satire and apocalyptic writings, comedy and tragedy, and a whole lot more. And the Holy Spirit used all of these forms to communicate His message. But if we

want to grasp the right message, then we have to learn how to read each kind of writing according to its proper “rules.” And we’ll be learning that down the road a piece.

And then fourthly we need to consider the atmosphere or the culture or the time and the place. And we need to ask questions like:

What was it like to be in the author’s shoes?

For instance, Paul says, in **Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice”**.

Well, that sounds good. But where was he when he said those words? Was he in some swanky hotel in Jerusalem when he wrote that letter? No! He was in a foul-smelling prison in Rome. And life looks a lot different from behind bars than from a hotel room. Amen?

And so the best you can, you want to try and place yourself in the shoes of the writer. And in your mind transport yourself along with your senses back in time to where they were and the environment they were in and also their mindset if you can.

And if there’s a sunset, then try and see it. If there’s an odor, then try and smell it. If there’s a cry of anguish or pain or grief, then try and feel it. If you’re studying Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, then join the church at Ephesus, and listen to Paul as he goes down on his knees to pray.

In other words, use your imagination, not just your intellect. It doesn’t take any professional training whatsoever to recapture the atmosphere of a particular passage of Scripture. That’s something that anybody can do if they’ll just take the time and make the effort.

And then next, we move on to interpretation.

Observation leads to interpretation. And here again, you ask and answer the question, What does it mean? Which is our first goal, to find its

meaning. Now, I want to suggest three things that will help you get to the meaning of a passage of Scripture.

First, ask questions.

If you want to understand a biblical text, you've got to bombard it with questions. The Bible is never embarrassed to be asked questions. That doesn't mean it will answer all of them. But you still need to ask them to determine if they can be answered. And a little later on, I'm going to give you a series of questions that will help you search out that meaning.

Second, look for the answers to those questions.

I mean, obviously, if you're going to ask questions, you've also got to look for the answers. And where will you find them? In the text!

The first step, the observation step will give you the basic building blocks out of which you will construct the meaning of a passage. And the answers to your questions will come directly from your observation process.

And the more time you spend in observation, the less time you'll need to spend in interpretation, and the more accurate will be your results. The less time you spend in observation, the more time you will need to spend in interpretation, and the less accurate will be your results.

And then third is integration.

Not only must you ask the text questions, and not only must you look for answers, but finally you have to put the answers together into a meaningful whole. Otherwise you just end up with a basket full of pieces that don't make any sense.

And so integration is the stage where you reconstruct the meaning of a passage after you've taken it apart to inspect the details.

And then those two steps, observation and interpretation lead to the third step in the process which is application. And in

application you ask and answer the question, How does it work? Again, not does it work, but how does it work? And there are two basic areas to consider.

First, how does it work for me?

Now, this can be a very convicting question, but so be it. You can't very well teach others the scriptures if you're not willing to apply them to your own life first. It's easy to study the Bible and say, "Oh, wow! That's just what the congregation needs or that's just what my class needs. But if we ignore the more personal question, What does this have to say to me? Then we've missed the whole point of scripture.

And what's the point of Scripture?

Life change!

How does this work in my life? Because if it isn't working in my life, then what authority do I have to share it with someone else?

And then secondly we ask the question, how does this work for others?

Now, obviously, the Bible does have implications for others. And so it is legitimate to ask, How would this transform their life? How would it affect their marriage or their family or their school life, if they are a student? Or their occupation, if they are in the work force? So how can I effectively communicate this biblical truth to others?

And we're going to learn some things to help us do that going forward. But for now, that's the big picture. That's an overview of where we're going and how we're going to get there.

And every time we come to a portion of God's Word, we need to approach it in terms of this big picture:

Observation: What do I see?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Application: How does it work?

So that's the destination and next week Lord willing, we'll get started on our journey.