

# Methods of Bible Study

By

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## INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY WORDSEARCH:

In this article Rev. Torrey often mentions using the "Textbook". He is referring to his New Topical Textbook, but any book that organizes the Bible into topics can be used with this study method. Books in this category include, but are not limited to, Nave's Topical Bible, Thompson's Chain Reference, and Torrey's New Topical Textbook. He also mentions a "concordance". Concordances let you quickly look up every occurrence of a particular word in the Bible. WORDsearch Bible accomplishes this via

the Find command. Rev. Torrey also recommends The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, which is a large collection of cross-references. WORDsearch Bible contains all of the study aids he recommends, and many more besides.

1. First of all make up your mind that you will put some time every day into the study of the Word of God. That is an easy resolution to make, and not a very difficult one to keep; if the one who makes it is in earnest. It is one of the most fruitful resolutions that any Christian ever made. The forming of that resolution and the holding faithfully to it, has been the turning point in many a life. Many a life that has been barren and unsatisfactory has become rich and useful through the introduction into it of

regular, persevering, daily study of the Bible. This study may not be very interesting at first, the results may not be very encouraging; but, if one will keep pegging away, it will soon begin to count as nothing else has ever counted in the development of character, and in the enrichment of the whole life. Nothing short of absolute physical inability should be allowed to interfere with this daily study.

It is impossible to make a rule that will apply to everyone as to the amount of time that shall be given each day to the study of the Word. I know many busy people, including not a few labouring men and women, who give an hour a day to Bible study, but if one cannot give more than fifteen minutes a great deal

can be accomplished. Wherever it is possible the time set apart for the work should be in the daylight hours. The very best time is in the early morning hours. If possible lock yourself in with God alone.

2. Make up your mind to study the Bible. It is astounding how much heedless reading of the Bible is done. Men seem to think that there is some magic power in the book, and that, if they will but open its pages and skim over its words, they will get good out of it. The Bible is good only because of the truth that is in it, and to see this truth demands close attention. A verse must often-times be read and re-read and read again before the wondrous message of love and power that God has put into it begins to appear. Words must be turned over and

over in the mind before their full force and beauty takes possession of us. One must look a long time at the great masterpieces of art to appreciate their beauty and understand their meaning, and so one must look a long time at the great verses of the Bible to appreciate their beauty and understand their meaning.

When you read a verse in the Bible ask yourself, What does this verse mean? Then ask: What does it mean for me? When that is answered ask yourself again: Is that all it means? and do not leave it until you are quite sure that is all it means for the present. You may come back at some future time and find it means yet a great deal more. If there are any important words in the verse weigh

them, look up other passages where they are used, and try to get their full significance. God pronounces that man blessed who "meditates" on the Word of God "day and night" (Ps 1:2,3). An indolent skimming over a few verses or many chapters in the Bible is not meditation, and there is not much blessing in it. Jeremiah said: "Thy words were found and I did eat them." (Jer 15:16). Nothing is more important in eating than chewing. If one does not properly chew his food, he is quite as likely to get dyspepsia as nourishment. Don't let anyone chew your spiritual food for you. Insist on doing it for yourself. Any one can be a student who makes up his mind to. It is hard at first but it soon becomes easy. I have seen

very dull minds become keen by holding them right down to the grindstone.

3. Study the Bible topically. Take up the various subjects treated in the Bible, one by one, and go through the Bible and find what it has to say on these subjects. It may be important to know what the great men have to say on important subjects; it is far more important to know what God has to say on these subjects. It is important also to know all that God has to say. A great many people know a part of what God has to say and usually a very small part and so their ideas are very imperfect and one-sided. If they only knew all God had to say on the subject, it would be far better for them and for their friends. The only way to know all God has to say on any subject is to go

through the Bible on that subject. To do this it is not necessary to read every verse in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It would be slow work, if we had to do that on every subject we took up. This would be necessary were it not for topical guides and Concordances. But in these we have the results of the hard work of many minds. Here we have the various passages that bear on any subject brought together and classified for use, so that now we can do in a few hours what would otherwise take months or years.

The topical method of Bible study is simplest, most fascinating and yields the largest immediate results. It is not the only method of Bible study, and the one who pursues it exclusively will miss much



of the blessing God has for him in the Bible. But it is a very interesting and fruitful method of study. It was Mr. Moody's favourite method. It fills one's mind very full on any subject studied. Mr. Moody once gave several days to the study of "Grace"; When he had finished he was so full of the subject that he rushed out on the street and going up to the first man he met he said: "Do you know anything about Grace?" "Grace who?" the man asked. "The Grace of God that bringeth salvation." And then Mr. Moody poured out upon that man the rich treasures he had dug out of the Word of God. That is the way to master any subject and get full of it. Go through the Bible and see what it has to say on this subject. This is easily done. Take your Textbook and turn to the subject.

Suppose the subject you desire to study is "Prayer." There will be found a long list of the various passages of Scripture that bear on this subject. Look them up one after another and study them carefully and see just what their teaching is. When you have gone through them you will know far more about prayer than you ever knew before, and far more than you could learn by reading any books that men have written about prayer, profitable as many of these books are. Sometimes it will be necessary to look up other subjects that are closely related to the one in hand. For example, you wish to study what the teaching of God's Word is regarding the atonement. In this case you will not only look under the head "Atonement," but also under the head "Blood," and under the head

"Death of Christ." To do this work a concordance is not necessary but it is often very helpful. For example, if you are studying the subject "Prayer" you can look up from the concordance the passages that contain the words "pray," "prayer," "cry," "ask," "call," "supplication," "intercession," etc. But the Textbook will give most of the passages on any subject regardless of what the words used in the passage may be. Other passages will be found in the section on Bible Doctrines under their proper headings.

There are four important suggestions to make regarding topical study of the Bible.

First: Be systematic. Do not take up subjects for study at random. Have a carefully prepared list of the subjects you wish to know about, and need to know about, and take them up one by one, in order. If you do not do this, the probability is that you will have a few pet topics and will be studying these over and over until you get to be a crank about them, and possibly a nuisance. You will know much about these subjects, but about many other subjects equally important you will know nothing. You will be a one-sided Christian.

Second: Be thorough. When you take up a subject do not be content to study a few passages on this subject, but find just as far as possible every passage in the Bible on this subject. If you find the

Textbook incomplete make additions of your own to it.

Third: Be exact. Find the exact meaning of every passage given in the Textbook on any subject. The way to do this is simple. In the first place note the exact words used. In the next place get the exact meaning of the words used. This is done by finding how the word is used in the Bible. The Bible usage of the word is not always the common use of today. For example, the Bible use of the words "sanctification" and "justification" is not the same as the common use. Then notice what goes before and what comes after the verse. This will oftentimes settle the meaning of a verse when it appears doubtful. Finally see if there are any parallel passages. The meaning of many of the most difficult passages in

the Bible is made perfectly plain by some other passages that throws light upon them. Then parallel passages are given in the margin of a good reference Bible and still more fully in *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*, a volume worthy of a place in the library of every Bible student.

Fourth: Arrange the results of your topical study in an orderly way and write them down. One should constantly use pen and paper in Bible study. When one has gone through the Textbook on any subject, he will have a large amount of material, but he will want to get it into usable shape. The various passages given on any topic in the Textbook are classified, but the classification is not always just the one best adapted to our individual use. Take for example the

subject "Prayer." The classification of texts in the topic is very suggestive, but a better one for some purposes would be:

Who Can Pray so that God Will Hear?

To Whom to Pray.

For Whom to Pray.

When to Pray.

For what to Pray.

How to Pray.

Where to Pray.

Hindrances to Prayer.

The Results of Prayer.

The passages given in the Textbook would come under these heads. It is well to make a trial division of the subject

before taking up the individual passages given and to arrange each passage as we take it up under the appropriate head. We may have to add to the divisions with which we began as we find new passages. The best classification of passages for any individual is the one he makes for himself, although he will get helpful suggestions from others.

There are some subjects that every Christian should study and study as soon as possible. We give a list of these:

The Atonement (of the Blood of Christ)

Justification

The New Birth

Adoption



Sanctification

Holiness

Assurance

The Flesh

Cleansing Faith

Repentance

Prayer

Thanksgiving

Praise

Love:

To God

To Jesus Christ

To Christians

To all men

The Future Destiny of Believers

The Future Destiny of the Wicked:

Punishment of the Wicked  
Death of the Wicked  
The Character of Christ  
The Resurrection of Christ  
The Ascension of Christ  
The Second Coming of Christ:  
The fact, the manner, the purpose, the  
results, the time  
The Reign of Christ  
The Holy Spirit  
Who and what He is  
His Work  
God.  
His Attributes and Work  
Grace  
Messianic Prophecies

The Church

The Jews

Joy

The Judgment

Life

Peace

Perfection

Persecution

4. Study the Bible by chapters. This method of Bible study is not beyond any person of average intelligence who has fifteen minutes or more a day to put into Bible Study. It will take, however, more than one day to study a chapter if only fifteen minutes a day are set apart for the work.

First: Select the chapters you wish to study. It is well to take a whole book and study the chapters in their order. The Acts of the Apostles (or the Gospel of John) is a good book to begin with. In time one may take up every chapter in the Bible, but it would not be wise to begin with Genesis.

Second: Read the chapter for today's study five times. It is well to read it aloud at least once. The writer sees many things when he reads the Bible aloud that he does not see when he reads silently. Each new reading will bring out some new point.

Third: Divide the chapters into their natural divisions and find headings for them that describe in the most striking way their contents. For example,

suppose the chapter studied is 1 John 5.  
You might divide in this way:

The Believer's Noble Parentage (1 John 5,  
verses 1-3)

The Believer's Glorious Victory (verses  
4,5)

The Believer's Sure Ground of Faith  
(verses 6-10)

The Believer's Priceless Possession  
(verses 11,12)

The Believer's Blessed Assurance (verse  
13)

The Believer's Unquestioning Confidence  
(verses 14,15)

The Believer's Great Power and  
Responsibility (verses 16,17)

The Believer's Perfect Security (verses 18,19)

The Believer's Precious Knowledge (verse 20)

The Believer's Constant Duty (verse 21)

In many cases the natural divisions will be longer than in this chapter.

Fourth: Note the important differences between the Authorized Version (KJV) and the Revised and write them in the margin of your Bible.

Fifth: Write down the leading facts of the chapter in their proper order.

Sixth: Make a note of the persons mentioned in the chapter and of any light thrown upon their character. For example, assume your chapter is Acts 16. The persons mentioned are:

Timothy

Timothy's mother

Timothy's father

The brethren at Lystra and Iconium

Paul

The Jews of Lystra and Iconium

The apostles and elders at Jerusalem

A man of Macedonia

Luke

Some women of Philippi

Lydia

The household of Lydia

A certain damsel possessed with a spirit  
of divination

The masters of this damsel

Silas

The praetors of Philippi

The Philippian mob

The jailor of Philippi

The prisoners in the Philippian jail

The household of the jailor

The lictors of Philippi

The brethren in Philippi

What light does the chapter throw upon the character of each?

Seventh: Note the principal lessons of the chapter. It would be well to classify these: e.g., lessons about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, etc., etc.

Eighth: The Central Truth of the chapter.

Ninth: The key verse of the chapter if there is one.



Tenth: The best verse in the chapter. Opinions will differ widely here. But the question is, which is the best verse to you at this present reading? Mark it and memorize it.

Eleventh: Note the verses that are usable as texts for sermons or talks or Bible readings. If you have time make an analysis of the thought of these verses and write it in the margin, or on the opposite leaf if you have an interleaved Bible.

Twelfth: Name the chapter. For example, Acts 1 might be called The Ascension Chapter; Acts 2, The Day of Pentecost Chapter; Acts 3, The Lame Man's Chapter; etc. Give your own names to the chapters. Give the name that sets forth the most important and characteristic feature of the chapter.

Thirteenth: Note subjects for further study. For example, you are studying Acts 1. Subjects suggested for further study are, The Baptism with the Holy Spirit; The Ascension; The Second Coming of Christ.

Fourteenth: Words and phrases for further study. For example you are studying John 3, you should look up words and expressions such as, "Eternal life," "Born again," "Water," "Believer," and "The Kingdom of God."

Fifteenth: Write down what new truth you have learned from the chapter. If you have learned none, you had better go over it again.

Sixteenth: What truth already known has come to you with new power?

Seventeenth: What definite thing have you resolved to do as a result of studying this chapter? A permanent record should be kept of the results of the study of each chapter. It is well to have an interleaved Bible and keep the most important results in this.

5. Study the Bible as the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God, and we get the most good out of any book by studying it as what it really is. It is often said that we should study the Bible just as we study any other book. That principle contains a truth, but it also contains a great error. The Bible, it is true, is a book as other books are books, the same laws of grammatical and literary construction and interpretation hold here as hold in other books. But the Bible is an entirely unique book. It is

what no other book is The Word of God. This can be easily proven to any candid man. The Bible ought then to be studied as no other book is. It should be studied as the Word of God. (1Thes 2:13). This involves five things.

First: A greater eagerness and more careful and candid study to find out just what it teaches than is bestowed upon any other book or upon all other books. We must know the mind of God; here it is revealed.

Second: A prompt and unquestioning acceptance of and submission to its teachings when definitely ascertained, even when these teachings appear to us unreasonable or impossible. If this book is the Word of God how foolish to submit

its teachings to the criticism of our finite reason. The little boy who discredits his wise father's statements because to his infant mind they appear unreasonable, is not a philosopher but a fool. When we are once satisfied that the Bible is the Word of God, its clear teachings must be the end of all controversy and discussion.

Third: Absolute reliance upon all its promises in all their length and breadth and depth and height. The one who studies the Bible as the Word of God will say of every promise no matter how vast and beyond belief it appears, "God who cannot lie has promised this, so I claim it for myself." Mark the promises you thus claim. Look each day for some new promise from your infinite Father. He has put "His riches in glory" at your disposal. (Php 4:19).

Fourth: Obedience prompt, exact, unquestioning, joyous obedience to every command that is evident from the context applies to you. Be on the lookout for new orders from the King. Blessing lies in the direction of obedience to them. God's commands are but signboards that mark the road to present success and blessedness and to eternal glory.

Fifth: Studying the Bible as the Word of God, involves studying it as His own voice speaking directly to you. When you open the Bible to study it realize that you have come into the very presence of God and that now He is going to speak to you. Every hour thus spent in Bible study will be an hour's walk and talk with God.

Sixth: Study the Bible prayerfully. The author of the book is willing to act as

interpreter of it. He does so when we ask Him to. The one who prays with earnestness and faith, the Psalmist's prayer, Open Thou mine eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of Thy law, will get his eyes opened to see beauties and wonders in the Word that he never dreamed of before. Be very definite about this. Each time you open the Bible to study it for a few minutes or many, ask God to give you the open and discerning eye, and expect Him to do it. Every time you come to a difficulty lay it before God and ask an explanation and expect it. How often we think as we puzzle over hard passages, "Oh if I only had so and so here to explain this." God is always present. Take it to Him.

Seventh: Look for "the things concerning Christ" "in all the Scriptures." Christ is

everywhere in the Bible (Lu 24:27). Be on the lookout for Him and mark His presence when you find it.

Eighth: Improve spare moments in Bible study. In almost every man's life many minutes each day are lost; while waiting for meals or trains, while riding in the car, etc. Carry a pocket Bible or Testament with you and save these golden minutes by putting them to the very best use listening to the voice of God. The Textbook can easily be carried in the pocket as a help in your work.

Ninth: Store away the Scripture in your mind and heart. It will keep you from sin (Ps 119:11), from false doctrine (Ac 20:29-30, 32; 2Ti 3:13-15), it will fill you heart with joy (Jer 15:16), and peace (Ps 85:8), it will give you the victory over the Evil One (1Jo 2:14), it will give you power



in prayer (Joh 15:7), it will make you wiser than the aged and your enemies (Ps 119:98, 100, 130) it will make you "complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (2Ti 3:16, 17). Try it. Do not memorize at random but memorize Scripture in a connected way. Memorize texts bearing on various subjects in proper order. Memorize by chapter and verse that you may know where to put your finger upon the text if anyone disputes it.