



Inspirations
(October 12, 2009)

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR STUDYING GOD'S WORD

2 Timothy 2:15 (KJV): ¹⁵Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Lately, I have truly been pondering the concept of studying God's Word. Now, don't get me wrong. For those who know me, and anyone who has read anything on this website, you know there are times when I can delve very deeply into the Word. Then, there are times, when I find that instead of studying something new, I have to go back to what God has already spoken, and I'm learning to be okay with that.

I am currently in one such season. I am reviewing my journals, and it's actually been very profitable thus far in revelations received, concepts I'm being reminded of, and just overall getting more rooted and grounded in my daily walk with Him. As a result, my mind turned to something I've been asked in several questions.

So, today, I want to impart some practical advice to address those questions about studying God's Word in terms of **WHAT**, **HOW**, and **WHEN**. We may have touched on this subject elsewhere on the site, but after a quick perusal, I didn't find it. So, if we did, know this is important enough to cover more than once! In addition, this is what has worked for me, but it is not an end-all or be-all to studying. It is something to inspire others to find what works for them! With that said, let's look at our first question.

WHAT TO STUDY?

Have you ever found yourself perplexed about where to begin with studying the Word? Okay, I have one question for you. Do you go to church? If not, that's a good place to start, for faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (**Romans 10:17**). If you do attend church, one of the things you can do to determine **WHAT** to study is to take notes during the sermon (or if notes are provided, make sure you use AND keep them). Then, during the week, take time to look up every Scripture referenced in the notes and read each one in context; start with the chapter where it is found. If time permits, read the whole book, especially if it's a short one.

Okay, I hear you thinking, I've read the chapter and even the book on every verse from church, and I've still run out of stuff to study. I have another question for you. Are you part of a Bible-study or some other Biblically-based small group? If so, make sure you are taking notes there as well. Whether the study is video-driven, book-driven, Bible-driven, or a combination thereof, there should still be some references to Scripture you can read in context that week. Again, begin with the chapter, and time permitting, read the whole book.

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In addition to what you hear at church and/or in your Bible study/small group, another source for study is daily devotionals. Actually there are a couple of different types of devotionals I'd like to address. One is reading the Bible through in a year. Since each day you have specific verses to cover, a practical approach would be to pick out at least one verse that really struck you and delve more deeply into it. The other type includes books containing a scripture or topic for the day with explanatory text, email devotionals (including those you can subscribe to), and other similar types of material that are intended to be completed each day, but are written by someone else. However, instead of just reading the devotion and leaving it at that, apply the same chapter and book principle to the verses contained therein. The bottom line is this: don't just depend on what other people tell you. Study it out for yourself, so it can become a part of you! Totally depending on others is like having them chew your dinner first and then feeding it to you! Personally, that's a visual that rather grosses me out, though some don't think it's all that bad. Nonetheless, hopefully, we can all agree that by the time someone else chews it, some of the nutrition and flavor is now gone.

Last, but not least, there are those blessed times when the Holy Spirit will impress upon your heart to study something specific. The key is to follow where He leads! Oh, how I love those times!! The things I learn are beyond words!

Now, with this knowledge, you have several WHATs to study during the week: Your church notes and/or your Bible study notes and/or your daily devotional verse(s) and/or what the Holy Spirit places on your heart. Guess what? That's not all. God can lead you to other resources as well, but these are some practical, every day places to start. Besides, if you are truly studying and not reading the Word like it's a novel, you probably won't run out of resources that week, and you'll plant lots of seeds in your heart.

HOW TO STUDY:

Well, now, this one can get very intricate and complicated, because what works for one does not necessarily work for all; because each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made by our Creator (**Psalms 139:14**). In spite of this, I will first share some principles God has shared with me, then some approaches to implement those principles. Although, let me start by saying I am not a heretic trying to ruffle people's feathers. So, bear with me when you read something that makes you go, "Hmm." Let the Holy Spirit speak to you about whether to accept it or reject it!

Principles Related to Studying

1. **LEARN SCRIPTURE INSTEAD OF MEMORIZING IT:** Accepting this concept was a definite paradigm shift for me, but it came as a result of me asking God why we struggle so much with making Scripture a part of us. What He spoke to my heart was to stop trying to *memorize* Scripture and spend time *learning*

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Scripture. When we memorize Scripture, we only seek to recall the information without understanding, but when we learn Scripture, we seek to recall the information to apply it in our lives.

2. **SEEK YOUR DAILY BREAD:** This principle was another serious paradigm shift for me! I used to be very focused on trying to spend a certain amount of time in the Word or cover a certain amount of text before I quit, and I would always get frustrated. I didn't understand why some days I could read a few verses and feel "satisfied" but on other days it took much longer for me to know I learned something. However, I eventually learned to spend as much or as little time as I need in the Word to get what God has for me in that day. Seeking my daily bread has helped me to get over watching the clock to make sure I have fulfilled a time quota or pressing on to finish a chapter when what I needed was in the first verse! It's also made my time with God more relational AND more fruitful for me. However, I've had to learn to spend the right amount of time in God's Word for where I am. I cannot spend too much time or too little time in the Word without getting confused, nor can I get careless with my Word time and spend too much time away. Whenever I do, I find it harder to get my daily bread once I return.
3. **ASK THE HOLY SPIRIT TO TEACH YOU:** One of the best things I've learned is when I ask the Holy Spirit to direct my time with God, He teaches me what I need to know. I've also had to learn that when God shows me something different than what I've been taught in the past, I have to be willing to make that paradigm shift, but I also have to make sure what I am hearing lines up with the whole counsel of God's Word. I can't just take one verse out of context and give it a whole new meaning! It has to agree with God's nature and the entire message of salvation contained in the Gospel. The dangers of taking verses out of context are too many to discuss here, but please know the danger is real and heed the warning. Another danger I have personally had to overcome is when God gives me a different revelation than something I heard from someone else, it is not for me to judge what that person taught. It is for me to be accountable to God for what He has taught me. Thus, the bottom line in all of this is we have to remember the Holy Spirit is the One that gives us our understanding. We are not to try to reason out the Scriptures in our natural mind, for our natural mind is at odds with God's Word anyway (**Romans 8:7**). But, if we allow the Holy Spirit to, He can, and will, make the Word of God come alive for us--no matter what that process looks like for each individual.
4. **CONSIDER KEEPING A JOURNAL:** This is very easy for me because I obviously love to write. For others, it's not as easy. However, I have found the rewards to be tremendous. My journal is where I think before the Lord, pray, document any revelations the Lord speaks to my heart, keep track of things I've learned, record dreams that make an impression on me, and expound on what the Holy Spirit is teaching me. However, one of the things I try not to do in my journal is to complain. If I am struggling through an issue, I will record that so I can learn from it later, but I try to keep my focus on me and how I can grow in the

Lord. Therefore, when I revisit my journals, I can get a fresh revelation from things God spoke to me days, months, even years ago! For example, two books of the Bible are dedicated to recording the history of Israel's kings (First and Second Chronicles). Well, my journals are my history; they serve to remind me of God's constant faithfulness in my life!

Now, with those principles established, here are some practical approaches I have implemented to improve the quality of my study time in God's Word. If they work for you, that's great. If not, please seek the Holy Spirit's guidance on what you can do, as He knows you better than anyone else.

Practical Approaches to Studying God's Word

1. **INVEST IN A GOOD STUDY BIBLE:** There are many different study Bibles available. When looking for a good study Bible, I encourage you to look for two things. One, how does the study Bible help you better understand the Scriptures? For instance, does it provide history that will help you interpret the times, or does it ask you questions to help you apply the Word of God to your life. How you process information will determine what kind of study Bible will work best for you. Two, what translation is the study Bible written in? Is it a version that you are comfortable with? For instance, not everyone enjoys reading "thee" and "thou," so they are not comfortable reading the King James Version. However, others find some of the more modern translations too wordy. The most important thing is to choose a study Bible that will help you learn and in a translation that you are comfortable with. So, look at several different ones until your spirit says, "This is it." The purpose of the study Bible is to give you more information than what you can get out of the Scriptures themselves, which will provoke thought in you to help you process the verses you are reading in terms of your everyday life.
2. **JOT DOWN SCRIPTURES WHILE READING:** If you are one who journals, I encourage you to jot the Scriptures down in your journal so you can process what you learn from them right there in your journal. However, if you are one who does not like to journal, you can try using index cards, because jotting down the verses that really speak to you helps to plant them in your heart. While you may not be able to recall them immediately, a seed has been planted that can now grow if properly cared for.
3. **ASK QUESTIONS WHILE READING:** This goes back to allowing the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher. If we don't ask questions when we run across something we don't understand, how can He teach us? Okay, here's a very simple statement for those who journal, but one that is easily overlooked: **WRITE THE QUESTION DOWN IN YOUR JOURNAL.** If He doesn't answer right away, mark it in your journal in a way you will know that question is still unanswered. When He does answer, write the date and the answer down in the margin or on the page somewhere, so you can praise God every time you read about His faithfulness.

4. **BREAK DOWN AN INTRIGUING VERSE INTO ITS SIMPLEST PARTS:** What is the verb in this verse, and what action is this verb requiring of us? What is this verse referring to? Does it have a “therefore,” or a “this” or some other word that points you somewhere other than the verse to find what it means? If so, back track that word to determine what noun or what topic it is referring to. For instance, 2 Corinthians 7:1 refers to “these promises.” What promises? You have to look in Chapter 6 to answer that question. However, asking those types of questions and doing that type of study can help us gain a better understanding of what is being said. For those who journal, these are some very good thoughts to capture in there as well.

If these principles and approaches work for you, applying them to your time in the Word can have a couple of benefits. One, you can increase your study time without it feeling like a burden, and two, you can improve your comprehension, so you are no longer just reading the Word—you are now *studying* the Word! If they don't work, again, seek the Holy Spirit's guidance. He will teach you how to approach God's Word in a way that will help you to grow!

As you begin to grow in your understanding, or if you need other tools, you can try using www.biblegateway.com to look up verses in more than one version. You can download e-Sword (free PC-based Bible software) from www.e-sword.net to be able to look up what words mean in the original Hebrew or Greek. Sometimes, this can bring new insights about a verse, but again you have to be careful not to take something out of context. Or, you can invest in a more dynamic Bible software like QuickVerse (www.quickverse.com) which contains several translations along with other resources (i.e. the same Bible dictionary that is in e-Sword) that can help you better understand what you are studying. You can even invest in Handbooks or Commentaries that provide additional insights into Scriptures (some Bible software comes with several of those resources included). While this list is definitely not exhaustive, it gives you an idea of additional tools you can use. However, I will say, not all of these additional tools are for everyone, so only go where the Holy Spirit leads.

WHEN TO STUDY:

Let me start by saying, this is one that will either set you free or definitely cause you to call me a heretic. With that said, there are Scriptures that teach us to seek God early in the morning, but if you are not an early morning person, trying to actually study the Bible at Oh-dark-thirty probably won't do you much good. So, ask God to show you how He wants you to seek Him early in the morning, then do your study time when you are most alert.

There are many ways non-morning types like me can seek God early. Be creative and let the Holy Spirit guide you. However, here a few I can share. My favorite way of seeking God in the morning is to turn my thoughts towards Him before my feet even hit

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the floor. Sometimes, I'll just thank Him for waking me up, and then I'll just lie there for a few moments praising and worshiping Him within me for Who He is. Sometimes, I'll also ask Him to guide me through my day, but more often than not I ask for guidance during my morning prayer. The most important thing for me is to turn my heart and my mind towards God before I ever open my mouth or move out of my bed! This approach helps me connect with God early in the morning in a way that encourages me! Another approach is, the night before, you can write a Scripture you need to plant deep in your heart on an index card and place it next to your bed so you can meditate on it when you first wake up. Each morning take a little time and chew on that verse, mentally break it down, put it in your own words. Once you know what that verse means in your life, move on to a new one. If you are keeping a journal, you can decide to review something in your journal. By the way, none of these things are mutually exclusive. You can do any, all, or none of them. The important thing is to seek God in a way that when you are done you feel connected to Him!

However, the harder it is for you to wake up in the morning, the more simple I encourage you to keep your "early-morning seeking" until you begin to grow in your relationship with God, and you are actually craving more time with Him. As you cry out to Him, He will draw you into His presence more and more. Otherwise, your futile fleshly attempts will be just that--futile!

As for your study time, again, find that time of day when you are most alert and set aside a block of time that will work for you. If it's in the morning, great! If not, ask yourself, "What am I seeking to achieve?" If you are seeking to grow through studying God's Word, you need to be alert. But, if you are trying to stretch yourself beyond where you are, trying to study in the morning may not be as productive for you because you aren't as alert, but you may develop a spiritual discipline that you did not have before. However, if you find that no matter how hard you try, studying in the morning is not fruitful for you, I encourage you to pick a time that is best suited to you. Regardless of what time you choose to study, start small so you don't overwhelm yourself and grow from there. Now, I can hear you say, "But I don't have time." Been there and done that more times than I care to admit, but if you watch TV, surf the net, read a book, or do any other recreational activity, you probably have more God-time than you think. After all, we truly do make time for what's important to us no matter how tired we are.

Now that we are armed with the WHAT, the HOW, and the WHEN, let me close with these bits of encouragement. One, no matter what you choose to do, start with something. You build a wall one brick at a time, but you have to get started with that first brick. Two, if you get sidetracked and don't put any bricks in the wall for a day, a week, a month, or even longer, guess what, what you've already done is still sitting there waiting for you to return to it. As mentioned earlier, it may take you a little longer to get things going again, but don't get on a guilt trip; get on a grace trip. Repent to God, pick up where you left off, and ask God to help you go forward.

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Finally, if you find yourself in a season where no matter what you do, your study time is not working for you, ask God why. Many possibilities exist; here are a few. One, you may need to harvest some or all of what's been planted. In other words, make what you've been studying a reality in your life and then share what you've learned with others, so you will have room to receive something new from God to repeat the process of growing and sharing. After all, the camel can only carry so much on his back before he has to deliver that load to someone. We are no different. Sometimes we get so full off what God has taught us He can't share anymore with us until we've helped someone else with what we've learned. We are blessed to be a blessing! Two, God may be waiting on you to do something He's already told you to do. Believe me; He surely will stop talking when we have not obeyed Him. Three, you may just be in a season of rest to allow the roots of what you've planted to go deeper. The point here is to not get stressed but to learn how to go to God to discern what season you are in so you will know how to go forward and when!

Father, I pray all that has been spoken in this newsletter is in line with Your Word and is pleasing and acceptable unto You. Father, I pray every soul that reads this writing will be touched by the power of Your Holy Spirit and the practical principles and approaches contained herein that they may receive all You desire for them to receive. I thank You, and I praise You for all You have done and will continue to do in my life through what You have taught me and I am now sharing with others. Holy Spirit, for any that read this writing and have a hard time with what's inside, I ask that You would comfort them and speak to their heart that no root of bitterness would spring up. Help them to find what works for them that they may be blessed to be a blessing! I give you all glory, all honor, and all praise. In Jesus' name. Amen!

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