

Principles, Preparation & Problems

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Week 2

Bible Study Methods

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Introduction

Have you ever heard a sermon or lesson and ask yourself, “How did he find all that in his text?”

Have you ever felt guilty because people had told you to study the Bible, but when you sat tried to study it, you didn’t really know what to do?

It is my experience that most Christians sincerely want to study the Bible on their own, they just don’t know how. They don’t need more exhortation, they just need some instruction on how. That is the purpose of this class.

Last week we looked at WHY we study the Bible and what benefits we can expect from Bible Study. In the weeks to come we will be exploring different methodologies. While each methodology may be different in detail, they each share some fundamental principles. Today we will explore those principles. We also look at what tools we need and what problems we can expect to face.

Principle # 1

1. Ask the right kinds of questions

All the methods we will look at in the weeks to come require you to ask questions about the text. What will be different each week is the kinds of questions you will ask. That will be one of the most important lessons of each week is honing your ability to ask questions.

Asking questions is a skill that you can develop. As you grow in proficiency in Bible Study, you will begin to master this. Like all skills, it takes time practicing to learn it. (Lannom learning to walk/Noah riding tricycle/Chef's cutting versus me cutting)

Of course it is helpful to remember that what you learned in school about asking questions, is still pertinent.

I keep six honest serving-men
(They taught me all I knew);
Their names are What and Why and When
And How and Where and Who.

The Elephant's Child
Rudyard Kipling

The more questions you ask about a text, the more you get out of it.

Participation

- Why do you think people have a hard time asking questions?
They don't want to appear ignorant, even to themselves.
They fear the answers.
- What are some attributes of a "good" question?
Open-ended (i.e., not Yes/No)
Clearly worded (i.e., precise)
Personally interesting

Principle #2

2. Write down your observations and discoveries

You really haven't thought about a text until you have put the thoughts you gained down in writing.

This is the main difference between Bible Reading (a daily discipline that should take about 15 minutes) and Bible Study (a weekly discipline that should take at bare minimum 1 hour).

Writing forces you to precisely and clearly articulate your thoughts.

We think faster than we write/type. Writing forces us to slow down.

Writing makes us use more senses, thus making us

"Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through fingertips." ~ Dawson Trotman (Founder of The Navigators)

Each method we talk about will come with a form designed to be used so that you can write down various notes.

Participation

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Principle #3

3. The ultimate goal of Bible Study is APPLICATION, not just interpretation
Remember last week we said the last benefit of Bible Study was that Bible Study builds my character with the ultimate goal of making me LIKE Christ.

We do not want to settle for understanding alone.

“The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.” ~ D.L. Moody

When I was a full-time evangelist, I studied with a woman who craved Biblical Knowledge. She consumed books about the Bible. She inundated herself with Biblical teaching via the TV and radio. She read and studied her Bible several hours a day. We met a couple of times of week and I had difficulty keeping up with her. Even with all that, she had one problem, though, and she was unwilling to commit her life to Christ. See, she was living with her boyfriend in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. She knew that was wrong. She knew to commit to Christ meant giving up that physical relationship. She refused to. All the Bible knowledge and Bible study was for naught because although she knew the word, she did not know the Word.

Each method we discuss will have its last principle, some kind of application. You will get used to asking yourself questions like:

- What attitude do I need to change as result of this study?
- What do I need to start doing or stop doing?
- What things do I need to believe or stop believing?
- What relationships do I need to work on?

Note:

- 1) Don't start studying the Bible to find some truth that no one has ever seen. (There is nothing new under the sun)
- 2) Don't study to find something with which to impress others. (God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble)
- 3) Just go to find out what the Word has to say to you. **The real problem most of us have is not interpreting difficult passages, but obeying the passages we do understand.**

Principle #4

4. Bible study must be systematic

We live in a 30-minute, sit-com world. We expect to be able to jump from episode-to-episode with no real continuity. We expect to be introduced to a problem, investigate a problem, and resolve a problem in 22 minutes (if you take out commercials).

Real Bible study will not happen we engage in a haphazard approach of the word of God.

Non-Systematic Approaches that do not work:

- Cafeteria Style – “I’ll take a little of this and a little of that”
- Dip-or-Skip method – “I like the Psalms, but don’t need any of that Zephaniah.”
- What are we going to find today – “My Bible just opened up to...”

Studying the Bible is like being a good detective.

- a) Look for clues
 - A. Don’t make any conclusions, just look at the details
 - B. Observes things other overlook because he is trained in observation (MONK, Sherlock Holmes)
- b) Asks questions based on his observation
- c) Puts evidence together and adds context to his observations
- d) Compares and Correlates to see how each fact is related
- e) Finally he draws a conclusion based on what he believes actually happened and who was involved

Preparation #1

1. Schedule your Bible Study Time

A. Set aside a specific amount of time to do your Bible study each week.

- Decide ahead of time how much time want to spend on Bible Study (I suggest 1 hour a week to start with)
- Don't overdo it; but don't short change yourself either.
- If you don't schedule it, you won't make time for it or it sporadic.
Franklin Covey – Big Rocks

B. How often should you study the Bible?

- Varies from person to person
- Keep a distinction between Quiet Time and Bible Study Time
 - Quiet time is daily (10-30 minutes) includes Reading, Meditation, & Prayer
- Nothing will kill quiet time quicker than trying to have Bible Study during Quiet Time
 - You can not study the Bible effectively in a piecemeal fashion
 - Better to block out larger periods of time (2-4 hours)

C. When should you study the Bible?

- Whenever you are best physically, emotionally, and intellectually
- When you can be undistracted and unhurried
- Since you are either a “day person” or a “night person” pick the time you are most alert.
- DON'T study when you are tired or after a large meal.

Participation

1. Why the distinction between Daily Quiet time and Bible Study time?
2. What is the purpose of each?
3. What do you think is the biggest enemy of Bible Study today?

Preparation #2

2. Keep a Journal

As already stated, you cannot study the Bible without writing things down that you have observed.

Each method has a form that is designed to go with it.

Preparation #3

3. Get the Right Tools

(Hand out list of reference tools)

The first few methods don't really require reference tools, but the others do.

We will spend some time during some of the classes talking about how and when to use specific tools.

We live in the "Information Age." There are books and websites on every conceivable subject. For instance, if you really wanted to, you could find the Talamud in Hebrew and Aramaic and have it shipped to you in 2 days. I love to read Thomas Aquinas' writings and I can, for free.

We rest on the shoulders of giants. Men and women that God has specially equipped throughout the ages with gifts, knowledge, and life circumstances that allow them to study and research in ways we never could. We would be remiss not to rely upon their vast knowledge.

Not that they are meant to replace the Bible; nor are they to replace our own minds and curiosity. They are to be an aid in helping us study. Just as carpenters need hammers and saws, artists need brushes and paints, we need tools.

Tools

- A good study Bible – I use both the NIV Study Bible and my most recent favorite is John MacArthur's NKJV study bible
- Several recent translations and paraphrases
- An Exhaustive Concordance – Besides your study Bible, this is probably the most important tool you will need. A concordance lists every word used in the Bible and lists where you can find it. It's like an address book for words in the Bible.
- A Bible Dictionary and/or Bible Encyclopedia
 - Explains many words and topics, customs and traditions
 - Can give historical, geographical, cultural, and archeological information
- A topical Bible – similar to a concordance, except it categorizes the verses by Topics instead of words
- A Bible Handbook – a combo encyclopedia/commentary in concise format
- A set of word studies – Allows you study original meanings without being a Greek/Hebrew/Aramaic Scholar.
- Commentaries – a collection of explanatory and interpretations of a text. Usually you should refer to a commentary only after your own study. They are fallible because they were written by men.

Preparation # 4

4. Spend time in prayer before each study

Two things to pray for:

- A. Ask God to cleanse your life from all known sin and fill you with the Holy Spirit.
You want to be in fellowship with God during the study.

Paul said that if you are in the flesh, you cannot understand spiritual truths (I Cor. 2:10-3:4)

- B. Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide you in your Study.
Ask God to open your eyes to his word.

Problems

- The Problem of Discipline
- The Problem of Dry Spells
- The Problem of Distractions
- The Problem of Discouragement

The Problems of Discipline

- This is probably Satan's best weapon. If you have a morning Bible Study time, then you will experience the "Battle of the Blankets." If you have an evening Bible Study time, then you will experience the "War of the Weary."

Solutions

1. Go to bed on time and get up on time
Psalm 127:2

It's not good to burn the candle on both ends

2. We have to learn to say "No"
We can't do everything.

Self discipline is something we face in many areas of life, diet, exercise, finances.

Self discipline is not a value that Society encourages. Actually, society encourages just the opposite. Instead of "deny thyself", society teaches us to indulge ourselves.

Participation

1. Think of an area of your life you are self disciplined in. What makes you disciplined there? How can you apply those same characteristics to your bible study?
2. What

The Problem of Dry Spells

One common problem for those who have just started Bible Study is they don't seem to get much out of them.

1. Acknowledge that there are three stages"
 - a. Castor Oil stage – we do it because we know it is good for us, but it is not too enjoyable
 - b. Cereal Stage – our Bible Study is dry and uninteresting, but we know it is nourishing
 - c. Country Fried Steak Dinner stage – where we are really feasting on the word of God
2. Don't trust your emotions – you can never judge the quality of your Bible Study by your emotions. Emotions may lie; feelings may come and go.

Long periods of dryness after initial feasting may be caused by one of the following problems

3. Disobedience – Unconfessed or willful sin in your life will keep the Holy Spirit from showing you anything new. If God showed you something in his Word three months ago, and you are still fighting it, he won't show you the next step until you've dealt with the first.
4. Your physical condition – There is a direct relationship between the physical and spiritual. If you are physically worn out (not getting enough rest, not eating right, etc...) it can have an impact on your spiritual life.
5. Trying to do too much – Rushing through your Bible Study to get to the next task implies the wrong motive for Bible Study.
6. Being in a rut – When your Bible Study becomes a ritual instead of a relationship. When it becomes a legalistic exercise instead of genuine anticipation. Change your plans, routines, your location.
7. Not sharing your insights with others – It is a fact of nature that a pond that only receives water but has no outlet will stagnate. The same is true of Christians who are always receiving but never giving.

The Problem of Distraction

Once you get started, Satan will attack you by trying to distract you. Your mind will wander in all directions. You will be bothered by noises, lack of sleep, poor lighting, tensions with others, worry, and a million other things that you just “can’t forget”

- Make sure you are thoroughly awake (take a shower, splash cold water on your face, do some exercises)
- Read and pray OUT LOUD
- Walk while meditating (you will not fall asleep if you stand up and move around)
- Keep a ‘To-do’ notebook handy. When you are reminded of something else, write it down and come back to it after your study time.

The Problem of Discouragement

By far the greatest problem will be our struggle to stick to our Weekly Bible Study. This is a hard habit to start and maintain because the World, the Flesh, and the Devil work in concert to keep us from it.

Some practical suggestions:

- Consider making a covenant with God – Make a serious pact with God to spend some time with Him. First, however, consider the seriousness of such a vow. (Eccl. 5:4-5).
- Put it into your weekly schedule – In advance, block out the time to study. Put it on your calendar, just like you would for a Dr. Appt .
- Expect to be attacked and be prepared. – To be forewarned is to be armed. Realize that you will be attacked on all fronts.
- Leave your Bible open to the passage you intend to study.
- Get a friend to help hold you accountable – This serves two purposes. One, it allows you to have someone to share your studies with. Two, it helps to have someone who will encourage you, pray for you, etc...