

Bible Study Method

The Bible is Your Friend

A. Introduction

When you believed in Jesus and received Him into your heart as your Lord and Savior, you entered into a relationship with Him. In a marriage relationship you have to communicate with your mate. You have to get to know them and hear their heart. Through the Word of God (The Bible, or the Scriptures) we get to know our Lord Jesus and we "hear" the heart of our heavenly Father. My father taught me from an early age to always ask this question: "What does the Word say?" This principle has steered my walk with the Lord. We need to base everything we believe and practice on the Word of God.

In Luke 24:27 & 45 we read: And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself. ... Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit that just as Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, He will do the same for you. I want to encourage you to develop a great love for the Word of God as you learn to walk with Jesus. He is the Living Word. You will fall in love with Him as you read and study His Word.

B. The Importance of the Word of God in the Life of a Believer

1. The Word of God is inspired by the Holy Spirit

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

We need to receive the Word as God's truth, and that the whole Bible is His Word. We cannot take some verses and reject others. All of the Word is the foundation and the standard we build upon.

2. We need to believe and obey the Word of God

John 2:27 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

We need to bow our knee to the Word of God and believe it. Obedience to the Word demonstrates our faith in His Word.

3. We need to feed our spirit the Word of God on a daily basis, in other words, read the Bible everyday.

C. The Benefits of the Word of God in the Life of the Believer

1. We get to know God through His Word. Your relationship with Jesus will grow.

2. The Word keeps us from error

Jesus said when we do not know the Word of God, we are in error. - Matt 29:22 & Mark 12:24

3. The Word cleanses us

In Eph 5:26 Paul writes how Christ cleanses us "by the washing with water through the word." When you read, study, and hear the Word preached, your heart and mind is cleansed by the Word. This is what the Holy Spirit says in Heb 4:12:

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

4. Protection against the storms of life

Jesus said, Matt 7:24-27 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

Building your life on the Word of God is fundamental to a stable life as a believer. When the storms come you can weather them, if you are anchored in the Word.

D. A Simple and Easy Bible Study Method

Here is a very easy and practical way to read and study the Word of God. This method can be used to study the Word for daily personal study, as well as when you come together in a group. A family, husband and wife, or parents with children, should come together several times a week, as often as possible, and study the Word together, using this method.

As a new believer start with the Gospel of Matthew and work through all of the Gospels, so that you will have a solid foundation of Jesus. Begin with chapter one, verse one of a Gospel. Where you end today, you continue tomorrow. Use these symbols as you read: Question Mark, Light Bulb, and Arrow. Not every verse will contain every one of these symbols. Sometimes you need to look at several verses that make up a paragraph to get the full meaning.



1. Question Mark

When you read a verse or passage, you might ask the question: "What does this mean?" As much as possible, you want the Word to answer these questions. When you still need more answers, ask the believers that are coming together with you in a group, as well as the person who discipled you. Most importantly, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the answer to you. We need to learn from Him as He opens the Word to us. At the same time we need to be teachable that the Holy Spirit will use another

believer or a leader in the body of Christ to teach us. No one individual has all the revelation or truth; we need to receive from each other.

2. Light Bulb

Just as in the cartoons when there is a little cloud above the character's head and a light bulb appears, "I get it!" In the same way when you read the Word, the Holy Spirit will cast light on what you are reading and the words will jump out from the page and ignite and enlighten your spirit. This is how we receive revelations of the Word from God. Jesus, the Living Word brings us light, for He is the true Light, that dwells in our hearts. The "Light Bulb" is the symbol that will come up most of the time when you read the Word.

3. Arrow

You shoot an arrow to a target. The target is our hearts. As you read the Word, the Holy Spirit will convict your heart that you need to repent and change your actions. There will also be instructions that are directed at your heart. So when you read the Word and the "Arrow" hits your heart, you need to respond with the right heart attitude and with the right action. You need to respond in prayer to Jesus and walk out what He is showing you.

(We received this simple method of studying the Bible from Tony and Felicity Dale)

D. Bible Study Principles

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth.

The more you read and study the Word, the more you will learn how to correctly interpret the Word. Here are some principles that will help you:

1. Always look at the context of the chapter and verse that you are reading. What do the verses before and after say?
2. Always interpret the Old Testament from the fullness of the New Covenant in the New Testament. The Old Testament has some wonderful stories and principles, but they point to Jesus in the New Testament. They are shadows and symbols of the full revelation in the New Testament. The Law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus. Therefore, we are no longer under the Levitical Law of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

The "natural" stories and events of the Old Testament, often point to "spiritual" principles in the New Testament. The Psalms and the Prophets (the prophetic books of the Old Testament) often contain prophetic words that are fulfilled in Jesus and in the ministry of the church in the New Testament. Not everyone is quoted in the NT, but as you get to know the Gospels and read the Epistles (all the letters/books after the Acts and before Revelations) and you then go back and read the prophetic books, the Holy Spirit will highlight it to you.

3. The four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John - are the foundational Scriptures of our faith. Here we get to know Jesus and His ministry. We need to believe and obey His teachings and commands, and we need to follow in His footsteps and do the same works and ministry as He did.

4. In the Book of Acts we see how the disciples obeyed Jesus, how they put into action what He had disciplined them in the Gospels. They were led by the Holy Spirit. We see how the Kingdom of God advances as they harvest souls in the nations and establish the church with these new believers. From the Book of Acts we can learn how the Holy Spirit wants us to advance the Kingdom today and establish the church.
5. The letters of Paul (Romans - Philemon) are written to churches that he establishes in the book of Acts as well as to some men who worked with him in these churches. When you read these always look at the context of the people he is writing to. Look at what he writes as the one side of a conversation and ask yourself, 'What was the other side of this conversation?' to determine why he wrote this letter.

Paul always built on the foundations that Jesus already laid in the Gospels. When he would start in a new city, he would preach the Gospel/Good News about Jesus and teach them the message of the Kingdom and establish these new believers in the commands and practices instituted by Jesus Christ our Lord. That is why you do not see Paul referring back to teachings and ministry of Jesus in his letters, because he had already disciplined the new believers in these. His letters follow up with these new churches afterwards. There is often a progression in his letters as the Holy Spirit keeps on unfolding the mystery of the Gospel to him.

6. Many principles in the Word are binary truths. This means that there are two sides to it, e. g. God's *grace* in salvation versus our *responsibility* to obey. As humans, we tend to understand and follow one side of the truth and have difficulty with the other. Always look for both sides and ask the Holy Spirit to train you to walk in this balance. This takes time and practice and does not come overnight. However if you will be diligent and patient, you will learn.
7. Careful study of the Word alone is not enough. You need the Holy Spirit to reveal the Word to you. The Word is layered with truth. It isn't that we add to the Word, but rather that He keeps on casting more light on what you are reading and deeper understanding comes in your spirit which you could not get just by academic study.
8. When you study a theme or do a word study, look first at how Jesus spoke on this subject or used this word. Then follow this understanding all the way through. Look at all the references concerning this matter, so that you can get a bird's eye view of the truth. Do not build any kind of doctrine on a few obscure verses that cannot be backed up by the rest of the New Testament.
9. When you hear someone teach the Word, receive it in childlike faith. Then go back to the Word and check it out for yourself. Once you recognize that this is truth, fill your spirit with the Word, so that this becomes "your truth" and not just someone else's teaching.

E. Three Ways of Interpreting the Word

1. Devotional

In your personal devotion to the Lord, as you read the Word daily, the Holy Spirit will give you personal revelation and encouragement (the light bulb). These 'revelations' need to be balanced with sound doctrine from the rest of the Word of God. When you get a 'prophetic word', it must always

line up with the Word of God. When the Holy Spirit speaks something to you personally, it does not necessarily mean that this is for the whole body of believers.

2. Literal

We believe that the Word is the truth of God and that we should obey and follow the Word with great diligence. The *words of Jesus*, often printed in red, and *what He did* must be interpreted literally and applied to our lives today. This does not mean that we become legalistic about these truths, but as we endeavor to follow them as literally as possible, we look for the heart of the Father. Read between the lines. The historical content of the New Testament is prescriptive, not just descriptive. We need to do what we read. As we read through the Gospels and Acts, we look for the principles and practices that the Holy Spirit wants to teach us for today. These are not just stories, but they reveal to us the heart of the Father. It is important to see progression in the New Testament and how the story of redemption unfolds. We will look at this in greater detail later in this study. It is important to connect the dots.

3. Prophetic

Throughout the Word there are verses, passages and themes that are prophetic in nature. That means that they tell us what the Lord is about to do, or will do, in the future. These are words about His Kingdom advancing through His church and about the Second Coming of Jesus, the final judgment and the new heavens and new earth.

Quick Overview of the New Testament

The Bible is divided into two parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the beginning of your Bible there is a table of contents listing all the books of the Bible. This is a discussion of the books of the New Testament.

1. The Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John

The first four books of the New Testament - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – are called the Gospels. The Gospels are named after the author of each book. The word ‘Gospel’ means ‘Good News’, and these four books tell the good news of Jesus, from his birth in Bethlehem to his death on the cross in Jerusalem, his resurrection from the dead, and ascension to heaven. Each of the four authors wrote about Jesus, his life, the miracles he did, and his teachings.

2. The Book of Acts

The name ‘Acts’ refer to the ‘acts’ or ‘deeds’ of the apostles after Jesus ascended to heaven. Jesus gave the name ‘apostle’ to twelve men whom He had chosen and who were especially close to Him while He was still on the earth. These men, especially Peter and John, and others too, especially Paul, proclaimed salvation through faith in Jesus, and many believed. The Book of Acts is the story of how the church spread from Jerusalem all the way to Rome.

The first part of the Book of Acts (through chapter 12) describes how the Church grew in Jerusalem and surrounding areas. In chapter 13 through the end, we read of Paul’s missionary journeys through regions that

are today part of Turkey, Greece and Italy. Paul planted the first churches in ancient provinces and cities such as Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, Ephesus, and Colossae.

3. The Letters of Paul to the Churches He Planted

The next nine books of the New Testament, from Romans to 2 Thessalonians, are letters that Paul wrote to the churches he had planted. These letters are also called epistles, which is just the ancient Greek word for a letter. Paul wrote these letters to encourage the churches in their faith in the Lord Jesus and also to correct problems that arose after he left. Some of the churches received two letters from Paul, e.g. 1 Corinthians (pronounced First Corinthians) and 2 Corinthians (Second Corinthians). Both these letters were written to the same church in the city of Corinth, which is in Greece.

From the earliest times, Paul's letters were arranged not in the order in which they were written, but rather from the longest to the shortest letter.

4. The Letters of Paul to People

The next four books, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon are letters written by Paul to specific people. Timothy and Titus were trusted workers who traveled with Paul and helped him plant churches. At times he sent them back to some of the churches he had planted. These letters instructed them how to strengthen the churches and care for the people. These letters are often called the Pastoral Epistles.

5. Letters by Other Authors

The remaining books, Hebrews to Jude, are letters written by various other authors.

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish believers and shows how the temple worship and sacrifices of the Old Testament had found fulfillment in Jesus. The author of this book is unknown.

James through Jude: These books are letters are named after their authors.

6. Revelation

This is the last book of the Bible and was written by the Apostle John, who had also written the Gospel of John and three epistles, 1 John, 2 John and 3 John. It is a prophetic revelation of visions of the resurrected Jesus in heaven as well as end time events.

More on the Epistles of Paul

As mentioned above, Paul was a prolific church planter. His home church was in the city of Antioch, which is located in present day Turkey, in the south east corner close to the border with Syria. From here he embarked on three missionary (or apostolic) journeys, taking the gospel to heathen lands where he planted many churches. Many Bibles have maps in the back showing Paul's journeys.

1. Paul's First Journey (Acts 13 & 14)

His first journey took him to the province of Galatia (today Central Turkey), where he planted churches in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. Collectively these churches are referred to as the Galatians churches.

The Book of Galatians is the letter Paul wrote to these churches. Galatians is the first letter Paul wrote, and also the first book of the New Testament that was written. He was prompted to write this letter, because some time after he returned to his home in Antioch, word reached him that some teachers had arrived in Galatia and tried to alter the gospel he had preached. These teachers insisted that the Galatians also obey the Law of Moses and Jewish customs and traditions. Paul writes this letter to refute this erroneous teaching, and stresses that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus, and not by trying to observe the Law of Moses. This theme is followed through by Paul in all of his other letters. This is the first letter written by Paul.

2. The Council in Jerusalem (Acts 15)

This issue of salvation through faith in Jesus alone, or by obeying the Law of Moses also, was such point of disagreement that a council was held in Jerusalem to settle the matter. James, the brother of Jesus, lead the council. Paul traveled to Jerusalem for this council and told the testimony of how the Gentiles (the word 'gentile' means everyone who was not born a Jew) in Galatia believed in Jesus, and was now serving God, without observing Jewish customs. Lead by the Holy Spirit, the council came to the conclusion that the Law of Moses and the Jewish customs were not to be required of believers in Jesus.

The Book of James Many scholars agree that James wrote his letter shortly after the council in Jerusalem.

3. Paul's Second Missionary Journey

Sometime after returning from Jerusalem to Antioch, Paul sets out on his second missionary journey. First, he travels through Galatia to strengthen the churches there, and then he travels on to the province of Macedonia, which today is the northern part of Greece. In the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea Paul is met with fierce persecution. He is beaten, thrown in prison, and expelled in short order from these cities. Nevertheless, there are those who believe and churches are planted. Collectively the churches of Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea are known as the Macedonian churches.

Leaving Macedonia, Paul travels on to the southern part of Greece, which is known as the province of Achaia. He stops in Athens, where he preaches, but only a few people believe, too few to establish a church.

Meanwhile, confusion arises in the churches in Macedonia, because they were left on their own so quickly. Paul receives word that they are confused about the Second Coming of Christ. Paul writes 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians to clear up this matter and to establish their faith further. These letters were either written during his short stay in Athens, or early on during his stay in the next city of Corinth.

Paul then continues south from Athens to the city of Corinth. Here he stays for 18 months. Many Corinthians believe and a large church is established.

After 18 months, Paul leaves by ship, crosses the Aegean Sea and stops briefly in the city of Ephesus. He is heading home to Antioch, and will visit Jerusalem on the way.

4. Paul's Third Missionary Journey

Paul's sets out again from Antioch. He travels through Galatia, where he strengthens the churches and ends up in the city of Ephesus in the province of Asia Minor. On a modern map, Ephesus is on the west coast of Turkey. Here he stays for two years and has an extremely fruitful ministry. The whole province hears the gospel and churches are planted in many surrounding cities. The seven churches mentioned in Revelations, were planted out of the ministry of Paul in Ephesus.

While in Ephesus, word reaches Paul that the church in Corinth is experiencing many problems. Corinth is across the Aegean Sea from Ephesus, connected by frequent trade ships. Paul writes 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians from Ephesus. In these letters he addresses problems of divisions, sexual immorality, and idolatrous practices that had crept into their church services.

After 18 months in Ephesus, Paul leaves. He visits the Macedonian churches, then goes back to Corinth.

The Book of Romans: During this stay in Corinth, Paul writes a letter to the church in Rome.

Paul returns, traveling again through Macedonia, and then taking a ship to Jerusalem. Trouble awaits in Jerusalem. Jews, who oppose Paul's preaching of Jesus among Gentiles, have him thrown in prison. He never reaches his home in Antioch due to this turn of events.

5. Paul's Imprisonment in Rome

After spending two years in prison, Paul is taken by ship to Rome for his trial to continue. He arrives in Rome where he is kept under house arrest. This is where the Book of Acts ends. Eventually Paul is released, but during his house arrest he writes more letters:

The Book of Colossians: This letter is written to the church in Colossi, a city close to Ephesus. The church here was planted while Paul ministered in Ephesians.

The Book of Philemon: This letter is written to Philemon, a friend of Paul, who lives in Colossi.

The Book of Ephesians: This letter is written to the church in Ephesus.

The Book of Philippians: This letter is written to the church in Philippi, in the province of Macedonia.

6. After Paul's Release

After his release, Paul continues to travel and writes 3 more letters to his co-workers, Timothy and Titus.

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus were written during this time.

Online Bible Study helps

In order to do more advanced study of the Word, there are a number of very useful websites

www.biblegateway.com

www.blueletterbible.com

www.biblia.com

If you do not have access to the internet, it would be good to invest later in Strong's Concordance. It is also good to compare different translations where possible, to get a clearer picture of what you are reading and studying.

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Reference: The Untold Story of the New Testament by Frank Viola.

All Scripture taken from the New International Version.

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