

Why we study the Word

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

- II Timothy 3:16-17

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the primary way that God has chosen to reveal Himself to mankind.

Why do we study the Bible?

To know God, both accurately and intimately.
To be transformed

The end goal of Bible study is not behavioral modification, it is the total transformation of the heart which will trickle down into actions. The Bible isn't a list of things we need to do or not do, it is God's revelation of Himself to us. So we aren't supposed to read the Bible for a list of action steps, or read it for solutions to our problems. Instead, we are to open the Word as a way of growing closer to the God who, in love, worked through time and history to get this book into our hands. And the more we read and study, the more we learn about the Author, and the more we learn, the more we grow in love and intimacy with Him. And no one draws close to God without walking away changed.

Basics of Studying the Word

Observation: What does the text say?

Interpretation: What does the text mean?

Application: How does the meaning of the text apply to life?

It is easy for us to read the Bible and jump immediately into looking for the application, for what the Bible says about your life or the particular situation we're in. But when we do this, we can quickly lose sight of the objective truths of God's word, and fall into cherry-picking passages that suit our preferences and opinions. We want to be sure we are viewing our lives through the lens of Scripture, not viewing Scripture through the lens of our lives. Therefore, when we go to study a passage, we must start with slow and thorough observation, then begin careful interpretation, and then we will understand rightly what that text means for us.

The Discipline of "Quiet Time"

The practice of having a "quiet time" as most modern American Christians understand it, is actually a combination of several disciplines that have been practiced in the Church for thousands of years. Though there are many different styles and methods that people have found helpful when learning to spend time with the Lord, there is no one "correct" way to approach it. So instead of espousing a single method, we will look at the merits and methods of the individual disciplines that compose a "quiet time", so that you can find the method of implementing them that works best for you.

- **Silence:** The discipline of silence is a crucial one in this age of constant stimulation. The natural pace of your life will keep you totally surrounded by noise, whether it's music, or Netflix or people or the buzz of your phone, there is always something to keep your mind focused on what's going on around you. There is always something to keep your mind from tuning in to the still, quiet voice of the Lord. There have to be times in our days and weeks where we create a silent space for ourselves to sit in, and begin to listen to what the Lord is saying to us. This importance of this discipline is likely where "quiet time" earned its name.
- **Solitude:** Jesus modeled this discipline so clearly throughout His life, and it goes hand in hand with silence. When Jesus found himself utterly poured out and drained by ministry, the Bible tells us he would go out to a secluded place to pray and be with His father. If Jesus needed it, we most certainly do too. Though the people around us can certainly be blessings, they can often be distractions when we are trying to tune into what God is teaching us. So it is wise to embrace the habit of being alone sometimes. Beyond creating undistracted time for God to speak, it also begins to break us of our fear of loneliness and our dependency on others.
- **Prayer:** John Bunyan once said, "Prayer will make a man cease from sin, or sin will entice a man to cease from prayer." Like any other relationship, our relationship with God will be more intimate when we talk to Him, and less when we don't. It's as simple as that. Prayer does not have to be a formal occasion, in fact, the Bible instructs us to pray without ceasing- to invite God into every thought, feeling, and situation we encounter in a day. However, taking the time to sit down and pray intentionally can help our often scattered and distracted minds.
- **Meditation:** Meditation is often misunderstood as emptying the mind, as meditation in the Eastern style demands. However, when we meditate on Scripture, we are holding it the forefront of our minds, and letting ourselves really take the time to understand more than just the surface of it's meaning. This is a time for us to invite God to help us understand that which doesn't come to us naturally.
- **Bible Study**

Basics of Inductive Bible Study

Observation: What does the text say?

- 1) Do an overview of the whole book in order to establish the context.
- 2) Read the chapter or passage you're wanting to focus in on.
- 3) Mark key words or phrases, the ones that stick out to you or are repeated frequently.
- 4) Read the passage again, this time marking...
 - Contrasts
 - Comparisons
 - Terms of Conclusion
- 5) Write out a list of the key words, and then write what you learned about or through each
- 6) Determine paragraph and chapter themes to give you a sense of the full message of the book as a whole

Interpretation: What does the text mean?

- 1) Remember: context rules!
 - The word context means "that which goes with the text"
 - View each verse in light of:
 - The surrounding verses
 - the book in which it is found
 - the entire Word of God
- 2) Always seek the *full* council of God's Word.
 - This protects against false doctrines supported by one or two cherry-picked verses
 - Saturating yourself in the Word of God is a safeguard against false teachings
- 3) Remember that Scripture will never contradict Scripture
- 4) Don't base your convictions on an obscure passage of Scripture
 - "Obscure passage": one in which the meaning is not easily understood, even after the proper principles of interpretation are used
- 5) Interpret Scripture literally.
 - God is not a God of confusion, He spoke to us so that we might know truth.
 - Look first for the clear teaching of Scripture, not a hidden meaning.
 - Understand and recognize figures of speech and use them accordingly
 - Consider what is being said in light of its literary genre.
- 6) Look for the single meaning of a passage.
- 7) Use other Bible translations (not paraphrases) to help understand what's being said.
- 8) If you're still unsure, consult a doctrinally sound commentary

*When you're still not sure...PRAY until you are!

Application: How does the meaning of the text apply to my life?

- 1) Determine the original application.
 - Ask yourself how the original authors wanted their original hearers/readers to respond
 - Ask yourself:
 - Is there a command to obey?
 - Is there an example to follow or avoid?
 - Is there a promise to claim?
- 2) Evaluate whether the biblical principle laid out in the passage is universal and timeless, or time-bound, and culture specific.
 - If the passage has heavy cultural context, then try and find the underlying principle, and how it would look in today's culture.
- 3) Look at your life through the lens of this passage:
 - Does this passage change the way you view God?
 - Does this passage need a response from you?
 - What would it look like for you to believe and obey this Scripture in a genuine, non-superficial way?
 - Are you obeying this passage externally but not internally?
 - Is there anything this passage convicted you of that you need to confess?
 - Is there any sin that this passage convicted you of that you need to repent from?
 - How do I need help in believing or heeding this Scripture?
 - What can I be thankful for because of this passage?
 - How can I praise God because of this passage?
- 4) Pray and ask God to show you what you are meant to take away from this passage, ask Him for clarity and conviction.