

Study to Show Yourself Approved

The Bible is a living Book. Some have no interest in studying it. Do you understand the value of Bible study? How can you establish a pattern and stick to it? What kind of things should you study? Read on—and learn why you should study the Bible!

GOD COMMANDS His servants, “Study to show yourself approved before God.”

The Bible is the inspired Word of God. It is His written Instruction Book to mankind. It answers every important question in life. It explains HOW TO LIVE—and reveals the road to salvation.

Then why do so few know HOW to study the Bible?

First, we must ask, why study the Bible? II Timothy 2:15 admonishes, “Study to show yourself approved unto God, a workman that needs not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

The apostle Paul tells us that proper Bible study leads to approval from God. The same verse also speaks of other benefits. First, as workmen, we need not be ashamed—if we study God’s Word. Instead, studying becomes fulfilling and satisfying. You have done what God expects you to do—an acceptable type of self-approval.

Rightly dividing the Word of Truth—knowing the Bible, inside and out—takes a lifetime. God’s Holy Spirit opens one’s mind to this spiritual understanding (Psa. 119:18; John 16:13). True biblical knowledge and understanding come from diligent effort and God’s Spirit working in you.

God expects us to familiarize ourselves with His Word. Only by fully appreciating it will we act on it. Christ said, “...It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, quoted from Deut. 8:3). Psalms

119:105 affirms: “Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

And as Paul admonished Timothy: “And that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (II Tim. 3:15). He continues in verses 16-17: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

Taking in the Word of God for spiritual nourishment surpasses the need of taking in physical food. The Bible provides light to avoid pitfalls in the path of life. The Bible gives us wisdom to understand the weighty aspects of salvation. All scripture is inspired by God to mold and teach His people so that they may become perfect and equipped “for good work of every kind” (Moffatt translation).

Bible study is a vital process that does more than teach us.

Ephesians 5:25-26 reveals the washing or cleansing effect that comes from Bible study: “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.”

This is echoed in Hebrews 10:22: “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

The analogy of water washing the body is not to be confused with the water of baptism. The water of baptism is not

what washes us clean. (Upon repentance, the blood of Christ cleanses one of past sins.) In this case, water symbolizes burial of the individual being baptized. The “watery grave” typifies the death of the old self and the emergence of a new person with a new life.

By contrast, Bible study washes the individual. This is our part of the cleansing process—God expects us to do our part. This process takes place as one internalizes God’s Word. This leads to the desire to repent and grow in godly character. God’s Spirit is instrumental in this cleansing process. But diligent Bible study is the way we wash and cleanse ourselves.

Bible study has many benefits. Therefore, one should establish goals in undertaking this vital spiritual activity.

There are many kinds of goals within Bible study. They fall into three categories: short-term, medium-term and long-term. This makes such goals much more obtainable, as well as interesting. Each of these categories will be listed below with suggested examples.

It should be understood that one could work on more than just one goal at any given time by alternating Bible study sessions, or splitting each session.

Herbert W. Armstrong taught seven keys to understanding the Bible. Although these keys are general overviews, they are indeed vital in being able to understand the Bible’s true doctrines.

The Seven Keys to Understanding the Bible

The true gospel: The kingdom of God will be set up on this physical earth for

a thousand years—the millennium—in the near future.

Salvation is creation: The process of salvation involves the development of godly character in those who are called and who overcome.

Duality: The method of duality runs through every phase of God’s plan, such as: the physical creation and the spiritual creation; the first Adam and the second Adam; the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In prophecy, duality indicates the “type” and the “anti-type.” This means the former fulfillment as opposed to the later, climactic, major fulfillment of prophecy.

God’s Holy Days: These are the seven annual Sabbaths that spell out the plan of salvation. God has commanded their observance forever. He forbids the observance of pagan holidays.

The truth about Israel: The true identity of the lost tribes of Israel and their importance in the world today. This involves the identity of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh as inheritors of the birthright. It also includes knowing the identity and location of the other tribes of Israel. Without this knowledge, prophecy cannot be understood.

The Bible interprets its own symbols: Man cannot understand the meaning of biblical symbols because he injects his own speculation. Let the Bible explain the meaning. Like parables, these symbols are often used to hide the meaning rather than to make them clearer.

God’s Sabbath: The seventh-day Sabbath is the test commandment that professing Christianity refuses to obey. This is the identifying sign of Israel and of God’s people.

Short-term Goals

As you examine the following objectives, keep in mind that they are not listed in any particular order.

It is best to begin with short-term goals. For example, read a short book of the Bible, such as James or Ruth. Consider the timing, such as near a Holy Day that pertains to a certain book. You might choose a particular book because it puts a crisis or particular interest into better perspective.

Study a chapter of the Bible. The reasons listed above could apply here, as well as to certain goals listed below.

Study a small subject in the Bible. A good example of this could be: “Why kneel during prayer?”

Study the background of a particular book. This could include the time and circumstances in which the book was written.

Study a difficult scripture. Here are some tips to keep in mind while studying:

Many kinds of subjects can be studied. Some examples would be the wearing of jewelry or the subject of hair length. Other examples could be astrology or tattoos.

Make it as interesting as possible, but keep it simple. Bible study aids, such as atlases and history books, may help stimulate interest and promote additional curiosity.

When selecting a topic, give it some forethought. Index cards are useful for listing ideas that come to mind when studying other topics. Ironically, many avoid studying the Bible because they feel overwhelmed. Keeping Bible study simple makes it easier to tackle these subjects.

Do not study the Bible haphazardly. Some study whatever pages it happens to open to. This is not the way to approach God’s Word.

God is not the author of confusion (I Cor. 14:33). He expects us to follow an organized approach to His Word.

Medium-term Goals

These are projects that might extend a few days, weeks, or months. It is possible to pursue short- and medium-term goals at the same time. It is also possible to alternate between the two.

Read a larger book of the Bible, such as Isaiah, Psalms or Proverbs.

Study a specific doctrine. This could be assisted by certain Bible helps such as concordances or topical Bibles.

For example, one could study the doctrine of tithing in detail. If faced with a physical affliction, you may want to study healing.

Memorize a series of key scriptures. Realize that some people such as the Pharisees were required to memorize the Torah—the first five books of the law. Others have memorized the entire Bible, yet do not understand it. When one memorizes key scriptures, the pur-

pose should never be to recite them to impress others, but to internalize the scriptures and apply them in your life.

Review sermon notes and look up the key scriptures. Also review your margin notes. Some may need correcting and updating!

You will find that the more you study the Bible, the more you will *want* to study the Bible!

Long-term Goals

A common long-term goal is to read the entire Bible. If you have never done this, challenge yourself to do so. The benefits are enormous!

A thorough reading of the Bible may take as little as six months. If one references commentaries and other supportive material, it may take as long as two years. This gives an overall foundational understanding, which can be built upon in the future.

Here is one tip for someone accepting the challenge to “read the Book.” Before beginning the project, you may wish to read our series *The Story of Bible*. It helps to provide a basic understanding of Old Testament events and the Plan of God.

Read all the Major Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Read a selected “harmony of the gospels”—another excellent project.

Make notations in your Bible. See “The Rules of Effective Bible Study” for a number of helpful hints on marking your Bible. If you have recently purchased a new Bible, try to transfer all your old Bible notes to it.

Re-read all RCG literature, using the Bible to reference each scripture.

Remember, the value of undertaking these projects and goals is to instill the habit and desire to study God’s Word.

Bible Helps

There are many useful Bible helps available. While some may be too expensive to purchase, you may be able to access them at your local library or via the Internet. This is not an exhaustive list, but it gives one an idea of the wide variety of invaluable helps that one could reference.

However, keep in mind that the authors may have injected their own wrong ideas and misconceptions. But

overall, these references are useful tools.

While helpful, recognize that these do not represent an “officially sanctioned” list of perfect or near-perfect study aids.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary: A very thorough one-volume Bible dictionary, which is practical and reasonably priced. Unger’s now has their Bible dictionary on CD for those with computers.

The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible: While very expensive, this five-volume set is probably the best Bible dictionary money can buy. You might find it in larger municipal and university libraries. It is well worth exploring.

Manners and Customs of the Bible: By James Freeman. This book discusses Bible personalities, as well as manners and customs of a given culture at a given time in history.

The Bible From 26 Translations: This large reference work shows every verse in the Bible from at least four or five translations.

The Amplified Bible: The King James Version with modern English updates.

The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown One-volume Commentary on the Bible: Although their full commentary covers six volumes, this JFB one-volume commentary is perhaps the most highly recommended of all *single*-volume editions.

Adam Clarke’s Commentary: Another six-volume set. This one is also well known and widely used. This commentary also has a condensed single-volume version.

The Companion Bible: This Bible is filled with historical, scriptural and linguistic details.

Halley’s Bible Handbook: Compact, yet filled with valuable archaeological notes and other historical background information.

Angus Green Bible Handbook: Somewhat more thorough and expensive than Halley’s Bible Handbook.

Nave’s Topical Bible: This book is ideal for tracing references when no common terms are used. Some Bible software packages have *Nave’s Topical Bible* integrated into their software.

The Works of Flavius Josephus: An excellent historical reference, considered by many to be the most authorita-

tive reference to supplement the Bible. The price is reasonable.

The Bible as History: By Werner Keller. An authoritative two-part history relating to the Bible.

Baker’s Bible Atlas: This helpful tool shows geographical locations and gives detailed explanations of the culture of ancient times. Many helpful photos and illustrations are given.

Oxford Bible Atlas: Similar to Baker’s Atlas and of equal quality, with differing emphasis.

All these different sources provide a kaleidoscope of spectacular information. They make Bible study not just interesting, but exciting. The titles listed here are but a small sampling of what is available. There are also a variety of websites where one can purchase such references on-line. Many of these and other items can be purchased “used” at a fraction of the “new” price.

Certain websites specialize in used books—and that includes used Bible reference books. Also, many of these helps are available free of charge on the Internet.

Study the Bible Daily

Consider some of the great benefits of daily Bible Study: “For the word of God is quick [living], and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

The Word of God is a living Book and “a discerner of thoughts.” It applies to all situations and should be looked to for daily guidance.

If studied correctly, the Bible will make you “wise unto salvation.” It imparts the wisdom to survive and grow while we continue in the proving ground of qualifying for the first resurrection.

The Scriptures help you to recognize and shun error. They help you to avoid the devil’s seduction.

When you study the Bible, God’s Spirit leads you into understanding more truth. This Spirit imparts spiritual understanding of Scripture and helps you to apply these principles in daily life.

You build faith by studying the many examples of God’s faithful servants (Rom. 10:17).

Study of the Bible helps you to be vigilant and to resist the devil.

Study for comfort. You can gain serenity, stability and peace of mind through Bible study: “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and *comfort* of the Scriptures might have *hope*” (Rom. 15:4).

In making time for study, different people have employed different strategies. Some set aside time early in the morning. This is ideal if circumstances allow the flexibility to do this. Others set aside time later at night—a practice that works for some, but not everyone.

In order for study to be beneficial, you must remain alert.

Try to study at a time when you can concentrate without distraction. Set aside a period of solid time if possible—not just a few minutes here and a few minutes there. Although an ideal situation might not exist immediately, actively plan and strive to make arrangements for better conditions in which to study the Bible. This is vital!

A Matter of Life and Death

Failing to study your Bible will lead to doubt, discouragement, emptiness, negativity, anxiety, unhappiness and a feeling that God is not with you. Prayer is talking to God. To diligently read your Bible is to listen to what God is saying to you.

Make Bible study a major priority. It is a matter of life and death.

Finally, consider this vital scripture: “If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you shall ask what you will, and it shall be done unto you” (Jn. 15:7).

This is a great goal—abiding in Christ and His word abiding in us. Answered prayer becomes one of the many benefits of attaining the overall spiritual goal—walking with Christ and living the Book. This is an immediate reward within itself, although it leads to the ultimate goal of eternal life. Bible study is instrumental in getting us there.

Although it may seem that time is at a premium and we have so little of it, make diligent effort to study the Bible daily. Eternal life is worth it! □

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