

How to get the Best out of Personal Bible Study

Introduction

The Bible is essential to spiritual growth. Yet, trying to understand it or developing the discipline for consistent study can be a daunting task. How can I understand the Bible when I read? What strategies do I need to implement to understand the Bible?

These are some questions that we are seeking to answer this evening.

To accomplish this, we need to understand several things:

1. Purpose of the Bible
2. The Content and Structure of the Bible
3. How to study the Bible

The Purpose of the Bible

1. Scripture is given to us so that we can know **what God says (2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:19-21)**.
 - a. It is the primary source of God's revelation. God revealed Himself through various means—through nature, through our conscience, through providence.
 - b. But none of these are as reliable as the word of God.
 - c. There are some important questions in life that every culture and tradition attempt to answer—where we are from, where we are going, what happens to us after death, what is right action, what's wrong with us and what is the solution for what's wrong with us?
 - d. The Bible is the authority on these matters—it is truth (John 17:17).

2. Scripture gives us a **knowledge of Jesus** that leads to salvation (John 20:30, 31).
 - a. The story of Scripture is the story of Jesus.
 - b. The Revelation of Jesus is not only found in the book of Revelation, but the entire Bible is a Revelation of Jesus.
 - c. If we are studying Scripture and it does not lead us to a deeper love for Jesus, we are taking the wrong approach.
 - d. John 5:39-40
 - e. The Desire of Ages, 390
 - f. “. . .The whole Bible is a manifestation of Christ, and the Saviour desired to fix the faith of His followers on the word. When His visible presence should be withdrawn, the word must be their source of power.”
3. Scripture provides the spiritual resources that we need to build our characters after the likeness of Christ (2 Timothy 3:17).
 - a. Spiritual growth is about replacing our evil habits with the instructions in the word of God.
 - b. This is what it means to be sanctified by the truth (John 17:17).
 - c. To build our life on Christ means to obey His word (John 7:22-24).
 - d. The Desire of Ages, 390 - “The life of Christ that gives life to the world is in His word. It was by His word that Jesus healed disease and cast out demons; by His word He stilled the sea, and raised the dead; . . .”
 - e. 1 Peter 2:2
 - f. “. . . as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby.”
4. Scripture gives us **hope** (Romans 10:4).

- a. If we should focus on what is happening around us, we would become discouraged.
- b. The Word of God tell us:
 - i. How the world will end.
 - ii. There is an end to the prosperity of the wicked.
 - iii. God will not allow us to be tempted more than we are able to bear.
 - iv. Corona Virus is not the end.
 - v. Death will die one day.
 - vi. My troubles will not last forever.

The Content and Structure of Scripture

The Bible contains sacred writings that God has given to His prophets for His people (Rev. 1:1-3). But the Bible does not only contain prophecy. It contains recorded history of God's dealings with His people, poems, letters, laws, genealogies and much more.

The Bible was written over a period of approximately 1600 years by some 35 authors from different backgrounds. In order to fully understand the messages of the Bible, it is important to know that though the Bible is relevant and profitable for God's people in every generation, each author (man of God) wrote a message that was directed to a particular group of people, for a particular time period, and a particular purpose. This means that we need to understand the context in which the message was given to fully understand how to interpret its meaning and apply its principles to our context.

An important part of this, is to understand the structure of Scripture.

1. The main division is between the Old and New Testaments. Old Testament is about God's dealing with Israel as His people and the coming Messiah. The New Testament is about the Messiah who has come and the establishment of His Church.
2. Here is a breakdown of its contents:

OLD TESTAMENT

3. The Old Testament was written before Christ came into the world and it contains 39 books. The books in the Old Testament are not necessarily arranged in the order of how they were written.
4. The division of the Old Testament is as follows:
 - a. **Books of Moses:** Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
 - b. **History of Israel:** Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah
 - c. **Poetry/Writings:** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations
 - d. **Major Prophets:** Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel
 - e. **Minor Prophets:** Hosea, Amos, Joel, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Jonah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
 - f. **Apocalyptic:** Daniel
5. The New Testament was written after Christ came into the world and contains 27 books. The division of the New Testament is as follows:
 - a. **The Gospels** (Life and Teachings of Jesus): Matthew, Mark, Luke, John
 - b. **History of the Early Church:** Acts
 - c. **Epistles** (Letters to Churches or individuals):

- i. **Paul:** Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews
- ii. **James:** James
- iii. **Peter:** 1 & 2 Peter
- iv. **John:** 1, 2 & 3 John
- v. **Jude:** Jude
- d. **Apocalyptic:** Revelation

How to get the Most out of the Bible

1. Read it
2. Study it
3. Memorize it
4. Obey it

Tips for Reading the Bible

1. Always begin Bible-reading with prayer.
2. Begin with books that are easier to understand. For example (Mark, Luke, Genesis, etc).
3. Understand how the books of the Bible are categorized (see Chart)
4. Use a version of the Bible that is as closest to modern English and is faithful to the original text as possible (e.g. *Authorized King James Version*, *New King James Version*, *Revised Standard Version*)
5. Do not 'rush' your Bible-reading. Read for understanding, not merely for accomplishing a reading goal.

6. Keep a daily journal of new insights, observations, and discoveries. Practice to write down all insights that come to your mind.
7. Use the morning hours or the time when your mind is most alert for Bible readings.

The Desire of Ages, 390

“We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know ‘what saith the Lord.’”

Study the Bible

1. Observation: What the Bible says
2. Interpretation: What the Bible means
3. Application: How can I apply its meaning to my life

Observation

The objective of this stage is to understand what the Bible says. To accomplish this, we need to do the following:

1. Select your passage.
2. Decide on the pericope—where a full thought begins and where it ends. Remember, the chapter/verse divisions are not always the best guide.
3. Do a background study on the book in which the passage is located (literary criticism):

- a. Determine the genre.
 - b. Who is the author (of the book)
 - c. When was it written?
 - d. Who is the original audience?
 - e. For what purpose was this book written?
4. Read the passage multiple times (even in different versions of the Bible) until you understand what it is 'saying'.
 5. Use a *Concordance* to identify other Bible texts and passages that may shed more light on what the current passage is saying.
 6. Use *Bible Dictionaries*, *Maps* and *Encyclopedias* to assist you in understanding unfamiliar words, places, and cultures.
 7. Ask the 'who, where, when, why and how' questions of the passage.
 8. As much as possible, seek to 'get into the shoe' of persons in the passage. You can do so by choosing one character and try to see things from his/her perspective.
 9. In your own words attempt to relate what the passage is saying.
 10. Make sure to write down all your observations, no matter how insignificant they may appear to you.

Interpretation

1. Write down all the insights that the Holy Spirit impress on your mind concerning what each thought in the passage means.
2. Make sure to discuss your conclusions with others and/or compare them with reputable Bible Commentaries (i.e. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*).
3. Make sure that your interpretations do not contradict established teachings of the Bible (2 Peter 1:20).

Application

Once we understand what the Bible is saying and establish what it means, it is time to assimilate the meaning of God's word into our habits and lives through obedience.

Memorize Scripture

Memorizing scripture helps to guard the mind against evil suggestions and make the word of God easily accessible to our faith.

1. Start small. Memorize one or two simple and well-known verses until you can go to those that are less known.
2. Use Scriptures that have special meaning to you. For example, based on the experience that you are going through, some Scriptures will mean more to you than others at that time.
3. Write down or print the text (s) on a piece of paper, take it with you and take time out during the day to review and practice reciting it.
4. Focus first on studying the meaning of the texts, then on regurgitating it word for word. In other words, make sure you understand what the text is saying before attempting to memorize it.
5. Take time to share the meaning of the text with others.

Obey Its Principles

Make sure the principle is clearly understood by you and is coherent with the entire Bible.

1. Practice obeying all the principles of God's word that are revealed to you already.
2. Esteem the word of God above everything else, even above your present life.
3. Even if you make mistakes, do not compromise on principle.
4. Remember, obeying God's word is the only way to truly prove that you love and have faith in Him (Luke 6:46-48).