

Introduction to Bible Study

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Why Study the Scriptures?

Is the Bible relevant enough for me to spend time reading it? The answer to this question is, "Absolutely." Granted, the context and cultural settings within the Bible are ancient, but they are nonetheless relevant, since the scriptures reveal God's involvement in and plan for mankind.

When Jesus said, "to Abide" or "continue" (John 8:31) in His word, He was challenging all who would dare to follow Him to not just believe in Him intellectually, but to believe in Him as to *apply* his principles to their living. This is the meaning of "abiding in the Word": applying the truths of Christ to daily living. Abiding in the Word is proof of discipleship.

What Must Be Realized

We must realize as believers in Jesus Christ that our adversary seeks to take away Christ's vitality from us. He wants to instill in us doubt, fear, and unbelief. In Ephesians 6 a metaphor of armor is used to describe the resources of the Christian in defending themselves from the attacks of evil. The only offensive weapon in the list is the "sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God." So, reading and meditating, and applying the Word to our lives is crucial if we are going to stand against all the craftiness and deception evil will throw our way.

Benefits of Meditating on the Scriptures

- Psalm 1:1-3 affirms that the person who meditates on the Word of God will be "like a tree planted by the river...whose leaf does not wither, and whatever he does, he prospers." Study of the scriptures produces stability and fulfillment.
- Jesus said there is a reason for His giving His teaching and principles for life. He said, "These things I have said to you so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11). Study of the scriptures produces the joy of Christ in living.
- 1 Timothy 4:15 implies that success, fulfillment, and stability evolve out of dedicated meditation upon the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul informs Timothy of the importance of the Word of the Lord. He says it is good for "doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness" (KJV) so that the believer be "thoroughly furnished" for good works.

Doctrine is the theological side of reading the Scriptures; in other words, what do we learn about God and His Will.

Reproof means to expose or offer proof. As we read and meditate upon the Scriptures, the Holy Spirit will convince us of sin and poor spiritual life management.

Correction means to set upright or reform. The Lord never speaks to us just to tell us who He is and how He works or just to tell us how wrong we are, but He lovingly uses His Word to reset us, like setting a broken limb. He reveals what needs to change and how to change it.

Instruction is the educational side of Bible study. The word means to educate like a child, to train and to discipline. Not only do we discover what needs to be corrected and how to do so, but God also reveals what new things need to be learned and applied.

Thoroughly furnished is the end result and goal of Bible study and meditation. God wants His people to be ready to respond to situations and prepared to be proactive in life so that good things are produced from our lives so as to give testimony to the grace of God.

To put all this another way:

Meditating on God's Word will tell me

...what I should know...
...what I should stop...
...what I should start...
...what I should be.

Hindrances to Bible Study and Meditation

Jesus told a story of a farmer who sowed his seed. (Matthew 13:3-9, 18-23) Some of the seed fell on the well-traveled path; some fell on shallow, rocky soil; some fell among the thorns; and some fell on good ground. The seed on the path was taken away by the birds or trampled underfoot. Those on rocky soil sprouted but could not get any root depth and died. The seed sprouting among the thorns was soon choked out, but the seed on good ground produced a good harvest. Explaining his story (vv. 18-23), Jesus relates the seed to God's Word and the different soils to the type of people who hear the Word.

1. There are those who are **Indifferent**: "the beaten path"

They allow the Word to be lost from memory and effectiveness because they desire the path of worldly ways.

2. There are those who are **Shallow**: "the rocky soil"

They have no depth in their lives because they have too many priorities rather than the central priority of obedience to God.

3. There are those who are **Cluttered**: "the thorns"

Materialistic ambition rather than the conviction of the Kingdom of God controls them.

4. There are those who are **Responsive**: "the good soil"

They welcome the Word and hunger for its meaning and purpose for their lives.

Further, one can begin to see hindrances to scripture application from this parable of Jesus.

Secularism - the "path" of human standards and tradition dilute the Word. Reading and studying the scriptures with bias or prejudice will not allow the Word to speak for itself. There is the tendency to make the Word say what we want it to say.

Emotionalism - The "shallowness" of human emotion prevents the Word from taking root. Faith is based upon the fact of God's character and plan and not upon human feelings. The Word is meant to enlighten not entertain.

Materialism - The human desire for material wealth will create a "clutter" that will choke out the Word from one's life. Desire and motives are to be towards God's righteousness and not toward selfish gain.

Different Methods of Bible Application

Hearing is the most common method of Bible application. Hearing the Word proclaimed by a capable Bible teacher/preacher is one means of allowing the Holy Spirit to work in you. Of all the methods, however, hearing is not the most productive one simply because most people forget the majority of what they hear in several hours. It is impossible to gain all the riches of truth in the scriptures by merely hearing the Word preached or taught.

Reading is a better approach than just hearing, and when hearing and reading are joined, greater retention occurs. Many people try to institute a Bible study commitment daily, but find after a few days, the interest is gone. Simply reading will not fully bring the benefits of the Word to your life; in fact, it has been said we forget 85% of what we read in 72 hours.

Studying the Word is another approach. This involves not only reading a text but taking time to think about the ideas or truths mentioned within it. Looking at the verse or verses in their setting is a way of studying the Word in order to bring a deeper meaning to the text. Using a concordance to look up key words in the verse to read other related verses is a way of studying the Word. Taking one book of the Bible at a time and reading it over and over to get a deeper understanding of the purpose of the book is another way of studying. Now, if

hearing, reading, and studying are being accomplished, a greater grasp of the Word is realized. Remember the more senses you employ in the Word, the better off you are.

Memorizing is an effective method of applying Bible truths to your life. Many people carry scripture memory cards in their cars and as they stop in traffic, they read the scripture over and over to instill it in their memory. Many Christian bookstores carry such scripture memory systems. Some believers make their own cards, writing on them the verse or verses they have found from their devotional reading.

Now, you say you've never been good at memorizing things. But, I beg to disagree. We memorize phone numbers, social security numbers, addresses, zip codes, names, birthdays, and so on. But, you say, "That's because I use them a lot!" You've answered the secret of memorization: usage and repetition.