

Some suggestions on how to study the Bible

“Study to show yourself approved to God...” 2 Tim. 2:15

Some of the usual ways

- Read the Bible through in a year
1189 chapters ÷ 365 = 3 ¼ chapters a day
25000 verses ÷ 365 = 68 verses a day (Approx.)
- Listen to the Bible on tapes or CD's in a year

Sometimes these methods can become an end in themselves, and after a year the goal may have been achieved (although rarely) but little else accomplished except for some pride. Before launching into Bible study it seems some other factors might be worth considering.

What is the overall goal of Bible Study ?

To somehow do God a favor by my dutifully keeping a religious ritual ?

Or to do me the greatest favor of all ? By daily letting a wonderfully good Heavenly Father love me, mold me and impart the life of His own Son in me, through eternal words of truth that He delights to make come alive to me, by His Spirit. As my relationship with Him grows, through each scripture imparted, He is better able to love and bless others through me.

How is this goal achieved – how does it work ?

- Merely by reading the Bible ? If that's all, then very little is accomplished. This would be the equivalent of reading a menu in a restaurant but never eating.
- By reading and memorizing scripture ? If that's all, I will have some head knowledge of the Bible, which inevitably will result in pride, but not much more. This would be the equivalent of holding a picture of how food looks in my mind but never partaking of it.

- By reading, memorizing and intellectually agreeing with or mentally assenting to a particular scripture ? If that's all, then the word of God can never yield its life or power to me. This would be the equivalent of putting food in my mouth but not swallowing it so that it never gets inside me and I never reap its true benefit.

In the wisdom of God, a person by his or her common sense or natural wisdom is unable to know God (1 Cor. 1:21). Neither by common sense can the secrets of the Bible be discovered (1 Cor. 2:14). The mystery of the Kingdom of God and the word of God can only be revealed by God to the hearts of those who love Him (Mar 4:11, 1 Cor. 2:10, Pro. 1:23, Psa. 25:14). To the intellect the Bible is a closed book, boring and impossible to understand. Of course many do try to comprehend the Bible mentally and this gives rise to the wide range of conflicting opinions on almost every subject. To the child of faith however, the Bible is the book of life whereby God communicates Himself through Spirit breathed words to all who have a spiritual ear and an inquiring heart. God's own Spirit is the original author of the Bible and the necessary teacher today of all of its truths (2 Pet. 1:21, 1John 2:27).

- Bible study therefore, or God communicating His very own life through living words to a believing heart, hinges on a person internalizing or taking down into their inner being a scripture personally given to them by God. This process, that may use reading, memorization and mental assent as initial steps, the Bible likens to the spiritual equivalent of several everyday natural activities – eating, growing, hearing, planting, and knowing. All of these, however, are intended to portray the one selfsame spiritual process of receiving internally (in the heart or spirit) God's words:

Eating - **“Your words were found and I ate them...”** Jer. 15:16. Without eating, digesting and assimilating a scripture, given to me by God, into my spirit, the scripture cannot become spiritual food.

Growing - **“Desire the ... word that you may grow thereby.”** 1 Pet. 2:2. All Christian growth comes from the entrance of God's words into the Christian's heart. It is with the heart not the mind that we believe.

Hearing - **“Today if you will hear His (God's) voice ...”** Heb. 3:7 & 8. Scripture while still on the page of a Bible is called the “letter” and is

called dead (2 Cor. 3:6). But when the Holy Spirit (the breath of God) breathes life into a scripture (and it jumps off the page) it is heard by the heart as the voice of God – not audibly to the natural ear but as a still small spiritual voice to the spiritual ear. Jesus said we are to **“live ... by every (such) word that comes (present tense) out of the mouth of God”** Mat.4:4.

Planting - **“the sower (God) sows the word”** (Mar. 4:14) into the ground of a persons heart. When the heart hears and understands the word that God has planted (spoken) that word germinates, takes root, bears fruit and changes the person into the likeness of that word. **“...the word of God which works mightily also in you that believe”** 1 Thes. 2:13.

Knowing - **“...(He) has given us everything that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of Him** (His words entering our hearts) **...whereby He has given us ... promises that by these** (promises or words entering our hearts) **we might be partakers of the divine nature.”** 2 Pet. 1:3 & 4. We know God only as He continues to reveal Himself to our hearts, not our heads, through His word unveiled by His Spirit. By the same process He conforms us to the image of His Son.

All of the above portrayals of the process of internalizing scripture, which is the goal of Bible study, depend on the Christian making actual contact with a living God. Christianity is a relationship with God through His Living Word, Jesus Christ, and not a religion.

A suggested plan for daily Bible Study

WHEN The earlier in the day we make contact with God the better off we will be. Often when we awake the first thoughts that come crashing into our minds are worry thoughts, fear thoughts, condemnation thoughts and anger thoughts. That’s why God invites us to **“...early will I seek you ...”** (Psa. 63:1). He promises that in the morning His words (the Bible) **“...when you awake they will talk to you”** (Pro. 6:22). When He talks to us silently by breathing life into His words, light comes and darkness flees, we learn more about Him and find peace and rest for our souls. (Psa. 119:130, Mat. 11:29).

ATTITUDE (a) Bible study can be a total waste of time unless I am, right now, walking in the light of both of the following two truths: **“My Father ... forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me...”**(Mat. 6:12 & 15). Uncovered sin, which includes unforgiveness towards others, separates me from God, hardens my heart and makes hearing His word impossible.

(b) The desire of my heart ought to be **“My Father...give me this day my daily bread...”** (Mat. 6:11). Jesus, the Living Word, said **“Your fathers ate manna from heaven in the wilderness...I am the living bread ... from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live...”** (John 6:49 & 51). The spiritual equivalent of eating manna daily is eating the word of God daily, the bread of life.

(c) It is essential, as I pick up my Bible, that my expectation be that I am going to seek and to make contact with God. Jesus promised that **“he that** (truly with his whole heart) **seeks** (me, always) **finds** (me)” (Mat. 7:8). He also said **“according to your faith be it unto you”** (Mat. 9:29). When I come to God I must believe that He is.

(d) Finally, I must have the attitude up front that if during my Bible study God tells me to do something, my heart is already settled that I am going to do it, or at least I am willing for God to make me willing to do it. Jesus said **“If anyone is willing to do His will he will know of the teaching...”** (John 7:17). In other words being willing to obey God (or even being willing to be made willing to obey God) is a key to the Bible becoming real to me.

HOW LONG Twenty (quality) minutes each morning would be good.

HOW MUCH One to three chapters, preferably staying in the New Testament (starting with Matthew), or the Psalms or Proverbs.

WHERE A quiet place, away from noise and potential interruptions, with the door closed.

DISTRACTIONS You will begin to learn how to cut off mental distractions such as day dreaming, fantasizing and drifting as you slowly keep turning your mind

back to the scripture in front of you – remember this is for you – the words God is about to speak to you are your life, Jesus said.

READING When reading it is useful to focus greater attention on those verses that contain statements of God’s truth (e.g. “Faithful is He that calls you who also will do it” 1 Thes. 5:24) as distinct from verses that while true statements are really more part of the narrative (e.g. “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” 1 Thes. 5:26).

Stay alert to words that spark or catch your interest, that speak to you exactly where you currently are. When that happens don’t rush to continue reading, pause, reflect on them 2 or 3 times. As you think about them a deeper understanding of them will come.

Don’t try to bite off more than you can chew. God doesn’t speak through paragraphs let alone chapters, He speaks through a line or a precept at a time (Isa. 28:10). Often only one verse will come alive and sometimes only a portion of a verse or even a word or two.

STUDY HELPS 1. It is best to read slowly but expectantly – remember it is not a race, the goal is to make contact with God, for the book to speak.

2. Highlighter pens help, to mark scriptures that communicate, and a notepad is useful to write out those scriptures or to jot down the thoughts that arise relative to them. It is practical to bookmark the page you end on.

3. Often reading a page or two from an “inspired” Christian book is a very effective lead-in to Bible study. An inspired book is (a) one in which you have the sense that God was leading the author as he wrote it, (b) you are drawn closer to God by it and your heart is touched (c) woven into the text are innumerable quotations and paraphrases of scripture. It is always good practice to check out each scripture reference in your own Bible. One or more of such scriptures may become your word from God for today. Listening to a portion of an “inspired” in depth Bible teaching tape can also act as a catalyst to Bible study. A list of recommended Christian books is attached.

After studying the Bible

- God has gently breathed life into a scripture and the words have contacted your heart. Those words are the life of God in you (John 6:63). In the

parable of the Sower and the seed (Mark chapter 4) Jesus warns that we will now be challenged by the enemy over the words of God we've just heard. First, if we did not ponder the words long enough for God to give us full understanding of them, they are immediately stolen (Mat. 13:19).

Then at some point we will be put under pressure, for the words sake, through a circumstance or a person or a thought that directly conflicts with the truth we have heard. If we believe the lie and are offended at the word, it will wither and die (Mar. 4:17).

Our hearts are fertile soil for whatever thoughts get planted in them. In an effort to choke the word the enemy will endeavor to sow thoughts in us that stimulate the appetites and desires of our flesh. Or sow care, worry or anxiety thoughts over some matter. Or try to persuade us to put our trust in material possessions rather than God. In a real sense the enemy is not interested in us, but only in separating us from the life of God, His word sown in our hearts. Despite these obstacles, Jesus said **"If a man love me he will retain my words"** (John 14:23).

- God has spoken to you through a word and you are blessed, loved and excited at some new insight into the nature and glory of God. Often, it would be wise not to rush off to tell someone what you've received, unless you have a strong awareness that God is leading you to. The person you talk to may not always be rightly related to God at the moment and could become a tool of the enemy to sow seeds of doubt in you. Also it may be necessary for some time to elapse for the word to firmly take root in your heart before it bears fruit into other lives. But when the time comes, what today was bread for you to eat will tomorrow become seed for God to sow through you into the hearts of others (Isaiah 55:10 & 11).

List of recommended Christian books

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title</u>	
Andrew Murray	Abide in Christ	An Exciting New Life
	Absolute Surrender	Daily Experience with God
	God's will: our dwelling place	Waiting on God
	Raising your children for Christ	Revival
	With Christ in the school of prayer	Humility
	God's Best Secrets (devotional)	Daily Secrets of Christian Living
	Norman Grubb	Rees Howells Intercessor
Dr & Mrs H. Taylor	Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret	
S.D. Gordon	Quiet Talks on Prayer (Try used books)	
A.B. Simpson	A Larger Christian Life	The Self-life and the Christ-Life
	Christ in the Bible Commentary (Ref.)	The Christ Life
	Days of Heaven on Earth (devotional)	Walking in Love
Hannah Whittall Smith	The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life	The God of all comfort
R. A. Torrey	How to bring them to Christ	Baptism with the Holy Spirit
	How to study the Bible	How to pray
George Mueller	Answers to Prayer	Release the Power of Prayer
William Law	The Power of the Spirit	Wholly for God (Try used books)
A. W. Tozer	How to be filled with the Holy Spirit	Wingspread
	Keys to the Deeper Life	
Merlin Carothers	Prison to Praise	What's On Your Mind?
Oswald Chambers	My Utmost for His Highest (devotional)	
Martyn Lloyd-Jones	Joy Unspeakable	
V. Raymond Edman	They Found the Secret	
Richard Gilbertson	The Baptism of the Holy Spirit (Ref.)	
Jeanne Guyon	Experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ	
John Bunyan	Pilgrim's Progress	
C.S. Lewis	Mere Christianity	
Dutch Sheets	Intercessory Prayer	
Neil T. Anderson	The Bondage Breaker	