

Getting the best from your Bible

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There's no way you can have a genuine and fruitful Christian life without time spent in God's Word, The Bible. The best thing about getting into God's Word is that *God can speak to you*. When that happens Bible reading gets really exciting and life-changing!



Almost everything we know of God we learn from His Word.
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. Psalm 119:105.

Here are a few tips to help you get the most out of your Bible times, so that God really does speak to you.

- **Recognise that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.**

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:16,17.

- **Read the Bible and also study it.**

Do your best (study) to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15.

Bible reading

Bible reading gives a general overview, and allows the Holy Spirit to take parts of the Bible and make them meaningful to you. Bible reading is best done systematically, so that you regularly read through the whole Bible slowly and carefully.

- ✚ **Before you begin ask God to speak to you from His Word.**

Open my eyes so I may see the wonderful truths in your Word. Psalm 119: 18.

- ✚ **As you are reading, think about the meaning of the passage and 'talk it over' with the Lord.**

You can do this by asking questions such as:

- What is the main point of this passage?
- What is God saying to me personally?
- What can I learn about the Father; about Jesus Christ; about the Holy Spirit?
- Is there a special command or promise or warning which is just for me?
- Is there something here which will help me be a better Christian?

- ✚ **Find the key verse in the passage. Write the key verse down and memorise it.**

(Memorising Bible verses is really good for you. You never know when God will bring a verse you have memorised into your mind. This can really help when you get into situations when you're not sure what is the best thing to do. See Psalm 119:11.)

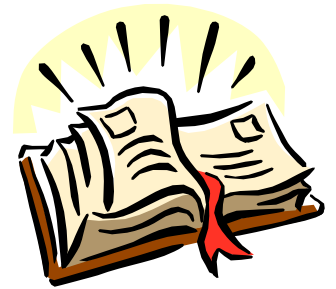
- ✚ **Pray about the things that God reveals to you.**

- ✚ **Do whatever God tells you to do.** *Your Word is lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Psalm 119:105

Bible study

Bible study digs more deeply into the Bible than just reading.

The word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we must give account. Hebrews 4:12.



There are many techniques you can use to study God's Word so that it is living and active:

- ✚ **Read it out loud.**
- ✚ **Read it slowly, carefully and systematically.** Concentrate and listen to what God is saying to you.
- ✚ **Underline it.** eg. **Blue** for promises and commands; **red** for salvation; **green** for the Holy Spirit; **black** for sin. Underlining helps you concentrate on what you are reading.
- ✚ **Meditate on it.** Go over and over it discussing it with the Holy Spirit. Consider it from all perspectives.

When you discuss a passage of the Bible with the Holy Spirit, make sure you listen to what He says. As you do this you will be meditating on His Word. God promises great blessings if you will meditate on His Word. See Psalm 1:1-3 and Joshua 1:8.

His delight is in the Law of the Lord and on His Law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Psalm 1:2,3.

- ✚ **Put it into your own words.** Summarising or paraphrasing helps you understand the meaning of the Word and makes it personal to you. It's best if you write down your thoughts as you do this.
- ✚ **Ask questions about it.** As you are studying ask lots of questions eg. *Why did that happen? What was God trying to say here? How did they react? How would I react? What was the point of that? How is that different today? What does God want me to do?* Then listen to the Holy Spirit's answers and do what He tells you!
- ✚ **Use study resources.** *Study to show yourself approved unto God; a workman who does not need to be ashamed; rightly handling the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:13.*

www.Biblehub.com is a great website for Bible Study!

You can study a book, a theme, a character, an event, Study involves asking lots of questions then looking up a range of resources and using them to find the answers to your questions. Out of this you develop a systematic understanding.

e.g. If you are studying a Book of the Bible you could ask questions like:
Who was the author? When was the Book written? Why was the Book written? Who was the Book written to? What effect did it have on them? What are the main themes? What are the key verses? What is the Book's outline? What are the main messages from God for the original readers of the Book? What are the main messages for me, or for Christians today?

You can get answers to your questions from:

- The Holy Spirit

The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. John 6:63 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26.

- a range of Bible study resources

These could be commentaries, concordances, dictionaries, atlases, books etc. Some of the most useful resources are:

the NIV Study Bible
Strong's Concordance
Barclay's or Matthew Henry's commentaries
Vines Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words
International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
Parsons Atlas
Software like Illumina and Glo
Bible study websites:

- www.biblehub.com a wonderful and easy to use resource for Bible Study.
- www.biblestudytools.com contains many helpful tools for Bible study.
- www.heartlight.org is a portal for all sorts of Christian resources.
- www.biblica.com/niv/ provides resources based on the NIV.
- www.freebiblesoftware.com E4 group provides free CDs which include many of the above resources.

As you do your Bible study it is best to write it down.

- **Interpret the Bible to get meaning from it.**

The Bible must be interpreted to gain meaning and understanding. There are four components in seeking to establish meaning and therefore to gain understanding: the **text**, the **author**, **you** and the **Holy Spirit**.

Each of these must be considered as you try to work out what the Bible is saying, and how it can be applied in your life. You can do this by carrying out exegesis and hermeneutics!

Exegesis is the process of trying to find the original meaning of parts of the Bible:

- What did it mean when it was originally written?
- What was the message the original author was intending to convey?
- What was the message the readers/recipients would take from it?
- What was the Word of God to the original readers/recipients in their situation?

Hermeneutics is the process of interpreting parts of the Bible so that they have meaning for us today.

- What does it mean to us today?
- What is relevant for us in our situation?
- What is the Word of God for us today?

If we are to interpret the Bible accurately any hermeneutics must be based on thorough exegesis, under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Questions about the trustworthiness, infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible must be asked at the exegetical level (relating to the original text in its original context and with its original purpose) not at the hermeneutical level (as it relates to us today). Otherwise the questions/answers are affected by our many and varied cultural differences and interpretations.

- **Study verses in the Bible in their context.**

Words only make sense and have meaning when they are in sentences, and sentences are given further meaning by what is before and after them. That's why all Bible verses must be studied in context.

Context also applies to:

- the genre of the book (history, poetry, song, story, prophecy, apocalypse, teaching, doctrine, personal or general letter, encouragement, correction, etc.).
- the meaning of the original words (because words in English today may have completely different meanings to those in the original text).
- the meaning the author was intending.

- the cultural situation the author was writing into.
- the historical situation in which the book was written.
- the purpose of the Lord in having the book written and included in Scripture.

Make sure that you consider each of these aspects of context when you are interpreting the Bible, and always hold your interpretations lightly.

There are many factors that will influence you as you work out what you believe. eg. your background, the teaching you have received, the culture you live in, your life experiences, your previous studies, the churches you have gone to, the countries you have lived in. Always recognise that there is more to learn and that your interpretations may be incomplete, your understanding partial, and that you may be biased or even wrong! Only in eternity will you fully know! *Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part, then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.* 1 Corinthians 13: 12. There have been great injustices and misunderstandings throughout history when the Bible has been interpreted out of context. It would be presumptuous to think that we were the first ones in history to get our interpretations right! (But secretly we probably think we are!).

- **Acknowledge the Bible's authority in your life.**

Sola scriptura (by scripture alone) was a foundational doctrine of the Reformation (along with *sola fide* - by faith alone, *sola gratia* - by grace alone, *solus Christus* - by Christ alone, and *soli Deo gloria* - to the glory of God alone). *Sola scriptura* says that the Bible as God's written word is self-authenticating, clear, its own interpreter, and sufficient of itself as the final authority of Christian doctrine. If this is so, you must acknowledge the authority of the Bible in its original form and language.

Prima scriptura is a doctrine that says the canon of the Bible is "first" or "above all" any other sources of divine revelation like nature, traditions, charismatic gifts, revelations, angelic visitations, conscience, common sense, the views of experts, the spirit of the times or whatever. These other sources may be helpful in understanding or interpreting the Bible but do not have the authority of the Bible itself.

The Bible is authoritative! Make sure you read it; study it, and obey it!

Further resources on interpretation of the Bible

<http://www.bible-interpretation.com/> is an excellent website giving simple and clear explanations about all aspects of hermeneutics.

How to read the Bible for all it's worth and *Gospel and Spirit* by Gordon Fee are superb books that give a scholarly explanation of principles of biblical interpretation. Gordon Fee is arguably the world's leading evangelical/Pentecostal theologian.

"*Interpreting the Bible*" and "*Principles for interpreting the Bible*" can be downloaded from <http://rosscallaghan.yolasite.com/bible-studies.php>

This website also has an exegesis of every book in the Bible (containing an introduction, outline, and detailed explanation of each book, plus discussion questions), and many other Bible studies on all aspects of the Christian life.

