

How to Study the Bible

Lesson #1—Longing for the Pure Milk of the Word

Introduction

Do you go out to eat at a fine dining establishment every night? Unless you are made of money, the answer is no. Although that food is amazing, you just can't get it every day. Instead, you mostly rely on cooking to provide your own meals. If you didn't know how to feed yourself, you would starve. Even one fine dining meal per week wouldn't cut it. You need daily food and getting it is up to you.

Yet how many Christians feed on God's word just once a week, if that? Assuming you attend church once a week, you are getting just one spiritual meal per week. The rest of the week, you eat nothing if you are not feeding yourself God's word. You are in spiritual starvation mode. If this is the case, there is no way you are going to have a strong walk with the Lord, being so spiritually emaciated. Matters are even worse if you attend church just once a month.

Instead, you must learn and practice preparing your own spiritual food. This is essential to your spiritual vitality throughout the week. You must learn to bake your daily bread and feast. There is no substitute for personal Bible study.

Of course, choices must be made. A person could go to the store to buy their meals frozen and pre-packaged. But store bought meals are usually unhealthy and bland; you never know what you will really get. Needless to say, nothing compares to home cooking. A home cooked meal is fresh, filling, nutritious, and delicious, when done right. It is the same with feeding on God's word. God Himself knows there is no substitute for your personal time in the word. This is God's provided means of instruction, guidance, and edification for believers. It is the most essential ingredient in the recipe for spiritual growth, all lifelong. As Peter says:

1 Peter 2:2

² *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,*

The problem is that many Christians don't know how to feed themselves. They exemplify a self-perpetuating malnourishment. Bible teachers of course can help with this. One of the reasons God gave some as pastor-teachers is to help feed the flock. Just as not all people are equally skilled in preparing food, not all are equally skilled in handling God's word. Indeed, God has specially gifted and called some to devote their entire lives to mastering His word, so that they can feed His people a gourmet spiritual meal. But as already established, believers cannot simply rely on Bible teachers for their *daily* bread. They must feed themselves.

This understanding produces the real solution to the problem of spiritual malnourishment. The answer is not simply to increase the number of Bible teachers, but rather to make every believer a Bible teacher of sorts. Like the ancient saying goes: give a man a fish, feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, feed him for a lifetime. All Christians must be equipped to read and study the Bible on their own, so that they can feast on God's word all the time. This is, in fact, one of the explicit reasons God gave some as pastor-teachers—not just to feed, but to equip.

Ephesians 4:11–12

¹¹ And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ;

Part of this equipping surely involves teaching the sheep to find food. In Medieval Europe, dominated by the Catholic Church, this was one of the greatest offenses of a wicked priesthood. Instead of giving the people total access to God's word, the priesthood forbid the lay person from reading the Bible and even hearing the Bible read on his own language. The result was a form of spiritual slavery. The people were kept malnourished to the point of death, but they were strung along with spiritual scraps here and there. The priests made the people completely dependent upon them for access to God's word, and even the little they dispensed was poisoned with falsehood. Thankfully, with the Reformation and aptly timed printing press, the essential practice of personal Bible study was rediscovered.

Today, however, Christians face a different problem, a deeper problem. It is not uncommon for Christians to possess multiple Bibles. They can be purchased for a dollar, they are free on the internet, and with smartphones, most have 24/7 access to the Bible in the palm of their hand. The faithful from ages past would die for such access to God's word. Yet with all this access, do Christians today study God's word any more than those in Medieval Europe who did not have access? For many the answer is no. They are just as spiritually starved, only Christians today have no priesthood to blame. To blame is their own lack of desire.

How can this be? The reality is that for some, their lack of desire is merely a reflection of their lack of salvation. Jesus said the tares would grow among the wheat and there are some in the church who have never truly been born again and consequently have no true desire for the word. Plain and simple, all living, breathing newborn babies long for milk. There are no exceptions. If this spiritual desire in a person is completely absent, this could be a real indicator that a person does not truly know the Lord. At the least, this is a call for serious self-examination and a return to the gospel. Have you truly embraced Jesus as Lord and Savior?

For others, they are spiritually alive, they are true believers, yet they are distracted by the world. Like a newborn, they are dazzled and dizzied by the sights and sounds of the world around them, but they are also distracted from the one thing necessary. Such Christians then need reminders and fresh conviction of the need to be devoted to God's word, to long for it.

The Goal

1 Peter 2:2

² *like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,*

The goal of this study is to remind and convict believers of their need to long for the word and then to equip those with the desire to study the Bible on their own. This guide aims to help Christians learn to feast on the word and grow in respect to their salvation.

One of the best presents you can give to a newly married couple is cooking lessons. A commitment is required up front, as is some hard work, but if the couple is diligent to learn, their lessons will pay huge dividends over the years. The same applies to learning to study the Bible. You must commit to learn and study. There is an upfront cost in going through this guide and putting in some time to get equipped. But this commitment will pay off quickly. Do you want to grow in godliness? Do you want to become more like Christ? There are no shortcuts to sanctification and there is no substitute for Bible study, so commit to long for the word.

In specific, the intent of this series is that you will learn to approach any text of Scripture, grasp its context, comprehend its details, and arrive at its original meaning. Bible study aims to discover what the text says and what the text means as God intends it, not as a person wants it. However, studying Scripture is not a mere intellectual exercise, so this guide will also help you move from a text's meaning to its application for today. The end goal, after all, is growing in godliness.

To make things even more practical, each section will include some examples using the short epistle of Titus. There will also be plenty of opportunities for you to practice on your own. And as an additional feature, this guide will show you how to take your Bible study even further using all entirely free online resources (e.g. Bible dictionaries, commentaries, etc.). Of course, you can always invest in some helpful printed resources if you are able. That being said, the only resource that is essential is the text of the Bible itself.

The next lesson will begin to explore the actual steps involved in Bible study. For the rest of this lesson, more needs to be said on the importance, benefits, and requirements of Bible study.

The Importance of Bible Study

Here are 10 reasons why Bible study is of the utmost importance for all Christians. This list is by no means exhaustive, but showcases how valuable Bible study is.

1. Salvation—Bible study unlocks the door to eternal life
 - 2 Timothy 3:15
 - John 20:30-31
 - 1 Peter 1:23
2. Worship—Bible study enables true worship of the true God
 - John 4:24
 - Acts 17:23ff
3. Growth—Bible study houses the gym of spiritual growth
 - 2 Timothy 3:16-17
 - 1 Peter 2:2
4. Guidance—Bible study gives you God's compass
 - Psalm 119:24, 105
5. Hope—Bible study reminds you of God's promises
 - Romans 8:28; 15:4
6. Warfare—Bible study teaches you to wield the sword of the Spirit in spiritual battle
 - Ephesians 6:13-17
 - Matthew 4:4ff
7. Parenting—Bible study holds the hope of the next generation
 - Deuteronomy 6:4-9, 20-25
 - Psalm 78:5-8
8. Admonishing—Bible study produces godly discipleship
 - Colossians 1:28; 3:16
9. Teaching—Bible study provides the source of authoritative instruction
 - 2 Timothy 4:2
 - Ezra 7:10
10. Evangelism—Bible study equips you to reach the lost
 - Matthew 28:19-20
 - 1 Peter 3:15

Special Case Study—Luke 10:38-42

According to Jesus, what is the one thing necessary if you are to be His disciple?

The Benefits of Bible Study

Obviously, this section will overlap with the above section on Bible study's importance. But if you get the importance of Bible study and dig into Scripture, you can expect these benefits, and more.

1. Life
 - 1 Peter 1:23
2. Holiness
 - John 15:4-5; 17:17
 - Psalm 119:9, 11
3. Joy
 - John 15:11
 - 1 John 1:1-4
4. Blessedness
 - Psalm 1:1-3
 - Luke 11:28
5. Wisdom
 - Psalm 119:98-100

Special Case Study—Psalm 19

Compare and contrast the two halves of this psalm. What does the second half reveal about God's word?

The Requirements of Bible Study

First, there are three essential spiritual requirements in order to study the Bible.

1. Salvation
 - 1 Corinthians 2
2. Illumination
 - 1 Corinthians 2
 - 1 John 2:20, 27
 - John 14:16-17, 26; 16:12-15
3. Prayer
 - Ephesians 1:15-18

Special Case Study—Luke 24:13-45

When the resurrected Jesus visited some of His disciples, what had to happen before they could fully understand the truth of Scripture concerning Him? How is this relevant today?

Second, there are three essential natural requirements in order to study the Bible.

1. Desire
 - 1 Peter 2:2
 - Job 28:1-18
 - Proverbs 2:4
2. Diligence
 - Acts 17:10-12
 - 1 Timothy 5:17
3. Commitment
 - Ezra 7:10
 - Psalm 1:2

Special Case Study—2 Timothy 2:15

What is Timothy's goal in this verse? How is that to be accomplished?