

## **Guide For Studying The Bible by Bill Hitefield**

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## 2. Reasons to study the Bible

### A. Introduction

With every action we take in life, we have a reason to take that action. Something has caused our will to decide to act; to take the action. Rather than quit in a race, we **will** ourselves to continue – and we cross the finish line. We decide we really need to lose weight, so we **will** ourselves to do it. The results of the activity are such it impels our will to follow through.

Reading and studying the Bible can also fall into that category. The actions we take must be influenced by our will. For us to devote our energy and attention to reading the Bible and to understanding the Bible, we must have reasons which influence our will. We can acknowledge the benefits of reading the Bible, we can agree with and believe the necessity of studying God's word, but until we **will** ourselves to do it, it will not happen.

What then are the reasons we should will ourselves to read the Bible? What benefit will there be from actually studying the Bible? In this section we will look at a few reasons to do so. Bear in mind, this list is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

### B. Spiritual necessity

I Peter 2:2 tells us “*As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby*”. Peter is telling us God's word is a necessity for us as believers – if we want to grow. During my life as a believer, I have seen two basic types of Christian lives being lived.

The first is a life lived in a **reactive** mode. The believer is one who doesn't really grow strong in their faith. They live their lives floating along on the path of least resistance. When an issue comes up, they are rarely prepared for it. They make do, they get through the issue, but they do not rise above the issue. This becomes a trademark of their lives. They are not prepared for life; they merely react to it.

The other is a life lived in a **proactive** mode. This believer knows life is going to throw some issues at them and **wills** themselves to be prepared. Among their other spiritual disciplines, they read God's word, study God's word, and meditate upon God's word. Like the life lived in a reactive mode, they do not know what the future holds. But they are prepared for it. An unexpected event occurs and they may be caught off guard as to the exact event, but they were ready for *something* to happen. Having studied God's word does not exempt them from the unexpected events, but it gives them a different perspective than the reactive life.

The focus of the proactive life is Jesus and our relationship to Him. When an event occurs, while we may look inward at the pain and such, our focus will be on Jesus. We never lose sight of Jesus. Why? Because God's word reveals Jesus to us – and we have immersed ourselves in God's word.

If we want to be **proactive** in our lives, we need to make the reading and studying of God's word an active part of our spiritual discipline.

### C. Spiritual growth

In the previous point we referenced a passage in Peter where he spoke to new believers as being “newborn babes”. He spoke of their need for milk. Each parent understands the dietary needs of a child. A child's digestive system is still growing. They are not able to handle the digestion of certain types of food. They thus start out with milk, the closest you can get to a “pre-digested” food. It is easy for them to digest, and it provides the nutrients they need at the time.

It is the same with a believer. There are certain “pre-digested” spiritual teachings and truths that a new-born believer must learn. They are essential and foundational truths. In Hebrews 6:1-2 the writer lists a few of these foundational truths: “<sup>(1)</sup> *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, <sup>(2)</sup> of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*”. Each of these are truths which a believer needs to understand fully.

In the end to the previous chapter, that same writer tells us (Hebrews 5:12-14) “<sup>(12)</sup> *For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>(13)</sup> For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. <sup>(14)</sup> But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*”. Here the writer speaks of the necessity of spiritual growth; and one of the needed ingredients of that growth. The reactive believer is the one who has “*come to need milk*”. While they should be growing, they are not. The proactive believer is one who has “*come to need ... solid food*”.

The results of these two types of lives are evident. The reactive believer “*is unskilled in the word of righteousness*”. When events come their way, they are unequipped to have the spiritual discernment to make the correct decision. Many times they don't even bother to make a decision, or they base their decision on human reasoning. They float from event to event.

The proactive believer is the one who “*by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*”. They have studied God’s word and have tried to apply it to their lives and the situations they face. Note the result of this. The result is not that they make good decisions. The result is they know how to “*discern both good and evil*”. God’s word does not “give us decisions”. God’s word gives us the foundation we need to **make** good decisions.

#### D. Spiritual usability

On some of the guitar forums I frequent, many of the posters do not like amplifiers made by Mesa Engineering. Their take is Mesa amps do have a lot of features and lots of tones buried within those features, but “there are too many knobs and buttons”.

For me, Mesa has been my go-to amp manufacturer for a good number of years. All of my current amps are Mesa amplifiers. I learned the secret to the use of Mesa amps years ago: Study the manual. They don’t work like other amps. To get the sound you want from them you have to know how to use them, how to set the knobs in that certain way to get that certain tone. You have to study the manual. Once you do that you find the amps to be extremely useful. No matter what type of tone you need – you can get it.

Believers are the same way in their relationship to the Word of God. For a believer to be useful to God, the believer must study the manual – the Word of God. As I studied the Mesa manuals I began “by reason of use to have my senses exercised” as to how to get the needed sound. In short, how to **apply** the teachings in the manual to **my needs**. The life of the proactive believer is the same. They become useful to God because no matter what situation the believer faces, they know how to **apply** the teachings in the Bible (the “manual”) to their lives

#### E. Conclusion

The reading and studying of God’s word is not a fruitless exercise (*pun intended*). It bears fruit because it is not optional for us if we want to be a proactive believer. It is a necessity. It is a necessity for our spiritual growth. In our spiritual growth we move from the milk of the foundational truths of the Bible to the “strong food” which can help us discern good and evil in our surroundings. Finally, a proactive life spent studying God’s word results in a believer who can be profitable to God, and can be effectively used by God.

### 3. Spiritual principles for studying the Bible

#### A. Introduction.

Our society likes things fast. Fast food outlets offer food in a very short time frame. The purchaser need not concern themselves with the preparing and presentation of the food. All they concern themselves with is the consumption of the food.

The reactive believer is the same. They thoroughly love going to church; singing and worshipping with others. However, their diet is typically one for which the (spiritual) food was prepared and presented by another.

The proactive believer is one who has learned to dine upon God's word. Through their process of studying God's word they have learned the steps necessary in preparing it for consumption. When preparing (physical) food for consumption you must take certain principles and factors into account:

- Is this the kind of food I need right now?
- Is this food prepared properly? Did I cook it long enough?
- Is there any meat to this food? Or is it merely liquid calories?

The same holds true for our study of the Scriptures. There are certain spiritual principles which we should take into account as we read God's word and study it in preparation to our consuming it.

#### B. God's word has a purpose.

Isaiah 55:11 tells us *"So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it."* God has a purpose in giving us His word. His word is powerful and will accomplish the task He has given it. It is up to us to will ourselves to allow it to accomplish its designed purpose in us.

In I Corinthians 10:11 Paul tells us *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."* This comes in the midst of a passage dealing with temptations we face in life. Israel was faced with them but *"The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play."* (Exodus 32:6). The Scripture was written for us, that we may learn from their experience – so that we could be proactive in our spiritual lives.

### C. Knowing God's word is not optional.

Psalm 119 (a great Psalm on God's word) tells us in verse 11 "*Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You.*" Many have taken this verse to speak of memorization of God's word. I submit it means more than mere memorization. Unless the person memorizing something knows how to use it and when to use what they have memorized, it is of no use to them.

Memorization carries with it the idea you have studied the item you are memorizing. The memorization then carries a purpose, it means something. If we are to win the battlefield of our mind, God's word cannot be a mere mantra to us. We must have some connection to it – it must have an impact on us, some meaning to us.

If we have studied God's word, and we are actively applying it to our lives, we *by reason of use have our senses exercised to discern both good and evil*". We are better equipped to withstand temptation and life.

### D. Do what the Scripture teaches.

A great sister passage to the verse we just referenced is found in Psalm 119:9 "*How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word.*" The key is not in merely **knowing** God's word, but in **applying** God's word. My Mesa amps were not effective for me until I actually **applied** what I read from the manual.

James tells us in 1:22 "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*". If we do not apply and practice what we study, we deceive ourselves as to the type of believer we are. We are reactive, and not proactive.

As we obey God's word, we learn (from experience) the principles which are contained therein. We all know – in our head – some of the promises of Jesus. But until we actually experience them, we cannot know them to the depth God wants us to know them.

### E. Scripture will agree with Scripture.

II Peter 1:20-21 "<sup>(20)</sup> ... *no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation,* <sup>(21)</sup> *for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.*". There are several different theories on the interpretation of this verse. The one which makes the most sense to me is that Scripture is not the idea of any one of the writers, but rather is the product of each writer being moved/inspired by the Holy Spirit.

I think of it like this. Picture each writer of Scripture as being a boat. Moses may be a big schooner. David a vessel made for war. Peter, a fishing boat. All are sailing vessels.

As they are on a lake, the wind (the Holy Spirit in our example) breathes upon each of them and propels them across the lake – to the exact destination He wants that boat (writer) to reach. The waves and wake made by the boat equates to the personality and writing style of the individual writer. Each writer made their impact on the voyage; each one had a definitive wake in the water. But the destination was not of their doing. The destination, the final product, was of God's doing.

Since every writer of Scripture was moved by the same source, the Holy Spirit, the message (the destination) of each of their writings is both unique, and common. Just like I cannot help but be myself (*much to the chagrin of others*) God cannot help but be Himself. As such His control of the inspiration of Scriptures will reflect Him – a single source.

In the end, this means the message God gave Moses in Genesis is not going to contradict the message God gave Peter in his epistles. They may use different words and different styles (*the different wakes in the water*), but their message and content will both take us to the same destination – Jesus.

As we study Scripture, we must keep this in mind. Because there is one Author, we should look for and expect a unity and continuity in what Scripture teaches us. Especially as we consider the next point.

#### **F. Do not let unclear Scripture negate clear Scripture.**

Some Scripture is very clear. Others, we sometimes have a hard time knowing specifically what God is saying. This is not new. It was around in the early church. Peter tells us in II Peter 3:15-16 “<sup>(15)</sup> *And consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—*<sup>(16)</sup> *as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.*” Just like today, people have some trouble discerning exactly what Paul is saying in some of his writings.

Those who read and touch only the surface of Scripture walk away from their experience convinced there are contradictions and errors in the Bible. One such error which causes trouble even today is the faith vs works debate based on comparing the writings of Paul and James. Knowing from our last point that the origin of all Scripture is **one** Person, we understand Scripture will agree with Scripture.

We apply that principle when we do not let an unclear passage cause us to question the truth explained in a very clear passage. For example, we know Paul is very clear in Ephesians 2 that salvation is a gift of God's grace and is received by faith. Very clear. We can read in Mark 10 of the rich young ruler to whom Jesus pretty much said “Sell all that you have and give to the poor ... then you will have eternal life”. If Paul's writing is clear, this one is a bit unclear.

Did Jesus actually mean this individual had to work his way into possession of eternal life, work his way in by selling all that he had?

If we apply the spiritual principle of “do not let unclear Scripture negate clear Scripture” we can immediately eliminate “works” as what Jesus is teaching. It must be something else. If we are a young believer, we could get really messed up, we could end up (as Peter said) twisting them all out of shape and get our doctrines wrong.

## **G. Conclusion.**

We thus have several guiding principles to keep in mind as we study Scripture (bearing in mind these are only a list to “get us going”):

- As we approach the studying of Scripture, we bear in mind there is a purpose to our study of it. God gave it with a purpose.
- We realize our study of scripture is not optional. If we are to be a proactive believer, we must study the Bible.
- As we study Scripture, we must obey it. We must put what we learn into action. Only by doing this can we progress from milk to strong meat.
- Because scripture will agree with scripture, we should expect a unity and cohesiveness in what we learn from God’s word.
- As we encounter unclear passages (perhaps it is our first time to encounter a particular passage), we do not let the unclear passage undermine something we know to be true – based on an absolutely clear passage.

## 4. Hints for studying the Bible

### A. Tools which can help.

There are many Bible study helps and tools available today. Many of them are good. Some are not.

One thing to consider in speaking of tools is to not allow the tool itself become the object of study. We can get so many Bible study books and commentaries that we turn to them instead of to the Bible itself.

Another thing to consider when thinking of Bible study helps is to consider the source. Not all Bible study helps are equally valid and good. As great as the internet is, I tend to place it lower in priority as a source simply because truth and error yell at the same volume on the internet. In some situations, Google's results must be taken with a grain of salt.

Some tools which I find helpful:

A Bible I can read. Find a translation you can understand Find one you like to read. If we use a translation which we like, we are more likely to continue in our Bible reading and study. A good option may be a study Bible or a reference Bible.

Another good thing to do is to get a Bible app which has your preferred translation. An advantage of a Bible app is you can use it to look up words (as you would with a concordance). I personally prefer a hard-copy Bible for my personal reading and study. But I also have an app on my PC for use in searching for verses containing certain words.

- Use multiple translations. If you can, use a second translation as a help when you study your Bible. Read the passage in both translations and compare them. For Bible study, I use a parallel Bible when I want to compare translations. A parallel Bible has multiple columns of the same Scripture text, but from different translations. Mine, for example, has the NIV, NLT, NKJV, and "the Message".
- Keep notes. As you study your Bible and learn things, keep a notebook of the truths you learn. I find actually writing something down causes me to quantify my thoughts (which helps me make sure I actually understand it) and help me remember what I have learned.
- Use a Bible dictionary. Using a Bible dictionary will help you understand the meaning of the original words used in Scripture. For example, the English word "know" is translated from several different Greek words. Having a Bible dictionary (such as the one by Merrill Unger) will you in knowing which word was used in the passage you are studying.

- Use a Bible commentary. A good Bible commentary will help you as you start to study the Bible. A good one will not only help you glean the interpretation of a passage; it will help you with the context and background pertaining to the passage you are studying. It will also give you other Scripture references to follow. Two challenges with using a commentary are:
  1. Make sure you get a doctrinally sound commentary. Since a commentary is likely to lean toward the bent of its authors, choose one which has a balanced approach to Scripture.
  2. Take care lest fall into the trap of studying the commentary. As you study a passage, make an attempt to discern the context and the meaning yourself. Exercise your own Bible study skills. Then go to the commentary to read the author's thoughts.

## **B. Practices which can help.**

There are also some practices we should follow as we read and study our Bibles. These practices position us to gain the most from the time we spend in God's word.

- "Your" place. Find a place where you are comfortable studying. It should be a quiet place, free from as much distraction as possible. It could be your bedroom, office, porch, or kitchen table. Find that place and return to that same place each time you study. Over time, your mind will learn what to expect when you are in "your" study place.
- Pray. The best way to start any time we spend in God's word, whether reading or studying, is to pray and express to God our need and desire for Him to guide us in our time.
- Trust. As you then begin your reading and studying time, relax and trust God to do what you have asked Him to do.
- Read the passage multiple times. Reading a passage once allows our minds to pick out and retain only a smattering of the detail and content of the passage. Re-reading the passage multiple times causes the content of the passage to become more familiar to us. As you read a passage multiple times, you will start to take in the entirety of the passage. As you read the verses at the start of the passage, you will find you begin to realize where the passage is going.

Perhaps you are reading of an individual's encounter with Jesus. At the start of the passage you read of the interaction between that individual and Jesus. At the end of the passage you read of the conclusion Jesus makes and the action He takes. As you go back and re-read the passage, as you re-read that interaction between the individual and

Jesus, you are now able to place it in the context of what you know Jesus does.

- Search for the context. In the passage you are studying, find the answer to questions such as:
  - Who is speaking? Is it Jesus? Is it a disciple? Is it an unsaved individual?
  - To whom are they speaking? Was Jesus talking to His disciples are the Pharisees? He spoke to each group differently.
  - When did this event occur? Was it during Israel's time in the wilderness, or in the time of the Judges? The social and economic background was different for each period.
  - What is the situation? If it is a Psalm, is it a Psalm of David written during a time when He was troubled because of His enemies, or one where He was "on the mountain" praising God?

### C. Methods which can help.

We have discussed the tools which can assist you in your Bible study along with some practices which will help. Let's now look at some methodologies of bible study. The following is a short list of methods of study which use those tools. And, as before, this is definitely not an exhaustive list.

- **Book study:** Study an entire book in scripture. Read the book through (for larger books it may take several sittings), and then break the book down into sections.

Your Bible may well provide an outline of the Book. Study each section, reading the section and then breaking it down into its elements – which are probably going to be individual chapters. See where each chapter fits into the overall book.

Don't concern yourself with studying each individual verse. The idea in this type of study is to learn the overall gist of the Book, how the book flows through its separate sections. (*But, as you see passages and verses which really pique your interest, make a note of them so you can come back and study them later*).

Since you are **studying** book, this will not be a two-day event. It may take you a while to work your way through some of the larger books in Scripture. But, when you are done, you will have a good overall understanding of the book.

- **Paragraph study:** Once you understand the overall theme of a book in Scripture, and how the author presents that theme, it can then be a

good time to study individual verses and paragraphs which caught your interest.

As with the book study, re-read these paragraphs so you have a good “working knowledge” of their contents. Use your Bible dictionary to define words which stick out to you. Use your commentary to assist you in learning how to interpret the passages. Allow the Holy Spirit to apply those truths to the issues in your life.

- **Subject/word study:** As you grow in your Bible study, you will want to learn more about different subjects. What does the Bible say about marriage? What did Jesus say about fasting?

Use your Bible’s concordance or your Bible app to list the verses in which the subject/word you are studying is mentioned. Use your dictionary to see which Greek/Hebrew word was translated into the word you are studying. Compare the different ways the different authors spoke on that subject, including which word they used to describe that subject.

This is a good time to use your notebook – so you can keep track of each reference ... and what you gleaned from that reference.

You can also find books by good Christian authors on certain subjects. As you embark upon your Bible study, these authors may help you quantify the things you are learning. For example, the subject of “prayer” will cause you to find a veritable plethora of references in the Bible. To group these references together (as in, these 10 verses reference the need for prayer, these 17 speak of the attitude of prayer, ...) it would be valuable to find a good study guide on the subject of prayer. Use that guide to help you work your way through the references.

## 5. Additional results of studying the Bible

### A. Drawing closer to Jesus.

John 6:29 *“You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”* This quote is a rebuke from Jesus to those who followed Him but refused to believe. Contained within that rebuke is a promise: *“these are they which testify of Me.”* Jesus tells us that the Scriptures themselves testify of Him.

In Luke 24:27 tells us *“And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.”* Jesus used the Old Testament writings (*which was all they had at this time*) and showed how they spoke to Him.

The result was fantastic! Luke continues in verses 31 and 32 with *“(31) Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight. (32) And they said to one another, “Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*. These two individuals had their eyes opened and began to see Jesus as He was. I love how it turned their heart around: *“Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?”*

As we study the Scripture, we too will see more of Jesus and be drawn into a deeper relationship with Him. Jesus will begin to “consume” and “ignite” our hearts.

### B. Becoming a stronger, more stable believer.

As we study the Bible, we are able to not only interpret it, but apply it to the issues of life. I Corinthians 2:13-14 tells us *“(13) These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. (14) But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”*.

These verses follow a section of Scripture where Paul tells us the Holy Spirit was sent to us to reveal spiritual truths to us. In these two verses we are told the natural man (one without the Holy Spirit) cannot “receive” the things of God. This does not speak of understanding the interpretation or meaning of Scripture. It speaks of the application of the Scriptures.

For example, the truth of the resurrection is a part of Scripture and can be understood by anyone who reads it. However, the application of the resurrection of Jesus to our lives can be accomplished only through the Holy Spirit – as He reveals the application of that spiritual truth.

Each passage of Scripture can be interpreted in only one way. While it is true some prophecies have a near (as in “near” to the time of the author) fulfillment and a “far” (as in a later time period) fulfillment, there is still only one interpretation.

The truths from that correct interpretation can be applied in many different ways. The Holy Spirit leads us in the application of that truth of Scripture to our lives. This is what the author of Hebrews meant when they said *“by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”*

This is something the unsaved cannot do. They have no spiritual life. They may be able to perceive general applications (as in “be good to the poor”). But only the Holy Spirit can bring specific application of Scripture to our lives.

#### **C. Becoming a more effective witness for Jesus.**

Peter tells us in I Peter 3:15 *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”* He exhorts us to be ready and able to give the basis for our faith and our hope. “Because my pastor said so” is not a good answer. “Because my church teaches this” is not a good answer.

A good answer comes from God’s Word. We don’t have to mechanically spit verses out at people. We need to tell them the basis of our faith is God’s Word – not our musings or the word of man.

The only way we can have such a firm foundation is to study God’s word.

#### **D. Being able to teach others.**

Paul tells us once we learn the Scriptures, we should be able to teach others. *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.”* (II Timothy 2:2). As we grow in our knowledge of Scripture, we should begin sharing with others, teaching them what we have come to know – just as those who came before us taught us.

We should prepare ourselves and be able to teach what we have learned. Paul continues in verse 24 with *“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach ...”*. God expects us to be able to teach others.

#### **E. Conclusion.**

Our study of the Scriptures will lead us to Jesus. We will begin to know Him deeper and deeper as we study His Word and obey. We will become stronger in our faith, moving on to the meat of the word; able to apply God’s word to more and more situations in our lives. God will be able to use us more than before –

as we are becoming a better equipped servant. Finally, through our study and subsequent growth, we will be able to teach others.

In short, we will be able to accomplish what the writer of Hebrews mentions in 5:12 "*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, ...*".

## **6. Conclusion(s)**

We have seen multiple aspects of the study of the Bible. Reasons to study it, tools for use in the study of it, good practices to use while we study it, things to expect from our study of God's Word.

All of this has been from our point of view. What about God's point of view? How can our study of the Bible impact God?

A good servant of God, one whom God can use more and more, is one who is learned in God's word; one who has studied God's word. A well-known verse on this subject is found in Timothy 2:15 "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*" A worker who is "approved" is one who can be used by their master for whatever task lies ahead. We can become more available and useful to God as we study the Scriptures and apply them to our lives.

May the study of God's Word, along with the application of God's Word to our lives, be a trademark of the Discovery family. May our spiritual discipline include not only prayer, but intense and heartfelt study of God's Word.

Thereby, may Discovery Church be one which grows to be more and more useful to God.