

Studying the Bible Prayerfully and Obediently

- The Word of God is important.

Q: What does God say about His Word?

- Joshua 1:8 // This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
- Psalm 119:105 // Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.
- Matthew 4:4 // But he answered, "It is written, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17 // All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- Hebrews 4:12 // For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Q: Is there a "right" way to study the Bible?

- Some study the Bible as a rulebook that gives them direction for how to live their lives.
- Some study the Bible's stories and characters for inspiration or a model for living a godly life.
- Some study the Bible with the mystical approach: let it fall open to any page and you will find some spiritual encouragement or guidance to help you through the day.
- Some study the Bible with the academic approach, which carefully examines each passage of Scripture to determine precisely what the original authors intended to say.
- Most of us cycle through each of these approaches and several others in our attempt to get the most out of the Bible.

1. Describe your experience with studying the Bible. What approaches have you tried? What has been effective? What has been ineffective? What have you learned in the process?

Studying the Bible Devotionally

- When we read the Bible we are hearing the voice of God.
- When we study the Bible we must be mindful of His authority as He conveys His purpose and will to us.

Q: How should we read a book that carries the same weight as the audible voice of God coming down from heaven?

- We should read these words devotionally. (We should be "devoted" to them)
- When God speaks to us, we should be quick to listen, eager to absorb everything He tells us.
- We should enjoy reading the Bible.
- We often get so caught up in the busyness of our lives or the details of the biblical text that we forget that we should be thrilled. We are hearing God's words to us!

- If you want to get a feel for what it means to enjoy the Bible, then read Psalm 119. It's basically a love letter written to God's Word.
- Two things are particularly striking about this psalm:
 - 1) The psalmist had a lot to say about God's Word (it's 176 verses long!)
 - 2) The psalmist really, really liked it. The repeated refrain is that he delights in God's law, statutes, precepts, commandments, etc. At one point (vs. 131) he even said, "I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments." That's a serious desire!
- We should long for God's word as life sustaining nourishment. (1 Pet. 2:2–3)
- God has given us the Bible to use in discipling, counseling, teaching, and encouraging the people around us (2 Tim. 3:16–17).
- As we study the Bible to teach, correct, or encourage other people, we need to let God's truths saturate every aspect of our minds, hearts, and lifestyles.

2. *What does it look like to take joy in reading the Bible? Have you ever experienced this? If so, what is it like? If not, why do you think you've never enjoyed the Bible?*

3. *Read through Psalm 119. What do you find striking, challenging, or encouraging?*

Prayer and Understanding

- Prayer is an important part of understanding Scripture.

Some believe that if we examine the biblical text closely enough—possibly even learning Hebrew and Greek—if we consult enough commentaries, and if we diagram every passage perfectly, then we can arrive at the true meaning of any biblical text. Each of these elements is important, but this mentality leaves no room for prayer, which means that there is no dependence on the Holy Spirit. It is a mentality of complete self-reliance. (John 16:13)

- We must rely on the Holy Spirit to reveal the wisdom of God to us.

1 Corinthians 2:9-14 // 9 But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him"—
10 these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11 For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12 Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13 And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

- We cannot understand the Bible without the Holy Spirit's help.
- Dependence on God in our thinking is a fundamental aspect of being human.
- Even before sin entered the world (Gen. 3), people needed revelation from God in

order to understand our existence and the world we live in. And this dependency only intensified after the fall.

- As a result of the fall, people are corrupt not only in their actions, but also in their minds (**Rom. 1:21**).
- This means that we naturally stray from God morally (a concept we're all pretty familiar with), but in addition to that, our minds are tainted by **sin**.
- Our **natural** inclination to sin intensifies our dependence on the Spirit of God to help us see God's truth as it really is, not as we'd like it to be.
- Without the Spirit, we will look at God's revelation in nature and in the Bible and misinterpret it.
- This is why **prayer** is absolutely essential to Bible study.
- Prayer is foundational to understanding the mind of God.
- Prayer is simply conversation with God, an act of faith, although "your Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Matt. 6:8), nevertheless we speak to Him with the intentions of deepening our relationship with Him.
- Begin your time of study in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal the **wisdom** of God's word to you and establish it in your life.

4. In practical terms, what does it mean to study the Bible prayerfully? What can you do to build prayer and dependence on God into your study of the Bible?

Studying the Bible Obediently

Q: What is the value of truth if it doesn't change us? (James 2:14-26)

- The strongest reason for saturating our Bible study in prayer is that we desperately need the Spirit to make our lives align with the truths we are studying.
- We need the Spirit to make us loving and to make our knowledge translate into loving action. (you can't do it on your own)
- Knowledge is **not** the sum total of our mission on this earth.
- Paul said knowledge can be completely worthless and even **harmful** : knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor. 8:1)
- Knowledge should enable us to love God and love our neighbors more fully.
- If we're not putting what we know to work in our lives, then our knowledge will simply make us more arrogant.
- Pray that God would give us a deeper love for Him and others so we can take the truths He reveals and put them into **practice**.
- Pray, obey, and begin enjoying the peace that comes from studying the Bible obediently.

5. Take a minute to think through the commands that you know God wants us all to be doing (for example, loving the people around you, forgiving others, praying, etc.). Now evaluate your life in light of these commands.

If these things are not manifested in the way you live, then you're misusing the Bible. Putting our knowledge into practice will be a **lifelong** pursuit for all of us, and we rarely see dramatic, immediate results. But if you're not seeing the things you learn translating into the things you do, then something foundational is out of place.

Studying the Bible with Faith

- If the Bible is indeed the very words of God, then those words carry the same authority and power as God Himself.
- When the Bible gives us a command, that command carries all the authority of God. Likewise, when the Bible makes a promise, that promise is as trustworthy as God.
- We read the Bible, but we don't act as if we believe what it says.
- We read about judgment for those who deny Jesus, but it doesn't change the way we reach out to the people around us.

Q: Do we really believe (i.e., have faith) in what God has said?

- The grace of God is another example: The Bible is clear that God forgives (Eph. 2:1–9, 1 John 1:9), yet many of us walk around with doubts and insecurities based upon past actions.

Q: If we studied with faith, wouldn't we live with visible peace and joy?

- We need to study the Bible with (simple) absolute faith.
- When we read that God works all things according to the counsel of His will (Eph. 1:11), then we need to believe it and live as though it were true.
- When we read that the Holy Spirit empowers us to put to death the deeds of the body (Rom. 8:13), then we need to put our complete confidence in that truth and live as people who are empowered by the very Spirit of God.

7. In your own words, explain what it means to study the Bible with faith. Do you see this playing out in your life? How so?

The Bible and Transformation

- Good Bible study leads to transformation. It may not happen all at once, but we should be noticeably different because of our time with Scripture.

Hebrews 4:12 // For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

- The Bible isn't merely an inanimate object that we study and pull information from. It has a life of its own. It acts. It reads us ; it pierces to the deepest parts of our being and discerns our motivations.
- Our God is a living God, His Word is alive, and He works through His Word to actively transform every part of our being.

James used striking imagery to highlight our need to be transformed by the Bible:

James 1:22-25 // But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. 25 But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

James compared the process of studying the Bible to a man looking into a mirror. Just like a mirror, the Bible has the ability to reveal to you the truth about your condition. First, he described a man who looks into the mirror, clearly sees the reflection, and then walks away without doing anything. This person is clearly foolish, but he also perfectly represents the way most Christians study the Bible. They read their Bibles, see the truth that demands transformation, then walk away as if nothing ever happened.

Q: Why do you study the Bible? Is it because you want to be changed, or are you studying to gain knowledge?

James followed his powerful metaphor with these startling words:

James 1:26–27 // If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person’s religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.

- Don’t live as one of those who “ deceive themselves.”

God has been so gracious to speak to us. His words lead to life. They set us free ! So much of God’s blessing comes to us as we listen to His voice and put His Word into practice. It would be a shame if we merely studied and didn’t allow these words to bless us as He intended.

8. Take a minute to consider everything you’ve thought through in this session. What changes do you need to make in the way you study the Bible?

9. Spend some time in prayer. Ask God to give you a heart for His Word. Ask Him to help you approach His Word devotionally and obediently.