

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

II Timothy 2:15

Introduction:

Reading the Bible and *studying* the Bible are two different things. One can read the Bible a whole lifetime and *still* not become *knowledgeable* of its contents. Study takes *time, tools* and *tenacity*. You will have to set aside specific periods of time for study; you need to acquire indispensable tools (a concordance, a word study book and a Bible dictionary); you will need to pursue it with persistence, until you have a meaningful grasp of its contents.

Several *important rules* should be kept in mind in studying the Bible:

1. *Context*: Determine who is speaking; to whom is the writer speaking; during what period does the event take place.
2. *Language*: Determine if it is literal or figurative.
3. *Nature of the statement*: Is it a question, command, explanation, narrative, prediction, parable, illustration, rhetorical? etc.
4. *Meaning of the original words*: Here is where the use of a word study book is essential. (A regular, secular dictionary is of little help).
5. *Background of the times*: Consider the cultural, historical, economic, religious, geographical, or political situation at the time of the writing.

There are *various methods* that may be used in studying the Bible. Here are a few:

I. BOOK OR CHAPTER

Read the book or chapter through first. Then go back and decide if there is an *outline* of its contents (you may want to consult a “study Bible” or commentary). Look up the meaning of important words. Determine how each sentence relates to the paragraph, chapter, or book. Look for a *theme* that may run throughout the book. Consult *several* commentaries (never just one) for help on difficult verses.

II. TOPICAL

With the use of a concordance (or during your regular daily Bible reading), write down where all the verses on a given subject appear. Read each verse or passage (in context) to see what it says about the topic. Write down a summary of what each passage teaches. Draw conclusions from the sum total of all passages consulted.

III. WORD STUDY

In a concordance look up every place *a certain word* is used. Consult a word study book to determine the *meaning* of each word (realizing context may affect its meaning). Determine how each word relates to the context in which it is found. Various books can be helpful: *Expository Dictionary of NT Words*, by W. E. Vine, *New Testament Words*, by William Barclay, etc.

IV. BIBLE CHARACTER

Look up in a concordance all the passages where a particular *person's name* is mentioned. Read each passage carefully. Then analyze each person according to their attitudes and behavior toward God and life: positive or negative traits, degree of their success or failure, reactions or choices under various circumstances, etc.

V. CHARACTER QUALITY

Look up in a concordance or topical Bible all the passages where a particular *character quality* (both positive and negative) is mentioned (patience, faith, love, courage, envy, fear, etc.). Then write down all you learn about such qualities (how obtained, what they accomplished, how they hindered, etc.).

VI. BACKGROUND STUDY.

With the use of such reference books as a Bible dictionary or Bible encyclopedia, read up on geographical locations, political conditions, religious practices, monetary or economic standards, manners and customs, cultural habits or practices, etc. These books contain concise articles, alphabetically listed, on such topics as Apostle, Baptism, Circumcision, Day of Atonement, Evangelist, Flood, Gentiles, Hell, etc.

Conclusion:

1. Be willing to make a *financial investment* in a few “study tools.”
2. Careful attention must be given to the prevalence of *religious bias* and *denominational slants* in some of the reference works consulted.
3. Remember, the Bible itself is the best *commentary* on any given passage.
4. *Sharing* what you learn in your studies will make your Bible study more profitable (personal conversations, Bible classes, communion talks, etc.)
5. Utilize a system for *preserving the fruit* of your studies (note books, file folders).
6. Never stop studying the Bible. Your spiritual growth *depends* on it.