



## New Ways to Study the Bible

### RADICAL Bible Study

Read the text

Analyze what the author is trying to say

Distinguish between what is historically and culturally relevant

Internalize the passage. Sit for a while and see what comes to mind

Correlate the passage to other places in Scripture to make sure what you're thinking doesn't contradict itself.

Apply the text to your own life situation

Live it.

### How to Effectively Study Scripture

**Have a goal or objective.** Otherwise you will likely lose interest. Some good reasons or objectives for study include:

- Scripture memory – Study through a book with the goal of being able to summarize each chapter from memory. This way you will truly 'own' a book of the Bible and will be able to tell stories from the text that are logical and follow the patterns of Scripture.
- Make a Chart – Make a chart to uncover something in the text. For example, you could read a gospel with the intent of making a chart that tracks Jesus' teachings, or you could read an epistle with the intent of charting God's promises throughout or the ways that love wins out over evil every time.
- Use your study for teaching – Take what you are learning in your personal study time and share it with a small group or in discipling a younger believer. The insight that you gain through your personal time will be a tremendous asset in these settings, and you will still learn more as you re-study the text.
- Follow someone else's teaching – If your church pastor, campus staff worker or small group Bible study is studying something, study along with them. Prepare the passage you will be studying a week in advance, so that when you hear the pastor or teacher speaking from the text you will have already been forming your own thoughts and opinions on the text.

**Asking the right questions is the key to understanding Scripture.** Good questions usually lead to good insights into what the author is trying to convey. Good questions to ask:

- What is the historical context surrounding the text?
- Why would the text be meaningful, refreshing or controversial to the original audience?
- What was the culture like when the text was written? How does this impact the author's message?
- How is the text relevant to us today? In what ways is our culture similar to the original audience?
- What does this text parallel in Scripture. Where else does the story or the verse take you to in the Bible? Perhaps Paul's teachings in Philippians remind you of a gospel parable – compare the two and see what greater insight into the passage the new verse may provide.

**If you don't see the point of a particular passage or group of verses, keep reading and meditating until it is relevant.**

"All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching," (2 Timothy 3:16) therefore God has a purpose for even the most seemingly mundane list or historical aspect of Scripture. **Didn't see anything? Be sure to persist in observing the text.** This stuff will come to you. It's in there and is good. Don't be afraid to spend several minutes, days, or even weeks on these points until God shows you what he wants you to see.

**Don't feel like you have to have all the answers to all your questions.** It is not uncommon to have twice as many unanswered questions as answered ones. If you don't have unanswered questions, you're probably not stretching yourself and really digging deep enough into the text.

**Don't be in a hurry to get to the next thing.** Scripture will be more meaningful to you if you take time to truly understand the text than if you feel compelled to finish a book by a certain date or feel like you have to spend a half hour or an hour reading every day. The most important discipline you can instill in yourself is that of meditating on the Scripture and taking time to listen to what God may be teaching you.

**Keep reading.** As you begin to develop a good knowledge of Scripture, your confidence will grow. You will be able to answer questions that you and others have with greater confidence because you have a wealth of Scripture behind you.

## Meeting with God

- Take a few moments to quiet yourself. Thank Jesus for his presence and ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in this time.
- What scripture did you received lately?
- Re-read the passage, asking the Spirit to clearly show you how the passage intersects your life. Perhaps God has for you:
  - A word of encouragement
  - A challenge or correction
  - An irritation
  - Something to show you about himself or yourself
  - A word for your friends or other GI folks
- Spend some time writing out your prayers to God around the topic he is addressing through the scripture.
- Is there someone you should share what God is speaking to you about for the sake of accountability and support?
- Pray for the day, that you would have an open heart to receive all Jesus has for you.

### Bible study boils down to the following B.A.S.I.C. points

*(taken from New Living Translation Web site – [www.nlt.com](http://www.nlt.com))*

**Bible**—It may seem obvious, but it's still crucial to have a Bible when you study. It's helpful to have at least two different Bible versions opened to the same passage. Speakers and readers of the English language have a gift of multiple translations of the Scriptures. These can often help you gain new insight from the way that specific terms are handled in different texts. For example, you can read [Ephesians 3:17a](#) in one version as, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (New International Version), and then turn to the New Living Translation and read, "Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him." Comparing the versions allows you to sense the depth of Paul's prayer.

**Attitude**—Receptivity and attention are crucial for those who want to benefit from their study of the Bible. This means that you open the Bible expecting God's Word to speak to you, and that you are willing to put into practice what you learn. Those who read the Bible with a ho-hum attitude, expecting to learn nothing, are rarely disappointed. But God rewards curiosity, hunger, questions, and an openness to him. One of the best ways to manage your attitude involves praying before you study the Bible. Ask God to open your eyes, mind, and heart as you read and think about his Word. Ask God to point out any barriers that might keep you from learning and then wait for a moment in silence to allow him to answer your prayer. Open your Bible with anticipation.

**System**—Over the centuries, followers of Jesus have developed many approaches to reading and studying the Bible. The discipline of *studying* is more systematic than the very beneficial practice of simply reading the Bible for devotional reasons. Bible study is methodical, deliberate, and time-consuming. Devotional Bible reading is much like eating nutritious fast food, whereas Bible study parallels a full course meal. Both kinds of spiritual nourishment have their place. One system may involve using a notebook or journal for taking notes. Another system may involve using a prepared study guide or workbook. Bible study should involve multiple readings of the passage, and maybe underlining important texts. Have in mind a list of the things you want to observe as you read: verbs (where commands hide), people (where life-lessons hide), character traits (where examples hide), and odd items that might provoke a good question. Familiar passages require even more attention, not less. (For example: [1 Corinthians 13:13](#) lists "faith, hope and love" and informs us that "the greatest of these is love." *Why* is love the greatest of these?) Then look for answers in the whole context of the verse or passage. Choose a system or approach to Bible study to follow and use it for a while. Develop the skill to approach various passages in the same way, training yourself to be observant and thoughtful. There are many tools available to help you answer common questions and avoid errors caused by lack of knowledge of what the rest of the Bible teaches. There are many pre-outlined study guides (such as the *Life Application Bible Studies* from Tyndale Publishers) that you can use to facilitate your study. Other tools such as Bible dictionaries, concordances, and commentaries will give needed background information and broaden your understanding.

**Involvement**—The Bible is "alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword" ([Hebrews 4:12](#)). God's Word will speak into your life. Get involved with it. Be ready to obey. If you find yourself primarily thinking about how passages apply to *other* people's lives, you are probably not paying careful enough attention.

**Confidence**—The Bible is God's Word, so you can be confident that it is true and right. It will be your guide and companion for life. Don't expect to understand all of it at first. You can grow into it. Don't worry, because those parts that you do understand will be plenty to keep you busy doing Bible study for a long time.

Other methods available at <http://www.intervarsity.org/greek/resources/discipleship>.