

STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

The Bible is unique in its production, preservation, proclamations, and product. In its *production*, it is a harmonious and unified message of redemption that has emerged out of diversity of authors, circumstances, and literary forms. In its *preservation*, it has miraculously withstood the ravages of time, persecution, and criticism, and continues to be the best selling book in the world. In its *proclamations*, it stands alone in its revelation of God's plan from eternity to eternity and in its life-giving message. In its *product*, it has changed the course of history, reached more people, and transformed more lives than any other book.

In spite of all this, the Bible is often taken for granted, even by those who vehemently support its inspiration and authority. Many believers associate Bible study with drudgery; limiting themselves to mere samples, they never cultivate a true taste for its contents. There are two basic reasons for this problem: lack of a proper *motivation* and lack of a proper *method*. This booklet is designed to overcome these obstacles to fruitful Bible study.

To own a Bible is a tremendous responsibility – to whom much has been given, much is required (Luke 12:48). The Scriptures must not merely be owned, but known; not merely known, but believed; and not merely believed, but obeyed. To encourage this, we will look at the purpose, prerequisites, principles, process, and practice of Bible study.

PURPOSE OF BIBLE STUDY

The Doorway to a New Domain

Scripture tells us that there are really two realms: that which is seen and that which is unseen. The first is the realm of apparant reality, the world we know through our minds and our five senses. If it were not for divine revelation, we would be locked into this level without any way of breaking through to the second realm, the world of ultimate reality. Bound to the level of the finite, the relative, and the temporal, we would be unable to find the meaning and purpose we long for that can only come from the level of the infinite, the absolute, and the eternal. There would be no hope of finding answers to the basic questions of life: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? Where am I going?

God gave us His Word to deliver us from this domain of darkness and to transfer us to the domain of light, the kingdom of His beloved Son (Col. 1:13). The Bible reveals the full scope of the Lord's creative and redemptive plan for His people. Only in its pages can we gain a perspective on our corporate past, present, and future and realize the overwhelming significance of our new identity as the recipients of "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ" (Eph. 1:3).

By drinking deeply and regularly from the well of God's Word, our entire value system will be gradually transformed from the temporal to the eternal. The study of Scripture sets our minds on the things above (Col. 3:2), the source of

all biological and spiritual life. It enables us to "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:18).

This is the heart of wisdom--plugging into the realm of ultimate reality and walking in the light, life, and love of the Lord. By pursuing the precepts and principles of the Bible, we gain the most important skill of all: the ability to live each area of life under the dominion of the King. The Bible does not tell us to live and learn; it exhorts us to learn and live.

The Pathway to a Better Life

There are several reasons for getting into the Word and letting the Word get into us. Here are six:

1. *Nourishment and growth.* The Bible was not merely written for our information, but for our transformation. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). While the Bible is an inspired revelation from the living God, it requires our response before it can have an impact upon our lives. Scripture is indeed "profitable for teaching," but its profit does not stop on the level of doctrine; it must move from the head to the heart to accomplish the purpose for which it was given.

God loves us and desires nothing less than our highest good: conformity to the character of His Son. A dynamic relationship with the truth of His Word provides us with the spiritual nourishment we will need to grow into the maturity of Christlikeness.

Exercise: Study 2 Peter 1:2-8 to trace the progressive effect that the knowledge of God and His promises has upon the life of a believer.

2. *New priorities and values.* The study of Scripture can deliver us from the bondage of a temporal perspective and provide us with an eternal value system. By frequently renewing our minds with the Word (Rom. 12:2), our thinking and behavior come more into conformity with God's view of significance, purpose, identity, and success. The pursuit of God's value system leads to fulfillment and joy in contrast to the frustration and unhappiness that result from the pursuit of the world's value system. See Psalm 5:11; 16:5-8; 105:3-4; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Matthew 6:33; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Philippians 1:21; Colossians 1:10-12.

3. *Overcoming temptation.* The study of Scripture provides us with both corrective and preventive medicine. It warns us in advance of the kinds of temptations we can expect (e.g., Prov. 4:10-27; 5:1-23; 1 John 2:15-16), tells us about the process of temptation (see Jas. 1:12-17), and shows us how to deal with temptation (1 Cor. 10:13; Eph. 6:10-18).

4. *Guidance for decision making.* The Scriptures reveal God's moral will for practically every area of life. A working knowledge of the commands, prohibitions, and principles of the Bible will give us wisdom and guidance in the

decisions that shape the course of our earthly existence (Ps. 119:105; Prov. 1:2-5), and a divine perspective that will enable us to respond in the right way to our circumstances and rise above them (Jas. 1:5).

5. *Knowledge of God.* The Bible is a progressive revelation of the person, plan, character, mind, love, and will of our Creator. We cannot hope to know Him and His ways apart from time spent in His revealed Word.

Exercise: All but three verses in Psalm 119 contain a reference to the Word of God (variously referred to as God's laws, decrees, precepts, promises, testimonies, statutes, judgments, ordinances, commands, and words). Read this psalm and record your observations of the beneficial effects of the Scriptures in cultivating a relationship with God.

6. *Knowledge of ourselves.* "For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). The Bible cuts below the facade of appearances and lays bare our secret motivations and plans (cf. 1 Sam. 16:7). As we read it, the Word becomes a mirror that exhibits our true character, exposes areas of self-delusion, and exhorts us to change (see Jas. 1:21-25).

PREREQUISITES OF BIBLE STUDY

The Prerequisite of a Plan

Even if a person realizes the tremendous significance of a working knowledge of the Word in his life, the prospect of Bible study may still seem unexciting and unrewarding because of the inadequate procedures he has used in the past. He may be properly motivated, but he could also be a victim of improper methods.

When people grope in the darkness of haphazard approaches to Scripture, it is little wonder that Bible study seems so unsatisfying and has such a minimal place in their lives. The hit-and-miss approach of Bible roulette provides little spiritual nourishment. Without an ability to understand and apply the truths of Scripture in a practical and meaningful way, believers miss out on the benefits of exploring and discovering biblical truths for themselves. This is why so many Christians have only a secondhand knowledge of the Bible and rely almost exclusively on the input of teachers and preachers.

The sections on the process and practice of Bible study later in this booklet will provide you with a plan that will make your time in the Word more rewarding.

The Prerequisite of Discipline

While we need a plan or method of getting into Scripture for ourselves, no approach to the study of the Bible will be effective without a measure of

discipline and consistency. If we are convinced of the value of time spent in the Word (the problem of motivation) and realize that fruitful approaches are available (the problem of method), the only remaining obstacle is the inertia that keeps us from beginning and tempts us to stop. There is no shortcut to extracting the deeper spiritual truths from the mine of Scripture. Even though they are available to all, we must be willing to expend the effort to find them. The dividends are well worth the effort: consistent time in the Word will shape the way we see the world and the way we live our lives. But this consistency cannot be won without commitment.

The Prerequisite of Dependence

We need a plan for Bible study, and we need the discipline to follow through with that plan so that it will become a habitual part of our lives. But these will do us little good if they are not pursued with a conscious sense of dependence upon the teaching and illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13-15). We must combine discipline (human responsibility) with dependence (divine sovereignty) as we approach the Scriptures. We cannot properly comprehend or respond to biblical truths in our own power; this requires the grace of God.

Exercise: What does 1 Corinthians 2:6-16 say about the role of the Holy Spirit in our understanding of God's revelation?

The Prerequisite of Responsiveness

We must not only open God's Word – we must also *be* open to His Word. James tells us that we must prove ourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves (Jas. 1:22). This requires responsiveness to the truth we receive *as we receive it*. If we are disobedient to the light we have been given, we will not receive further illumination (cf. Mark 4:23-25). The old couplet is true:

Light obeyed increaseth light,

Light rejected bringeth night.

Salvation begins with a response to the person and work of Christ as revealed in Scripture. The sacred writings "are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Non-Christians cannot "accept the things of the Spirit of God" (1 Cor. 2:14) because they do not have the Spirit. Unless a person has a relationship with God, he cannot understand His Word. Similarly, one must grow in this relationship to increase his capacity to understand Scripture. Our fellowship with the Lord is dependent upon obedience (see John 15:14-15), and disobedient Christians cannot accept the solid food of the Word (see 1 Cor. 3:1-3). As G. Campbell Morgan observed, "if we persist in the things against which we are warned, the Bible becomes a sealed book, and we can neither know it, nor teach it."

The Prerequisite of Honesty

"Holy Scripture is the unchangeable word of God to which man must bend himself, and not something which he can bend to his own personal ideas" (Jean Danielou). The truth of the Bible is radical, and we will often be tempted to twist it to fit our preconceived opinions and tone down its message so that we will be more comfortable. We must be honest before the Word, and this means openness to new insights and willingness to give up cherished notions. "Unless we carefully examine the hidden assumptions that constitute our perspective, and seek to discover God's unique perspective on issues critical to understanding Scripture, we are bound to misunderstand. And, misunderstanding, we will find the Bible a disappointing book" (Lawrence O. Richards).

The Prerequisite of Exposure

"For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27). We must expose ourselves and others to the full counsel of God, and this requires a comprehensive view of the entire spectrum of the Bible. There are five basic categories of Scripture: Old Testament historical books, poetical books, and prophetic books; New Testament historical books (Gospels and Acts), and epistles. If we limit ourselves to any one of these categories (e.g., the Gospels or the epistles) and avoid the others, we will suffer from an imbalanced diet and our perspective will be distorted.

PRINCIPLES OF BIBLE STUDY

Rules

1. Treat the Bible as a complete book; it is a unity in diversity. Try to relate each book you study to the central theme of Scripture: God's loving plan to redeem and restore imperfect people through the perfect work of His Son.

2. The Bible is a unified book, but as we study its pages, we should also remember that it is a progressive revelation. Over the fifteen or more centuries during which it was written, its portrait of God and His redemptive program was gradually enriched and clarified. It has been said that, "The New is in the Old concealed; the Old is in the New revealed."

3. Do not regard the Bible as a textbook; it is not merely an object to be observed but an oracle to be obeyed. Approach it with a proper attitude of reverence, care, and receptivity. It is alive with the Spirit of God, and it has the power to change the lives of those who respond to it. It is trustworthy and inexhaustible. There are always fresh truths within its pages, and the more deeply we mine, the more insight we will gain. It can transform our thinking and gradually move us from a human to a divine perspective.

Exercise: Inspiration has been defined as "God's superintendence of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities, they composed and recorded without error His revelation to man in the words of the original autographs" (Charles C. Ryrie). Read the following passages and briefly describe

how each aids your understanding of inspiration: Jeremiah 30:2; Matthew 5:17-18; 15:4; John 10:35; 17:17; Acts 28:25; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 3:15-16; Revelation 22:19.

4. Let the Bible speak for itself. Scripture is its own best interpreter and commentator. This means:

a. Interpret unclear passages in the light of those which are clear. When wrestling with a difficult passage, use cross references to consult other verses which deal with the same subject in a simpler way. Then bring the unclear into conformity with the clear.

b. To be truly biblical, a specific doctrine must incorporate everything the Word has to say about it. We build up our understanding of theology by comparing Scripture with Scripture.

5. Interpret every passage in light of its immediate context (preceding and following verses, paragraph, chapter) and broad context (book, testament, Bible). A verse lifted out of its context can become a pretext. It is not as easy to twist the meaning of a verse when it is observed in its setting.

6. Take the text at face value and interpret it in its plain or literal sense. Do not interpret it in a spiritual, symbolic, or allegorical way unless the context tells you that parables, symbols, or figures of speech are being used. A passage normally has only interpretation, though it may have a number of applications.

7. Be sure to consider the cultural and historical setting. This, along with customs and geography, provides the proper backdrop to assist you in understanding the portion of Scripture you are studying. Ask yourself the question, "What did this passage mean to the people of that time and culture?"

Research

1. In Bible study as well as prayer, it is crucial to choose the right time and place so that we can be consistent. This discipline of consistency is essential to a growing theoretical and practical knowledge of the Word of God. Listen to this statement by D. L. Moody:

A man stood up in one of our meetings and said he hoped for enough out of the series of meetings to last him all his life. I told him he might as well try to eat enough breakfast at one time to last him his lifetime. This is a mistake that people are making; they are running to religious meetings and they think that the meetings are going to do the work. But, if this doesn't bring you into closer contact with the Word of God, the whole impression will be gone in three months.

2. Don't be haphazard in selecting a passage for study. Try to be systematic in your choice of topics, chapters, and books so that your input will come from all parts of Scripture and touch upon every aspect of your life.

Design your study sessions so that you will not sacrifice quality for quantity by

overburdening yourself with unmanageable portions. Work with sections you can thoroughly digest.

3. Avoid getting bogged down in one translation. Use a primary version for in-depth study, memorization, and meditation, but work with others from time to time. Some versions are better for broad reading, while others are more suited to detailed study.

4. Gather information from the text by bombarding it with as many questions as you can and doing the necessary research to answer them. This will force you to delve into the Word instead of skimming over it.

5. Using the information you have collected, determine what the author means and try to glean insights. State your conclusions in the form of principles.

Response

Even if we observe all the rules, engage in conscientious and thorough research, and develop dazzling principles, we can still miss the whole point of Bible study. God did not inspire Scripture so that we could accumulate a great wealth of information, but "that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:17). As Irving L. Jensen noted, "The important thing is not how many times you've gone through the Bible, but whether the Bible has gone through you." We must respond to what we learn through our study by allowing God to transform our attitudes, feelings, and actions. Only then will our study of the Word be glorifying to God.

PROCESS OF BIBLE STUDY

Now that we have looked at the purpose, prerequisites, and principles of Bible study, it is time to begin the process. To do this, you should familiarize yourself with four basic steps that will enrich your time in the Word regardless of what specific method you use: *ask, answer, accumulate, and apply*. With them, Bible study will be productive and meaningful; without them, it will be dry and empty. Use these four steps until they become second nature to you. When you begin to saturate your study with them, your time in the Word will never be the same.

Ask

Ask key questions that when answered will provide insight into the meaning of the text. Perhaps the most important skill in Bible study lies in asking the right questions. Here are the questions you should use:

ASK . . .	IS THERE . . .
WHO? -- The persons	A key word? -- Important to meaning
WHAT? -- The problem, plot	A comparison? -- Often introduced by "like"
WHEN? -- The time	A contrast? -- Often introduced by "but"
WHERE? -- The place	A repetition? -- Indicates emphasis
WHY? -- The purpose, reason	An atmosphere? -- Joy, anger, fear, etc.
HOW? -- The solution, resources	A clear literary form? -- Poetry, prophecy, narrative, etc.
	A progression? -- Events, ideas
	A climax? -- Lesser to greater
	A significant point of grammar? -- Tense, sentence structure, number (singular or plural)

Answer

Good questions demand accurate answers. There are two primary sources for these answers: the text and the tools of the trade.

Text and Context

We have already noted that Scripture best explains Scripture. You will find that many of your questions will be answered in the immediate and broad context of the passage you are studying. Always look here first, and you will experience the joy of creative discovery.

Tools

Begin to collect and use the tools of the trade. These will give you great help in finding the answers you need for any method of Bible study. Just as a carpenter would never go to work without his hammer and saw, the serious student of Scripture would be ill-equipped if the tools of Bible study are not within arm's reach.

Here are some basic study tools you should consider adding to your library:

Modern Translation:

New International Version

New American Standard Version

Study Bible:

The Open Bible

The Ryrie Study Bible

Topical Bible:

Nave's Topical Bible

Concordance:

Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible

Bible Survey:

Talk Thru the Bible

Explore the Book

Bible Handbook:

Unger's Bible Handbook

Bible Dictionary:

New Bible Dictionary

Bible Commentary:

Wycliffe Bible Commentary

New Bible Commentary

Bible Encyclopedia:

Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible

At the end of his life, the Apostle Paul gave this exhortation to Timothy, his child in the faith: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). A careful and consistent use of the text and the tools will help us fulfill this mandate.

Accumulate

Once you have asked the right questions and arrived at clear answers, you are ready to accumulate practical principles. The easiest way to accomplish this is to put on the SPECS that were given to you in "Searching the Scriptures," the fourth lesson of the Search BASIC DISCIPLESHIP booklet:

Sins to Forsake

Promises to Claim

Examples to Follow

Commands to Obey

Summary Thought for Today

Apply

"The end result of all Bible study should be the application to life.

Remember, the Word of God is 'seed' to be planted in your heart, to take root and bear fruit" (Lloyd M. Perry). Because biblical truth touches upon all areas and relationships of life, it is important that we maximize its impact by being very specific in the way we apply it. In this fourth stage, the SPECS you have accumulated throughout your study should now be prayerfully applied to these eight vital relationships:

1. God and You
2. You and Yourself
3. Husband and Wife
4. Parent and Child
5. Employer and Employee
6. Christian and Christian
7. Christian and World System

--Non-Christians

--Satan

8. Christian and Creation

PRACTICE OF BIBLE STUDY

The practice of Bible study involves a variety of methods that will enable you to uncover the treasures of Scripture in different ways. Each is designed to provide its own particular benefit, and it is a good idea to try using all of them to find the ones that help you the most. After becoming familiar with them, you may want to switch methods from time to time to avoid getting caught in the rut of routine. Some of them compliment each other and can be used concurrently. The process of ask, answer, accumulate, and apply can be successfully plugged into any of these methods.

Planned Reading

Definition

This method is the broadest approach to Scripture because it involves the systematic reading of book after book according to a predetermined plan. There are many variations, but most of them relate to daily readings derived from a yearly goal (e.g., reading the whole Bible in a year).

Benefits

1. There is no better way to get a comprehensive overview of the Word.

Reading large segments of Scripture will give you an increasing familiarity with

the flow of the people, places, events, and concepts in the Old and New Testaments.

2. Long-term use of planned reading will take you beyond favorite portions and expose you to the whole counsel of Scripture.

3. You will begin to think creatively across books and Testaments as you discover connections between concepts in different passages.

Steps

1. Set a goal for what you want to read and target a realistic completion date. If you decide to read the Bible in a year, you can choose one of the available reading schemes or formulate your own. It is usually desirable to include daily input from more than one portion of Scripture in your reading plan.

2. In *Enjoy Your Bible*, Irving L. Jensen has suggested a method that will help you actively interact with the text as you go along:

a. *Read*

- (1) Read aloud. This is especially helpful in devotional literature like the Psalms.
- (2) Read carefully. Don't be mechanical; try to be alert and observant.
- (3) Read repeatedly. Additional readings will give you greater insight into a passage.
- (4) Read peripherally. As you read a text, think about its context.

b. *Reflect*

- (1) Reflect purposefully. As you reflect upon the passage you are reading or have just completed, do it with the clear purpose of knowing God better and becoming more conformed to the image of His Son.
- (2) Reflect imaginatively. Actively use your mind's eye to visualize the situation and put yourself in it.
- (3) Reflect humbly. Never take the Bible for granted; remember that you are privileged to reflect upon the revelation of the living God.
- (4) Reflect prayerfully. Personalize your reading by communicating with God about the truth you derive from it.
- (5) Reflect patiently. Reflection takes time and concentration. Include this in the time you have allotted for your reading.

c. *Record*

When an important verse, thought, or application emerges from the text, jot it down so that you can retain it and refer to it in the future.

d. *Respond*

- (1) Respond with confession. When the Word exposes an area of sin in your attitudes or actions, quickly respond by acknowledging it so that you will continue to walk in the light.
- (2) Respond with faith. Stand upon the truth of what you are reading.
- (3) Respond with obedience. Resolve to take the truth you have just seen and put it into practice during the remainder of the day.

Memorization

Definition

In this method, the student of the Word selects portions of Scripture according to a definite plan, commits them to memory, and keeps them memorized by means of periodic review.

Benefits

1. This is the most effective way of making Scripture a part of your thought patterns. The discipline and repetition necessary to memorize a text will plant it deep within your consciousness.

2. Memorization places Scripture at your fingertips, always at your disposal for use on unexpected occasions. It will also enhance your teaching, counseling, and witnessing.

3. "Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee" (Ps. 119:11). The passages you have memorized will assist you in times of temptation.

Steps

1. Start with the Scripture memory cards in the Search basic and advanced discipleship booklets. This will give you a good variety of passages that you can use in many situations. After you have memorized these verses,

you may want to consider using the Navigators Topical Memory System to build your mental library of verses.

2. Carry your cards with you and use them during the "dead times" of the day (waiting for an appointment, waiting on line, waiting on hold, waiting in traffic). The key to memorization is repetition, so expose yourself to your new verses briefly but often.

3. Set specific and realistic goals. Try to learn one or two verses a week. Periodically evaluate your progress and make the necessary adjustments.

4. Be sure to review what you have memorized so that it will not gradually slip away from you. The more you have learned, the more important a methodical program of review will become. Otherwise, you will suffer the frustration of losing faster than you learn.

5. Consider the possibility of memorizing a larger portion of Scripture, perhaps a chapter like John 15 or Romans 8, or even a small book like Philippians or Colossians. Memorization is a skill that improves with practice, and after you have mastered a good number of verses, you may be ready to tackle something bigger. One of the advantages of this is that you learn a passage in its context and force yourself to think according to an inspired sequence of concepts.

Perhaps the easiest way of memorizing large portions of the Word is to work with it a chapter at a time. Read the chapter several times a week while using a 3x5 card to uncover a each line as you go through it. After a while, you will find

yourself guessing more and more of the lines before you reveal them. Once you have learned a chapter, review it regularly to keep it with you.

Meditation

Definition

Meditation is the process of ruminating or chewing on a passage to absorb its life-giving contents. In this method, we focus our attention on a verse or phrase of Scripture or on a biblical concept and reflect upon it one or more times during the day.

Benefits

1. Scripture tells us to meditate on God's revealed truth day and night (see Josh. 1:8; Ps. 1:2; 119:97,148). Meditation directs the conscious mind during the day, and before retiring, programs the subconscious mind during the night.

It is an excellent way to practice the presence of God.

2. This method integrates the Word of God into our minds, affections, and wills so that our thinking, emotions, and choices throughout each day are brought into increasing conformity with the truth. In Bible study, we master the Word; in meditation, the Word masters us.

3. Meditation enables us to ponder a passage in depth and so that we can gain meaningful personal insights that we would otherwise have overlooked.

4. This approach to biblical truth is an indispensable part of the process of abiding in Christ. As we abide in Him and His words abide in us, we bear spiritual fruit (see John 15:7-8).

Steps

1. Follow a plan to find appropriate texts for meditation. One way is to meditate on the verses you have already memorized. Gradually go through them by letting each become the theme of one day's meditation. Jim Downing in his book on *Meditation*, suggests another plan which involves the daily reading of every thirtieth psalm, the first corresponding to the day of the month. Five minutes before going to bed, read through the next day's psalms until you find a verse that particularly speaks to you. Then close your Bible, and be sure to make that your last waking thought. If you wake up during the night, think about the verse. In the morning, read through the five psalms with your verse in mind and let it be the theme of your meditation that day.

2. Select specific times for brief interludes of meditation on the verse you have chosen for the day. These could be before meals and coffee breaks or you could use a watch with an alarm to remind you at regular intervals through the day (when the alarm sounds, immediately set it for the next brief meditation break).

3. If you are not working with a verse you have previously memorized, read your verse several times (try doing this aloud) until it becomes easy for you to think through it.

4. Use your imagination and begin to visualize the concepts in the verse in as many ways as you can. Put yourself into the words and into the historical context of the verse.

5. Ponder each word and phrase of the text and try to gain as many insights as you can. Creatively approach it from different angles, and ask the Spirit of God to minister to you through this process.

6. Personalize the passage and make it your own by putting it in the first person and praying it back to God. Commit yourself to pursue and apply the truths you have found in it.

7. Offer praise and worship to God on the basis of your day's meditation.

The Synthetic Method

Definition

In the synthetic method, we study an entire book of the Bible by moving from the parts (verses, paragraphs, major divisions) to the whole in order to discover the flow of thought and the central theme of the book.

Benefits

1. This method gives you a bird's eye view of Scripture and enables you to understand a book as a unit.
2. You will be able to think through the historical and/or logical sequence of the book.
3. Synthetic study gives you a comprehensive picture that will help you see how the pieces of the puzzle fit together. It provides a structure that will organize and integrate the details, so that you will be able to visualize the context of each verse and paragraph.
4. With this method, you will know what is in each paragraph of the book.

Steps

1. Select a book--begin with short and easily outlined books like Ephesians and Colossians.
2. Plan to work with the book at a convenient time and in a consistent way.
3. With a pen and paper ready for your notes and observations, read through the book in one sitting. In this reading, look for the central theme of the book and how it is developed.
4. Read the book a second time and use the questions found in "The Process of Bible Study" above. In the synthetic method, don't get too detailed in

your use of these questions. Note problem passages and use the tools to find answers.

5. Read the book a third time and create a title for each paragraph.

Follow the ROSE guidelines to make your titles crisp and useful:

- a. Retainable--easy to memorize.
- b. Original--your very own.
- c. Short--three or four words.
- d. Exact--suited to the paragraph.

Be sure to memorize your paragraph titles so that it will be easy for you to think your way through the book.

6. During the fourth reading, go through the book with your SPECS on (sins to forsake, promises to claim, examples to follow, commands to obey, summary thought for today), so that you will accumulate practical principles to apply in your life. Record these principles or you will lose them.

7. Now you are ready to develop an original outline of the book. Create titles for the major sections of the book, and use your paragraph titles as well.

8. Finally, write a paragraph to summarize the main theme of the book. Show how each of the book's paragraphs contributes to the development of this theme.

This booklet includes a synthetic Bible study worksheet which you can duplicate and use to record your results in steps 5 and 6. You will need separate pages for steps 3, 4, 7, and 8.

Sample of the Synthetic Bible Study Worksheet
on the First Five Paragraphs of Ephesians

The Analytical Method

Definition

The analytical method of Bible study focuses on the details and particulars of a passage and engages the student in an in-depth analysis of the Word. In contrast to the bird's eye view provided by the synthetic method, the analytical method offers a worm's eye view by getting us immersed in the soil of Scripture.

Benefits

1. God inspired not only the broad themes of Scripture, but all the details as well. Using this method, we will gain an appreciation for the words, nuances, figures of speech, and other particulars of a passage.

2. This method will give us skill in observing and interpreting Scripture as we break it down into its separate components and see how they fit together.

3. Systematic analysis will help us mine the inexhaustible treasures of the Word. We will more clearly see that each time we approach a passage, we can gain new meaning, depth, and insight.

Steps

1. Select a passage for study. Note the paragraph divisions in your translation of the Bible--it is best to analyze one paragraph at a time as you go through the text.

2. Carefully read the paragraph several times.

3. Probe each verse of the paragraph in depth by making observations and *asking* as many of the questions found in "The Process of Bible Study" as you can. Unlike the synthetic method where you asked broad questions of the passage, in the analytical method you should stop to ask questions on the level of words, phrases, and verses. Record your questions because you will need them for the next step.

4. Use the text and context to find the *answers* to your questions. For some of them (e.g., historical background, chronology, word meanings), you will need to draw upon the recommended Bible study tools.

5. *Accumulate* principles from each verse by putting on your SPECS.

6. *Apply* these principles to the eight vital relationships of your life listed in "The Process of Bible Study."

This booklet includes an analytical Bible study worksheet which you can duplicate and use to record your results in steps 3 through 6.

Sample of the Analytical Bible Study Worksheet
on the First Paragraph of Ephesians

Other Methods

Observation, Interpretation, Correlation, and Application

This method is similar to the ask, answer, accumulate, and apply process described above. It has been said that "A wise man will learn more in a walk around the block than a fool will learn on a trip around the world." In observation, we ask basic questions of the text, look for key words, phrases, and verses, find connecting words and progressions of thought, and discover contrasts and comparisons. In interpretation, we seek to understand the things we have observed to discern the meaning and purpose that the author had in mind. In correlation, we relate the passage we are studying to the overall context

and coordinate it with other sections of Scripture. In application, we derive specific principles from what we have learned and seek to implement them in our lives. See Walter A. Henrichsen's *A Layman's Guide to Interpreting the Bible* for a more detailed description of this method.

The Topical Method

This can be a very fruitful method because it helps us discover the development of a theme through the pages of Scripture. Choose a specific topic and decide whether you wish to trace it from Genesis to Revelation or limit yourself to its use in a section or book of the Bible or in a series of selected verses. You may want to choose a theme like sin, redemption, forgiveness, love, or wisdom. Or you may study a concept like speech, the family, stewardship, or work. Use a concordance (*Nave's Topical Bible* is also helpful) to find the passages you will work with. Make your observations, ask questions, look for the answers, and then formulate an outline of the topic to organize your key thoughts. Check and supplement your results by using a Bible encyclopedia. Summarize your findings and be sure to end with a set of specific life applications.

The Biographical Method

A study of the failures and successes of Bible personalities is an excellent way to uncover spiritual principles and discover insights into the way God works in people's lives. If the person you want to study is a major figure in

Scripture, you may want to confine your study to a particular book or a portion of his or her life. Use a concordance to find the relevant passages. As you work with these verses, create a list of the events in the person's life and then arrange them in a chronological sequence. Use this list to create a biographical outline with the associated verses. With this outline, move through the character's life and make a set of observations, interpretations, and applications.

There are a variety of other Bible study methods which could prove useful after you become familiar with those outlined in this booklet. *Effective Bible Study* by Howard F. Vos, for example, describes seventeen approaches, including the theological, literary, geographical, sociological, political, cultural, and psychological methods.

REFLECTIONS

1. Write down the six purposes of Bible study that were given earlier in this booklet.

Think about this list and use it as a motivation builder that

will help you overcome the barriers to your own study of God's Word.

2. What are the six prerequisites of Bible study?

In the spaces at the right, rank these prerequisites from 1 (the prerequisite you have best fulfilled in the past) to 6 (the prerequisite you have least fulfilled in the past).

3. What do you think are the two most important rules of interpretation?

Why did you choose these rules?

4. What are the four A's in the process of Bible study?

Can these be used in any Bible study method? When do you plan to start putting them into practice?

5. Look over the list of recommended Bible study tools and select the first six you would like to have in your library. Try to purchase them over the next six or twelve months. As you do, familiarize yourself with these tools so that you will know how each one can assist you in your study program.

6. What are the SPECS of Bible study?

Be sure to memorize this list and use them until they become habitual.

7. Memorize the eight vital relationships so that they will come to mind when you seek to apply the biblical principles that surface in your study.
8. The only way to discover the benefits of each of these methods is to put them into practice. Plan to do this by using a different method each month until you have gone through them

all. Then select the ones you found most beneficial and formulate a future plan to implement them so that you will enjoy a variety of useful study methods.

9. Consider the possibility of forming or joining a group that studies the Bible together. Bible study is best when it is done individually and corporately, because each person can share the insights he or she learned so that others will benefit from them. This adds the dimension of mutual encouragement, exhortation, and accountability, and enables us to gain perspectives on Scripture we would otherwise have missed (see 1 Cor. 14:26; Heb. 10:24-25).

SCRIPTURE MEMORY CARDS

Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 119:105; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:16-17;

Hebrews 4:12; James 1:22.