

DIGGING INTO GOD’S WORD
(Workshops on Studying the Bible for Yourself)

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Week One

GETTING STARTED

Most people approach Bible study like they were taking medicine; they know it's good for them, but it's not very tasty.

But God intends His Word to be a delicious feast; it's not only healthy for us, it is also sweet to the taste.

Reading Scripture should be a joyful adventure; yes, even downright FUN! And yes, it IS good for us! The great evangelist George Mueller said;

“The vigor of a man’s spiritual life will be in direct proportion to the place of the Word of God in his life.”

We all know that we should read the Bible. We agree that the Scriptures offer great benefit to our lives. So, how are we doing?

SELF EVALUATION #1:

Rate yourself on the following questions using a scale of 1 to 10; with a score of 1 meaning “never,” and a 10 meaning “*all the time.*”

- ___ I spend some time reading the Bible every single day.
- ___ I look forward to the time set aside for reading Scripture.
- ___ When I read the Bible it makes sense to me.
- ___ When I spend time in the Word I feel that I've been with the Lord Himself.
- ___ I find that during the day I think about what I've been reading in God's Word.
- ___ I love to share with others what God is teaching me through His Word.
- ___ I make it a priority to read the Bible before reading other “devotional” books.

___ **TOTAL - Tally up your points.**

If you scored **60-70** you might be called “*on fire*” regarding your desire to read God's Word.

A score of **0-20** may indicate that you are giving God the “*cold shoulder.*”

If your score is **30-50** you might be considered “*lukewarm*” (see *Revelation 3:16*).

The Lord wants our hearts to be zealous for Himself and His Word. He has promised us that we will experience great personal reward from Him if we will obediently spend time with Him in His Word (*Psalm 19:11*).

How does God's Word benefit us?

1. It makes us confident in what we believe (*I John 5:13; II Timothy 3:16*).
2. We become spiritually stronger (*I Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:11-14; Acts 20:32; Romans 10:17*).
3. It shows us where we need to change (*II Timothy 3:16; Psalm 19:11; II Timothy 3:16*).
4. It points us in the right direction for life choices (*II Timothy 3:16, 17*).
5. It keeps us from sinning (*Psalm 119:11*).
6. We get to know Jesus more intimately (*John 14:21; Jeremiah 29:13*).
7. It results in living a joyful life (*Jeremiah 15:16; Ezekiel 3:3; Psalm 19:10, 119:103*).
8. It leads us to success in life (*Joshua 1:8; Proverbs 16:20*).

Isn't that awesome?! Yet, even though we know that reading the Bible is good for us, very few Christians spend regular time in God's Word. In a recent survey, Americans rated their "*Bible knowledge*" as being the weakest area of their "*faith maturity*" (*The Barna Group; June, 2005*).

While the Bible is the "*best-seller*" of all history, it is not widely studied. God's Word is "*a book more often bought than read, much more generally owned than known.*" We seem to know enough to own a Bible, but not enough for the Bible to own us.

We have been exhorted to "*be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth*" (*II Timothy 2:15*). But, shamefully, God's Word is handled very little today. Christians today pay the Bible lip service, but fail to give it life service.

Knowing that the key to all spiritual maturity, effectiveness, joy, success and prosperity in life lies within the pages of God's Word, why don't we spend more time there?

SELF EVALUATION #2:

We have great intentions to be in God's Word, but we have even greater excuses for not reading the Bible. In the space below list the things that hinder you from reading the Scriptures on a regular basis.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Why do people have Bibles, but fail to read them? Some reasons might be that:

- a. We feel like we don't get anything out of it when we read the Bible.
- b. It sounds like too much work.
- c. We don't know where to start.

Let's look at these situations one by one.

a. We feel like we don't get anything out of it when we read the Bible.

The Lord tells us that He is the "Sower" and His Word is the "seed" (*Luke 8:5-8, 11; 1 Peter 1:23*). We are exhorted to "receive the word implanted" (*James 1:21*) so that it can bear fruit in our lives.

One reason that we fail to dig into God's Word is because Scripture doesn't seem to "dig into" the soil of our hearts. It doesn't seem to penetrate. Frankly, we don't seem to get anything out of it when we do read the Bible.

In the parable of the Sower, Jesus explained that the seed takes root in the soil of a person's heart (*Luke 8:12-15*). God's Word does not intellectually take root in our minds; it takes root in our hearts. Our failure today to thoroughly grasp the Word lies in the failure of our hearts to respond to God.

In Jesus' parable, the seed is dispersed onto four types of soil. Each soil type receives the seed with varying degrees of success.

"The roadside soil" represents people whose hearts have become trampled and hardened. The seed never penetrates the soil, and "*the devil comes and takes away the word from their heart, so that they may not believe and be saved.*" This soil needs to be plowed and broken up, as these unbelieving hardened hearts are unresponsive and resistant to the Word.

"The rocky soil" represents those who initially hear and "*receive the word with joy.*" But then, "*these have no firm root; they believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.*" While these people seem quick to superficially respond, the Word does not take root in their hearts. This soil needs to be cultivated to a deeper level so that the root can become strong.

"The thorny soil" represents those who hear the word, then "*the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful (Mark 4:19).*" This soil needs to be weeded from the unfocused priorities of the world. With hearts and desires that easily wander away from the Lord, their spiritual life is stillborn.

"The good soil" represents the hearts of those who "*hear the word in an honest and good heart, and hold it fast, and bear fruit with perseverance.*" These people eagerly receive God's Word, hold onto it wholeheartedly, and fruit can be seen in their lives over time.

We must give attention to detail (*Matthew 5:18*) as well as give attention to the whole. One basic key to study is to ask questions as we read, constantly asking the “**5 W’s and 2 H’s.**”

WHO is involved or being discussed here?

WHAT is being done or said?

WHEN is this happening?

WHERE is this taking place?

WHY is this occurring?

HOW is this happening?

HUH? Note any unanswered questions that you have.

What is the best method for studying the Bible?

Every individual is uniquely created by God, and each person must discover what particular method of study “*rings their bell.*” The priority of every Bible student is to accurately understand the intent of the Author. The meaning of Scripture is NOT what we think it means; it means what GOD INTENDS it to mean (*II Peter 1:20, 21*). We must logically and objectively scrutinize Scripture, in order to understand it (*Isaiah 1:18*). Yet, the methods leading to that understanding may vary from person to person.

We need to listen to Him as He instructs us individually. If we have become dull of hearing (*Hebrews 5:11*), He can open our ears to listen as a disciple (*Isaiah 50:4, 5*). We must be sensitive to understand how the Lord speaks to us.

“Give ear and hear my voice, listen and hear my words. Does the farmer plow continually to plant seed? Does he continually turn and harrow the ground? Does he not level its surface, and sow dill and scatter cumin, and plant wheat in rows, barley in its place, and rye within its area? For his God instructs and teaches him properly” (Isaiah 28:23-26).

The farmer uses different methods to plant varied seeds. Likewise, as the seed of God’s Word is planted into the soil of our hearts, we will each experience unique planting situations. God will instruct us as we listen to His voice and His Words.

Reading Scripture should be filled with adventure and joy. During the coming weeks you will experiment with twenty varied techniques of Bible study that will help you discover how the Lord speaks to you, personally, in His Word. So, fasten your seatbelts and let’s start exploring some of the ways that we can search the Scriptures; let’s dig into God’s Word!

WORKSHOP #1

LEARNING TO USE "THE TOOLS"

You will need your Bible, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, Vine's Expository Dictionary, and some paper for making notes.

1. Read John 21:15-17 in your Bible.

- a. How many times do you read the word "*love*?"
- b. How many times did Jesus ask if Peter "*loved*" Him?
- c. What was Peter's verbal response each time?
- d. Why might Jesus have asked Peter this so many times?
- e. How did Peter feel about being asked this so many times?

2. Look up the word "*love*" in your concordance. Locate the usage of "*love*" from John 21:15-17.

- a. How many times does your concordance record the word "*love*" in these verses?
- b. Write down the italicized number located to the right of the verse cited in your concordance.
- c. Do all of the usages of "*love*" noted in these three verses have the same italicized number?
- d. How many usages of the word "*love*" seem to be missing in the concordance's record of John 21:15-17?

When you encounter this problem in the concordance you will need a King James Bible translation. In these three verses, there are four times when the King James Bible records Christ's word for "*love*" as "*lovest*."

3. Look up the word "*lovest*" in your concordance. Locate the usage of "*lovest*" from John 21:15-17.

- a. Write down the number located to the right of the verse cited in your concordance.
- b. Do all of the usages of "*lovest*" noted in these verses have the same italicized number?

4. Locate the Greek Dictionary of the New Testament in the back of your concordance.

- a. Look up each "*love*" and "*lovest*" number referred to in John 21:15-17, writing down the Greek word and its definition.
- b. Based upon this information can you discern why two different words for "*love*" might have been used in this passage?

5. Look up the word "*love*" in your expository dictionary.

- a. Locate the exact words used in John 21:15-17 and read the explanations for each. Why might two different words for "*love*" have been used in this passage?

How to do a CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY

Consideration of the sequence and timing of people and events in the Bible can bring to light things that are usually missed. As one reads through the Old Testament it becomes evident that the books themselves are NOT all arranged chronologically. For example, one finds the book of Ezra located before the book of Isaiah in the Scriptures, though Isaiah wrote almost two hundred years before Ezra.

The Lord values chronology and introduces sequence in the first chapter of the Bible. The word "*Genesis*" means "*origin*" and God speaks of the sequence of days in the Creation Week. We also find the chronology of mankind's history in Genesis.

While chronological studies may not always reveal something new, they often can give added insight.

WORKSHOP #6 LEARNING TO DO A CHRONOLOGICAL STUDY

1. Read Genesis chapter 5.
2. At the top of a sheet of paper draw a line about nine inches long. Mark each half inch, making each segment the equivalent of one hundred years.
3. Beginning at "0" with Adam's creation, measure off on your time line how many years Adam lived. Mark the point of Adam's death.
4. Draw nine more nine inch lines directly beneath Adam's time line. Beginning with Seth on the second line continue to note on your time lines the births, lives, and deaths, of the nine other men mentioned in chapter 5. Draw all nine lines so that they begin at "0" where Adam was created.
5. Do you see anything that you had not known before as you look at your chronological time line? Consider these questions.
 - a. Who was alive during Adam's lifetime?
 - b. What men were living at the time that Enoch was "*raptured?*"
 - c. What man died a natural death before his father died?
 - d. The name "*Methuselah*" is translated "*when he dies it will happen,*" or, "*his death shall bring it.*" What happened shortly after Methuselah died?

(See Genesis 6:13)

How soon afterwards did "*it*" occur?