

Bible Study Methods

2 Tim. 2:15

Introduction:

Today we are going to talk about a very important discipline in a believer's life: Bible Study. Please do not get this confused with your daily Bible reading. Bible Study is your ongoing mastery of God's Word through spending regular blocks of time digging deep to find truths, insights, and application.

I'm afraid that while some may have a regular daily devotional time in the Word, very few actually study it. Some might occasionally read a Bible study book, but few do it for themselves. We often listen to teachers who do it for us, but few do it for ourselves. We often get very worked up about those who would question the inerrancy of Scripture, but we don't really study it that much. In fact, Rick Warren says, "It seems we are guilty of being more interested in defending God's Word than studying it."

First let's look at a familiar passage that we frequently quote to our children and see how it might apply to us.

Background Passage:

2 Tim. 2:15 - Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth.

<2:15> σπούδασον σεαυτὸν δόκιμον παραστήσαι τῷ θεῷ, ἐργάτην ἀνεπαίσχυντον, ὀρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας.

4704 σπουδαζο sroudazo {spoo-dad'-zo}

- 1) to hasten, make haste
- 2) to exert one's self, endeavour, give diligence

"Be diligent" is imperative. The sense is to do everything possible to meet God's standard for someone who handles His Word. So the KJV "Study" is actually an OK translation.

1384 δοκιμος dokimos {dok'-ee-mos}

- 1) accepted, particularly of coins and money.
- 2) accepted, pleasing, acceptable

In the ancient world there was no banking system as we know it today, and no paper money. All money was made from metal, heated until liquid, poured into moulds and allowed to cool. When the coins were cooled, it was necessary to smooth off the uneven edges. The coins were comparatively soft and of course many people shaved them closely. In one century, more than eighty laws were passed in Athens, to stop the practice of shaving down the coins then in circulation. But some money changers were men of integrity, who

would accept no counterfeit money. They were men of honour who put only genuine full weighted money into circulation. Such men were called "dokimos" or "approved". Donald Barnhouse

3718 ὀρθοτομεο orthotomeo {or-thot-om-eh'-o}

- 1) to cut straight, to cut straight ways
 - 1a) to proceed on straight paths, hold a straight course, equiv. to doing right
- 2) to make straight and smooth, to handle aright, to teach the truth directly and correctly

It's a great passage to teach our kids. But doesn't it apply to us, too?

Practical Considerations:

It's evident that God wants us to study His Word diligently and regularly. But how? Can anyone do it? Is there training required? Do I need any other resources besides a Bible? What are some practical ways I can study the Bible?

Can anyone do it? Whenever God gives us an imperative, it is definitely something any Christian can do.

Is there training required? Training can help. It can give you experience and skills in using some of the resources we'll talk about next. But training only gives someone a head start, and a diligent untrained beginner can quickly make that up and more simply by making the effort to get started.

Training in the ancient Hebrew and Greek languages can be helpful for advanced study, but today there are plenty of resources available that make knowledge of the original languages much less important.

What Bible translation(s) do I need? There are many thoughts on which Bible translations are best. It is entirely possible that you might want to choose a more free translation for your daily devotional (e.g., The New Living Translation), but use a more literal translation for your Bible study.

I would probably recommend one of three translations for a primary study Bible, with the others being valuable study resources alongside. All three are based on the latest manuscripts, unlike the venerable KJV. The NIV is the top recommendation from many Bible scholars. It is more of a dynamic equivalence translation than the others I will recommend, but scholars suggest that having experts interpreting not only the language, but also the idiomatic phrases and grammatical constructions keeps the reader from having to handle those most difficult aspects of translation and interpretation. In addition, there are a broad range of study Bibles available based on the NIV.

Some others recommend the NASB. It is a much more literal translation, meaning that most of the time, it translates the original language accurately and readably into the reader's language, in this case, English, even if the translation

may not immediately convey the meaning of the original text due to idiomatic or grammatical differences between the languages.

The third translation I would suggest is the NET Bible. It is more of a dynamic equivalence translation, but includes literal translations in the notes whenever an idiom has been interpreted for the reader. Unique among the three translations, the foundation that funded it distributes it without license fees, making it free on the Internet and much lower priced in printed versions.

What kind of Bible should I use? After you have decided on the primary translation you are going to use, then you should decide what kind of Bible to get. There are many different bindings, print styles, and additional resources available. Since you will be using your study Bible heavily, make sure the binding will last. Get a print size that is big enough for you to read comfortably for long periods. If possible, find a printing that has wide margins, as you will be making lots of notes.

Different Bible printings range from nothing but the text itself all the way to fully equipped “Study Bibles.” You’ll definitely benefit from annotations like cross references, translators’ notes, concordance, and book introductions.

Full-fledged “Study Bibles” add more notes with the text, footnotes explaining the text up to the level found in an abridged commentary, and even practical applications inserted with the text, in the footnotes, and / or on additional pages inserted throughout the text.

The value of the resources is undeniable, but there are at least three cautions I should mention. First, it can be very easy to unconsciously treat the notes with the same respect that the Scripture rightly deserves. You must always remember that only the Text itself is inspired, not the added helps. Secondly, and related to the first, you should also remember that the commentary and other notes are opinions. Yes, they are likely educated, godly, respected writers, but their notes should only be used to assist and to validate the truths, insights, and application you have already discerned. Finally, since one of the important exercises of the Bible study process is to hear from God how His Word applies to your life, I would avoid the practical application suggestions offered, if any. I’m completely confident God can communicate that far more clearly and specifically to you directly as you begin to study His Word seriously and deeply.

Do I need other resources? Some pastors in this world have only a plain Bible or even just a New Testament, and they can study the Bible very well. But, there are some resources that will aid you and are readily and inexpensively available to many students of the Word. Here are a few recommendations, in a rough order of usefulness:

- Other Translations – You should get a few other translations, like the ones I mentioned above, plus possibly the YLT that is the most literal

translation I have seen, giving you a very good sense of the exact wording, grammar, and word order of the original language, albeit at the expense of readability. Or, you can do even better and get *The Bible from 26 Translations*, which has the KJV text for every phrase in the Bible and then below it quotes that phrase from any of the other translations that differ significantly. It includes about every translation you would want to have except the NIV, which wouldn’t be an issue if you choose that for your primary translation.

- Exhaustive Concordance – Contains the location of every appearance of every single word in the entire Bible. Incredibly useful for word studies. (Make sure you get one that is for your specific translation.)
- Expository Dictionary – Adds linguistic, grammatical, historical, and cultural explanations to the basic definition of the translated words. Very useful for preparing for teaching and preaching. I’ve used Vine’s forever, but it is based on the English words found in the KJV, so it is less useful for other translations. I have heard that Mounce’s Expository Dictionary is more updated and useful for modern translations.
- Topical Bible – Bible verses arranged by topic. Brings additional references to topical studies beyond what a concordance can offer. (E.g., a concordance will not be of much value when studying the trinity, since that word doesn’t appear in the Bible. A topical Bible will list every verse that relates to the trinity.) Nave’s is probably the best choice.
- Bible Dictionary / Encyclopedia / Handbook – Great for biblical background that will help interpret the historical and cultural differences among words, customs, and traditions, as well as historical, geographical, cultural, and archeological information that will illuminate the Scripture. Dictionaries are the most concise. Encyclopedias add more detail and topics. Handbooks follow the order of the books of the Bible, instead of being ordered by topic, and can add commentary. Most Christian publishers have a good Bible Dictionary. Also recommended are the *Halley’s Bible Handbook* and *The New Unger’s Bible Handbook*.
- Commentary – Commentaries are very difficult to recommend, as I have not found useful commentaries except for the large many-volume editions that can be quite daunting for the beginning Bible student. I recommend going to a store to evaluate them in person. I can suggest staying away from the “classic” commentaries written before the latter 20th century, especially Matthew Henry.

If you have a Bible, you have the minimum requirements for Bible study. If you are able to add another quality translation or two and concordance, you'll be much better equipped. Any of the remaining resources will further expand your effectiveness as a Bible student. But don't wait until you have a complete library to get started.

What are some practical ways I can study the Bible? Here are nine different methods you can try:

Bible Study Methods:

There are two primary ways to study the Bible: exegetically and topically. They both have their advantages and are both valid, enriching ways to look at the Scripture. Within the two types are multiple methods to extract out valuable truth, insights, and application.

Exegetical Bible Study:

Devotional – This simple Bible study method is especially suited to individuals whose library does not yet contain other resources than their Bible.

Sectional – This method is also

Macro – This

Micro

Grammatical / Syntactical –

Rhetorical –

Topical Bible Study:

Word Study –

Topical –

Biographical –

Conclusion:

God has gone to great lengths to make sure we have His Word in our hands. It's wonderful to spend time daily in it during our quiet time. But it's also critically important for each of us to spend time regularly studying it to dig out the truths, insight, and application we need for living as true disciples of Jesus.