#### Lesson #7 How to Study the Bible Why Don't People Study the Bible?

Even though the Bible remains the most sold book in the world, it's also one of the most neglected ones. The Barna Research group of Glendale, California reports that in a typical week, only 10 percent of Americans read the Bible every day. This percentage is on the high side.

Gallop polls confirms those findings. In one survey they found that 82% of Americans believe that the Bible is either the literal or "inspired" Word of God. More than half said they read the Bible as least monthly. Yet half could not name even one of the four gospels.

If you did not know any more about your job or profession than you know about Christianity after the same number of years of exposure, what would you employer do?

The reason God can't use you as much as He wants to may well be that you are not prepared.

There are three basic kinds of Bible students. There are the **"castor oil" types**. To them the Word is bitter but it's good for what ails them. Then there is the **"shredded wheat" kind.** To them the Scripture is nourishing but dry. To them it's like eating a bale of hay. But the third kind is called the **"strawberries-and-cream" folks**. They just can't get enough of the stuff. What kind are you? Many of us are growing old and not growing up.

The issue in Bible study is not speed, but direction. What matters is not how far you get but whether you keep at it and keep making progress.

**The Process**

There is a basic process that will help you in studying the Bible more effectively. If you are attempting to study the Bible now, you are employing some type of process. I would like to give an overview of a tried a true process that is taught at many seminaries. There is no way that this brief overview will be as comprehensive as a seminary course, but I hope it will get you started on the right path. Much of the material is from a book written by Prof. Howard Hendricks called "Living by the Book" I suggest you put it on your gift list for yourself.

**Step 1 Observation**

In this step you ask and answer the question. What do I see? You assume the role of a spiritual detective. No detail is trivial. I do this by reading and re- reading the passage in small pieces. I will read it very slowly meditating on every single word. How often have you missed a word like "it" or "and" that changed the whole meaning of the passage.

Let me demonstrate a little. I will pick out only two things that you may not have noticed before in the story of Adam and Eve. Read the verse and read it again observing each word.

*Gen 3:6 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. (NIV)*

Some observations are:

1. Eve thought three things about the fruit.

* Pleasing to the eye,
* Good for food and
* Desirable for gaining wisdom.

1. Adam was with her

Most of us though that Eve was alone with the serpent. This step is very important because it sets the foundation for the other steps. At this step you ask many questions. The series of questions are sometimes called the five "W's" and the "H" or the "reporters’ model." The questions begin with either, Who, What, When, Where Why and How.

In the above example, if you had asked. "**Why** did Eve eat the apple" you would see the three reasons. If you had asked, "**Where** was Adam" you would have seen that he was with her.

Look for things that are Repeated, Emphasized, Related, Alike and Unlike. Look for "but", "or" and "for."

**Step 2 Interpretation**

Here you begin with asking the question. "What is the author’s intended meaning? Too often our Bible study begins with “interpretation." The true interpretation is not what you think it means but what is the author's intended meaning. This will force us to consider context, word meanings, the time in which it was written and several other points of consideration. Let's look at the following verse.

*Matt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,* ***baptizing*** *them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (NIV)*

What does the author mean by being baptized? Does this mean to be sprinkled or totally submerged?

The original word in this passage is "baptizo"

907 baptizo-

1) To dip repeatedly, to immerse, to submerge (used of vessels sunk)

2) To cleanse by dipping or submerging, to wash, to make clean with water, to wash oneself, to bathe

**Step 3 Correlation**

We validate our observations and interpretation by correlating them with other passages that has some correlation with the one you are studying. For example, we should check to see if key words used in our study passage means the same in other passages of scripture.

**Illustration:**

Here is a passage the talks about being baptized. Is there an example somewhere else in the Bible to help people decide if they must be dunked or sprinkled?

*Matt 28:19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations,* ***baptizing*** *them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (NIV)*

Luke gives and account of Jesus being baptized. It is the same word used in Matthew that means to be submerged.

*Luke 3:21 When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened (NIV)*

**Step 4 Application**

Here you begin by asking the question, how does it work? How do I apply this to my life? This is where the Bible becomes relevant to you.

Now that you have an understanding of the passage concerning baptism, you should apply that to your life and teach your children the meaning of it.

**The Short Process**

We must remember that there is a distinct different between your quiet time and serious Bible study. I have found it very helpful to use a short process during quiet times. Then later go back to do a more in-dept study. Those steps are as follows;

**Step 1 Read**

During "Quiet Times" read only one chapter in or to get the chapter context. Then read a small number of verses and re-read and re-read. Asking God to reveal His pearls to you. Sometimes I may only read one verse or up to 5. In Quiet Times you are not reading for mileage but for spiritual growth.

**Step 2 Record**

Take time to record what you see in the passage and what the Holy Spirit has shown you. Summarize your insights and observations. Write down you questions also for later study.

**Step 3 Reflect (Mediate)**

Reflection or mediation is vital to understanding God's Word. Ask yourself what it is that you see? What does it mean to me? This is where it begins to change your life and bring you closer in your relationship with God.

Remember that the Bible does not yield its fruit to the lazy.

**Helpful Resources**

If we only use the Bible to study God's Word we will miss out on the wonderful blessing of in-depth study. Our own Bible even tells us that it does not contain everything.

*John 21:25 Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written. (NIV)*

Also remember that the original Scriptures have undergone a series of translations and span hundreds of years of culture. God has used people to provide us with "helps" to help us get a clearer understanding of his preserved word.

I will mention some of the resources that are available or that I use. This list is by no means an exhaustive one. It is to give you an idea of the different types of resources.

**Study Bible**

A good study Bible is the most important book you will ever own. They now come in a variety of versions. The two versions I would suggest you first consider would be the (NKJ), New King James and the (NIV) New International Version. Find out which one you pastor uses and let that be a guide. The study Bible should come with notes, concordance, maps and good margins to write notes on the pages. I suggest large enough type to avoid eyestrain. Plan to purchase another study Bible version later.

**Bible Dictionary**

There are many different Bible dictionaries on the market. Look for one that has both Old and New Testament words. Our Bible was written in a different time period and a good dictionary will help us under some of the words used and define people, places and things mentioned in the Bible. Some very popular ones are Naves Topical Dictionary, Nelson's and others.

**Exhaustive Concordance**

A Concordance will help you in the correlation step of your study. It is indispensable in doing any type of word study. Some popular ones also include a dictionary. The concordance will take the word that is used in your version of the Bible and give you the original Greek or Hebrew word and its meaning. Be sure you have a concordance that matches your version of the Bible. Some well knows are Strong's, Young's and Englishman's.

**Historical works**

Historical books, documentaries and videos will put more flesh in your study. It will give you an insight into the time period and provide more detail about some events, places and personalities than the Bible. Some well-known historical works includes the book “Works of Josephus”, “The Life and Times of Jesus Christ the Messiah” and others.

**Commentaries**

Commentaries come in many different forms. There are those by one author for the entire Bible such and Matthew Henry's Commentary, which come in volumes. There are those that cover the Bible in one book. There are those that one author writes on only one book. I started with the New Layman's Bible Commentary and now I have at least three or four. Commentary should be used to confirm your understanding or give you a different look. Do not depend on commentaries to educate you they are only to assist you. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you.

Take time to discuss your purchase with a salesperson in the bookstore, they can help you save money.

**Computer Software**

Last but certainly not lest are the computer software offerings. With many of these you can get all you need in one program plus more. They are easy to work with and most of them are linked to the other books to help you. By linked I mean that suppose you were reading *John 3:16.* At that point you can go to Strong's Concordance and get the original words for that verse. It can take you to a commentary that will explain in more detail that exact verse. The two that I use are Biblesoft PC Bible and Logos products. In the long run the software products are easier and cheaper.