

7. The Master's Instructions about the Bible

7.3 Ways of studying God's word (2 Timothy 2:1-26)

It is possible to read the Bible out loud in about seventy-eight hours. If ever you have flown in a plane you will have noticed that you can see different perspectives at different points of your journey - though some flights are so busy you cannot see anything. On a journey from Khartoum to London I had some lovely views of the river Nile meandering through the deserts of Egypt. The view from such a height was quite different from the one a few days earlier in Khartoum itself when the hustle and bustle of activity on the river hardly let me notice the river itself.

Some Bible study should be digging for details and some Bible study should be gazing at great themes. All Bible study should be immersed in prayer.

You may want to study one Bible book

Read it through several times and jot down or mark any words that keep recurring, any themes that are developed, any beginnings that come to their climax, any natural breaks in the story.

You may want to study a particular chapter

Again read it through several times and also read the preceding chapter to set it into the context. This is always important when reading small parts of Scripture. Twice the Bible says: 'There is no God,' but you find it does not mean that when you see the context! (See Psalm 14:1; 53:1).

In both of these methods of study ask yourself questions and look for the answers in your reading. It will be helpful if you note down your answers in a form you can keep through the years.

What is the main thrust of this scripture?

Are there any other significant matters raised?

Can I summarize the teaching in a couple of sentences?

Is there an example I should seek to follow or avoid?

Are there any commands I should obey?

Are there any promises I should claim?

Perhaps you can compare your findings with those of a friend, or with a commentary.

You may want to study a special word or topic

Use a concordance to discover all the occasions that a particular word appears in Scripture, or in one Bible book. Look words up and group them into 'definitions', 'demonstrations', or 'different meanings' and also have a column: 'Don't quite know where this fits!'

Consult an expository dictionary or commentary to define the exact meaning of the word. Decide for yourself how this can be developed in your own daily lifestyle (or how it can be avoided). Then study any words that are nearly the same or have a bearing on the original subject.

You may want to study a character's life and reputation

Again you will find a concordance helpful in discovering every Bible reference to this person. Set them into context by reading the surrounding passages. Pick out the main incidents in his life.

Apply this by asking more questions. Build your recorded answers into a useful resource book for your own ministry.

How did he meet God?

How did God call him to do what he did?

What were his strong points?

What were his weaknesses?

What does God want me to learn from his life?

We are to do our best to present ourselves to God as people who correctly handle the word of God (2 Timothy 2:15). It involves *labour, learning and living*.

For the **Bible studies found in the following two sections of this book**, read at least twice through Mark's gospel (for 'Mark's Life and Ministry of Jesus Christ') and read at least twice the book of Acts (for 'the Life and Ministry of Peter'). Write down any verses that mean something special to you as you do so. Note any questions that come to you.

The outlines given on the life of Jesus and the life of Peter are only a guide. See if you can build on them for yourself. Pray before you read and ask God to speak personally to you. After reading the passage you

may find a commentary or Bible-reading aid will help answer some of your questions, or maybe it will clarify the issues raised.

The Bible says: 'Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ' (Romans 10:17). It is a good idea to make a habit of grasping **what God gives you in the Bible sermons you hear**. A simple outline, such as the one below, may help you pick out the 'bones'.

Bible passage read:

Subject:

Speaker:

Date:

Place:

Introduction:

First main point:

Second main point:

Third main point:

Fourth main point:

Response. What should I do?

How should I do it?

Discussion guide for 'Ways of studying God's word'

1. Describe the differences between "an overview study" and "a detailed study" of the Bible.
2. What are the strengths and the weaknesses of either method?
3. "The Bible is not an end in itself. It is a tool in the hands of God the Holy Spirit". Discuss this in the light of John 14:26 and Matthew 7:24.
4. How can you "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who

correctly handles the word of God", 2 Timothy 2:15.

Be as practical as you can in your answer.

5. What is a Bible Concordance useful for?
6. What is an Expository Hebrew or Greek Dictionary useful for?
7. What can you do if you do not have access to either of these books?

8. Pick your favourite verse (or two/three maximum). Study it by using the following ten questions:
 - What words in it need a clear definition of understanding?
 - Why is the correct understanding important?
 - What is the main truth of the text?
 - How does God see this truth?
 - How can I see *and experience* this truth?
 - What challenges does this verse present to me?
 - Is there a promise to claim? An example to follow? A truth about God to remember? Or a command to obey?
 - What other Bible verses help explain this verse?
 - Is there anything I need to ask a more experienced Christian about this verse? (or look up in a Bible commentary).
 - Can you learn the verse to be able to tell it to your friend off by heart?