

How to S.T.U.D.Y. the Bible

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As men, we need to learn how to study the Bible. We believe in the perspicuity of scripture. That means that it can be read and understood by a born again follower of Christ. Some have been taught that only 'clergy' can understand scripture, but that is not what the Bible teaches. The Jews of Berea were more noble because they searched the scriptures daily to see if the things that the apostle Paul was teaching lined up with scripture.

Acts 17:11 *These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.*

Not only that but we are commanded in scripture to study the Word of God for ourselves. A man needs to know what the Bible teaches so he can lead his family. He needs to know if the pastor is preaching and teaching truth. He needs to be able to study and discuss the Bible with his wife. He needs to be able to lead his family in family worship. He needs to be able to help other men understand the Bible.

2 Timothy 2:15 *Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

The word 'study' means to be diligent or to make an effort. We need to work hard at our study of the Bible because we are handling the Word of God. A workman that does not need to be ashamed is one who rightly divides the word of truth. The phrase "rightly dividing" means literally to 'cut it straight'. Imagine a carpenter who did not accurately measure or use diligence in his labor of building a house. When he finished if the house was crooked and the walls were not straight, he would be ashamed when someone came to inspect the work.

If a carpenter needs to be diligent about his work of building a house, how much more should we be diligent in our study of the Word of God? We are responsible to teach the Word to our families and live the Word out daily. We must be diligent to study and teach the Word of God and accurately convey the truth. Peter tells us that in his day there were those who "are unlearned and unstable". He went on to say that they "wrest" the scriptures unto their own destruction. **2 Peter 3:16**. To 'wrest' means to twist, pull or force something. In other words, those who are unlearned twist scripture to make it say something that it does not say. They also pull or force it to teach what they want it to teach instead of simply allowing it to say what God intends for it to say.

We as Bible teachers do not want that to happen in our teaching. We do not want to be ashamed, but we want to cut the Word straight and handle it right. Let's see how we can S.T.U.D.Y. to show ourselves approved unto God.

S – START WHERE EZRA STARTED

We have to have a place to start. Let's go to the Old Testament and see a man who was a scribe and who had a pioneer ministry in Israel. Ezra was among the exiles who returned from Babylon to Judah. He was a part of the great rebuilding campaign. Under Nehemiah, the wall around the city of Jerusalem was rebuilt. The temple was rebuilt and the people had to be rebuilt. The Word of God was the instrument used to rebuild the people. That is one of the tasks of a Bible teacher – to build lives and rebuild broken lives.

Ezra 7:10 *For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

The first thing Ezra did was to prepare his heart. Good teaching comes from the heart. Therefore, good Bible study must begin with the heart. God sees our heart and he wants us to have a pure heart. Jesus said,

Matthew 12:35 *A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.*

If we see our heart as a treasure chest and fill it with good things from the Word of God, we can have something to bring out of it that is good. This is what it means to prepare our heart. Ezra prepared his heart for a purpose. He prepared his heart for three things:

1. To seek the law of God. This means that he studies the Word of God not just with his head but with his heart. Good study always begins with prayer and reading the Word. Ezra had to read the Bible prayerfully and diligently to understand it. There is no substitute for reading the Bible. Bible teachers should pray and read the Bible every day. As you read you should have a pen and paper in hand to write down things that you learn and observe.
2. To do it. **James 1:22** *But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.* Before you can teach the Bible to others, you must obey it yourself. You cannot expect someone to learn a lesson that you are not willing to learn. You cannot expect someone to do something that you are not willing to do. You will be held accountable by those you teach because they will compare your life to your teaching. These two must line up.
3. To teach it. Ezra studied first to learn, grow and obey the Word himself. Then he was able to teach others the Word of God. I have talked to many people who give testimony that it was when they began to study their Bible to teach someone else that they really began to grow. When you study to teach, you always anticipate others questions and you will try to find the answers for things that you might otherwise simply read over.

A teacher must begin S.T.U.D.Y. where Ezra did – by preparing his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it and teach it to others.

T – TAKE THE PASSAGE APART

- ANALYSIS

After you have prayerfully read the passage of scripture begin the process of analysis. Analysis is taking a compound body and breaking it down into its constituent parts. Think of it as taking the passage of scripture apart. We want to determine what God means in his word.

Start by getting the general theme or point of the passage of scripture. Sometimes this is just one word. Maybe the passage is about faith or money. Then try to outline the passage of scripture. This does not have to be fancy. Just break it down into the main parts. You may be studying one verse.

For instance:

Ezra 7:10 *For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*

What is the main point? Ezra prepared his heart.

Outline:

Ezra prepared his heart to:

1. Seek the law of the Lord – Study the Bible.
2. Do it – Apply what he learned to his own life.
3. Teach in Israel laws and judgments – Teach others.

Next, continue to break the passage down into smaller parts. An important thing to do is look at the verbs. Verbs are action words and they help you see what is happening in the passage of scripture. Here are the verbs in the above scripture: Prepared, seek, do and teach. As we study these verbs we see all the action that Ezra took. We can then look up these verbs in a Bible Dictionary and study the meaning of each word. Remember that a word can have more than one meaning, so context is king in determining the meaning of a verb. Take for instance the verb 'run'. The meanings for this word are many. You could be talking about your nose running or going for a jog. A politician run's for an election and a list of numbers can be called a run. Be careful with dictionary definitions and do not read too much into the text.

Another thing to look at in the analysis stage are the nouns. A noun is a person, place, thing or idea. Here are the nouns: Ezra, heart, law, LORD, Israel, statutes and judgments. Once again we need to know what these nouns mean and determine meaning based on context.

After the passage has been taken apart by getting to the main point and outlining it the general flow will be apparent. Defining the verbs and nouns gives us a better understanding.

U – UNDERSTAND WHAT THE PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE MEANS

Proverbs 16:22 Understanding is a wellspring of life unto him that hath it: but the instruction of fools is folly.

The Bible says what it says and means what it means. It means what it was intended to mean by its author, the Holy Spirit. It means what the original hearers were intended to understand by the One who gave them the message. Scripture does not mean one thing to one person and something completely different to someone else. We must study to understand Scripture so we can hear the voice of God for us today.

- DEFINITIONS

The first place to start understanding is to define the words in their context. There are two ways to do this. First, compare scripture with scripture. Look for places in the Bible where the word is used. Do this for the English word and the underlying Hebrew or Greek word.

In the above illustration Ezra is the subject of the verse. Look for his name in other places in the Bible. Read the book that is named after him. A Bible dictionary will also help to define Ezra.

- CONTEXT

The context must always be kept in mind. A verse cannot be pulled out of its context to make it say what it was never intended to say. Every verse is a part of a larger paragraph. Every paragraph is a part of a larger chapter and every chapter is a part of a larger book. The individual books are a part of the Bible as a whole. By taking a verse out of context a verse will say something it was not intended to say.

When you study a verse in context, you are obeying God's Word. The Apostle Paul instructed the younger man Timothy to, "*preach the word,*" (**2 Timothy 4:2**). We have the Word of God, it is our job to study it, obey it and preach or teach it to others. The temptation to take something out of context comes when we have something we want to say and we go to the Bible to try and find a verse to prove it. When teaching the Bible, it is your job to help others understand what the Bible says, not what you want to say.

- COMPARE SCRIPTURE WITH SCRIPTURE

There is no substitute for praying and reading the text to teach over and over again. After you have read and re-read the passage of scripture, it is time to compare scripture with scripture. Use cross-references to compare other passages of scripture that discuss similar subjects. Many Bibles have a cross reference system. Some have them listed in the center between the columns of text. Some list them at the end of verses. Some list them at the

bottom of the page. The best cross reference system will be yours after years of reading and studying the Bible and the Holy Spirit teaches you how scriptures relate to each other. For those who have access to the Swordsearcher Bible software, the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge is a good cross reference tool.

- **FIRST MENTION**

Always be sensitive to the first mention of a word in the Bible. Many times you can learn much about what God thinks of something by studying the first time it is used. For instance, in Genesis the first mention is made of the marriage covenant and the sanctity that God applies to marriage. Even though the Bible is faithful to tell us of adultery, fornication, homosexuality and polygamy in the lives of people, we still can know that God's plan is for marriage to be lifelong, binding and between one man and one woman.

- **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Study the life and times in which the Scriptures were written. The Bible is timeless, but often the lessons cannot be fully understood and appreciated until they are understood in their historical setting. For instance, we learn that Gideon was threshing wheat in a wine press. If you don't understand how wheat was threshed and what a wine press is, you will completely miss the setting. Wheat was threshed on the top of a hill so the wind would carry away the chaff. Grapes were pressed in a vat so the juice could be collected. Gideon was in a wine press because he was afraid of the Midianites spotting him on the top of a hill. Historical background is very important for fully understanding a passage of Scripture.

- **LOGIC**

Good Bible study makes sense. It might not at first, but God wants you to understand his Word. When you study, use logic and reason to come to an understanding that makes sense in light of the rest of God's Word. Many in our day think the Bible is a book to be revered, but that it cannot be fully understood. That is not what God intended. God tells us over and over again of the advantages that come from reading and understanding God's Word. The Bible makes sense when interpreted rightly.

- **COMMENTARIES**

A final step in understanding a passage of scripture is to make good use of other gifted Bible teachers throughout history. There are many good commentaries available. A commentary is an author's teaching on a passage of scripture. They are making the comments about the passage. These can be helpful, but realize that it is man and not inspired like the Bible. **WARNING – ALL BIBLE COMMENTARIES ARE NOT CREATED EQUALLY!**

D – DEVELOP AN OUTLINE

- SYNTHESIS

Taking the passage apart is called analysis. Now it is time to put it back together. Putting all the component parts together is called synthesis. A simple process to synthesize all the information from study is needed. During your study, you have learned many things about the scripture. You have accumulated a lot of information. Now it is time to put it into a useable form that you can teach from.

- SUMMARY STATEMENT

A good Bible study or sermon is about one thing. As you study you learn a lot, but you cannot tell all that you know. To focus the information you need to aim at your target audience. It may be your family or a small group Bible study. It may be a church or a large group at a conference or convention. A summary statement that sums up the main point of the passage of scripture in question is helpful. In the earlier example, the summary statement might be: “Before we teach others, we must prepare our hearts and apply the Word of God to ourselves.”

- OUTLINE

Next, refine the outline and begin to put the information in an order that can be easily understood. The outline is a skeleton on which all the information you have gathered from your study can be arranged. The outline is a simple and practical way to get the information in a form that can be presented to others.

When I first started preaching, my pastor showed me a way to outline a message. I use this almost every time I study and prepare to preach.

TITLE:

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

MAIN POINT #1:

- a. Explanation
- b. Illustration
- c. Application

MAIN POINT #2

- a. Explanation
- b. Illustration
- c. Application

MAIN POINT #3

- a. Explanation
- b. Illustration
- c. Application

CONCLUSION:

From the scripture on Ezra, we can fill in the outline like this:

TITLE: Prepare to Teach

SUMMARY STATEMENT: Before we teach others, we must prepare our hearts and apply the Word of God to ourselves.

MAIN POINT #1: Start by Studying the Bible.

- a.
- b.
- c.

MAIN POINT #2: Apply what you learn to your life.

- a.
- b.
- c.

MAIN POINT #3: Teach others what God has taught you.

- a.
- b.
- c.

CONCLUSION: With Ezra as our example, we can be effective teachers of God's word.

You may only have two main points or you may have four or five, but if you will use this simple approach, you should be able to organize your study information into a form that can be easily presented. Imagine a car for a moment. I know how to drive a car, but I don't know much else about them. However, if I were to take the time to completely dismantle a car piece by piece and carefully study each component part, I would have a much better understanding

of how cars work. Then, after careful study of each part if I put the car back together, I would have a great understanding of the car. This is what you want to do with a passage of scripture. With each main point you need to consider three things:

- EXPLANATION

First, explain the main point. Do your best to help your audience understand what the scripture means. Define the words and compare other scriptures that help clarify the text. Bring in the cultural and historical setting.

- ILLUSTRATION

Next, illustrate the main point. This can be done in many different ways and the audience must be considered carefully. If you are teaching young children, choose an illustration that applies on their level. Bring in a story from scripture or a proverb to illustrate. You can use a personal story from your life to aid in understanding. Always be on the lookout for good Bible illustrations.

- APPLICATION

Last, apply the point to your life and then to the lives of whoever you are teaching. Here a good way to discover application is to ask some questions of the text.

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a promise to claim?
- Is there a sin to avoid?
- Is there a warning to heed?
- Is this something to commit to prayer?
- Is there a question to answer?

God's Word is not just to be studied, it is to be obeyed!

Y – YIELD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

Study is only half the work. We must realize that God has called us to teach his word. This is a work the Holy Spirit must do.

1 John 2:27 *But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.*

In order to understand God's Word, you must have the Holy Spirit living in you.

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.*

After we are born again, we must be continually filled with God's Spirit. To teach the Bible, you must allow Him to teach you and then allow Him to teach others through you! To be filled with the Holy Spirit you must ask the Lord to fill you and receive his filling by faith.

Ephesians 5:18 *And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.*

Luke 11:13 *If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?*

Seek cleansing of your heart from all known sin as you confess your sins to God.

1 John 1:9 *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*

When you yield your life to God, you are asking him to take full control. He can have the right to your mind and your heart. Then we can be empowered to do his work.

There is no higher calling than to teach others the Word of God. It is not a task we can accomplish in our flesh. But when we yield ourselves to God, he gives us the ability and strength to do what he wants us to do.

Philippians 4:13 *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.*