

FOUNDATIONS: CHRISTIAN DISCIPLINES - HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Introduction: This is the foundational study in Christian Disciplines. Every Christian Discipline begins with knowing what God thinks and wants from His children. The Bible reveals God's mind and heart. Without knowing God's Word, it is impossible to know God. The Bible is God's revelation of Himself.

An interesting tidbit of information concerning the Bible. There are 1189 chapters in the Bible. From Genesis 1 to Psalms 117, there are 594 chapters. From Psalms 119 to Revelation 22, there are 594 chapters. Psalms 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible. Psalms 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. If you add together 594 and 594, you get 1188. Psalms 118:8 is the center verse of the Bible. The center verse of the Bible is Psalms 118:8 - "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put your confidence in man." The center word of Psalms 118:8 is Jehovah/Yahweh. The Bible begins with God and ends with God, and now we know that everything in Scripture centers around God.

The Bible is a love story, a story of God and man. It reveals God, His nature, His attributes, His ways, His will, and His story of redemption. In that story, the unknown characteristics of God are revealed. Though God has always been love, His love was never fully demonstrated until there was a fallen creature – man. The same can be said of grace, mercy, justice, longsuffering, patience, joy, peace, goodness, self-control, redemptive power, etc..... Though each of these character traits always resided within God, none were fully demonstrated until the fall. Only through fallen man was the fulness of the nature of God on full display. Before the fall of man, no one could fully know who God really was.

The Bible is a systematic revelation of God. He begins with "Elohim/God", the Self Existent One, the strong One, the Creator and sustainer. He doesn't reveal Himself as Yahweh/Jehovah/LORD until man was created. Yahweh is His personal name, the name through which He reveals His nature. It literally means "I Am what I will to be". When provision was needed, God revealed Himself as Jehovah Jireh – I will to be your Provider. When knowledge of His everyday dealing in our lives needed to be known, He revealed Himself as Jehovah Raah – I will to be your Shepherd. When troublesome times were everywhere, He revealed Himself as Jehovah Shalom – I will to be your Peace. When sin prevailed, He showed Himself as Jehovah Tsidkenu – I will to be your Righteousness. Throughout the Scripture, He shows up at the opportune time to be the Answer to everything man would ever need, and He still does.

Along the way, He made Himself known as the Lord/Adonai – "Master". He is Master, King, Ruler, Sovereign, Controller, etc... Man is at his best when he knows and acknowledges God's role in history, and consequently his own role – servant. All of

man's problems radiate from his desire to usurp God's role and position in life. If we get the God part right, we will get the man part right.

The Bible is an expose on a myriad of subjects, but the primary things it exposes are

1. God/Jesus/Holy Spirit
2. Man – his condition, nature, and hope
3. Satan – his nature, desire, strategy, weakness, and end.
4. God's purposes – The Why of the story.
5. God's role in creation's affairs, especially man's redemption.
6. End time prophecy.

The Bible is an amazing Book. It was written by 44 authors over a period of approximately 1500 years. It contains 66 books, 1189 chapters, but it is without doubt one single Book. The oldest complete book of Scripture is probably Job. It would have been written around the time of Genesis 12 and the story of Abraham. Genesis 1 – 11 are older than Job, but the latter chapters of Genesis are after the story of Job. The writing of Job/Genesis was approximately 1400 BC. The final book of Scripture, Revelation, was written by John in 90 AD. The Bible, as before stated, is a systematic revelation of God. Each of the writers wrote independently of one another. There was no collaboration between the authors, yet the story line of the Bible never contradicts itself. The authors come from all walks of life. Shepherds, businessmen, tax collectors, fishermen, prophets, kings, doctors, lawyers, etc.... were all responsible for the penning of Scripture. Each were moved by God to write, and each were under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit as they wrote. The writers were the megaphones through which God would shout out His existence and purpose to a people who didn't always want to hear.

What does the Bible say about Itself? The Bible declares itself to be “God breathed (II Tim. 3:16-17).” Though it was written by human instruments, “holy men of old wrote under the direction of the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21).” The Bible declares itself to be “profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness in order that the man of God might be mature and furnished for every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17).” Joshua challenged God's people to not “let the Book of the Law depart from their mouth, but meditate in it day and night (Joshua 1:8).” By doing so the recipients “would be prosperous and enjoy success (Joshua 1:8).” David declared in Psalms 119: 9-11 that “a man's ways could be cleansed” by reading and heeding God's Word. He went on to say that God's Word “in our heart” will make us more likely to “not sin against God.”

Jesus identified Himself with the Word and as the Word made flesh. Paul declared that “faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17).” He also declared the Word to be the “Sword of the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:10-18) that is necessary for defeating Satan and his cohorts. The Bible warns people against “private interpretation” (II Peter 1:20), or in other words, coming to our own conclusions as to the meaning of a passage of Scripture. The Bible challenges us to search the Scriptures as one would search for hidden treasure or gold. The Bible also says that it will interpret itself if we will study it in its entirety.

Psalms 19 is a beautiful passage concerning the value of Scripture. There David says “the law of the LORD is perfect... the testimony of the LORD is sure... the statutes of the LORD are right... The commandment of the LORD is pure... the fear of the LORD is clean... the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.” He then says that “they are more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb.” They warn the servants of God and promise great reward to those who keep His Word. The Bible declares itself to be “a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path always” (Psalms 119:105). We are challenged by Scripture to “rightly divide the Word of Truth” (II Tim. 2:15).

Much more could be written here, but suffice it to say that the Bible is the “inspired, infallible, inerrant, and holy Word of God.” It has no flaws in the original writings, the main flaws in interpretations is in language inaccuracies (the Greek and the Hebrew are far more meaningful languages than modern languages). It is critical to study Scripture by looking at the original languages if possible.

There is no “right” way to study Scripture. There are many ways to study, each one has merit and reason. This is important to note because humans want to think their way is always the only right way.

- **Expository** – Studying the Bible and allowing it to expose itself within the context of the passage, the book, and the entirety of the Bible. Scripture never contradicts itself. Any seeming contradiction is a result of our own limitations, not the limitations of Scripture.
- **Systematic study** – A verse by verse study that encompasses the entire Scripture.
- **General reading** – Used to get a feel for the entirety of Scripture.
- **Book study** – Taking one book of Scripture and doing in depth study, verse by verse to know the entirety of what God is saying to us today.
- **Topical study** – Choosing a topic in order to understand a certain truth.
- **Character study** – Choosing a person from Scripture in order to know the person and God’s dealing in human history.

- **Word study** – Using tools at our disposal to understand the fulness of words in helping us to understand the fulness of Scripture.
- **Historical study** – Studying historical and cultural times in order to understand context to Scripture.
- **Single verse or grouping of verses study** – When you want to know what God is saying in a specific verse or passage of Scripture.
- **Books written by people about God’s Word study** – Allowing the study of others help us in our own study of God.
- **Group study** – Assembling together for the study of God’s Word. It is usually led by someone who has learned the discipline of Bible study. Discussion from the group is encouraged and valuable.
- **Life happens study** – Sometimes life happens in unexpected ways and unexpected times leaving us with few answers as to the whys of life. Many have found much solace and answer to their moments during times of crisis by going to God’s Word during such times.

These are a few of the ways and reasons that people study Scripture. Each have their place and merit. No one way to study is the only way, though some are more essential than others, especially when beginning our study. I will speak to this in the lines ahead.

Below are some of the absolutes in Studying of God’s Word.

1. **Prayer** – The Bible is not easy to understand. It is an infinite revelation of a Being who is so far beyond our comprehension that we will never fully, in this lifetime, know. He must, and will, reveal Himself. Prayer is the beginning. We ask Him to make Himself, and His will, known to us as we study His Word. Prayer is the greatest act of humility known to man. It removes my seeming ability from the equation and submits me to the overwhelming incomprehensible insurpassability of God.
2. **The Holy Spirit** – The Bible says of itself that it is “Spiritually discerned”. This means that the Holy Spirit is the primary teacher of the things of God. He wrote it through human instruments who were yielded to His control. He is able and willing to reveal to you the things of God and to make God known in this present age. Yield yourself to His guidance each time you study Scripture.
3. **Bible Memorization** – It is important to “hide the Word in our hearts” (Psalms 119:11) for many reasons, but it is imperative to memorize certain Scriptures in order to effectively study the Bible. While studying, the Holy Spirit will bring to your remembrance these passages while you are studying another passage. The Bible says that Scripture reveals Scripture. Without an understanding of doctrine, it is difficult to understand the general premise of Scripture. By memorizing

certain key passages and verses we allow God the privilege of using those elements in our everyday walk.

4. **Ask** – The Bible says that “in the multiplicity of counselors there is wisdom. (Proverbs 15:22)” Someone rightfully said that “it is better to feel like a fool for a moment than to be a fool forever.” Scripture also says that “we have not because we ask not (James 4:3).” There are people who do know what we don’t know. Ask them!!!!
5. **Make Bible study a discipline** – Set aside a time for Bible study. If you don’t, you won’t. This is easy to do. You are disciplined to go to work at a certain hour. You are disciplined to eat at certain times. You are disciplined to turn on your favorite television program each evening. You are disciplined to do what you feel is worthy of your time. Bible study is worthy of your time. I encourage you to set aside a specific time to study God’s Word. Set aside a specific block of time. It should be a short period in the beginning, but should increase with time.
6. **Make Bible study fun** – I often challenge people who are new to Christianity to read the four gospels with one purpose in mind – to get to know Jesus. I ask them to discover one new thing about Jesus each day and then to ponder that discovery before going to the next discovery. By doing this, a person will discover 30 new things about Jesus in the course of one month, and if they continue this discipline they will know 365 things about Jesus in one year. That is as much as most veteran Christians have discovered in a lifetime. It gives motive and will motivate.
7. **Believe that God wants His children to know Him.** Paul said that he “counted all things as dung that he might know God (Phil. 3:8).” His pursuit of God is unprecedented in human discipline. He spent 3 years on the back side of the desert in study and contemplation of God before he began his ministry and writing. He poured himself into this discipline and God showed up, revealing Himself and His heart to this person with a desire. God still does. If you have a desire, a hunger, God will show up for you and make Himself known to you. He desires to do so. One of the last things Paul would write is in II Timothy 1:6 – “I know Whom I have believed in...” The desire to know God is achievable.
8. **Believe that you are capable of knowing the Bible.** This is probably the biggest deterrent to Bible study. People are intimidated by the complexities of Scripture and the largeness of the task ahead. They look at the largeness of the study and think themselves too small. God says that He has placed in you “everything that is needed for life and Godliness (II Peter 1:3).” God says you “are complete in Christ (Col. 2:10).” God says He has placed in you “the Divine nature (II Peter 1:4).” God fully equipped you when He saved you. His Holy Spirit took up residence in your life the moment you believed. He has given you His Word in order to know Him and His will. He has given to you the riches of the ages and simply asks you

to believe that He is willing to reveal to you what you need to know. Some of the greatest theologians in human history were “unlearned” men. Look at the disciples that God chose to teach in order to reveal Himself to a world that had grown dark. The Bible teaches in the Book of Acts that the “theologians” of the day were confused at the wisdom and understanding of the followers of Christ and “knew that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:3).”

Here are some things that have helped me in studying the Bible.

- **A Bible** – I use the King James Version. This is not required. There are many good Bible interpretations today. Find one that is right for you. Interestingly, one of the reasons that I use the KJV is because it is difficult to understand. I am also of the mindset that the LORD would not have allowed us to have a subpar interpretation until the 20th century. Because of the archaic language, I am challenged to delve into deeper study to understand the complexity of the language. It has been very helpful in my discipline to do word studies. Understanding the original languages has helped immensely in understanding the Bible. There are many tools at your disposal to help in this matter. You do not have to be a Greek or Hebrew scholar to master word study.
- **Strong's Exhaustive Concordance** – This is a tool that is very helpful in referencing and cross-referencing passages of Scripture. It also has a tool to allow a person who does not know Greek and Hebrew to study the original languages. To me, this is essential to good Bible Study.
- **A Good cross reference study Bible.** There are many. I began with the Scofield Bible and still use it. His notes and cross references have been very helpful over the years. There are many good references. John MacArthur's study Bible is very good and sound.
- **Parallel Bible.** Parallel Bibles will have as many as 4 versions on corresponding pages. This allows you to read different Bible interpretations side by side. If you are like me, it will cause you to do much research on your own because of seeming discrepancies between versions.
- **Vines Word Study** – Goes into depth on the meanings of words from Scripture. It fully delves into the original languages and helps the novice, with no knowledge of the Greek or Hebrew, to be an expert.
- **Bible Dictionary** – This book will allow you to know things and customs of the days of Scripture. By knowing things about the economy of the day, or the customs of the times will help you to understand more fully what God is saying to you today.
- **Bible Commentaries** – Very helpful tool, especially with hard passages, but be forewarned that interpretations vary greatly. Do not take the word of the

commentator as Gospel. It is subject to be wrong. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit can guide us, so always listen to your Spirit when reading others interpretations.

- **Books** – Very similar response as Bible Commentaries.
- **The internet** – The available tools for Bible study is amazing. Take advantage of the day and time in which you live.
- **Listening and praying** – I have gained greatly by listening to what others say, whether it be a sermon or just in conversation. This has been invaluable.
- **Asking questions** – This is of paramount importance. Be humble. It is never a bad thing to admit you don't know it all.