

How to Study the Bible

An excerpt from Rick Warren's chapter "The Devotional Method of Bible Study" in *Bible Study Methods*. The table at the end was produced by Glen Davis, campus pastor at Stanford University

Definition

The devotional method of Bible study involves taking a passage of the Bible, large or small, and prayerfully meditating on it until the Holy Spirit shows you a way to apply its truth to your own life in a way that is personal, practical, possible, and provable. The goal is for you to take seriously the Word of God and 'do what it says.' (James 1:22)

Why Application is important

The Bible was given to us to show us how we can have a relationship with Almighty God and how we are to live our lives his way in this world. It was given to change our lives to become more like that of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul declared that it is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training the believer in righteous living (2 Timothy 3:16).

The Bible is a practical book, for it is concerned with practical godly living. Bible study without personal application can be just an academic exercise with no spiritual value. The Bible was written to be applied....

Application is Necessary for our Lives

1. *You can't really get to know the Word of God unless you apply it to your life.* During his ministry Jesus had a number of encounters with the religious leaders of his time. These were primarily the Pharisees, the acknowledged scholars of the day; the scribes, legal and religious experts in Jewish law; and the Sadducees, the liberalizing element of Jewish society at that time. One on occasion the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection from the dead, ask Jesus a trick question.

Jesus' answer is indeed interesting. He said to them, 'You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God' (Matthew 22:29). The Sadducees had an intellectual knowledge of the facts of Jewish Scriptures (our Old Testament), but they did not apply these principles in a personal way.

You can be a walking encyclopedia, with your head crammed full of biblical knowledge, but it won't do you any good if you don't apply it practically in daily living. If you study the Word of God without applying it to your life, you are no better off than the Pharisees and Sadducees of Jesus' day. You don't really know the Scriptures until you put them into practice.

2. *Studying the Word of God can be dangerous if you merely study it without applying it.* Bible study without application can be dangerous because knowledge puffs up. The apostle Paul stated, 'Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up' (1 Corinthians 8:1). The Greek word translated 'puffs up' contains the idea of being inflated with pride that in turn leads to arrogance. ...When you correctly apply the Word of God to your life, you eliminate the danger of being puffed up with pride.

Bible study without application can be dangerous because knowledge requires action. What a man knows should find expression in what he does. James declared, 'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says' (James 1:22). God's commands are not optional. He does not say, 'Please won't you consider doing this?' He commands, 'Do it!' And he expects us to obey.

Application is Hard Work

It would seem that applying the Bible would be fairly simple, but actually it is the hardest part of Bible study. Why is that? Application doesn't happen by accident. We have to plan for it, or it will never come about. Three things that make applying Scripture to our lives so difficult are that it requires thinking, the devil fights it viciously, and we naturally resist change.

1. Application is hard work because it requires serious thinking. Sometimes it takes a long period of meditation (concentrated, prayerful thinking) before we see a way to apply a truth of Scripture we have studied. Sometimes it may mean looking beneath a temporary rule to see a timeless principle in the text. Sometimes it means looking beyond a local custom to see a universal insight. All this takes time and concentration that we may be hesitant and reluctant to give.
2. Application is hard work because Satan fights it viciously. The devil's strongest attacks often come in your quiet time when you are trying to apply what you have studied. Satan knows that as long as you are content with merely having head knowledge of the Word, you are not much of a threat to his plans....
3. Application is hard work because we naturally resist change. Often we don't "feel" like changing, which is what true application requires. We live by our emotions rather than by our wills, for we are content to stay the way we are. ...Applied Bible study as an act of the will leads to maturity and is the basis for stability in your Christian life.

Four Steps to Practical Application

1. Step one: pray for insight on how to apply the passage. Ask God to help you apply the Scripture you are studying and show you specifically what he wants you to do. You already know that God wants you to do two things: obey his Word and share it with others.
2. Step two: meditate on the verse(s) you have chosen to study. Meditation is the key to discovering how to apply Scripture to your life. Meditation is essentially thought digestion. You take a thought God gives you, you put it in your mind, and think on it

over and over. Meditation may be compared to rumination; that's what a cow does when it chews its cud. It eats some grass and sends it to its first stomach; then it lies down, brings the grass up, chews on it, and swallows it again. This process of digestion is repeated three times. Scriptural meditation is reading a passage in the Bible, then concentrating on it in different ways. Here are several practical ways you can meditate on a passage of Scripture.

- a. Visualize the scene of the narrative in your mind.
 - b. Emphasize words in the passage under study. Read through a verse aloud several times, each time emphasizing a different word, and watch new meanings develop.
 - c. Paraphrase the passage under study.
 - d. Personalize the passage you are studying. This can be done by putting your name in place of the pronouns or nouns used in Scripture.
 - e. Use the S-P-A-C-E-P-E-T-S acrostic.
 - i. Sin to confess?
 - ii. Promise to claim?
 - iii. Attitude to claim?
 - iv. Command to obey?
 - v. Example to follow?
 - vi. Prayer to pray?
 - vii. Error to avoid?
 - viii. Truth to believe?
 - ix. Something to praise God for?
 - f. Pray the verse or passage back to God.
3. Step three: Write out an application of the insights you have discovered through your meditation. Writing your application out on paper helps you be specific. If you don't write something down, you will soon forget it. ...It has been proven that if you write something down, you will remember it longer and be able to express to others what you've learned. You need to remember four factors in writing out your application:
- a. Your application should be personal: You should write it in the first person singular. Use the personal pronouns I, me, my, and mine throughout.
 - b. Your application should be practical: it ought to be something you can do. Plan a definite course of action that you intend to take.
 - c. Your application should be possible: it should be something you know you can accomplish. Otherwise you will be discouraged.
 - d. Your application should be provable: you must set up some sort of follow-up to check up on your success in doing it. It has to be measurable so you will know that you have done it.
4. Step four: memorize a key verse from your study.

Summary

The ultimate test by which we study and apply Scripture is the person of Jesus Christ. We have to ask, "Does this application help me become more like Jesus?"

A man saw his neighbor coming out of a church one Sunday morning. He asked the churchgoer, "Is the sermon done?" The neighbor wisely replied, "No. It was preached, but it has yet to be done."

If we do not apply biblical insights God gives us, we become spiritually hardened and callous. We become dull to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Application of God’s Word is vitally necessary to our spiritual health and our growth in Christian maturity.”

“All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.” (II Timothy 3:16)

	Belief	Behavior
Positive	Teaching: “Is there something I should believe based on this passage?”	Training in Righteousness: “Is there a habit I should cultivate based on this passage?”
Negative	Correcting: “Is there a belief I should abandon based on this passage?”	Rebuking: “Is there a behavior I should stop or changed based on this passage?”

Questions:

1. Where is the place you meet with God?
2. Are you reading to stay dutiful or are you seeking God in scripture in order to obey him more?