

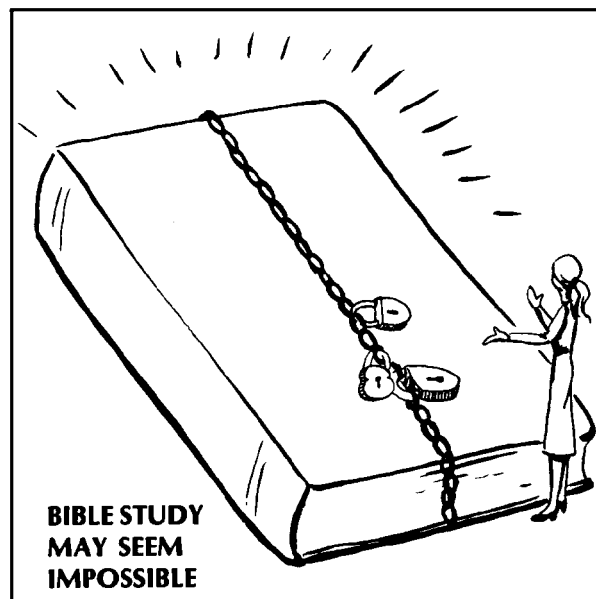
Lesson
4

Preparation for Bible Study

Now that we have stated reasons for studying the Bible and briefly described the Bible, we need to discuss how to study the Bible. In this lesson we want to talk about things that will prepare you to study. Then, in the next four lessons we will present some methods of organizing your study.

You might think that to study the Bible is an impossible task. There is so much material to cover and some of it is difficult to understand. But as with any other large task, if you know how to do it and divide it into smaller parts, you will accomplish a great deal.

You might be interested to know that it took over 20 people to prepare this book, *How to Study the Bible*, in a process of 35 steps. Many of the steps took weeks to complete and some of them had to be repeated. This book is just one in a series of books that have been and are being written for you to help you know about God and His will for your life. A few years ago this whole task seemed impossible. It is being accomplished because of a plan of action.



In this lesson you will study . . .

Basic Tools for Study
Basic Rules of Interpretation
Prayer for Guidance

This lesson will help you . . .

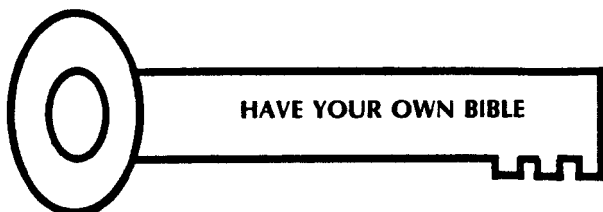
- Describe basic tools for Bible study.
- Describe basic rules for how to interpret the writer's intended meaning.
- Tell why you need the Holy Spirit to teach you as you study.

BASIC TOOLS FOR STUDY

Objective 1. *Show understanding of the use of three basic tools for Bible study.*

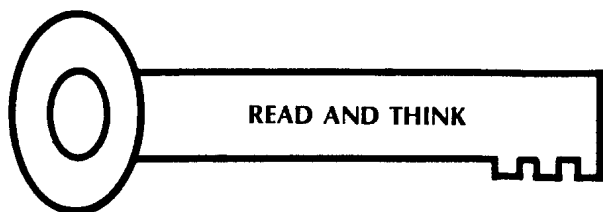
The best way to grow spiritually is to study the Bible. You cannot rely on the studies or teachings of other people. The study of God's Word is an individual task. It is perhaps the most personal task you will ever become involved in. This task will affect your whole being—who you are and what you do.

Naturally, you influence other people around you. Therefore, what you learn in your private Bible study, you must share with others. As you learn and grow in the knowledge of God, you should teach Sunday school, share in group Bible studies, and tell your friends and neighbors about Christ.



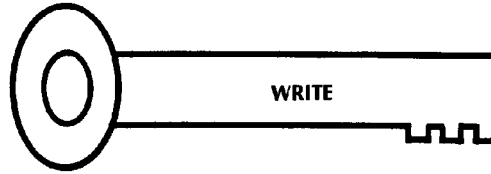
The tools you need for Bible study are very few. Of course, *you need a Bible*. (It is helpful to have more than one version of the Bible so you can compare the wording of difficult passages of Scripture.) The Bible expresses all of God's revelation to man. It tells you all you need to know about your new life in Christ and your eternal life in heaven. Thus, the Bible is its own best interpreter. The more you read it, the more you understand its meaning.

Your eyes and mind are the second tool for study. When you use your eyes, you can experience many things a blind person cannot. Yet, so many people who can see are careless and do not really "see" or experience all that they could through using their eyesight and their ability to think.



Physical sight is closely connected to spiritual sight. This means knowledge or insight into the hidden truths of God. In fact, the Scriptures use the word "seeing" to mean "knowing spiritual truth." According to 2 Corinthians 4:4 those who don't believe the gospel about Christ are blinded by Satan so they cannot see the light that comes from God's Word. (See also Matthew 13:14-16.) And Isaiah 44:18 says that those who reject God "close their eyes and their minds to the truth." On the other hand, the pure in heart, those who love God, will "see God" as Matthew 5:8 tells us. Yet, so many Christians are guilty of not studying God's Word, as they should. They do not "see" or experience as much of the truth as they could.

You can begin to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), if you allow the Holy Spirit to make the Word clear to you. The goal of your study is to have spiritual sight. You want to know God's truth and apply it to your life in your daily decisions and actions (1 Corinthians 2:13-16). Through careful study you will receive knowledge of the Bible's teachings about your new life. You will be better prepared to recognize and reject false teachings. The Apostle Paul warned the young churches and his friend Timothy to be aware of false teachers. They would try to lead Christians away from the truth by making them obey rules that are not biblical. (See Ephesians 4:14.)



Your third tool is a pen to write notes as you read the Bible. To write something helps you to remember it because you “see” it in a different way. As you write repeated words or special things that are mentioned, you will actually “see” more of what the writer wrote. Write references that are made to other passages so that you can read and compare them. Also write any questions that come to your mind as you read, or any thoughts you have. Later when you read over your notes, you will begin to understand the Bible better and you can answer some of your questions.

These three tools, the Bible, your physical and mental eyes, and a pen, are really all you need to study the Bible. There are other tools that are helpful to Bible study. You may be able to use a Bible concordance, which lists in alphabetical order all the words of the Bible and their Scripture references. If, for example, you wanted to read several Scriptures about “faith,” you could easily find them by referring to the word “faith” in the concordance. Many Bibles have a small concordance in the back of them. The *Good News Bible: Today’s English Version* has a very small section called the “Subject Index.” It lists names, places, and major topics, giving their page references. It does not list separate words with all their Scripture references.

The Bible dictionary is a tool that provides definitions of difficult words and information about biblical times, places, culture, and people. Another kind of tool is the Bible commentary. These are books written by various Bible scholars who share their own understanding of the Scriptures based on their long and intense study.



If none of these extra tools are available to you, don’t worry. The Holy Spirit will reveal the meaning of the Word to you even though you have no study helps. Ask for divine guidance as you put into practice the study methods you learn in this course.



For You To Do

- 1 You can depend on just the Bible for learning about God’s revelation to man because
 - a) other great religious books duplicate its material.
 - b) no other books discuss God’s revelation to man.
 - c) the Bible expresses all of God’s revelation to man.
- 2 The most important tools for Bible study are
 - a) commentaries by well-known writers.
 - b) a Bible, your eyes, and a pen.
 - c) books on new revelations.

3 The relationship of spiritual sight to eyesight is suggested by the term

- a) seeing the truth.
- b) circumstances of truth.
- c) light for seeing.

4 The main purpose of writing notes as you study is to

- a) keep a record of what you have studied.
- b) keep from having to remember what you read.
- c) see in a different way what you are studying.

Check your answers.

BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

Objective 2. *Show understanding of three basic rules of interpretation.*

You may wonder how to begin your study of the Bible. What book should you start with? How many verses should you study each day?

You should begin with a short book (such as Colossians which we will study in Lesson 5) and study about 20-25 verses a day. You may be able to read more than this, but your study will take more time. You should cover a short passage each day in order to gain the most out of your study.

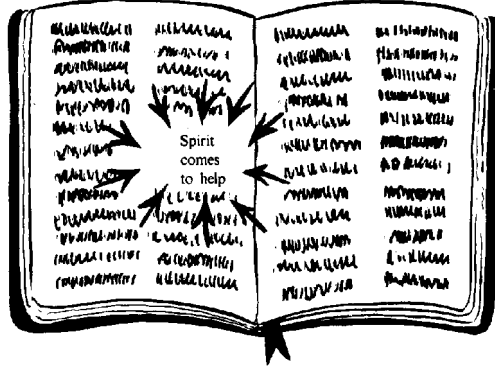
Just as you may have questions about how to study, you may have questions about the meaning of certain passages of Scripture. How can you interpret or explain the meaning of them? One rule of interpretation is: Ask questions about each passage of Scripture. Who is the author? What is his main purpose? To whom is he writing? Who or what is the passage about? How was something done? When did it happen? Where did it happen? What does this passage mean? What was the purpose in saying this? What truth does it suggest?

We will use Romans 8:26-27 as a sample passage to interpret.

In the same way the Spirit also comes to help us, weak as we are. For we do not know how we ought to pray; the Spirit himself pleads with God for us in groans that words cannot express. And God, who sees into our hearts, knows what the thought of the Spirit is; because the Spirit pleads with God on behalf of his people and in accordance with his will (Romans 8:26-27).

We cannot answer the first three questions. But we can see *what* these verses are about. They are about prayer, the Holy Spirit's prayers on our behalf. *How* the Spirit prays is in "groans." These come from deep inside us in "our hearts" where the Spirit dwells. (See John 14:15-17.) The Spirit prays when we don't know how we ought to. The Spirit prays on behalf of God's people wherever they are. This passage means that we have a very great Helper. He not only pleads with God for us but also pleads for that which is according to God's will. We cannot see yet how these verses serve the author's main purpose but they do serve to encourage us in our faith. They also suggest, for one thing, that as we really seek to do God's will, the Holy Spirit will renew our mind! Then we will pray in accordance with God's will.

In order to answer the other questions, we must read the verses that surround this passage. Surrounding material is called the *context*. By reading verses 1-25, we see that the author is discussing our new life in the Spirit (vs. 5, 9) as children of God (vs. 14, 17) who have hope in a future glory (v. 18). This context helps us to better understand why we have the power of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. It is because of who we are in Christ.



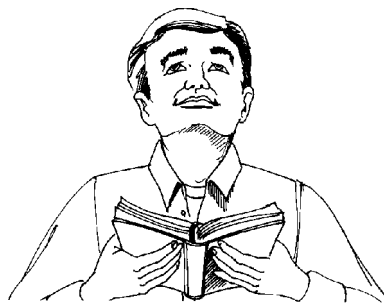
**THE CONTEXT HELPS
TO MAKE THE MEANING CLEAR**

By reading chapter 1 of Romans we learn that Paul, an apostle (v. 1), wrote this letter to the church in Rome (v. 7). After giving his greetings, he states his main purpose in verses 16 and 17: the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that salvation is by faith, not by anything else. Now we can see how the emphasis in verses 26 and 27 on our victory through the Holy Spirit supports Paul main purpose. He teaches that faith brings salvation and future glory in heaven.

The second *rule of interpretation* is: Explain the meaning of a Scripture as it relates to its context. False teachings can arise from taking a verse or part of a verse out of its context. Sometimes people claim God’s promises while ignoring the conditions that go with them (See the condition in Matthew 6:33.) Others may use a verse to support their own belief without paying attention to the intended meaning of the verse that is based on its context. For example, a man who wants to divorce his wife might refer to 1 Corinthians 7:1 to support his desire. But this verse alone is not support enough for his argument. In fact, when we read all of chapter 7 and Ephesians 5 and 1 Timothy 4: 1-4, we see that divorce is not acceptable to God.

When a passage presents limited teaching or a seeming conflict, we need to study other passages that give related teaching. This third *rule of interpretation* provides a more complete and balanced teaching of the truth. Look in the margins of your Bible for references to related Scriptures.

These three rules become easier to use the more you read the Bible.



For You To Do

- 5 Select the best completion answer for each of the following sentences:
a If you ask questions as you read a passage of Scripture, it helps you

.....
interpret the passage./see how much you already know.

- b If you cannot answer many questions about a Scripture, you should

 go on to find something else./read the context to find more answers.

- c References listed in the margins of your Bible are

 helpful for anyone who studies./important for teachers only.

- d Using the rules of interpretation helps you

 find support for your ideas./avoid false ideas.

- 6 Read Romans 14:4 and interpret it as you read and answer the following questions.
 - a What is this verse about?

 - b Read the context in verses 1-6. What seemed to be causing problems in the church at Rome?

 - c Read Colossians 2:16, which is given as a reference for Romans 14:1-6, and 1 Timothy 4:3, a
 verse we referred to in the lesson. What do these verses suggest?

 - d Read James 4:11-12 which gives related teaching. What particular new meaning does it
 suggest?

 - e Read Matthew 7:1-5 and Luke 6:37-38, 41-42 which give Jesus' own instructions on this matter.
 What additional emphasis is made about our conduct towards others in Luke 6:37-38?

 - f Now read all of Romans 14 for a more thorough teaching of what verse 4 means. What should
 you do about Christian brothers who believe differently than you do?

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

Objective 3. *Recognize the relationship between prayer and your study of God's Word.*

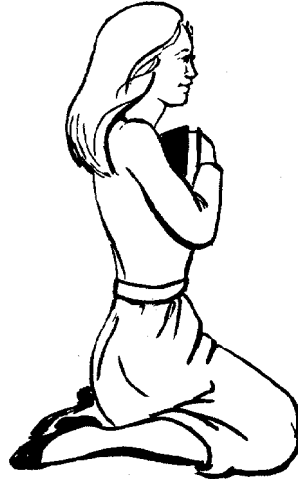
We have the Holy Spirit to direct us in God's will for us. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, continually, and is our guide. This is described in 1 John 2:27:

But as for you, Christ has poured out his Spirit on you. As long as his Spirit remains in you, you do not need anyone to teach you. For his Spirit teaches you about everything, and what he teaches is true, not false.

Remember, people who do not have God's Spirit in them cannot interpret the spiritual truths of the Bible. But neither can we unless we ask the Holy Spirit to help us. He doesn't force the truth on us. We must pray for understanding as King David did, repeatedly.

Open my eyes, so that I may see the wonderful truths in your law. I am here on earth for just a little while; do not hide your commands from me. My heart aches with longing; I want to know your judgments at all times (Psalm 119:18-19).

Effective Bible study depends on prayer. Prayer indicates our humility, sincerity, and dependence in our relationship to God. Prayer shows us our need for help and guidance. Prayer



helps us pay attention to our study and respond to Bible lessons. Prayer opens our minds so that we are ready to receive truth:

So then, have your minds ready for action. Keep alert and set your hope completely on the blessing which will be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed (1 Peter 1:13).

Once again we refer to what 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

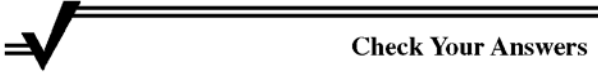
All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed.

This passage shows us why we must study God's Word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you learn as much as you can about interpreting God's Word as you continue studying this book.

7 Circle the letter in front of each correct completion. Prayer is necessary for effective Bible study because

- a) the Holy Spirit is our teacher.
- b) we acknowledge our need for guidance through prayer.
- c) it makes us receptive to the truth.
- d) it reduces the burden on us to study hard.

Now that you have completed the first four lessons, you are ready to answer the first section of your student report. Review Lessons 1-4, then follow the instructions in your student report. When you send your answer sheet to your instructor, ask him about another course of study.



Check Your Answers

- 1 c) the Bible expresses all of God's revelation to man.
- 5 a) interpret the passage.
b) read the context to find more answers.
c) helpful for anyone who studies.
d) avoid false ideas.
- 2 b) a Bible, your eyes, and a pen.
- 6 a) We are not to judge our brothers in Christ. Their master is Christ. He will judge them.
b) There is arguing about what people can and cannot eat and whether or not one day should be set above the other. If you read verse 17, you see that these are not to be our concerns.
c) We need to look to God for guidance rather than to men. Thus we will be judged by God, not by men.
d) The act of judging another person shows our disobedience. We must not play God or we will be judged even more severely.
e) Not only should we not judge others, but we should forgive them and love them by giving to them.
f) Do not judge or condemn them; instead protect them by not doing anything that would weaken their faith.
- 3 a) seeing the truth.
- 7 a) the Holy Spirit is our teacher.
b) we acknowledge our need for guidance through prayer.
c) it makes us receptive to the truth.
- 4 c) see in a different way what you are studying. **Lesson**