

## **Feeding Yourself From the Word of God** **Workshop#2: Bible Study Tools** (D. Parlett)

Welcome to Workshop #2:

We will be adding more and more to our knowledge of how to unpack the secrets of the Bible. Again, we are doing that by:

1. Learning Bible Study methods
2. Practicing our methods on actual verses and passages.

Does it ever seem like learning to study the Bible is like being in a class, maybe even a boring one? It is very important to keep in mind that the focus of your Bible study is a person. Hebrews 4:12 says, “*For the word of God is living and active...*” God is living and active and you can get to know Him and fall more in love with Him through your time in His Word. As you seek to know the Book, He speaks to your heart. As you sit down for your time in the Bible never forget that God wants to meet you there and bless you. Listen carefully for his voice.

Review:

In Workshop #1, we learned about the Prerequisites of Bible Study: Do you remember? (It has to do with the heart).

And we learned about the Foundations of Bible Study: What are the three basic steps of almost any Bible study method? What is the goal of these three steps?

Also, I hope that you have chosen a course of study so that you can practice the techniques you learn in this workshop. Did you read it enough to get familiar with it? What were your first impressions, thoughts, questions, reactions, or blessings that you got from it? I hope you wrote those down. Could you find anything out about the background information to the book such as author, audience, and cultural/historical background? The important thing is that you are having regular time in the Word. At this point don't worry if you are doing everything correctly. The important thing is that you are diving in.

In this workshop, we will cover:

**Bible Study Tools.**

### **Introduction**

Doing any job well, involves having the right tools. Any handy-man, amateur or professional, can tell you that. It's the same with Bible study. So, what do you need in your most basic and helpful Bible Study kit? Here's a list, starting with the most important ones.

#### **A. Bible Study Tools:**

##### **Your Brain, Heart and the Spirit:**

*Your Brain:* Probably the most important Bible Study tool is your brain. I have heard that cows will regurgitate their food and chew that grass even more to get out all the nutrition they can. Our Bible study needs to be like that. We need to really chew on the verses we read, repeatedly. Don't be lazy. Think carefully through the meaning. Make insightful observations. Pray. Draw up a chart. Ask questions. In my own Bible study, I have found that if my pen is moving, my brain is working, so keep that writing implement busy.

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*Your Heart:* But don't make the mistake of just being analytical. There should be an emotional component to our response to what we study. There might be joy, conviction, empathy, enlightenment, anger, wonder, surprise, laughter or more. Make sure you are feeling the passage. Try to relate to the situation or the characters in the section you are reading. Very possibly you will be moved to pray to God as an expression of what you are feeling (write out that prayer). Let your heart play a role in your study of Scripture.

*The Spirit:* Finally, there is the Spiritual component. When you became a Christian, a brand new spiritual life was born in you that began to grow and change you from the inside out. We can call on this supernatural power to be involved in the whole process of Bible study. At the front end, to guide our thinking, our writing, our analyzing and our insight as we study. But the Spirit is especially helpful on the back end, to help us correctly respond to and apply what we learn. I know I need His strength to obey the commands, believe the truths, follow the examples or make the changes the flow out of my time in His Word. It is hard but glorious work and we need the Spirit to make it count.

#### **Your Bible:**

Of course, for Bible study it's helpful to have a Bible. Not all English translations are the same. I find it helpful to have several versions. Sometimes, the way a verse is translated in another version can help you figure out the meaning. Here are my recommendations (or non-recommendations) on translations:

**NIV** (New International Version): for readability (my favorite).

**NAS** (New American Standard): for faithfulness to the original construction. (Why is that helpful at times?)

**KJV** (King James Version): especially for Psalms and other poetic literature. Generally has old fashioned language. New version, **NKJV**, is more up to date.

**Living Bible** or **The Message**: be careful. These versions can be helpful but should be considered paraphrases or even commentaries. The authors 'read' a lot into these translations.

#### **A Notebook:**

The advantages of writing things out cannot be over-emphasized! As observed before, when the pen is moving, the brain is working. We will be teaching many methods of observing and taking notes but whatever you do, keep writing. For example, ask questions, make comments, observe patterns, write a letter to God, outline, write definitions, make charts, etc. It's also good for reviewing when you come back to your study at a later time. Remember: Look at your fish!

#### **The Advantages of a Study Bible:**

Study Bibles are very popular and there's a reason. There are some helpful extras in a Study Bible that can be a great advantage in your study. Here are some of the most common features of a Study Bible:

**Introductory notes and outlines:** When I was studying the book of Galatians I found it very helpful to know the background of that letter. It really shed light onto why Paul emphasizes the things he does. I also noted that the book of Acts gives the context of some of the things Paul refers to in that book.

**Cross references:** For many verses, there are other verses in the Bible that can compliment or expand your understanding of the meaning of a particular text. Cross references are a list of those other verses. Be aware that other people have compiled these lists and they may not be exhaustive.

**Verse notes:** These are brief comments, interpretations or background information for a particular verse or set of verses. Can be helpful but sometimes they, like commentaries, can do the thinking for you.

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**Concordance and reference charts in back:** An explanation of how to use a concordance follows. Other reference sections are maps, weights and measure charts, and various indexes. These can tell you things like how far people traveled, or how expensive something was.

**A Concordance:**

A concordance is a list of verses in the Bible that contain various words. For example, you could look up a number of verses, from all over the Bible, that all have the word “fire” in them. This can be very helpful for doing a study on a particular topic or in finding a verse that you don’t have the reference for or doing your own cross referencing.

Concordances vary in how many verses they will list. The ones in the backs of Bibles are generally short and just contain the main verses that contain a particular word. Exhaustive Concordances, on the other extreme, list all the verses that contain a particular word for all but the most inane words in the Bible, such as “and”, “it” or “the”.

I have found the most helpful concordances are in-between these two extremes. They are often called “Complete” or “Handy” concordances. Obviously, it is most helpful if your concordance is the same version as the Bible that you are reading.

**Concordance Exercises:** (for a few more exercises see the section at the end):

1) **Finding a verse:** Find a verse where you sort-of-know what it says but don’t know the reference (e.g., “You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free” or “Do not judge or you will be judged.”) Where are those? How would you use a concordance to find it?

2) **Topical/word study:** Using a concordance, look up all the verses on (choose one): cross, anger, veil, money or other examples. Try doing a mini-topical study on something that interests you using this method. But, remember, if your topic causes you to use a word whose meaning is too general, such as “love” or “church”, you will get bogged down or confused in your study. Try a more specific word.

**A Commentary:**

A Commentary contains the comments of a particular “scholar” or group of “scholars” on the meaning and application of a part (or the whole) of the Bible. In my opinion, there are both plusses and minuses to using commentaries. The negative is that you can read their thoughts instead of doing your own. Don’t let a commentary do the thinking for you. It’s better to wrestle with a passage yourself for a while and then only consult a commentary if you are really, really stuck or if you want to compare your comments with theirs. The positive contribution of a commentary is that sometimes they can discern things that you missed or give you background information or language clues that you cannot research for your self. Honestly, when I have worked hard on a passage I find that I have seen just about everything the experts did. I think you can too.

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**On-line resources:**

There are an increasing number of Bible Study tools on line. Key words: Bible Study. Look around. There is quite a lot out there. There may be more to recommend. For example:

<http://www.blueletterbible.org>

A very comprehensive resource. It contains a powerful topical search engine, concordance-type search, verse reference look up, and an interlinear Hebrew and Greek with links directly to Strong's Concordance. It also has the full set of Chuck Smith, David Guzik, and Matthew Henry commentaries on-line.

<http://www.biblegateway.com>

The Bible Gateway is a tool for reading and researching scripture online in many different translations. It provides advanced searching capabilities, based on keywords, phrases, or scripture reference.

<http://www.helpmewithbiblestudy.org>

A great companion to this workshop. It goes in depth on Bible Study Methods, Bible Tools, and also has a growing set of articles by various pastors and scholars arranged by theological subject.

**B. Next Workshop (#3):**

1. We will learn a variety of **Observation techniques**.
2. In particular we will take a closer look at one particular Observation technique: the **Syntactical Outline Method**.

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**C. Workshop #2: Questions / Exercises:**

**1. Emotional Analysis:**

In many passages it is helpful to put yourself into the situation and try to “feel” the passage. Try to relate the various characters or moods in the passage. How would you feel if you were there in the scene? Can you be empathetic?

The goal is to make it real. Often, an emotional analysis will cause the passage to be both more memorable and meaningful. If a section of your chosen course of study lends itself to this kind of analysis then try it on that.

If not try these passages: 2 Samuel 12:1-14 or Luke 5:17-26. Remember that it might be helpful to review the chapters around these sections if you are not familiar with the stories.

**2. Using Bible versions:**

**Warning:** *The following verse contains content not suitable for children.*

Check out this contentious verse in different translations: How does the translation change your understanding?

Galatians 5:12 - **King James Version**

*“I would they were even cut off which trouble you.”*

Galatians 5:12 – **New American Standard**

*“I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves!”*

Galatians 5:12 - **The Message**

*“Why don't these agitators, obsessive as they are about circumcision, go all the way and castrate themselves!”*

**3. Cross References:**

First, if you have cross references in your Bible then try a few out on verses in your chosen course of study especially if you don't really understand a verse. Were they helpful or not?

Second, try these exercises:

Even if you are not a husband try reading Colossians 3:19. Make some notes. Then read 1 Peter 3:7. What did you learn about husbands here? Finally, read Ephesians 5:25-33. How did this deepen or expand your understanding of the role of husbands? Give your observations to a husband near you!

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Read 2 Peter 1:3. Note the last line. Can we deepen our understanding of God's Glory and Goodness? Try Exodus 33: 12-23 but especially 18-23. What did you think of this passage? How did it affect you? Did this additional passage help deepen your understanding?

**4. More concordance exercises:**

*Finding verse references:* Using a concordance try finding where this verse is: "...he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you" or "Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler."

*Topical studies:* Using a concordance do a topical study on blood, spirit or belief / believes / believing. As you read many verses for each word did your understanding of it increase? Were some verses irrelevant? Can you write a short analysis of the word you chose to study that you could share with others?

**5. Read a commentary:**

Study a passage in your chosen course of study thoroughly and then if you have access to a commentary (at your church library for example) then read the commentary for that passage. Did you learn new things about your passage or not? Was it helpful in anyway? Do you agree with the commentator?

**6. Go on-line assignment:**

Using a search engine, or a link, find another on-line Bible study resource. How did this site help you? Was it easy to use?