

Becoming a Student who Knows the Word of God in Depth

So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples." (John 8:31)

It is understandable that a new believer does not know the Bible well. But it would be wrong if one always remain at this stage. From the perspective of the Bible, it is ridiculous that a believer does not even know the Word of God. Actually, to be a true disciple of Lord Jesus, only knowing the teachings of the Bible is inadequate; he has to always obey the Word of the Lord and live according to His Word.

Therefore the Word of God should undoubtedly be of utmost importance to our life. J.S.James said, "God speaks to us through His Word. Numerous servants of God have written many gratifying and inspiring books, and we should put all these books on the less important place on the book shelf. The Bible should be the most important book. It would be great if you have plenty of time to read all the books on the shelf. But do not forget to put the Bible in the first place." Every Christian has to become a student who deeply knows the Word of God.

A. Purpose of Studying the Bible

Every Christian has a purpose of life, which is glorifying God. There is one life far glorifying God than all the other, which is Jesus Christ himself. Therefore every Christian should yearn to be transformed to be more like Jesus.

Imitating Christ is a life-long process, and the Word of God is the important means for us to imitate Christ. If we have the Word of God richly in our hearts, the Holy Spirit will transform our life through the Word, so that we can give greater glory to God. Thus the purpose of studying the Bible is to be transformed to be like Lord Jesus. It is very important that we keep this in mind.

B. Levels of Studying the Bible

1. Desire

The most important key to knowing God and His Word is a heart thirsting for God. This is a committed heart which is faithful to the God, putting Him in the first place in desire and in knowledge. Therefore every Christian should ask himself, "To what level am I willing to know the Word of God? Do I want to have a close relationship with Him? Do I want to pay the price for it?"

"You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13)

"O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water." (Ps 63:1)

Such a thirsting heart will drive us to seek diligently for His Word. When you love God, you will love to study His Word.

2. Obey

The prior condition for willingness to obey the truth is knowing it (knowing in the heart, not just in the intellect) Jesus says, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own authority." (John 7:17)

Many Christians today cannot grow in faith through the Word of God, and neither can they experience the truthfulness of His Word. This is because they have not submitted to the authority of the Bible. Therefore, when we study the Bible, we should be obedient and admit the authority of the Bible in our life.

3. Be teachable

To be teachable is to earnestly accept the teachings of God. This is also the appropriate attitude of a student in the process of learning.

"The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. Morning by morning he awakens; he awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught." (Isa 50:4)

"Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning." (Prov 9:8-9)

Can you be quick in accepting the Word of God?

4. Be accurate and rigorous

We should not be rash and indolent in studying the Word of God. But we should concentrate and be attentive, so as to be accurate and rigorous. Remember, we are not studying the Bible as if we are doing an assignment for a training course. The most important thing is to study the Word of God.

"Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men." (Col 3:23) We should be even more so in studying the Word of God.

C. Principles on Studying the Bible

1. Must be a first-hand study

Christians should not know the Bible only through second-hand materials such as commentaries, devotional books or sermons; personal experience in discovering the Word of God is of utmost importance. You will develop a strong faith during this process of study, and will not waver in face of temptations. Too many Christians rely only on the insights of others on the Word of God, and cannot have a strong faith in the Word of God. They are not grasping the Word of God speaking to them personally in life.

The Bible praises the Bereans in this way, "Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

When you taste the Word of God by yourself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, every truth will become unique and fresh. So do not just study information about the Bible, but study the Bible itself.

2. Must rely on the Holy Spirit

When study the Bible, we must rely on the Holy Spirit. The Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as is thus known as the Word of God. So the Holy Spirit Himself is the most authoritative interpreter of the Bible.

Adolph Saphis once said, "We cannot study the Bible as we study other books, for the Bible is different from of the othersThe difference between the two is just like the difference between Jesus Christ and other human beings. Jesus is both God and man, so are the Bible the Word of God and the word of man. Therefore we can only know the true meaning of the Bible through the Holy Spirit."

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (John 14:26)

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come." (John 16:13)

Every Christian should believe that the Holy Spirit has enough power to help them understand the Bible, even the difficult passages. The Holy Spirit is the best and the most qualified teacher of all. However, when we come across some passages we do not understand, we like to seek advice from others and seldom ask this most Holy instructor. Actually, prayer cannot be separated from studying the Bible. When we can skillfully grasp the Word of God, we can also pray in depth. Prayer and Bible study are complementary. Yet sometimes we have to plead again and again for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in explaining some scenarios. In such cases fervent prayer and patient waiting are very important, and the Holy Spirit will teach us in the most suitable time and in the most suitable way.

Bible study is an adventure and trial of faith.

3. Must be jotted down

A profound thought has come across your mind, but you forgot to jot it down. Have you such an experience? And the more you want to recall such a thought, the more it escapes you. Such frustrating experience explains the importance of jotting down your thoughts in studying the Bible.

Moreover, sometimes you think you know some truth, but find it hard to write it down. This is because the truth is still vague in your mind. For example, we all know the meaning of "humbleness". But when you are asked to write down the definition of "humbleness", you will find it hard to be penned. Dawson Trotman, the founder of Navigator, once said, "When all thoughts passes from the mind and expressed through the mouth or the fingers, they become clear and succinct."

The greatest difference between reciting the Bible and studying it is that in the latter you have to summarize and write down your thoughts. When these thoughts can be written down, you have owned a rich fountain of Biblical knowledge.

4. Must be consistent and systematic

Studying the Bible has to be consistent and be your life habit. It is not just a pastime. If the

Bible is the Word of God, you have to study it carefully and diligently. However, even if we spend our whole life studying it, the Word of God is still inexhaustibly rich.

Studying the Bible has to be systematic. Studying of any book cannot be done without an order, skimming here and there. This is even the more in studying the Bible. Every Christian has to find for himself a way to know the Word of God in a balanced and holistic perspective.

5. Must be easily transmittable

“What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2)

What Paul has said to Timothy illustrates an important teaching of the Bible. God does not only require us to grow in his Word, but also wants us to help others to stretch their potentials to their limits.

Every believer has to see himself as a bridge between two generations. Our responsibility is to transmit what we have learned to others. Nevertheless, we are not only sharing what we have learned in our study, but to teach others to study the Bible on their own and never rely on the feeding of others. Therefore our method of studying has to be transmittable.

6. Must be applied to daily life

D. L. Moody said, “The Bible is not only for an increase of knowledge, but also for a transformation of life.”

“But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” (James 1:22)

Applying the Word of God in daily life is the main purpose in studying the Bible. In studying, always ask yourself, “O God, what are you saying to me? What do you want me to do?”

It is necessary to write down honestly all the applications the Holy Spirit has revealed to you. Sometimes He may be asking you to have a change in your personal relationship or behaviors, or sometimes He wants you to have a change in your attitude or knowledge of the Biblical truth.

Writing down what God has said to you in the process of study is very helpful. Remember to jot down the passage studied and briefly the applications. After studying, pray for these applications, and ask God in which point He particularly wants you to apply in your life. Although you may give yourself many challenges, but focusing on one of the applications may even be more helpful.

Here are three steps that may help you to write down your personal applications:

- a. Write down what God reveals to Christians through this passage the appropriate behaviors and attitudes.
- b. Compare what you have written with your present life, and write them down. If possible, illustrate it with some real episode in life.
- c. Write down what you plan to change your present situation according to what God has revealed to you in this passage.

Your applications should have three characteristics:

- a. The application must be personal: Write in the first person, using “I” or “my”. And the

application must honestly reflect your real life.

- b. The application must be practical: Write down in detail how you can apply the truth to your real life. Do not write in general terms. If possible, write down the time you are going to work out your plan.
- c. The application must be feasible: Do not get the goal too high, because you have to be able to work out your plan. It is better to be something that you can handle and manage. And a short-term goal is often better than a long-term one.

Writing the applications not only takes time, but also a prayerful heart of meditation. Do not rush, because writing down the applications is the most effective step in spiritual growth.

- 7. Must read the passages in context, and be able to write down the answers in your own words

Besides meditating on the meaning of the passage itself, reading it in context is also very important. If we do not read in context, it can be a garble.

Do not just copy from the words of the passage, but use your own words to write down your answers. This can help you understand the text, and consolidate the truth in your heart. Remember to spend time in meditating the meaning of the text before writing down your answers.

- 8. Must include the Bible study time in your timetable

Plan for a specific time slot every week to study the Bible, and treat this as an important dating with God. Mark this down in your diary. Keep this dating as you keep those with your friends. But note that this schedule should not be too tight or rigid, the best time should be one when you are most awake and vigilant. At the same time, this should be a time without disturbance. The worst time is when you are tired or weary. Friend, you should offer the best time to the Lord.

Some like to study for a long time, say two to three hours at a time, while some others think it is not necessary to study in one go, and may split the time into two 1-hour slots. Some even think that it would be better to study a little bit each day. No matter what, try to find a time most suitable to yourself.

- 9. Must be self-disciplined and diligent

You may ask, "I am really too busy. How can I squeeze out time to study the Bible?" The answer is simple. Weigh the importance, and choose what should be done.

Oswald Chambers once said, "Any way, if a believer cannot try his best to have time to build a good relationship with God, he cannot continue to walk with God, no matter what experience he may have. Remember, do not neglect God. You should rather give up other things than giving up God."

In this world of inequality, only one thing is equal for the rich and the poor, which is that we all have 24 hours a day. Usually this 24 hours is up to our control, and we would use it for the things we most want or necessary.

As we have so many activities and programs each day, we need to be self-disciplined and

offer up time to know the Word of God.

However, study the Bible is not an easy thing to do. It takes painful struggle and untiring study to grasp the joy of being inspired, molded, strengthened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.

“Yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.” (Prov 2:3-5)