How To Study The Bible

Introduction: Seven things that should always accompany Bible study:

1) A belief in the Scriptures being inspired of God (II Timothy 3:16-17)
2) A love of the truth (II Thessalonians 2:9-12)
3) A desire to grow in knowledge (I Peter 2:1-2)
4) A desire to do what you learn (John 7:17; James 1:25)
5) Application of learning as you go along (Hebrews 5:12-14)
6) Diligent effort (II Timothy 2:15)
7) Prayer for wisdom (James 1:5)

I) The Bible - An Anthology

The Bible is a very big book. Actually, it is a library of 66 different books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament. These books are all joined together because they have one common theme. This theme
is God's plan to save man from his sins through Jesus Christ. The first 39 books, the Old Testament, tell us that "Christ is coming." The first four books of the New Testament tell us that "Christ has come." The last 23 books of the New Testament tell us that "Christ is coming again."
II) What Does The Bible Say About Understanding It?

“Therefore, do not be unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Ephesians 5:17). “For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his
will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” (Colossians 1:9). Also read Psalm 119:97-104.

What About the "Mystery" of the Bible? Matthew 13:16-17; Ephesians 3:15; Colossians 2:1-3. At one time a mystery..NOT NOW!

**What Then Is The Problem?**

b. Blinded Minds - II Corinthians 4:2-4  
c. Multi-level Learning Infractions - II Peter 3:15-16; Hebrews 5:12-14  
d. Application Problems - John 7:16-17, 19-24  
e. Weakness - I Corinthians 8:4-7  
f. Understanding Through Human Eyes - I Cor. 2:9-14; II Cor. 5:7; Hebrews 11:3

**III) Some Guidelines For Profitable Bible Study**

**1. Study with an open mind (Acts 17:11)**

a. Avoid prejudice as much as possible  
b. Do not try to make the Bible prove you right  
c. Your personal Bible reading and study should be identified as “inductive” which means you engage yourself personally with the text, careful to let the text determine what you believe, teach and practice. The opposite of this is, to blindly accept the deductions of men and impose those into the text of Scripture. If you simply submit to what others tell you the Bible says, then read and study with those assumptions, your approach is not inductive and independent. If you decide (out of tradition, family or peer influence) what you want to believe, teach and practice first, and then read the Bible in search of passages that sound like they confirm what you have already decided, that is not inductive and not objective. If you have been trained at the feet of sound Bible students, the non-inductive ap-
proach may not yield a steady stream of error. But it isn’t the best approach for the best results in your personal faith and practice.

2. **Study Constantly (Joshua 1:8)**
   a. Make a daily habit of reading (Acts 17:11)
   b. Meditate or ponder often (Psalm 1:2)

3. **Study Methodically**
   a. Read the whole Bible in a year. Use a daily reader planner to help. I will be glad to get you one.
   b. Study certain topics (Acts 17:11).
   c. Overview the Bible occasionally
   d. Do not just randomly read wherever the book opens or only a few favorite passages.
   e. A Suggested Study Order of the New Testament (Rick Lanning’s)
      1. The Beatitudes - Matthew 5:3-12
      2. James & I, II Peter
      3. I, II, III John & Jude
      4. Luke
      5. Acts
      6. Ephesians
      7. Philippians & Colossians
      8. I, II Thessalonians
      9. I, II Timothy & Titus
      10. I, II Corinthians
      11. John
      12. Galatians
      13. Hebrews
      14. Romans
      15. Revelation
f. Reasons for this arrangement. I try to follow God's order from "milk" to "meat."
So I begin with Jesus' description of true Christianity as outlined in the beatitudes.
Then, I go to the epistles which deal with basic day-to-day Christianity (James,
Peter, John, Jude). Next, I study Luke's 2 volume set (Luke / Acts) to learn the life
of Christ, followed by the result of His life, the growth of the New Testament
church. That is followed by a detailed study of the church (Ephesians) and the
greatness of Christ (Philippians/Colossians). Next we learn the details of Christ's
coming (Thessalonians). The work of the preacher (Timothy & Titus) is then stud-
ied. Then we turn to problems in a local church and how to deal with them (Corin-
thians). This is followed by the gospel of John which gives a different approach to
Christ's life than Matthew, Mark or Luke. Finally we turn our attention to the most
difficult books in the New Testament. These books are last so that the young
Christian will have had time to learn many details from the Old Testament through
reading and hearing sermons and Bible classes on it. A working knowledge of the
law of Moses and Judaism is needed to understand Galatians, Hebrews, Revelation
and some of Romans. As you begin to grow you will want to work in time for a
general reading of the Old Testament and studying them in Bible classes. A knowl-
edge of the Old Testament is vitally important (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians
10:1-11).

NOTE: For those who have little or no Bible background I strongly recommend a
good children's Bible story book to supplement your reading. I've discovered this
helps the "babe" get a better grasp of the stories because it summarizes the les-
son and is easier to understand.

How to study these books is very important. To begin, concentrate on one book at
a time. Get the "feel" of it by reading it through several times. Next, learn what
the overall theme is so you can keep your bearings as you study. If you lose sight
of the theme you become confused and get off track. Then, study one chapter at a
time, writing questions and making notes. Don't be afraid to ask others for help, that's what brethren are for.

4. Respect the Two Major Divisions Of The Bible
   a. Old Testament - For the Jews Until the Death of Christ (Galatians 3:23-29)
      ...Now for our learning (Romans 15:4; I Corinthians 10:11)
   b. New Testament - The law of Christ (I Cor. 9:21)... All things must be done by His authority (Colossians 3:17)
   c. In the days of the Law of Moses under which Israel lived, animal sacrifices, sabbath keeping, special feast days, instrumental music and choirs and a special priesthood were all a part of required worship (Exodus 20:8-11; Leviticus 23; 1 Chronicles 25; 2 Chronicles 29:25; Psalm 150). But Jesus fulfilled the Law, Psalms, and Prophets (the Old Testament) (Luke 24:44). He has taken it away (Colossians 2:14). Today, all men live under the Law of Christ, which is the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6-13). Let us see that these Old Testament laws of worship are not for us. We must go to the New Testament to find how God wants us to worship Him today.

5. Respect the Context
   a. Ask yourself questions as to who wrote it, to whom it was written, the circumstances surrounding the remarks, the time it pertains to, etc.
   b. Always read the verses before and after
   c. Avoid misapplication (Satan’s problem - Matthew 4:6)
   d. Ask Who, What, When-type questions...(1) Who is speaking? (2) Who is spoken to? (3) When is he speaking? (4) What are the circumstances or conditions under which he is speaking?
   e. "Who is speaking?" Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. However, these inspired writers sometimes recorded by inspiration the words of evil men. Even the words of Satan are found in the Bible (See Job 1:9-11; 2:4,5; Matthew 4:3,6,9). These words are accurately recorded, but they
are not recommended for us to follow today. If one asks, "Who is speaking?" it will help him to know whether the words he is reading are words he should obey.

f. "**Who is spoken to?**" In Genesis 6:14, we have the following commandment of God: "Make yourself an ark of gopher wood." Is it necessary for us today to build a ship out of gopher wood in order to please God? No, God does not want us to do this. This command was given to Noah. It was necessary for him to obey it in order to be saved from the great flood which God was going to send on all the world. But this command does not apply to us today. If we answer correctly, "Who is spoken to?" we will see this command was meant only for Noah.

g. "**When is the Bible writer speaking?**' Is the writer speaking to people such as Abraham and Isaac who lived in the Patriarchal Age when God revealed His will directly to the fathers? Or, is he speaking to the people of Israel who lived under the Law God gave Moses at Mt. Sinai? Or, is he speaking to people today who live under the Law of Christ, which is the New Testament?

h. Read the surrounding verses - It is easy to misrepresent Biblical teaching by removing a verse from its context. Simply considering the verses before and after will help to preclude such misuse of the verse.

**6. Understand the "Time Limitations" on some Scriptures.**

a. Time limited scriptures are those which teach that which is limited in its application to a given person, place or time.

b. The Old and New Testaments - 2 Cor. 3:6-9. (already discussed above)

c. The age of miracles - Scriptures that teach of the working of miracles need to be understood in their proper time frame - cf. Mark 16:17-18, 20; Heb. 2:4. A failure to remember these as "time limited" scriptures results in many errors and brings about occasions for frauds to deceive people. The Bible teaches that miracles have ceased - 1 Cor. 13:8ff.; Acts 8:14, 18

Timothy’s personal instruction to bring specified items to Paul - 2 Tim. 4:13

7. Research background, cultural information
a. Holy kiss - Rom. 16:16
b. Washing of feet - 1 Tim. 5:9-10
c. The imprisonment and persecution setting of the writing of Revelation
d. Geographical locations

8. Never cause the Bible to contradict itself (Matthew 4:6-7)
a. If a difficult passage disagrees with a simple one elsewhere, drop the difficult interpretation for the time being.
b. If harmony is disrupted by obscure word meanings, outside source commentaries, etc....drop it!
c. Discuss apparent contradictions

a. “The Bible is its own best interpreter”
b. Use cross-referencing Bibles to aid in doing this, but remember they were written by men.
c. Show practice on overhead.

10. Consider ALL the Bible says on any given subject.
a. The Bible is not written like an encyclopedia
b. Sometimes a point is just being emphasized in one place
c. Balance has to be found in some cases
d. Give examples.

11. Appreciate the different styles of literature employed by God
a. Figurative (symbolic) and literal language - All human languages have two types of speech; literal and figurative. Literal language is the type which is found in the
historical books of the Bible such as Genesis and Exodus, the book of Acts, etc. It is fact. Literal words must be understood to have their actual meaning. In literal language, if a sheep is mentioned, it means a four legged animal which has wool on its back.

Figurative language is different. Words are used to represent ideas or thoughts which are different from the actual meaning of the word. For example: a sheep or lamb may be spoken of, but an animal is not meant. It is being used to represent something else which has some of the qualities of a sheep or lamb. Jesus was a man. He is the Son of God. But in figurative language in the Bible, He is sometimes spoken of as a lamb. John the Baptist said of Jesus: "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29)! Lambs were used for sin offerings under the Law of Moses. John did not mean that Jesus was an actual lamb. But he meant that Jesus would be the offering for our sins.

How do we distinguish figures of speech from language to be understood literally? Whenever possible, scripture should be understood literally, taken at face value. But, whenever scripture becomes contrary to known fact or revealed truth, then one may reasonably expect some figure is being used.

b. Poetry and Proverbial sayings

c. Letters to real people (you are reading someone else’s mail)

d. Grammatical figures of speech

* Simile - a comparison through the use of words "like" or "as" - Matt. 11:16. A simile may be lengthened into a parable - Matt. 13

* Metaphor - a comparison by representation: "Go tell that fox..." - Lk. 13:32. This wasn't a literal fox, but the making of a comparison to one crafty as a fox. A metaphor may be lengthened into an allegory (Isa. 5:1-7).
* Metonymy - a change of one noun for another related noun: "And he took the cup ... and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves" - Lk. 22:17. The word "cup" means the contents of the cup, not the container itself.

* Hyperbole - an exaggeration. This usage is especially common in the Old Testament - Deut. 1:28

12. Handle carefully difficult portions of the Word (II Peter 3:15-16)
* As a small child might strangle on solid food, so babes in Christ - Hebrews 5:9-14.
* Patiently allow time to grow in understanding.

13. Additional study helps (not required)
a. Obtain more than one translation (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, NIV, RSV, ESV)
   The King James Version (sometimes called the “authorized version” of 1611) - King James stated that no comments were to be added in the margins. About 48 scholars divided into 6 groups in various locations worked on different portions of the Bible and exchanged them to review and check each other’s work. The work took approximately 3 years to complete. A very good translation, it remained the most popular for nearly 3 centuries!!! Some weaknesses: “Baptism” should have been translated “immersion”, but was simply Anglicized. The KJV is based on limited Greek and Hebrew texts. Many more have been discovered since. Archaic wordage - eg. suffer, conversation, communicate, whithersoever thou goest, etc. Hard for some to read and meanings have dramatically changed in some. Inconsistencies - eg. Jeremy, Jeremias, Jeremiah; hell, hades, etc.

* A Brief Review Of Some Recent English Translations: I have a list showing 128 English translations! Many are still in print, but many you will likely never find. There are even more now. Some already in the 21st century! The internet is a tremendous source for many. All translations have their strong and weak points.
There is no flawless translation. None! Here are some comments on a few of the more prominent ones: The English Revised Version was completed in 1885 and is almost the same as our American Standard Version (ASV) completed in 1901. It is strong in Greek, but not as beautiful in English as the KJV. May have been overly translated... if that is possible. Some of the archaisms retained and some new ones: “lest haply; would fain”, etc. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) was completed in 1952. Most of the archaisms were removed. The New American Standard Version (NASV) is obviously an update of the ASV. It was completed in the early 1960’s. Some bias shows through - eg. I Cor. 5:1, 9-11 uses the general word “Immorality” instead of fornication or even sexual immorality. The New King James Version (NKJV) was completed in 1982 and updates the obsolete English of the KJV, while at the same time incorporating some of the better Greek or Hebrew references. “Baptism” still untranslated. Still based on the KJV with its weaker Greek texts. The New International Version (NIV) was finished in 1978 and is an independent translation, not building on previous ones. Calvinistic leanings are very evident - eg. Psalm 51:5 “Surely I have been a sinner from birth”. Most all translations continue to leave baptism untranslated!

* Some Weak Versions: New World Translation - The Jehovah’s Witnesses published their version of the Bible in the 1950’s. It is biased toward their beliefs. Good News For Modern Man - One man effort; very biased. The Living Bible - an admitted paraphrase. The New English Bible - A 1960’s version that falls short of faithfulness to the original text


* The recent English Standard Version (ESV) is a good translation.
* Remember...No translation is 100% accurate. Translators are not inspired! Compare translations - have at least two, if possible. Do not have readability at the expense of truth! Avoid biased translations and paraphrases, except as human commentaries. Be wary of individual works and those by unbelievers who do not believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.

b. A concordance (Strong’s or Young’s)

* Use Of A Concordance - Example: Hebrews 1:3 reads as follows in the NASB...“And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high;”

I might want to find some passages relating to the word “power” used in this verse. If I opened my concordance, based on the NASB, I will find hundreds of places where this word occurs, listed in order of their appearance in the Bible. Typical entries would look like this:

but also in p and in the Holy - II Thess 1:5
Lord and from the glory of His p - II Th. 1:9
and the work of faith with p - II Th. 1:11

This brief partial quote of a verse will help me to decide if I want to investigate the verse further and use it in my study. The word “power” is used in several ways. I would be most interested in finding where it is used with reference to the power of the Son of God, since that is what my Hebrew text is about. So, as I survey the entries in the concordance, I might notice the following one:

the p of Christ may dwell in me - II Cor 12:9

Upon turning to this verse in my Bible, I would find:
“And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”

Key thought: Christ’s power that upholds all things, also dwells in the faithful Christian.

A good concordance is probably the most helpful Bible study tool one can have. Many Bibles also contain an abbreviated concordance in the back. In a pinch, they are helpful, but a separate, more thorough concordance would be better. They are very inexpensive.

c. A Bible dictionary (Vine’s, Thayer’s)  
d. An English dictionary  
e. Bible Atlas  
f. Workbooks  
g. Commentaries

a. Growth in knowledge takes time  
b. Do not force passages to mean things  
c. Allow time for meditation (sleep on it)

**15. Sometimes read a whole book with little interruption**  
a. The beginning often ties in with something said at the end  
b. Disregard chapter and verse divisions

**16. Respect the silence of Scripture**  
a. The Bible bases a conclusion due to the law not saying something - Heb. 7:14
b. Liberal thinkers will get themselves in trouble when they speak where God has been silent.
c. The Bible not saying something in no way authorizes it.

17. **Learn the unique meanings of Biblical words** - eg. propitiation, redemption, sanctification, etc.

18. **Recognize the changing meaning of English words** - the old English of the KJV may mislead one if interpreted through modern English thinking.
* baptism is not sprinkling
* conversation is not talk, but manner of life
* perfect means complete, not sinless

19. **Use Common Sense** - Common sense has its root-idea in the ability to discover harmony in the things which agree; and, conversely, to perceive unlikeness in opposites. Remember, God gave His revelation to the "common man"; Bible writers appeal to human experience and the common surroundings of man, in a language all can understand. Hebrews 5:14 says we must exercise our senses to discern good and evil in handling the word of God

20. **Mental Industry** - This means one must be willing to put forth the effort in gaining knowledge of scripture; studying is work.

21. **Study With Intentions Of Doing What It Says** - The Scriptures have built in a blessing and curse, depending on the desires of the student. Some are said to be ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth (II Timothy 3:7) They have cursed themselves somehow. One way may be that they simply read and hear the word but never do what it requires of them (James 1:21-25). Jesus once said if anyone wants to DO my will He will KNOW (John 7:16-17).
22. Be Honest - *But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.* (II Corinthians 4:2). The Bible can be mishandled and we should seek never to do so.

* Be careful of “innocent” misuse of Scriptures to even prove a true point. A good example: Matthew 18:20.

**Conclusion:** Read and study your Bible everyday.