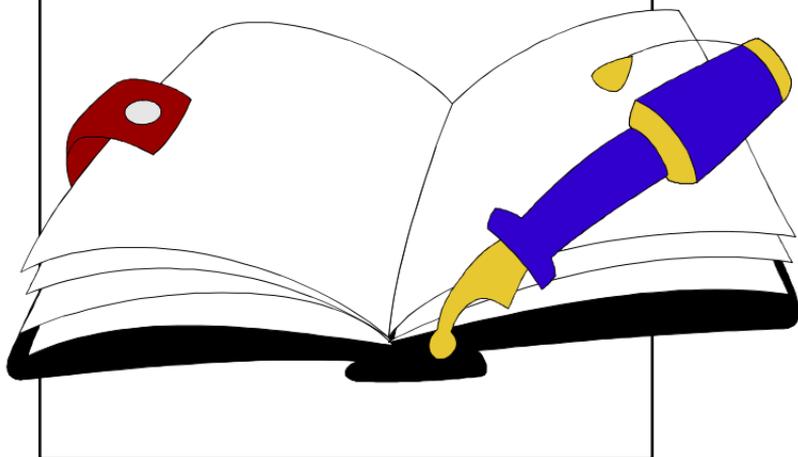

MEDITATIONS & METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

Methods & Tools of Bible Study



Ingimar DeRidder

A Walk through a Forest

1

In the cool of the day

Have you ever taken a walk in an ancient forest? Have you ever felt you were walking where no one had ever walked before? Did you find yourself taking care with each step feeling you were walking on holy ground? Have you ever, found yourself almost speaking in a whisper in the woods afraid to disturb an almost sacred silence that seemed to clothed the air with majesty? Have you ever stood with head bent back gazing up at a vaulted green canopy atop a colonnade of pine trees and felt you were standing in a hushed cathedral?

Have you ever smelled the scent of fresh cut timber or enjoyed the warmth of a camp fire complements of the pulpy meat of a tree? Have you ever run your hand across a sanded and varnished piece of oak or looked into the richness of a rosewood panel?

Have you ever watched the trees sway in the wind on the brink of winter, or witnessed the spectacle of spring unfold before your eyes?

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Eric Sloan wrote a book entitled [A Reverence for Wood](#). In it he described the properties of different kinds of wood and explained their many uses throughout the years for the benefit of mankind. Each wood is suited for a specific use. He beautifully explained how old time craftsmen would make a wagon out of a dozen different varieties of wood. One type for the spokes another for the wheel. One kind would serve well for the chassis and another would be best if used as a seat, etc. After reading such a book, one could understand his seeming reverence for wood.

We reserve our reverence for only one. We reverence the maker of the wood, we reverence the God of creation and not creation itself. The Christian can come into the forest and appreciate, not only the gift, but also the giver.

Not everyone appreciates the pristine beauty of the forest. Some are careless and litter the landscape. Some leave their awful mark on the environment and spoil the land. Some needlessly damage the life and tranquility. Others would ravage the timber with a dangerous irresponsibility and recklessness not realizing that *“unto whom much is given, much is required.”*

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It is with a deep reverence that we approach the eternal word of God. We realize that it has been given to us as a gift of heaven. It is more useful to man than all the forests of the world. It is the very word of God and contains benefits too numerous to mention.

There would be several ways to study a forest. One way would be to come with a magnifying glass and study the aphids milking the leaves of a tree. Another way would be to catalogue the different species of plants that grew side by side. Another would be use the five senses: to listen to the sounds of the forest or describe the smells or feel the bark.

Another way to study a forest would be to cut a tree down and examine the rings. Their number would tell you how old it was while their thickness would describe the growth of a particular year. Scars would attest to damage from a fire or bout with some disease.

One afternoon in the forest would not do justice to discovering what a forest actually was; but if one came each day and observed the change of seasons they would have better insight into the cycle of life.

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My point is that there are many different ways to approach something. Even when we have observed the “what” we still must discover the “why.”

The study of the Bible is also a study of a living thing. One can approach it from many directions. It can be studied close up one leaf at a time. It can be studied from a distance. And as one might watch the loggers remove choice timber and inquire as to their intentions, one might look for those most useful and utilitarian timbers of eternal truths and ask “what would God have me to learn from this or build from that.”

A forest is a defined area of life which provides a home for some creatures and contains an innumerable wealth of resources for products for the benefit of mankind. Its contribution is sometimes obvious like a oak desk or a cedar chest or subtle like the Carbon dioxide siphoned from the air, and the oxygen manufactured.

What must it have been like for Adam, the first man, to walk in the virgin forests of paradise? Who can imagine the marvelous discoveries he made each day. What must it have been like at the end of each day to tell God all the things he had

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seen? Adam must have been like a child on Christmas morning unwrapping all the wonderful gifts of creation. We can only imagine.

Yet just as Adam was able to explore Eden each day, we have a paradise of words and wonders. We have the Bible, a gift from heaven. Where do we begin? How shall we study it? Can we study it without it losing its wonder? Can we enjoy its fruits without trampling the sacredness of its ground? Can we understand the spiritual eco-system of holy things? The answer is "yes."

2

Time

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.”

There are several ways to study the forest from the perspective of time. The first is to watch the quiet explosion of spring. Buds of green are heralds to the coming blossom or leaf. The naked winter is forgotten and the world is clothed in a chlorophyll green. The leaves sway in the breeze and play in the sun through the summer season. Then in a kind of grand finale of colors, in brilliant hues of gold and crimson they take a bow just before the cold curtain of winter comes down once more.

One could watch a shoot burst from the forest floor and become a seedling. Its progress could be monitored and its growth measured. Its life could be traced from beginning to end until it was fully matured and ready for some special purpose.

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A great titan of the earth could be cut and every ring counted and every grain observed and admired. Great effort could be made to get it to the mill where it is transformed into something of greater use for man, being careful that nothing is wasted.

There are different ways to consider a forest in relation to time. So too, the Bible and its truths can be approached as something living in the realm of time. A truth first discovered as a seed can be watched as it grows into a monarch. The sons of Adam and daughters of Eve can be studied as they go through the cycle of seasons of their lives. The rings of character can be examined as reminders and memorials to the consequences of choices made. Acorns can be seen becoming mighty oak trees or mighty oak trees can become sick and die. Time is the stage upon which living is acted out. Time is also a dimension through which to study God's Word.

"In the beginning God" so the Bible begins. It is as if the sun has arisen for the first time to melt the darkness. The curtain suddenly comes up and the actors of revelation begin to speak their lines. The Bible is a fascinating story and a drama the unfolds before our eyes. Before us we will see faith and hope

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fall on its face the victim of evil and intrigue. Truth and error, light and darkness cross swords and do battle through the centuries. An ancient promise of a deliverer and champion is fulfilled with the coming of God himself born in an obscure village called Bethlehem. This Captain of Salvation was set upon by the forces of sin and is impaled upon an old rugged cross. After three agonizing days a resurrection breaks the despair and gloom.

This resurrected Savior leaves behind small band of Spirit-filled followers that infect the world with a life changing message called the Gospel. These followers are given information about the meaning of life and mechanics of new life and they unfold the wonders of things like grace and mercy as well as warn about the ravages and ruin of sin.

God is eternal. Time is temporal. Time is a parenthesis and a dimension of life in which we exist. Time is the most natural and logical approach to understanding Gods revelation to us. There was a time when God first spoke our world into existence. There was a time when He made the first man and spoke the first word to him. There was a time God called the beginning and a time known as the end. *“To everything there*

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is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.”

A good place to begin is at the beginning. Have you ever come late to a class or a lecture and been at a loss to understand what was going on? Missing the opening act of a play might keep the whole thing an unsolved mystery, even to the end. Missing the first day of school places a student at great disadvantage since it is during that class that the teacher lays out the general scope of the class as well as his or her expectations and requirements for success.

Should a person then begin with Genesis and work their way through verse by verse, book by book until the final period and Amen of the Bible? That is not necessarily the best way for a novice to start his journey through the forest. A seasoned student might however begin at the tree of life in Eden and continue until he comes before the tree of life in revelation. A journey through time would bring the student to the Oak of Abraham, the Juniper under which Elijah lost heart and almost lost faith, the Cedar of Lebanon, to the Sycamore upon which Zachaeus was perched.

The Christian should start where he is. He was not fashioned in the clay of Eden but in the gold of the Gospel. A beginning

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Christian student should start in the beginning. He should not start in Genesis, but in John. *"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God."* (Jn. 1:1) The best place to start is with Christ, our Savior, our Lord and our God. Study the New Testament through the perspective of time. He came, he became, he overcame, and he is coming again. Follow in his footsteps from place to place. When the two disciples of John asked him "where do you live," he challenged them to *"come and see."* That is the invitation to every student of the Bible. "Come and see."

Twenty-one chapters contain the account of God's visit to this troubled world. They have been carefully edited by the Holy Spirit, including and excluding according to sovereign will. Every jot and tittle of truth has been miraculously preserved by providence. Of those thirty years (not counting reference to a state before creation, and to the aftermath of time) the Gospel of John primarily concerns itself with the active ministry years of Jesus. So we begin our study of three and one half years of ministry, miracles, and manners of the Son of Man. We follow the Master from Cana to Calvary. We watch him arise early to pray, and teach and preach a message of life eternal. Then we come to one Friday when the Son of God hung on a cross, and

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with all creation we hold our breath through a sad and silent Saturday, until we arrive on a golden daybreak and a glorious resurrection Sunday.

After a sufficient acquaintance has been made with Salvation and the Person of Jesus Christ, the serious student should begin with the new creation and first century genesis, the book of Acts.

While the light of the wise men led them to the manger where they worshiped the Christ child, the light of the New Testament actually is born on Pentecost because of the resurrected Savior. The cradle of Christianity is the upper room in Jerusalem and the march of the church triumphant continues through historical time through the letters and epistles of the apostles until it is found in some future time casting its crowns before the throne of God.

Time should be given to the study of Acts while the student makes note of the advance of the Gospel from place to place, city to city to prepare for a closer examination of particular letters to particular people, dealing with particular problems.

Paul's letter to the Thessalonians cannot be fully appreciated

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until it is seen in an historical context and time frame. A study of the Book of Acts is like walking through the forest until one has witnessed the full cycle of seasons and seen the whole before taking a closer look at the parts.

To be sure, one could study an acorn or a dried and brittle oak leaf and learn many things, but without having ever seen a tree, let alone a forest, such a scientist would be at a great disadvantage. First see the forest, then the trees.

While at times, pin pointing a date may be important in Bible study, usually it is of little importance except in deciphering the flow of things. It is the sequence of events that is important.

As you study record important events in sequence diagramming them on a time chart. This chart is simply a record of where you have been and what you have witnessed. It is a birds eye view of the forest showing the clearings where significant events took place. It will grow as you grow. It will be called upon often to help get your bearings when you temporarily get lost in the details of the particular. A time study reminds us that the author was going somewhere and we are looking at His-story.

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"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."
Mk. 4:28. Not everything is history, yet there is always a growth and development of truth. Paul is a master at leading the reader logically step by step from where they are to where they should be.

3

Trees

Trues

A forest is made up of trees. The forest begins to become a more familiar place when one recognizes some of its inhabitants. Most people know an oak from a pine, and a beech from a maple. The forest becomes more and more interesting as your knowledge increases. It is one thing to recognize a pine. It is another to know the difference between a spruce and a Douglas fir, Yellow Pine and Ponderosa.

A tree is primarily recognized by its bark and leaves. Some trees are small and frail, others, like the giant redwoods of Washington are so large that they remind us of our insignificance.

Certain woods were sought out by King Solomon to be used in the holy temple because of its enduring long lasting qualities. Some trees bleed a resin when cut. This resin, like frankincense, is placed upon burning coals in worship. Some trees were sought out for their healing and medicinal qualities. Every tree has its special unique attributes and uses.

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So it is in Gods word. No truth just happens to be there. Each is there by design and has certain properties and benefits. As in any forest, some trees stand higher than others. Some are broader in girth and others are found so seldom that they must delight at their discovery.

A study of each chapter or segment will have one outstanding theme. The beginning of a profitable Bible study must begin with a search for the greater and grander truths that seem to welcome the believer to visit. Standing at the base of these grand themes like grace, faith, and salvation cause us to lift our eyes up to heaven; and like the heavens themselves they declare the glory of God.

Walk through the Scriptures like a reverent visitor to a national forest and attempt to recognize as many trees as you can. Read a chapter and mark the grand themes of the of the living Word. Some truths will stand out far above the others, remembering that each is planted by design. Make note the presence of lesser themes and special note of rare tender and fragile plants.

To begin you might start with ten grand themes. Give each of these grand themes its own color code. I suggest you consider

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the following: New life (dark green), Grace (purple), Gospel (orange), The Cross (light green), Heaven (light blue), Ministry (yellow), Trials (grey). Two additional colors can be assigned for Principles (dark blue) and Promises (gold). These are just suggestions.

Only mark your study Bible until you become more sure of yourself. Words can be either circled or boxed with a particular color or lightly shaded in.

Each segment will have a major emphasis. Find that emphasis. You cannot begin to appreciate the purpose of designer until you do. Look for the key verse of each chapter. Look for the key verse of each book. For example, a word that keeps appearing in First Peter is the word “suffer” and “suffering.” It is a letter that speaks about persecution and trials. It is not until we come to 2:21 that suffering begins to make sense. In 2:21 we have found the key or (in the metaphor of the forest) the tree.

For example, in First Thessalonians we discover the purpose for the letter in chapter 3 verse 2. It is from this verse that everything else seems to radiate from like spokes on a wheel,

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or (again using the forest metaphor) roots of a tree.

We first take an overview of the forest to get a birds eye view. Such a view of First Thessalonians would immediately tell us that there are five chapters. Next we walk through the woods looking for particular trees. When we have found the “tree in the midst of the garden” or grand theme, we are ready to take a closer look.

Branches

Outlining

"I am the vine, ye are the branches."

Branches are interesting as any adventurous boy (or Tomboy) will tell you. They would rather be perched in a branch than sitting in a parlor any day. Zachaeus once found himself in the branches of a sycamore and Absalom was killed when he was caught out on a limb.

Branches are naturally ascending extremities of a tree. To the untrained eye they may not look organized or following any particular pattern, but each species gives itself to spread out in a predictable manner.

The pine is the most symmetrical with each branch proportionally and predictably smaller than that of the one beneath it. Even the oak spreads itself just like an oak, and any botanist could recognize the silhouette of the juniper tree.

To an orthopedic surgeon a branch might look like the fingers of a hand or a skeleton. To an English teacher it might look like a schematic drawing for a diagrammed sentence. For our

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purposes of Bible study, a branch looks like an outline of a book or chapter.

The third step in Bible study is to look for the branches, defining and counting the largest limbs. These are the main points or ideas of the author. A study of the main limbs will reveal additional limbs naturally growing from them and likewise, smaller fingers growing from them. Points, sub-points and sub-sub-points.

You must find the right tree if you are to count the right branches. The main verse is the centerpiece of the text. Remember, the author has one main idea or reason for writing.

There are several laws of composition (laws of the branches) to consider when outlining a section, book, or chapter. The law of radiation already mentioned, is a central truth to which many other truths point back to. As the proverbial "all roads lead to Rome," so much of a given passage point to this one great theme. In Hebrews it is the superiority of Christ. In Ephesians it is his preeminence. This is the form called **radiation**.

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Another form often found is that of **repetition**. A reading of John 11:46- 12:19 will show a repetition of the theme the death of Christ. As mentioned already, in 1 Peter the theme is suffering. Look for repetition. Every musical composition has a rhythm or a beat. It also has a refrain or a repeated measure of music that defines the mood of the piece.

Another thing to look for when outlining is **contrasts**. Truth is often enforced, explained, or qualified by using contrasts. The book of Proverbs most often uses this device. Jesus used it as well: *"You have heard it said...but I say unto you."*

Many passages can be easily recognized as lists. The mind of a spirit filled Christian is described and outlined as a list in Philippians four: *"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just,"* etc. There are genealogies, and qualifications, and elements, and components of something. These should be the easiest to spot.

Another law of composition that should be looked for in outlining is that of the **turning point**, "hinge," or "continental divide." They are often found in the words "but," "therefore," and "wherefore." These words connect one great truth to

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another. They are the footbridges that allow the student to cross from one great plain to another. Paul's great legal arguments in the courtroom of Romans 1-4 and the conclusions and consequences of chapters 5-6 are connected by a great and important "therefore" in 5:1.

Outlining, or studying the branches is a wonderful way to grasp the meaning and purpose of a passage. Until the student outlines a chapter of a book on his own, he does not really begin to understand it.

Using the various laws or methods of composition outline the book of 1 Thessalonians on a single page. You should have five main points. Beneath them you should have at least two sub-points; and beneath that a few sub-points should have sub-sub-points (i.e., I., II., A., B., C.1.2.3.). Give each chapter a title. After careful thought give the book some name other than 1 Thessalonians.

You should find leaves hanging on the branches of a living tree. Not in winter, someone says. It should never be winter in your Bible study. When you read and see nothing, it is time to warm your heart in prayer and try again.

5

Leaves

Word Studies

Words are vessels that hold ideas. It is impossible to think without words. Words are the paint on the pallet of artistic articulation. We are able to transfer an idea from our mind to another through the medium of words. Brick by brick, word by word an idea is brought from one brain to another. Words are the atoms of the universe of thought. Words are the leaves on the branches of the tree. It is the leaf that captures the sun and through a miraculous transfiguration makes oxygen, which sustains life. Leaves are millions of little factories which make life possible on the planet.

Jesus said,

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I speak unto you , they are spirit, they are life."

We have now come closer in our study to examine and appreciate the very leaves upon the trees. Sometimes they are small and sometimes large, but they are always alive. There are many things that can be said about doing word studies. We

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limit ourselves to a few important and simple approaches, techniques, and tools.

As you read a passage note the objects and subjects and important adjectives in the left margin of your study Bible. Note the action verbs or the adverbs in the right. This is a simple way of paying attention to what is happening to whom in a particular passage.

Take a closer look at any unfamiliar word by doing a short word study. The steps are as follows: First determining the definition in a dictionary. Second determining the definition in a concordance like Strongs. Find the word in the alphabetical listing in English. Note the numbered reference to the original Greek or Hebrew word. Find the number in the back and record the definition. Notice where this same word is used elsewhere in the Bible and look up those passages.

The translators did not always translate a word the same way. Because of this a concordance will not indicate that a particular word can have other uses or meanings that might shed light on a particular passage. Because of this, the next step is to look up the Greek or Hebrew word in a Lexicon. There you will see

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the different ways it has been translated and the different nuances of meaning.

To get more insight into the use of a word, you might then go to a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia. The more serious student might dig even deeper by looking at Vine's or Trench's word studies. Such work is hard work, but the results are rewarding.

Paying attention to the individual words may not be as complicated as above suggested, but simple mistakes are not uncommon. There was a country preacher with limited education who preached a sermon about "Simon the leaper." Given to extemporaneous discourses as the "spirit moved him," he went on to speak about how this man "leaped" out of darkness into light, and into the kingdom of God, etc. As a matter of fact, he had old Simon leaping all over the place. It was an amusing exercise in elocution and he was egged on by many "Amens" from his congregation. The only problem was he misread "leper" for "leaper" and he had that poor old leper leaping all over the place for nothing.

Pay attention to the words. Every jot and tittle is important. Some cults add an a before God in John 1:1 and attempt to

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make Jesus simply a God. Some miss the purpose of Salvation when they fail to note the significant preposition from in Matthew 1:21. He did not come to save us in our sins or in spite of our sins, but from our sins.

The question to determine is simple: What did the author say? What did he mean to say? The second part of that question is determined by context to which we next turn our attention.

6

Roots

Context

All trees have roots. It is the roots that hold a tree in place and hold it up. Many verses do not stand straight without their roots or context. Many cults have done great violence to the Word of God by cutting off a tree at its roots and planting it in their heretical greenhouses. From teachings about baptism for the dead, polygamy, strange fire miracles, drinking of poison and handling venomous snakes, countless damage and havoc has been done while using a text out of context.

There are several contextual considerations to keep in view. The first is immediate context. This simply means the student should read the verses before and after any given verse before attempting to interpret it. Many problems are solved this simply.

The second context to consider is the possible historical or cultural context. First Thessalonians has its roots in Acts 17. John 3:14-15 makes little sense apart from its meaning found in Numbers 21:9. A promise fulfilled cannot be fully appreci-

ated without first appreciating the promise given.

The idea is to interpret scripture with scripture. An unclear passage is clarified by looking at a clear passage.

For example, the idea that Jesus died for our colds, corns and gallstones is popular in some circles who point to Isaiah 53 which says "*by his stripes ye are healed.*" As a side light, isn't it curious that wherever this idea is taught there is usually a lot of offering plates being passed around? It seems that if Jesus died to pay for my sicknesses any ministry along these lines should be free.

A look at 1 Pet 2:24 in its context will show that Isaiah was speaking about spiritual sickness or sin and not my arthritis or rheumatism. This old body is still part of the creation that groans as it waits for the final redemption spoken of by Paul in Romans.

When trying to determine the meaning of a particular verse in its context, one should consider the purpose of the book. These simple guidelines should help any student rightly divide the Word of truth so as to be a workman that needeth not to be ashamed.

7

Change

New Life

God is perfect. He is the only one that is perfect. God is the only one who does not have to change. Everyone else or everything changes or must change.

When most people read the Bible nothing happens for one simple reason, they are not willing to change. Why do some people not believe the Bible? You say they just do not have faith. That is true, but why do they not have faith, why do they not believe? Some theological systems say it is because God has not given them faith. I find that difficult to accept. If God asks us to walk he enables us to walk. I believe that faith begins with a spark. I am not talking about the divine spark spoken of by people like Emerson. I am not suggesting that there is a spark in the unsaved man at all. What I am suggesting is that a saving faith in God is not attained with a single quantum leap. Rather, like the ocean, it begins with a single rain drop.

Let me get back to why people do not believe. It would be foolish to say people do not believe because they do not

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believe. That is what we are saying when we suggest that a person does not have faith because God has not given them faith or because they are not of the elect, etc.

The message of John the Baptist was simple: repent. It was the constant refrain of his preaching. What does repent mean? It means change. Biblical repentance is actually changing your mind, will, emotions. No one will ever enter heaven without first repenting. Repenting is changing direction. This spiritual change first changes perspective (or is positional) then it changes practice (this is practical).

Who believes the Scriptures and who does not? The answer is simple. Those who don't want to change don't believe. Those who want to change are those who believe they should change. The poor are more obviously aware of their need to have some change. It is not enough to want to change, like to change, think it might be nice. People have to come to the point (a turning point) realizing that they must change.

The woman at Sychar didn't know what she needed. Something happened in her life that brought her to the place where she realized that she must have this living water.

The Christian life begins with faith and repentance. Repentance is a change of life which that initially turns us in the opposite direction. While we were once traveling away from God headed for an eternity lost in space so to speak, we made an about face and are now headed toward God and an eternity of fellowship with him.

Yet even after that initial one hundred and eighty degree turn we are prone to drift off course or as Charles Wesley said prone to wander. A plane that flies from New York to California is constantly making corrections in its flight. It is continually compensating and making adjustments. Head winds, sheer winds, tail winds, down draft, and turbulence are forever changing, therefore the plane must change also. California does not change and New York does not change, they remain the same. Getting there requires hundreds of computations and compensations.

Why study the Bible at all?

The Bible establishes and fixes two points: Where we are and where God is. Salvation insures our arrival at the proper destination. Sanctification is the journey which will not be

complete until we touch down so to speak upon the runway of heaven. The Bible is the instrument God uses to guide, mold, and lead us along.

Much could be said about the unnecessary futility of wandering around in the wilderness. The Israelites wandered around because they were not willing to "do it Gods way."

God gave Moses a set of coordinates much like a navigator would chart a flight plan for an aircraft. If you miss the first coordinate of spiritual obedience immediately you are "off course." Being "off course" is one of the meanings of the word sin. The Bible was written to help us stay "on course."

We study the Bible in order to: Grow in Grace

God's Word reveals Gods heart and is an instrument of grace. Some religions talk of sacraments. Some groups speak of seven sacraments, like the Roman church. Others speak of two. A sacrament is something that communicates grace to man, and is necessary for salvation. I once belonged to a group that taught that baptism and the Holy Communion were

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sacraments. Then I saw those acts of obedience as ordinances rather than sacraments. There is however one thing that is closer to a sacrament than anything I knew before. It not only communicates grace, but it is also the instrument or catalyst of conversion itself. Without it there is no salvation. I speak of the Word of God. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

After Salvation, the ministry of the Word in our lives continues to be a seed bed for Christian growth. A Christian cut off from the Word of God is like a plant plucked up by its roots. Such a plant is still alive but soon wilted to be sure.

We study the Word of God to know (experience) the grace of God and the heart of God. The living Word works only when it is transplanted into our heart (not our head). The ministry of the Word is heart to heart. It is the only spiritual weapon issued to the believer.

The first reason is to grow in grace. The Bible is the well spring from which the grace of God flows into our lives. Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

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The second reason is to arm us for the spiritual warfare that assails us every day. The Bible is the only weapon issued to the believer and its neglect places us at the greatest disadvantage. Satan would have us to remain in darkness and be ignorant to the truths of our relationship to God and the riches of our birthright.

A study of the Bible exposes the wiles of the devil and warns us about the many possible snares and pitfalls. Satan does not wait to tempt when we are in church, or with the pastor. He tempts us when we are alone. Woe to the believer who is unarmed or is untrained in the use of the Sword of the Spirit.

So it came to pass in the day of battle, that there was neither sword nor spear found in the hand of any of the people that were with Saul and Jonathan... 1 Sam 13:22. That is a sad position to be in the day of battle. The reason for that sorry state of affairs is seen in verse 19. Gods people had no smiths in the land. So it is with many Christians today. They are not skilled in the use of the weapon of spiritual warfare, and there are few who are skilled in forging a weapon themselves.

While we enjoy the ministry of others in the Word, there is no

substitute for personally arming ones self against the wiles of the devil.

It is necessary to interpret life.

The Bible is Gods touchstone of truth. The Bible enables us to interpret the times in which we live. The Bible gives meaning to everything that happens.

A life without the Bible is a meandering rivulet rushing into a meaningless sea. The believer studies the Bible, not only to discover the heart of God, but also to learn something of the mind of God.

The unbeliever sees the chaos and confusion of a world out of control and either resigns himself to the way things are or puzzles over the seeming madness of men. The Bible explains why things are and how they will be.

The purpose of studying the Bible is not to uncover a calendar of future events as much as it is to assure ourselves that God is still in control and has a grand plan. Our purpose is not to impress others with our insights, nor to be a spokesman of

things to come. Bible study instead is more like the shock absorber of life that allows us to calmly travel the many rough roads of our experience. Bible study allows us to make sense of much of the nonsense. It provides us with a blessed assurance and an anchor that keeps our boat from drifting in the night.

It is the avenue to fellowship with God.

While the Church has been given the gift of special teachers, nothing can substitute to a first hand fellowship with God. What if you never saw your wife or children, but had to rely solely on an intermediary to tell you about them. What if you were not even permitted to read their letters, but had someone tell you what they said? Much would be lost and the relationship would be unreal.

Such is the cardboard Christianity of those who rely on a pastor or teacher for the only news of heaven. Such is a hand-me-down Christianity of those who let others visit God on the mountain top and then attempt to describe things perhaps too great for their vocabulary. Those who depend upon others for their daily or weekly allotment of manna from heaven are really

resigned to eating crumbs that fall from some rich mans table. This might be enough for some, but the student of the Bible has a larger appetite than that. The Woman of Sychar might have been eloquent, but nothing could compare with hearing the words of life from the very lips of Jesus. *"Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves..."* John 4:42. We must learn to study the Bible so we may hear him ourselves.

It communicates spiritual life and vitality.

The Bible is the breath of God. All scripture is given by inspiration 2Tim 3:16. The word inspiration literally means God-breathed.

Do you remember when God made Adam? He fashioned him out of the earth. He had a body with all its parts and members. Adam was the picture of the perfect man with arms, legs, eyes, ears, and nostrils. Something was missing however. Adam remained lifeless and inanimate until God added a life force and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life... Gen. 2:7.

There is something living and spiritual about the words of God.

It is the spirit that quickeneth: the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life John 6:63. Many a believer seems to have a lack of heavens oxygen. Taking a deep breath once a week during some worship service will not get you through the week. Reading what others say about God in some devotional booklet will not suffice. The serious faithful student of the Bible is filling himself with more than facts, but with the breath of God. That explains why certain men seem so spiritual attuned and quickened.

It lifts our thoughts higher

"God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts" (Isa 55:9). The ideas and thoughts of God are so far beyond our thinking that the only way we could possibly entertain one of them is to discover it in the Bible.

A little child might just as well try to reach out into space and pluck a star from the sky as for man to contemplate the ideas of Omniscience.

In the Bible, God has come down to where we have some hope

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of reaching Him. As the manna fell from heaven, so too the Bible offers the believer the very bread of life.

Yet let us realize that we bear these treasures in earthen vessels. Our minds are feeble receptacles in which to hold and carry the thoughts of God. The natural man has no idea what to make of them. They are to the unregenerate pearls before swine. The Pharisees handled, studied, memorized, and taught the words of God and didnt have the slightest idea what they meant. God help us!

It is the catalyst for change.

We dare not study the Bible apart from God. We are not conducting an autopsy, but are handling the very living words of God. Some come as coldly as a coroner. No wonder the Bible remains lifeless on the desk. The Bible is more than ink and paper. The Bible is more than words and ideas, for one can even understand what it is saying and be unmoved. There is another element of Bible study that has something to do with being a living spiritual thing.

When we study the Bible we must be willing to change. God

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gave us His word to change us. Nothing happens to the person unwilling to change. But if we are willing to be changed by the words of this book something supernatural happens when we study it.

Jesus said, *"I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes"* Matt. 11:27.

Bible study must be more than diagramming sentences or cataloguing facts. Bible study is about changing lives, first ours and then that of those around us.

Ingimar DeRidder

8

Fruit

Application

Imagine a farmer who plants, tills, waters, and weeds yet who never got a as much as a single potato for his effort. Imagine a gardener who labored, toiled, and fussed endlessly over the plant beds and yet never saw a flower or a fruit? Imagine a orchard that never yielded an apple, or a forest that never gave a board or plank to the mill. These imaginations are quite depressing as it seems the only harvest is one of futility.

Imagine a person who goes off to Bible School and comes back with a “form of godliness while denying the power thereof.” Imagine the Bible student with all his atlases, commentaries, and diagramed sentences who is still selfish, self-centered, short tempered, and as intolerant of others as he was the first day he began to study. That would be a sad condition, would it not? Application is the fruit of Bible study. Information, interpretation, and alliteration without application amounts to an empty bushel and a fruitless harvest. We have been ordained to bring forth fruit.

Here is the heart of application. We must be changed. Our relationship with God changed at the moment of faith. Our bodies will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. We are now being changed through the process of sanctification and the medium of the Word of God. It must be a preestablished premise that if God is gracious enough to reveal himself and his will in his word, we are willing to change.

Sometimes the change is dramatic like a Saul becoming a Paul. Sometimes it is spectacular like a Philippian jailer crying out in the dark and stepping into light. Most of the time, however, change is done in smaller, less observable increments. Change can involve our core beliefs, our attitudes, our feelings, our impressions, as well as our actions. If our Bible study leaves us unchanged we have failed.

There are some simple questions that we must ask ourselves when we are studying God's truth.

1. Is there a timeless principle for me to grasp?

Learn to gently and reverently push the leaves aside to reach for the fruit. Principles are found in every book of the Bible. They are guidelines for living. They may be practiced in the first and

last centuries alike. The fact that someone is wearing tunic or a robe is the practice, modesty and dignity is the principle. We no longer wear tunics, nor are we expected to, yet modesty is timeless and always in fashion. We may no longer make tents or sell camels, yet the principle of “do unto others as you would have them do unto you” is just as valid today as it was two thousand years ago.

2. Is there a sin for me to avoid, confess, or forsake?

Sin is the great spoiler still. God hates it because of what it does to us and how it ruins life. Sin is not always obvious. Satan did not ask Eve to sin in the garden. He came to her with what seemed to be pretty good idea at the time. The fact that the subtle suggestion was in direct opposition to God’s simple command seemed to be lost to Eve. God gave Adam one restriction and warned him of the consequence of ignoring his directions. Since that time the seeds of that disaster have blown across the world upon the winds of adversity and there are innumerable dangers everywhere. God has written the Bible to warn us about sin and rescue us from its sorrows.

When it is obvious that we have transgressed, or violated one of God’s rules for happiness and success, we are admonished to make it right without delay.

3. Is there a promise for me to claim?

The eye of faith sees them everywhere. The children of God are wealthy with the benevolence of God. Faith has its genesis in the garden of God's word. If God promised it would be, it must come to pass. God has filled his book with blessings and assurances that are there for the taking. We need not be timid when it comes to gathering the manna that falls from heaven.

When we discover a promise given to us, we are encouraged to cash it in. No saint need be spiritually impoverished, filled with doubt, fear, or uncertainty. When we discover a promise we should mark it, memorize it, record it, and bank on it. We should be like Abraham who "staggered not at the promises of God."

4. Is there an example for me to follow.

Jesus coined the phrase that captures the essence of Christianity: "follow-me." Yet God has filled the Bible with hundreds of patters of spiritual and successful behavior, as well as paradigms, axioms, and examples. "He that walketh with wise men, shall be wise" said Solomon. To Isaiah he said "this is the

way, walk ye in it.”

5. Is there a command for me to obey?

We are men and women under authority. We are soldiers under orders. We are servants who need to learn to do “not [our], but thy will be done.” The Bible is more than a book of suggestions. It is a book of instructions that must be followed. “Why call ye me Lord, Lord and do not the things which I say?”

6. Is there a warning to be heeded?

Not everything is a sin. We are told about trying to run while carrying weights. We are instructed about the deceitfulness of riches, and the heart of man. We are told about the dangers of trying to serve two masters, or halting between two opinions.

7. Did I see God?

Adam met God in fellowship in the cool of the day. Do I just see words, axioms, warnings, truths? All these things are like the aura and glory of God. All these are wonderful, important,

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necessary, and exciting, but they are not God. Pick the fruits from all the trees of God's garden. Rise up early and bring your heart like a bushel, but with all the searching, picking, and gathering, don't forget to thank the one who planted it all. Don't neglect to set you basket down long enough to visit with the Lord of the harvest. When you enter the forest of God's word do not stop until you reach the garden of paradise and there worship the Almighty. Press on past all the beautiful, but lesser timber until you reach the cross. Stop there to worship, praise, and wonder. Do not be satisfied to see the leaves; reach for the fruit. Do not be satisfied, even with the fruit, unless you have seen his face. Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

9

Warnings

Don't get lost

Recognize symbols. Beware of missing the symbolic meaning of words, but also beware of seeing symbols everywhere. These are two common mistakes. The first general rule to be applied is to interpret everything according to its literal and ordinary usage. Beyond that, realize that there are many literary devices that are exceptions to that rule. God has employed parables, metaphors, similes to communicate truth. There are types as well as allegories, and even strange and prophetic code words (as in the Babylon of Revelation, and the weeks of years in Daniel).

Non literal language has many useful purposes. Most often it is used to clarify and simplify a lesson. *"The [righteous] shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water"* is a simile. Such are many comparisons that connect two distinct ideas with the word *like*, or *as*. A simile is a confessed comparison. The expression : Certain false teachers are said to be *"wells without water"* is a metaphor. A metaphor is an implied comparison.

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Everyone knows what a well without water is. Immediately we think of the disappointment of a dry well, as well as the worthlessness, and perhaps the deception involved. One picture helps us to understand the other.

Types are comparisons of people or things. The scriptures alone should determine what is a legitimate type. We can say Christ is a type of Adam only because the Bible links them.

Parables are earthly stories with heavenly meanings. The general rule in interpreting parables is to find the single central truth. Their purpose was not to illustrate as much as it was to hide pearls from swine which would not appreciate their worth.

Even with all the above non-literal language and devices most of what God has given is straight forward and forthright. A mistake that is often made by the ambitious student is to make things symbolic when they are not. Imagination is not Illumination. Dont look for things that are not there. Here are some guidelines:

First, do not spiritualize. One of the most common mistakes

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committed by the over zealous student is to see something that is not there. Spiritualizing scripture is a violation of the intended meaning and simple interpretation. It makes everything symbolic and subjective. The Roman church has always held to the idea that there are at least three meanings to Scripture: The historical, the mystical, and the literal. If it has three meanings, how do we know what it means.

An example of such a violation is often seen in evangelical churches today when the donkey in the story of the Good Samaritan is seen as a Sunday School bus and the Inn becomes the local church; the oil and wine each represent some particular ingredient.

A parable has one main truth to communicate. Words around that truth are subordinate and incidental. Application is one thing interpretation is another. There are many applications for a passage, but only one interpretation.

Beware of being carried away with numerology. It is rooted in superstition. Each letter of the alphabet is assigned a numeric value. Each number or combination of numbers becomes a kind of biblical zodiac. All kinds of strange

interpretations result from this type of wresting of Scriptures. It might be true that certain numbers are statistically associated with certain elements, facts or events, but we are on dangerous ground when we go beyond what the Scriptures actually say. To assign the number 6 to man, 7 to God, 5 to grace does not particularly enhance our lives or unlock any mysteries. It is indeed curious that the number 40 is so often associated with trials, and 7 with completion, but do not turn the Scriptures into tea leaves, or tarot cards.

Every cult has its origin in a misinterpretation of a Scriptural text. Satan himself quoted the Bible to Jesus during the temptation. Beware of private interpretations. While God has hidden truth from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes, he does not make oranges into apples or bread into rocks.

Be careful of trying to use the Scriptures to promote your own preferences and wishes. Beware of using the Bible to win arguments. Be careful not to treat the Words of God with irreverence, lightly or in a frivolous manner. Beware how you handle holy things.

10

Seeds

For Others

Eat the fruit. Enjoy each bite, but save the seeds. You can count the seeds in an apple, but you cannot count the apples in a seed. Make sure you plant some of the seeds of the truths you have learned for a future harvest. When you have planted those seeds in the life of another person you have begun a second cycle of life and a new generation of faith. A good Bible student is not finished when he has plucked the truth from God's branches. He must go on to communicate the truth to others. Paul told Timothy to commit what he had learned to faithful men, so they could teach others also.

Best Way to Learn

No sooner had the woman of Samaria discovered the truth than she rushed off to tell others. The best way to keep the faith is to give it away. The best way to truly learn something is to try to teach it.

Share Truth with Others

Once we have learned from a text: what it says, and what it means, we naturally want to share it with others. Whether we are teaching an official group, or personally discipling an individual it is the fulfillment of the great commission.

Teacher is Catalyst for Change

Communicating Bible truth is one of the most exciting and profitable endeavors we shall ever be engaged in. Remember, when we bring the Word of God we are a catalyst for change. We hold in our hands the key to happiness, peace, and success. We hold in our hands the paradigm for successful living. We have the answer to all the problems of mankind within the covers of the Bible.

Make an Outline

After using the simple methods and guidelines already mentioned, make an outline of the passage, text, book or chapter. Keep it simple. The days of twelve and fifteen point outlines are over for the most part. Dont try to serve up a twelve course meal. Try instead for simple meat and potato affair. Commu-

nicate the main truth or truths in the most direct and forthright manner.

Structure

A good short story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. That is still the best route. The modern TV soap opera is a good example of the opposite. There are plots, and subplots, and sub-sub-plots. There is intrigue, and emotional manipulations. That is entertainment. Stick to a simple bare bones outline when teaching the Bible.

State the trues, facts, or lessons succinctly. Forget about alliteration, or any other temptations to be cute. Some are good at it, most are not. Many think they are alliterating when in fact they are obliterating the truth. The purpose of Bible teaching is not to entertain. We should always try to be more clear than clever. On the other hand, there is no advantage is being disorganized, vague, unpolished, or uncertain. Remember, truth is most beautiful when it is allowed to be itself. This is what it says. This is what it means. It is that simple. Bible study can be exciting, informative, pragmatic and useful, clear and fast paced.

Be Systematic

Study and teaching should be systematic. After a book is studied it can be taught verse by verse, chapter by chapter, or as an overview in one lesson. In one case you will attempt to show people the whole forest. That answers the simple question of, why was this book given to us? The chapter by chapter approach looks for the grand themes and attempts to explain their significance. A verse by verse approach is the most laborious and time consuming, but often the most productive method of teaching the Bible, however it should be kept in mind that the chances of a listener always being there to hear every verse are almost nil. While the teacher is going through verse by verse, the hearer who has come to listen only this one time does not know where you've been nor where you're going.

A Word study

We have introduced you to the basics of doing a word study already. When teaching a word study keep in mind that the hardest part is to be exhaustive without exhausting the listener. Prayerfully choose examples with purpose while still trying to

present the lesson with a beginning, middle, and an end. Some poorly presented lessons are like a piece of sausage and ended only when time runs out, no matter where that might be.

Character Studies

The Bible affords us, not only a glimpse at God, but it also allows us to take a good look at ourselves. By studying people we learn how to do it, or how not to do it (whichever the case might be). The Bible is filled with heroes as well as villains. They are there as an example. Remember Lots wife and remember the widow with the two mites and learn.

Topical studies

Topical studies lend themselves to the deductive approach of study. Teaching is the same no matter what method you used to discover truth. A topical study is a word study that embraces more than one word. Once again keep it simple.

The Question

The simplest and most effective method of teaching requires no blackboard, electronic devices, charts, graphs or displays. One of the most useful and ancient methods of teaching is by asking a question. The question sets the student off searching for the

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answer. After a season, they have either discovered the answer or demand an answer. The question and answer method is as effective with one as it is with one hundred.

The important thing is that we each share with others what God shows us. Every Christian is called to teach. It is part of the Great Commission. We are encouraged to take the fruit we find upon every tree in this garden. A faithful study of God's word always yields a bountiful harvest.

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The Bible is the greatest treasure given to man. It is "quick and powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword." No one has fully plumbed its depths. It is a gold mine and mother-load of truth and wisdom that can never exhaust its riches. The Bible is still the bush that burns but is not consumed.

Some religions gather to visit and worship at a black stone said to have fallen from heaven. Others have their tokens, and spiritual relics. We have the Bible, a miraculously given and preserved collection of God's Words. It contains all we need for faith and practice of faith.

We do not worship the Book. We worship the God of the Book. Adam fellowshiped with God in the Garden. The garden is gone. The Jews fellowshiped with God in the temple. The temple is gone. What is left is a paradise of words. Blessed is the man who daily visits with the Lord in his Word in the cool of the day. Dedicate yourself to master the content of this Book until it masters you.