

Foundation 7: How to Study the Word of God

Zoom In and Zoom Out

There are several ways to study the Bible. I don't intend to cover them all (in fact, I'm sure I don't even know what they all are), but what I am going to cover are just a few of the ways that I have found to be most helpful over the years. Keep in mind that virtually any variation of these approaches would also be beneficial. The main idea is that we are spending time in the Word and soaking up the revelation knowledge that is present in all of scripture.

A helpful way to think of the different ways of studying the Word is to imagine you were looking at the Bible through a zoom lens on a camera. With that lens, you can zoom way in, or zoom way out, or anything in-between. Each approach produces specific benefits; it simply depends on what you want to accomplish. If you are zoomed out (getting a wide view of the Word overall), you get a broad base understanding of how God moves and thinks, which helps to give you a more sure footing in your understanding of doctrine and/or God's ways. On the other hand, the more you zoom in (focusing deeply on small sections of scripture), the more in-depth you can go and thereby find the deeper revelations. Both are equally helpful and necessary.

The Blanket Approach (zoomed out)

With the blanket approach, we are not concentrating on any one subject, but instead we are *familiarizing ourselves with the overall mind and ways of God*. Through this approach, we see the Lord in many different scenarios and how He responds to them. This is accomplished by simply finding a starting place in the Bible, and then reading straight through chapter after chapter, and book after book. I personally find it helpful to first have a goal and a plan. For example, a goal may be to read an entire book, or the next three books, or maybe the entire New Testament, etc. Once I have the goal, next I make the plan by deciding how much I want to read at a minimum each day in order to accomplish my goal (e.g., 3 or 5 or 10 chapters per day). Then I begin.

This approach also makes it easy every time I come back to the bible because I know exactly where to start and I can just jump right in. In keeping with the food idea from the last chapter, this is like covering all the food groups by simply eating lots of different foods. This approach keeps a person “well-balanced” in their understanding of God and His ways.

Topical Study (zoomed mid-way)

With a topical study, we decide on a particular topic that we want to learn about (e.g., what does the Bible say about angels, dancing, drinking, the baptism in the Holy Spirit, healing, death, salvation, etc.). After deciding on a topic, we will look up every scripture in the Bible

related to this topic and study each verse in order to gain a broad based understanding of what the Bible has to say about this subject. This usually takes hours or even days or weeks. This form of study is an absolute must when forming or confirming doctrine. With a topical approach, you learn about a particular subject in the context of the Bible in its entirety. This makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to take a scripture out of context and thus form a false doctrine.

To study God's Word topically, you will want to have a good exhaustive concordance. The two primary ones are the Strong's exhaustive concordance and the Young's exhaustive concordance. Note that while you may have a concordance in the back of your bible, it will not be an "exhaustive" concordance. The last few pages of your bible will usually only list a few selections of some important words. An exhaustive concordance defines and tells you the location of EVERY SINGLE WORD used in the bible.

Exhaustive Concordances are available at any bible bookstore as well as any major secular bookstore. They are also available on-line via the Internet and in the form of "apps" for phones and tablet devices. In deciding on an exhaustive concordance, you will find it easier to use a concordance that matches your translation of the Bible. For example, if your main bible is the NAS, and if your concordance is based in the King James, then when you wish to look up a particular word, you will also have to have a King James Bible available to know what word it uses to

translate that verse (in the event that it's different) in order to look it up.

Once you have access to a concordance, don't be intimidated by learning how to use it. Learning to use a concordance is about as easy as using a phonebook or dictionary, but infinitely more valuable. A concordance allows the researcher to find all occurrences for the same word (such as "blood") throughout the entirety of the Bible. But because all English words are a translation of Hebrew (for the Old Testament) and Greek (for the New Testament), a concordance also helps researchers to understand the base word that translators relied upon for the English translation.

It is important to understand the base word because one English word can translate into multiple Greek or Hebrew words. The ability to track these Greek and Hebrew words and to see which scripture passage uses which base word is one of the main benefits of a concordance. The following passages from John's account of the Gospel illustrate how this applies (NIV):

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be." (John 12:26)

"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:15)

Both passages use the English word “servant.” However, each passage renders “servant” from a different Greek word. John 12:26 translates servant from the Greek *diakonos*, meaning “minister servant.” But John 15:15 translates servant from the Greek *doulos*, meaning “slave servant.” Understanding this difference in the Greek helps unlock a more accurate understanding of Jesus’ words in these two passages.

In addition to helping us clearly see the original language (Hebrew or Greek) of a verse, an Exhaustive concordance also serves two other purposes. The first is it helps us find a scripture(s) that you already know, but don’t know where it is located in the bible. The second is it helps us research what the bible says about a particular word or subject.

- How to find a scripture that you already know, but **don’t know where** it is located: In this situation, you simply look up any word that is *within* that particular scripture. The best way to look this up is to use the most *uncommon* word within that scripture. The reason for this is to reduce the number of possibilities that the concordance is going to give you to find your verse. Your physical or digital concordance will then list the occurrences of that word in scripture. It helps at this point to know if the scripture is in the New Testament or the Old, or better yet, even which book it is in. This too will cut down how many passages you will need to look through.
- Researching what the Bible says about a particular subject (or word): This is where it really gets good! For

this type of study, you first decide on a topic or a word that you wish to research, e.g. “angels.” Now, you simply look up this word (including all of it’s associated words, e.g. “angels,” “angelic,” etc.) in the “main” portion of the Concordance. This will then tell you every single scripture in the Bible that has these words in it. It will also give you the Hebrew and Greek words used so that you can look them up in the dictionary to study their fuller meanings. Now you can spend the next few hours or days and begin looking up each scripture reference given so that you can read it in context and see all that the Bible reveals about angels. You may even take the time to copy down (by hand or computer) all of those scriptures onto one sheet or packet of papers to be able to read in succession. This approach will give you a wonderful, thorough and well-balanced insight into most any subject. In this way, the concordance is a brilliant tool for topical study!

Meditation Approach (zoomed in)

The meditation approach is a wonderful method due to the revelation knowledge that comes from it. However, you must also use the other approaches (blanket and topical study) in order to safeguard against forming strange ideas or doctrines from very focused meditation. The more broad-based approaches to studying the Word will put the revelations that you get through meditation into the context of the bible as a whole.

With the meditation approach you will want to decide on a very small section of scriptures; one, two or maybe three verses, and no more. Then, simply *meditate* on them. Two of the common Hebrew words from which we get the word meditate mean “to chew the cud” just like a cow chews on grass over and over in its mouth, and the other definition means “to pound in.” This is what we do when we wish to meditate on scripture. Chew on it over and over and over. Pound it in and pound it in. Don’t be in a hurry!!! Slow way down, relax, get comfortable, and then just read those verses very slowly, considering each and every word. Look up some of the key words in a Greek or Hebrew dictionary to draw out more understanding. Then read it again.

Most importantly, *pray and ask the Holy Spirit to give you revelation knowledge of these scriptures!* Then read it again, and again, emphasizing different words each time you go through it to put a slightly different angle on it. Continue to think on it throughout the day, and over the next several days. Don’t take in other scriptures until you are ready to move on. A singular focus like this leaves your mind free to only chew on this one section of scripture. Most importantly, trust that the Lord wants to show you what it really means. Ask Him to show you how this applies to your life and/or to others.

Generally speaking, the meditation approach is the most powerful form of reading and learning the Word of God. However, it bears repeating, if you don’t also have a good balance of the “blanket approach” to form a solid base of

God's ways, this meditation approach is also where people can come up with some really weird ideas and doctrines. So you need both.

Memorization

Memorization is a powerful tool to use in conjunction with the meditation approach previously discussed. However, it also carries with it some distinct differences and benefits. One distinct difference is the amount of scripture that you can memorize. It could be just one or two verses (as in the meditation approach), or it could be an entire chapter or even an entire book ... yes even entire books! Don't underestimate your mind, it is incredibly powerful. God made it that way.

One of the keys to being able to successfully memorize scripture is to repeat it out-loud many times, adding small snippets at a time. For instance, if you were memorizing Jn. 3:16, an approach like this would likely work quite well for you:

- Repeat, out loud "For God so loved the world" 10-15 times or until you do not need to look at that page in your Bible to get it perfectly correct a few times in a row. *(Note that this will probably only take you about 30 seconds to complete)*
- Add "that He gave His only begotten Son" to your first memorized phrase and then repeat it all, out loud "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten

Son” another 10-15 times or until you do not need to look at that page in your Bible to get it perfectly correct a few times in a row. *(This will take you about 60 seconds to complete)*

- Add “that whoever believes in Him” to your first two memorized phrases and then repeat it all, out loud “For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him” another 10-15 times or until you do not need to look at that page in your Bible to get it perfectly correct a few times in a row. *(This will take you about 90 seconds to complete)*
- Add “should not perish but have everlasting life” to your first three memorized phrases and then repeat the whole verse, out loud “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” another 10-15 times or until you do not need to look at that page in your Bible to get it perfectly correct a few times in a row. *(This will take you about 120 seconds to complete)*

There you have it! A perfectly memorized verse, and you will never forget it! If you memorize that verse in the morning you could then repeat it to yourself throughout the day which will serve to help solidify it even further in your memory. And it will be a powerful meditation in your heart all day. You will receive revelation from God through that process! In fact, you will probably get so touched by that particular verse that you will want to share the Gospel with some people before the end of the day!

Again, take note of the process outlined here. That process will really help you memorize scripture more easily. By breaking the verse down into smaller sections, the memorization process does not require any specific talent or cognitive abilities, just persistence. In addition to being “sure-fire,” this memorization process is still quick! Using the outlined process, you are 300 seconds (5 minutes) away from memorizing Jn 3:16 or another verse of similar length!

If you have not tried memorizing scripture already, you will notice that there are several benefits to committing God’s Word to memory. One is that it simply forces you to think about each and every word. It also makes it available for you to draw on and thus meditate on it at any time of the day or night because you no longer need to have the physical Bible at hand to know what the verse says. In addition, you can instantly draw on the scriptures you’ve memorized to minister to others even if you don’t have your Bible with you. For this reason, it is a good practice to also commit to memory the scripture’s “address” (i.e., book, chapter, and verse) as well so that when the Holy Spirit brings a memorized scripture to mind when you are ministering to others you will be able to show them exactly where it says that in the Bible! Lastly, the repetition that is necessary to memorize scripture plants that seed in abundance into your heart, which is where Jesus said it must be planted if it is to grow and produce fruit. (Mk.4:13-20, 26-29)

In Closing

Remember that the Holy Spirit is the author of the Bible. Wouldn't it be nice if whenever you were reading a good book, you could have the author next to you to explain anything that you might not fully understand? Well you do have that exact luxury when reading the Bible! Assuming that you are born again, you have *the author*, the Holy Spirit living on the inside of you. He is here specifically to help you understand the Word, as well as to reveal Jesus and the Father to you. (see John 14:17, 26) Therefore, pray every time before reading the Word, and ask the Holy Spirit to open and illuminate the scriptures to you. Pray that in faith, then begin reading.

Secondly, recall that the Word of God works in our hearts. Prov. 4:20-21 show us that our heart is affected by what it hears, what it sees, and what we ourselves say. Therefore, if you want to have the maximum effect from the Word, read it **out loud** whenever possible. This way, as you read, you will utilize all three of the gates to your heart simultaneously: your eyes, your ears and the words of your mouth. This is powerful!

And as a last practical piece, it is my personal belief that since we live under only one covenant with God, the New Covenant, that it is wise to spend the vast majority of your time studying the covenant that you live under. So I tend to spend between 80-90% of my time reading the New Covenant (or New Testament), and 10-20% of my time in the Old Testament. I know that not everyone will

agree with this since it is ALL the Word of God, which I absolutely agree with. But, Jesus' blood established a new covenant: *"For this is My blood of the new covenant."* (Mt. 26:28) Jesus also said *"And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."* (Mk. 2:22) He was comparing the Old covenant with the New and saying that you cannot mix the two. The relationship we now have with the Lord is vastly different than what the people of the old covenant were able to have. Ours is *"a better covenant, which was established on better promises."* (Heb. 8:6) It is a Covenant based on Grace! Therefore we must learn and understand the New Covenant in order to properly understand and fully reap the benefits of this new relationship we now have with the Lord because of what Jesus did for us. In fact, as our revelation of the New Covenant increases, our ability to see the revelation hidden in the scriptures of the Old Testament also increases!

Scriptures

And he said unto them, "Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables? The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; and have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for

the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, and the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred. (Mk.4:13-20, KJV)

“even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.” (John 14:17)

My son, give attention to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your eyes; keep them in the midst of your heart; (Prov. 4:20-21)

“For this is My blood of the new covenant” (Mt. 26:28)

“And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins” (Mk. 2:22)

But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. (Heb. 8:6, ESV)