

Bible study

Hebrews 4:12 – For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

The most important thing in our life, is our relationship with God. Getting to know God, interacting with Him and experiencing how He interacts with us, that's what our life is about.

Our faith is not just about rational facts that we have accepted, and that can make us better people or even give us eternal life.

It's in the first place about our relationship with God; with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

"Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3).

Goal of Bible study

Getting to know God is therefore the most important goal of Bible study.

The Bible is written, inspired by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has worked through many different people in different time periods, to create the Scriptures. He has guided the composing of the Bible and protected the passing on from generation to generation.

But we also need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be able to understand the Bible. Without the Holy Spirit who speaks to us, the words of the Bible are just words.

Today God speaks *directly* at us through the Holy Spirit, when we are reading the words of the Bible. Then they become *living* words. God has real contact with us through the Holy Spirit at that moment.

God knows us completely and you may receptively and humbly expect Him to speak personally with you, when you're going to read the Bible. Your attitude; receptively, in full confidence in God, wanting to listen and follow what He has to say to you today, will make sure that you can receive what God wants to give you. Because God doesn't force you into a relationship.

Without the Holy Spirit speaking to you, you can't receive spiritual growth. Purely studying the words of the Bible to acquire knowledge is not the main reason why we do Bible study.

We do Bible study in the first place to hear God speaking with us.

Jesus is the Word

In the Old Testament people were looking forward to the coming of Jesus, who is the living Word of God. Jesus is the Author of the Bible and is God's Word *in the flesh*.

"When the author of the Scriptures appears, we have to stop explaining Jesus in terms of our understanding of the Scriptures and we must explain the written words in terms of Jesus, the Living Word." (The Scriptures, God's gift, page 10)

Jesus Himself shows us how we should read and understand the Bible, because He is the Author.

And He tells us that the Old Testament was pointing to Him, in many ways. The Gospels are for us the central point of focus, because Jesus is revealed in these; His birth, life, death and resurrection. And the letters work out further who Jesus is and what this means for us.

Guidelines for a respectful, faithful approach of the Scriptures in prayer

1. We need a desire to be spoken to by God. That's why it's good to start Bible study with prayer.
2. We listen as God's children, as His sheep (not as His advisors or as scientists).
3. We trust that God can get through to us and will give what we need. So we trust in Him and not on our Bible study techniques.
4. We trust that He enables us to follow where He leads us.
5. God decides what we need, so it's not in the first place about getting answers to *our* questions, but that we're shaped as He wants to.
6. When we read, we ask first and foremost the question: "Who are You Lord?" "What are you telling about Yourself in these Bible verses?" Other questions come second.
7. We learn to distinguish what God asks us to do, when we learn to know God's character, goal and pursuit better. We can only obey, when we know who we obey. So first get to know God, then understand what we should do.
8. Central in our study and understanding of the whole Bible, should be the Person and deeds of Jesus, as they are found in the entire Bible and mostly in the Gospels.
9. From there we can look at the interaction between Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit. Pay a lot of attention to the parts of Scripture that talk about this, because you can get to know God so much better by this.

Guidelines for the interpretation of the Bible

1. Interpret each verse in the context of the big picture (chapter, Bible book, entire Bible) and mostly from who Jesus is.
2. Interpret the unclear in the light of the clear. One single verse is not suited to tie an entire teaching to, but we understand it in the light of the big picture. And here applies too: Jesus is the centre, from where each verse or idea is understood.
3. Interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.

Unlearning bad habits

1. Wanting to think of a meaning yourself for what you read is not the right approach. God gives meaning to what you read through His Holy Spirit.
2. Thinking of a context yourself for what you read. This happens almost automatically if you're not receptive for the context that God wants to show you.
3. Wanting to read neutral and objective. God has a specific goal for you; He knows you and knows what you need in your life and situation. You may receive that.
4. Wanting to read theoretic and factual. That doesn't help you; God wants to develop a relationship with you through reading the Bible.
5. Wanting to see God according to your ideas. You can only know and understand God, when God reveals Himself to you and you can trust Him to want to and do that.
6. Reading without willingness for repentance and reconciliation with God.
7. Wanting to know facts about God, instead of getting to know Him in a relationship.
8. Always taking the Bible literally or emotionally or figuratively etcetera. The words of the Bible are a means God uses to tell us something about the reality: who He is, what is true and right, who we are in relationship to Him. He does this by the Holy Spirit who speaks to us, when we read the words. Then we understand who He is and we can't comprehend that in an earthly way. The words are pointing beyond themselves and point to realities that are much bigger than the words themselves. At the same time, we can only come to this spiritual reality through the words of the Bible. That's why the Bible is indispensable.
9. Reading each verse with the idea: I have to do/become this. It's rather about reading to see: "This is what God is telling me about Himself". So then when there is a real assignment in the text, you will understand and be able to follow it better.

Principles in Bible study

1. Understand and appreciate the form in which the Bible is written; there's history in it, literary parts, poetry etcetera. This helps you to

understand what you read, but this knowledge cannot become more important than your receptiveness that God speaks to you in that moment.

2. Knowledge of the Biblical languages and of the culture in which the Bible is written also helps with a better understanding.
3. When you see an assignment in the Bible, look first what God is telling about Himself, what is preceding that assignment. That can be a couple of verses before that, but it can also be the entire book where the assignment is in. For example: Romans 12-16 give assignments that are based on the grace that is worked out in Romans 1-11.
4. When you see a warning, realise that this is been given from God's love and is meant to save, not because God wants to punish. The goal of a warning is, that we listen to it and by doing so the punishment or negative consequences can be prevented.
5. When you see a deed from God or His people, look for the words of God that accompany this and don't think of a reason for that deed yourself, but look for the divine explanation for that deed in the Bible.
6. Understanding the Bible is a task of the church as a whole, of the entire Body of Christ from all ages. So we need each other and can't explain the entire Bible by ourselves. This will also give us protection and support as individuals.

And when you're too ill...

Suppose you end up in the hospital, or become demented, or get a burn-out. Or you have a handicap, as a result of which you can't read the Bible or can only read it a bit. Then you may trust God, who knows you completely, to take care of you and to find a way to give you what you need. That what you receive will be enough. Then you can also surrender yourself in trust to God, and be receptive to Him, in the ways He provides for you.

Questions:

- ⊙ Is this way of doing Bible study new for you?
- ⊙ Do you think everyone has a relationship with God in exactly the same way? Does everyone experience it in the same way?
- ⊙ Who wants to share with us, how you experience your relationship with God during Bible study? Do we see differences in each other's experience?
- ⊙ What do you find difficult when doing Bible study?

- ⦿ Do you have tips for each other?

Assignment:

- ⦿ Focus your attention on your relationship with God in your Bible study the next few weeks: on getting to know Him, to hear Him speak personally to you.
- ⦿ Note one or more experiences with this, to share with us the next time.