

Guidelines For Effective Study

- I. Definitions.
 - A. study: To apply the mind to the acquisition of learning; to think intently; to meditate; to reflect, try to recollect something or to come to a decision.
 - B. meditate: To muse over or reflect upon; to consider, study, ponder.
 - C. ponder: To ascertain the weight of; to weigh. Also. fig. 4. To weigh (a matter, words, etc.) mentally; to give due weight to and consider carefully; to think over, meditate upon.

- II. God expects us to study and meditate, especially in His word. **PRO 15:28; PSA 1:1-2; 119:99.**
 - A. God does not expect everyone to be a pastor or teacher. **1CO 12:28.**
 - B. However, God does expect us to grow in grace, knowledge and understanding so we may resist deception and temptation, effectively witness and contend for the faith.
2PE 3:18; 1PE 3:15; HEB 5:12-13.
 - C. The method and extent of study will vary, depending if you are:
 1. striving for personal enrichment and acquaintance with God.
 2. preparing a message to deliver publicly.
 3. facing a challenge from an opponent of what the Bible says.

- III. There are basically three processes in effective studying.
 - A. Acquiring information. This is done by reading and listening.
 - B. Converting information to knowledge.
 1. This is done by thinking and reasoning.
 2. You learn by thinking about what you are reading and doing.
 - C. Applying or demonstrating knowledge.
 1. This is done by talking, witnessing, writing, solving problems or being tested.
 2. It has been wisely said that it takes a little bit of knowledge to believe something, more knowledge to understand it, and a lot of knowledge to teach and defend it.

- IV. Consider this procedure for effective study.
 - A. Preview the material that you intend to study. Having a general idea in advance of what you need to learn helps you to piece the various parts of the material together.
 1. If you are learning by reading, you may preview by scanning the material to be read in advance or going over the topical headings.
 2. If you are learning by listening, you might go over in advance the material that will be presented or try to imagine what might be presented.
 - a. For example, if the pastor is going through a book of the Bible, read ahead so as to gain some idea of what he might talk about.
 - b. Likewise, if the topic of a future sermon or Bible study is announced, give some preliminary consideration to it before the time comes to hear it.
 - B. Study the material. THINK about what you are reading or hearing.
 1. You might write down significant points or summaries of what you read or hear.
 - a. This helps in focussing attention on what is being presented.
 - b. It also challenges you to get something out of what is presented.
 - c. It may help you to keep awake.
 2. Some pointers on note-taking might be:
 - a. Record the points in your own words as this lets you know how well you are grasping the material.

- b. Be brief where able. Leave out unnecessary words and use abbreviations.
 - c. Take notes on ideas, not just topical headings which sometimes don't supply enough information to give understanding.
 - 3. Listening is a mental process wherein you think about what you are hearing. Here are some practical tips to improve listening ability:
 - a. Look at the speaker. Looking elsewhere causes the mind to focus on other things.
 - b. Look for the general plan and theme of the speaker. Previews and reviews of the presented materials are valuable here.
 - c. Listen for ideas, implications and significance rather than just words and facts.
 - d. Listen for special emphasis given to certain points. This helps you to keep everything connected with the main theme.
 - C. Verbalize the material. Put in your own words what you think the writer or speaker is trying to convey.
 - 1. This counteracts nebulous or foggy impressions of what you are attempting to learn. It sharpens your perception of the material.
 - 2. Speak to yourself using your lips. Trying to verbalize by simply using the mind can be ineffective as the mind will flit over things and jump to other subjects. When you use your lips you are forcing your mind into a single channel of thought.
 - 3. The psalmist said, "I will meditate also of all thy work, AND talk of thy doings" (**PSA 77:12**). See also **PRO 5:1-2**.
 - D. Review the material.
 - 1. After studying something you immediately begin to forget it.
 - 2. Review is a repetition of verbalizing done at a later time.
 - 3. Review is an exercise in retention, which God requires. **PSA 119:11; PRO 4:4-5; 1CO 15:2; HEB 2:1.**
 - 4. Make use of materials made available to you, such as outlines and meditations.
- V. Consider some psychological factors related to study.
- A. Readiness. This is the condition of being mentally and emotionally prepared to learn.
 - 1. Reviewing what you have learned and previewing what you are going to learn helps set the mind into the frame of study.
 - 2. Having a regular place to study enhances the mood to learn.
 - 3. Having a regular time to study will also assist in setting you in the mood to learn.
 - 4. When possible, isolate yourself from competing noise and distraction. **GEN 24:63; PSA 4:4; 46:10; PRO 18:1.**
 - 5. Readiness is a big factor in a learning encounter with God. **EZR 7:6, 10.**
 - 6. Do you prepare to intently learn from the sermon by prayer, confession of sin, thoughtful anticipation and adequate rest?
 - B. Motivation.
 - 1. This comes about through one or more several factors.
 - a. Interest. You will try to learn what you are interested in and what is relevant to you. Make sure you treasure the right things. **MAT 6:21; PSA 119:72.**
 - b. Intention. You will learn what you intend to learn. For example, you will almost surely forget a name you don't intend to remember.
 - c. Desire. Desire to learn can come about through being interested in

something or being challenged.

- (1) For example, a student who desires not to repeat a course will try to learn the material to avoid that. Getting through the course is a challenge stimulating desire to learn.
 - (2) Or, perhaps you have been forced to research or defend a doctrinal position in order to justify the wisdom of God, clear your own conscience and/or lead someone to the truth.
 - (3) At any rate, don't expect to grow in understanding if there is no desire to do so. **1PE 2:1-2.**
 - (4) **(PRO 17:16)** Wherefore is there a price in the hand of a fool to get wisdom, seeing he hath no heart to it?
2. Mark how these things come together in **PRO 2:1-5.**
 3. A realization of one's sinfulness, an appreciation of Jesus Christ and His salvation, a desire for personal evidences of grace, a yearning to please God and a desire to defend His truth and lead others to it will provide motivation to learn of Him.
- C. Knowledge of Results. You learn better when you know how effective your study is.
1. Verbalizing is an immediate form of feedback giving you results of your learning.
 2. Test yourself on the material. This also provides feedback. For example, study the issue of the Deity of Christ and present it to that Jehovah's Witness missionary the next time he comes by the house.
 3. An occasional test or assignment given by the pastor also helps you see how well you are learning and provides incentive for further learning.

VI. The following are Biblical and pastoral observations for effective and profitable Bible study.

- A. Again, desire is paramount. **PSA 111:2; PRO 18:1; 1PE 2:1-2.**
- B. Make sure that sin is not a barrier to your understanding. Unconfessed and/or unforsaken sin will cause one to be led astray, but by contrast, willing obedience leads towards truth. **EZE 14:3-5 ct/w PSA 111:10; JOH 7:17.**
- C. Pray for wisdom. **JAM 1:5-6.**
- D. Familiarize yourself with the rules of Bible study and follow them.
- E. Equip yourself with some basic tools:
 1. A good Bible that will last (preferably with margins large enough for jotting cross-references down, etc.).
 2. An exhaustive concordance, like Strong's, or a computer Bible program if possible.
 3. A good grammar book, for the "...form of sound words" (**2TI 1:13**) are vital to understanding the meaning of a text.
 4. A good quality collegiate-level dictionary (Oxford English Dictionary is the preferred choice, but not cheap).
 5. A Bible high-lighter for accenting passages. Be discreet in your selection since some bleed through pages excessively.
 6. A high quality, fine-tip pen for making marginal notes in your Bible. Recommended is the Micron Pigma, a waterproof, fade-proof, fast-drying, non-bleeding pen available in different size nibs.
- F. Use the blank pages in your Bible to start a topic reference and/or a collection of important verses to remember or cogent observations.
- G. Read. The more you familiarize yourself with God's word, the more light will come (**PRO 4:18**). One of the best ways to enhance your memorization of Scripture is simply by frequent reading.

- H. Take notes.
 - 1. Have a labeled book section where the 66 books of the Bible are laid out in order. As you read through a book, jot down things of interest. Mark the date of your study to show your progress over the years.
 - 2. Have a set of notes laid out topically. As you do general reading, you can catalog relevant verses and ideas under the appropriate topical headings.
 - 3. If you are involved in a lengthy study of a topic, divert for a while and read another portion of Scripture, but keep your eyes and mind open for things that may relate back to your base topic.
- I. THINK about what you are reading. Consider implications and relationship to other Scripture and doctrine.
- J. When doing a topical study, start out by brainstorming. Write down everything that comes to mind about your topic. Sort and organize them later as you do your research.
 - 1. Concentrate on key words that are pertinent to your topic and then check your concordance for other places where these words appear. This almost invariably sheds more light on the topic and may spark other ideas to add to your brainstorming list.
 - 2. Follow a similar idea with your dictionary, defining key words.
- K. Concentrate on the New Testament, especially the four gospels and the Pauline epistles. Above all other writers of Scripture, Paul is the most valuable for New Testament Christians.
- L. Don't overburden yourself with unreasonable expectations or demands. God and I both know that you have family and work responsibilities that are important.
- M. Give thanks for what God has shown you, walk in the light that you now have, and share it with others as able.