

CHAPTER 29

IS THE BIBLE LIVING IN YOU?

Would you like your Bible study to be even more meaningful? To be one of the most exciting, thrilling aspects of your life? It can be! The principles outlined in this article will show you how.

When you hear the terms "Bible study" or "studying the Bible," what comes to your mind? Is it a picture of an energetic scholar, with spectacles and copious notes, pouring over commentaries, lexicons and other biblical materials, searching out the pearls of truth in God's Word?

To perhaps most people, this is what the term "Bible study" means.

But, this definition is not truly complete!

Make no mistake, detailed research and study of God's Word IS important! God has blessed us with many marvelous and wonderful tools for helping to understand His written Word: Bible dictionaries, lexicons, concordances, commentaries, etc. All are very important and useful to the Christian.

But, there is a deeper, richer — more advanced — form of "studying" the Bible every Christian needs to apply!

THE PRACTICAL APPROACH

Before getting down to specifics, let's first notice an important admonition in 1 Thess. 5:21. "*Prove all things, hold fast that which is good.*" The word "prove" actually means to "test by doing." It means to try out, put, to use, or experience first hand, such as test-driving a new car.

Remember the example of the man in the Bible who bought five oxen and wanted to prove them first before following Christ? (See Luke 14:19.) What he meant was that he wanted to test them to see if they were strong and healthy and capable of doing hard work.

This is the approach we should take toward the Bible. We are told to prove or test its worth and value by putting it to use in our lives. When Jesus Christ said man must live by every word of God, He had this concept in mind. God intends that we do more than just "read" the pages of His Word. He wants us to live it in order to prove that His instruction is for our good.

Another verse that teaches us how to study the Bible is 1 Thess. 2:13. "*For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe!*"

The Word of God, then, is to effectually work in us! That is, it is to lodge deeply within our minds, stir us to action, move us to do good works and inspire us to grow in the nature of God.

THE BASIC KEY

The REAL KEY to understanding the Bible is simply this: Once you have read and studied God's Word, you must act on it, to test it by doing, to put it into actual practice in your life. You are to live it with all your being. Then watch it produce the glorious fruits of God's Holy character in you.

This is the ultimate in "Bible study!" As you apply and inculcate its teachings, you will actually experience its miraculous power and inspiration. The written Word of God will begin to live in you and through you — changing and transforming your life into the likeness of God Himself.

It will have deeper meaning than it ever had before! You'll gain new knowledge, insight and understanding into the mind of God you never knew existed. This kind of knowledge can never be acquired through reading scholarly works men have written about God and the Bible.

Jesus said the application of His Words would have this impact in our lives: "...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are LIFE" (John 6:63). His Word is like food, to be eaten and converted into spiritual character (John 6:48-51.)

LIVING THE WORD "REMAKES" YOU

When we study the Bible in this fashion, meditating on its principles and living it daily, we become more like God by allowing His Spirit — His life — to work in us. Notice: "*Jesus answered and said unto him, if a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).*

The apostle Paul spoke of putting on "*the new man, which is renewed in knowledge (concerning God, the Bible, and Christian way of life) after the image of him that created him" (Col. 3:10).*

When we actively incorporate the Bible into our lives, we are incorporating the mind and nature of God! Jesus Christ is the Living Word personified (John 1:1). He lived God's commandments, inspired them to be written for our good and has told us as Christians to abide in them.

By living God's Word, allowing it to transform our lives, we actually live as Jesus would live. We "put on Christ" and become like Him — in thought and action! This process in reality remakes us! As the apostle Paul wrote, we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (II Cor. 3:18).

REAL LIFE EXAMPLES

The point to be driven home is simply this: We can read the Bible, Bible study helps, and "understand" the Bible in an academic and theoretical fashion.

But, not until we actually begin applying it — testing and proving it through obedience — do we really grasp and internalize what God is like. There is simply no substitute for the experience of Christian living. Hebrews 5:14 says, "*But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use (a living application of God's word) have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil!"*

David, a man after God's own heart, knew the secret of understanding God's Word. He wrote: "*A good understanding have all they that DO HIS COMMANDMENTS..." (Ps. 111:10).* Notice — understanding follows the doing. When you practice the Word of God, you will begin to understand it. The Bible will come alive and make sense because you will have proved to yourself that it works.

It's similar to the training you might receive if you were trying out for a basketball team. The coach can tell you how to shoot the ball, how to dribble and pass it. He can show you films on technique. But, until you get on the court and try out the skills yourself, you won't really understand all that's involved. You might comprehend with your mind — but you won't get the "feel" of it until you bring your body into action.

The same principle is found in vocations such as auto mechanics. I know a man who likes to tinker around and do minor repair work on his car. He's got a manual that explains the basics. It's a good book and shows just how to make certain repairs. He's learned a lot from it, but until he put it to use, he only had a superficial understanding of its theory and instructions.

God's "instruction book to man," the Bible, is much the same way. We can read it, research it, analyze it and even memorize key verses — but until, we truly begin to apply it, we will never completely grasp or understand its real value and meaning.

Mr. Herbert Armstrong has said many times, "Unless knowledge is used and acted upon, it is of no practical value."

HOW TO LIVE THE WORD OF GOD

Living the Word of God — and seeing its wonderful truths unfold — is one of the most exciting experiences available to us as human beings. Through it, God has revealed His powerful, invisible, spiritual laws. He has set in motion to govern our lives: love, interpersonal relations, health, finance, success, etc. Living the Word brings deep, rich rewards — both physically and spiritually.

Take the law of tithing as an example. A person would be hard put to understand how tithing works until he put it to the test in his life. But you and I know that it works from experience. We tithe — God blesses. As we obey God and trust Him in faith, He opens up doors of opportunity and pours out His blessings. The Bible works, because God stands behind it and makes it work.

Take another example in Prov. 3:6. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and he shall direct thy paths"! How could one ever know the truth of this promise until he took God at His Word and tried it out? The proof of understanding comes from doing! We do — we understand. God always follows through with His promises when we respond to His instructions.

LIVE BY EVERY WORD

Jesus' instruction in Matthew 4:4 bears repeating: "...Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Note how all-encompassing this verse is. We are to live by every word of God — not just by a few favorite passages that give us pleasure or inspiration. If we are to grow into the fullness of Christ, we must never pick and choose. We're to heed and obey every word that God has spoken.

By using this approach to daily Bible study, think of how well-rounded, balanced and mature you will become. By absorbing its message into the whole of your being, you will start to become perfect as God is perfect. (Matthew 5:48.) The apostle Paul said in II Tim. 3:16-17: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect (complete), thoroughly furnished unto all good works!" It is by living the whole of scripture that we come to know God and grow in His fullness.

The Bible isn't a book to be left on a shelf — it's to be internalized and made a part of your life. Your outward conduct should be a constant reflection of God's Word working in you.

BRING THE BIBLE ALIVE

We come now to a question which is probably the most essential: HOW DO YOU APPLY IT?

The following is a brief, simple little outline which can help you achieve the living reality of Bible study. It's a step-by-step plan that's easy to follow — and it works! I call it the "Three-A-Three-R-Formula" because the first three steps begin with the letter "A" and the last three steps begin with the letter "R." In sequence here they are:

1. **ATTENTION**: Give conscientious thought and attention to what you're reading as you dig into God's Word. Think and concentrate. Go beyond the surface — go beyond mere words. Realize that God is speaking to you personally, and that He expects you to give your utmost respect and honor to what He is saying.
2. **ASSOCIATION**: Associate every word and every thought to your personal life. Think of all the ways you can apply God's instructions to every facet of your existence — to your personal, family and social life. To your business, as well as to the entirety of your environment.
3. **APPLICATION**: It is not enough just to associate the teachings of God's Word. You've got to live them, to apply them, and to experience the abundant success they were designed to produce. God's Word is a living word which will bring great spiritual and physical rewards to you, as you apply it.
4. **REPETITION**: A one-time effort is not enough. You must keep applying God's Word over and over until it becomes your "second nature." Whatever precept or principle you're trying to inculcate — live it again and again until it becomes an unconscious habit.
5. **REFLECTION**: Being human, we need constantly to consider the progress we're making. We need to go over the scriptures we have studied and ask, "Are we measuring up? Are we forgetting anything? Did we overlook something? Are we really applying the Words of God everywhere in our life as we should?" This exercise should take place at least once a day (preferably before retiring) — if not several times — to ensure that we do not forget the things that we learned.
6. **REVIEW**: Whereas "reflection" has to do with specific daily applications of God's Word, "review" deals with our general, overall progress. Often we need to take a bigger view of what we are hoping to accomplish and whether we are growing. Looking back over the material we have covered as a weekly review can be extremely valuable to our growth. In other words, are we staying on track? Is everything coming together in clear focus? Are the pieces falling in place? Are we starting to assemble the superstructure of character?

BE A "DOER"

Yes, this practical approach to Bible study can be one of the most exciting and thrilling aspects of

your life! And, the time to start is now! The apostle James exhorted us to be *"DOERS of the Word, and not hearers only..."* (James 1:22). David said he made haste and delayed not to keep God's commandments. (Ps. 119:60).

Searching out truths in commentaries and Bible helps can be helpful. Using the tools which God has made available can help round out your knowledge. But, most importantly, LIVE what you learn — and your true depth of understanding will increase. As the apostle Paul wrote: *"STUDY* (be diligent, actively live God's Word) *to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (II Tim 2:15).

This is the essence of true Bible study that can CHANGE YOUR LIFE for ETERNITY!

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