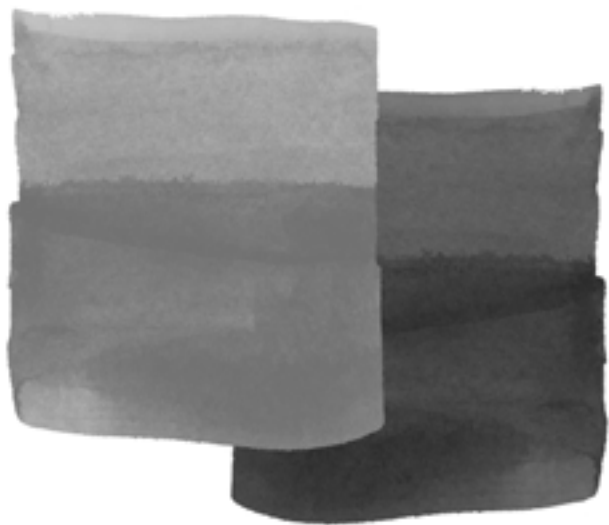


QUICK THEOLOGY

Bible Study Basics



PHYLICIA MASONHEIMER

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phylicia@phyliciamasonheimer.com

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Introduction

Why should we, as believers, spend time studying the Bible? You might find yourself responding to this question with more questions: “*Isn’t just reading the Bible enough? Can’t I just listen to an audio Bible a few days a week?*” But I would encourage you to think about your education: How much of your high school English class would you have retained if you had only listened to a lecture on audio three times a week? Not much! Our minds are best trained to retain and use information when they are repeatedly exposed to it in different ways. The Bible is no different! While audio and simple reading are beneficial in their own way, they simply cannot cement the truth of Scripture in your mind like studying the Bible in-depth.

The fact alone that our Bible—sixty-six books, written and compiled over 4,000 years—is the inspired Word of God could be motivation enough to dig into it

often. But knowing the precious nature of this document is only one part of why studying the Bible is important. We must also remember that it is *inerrant* (without error) and *infallible* (unable to deceive). Furthermore, it is how we come into a personal relationship with the Lord, our Creator and the lover of our souls.

Not only is the Bible a personal “letter” from God, but it is also a collection of real, historical documents! These documents contain all kinds of literature—narrative, poetry, prophecy, gospel, epistle, and apocalyptic. Knowing the author’s intent, the genre, the historical context, the significance of relevant words, and more all help us to understand the meaning woven into God’s Word.

If you are new to studying the Bible (or getting back into it), the idea of starting might be overwhelming. Where do you begin? That is exactly what this guide is here to teach you!



Getting the Most out of Your Bible Study

I love studies by Beth Moore and Priscilla Shirer, and I've done many (very, very many!). But there comes a point when we can stop relying on other people to tell us what the Bible means and instead *read the Bible for ourselves*. In order to have a fruitful study that changes your life, your heart and mind must be exposed to the raw truth of God. The Holy Spirit will speak to you through His Word:

“The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person’s thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God.” (1 Corinthians 2:10-11, NIV)

The Bible is the inspired Word of God, and it holds the power to transform our lives. But we are only

transformed by it to the degree we are exposed to it.

“The Word of God is living and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12, NKJV)

The Bible is God’s *special revelation* of Himself to man. Though He reveals Himself in nature (general revelation) and through creative design, the Bible is the only place where God has shown us His character, priorities, and plan in a historical, literal way. When we fail to make time for God’s Word, we miss out on the very things we need to live life effectively.

The Word of God is living and powerful. To know abundant, thriving life and to live powerfully right where we are, we need to study it. We need to know it. And through it, we need to know God.

But how do we get the most out of our time with the Bible? We do so by being:

- Intentional
- Thoughtful

- Disciplined

Intentional: Bible students do not expect the Bible to speak to them by randomly flipping to a page. They choose a place to start. They learn how to break down passages and where to look when they have questions. They set aside time for digging deep.

Thoughtful: Bible students are always asking questions of the text: “*Who is this talking to or about? Where else in the Bible is this mentioned? Why did the author say this?*”

Disciplined: Bible students do not wait to feel like studying before they make the Word of God a priority. They know that emotions come and go, but that we are changed by coming to the Word regardless of our feelings. Feelings follow actions!

It is much easier to be consistent in Bible study if you have some simple steps to start with. That is why our next step is to *choose a place* for study. After that we will get into how to actually break down a passage.



Create a Space for Study

When I was a teen, I used my walk-in closet as a hiding place with the Lord. In college, I used my crowded desk or a certain overlook surrounded by flowering trees. During my career, I used two different prayer chapels on my lunch break, depending on which office I worked in. At home, I use a comfy armchair in my living room.

Even as my life has changed, there has always been a time and place for Bible study and prayer. Whether it was in the tiny prayer chapel next to my office or in a rocker during a 3 a.m. nursing session with a newborn, my Bible study corner has always been important to me. You, too, can make time with God happen in any life stage!

While we can't let location (or quietness or perfect circumstances) determine whether or not we come to the Lord, here are some ideas for choosing a place for your study time:

Choose a spot that is easily accessible, usable, and not

too comfortable.

If you choose an out-of-the-way spot, you are likely to forget. If you choose somewhere comfortable like your bed, you are likely to fall asleep. I recommend choosing a place where you can sit upright. You can choose to sit at a desk or table to spread out your materials, or you can keep it simple like me and spread it all out on your lap.

MAKE A BASKET FOR MATERIALS

You are much more likely to make study a habit if you have everything you need already there at your spot. If you have to gather it all up, you'll lose time, get distracted, and maybe not be able to study at all! In the table by my chair I have highlighters, pens, a journal, and a Bible. Sometimes I will keep a commentary or some study materials close by as well.

CONNECT TO YOUR ROUTINES

Do you drink coffee every morning? Make a habit of only drinking coffee when you do your Bible study time. By connecting an existing habit with a new one, you are more likely to be consistent. My typical morning looks like this:

6:00 | Wake up

6:15 | Pilates workout in the living room

6:45 | Grab water and coffee, then sit down to study

7:30 | Make breakfast for everyone

I sandwich my devotional time between my existing habits of working out and having breakfast, and I use coffee as a reward. Over time however, you won't need the other habits to maintain consistency; you will come to the Word as a habit in itself!



Introduction to Inductive Study

So you've made your coffee. You're in your cozy chair with your Bible and notebook... now what?

Some people consider "study" just reading the Bible, but that is not what study means in any other context. Studying involves taking notes, retaining information, and integrating it into one's life in some way. In college we do this via books, lectures, and tests. With the Bible, we don't have to be tested, but we *do* have to be just as intentional to train our mind in its absorption of information. We don't retain just by reading.

Before we dive into the details of studying, I want to make an important point. Yes, your time and space for study are important. But we need to lose the idea that time with God requires a candle and coffee to be successful. In my stage of life, my "quiet time" isn't all that quiet. With three small children, my Bible study is sometimes broken up over the course of the day. It is often done with my oldest (who is currently almost five)

sitting in the armchair next to me (she's an early riser!). And if I miss my early morning time, I often do my study with my kids playing at my feet. Bible study should not become a point of idolatry, where we refuse to meet with God unless the circumstances are perfect. The point of studying the Bible is to know God. We do benefit from it, but it is not about us or our preferences!

So without further ado, here is a basic structure for studying a passage of Scripture.

READ THE PASSAGE

First, read through the passage slowly, taking in the big picture. If you are not reading in a book like Psalms or Proverbs—where each chapter contains mostly independent thoughts—try to read the preceding few paragraphs and a few paragraphs *after* the passage to get more context. When I read the Bible chronologically (each book in the order it happened in history), this offers a nice review of what I read the day before.

READ THE PASSAGE ALOUD

Next, read the passage aloud. This might help cement the thoughts in your mind, and hearing them through