**DISCIPLESHIP LESSON #3**

**How To Study Your Bible**

There are many different methods of Bible study. In any Christian bookstore you will find many different books on the subject of Bible study. In this lesson, we want to find the most helpful method and incorporate this method into your life. You may have some idea how to study however, this will only help you gain the most from your time in finding out about this great God we serve.

**WHICH BIBLE?**

The Bible you choose to study is the first consideration. There are many different translations today and finding one that is true to the original languages is not always easy. Most people look for a Bible that is easy to read and understand. This is an unwise thing to do because we are dealing with a translation from one language to another. If you want an accurate translation, it may not be as easy to read as you would like, but it will be accurate and true to the original language. Let us begin by looking at the background of the Bible and this will help you decide which one to use.

According to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, the word used to describe the collection of books in the Bible is the word "canon." The word 'canon' is of Christian origin, from the Greek word 'kanon,' which turn is probably borrowed from the Hebrew word 'qaneh,' meaning a reed or measuring rod, hence, norm or rule. Later it came to mean a rule of faith, and eventually a catalogue or list. In present usage it signifies a collection of religious writings divinely inspired and hence, authoritative, normative, sacred and binding. (ISBE, Electronic Database, by Biblesoft). We can see from this description that what we have in the Bible are books put together to form a whole. This is called the canon of Scripture. The Old Testament consists of 39 books and the New Testament consists of 27 books. Very strict guidelines were used to determine which books should be included and which books should be left out. Dr. W. H. Green, an Old Testament scholar says this: *Each individual book of an acknowledged prophet of Yahweh, or of anyone accredited as inspired by Him to make known His will, was accepted as the Word of God immediately upon its appearance....Those books and those only were accepted as the Divine standards of their faith and regulative of their conduct which were written for this definite purpose by those whom they believed to be inspired by God. It was this which made them canonical.* (ISBE, ibid.). If a prophet of God wrote the book, it was considered as a part of the Bible.

The New Testament was a little different but in some ways similar. If an apostle (one who had seen the Lord and received revelation from Him) placed his name in the book, it was considered canonical. The book had to be written by an apostle or someone that apostle dictated to, in order to be considered. The early church needed to recommend the book or it would not be considered. So the books we have in our Bible today have been carefully selected as to their author, message, and history. What we have in our Bible are the words of God and these are His only revelation of Himself to man. But back to the original question; Which translations can be trusted?

**NIV**

The New International Version (NIV) is a good translation that has quite a popular following. It is called a "dynamic equivalent" translation. What this means is some words are modernized so they are easier to understand. Often a word has no direct translation in English so an equivalent is used rather than translating it literally. This makes for a translation that is easy to read for children and adults. But the question remains, "Is it accurate?" The Greek text from which the NIV comes is an eclectic one. This means that the many different fragments, scraps, and pieces of papyri (a heavy paper used in the first century upon which to write) have been put together to form a text that has the best probability of representing the original words. Edward Goodrich and John Kohlenberger took the various readings in the Standard text and "reverse engineered" them to come up with the text for the NIV. This is why the NIV differs from the KJV or the RSV. This is technical but the NIV is a very good translation and it is easy to read.

**KJV**

The King James Version was the most widely read translation in the English speaking world until the NIV. Many people love the KJV because of its old English words and poetic way of saying things. It is a good translation but is hampered by the difficult words. Some words are archaic (not used anymore) and a dictionary is needed to understand them. The KJV was originally published in 1611 under the authority of King James of England. Some denominations believe that the KJV is the only one to use and all others are tools of Satan. This belief comes from ignorance of Bible history. It is a good translation if the problem with the archaic language can be avoided.

**NKJV**

The New King James Version is also a good translation and like the KJV comes from the majority text school. This means the manuscripts that agree with one another, no matter how old or new, are used in the translation. However, the NKJV is also an eclectic translation in that it includes many footnotes to show the different variants in the different texts. The archaic language has been modernized to make the NKJV much easier to read and understand.

**NASB**

The New American Standard translation claims to be the most accurate English translation. In some places it is more difficult to read because of the way it is translated. This happens when a translation tries to be as literal as possible. It becomes choppy and one has to read carefully to see what is being said. However, the NAS uses modern language and is a favorite among those who have some knowledge of Hebrew and Greek. The NAS is a good translation because of its accuracy, readability, and potential for word studies.

**NLT**

The New Living Translation began as a revision of the Living Bible. However, the translation team soon realized that it was better to begin a new translation than to revise the Living Bible. The NLT is the result. It is readable, fairly accurate, and more easily understood than some older translations. However, it is wise to read the NLT with another translation close by to compare the differences between the two. The NLT is now the bestselling translation of the Bible in the world (as of March, 2013).

**ESV**

The English Standard Version is a fairly new translation that has become extremely popular. It is a word-for-word translation similar to the NAS. It is basically a revision of the Revised Standard Version of 1971. Over 90% of the RSV is retained in the ESV. However, some very good changes were made that places the ESV in a much more credible position. In Isaiah 7:14 the RSV translates the person in the verse as a "young woman." The ESV translates it "virgin." Matthew quotes from this verse in his Gospel and uses "virgin," rather than "young woman." So this is a welcome change along with others. The ESV is a very good translation also.

These translations are all good and have both negative and positive points. You might ask your pastor and get his input on which Bible translation is best for you.

Now that you have selected a good translation, you are ready to embark on a fascinating journey. This is the journey of Bible study. At the end of this lesson there will be a list of books that will help you as you seek to understand the greatest Book ever written. You might ask if the Bible is reliable. According to some of the greatest Bible scholars who have ever lived, the Bible is not only reliable but is absent from error. This means the original manuscripts had no errors. God is perfect and therefore His Word is perfect. One of the early church fathers, Augustine, said this about the Bible: *...for of these books of the prophets and apostles it would be wicked to have any doubt as to their entire freedom from error* (Warfield, Vol. 1, pg. 179). The copy of Scripture you hold in your hands is the Word of God. You can trust it.

**OBSERVATION**

The first step in Bible study is called "observation." This means you simply observe what is written. However, there are questions you might ask to get a grip on the situation behind the writing of the book you are reading. Who wrote the book? What was the author's intent and who was the intended audience? A good Bible to use for study is the International Inductive Study Bible. It is available in the NIV, NASB, and the ESV. The margins are wide and each chapter has a place for you to write the theme for the chapter. This comes about from reading and re-reading a passage. After several times of reading over the passage, you will see things that you did not see the first time. You might ask yourself 5 questions as you seek to understand the passage.

1. Who is speaking and being spoken to?

2. What is the situation in the passage?

3. When did or will this take place?

4. Where is the situation taking place or where will it take place?

5. How is it to be done or illustrated?

Let us apply these questions to a passage and see how it works. Take Isaiah 6:1-8 for example. Turn in your Bible to this passage and answer the following.

1. Who are the characters in this passage? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

2. What is the situation in the passage?

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3. When did this take place? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. Where is the action taking place? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. How is the truth of God illustrated? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Do not be discouraged if you cannot answer all five of the questions. The Bible is written in different styles and some styles do not give an answer to all five questions. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you as you observe. He is willing and able to help you discover what God wants you to see in His Word. Let us consider some principles that will help in observation.

1. Mark key words and phrases - Look for key words that are repeated. John uses the word "world" often in his writings. Paul uses the word "all" over 80 times in the book of Romans.

2. Look for lists - Consider lists of positive or negative terms.

**CORRELATION**

As you observe, it is important to be able to see all of Scripture and how it correlates to what you observe. Correlate means to bring together, so as to compare. Scripture will never contradict Scripture. If one passage says one thing, another passage will not disagree with it. If it seems to, your interpretation of one or the other is wrong. It has been said that Scripture interprets Scripture. The more you know of the whole of Scripture the less you will make mistakes in what you discover in a passage. How does the Apostle John's use of the word "world" compare with Paul's use of the same word? Why does James seem to contradict Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone in the book of James? Correlation will help you put Scripture in its proper interpretation.

**INTERPRETATION**

After you have observed and correlated what you have observed, the next step is interpretation. At this point, you must ask this question: "What does the passage say?" Once you answer this question you can move into application but you must get this principle right. Interpretation answers the question above. This is the result of what you discover as you observe and correlate. At this point you are not trying find out what the passage says to you today, but rather to find out what the passage says in its context. What did the people who received this letter or book understand it to mean in their own time? There are several principles to consider under this step of interpretation. We want to consider these one at a time.

1. Interpret Scripture literally - What the text says is what it means. There are some books that speak in symbols and pictures, but those are not the norm. Revelation, Daniel, and Ezekiel are often filled with unusual statements and symbols. Most other books can be interpreted literally. There is poetry, narrative, prophecy, proverbs, history, and biography. Each one is different and has to be considered differently.

2. Obscure passages - It is unwise to base convictions on obscure passages or passages that are unclear and difficult to translate. If something is said only once in Scripture, you can be sure it is true. If it is repeated often it is also true. But, it is dangerous to build a doctrine on a passage that is unclear. When proper principles are applied and the outcome is still unclear, doctrine is not to be based on such a passage.

3. Look for the single meaning - Let the passage speak for itself. Do not place your ideas upon the text, let the text speak. Try to understand what the author had in mind without twisting verses to say what you want. What is plain in the passage is more important that what is unclear.

**APPLICATION**

This is the final aspect of study and here you will make application of what you have discovered. Studying the Bible does no good if you cannot apply it to your life. Under this principle, the question is being answered, "What does this mean to me?" The passage you have studied was written long ago. How do we make it apply to today? This step is the "doing" of God's Word. (James 1:22 tells us: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.") You must become a "doer" of the Word in order to become like Jesus. We will use a verse to guide us in the area of application. Paul wrote to Timothy in (2 Timothy 3:16-17 and said this: (16) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.") Application has to do with the things mentioned in this passage. Let us look at them one at a time.

**Teaching** – Teaching is another word for “doctrine.” Doctrine is what God’s Word says on any subject. It is always true no matter what others say or have said. Once you understand what the Bible says on a particular subject, you simply obey. We are obligated to accept the truth and live by it. Often, accurate observation and correct interpretation lead to a change in beliefs or behavior. When you adjust your life to a teaching out of God’s Word, you have applied what you have learned.

**Reproof** – Reproof is when God’s Word exposes areas in your thinking or life that do not agree with the teaching of Scripture. This could include wrong thoughts, wrong behavior, or wrong beliefs. We accept what God’s Word says by agreeing with God and taking steps to change whatever is wrong. This is a great help in dealing with sinful practices.

**Correction** – Correction is the most difficult step because when we see a problem, we are not often willing to correct it. The good news is that God has not left us on our own in correcting wrong behavior. He has given us His Holy Spirit to guide us and encourage us in making the proper changes. We are not left alone in the Christian life. God knows we are not able to live up to His commandments without His help. Scripture give us steps to take, or shows us how to confess and turn from wrong. When this step is applied, God will work in your life in such a way that you will know and others will know, to whom you belong.

**Training in righteousness** – Not only does God’s Word correct our thinking and behavior, it gives us positive steps to become more like Jesus Christ. There are teachings, commands, promises, warnings, and examples of men and women who struggle just like you and me. All these can show us the positive side of obedience. This step takes us along the road to godliness or righteousness.

There are other valuable helps in studying the Bible. We want to consider some of these helps because they give a more balanced approach. One thing to consider is that the more you know about the English language, the more you will understand the Bible. It was translated into English from Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. The Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew with a few books like Daniel and Ezekiel being the only ones to have a small amount of Aramaic. The New Testament was written in Greek. If you want a challenge, consider learning the Hebrew or Greek alphabet. Most people do not try to learn Hebrew or Greek. The great advantage in learning about either language is the benefit you will gain from Bible study. It will help you in your personal study of the Bible. If you are interested, ask your pastor about what he would recommend.

Let us look at a passage that will help us put all this together. (1Pe 2:13-17 ESV) (*13) “****Be*** *subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it* ***be*** *to the emperor as supreme, (14) or* ***to*** *governors as* ***sent*** *by him to* ***punish*** *those who* ***do*** *evil and to* ***praise*** *those who* ***do*** *good. (15) For this* ***is*** *the will of God, that by* ***doing*** *good you should* ***put*** *to (16) silence the ignorance of foolish people.* ***Live*** *as people who* ***are*** *free, not* ***using*** *your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but* ***living*** *as servants of God. (17)* ***Honor*** *everyone.* ***Love*** *the brotherhood.* ***Fear*** *God.* ***Honor*** *the emperor.”* Peter is talking to a group of people who are mostly Jewish Christians. Notice in this passage the number of prepositions. A preposition is a word connecting the object of the sentence to another part of the sentence. In, with, by, toward, under, and over are just a few sample prepositions. You will see them underlined. Notice also, how many times “of” appears in the text. In English, the word “of” is ambiguous or unclear. What is a bond slave of God? Is it a slave belonging to God or a slave who characterizes godliness? The context will give the answer. The action words or verbs appear in bold. This shows the action of the entire passage and makes it easy to see the direction the writer is taking. If you try this with a passage and use a highlighter for the different words and how they are used, it will greatly benefit your Bible study time. Let us examine the passage again and answer the following.

1. Who is to submit? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

2. Why are we to submit to all governing authorities?

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3. From what are Christians free? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

4. What is the purpose for Christians obeying authority? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

5. How are we to use our freedom?

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Try this method of color coding words on a different passage and see if that helps. Another way is to diagram the passage. Your discipler will have to show you how to do this. They can diagram a passage and you will see how to do the same in a short time. Enjoy your study of God’s Word!

**Suggested Books For Study**

The Joy Of Discovery In Bible Study by Oletta Wald, Augsburg Publishing House.

How To Study The Bible by Olin T. Brinkley, Convention Press.

Opening The Book by Hans Finzel, Victor Books.