

Palisades Community Bible Church

Online Sunday School

What Is Bible Study?

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Have you ever been riding in a passenger plane and heard the captain make an announcement like this: “UUhhh, ladies and gentlemen, we appreciate your flying with us, today. Right now, we’re cruising at an altitude of aaaahhh 34,000 feet, we have a tail wind of 91 miles per hour making our cruising speed 540 miles per hour. The aahhh outside temperature is 64 below zero. We expect to be just about uhhh seven minutes ahead of schedule and we should have a smooth ride all the way.....”?

I used to be a frequent flyer and NEVER understood the need to convey such data to passengers.

Then, I asked.

Nobody was going to come to my seat and tell me. I had to ask.

While in the terminal, one day, I saw a pilot having his coffee and I asked. He explained that the cruising altitude is all about wind resistance, which equates to fuel consumption and flying time. The wind direction, velocity and temperature also impact those two variables. In other words, the pilot could simply tell you that flying conditions are optimal and you’re going to arrive on time, or early. But, the data the pilot gives you are from HIS view of the situation.

Great! Now, when I hear the pilot speaking, I understand what s/he’s conveying!

Have you ever tried reading your Bible and come away with a similar feeling; “What’s that all about? What does it mean? What am I going to do with it?” It’s a common issue. Even more common; lots of folks just don’t read their Bible.

Hey, I’m not picking on anyone. It’s a common thing, not reading one’s Bible. The Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day didn’t read theirs or they’d have known who Jesus was. If we don’t read OURS, how will we know Jesus, either? In my business, I

talk with a lot of people, and I make references to Biblical truths. In turn, I learn that most people I come across just don't read their Bible.

Why Bible Study Is Essential

God authored the scriptures so that we can know Him. In the Bible, He tells us thousands of life-enriching, timeless truths. But, not a lot of people read it. Maybe they tried, but they don't get much from it. There is so much to be gained from Scripture, if we open OURSELVES to it. Suppose we work on that? Are you interested?

If you consider yourself a follower of Jesus, remember, there were "followers" and there were "disciples." From Webster's:

Follower: one that follows the opinions and/or teachings of another

Disciple: one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another (A "disciple" is far more committed, involved, engaged, devoted than a follower.)

There were those who followed Jesus because he healed people, fed people, cast out demons and imparted wisdom. Some may have even enjoyed the fireworks between Jesus and the Jewish leaders who tried to discredit Him. However, all but Jesus' disciples wandered off when this happened:

Matthew 16: 24 "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 25 For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 26 For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done."

Those were hard words, but TRUE WORDS. This teacher of kindness, love and forgiveness also spoke of self-denial, death and judgement. The casual Bible 'speed-reader' might not get much meaning, here, but there are many great messages imbedded in just this passage.

So, how does the average person pick up a Bible and get something out of it? More importantly, how does a follower of Jesus read His word and become a greater disciple?

How Important Is God's Word?

Step one is to recognize just how important the Bible is:

John 1:1 “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was with God in the beginning. **3** Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. **4** In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.”

God's word is fundamental, foundational, essential to life as a Christian. Attempting to live a Christian life without His word is like a being a plant that receives too little water and nutrients. It's weak, frail, vulnerable. Far too many Christians suffer the fates described in:

Matthew 13: 3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. **4** As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. **5** Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. **6** But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. **7** Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. **8** Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. **9** Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

So, what was this all about? If Jesus had something to say, why not JUST SAY IT? His disciples came to him after he taught this and asked him why He speaks in parables:

Matthew 13: 13 This is why I speak to them in parables: “Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. **14** In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

“You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

15 For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ “

Jesus taught in parables (short stories that illustrate a principle) because many following him were 'too cool for school.' They had calloused their hearts so that the words He spoke could not penetrate. Those who did not understand were those who WOULD NOT ACCEPT Jesus' teachings.

The Role Of The Holy Spirit

There is great power that the Word of God imparts to you; but not the words, only. Jesus promised His disciples that, after he completed His earthly mission, He would leave them. Then, the Holy Spirit would come:

John 14:26 "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you."

As a disciple of Jesus, we have two things, so far, to help us grow in Christ: **The Bible, and the Holy Spirit**, which is a "helper" in understanding the Bible. Read how Watchman Nee describes it:

The Holy Spirit is the doorkeeper of God's Word. I like my English name, Watchman. It means one that guards and keeps watch. God has put the accomplished work of the Lord in the Holy Spirit. Today the Holy Spirit is carefully watching. He is like a doorkeeper. As soon as a person receives the Lord, immediately He opens up the matters in God's Word to him.

A few days ago, a brother sent me a box of candy. The box was very big and had flowers printed on it. It was wrapped in peach-colored paper with a letter attached, saying that the candy was a gift for me. I can say that what I received was a paper box. I did not receive the candy itself. I did not even taste the candy. What was in my hand was a paper box. But what I had actually received was the candy because the candy was in the box. What I took home was the box. But at the same time, I took the candy that came with the box.

What we receive today is the Word of God. But what we receive into us is the work of the Lord Jesus. When we receive the Word of God, we get the work of the Lord, for the Lord's work is in God's Word. When one believes today, he is not believing that the Lord has done something for him. He is believing in the Word of God. But when one believes in the Word of God, the Lord's work is automatically applied to him. Hence, if you say that you are not very smart and that you cannot understand the work of the Lord, I will say to you

that God does not require you to believe in the work of the Lord. He only requires you to believe in God's Word. When you believe in God's Word, you will obtain His work in the Word.

Apparently, what I took home was the paper box. How do I know that it contained candy? When I went home, I removed the colored paper and opened the box and took out the candy. Thank the Lord. This is how the Holy Spirit works. We receive God's Word by faith, and the Holy Spirit opens up the work of the Lord that is contained in God's Word. Therefore, we must realize that the work of the Holy Spirit is fellowship. The Holy Spirit conveys the work of the Lord contained in God's Word to us. Without the Holy Spirit's conveying, God's Word remains only the Word. But when the Holy Spirit comes, the Word is opened up. Hence, God has prepared the Lord Jesus. He has also prepared the Holy Spirit for this work of fellowship.

Let's walk through the process, really quickly: A) a person accepts Jesus as their Savior. B) they start attending Church services and hanging out with other believers. C) that's pretty much it for a long time. What's missing? A and B are GREAT! In effect, the 'box of candy' has been received, however, NOT YET OPENED.

There hasn't been the transition from "follower" to "disciple." Two things are needed: the Holy Spirit and God's Word. We must open the pretty paper box and get at the candy inside. The TWO most important things, at this point, are God's Word and the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, the Christian life can be like the seeds that were scattered on the rocks or on the road; equal amounts of failure and success.

Making The Bible Make Sense

I hear you, I hear you, I REALLY do: "But, I have tried reading the Bible, and it just doesn't sense." Let me give this illustration:

Consider a person who is very intelligent and well-educated. He may be wise in his own eyes while reading the Bible. It can be tempting to inject wrong meaning, or even overlook the meanings of specific scriptures. It is all too easy for him to treat God's holy word as just another book, the contents of which, may be applied

or ignored. By working in his own strength, he excludes the Holy Spirit's work. The box of candy stays wrapped up.

In Exodus 34, Moses had come down from Mount Sinai after receiving the Law from God. Having been so close to God, his face shown with a "radiance" as if it were a light. It was too much for others to look at, so Moses put a veil over his face to protect the others. This veil illustrated the barrier between God and man. In the next passage, Paul explains how Jesus eliminates that veil, yet it is still between those who reject Christ, and God. The tradition of covering their face while reading the Old Covenant remains, even though Jesus has come to declare God's New Covenant. They keep the veil over their faces.

2 Corinthians 3: 14 But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away. 15 Even to this day when Moses is read, a veil covers their hearts. 16 But whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

I cannot tell you how many people I talk with who tell me they read books in the Bible years ago, but today, are not reading it. What happened? The Holy Spirit was not employed to open that box of candy! They read the words, but there was no imparting of their value. Like the seeds scattered among the weeds, or on the road, they cannot put down roots. This is what the Holy Spirit solves for us.

Jesus, himself, received the Holy Spirit from His Father:

Matthew 3:16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."

At this moment, God sent His Spirit to Jesus to 'open the box of candy.' Jesus received into Himself THE VERY WORKS OF GOD CONTAINED IN HIS WORD. Jesus then began His earthly ministry; carrying out the very works of God contained in His word. Likewise, Jesus promised His disciples that the same 'Holy Spirit' would come upon them:

Acts 2: 1 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 They saw what seemed to be

tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them.

Because of their special ministries, the disciples were given a special measure of the Holy Spirit which enabled them to share the Gospel among diverse people groups. The Holy Spirit resides in each Christian to enable us to internalize God's Word and employ the unique 'spiritual gifts' He has given us.

So far, we've not gotten into the nuts and bolts of Bible study. The first and second steps have been taken: salvation and church attendance. Next, we must realize that we are 100% helpless to understand God's Word without the Holy Spirit. Step 3: before opening your Bible, ask Jesus to allow the Holy Spirit to reveal His word to you; to open that box of candy and present the works of God through it. This is essential.

Each and every time you open God's word, ask for the Holy Spirit to guide you. Realize that, no matter how smart...or not smart....you may be, it is God's word working in you that will accomplish His purpose. Look, even Jesus answered taunts and accusations with His Father's own words:

Matthew 4: 1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[a] by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry.

3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." 4 Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. 6 "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.'" 7 Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me,

**Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’” 11
Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.**

The Holy Spirit had opened up in Jesus the complete works of His Father. This enabled Jesus to, then, carry out His assigned mission. This can happen in your life, as well.

The Nuts And Bolts

Every Christian needs what’s called a “Study Bible.” Unlike the typical pew Bible, a study bible contains resources on every page that add clarity to what you are reading. Strange words are defined, links to other similar passages are made. Links between the Old and New Testaments are shown. These valuable resources help the reader understand the “context” of what is being read.

Every Christian needs to be involved in a Bible Study. Attending the Worship Service is important. Also critical to growing in Christ is the actual applied STUDY of His word....which is more than sitting idly while a preacher tells it to you. A Bible Study focuses on specific scriptures and the meaning is gleaned from them. Every single phrase in the Bible is like a diamond. What makes the diamond sparkle is the facets, which reflect light from many directions. The scriptures have many facets, and close examination reveals them.

Finally, every Christian needs to study his/her Bible on a regular basis. There are literally hundreds of Bible study aids, Bible reading aids, and methods. Ask your Pastor, or a teacher in the church for suggestions. Let them get to know you so they can make suggestions.

Every mature Christian wants every other Christian to grow! Don’t be private about your Bible study habits or struggles. The Holy Spirit, the Pastor, and most every mature believer you meet WANTS to help you grow in Christ. Reach out and use them.