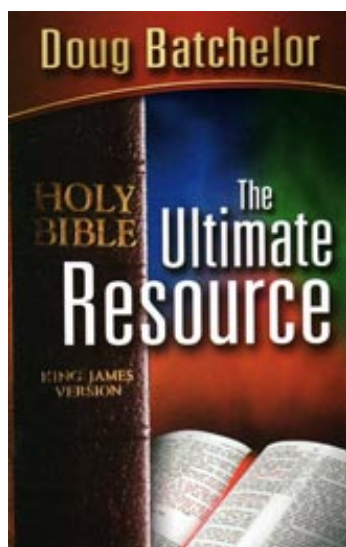


The Ultimate Resource



By Doug Batchelor

“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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” —2 Timothy 3:16, 17

An Amazing Fact

Commander William R. Anderson and his crew of 116 were the first to reach 90 degrees north ... under the ice. The trip, dubbed “Operation Sunshine,” was made possible by a new technological marvel, the USS Nautilus, the world’s first nuclear-powered submarine. Under hundreds of feet of ice, the Nautilus’ nuclear reactor not only powered the vessel but enabled the crew to have the filtered air and water needed to reach their destination. Moreover, unable to surface for direction, they traversed the dangerous waters using a new invention called the gyrocompass. On August 3, 1958, at 11:15 p.m., Anderson announced, “For the world, our country, and the Navy—the North Pole.” The ultimate vessel in the world had enabled humans to accomplish what had been deemed the impossible: reach the geographic underside of the North Pole.

What Is the Bible?

God’s people are something like nuclear submarines, submerged in the murky waters of a world steeped in sin and darkness. And just as water shouldn’t infiltrate the hull of a ship, so the world shouldn’t infiltrate His church. On our long, often-dark journey through these troubling waters, the Bible is as crucial to us as the gyrocompass was to the USS Nautilus. Without the clear guidance of the scriptures, we would be aimlessly lost.

Never has there been a time in history when we have had more of the Word of God available to us and more commentaries to dissect, critique, and explain it. As an example, I have a “pocket PC” with multiple versions of the Bible, along with Bible dictionaries and inspired commentary—I can even listen to the Bible and watch Bible videos with it. Moreover, the internet offers a broad spectrum of free Bible software and even free electronic Bibles.

But the old saying “familiarity breeds contempt” is true. Despite the proliferation of Bible resources, people today are more biblically illiterate than ever. But why, especially when we so desperately need God’s Word in our lives? So in this first section of this short book, I want to instill within you a craving for Scripture and revive your awe of God’s Word. If you’ve never understood why we have the Bible, I want to paint a rich picture for you that will inspire you to open the Bible up and dive into its pages.

A Little History

People have not always used books to store and communicate information. In the beginning, the messages of God to man were communicated orally. God spoke to Adam face to face in the garden of Eden, thus Adam received revelation straight from the Creator. In turn, Adam shared this knowledge with Seth, and Seth passed it down to Lamech, who passed it on to Noah. Though sin had infected the world, Adam and his descendents possessed minds fashioned from the hands of God—more powerful and sophisticated than any

supercomputer. Prior to the Flood, when lives were measured by hundreds of years, humans had a vast capacity to remember virtually everything said, heard, and seen. (Today we would call it photographic memory.)

Yet following the Flood, something different started happening: Lifespans began to dramatically shorten. The earth's environment radically changed, and subsequently, lifestyles began degenerating. In short, the ability of men to remember God's oracles had become severely impaired. By the time of Moses, after years of His people being held in bondage in a pagan-infested nation, God saw that it was necessary to codify His messages to humanity. As a result, Moses became God's first scribe, and Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and probably the book of Job, were written during Moses' days in the wilderness.

Transcribed and copied on paper, leather, or clay tablets, the first collections of Scripture were all written out by scribes. (Of course, the original print of the Ten Commandments was written by the finger of God in stone.) These rare copies, each written out by hand, were treated like precious treasures. To have Scripture was such a privilege; it's something we can't appreciate today. Then, more than 500 years ago, Johann Gutenberg developed the printing press, enabling the mass production of Bibles.

The Sword of Christ

The Word is a powerful weapon. Every time Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, He quoted from Scripture, saying, "It is written." It's evident from this and other exchanges that Jesus had memorized considerable amounts of Scripture: "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:11). And He used this mastery and His application of the Word to fight off Satan's attacks.

As with Jesus, so with us; that is, we must use the Bible to fight off temptation. Revelation 19:11 declares, "And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True." Obviously, this passage is a picture of Christ and the Word itself. The passage continues, "And in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God." Who is the mysterious rider on the white horse? Jesus or the Word? Perhaps there isn't even a difference in that the Word is the expression of Christ. Jesus is the Word. Does the Word of God make war? Jesus answers, "I came not to bring peace but a sword."

The Bible is a weapon that we can use to invade the devil's territory. In Revelation 13, we learn that the beast received a deadly wound by the sword. What is that sword? The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. And Ephesians 6:17 affirms, "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"—our primary weapon against the enemy.

The Light of God

We live in a very dark world. Even if you stood outside on the equator in the middle of a desert underneath a clear blue sky at noon, it would be utterly dark compared to heaven. It's so dark here that we can't navigate our way around without clear direction from God. The Bible presents that direction. It is the light that illuminates our path. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalms 119:105). Furthermore, "For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light" (Proverbs 6:23).

A few years ago, I experienced absolute darkness. I like caving, so once while in Virginia, I went to explore a place that advertised itself as the "Endless Caverns." Of course, the cave isn't endless, but it does go hundreds of feet below ground. As my tour guide and I were making our way down into the abyss, she said, "If you want to know what absolute darkness is ..." and then she shut off the lights. The absolute black was

surreal; it looked the same whether I had my eyes closed or open. After a little while sitting there in total darkness, I took out my keychain that had a little LED light. When I turned it on, it was as though someone had switched on one of those giant spotlights at the grand opening of a new store. That little bit of light made such a tremendous difference when compared to the abject darkness within the bowels of the earth. “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19 NKJV; see also Psalms 43:4).

An Enduring Truth

Psalms 119:89 proclaims, “For ever, O Lord, thy word is settled in heaven.” In a world full of uncertainty, Scripture does not change, no matter what happens on earth or in heaven. “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). Honey is an animal byproduct that never goes bad. Sure, it might crystallize, but unlike some food preserved in vinegar, honey will never spoil. It is a natural preservative that can be reconstituted simply by warming it in hot water. Frankly, it’s quite a miraculous feat. The Bible says, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalms 119:103). The Word of God, the law of the Lord, is sweeter than the honeycomb. In Ezekiel 3:3, God instructs the prophet, “Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill thy bowels with this roll that I give thee. Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness.”

The Frenchman Voltaire was a skeptic who didn’t think Christianity would last long and that the Bible would soon be an extinct form of literature. How ironic that in the exact spot where Voltaire made that bold prediction sits a Bible warehouse—churning out Bibles! It doesn’t matter how often it’s attacked, the Bible is “an anvil that has worn out many hammers.” Jesus assures us, “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall by no means pass away” (Matthew 24:35). And Jesus Himself is that Word, and like Him, the Bible is the same yesterday, today, and forever. “My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips” (Psalms 89:34).

Words of Life

The words in the Bible are not just words. You might see black and maybe red ink on white paper, or even just pixels on a computer screen, but it is much more than that. It is a message that is made of spirit and life with an unexplainable inherent potency and vitality. “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63 NKJV).

When you read the Word with an open heart, it comes alive. It’s real, and it’s unlikely that anyone could ever open it—with sincere desire—and never get something out of it. A.W. Towser said, “A loving Personality dominates the Bible walking among the trees of the Garden and breathing fragrance over every scene. Always a living Person is present speaking, pleading, loving, working and manifesting Himself.” When people read God’s Word with their hearts sincerely seeking to hear what the Spirit is saying, it becomes a living testament from Christ.

Sometimes we get caught up in what Jesus looked like. We see pictures, and we begin to form our impression of His physical appearance. But is anyone exactly sure what color His eyes were? Or how tall He was, or how much He weighed? Does it even matter? The essence of Christ that changed the world was His Words. Soldiers were sent to arrest Jesus, and they came back saying, “Never [a] man spake like this man” (John 7:46). It’s the Word that changed everything, and that Word is Christ. Moreover, Christ is eternity; thus the only book that will make a restful pillow when you’re dying is the Bible. Every other book will be like stone.

Food for the Soul

Most people do not miss too many meals. If we miss one, we’re not going to miss the second because we get very hungry. My question is, do you hunger for God’s soul food? “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts” (Jeremiah 15:16).

During a checkup, a doctor might ask you about your appetite. Why? Because a lack of appetite could mean something serious is wrong with you. It’s a sign of bad health. Likewise, it could be a sign of bad spiritual health if you have no appetite for the bread of life. “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4).

Some people have no craving for the Bible because they have spoiled their spiritual appetites by eating the wrong things. “Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance” (Isaiah 55:2). After an evening of typical television, most people have no hunger for the Bible. A mom usually won’t allow her children to gorge on candy just before dinner. “Don’t eat that; it will ruin your appetite!” Naturally, she wants them to fill up on a nutritious meal, not empty calories. Likewise, many people have no appetite for God’s Word because they gorge on entertainment junk food.

People also develop a taste for what they eat. As much as I travel, I still never cease to be amazed at what strange foods people relish. On one Pacific island, they eat a pounded root extract called saguaro, and to me it is just so bland. Yet they salivate just thinking about it. Everybody has their favorite peculiar food, including me.

And that’s because we eat it. It is a part of our lives and culture. We force broccoli down our kids’ gullets hoping they’ll develop a taste for it. In fact, I eat some things now that I hated as a kid. You might be saying, “Doug, I have no appetite for the Bible.” Read it anyway, and as you read it, you’ll eventually start developing a taste for it and ultimately crave it. “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

Harmonious and Accurate

The Bible is a miracle in so many ways. Though written over a period of 1,600 years by about 40 different authors—on three different continents, speaking four different languages—it’s completely harmonious. Written by kings and peasants, with a wide spectrum of education in between, it delivers one mes-sage and one voice. Moreover, in Revelation you’ll find reference to Genesis, and in Genesis you’ll find a reference to Jesus. It’s overlaps constantly. It’s like gazing into the electrical room of a skyscraper and seeing thousands of little wires crisscrossing everywhere connecting every function in the building.

It’s also a miracle of accuracy. Sin entered the world because man doubted God’s words; we shouldn’t make the same mistake today by doubting the accuracy of the Bible, especially with so much proof on its side. For instance, Daniel prophesied the correct sequence and time of the Babylonian fall from power, along with the rise and fall of the Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman empires. He also correctly predicted that Rome would be split up into 10 separate nation states. Consider next some of the amazing Bible passages that perfectly foretold the first coming of Jesus and their fulfillments:

| Messianic Event | Old Testament Prediction | New Testament Fulfillment |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Born in Bethlehem | Micah 5:2 | Matthew 2:1 |
| Born of a virgin | Isaiah 7:14 | Luke 1:26-31 |
| From David’s line | Jeremiah 23:5 | Revelation 22:16 |
| Attempted murder as a baby | Jeremiah 31:15, 16 | Matthew 2:13-18 |
| Betrayed by friend | Psalms 41:9 | Matthew 26:25, 34 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| Betrayed for 30 silver pieces | Zechariah 11:12, 13 | Matthew 26:15 |
| Death by crucifixion | Psalms 22; Zechariah 12:10 | Mark 15:15 |
| Clothes gambled for | Psalms 22:18 | Matthew 27:35 |
| Bones unbroken | Exodus 12:46 | John 19:31-33 |
| Buried in rich man's grave | Isaiah 53:9 | Matthew 27:57-60 |
| Day, year, hour of death | Daniel 9:26, 27; Exodus 12 | Matthew 27 |
| Resurrection after 3 days | Hosea 6:2 | Acts 10:40 |

The Dead Sea scrolls testify to the fact that these prophecies were written well before Jesus was born. Not only that, they all came to pass. The accuracy of the Bible is miraculous. Why neglect it when it is so precise regarding the first coming of Jesus? Don't you think we can trust the prophecies regarding the second coming?

The Word Is Proven

President Woodrow Wilson said, "I am sorry for men who do not read the Bible every day. I wonder why they deprive themselves of the strength and the pleasure." That's what happens when you read about God supernaturally intervening in the affairs of men to accomplish His redemptive purposes. The greatest testimony to the Bible is the way it changes lives.

I never cease to marvel at the transformation in people when they pick up a Bible. These people's lives were a total mess, but when they started reading the Bible, they turned around. I know that feeling, because it happened to me. Drug abusers become clean, marriages are restored, and alcohol and gambling addicts are freed.

Why? It was the Word. It's the anchor of our souls and the bread that comes down from heaven. Christ said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." We need to learn to love that bread, more than the unhealthy food this world has to offer. The Bible says, "Love Me and keep My commandments." You can't obey Jesus if you don't love Him. You can't love Him if you don't know Him. And you will never know Him unless you take time to know Him.

The Bible is the primary way that God reveals Himself to fallen man. Maybe you are studying your Bible, but you're just picking up a few crumbs that fall from the children's table. Maybe you're not studying at all. Whatever you do to increase your time in the Word is going to create a positive blessing for you spiritually.

But you need to choose to do it. If you join a health club, it's going to cost you something. It will cost you time and money that you can't spend elsewhere. You'll have to give up something, but it will be worth it. It's the same with the Bible. Don't neglect His Word in preference for such trivial, passing things like television. God is saying to you, "Do you really want to know Me? My promise is, 'You'll find Me when you search for Me with all of your heart.' " He's not very far away—however far away your nearest Bible is. If you really want to get to know God better, ask Him for help. The devil is never more afraid than when you drop to your knees and pick up God's Word.

If you're not part of a weekly Bible study group, I'd like to encourage you to join one. Just take an hour, once a week, to get together with others of like faith and read the Word of God together. It will do wonders for your spiritual health. Not only is it a great means of strengthening and fortifying your own soul, but it has tremendous evangelistic potential because you've got friends and neighbors whom you could bring.

Yes, it's a cold and dark world out there, and it's easier to get lost in it than it would be under the North Pole in a nuclear submarine. But God has given us a never-failing gyrocompass in His Word, and if we read it—with a desire to follow it and know the God who inspired it—we will have a sure guide, one that will never let us go astray, and one more powerful and effective than all the nuclear submarines in the world.

How Do You Study the Bible?

A man once dreamed that he was walking through the desert one night when he heard a voice that told him to fill his pockets with the stones at his feet. The voice then said, "Tomorrow you will be both glad and sad." So the confused man took a handful of pebbles and stuffed them in his pocket. The next morning he examined the pebbles and discovered that the stones were really precious gems. He was happy and sad—happy he had obeyed and picked up some gems, but sad that he had not picked up more. The Bible is filled with priceless riches, but unless we open it and mine its pages, we will be without true wealth. "The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of coins of gold and silver" (Psalms 119:72; see also Proverbs 8:10, 11).

Without my own study of the Bible, I might still be lost, perhaps confused by the teachings of some New Age cult. It was the Bible that turned me into a Christian, which is a miracle considering that I was from a Jewish family full of cynicism about Christianity. I'd been taught evolution and believed that the Bible was full of fiction, fantasy, and fables. Yet in a cave, all alone, I picked up the Bible and this dynamic, powerful book changed my life.

The Word of God needs to be part of our lives. This will never happen unless you make the decision to reserve regular time with the Lord in study and prayer. But how do you study the ways of God? It's one thing to own a Bible; it's quite another to read it.

How do you go about studying it?

Is it really a locked book, filled with hidden codes? Do you need to have a degree or be a theologian to get its secret meanings? The answer is an emphatic "no!" And I say that because I'm exhibit A—living proof that you don't need to be a great professor of religion to grasp the Word.

When I first started reading the Bible, I was a high school dropout. Comparatively uneducated, not a great reader, and faced with a King James Bible, I was nevertheless able to understand what I read. God was able to speak to me through His Word, even though I didn't get everything straight the first time. Eventually, it became clear. And today, even after many years of studying, I am still blessed with new light when I read my Bible.

To help you, I've outlined some basic principles that have proven useful to me in studying the Bible. These simple concepts helped me to become an avid student of God's message. I have no doubt that if you apply these principles, you too will be able to understand much more, and your life will never be the same.

Ask the Author

Before you read the Scriptures, you should pray. A short but sincere prayer before you read is worth more than a long meandering prayer. The Bible is a divine book requiring divine guidance to understand it. The Lord says, "The word is Spirit and life" (John 6:63). God's Spirit inspired the writing; God's Spirit needs to inspire the reading. We're also told that spiritual things are "spiritually discerned." That might seem like common sense, but most people try to read the Bible with their own feelings as the interpreter. They want the Bible to tell them what they want to hear; they want it to say what they want it to say. That won't work—imposing ourselves on

what we read rather than allowing God's Spirit to impose on us what we need to understand. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14).

James 1:5 explains, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." We can expect God to give us wisdom while we're reading, especially when we with an earnest heart ask for His help. If you want to understand a book, who better to ask than the author? Sometimes you might read a passage in a book and ask yourself, "What did the writer mean by that?" Unfortunately, you can't call most authors to ask what they meant. But you can ask God. He can grant you perfect understanding because He wrote it.

Again and Again

John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, said, "Read the Bible and read it again. Do not despair of help to understand something of the will and the mind of God as if they are fast locked up from you. Neither trouble yourself though you may not have commentaries and expositions. Pray and read and read and pray for a little from God is better than a great deal from man."

Bunyan wrote one of the best-selling books of all time, but he was technically an uneducated man in the sense that he didn't have a lot of formal training. He didn't have a Ph.D. But he became a brilliant man through the devoted reading of Scripture. He read passages over and over again until they finally made sense. That's exactly what happened with me. (Though I still have a long way to go in unpacking all the gifts found in God's Word.)

When a soldier in some distant land gets a love letter from his girlfriend or wife, does he read it only once? I don't think so. No, he pulls out that piece of paper and with longing reads it over and over again. He might even smell it and figuratively wrap himself up in her words of love and encouragement. He will search every word, every nuance, reading between the lines just to understand what his beloved was truly saying. The Bible is a love letter from God to us; should we treat it with less heartfelt interest?

Be Willing

Jesus said in John 7:17, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself." One of the biggest keys to understanding God's message is having the willingness to accept and act on what you read. It is important to ask, "Lord, help me apply the things I have read in your Word to my life." Approaching God with a cynical curiosity will most likely lead to confusion and frustration.

I have a theory that there are some things God does not allow us to understand because we are responsible for what we understand. Jesus said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John 16:12). If we aren't walking in the light He has already shone on our path, why should He give us more? It would just make us more culpable on the day of judgment.

Sometimes it can be hard to have that willingness to do what the Bible says, so you might even need to pray for God to make you willing. If nothing else, pray that He will make you willing to be made willing. Our carnal natures are in rebellion against God. Our sinful natures make us want to do sinful things, and we might not be that eager to surrender to what the Word of God tells us.

During the final illness of W.C. Fields, someone walked into his hospital room and found him reading the Bible. Because Fields was not exactly known for piety, the person asked, "Bill, what are you doing?" "Looking for loopholes," he replied.

That's exactly the wrong attitude! You must approach the Word of God with a heart willing to obey its precepts. That will get you on the right road, as it put me on the right road. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22). The biggest battle in comprehension we all face is a willing heart. Get your heart right with God, and your mind will always follow.

Let It Speak for Itself

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15). Sometimes we over-spiritualize basic things in the Bible, never letting the words just plainly speak for themselves. Of course, there are many spiritual symbols in Scripture, but when the Bible says, "He woke up in the morning," some people might agonize over this phrase, trying to squeeze some spiritual abstract meaning out of a straightforward verse.

It's important to get the factual record of what happened. Don't bring preconceived ideas to prove what you already believe. Instead, let the Bible speak for itself. You can identify people with this attitude when they say, "I know I'm right. I've just got to find a verse to prove it." And they'll start reading the Bible not to hear what God says, but searching for proof texts to support their position. And if they can't find a supporting verse they generally twist something to make it fit—like the man who puts together a jigsaw puzzle with a hammer in one hand and scissors in the other.

It's possible to completely butcher the Bible and different verses, rearranging, cutting, and pasting passages to torture God's Word until it declares that water flows uphill. So be careful. Again, we need to approach the Word with a humble, willing heart—and open to what the Bible says even if what it says isn't exactly what we want to hear.

Understand the Context

With the exception of Proverbs, the Bible is not a series of isolated one-liners. Some people "study" by jumping from one verse to another, leading them to some flawed doctrinal conclusions. So when you read a verse, you should also read a few verses before it and a few verses after it. Sometimes that's all you need to do, but you might also have to read the entire chapter. Occasionally, to get the complete context, you'll need to read the whole book. Trust me, it's worth the investment.

1. It always helps to know the historical, geographical, and cultural context. I remember, for example, reading Jesus teaching about honoring your father and mother, but then He mentions "Corbin." I thought, "Who or what is Corbin?" Well, I had to do a little background study to find out that in their culture, children could dedicate their wealth to the temple instead of using it to support their parents in their old age. It was a rite that enabled them to dodge the fifth commandment, because their wealth was now technically God's property. That's where a little extra research paid off big.

2. Also consider the language. Sometimes when things are translated from one language to another, there's a potential to lose context and information. There are little nuances of meaning that can't always be exactly translated from one language to another. Though you don't need to know the original language to be able to understand the Bible, sometimes taking a little time to look up the original meanings of words can be very helpful to enhance comprehension. An example would be the word translated as "bottomless pit" in Revelation 20:1. In English, when we hear "bottomless pit," we conjure up pictures of a deep well that starts in Kansas and goes straight through the earth coming out in Mongolia. But looking at the original word in Greek, "abussos," it paints a different picture of a place of deep spiritual darkness where fallen angels are imprisoned (2 Peter 2:4;

Jude 1:6).

As you mature in your Bible study, don't be afraid to check maps, dictionaries, commentaries, and concordances. They can help you immensely in getting the gist of each passage and help you grasp the meaning in ways that will astound and amaze you. Of course, as Bunyan said, you don't need these to understand what God is saying. (Also keep in mind that Bible commentaries represent the interpretation of various scholars. While these are often very helpful, they are not necessarily inspired.) For centuries people built beautiful houses with only hand tools. But now power tools make the job easier. So just start where you are, with whatever tools you have handy. If you do, I guarantee your hunger will grow and you'll find a little Bible study library growing up in your home or on your computer.

Don't Jump to Conclusions

When arriving at truth in Bible study, you need to get the testimony of several verses. "In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established" (2 Corinthians 13:1). This applies to Bible study very well.

Some will read one verse in the Bible and create an entire doctrine based on that one verse alone, without much justification. For instance, I often get asked about a passage in 1 Corinthians 11 regarding women not cutting their hair and praying with their heads covered. This isolated verse can be difficult to understand. Why then build a belief system out of it, especially when no other verse even hints at that subject? You've got to be careful about building a doctrinal monument around that one verse, as it might have just been a cultural tradition or custom.

Isaiah 28:10 teaches, "For precept must be upon precept ... line upon line; here a little, and there a little." A good reporter will interview as many witnesses as possible when writing about some major event. Likewise, running to and fro through the Bible, comparing Scripture with Scripture, will work to help you learn for yourself what the truth really is. You need to look at all the relevant verses dealing with a subject and compare them with each other. This is crucial. You won't be embarrassed if you study the Bible that way.

Some of the popular false teachings today are based on one or two nebulous and misunderstood verses. Proponents of these odd teachings keep going back, again and again, to these few verses until they've managed to build an enormous following even though they neglect the weight of evidence from hundreds of other verses that, if carefully studied, would contradict the very teaching that they are so passionately promoting.

Avoid Private Interpretations

"Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (2 Peter 1:20, 21). Sometimes, we'll hear someone say something like, "This is what I think this verse means," or even, "I feel in my heart it could mean this" or some other warm fuzzy sentiment. Be very careful when you hear these kinds of subjective statements. It's often an indication of people not letting the Bible speak for itself.

Additionally, people who don't study with others often develop eccentric beliefs. Of course, God can speak to you alone through His Word, but almost without exception people who don't fellowship with other believers and don't bounce their interpretations off stable Christians can come up with some very bizarre ideas. They become a law unto themselves, forgetting that in the multitude of counsel there is safety (Proverbs 11:14).

In Acts 20:30, Paul warns, "And of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things," meaning

warped teachings, “to draw away disciples after them.” Sometimes these independent teachers want simply to be unique to gather a following around them, so they feel compelled to come up with an exotic doctrine and say they have a special revelation from God that no one else has. But please remember, in Acts 17:10, 11, we’re told about the people of Berea: “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” If you do that, diligently studying the Word of God with other Bible-based followers of Jesus, you will be safe.

Where’s the Beef?

Dwight Moody said, “Sin will keep you from the Bible or the Bible will keep you from sin.” The church is struggling today in the face of a biblical illiteracy pandemic. It’s so important now to be personally grounded in the Word because false teachings are only going to multiply as the clock of earth’s history winds rapidly down.

In the end, the devil and his minions are going to be quoting from the Bible more than ever. He’ll wave it around and point to it and he won’t hide from it. For many, the superficial, shallow, breezy approach to Bible doctrine will not prepare them to defend their faith against the devil’s clever deceptions. He already has his people out there, sharpening their arguments and twisting Scripture to their ends.

The milk of the Word is certainly okay for starters. Peter tells us that “[as] newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). It’s clear that God can work with you wherever you are at, but growing saints must graduate from milk to meat. That’s why we need to dig deeper for solid food. How long have you been receiving milk? When are you going to get ready for the real meat of the Word?

“And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1 Corinthians 3:1, 2). Stop delaying and get studying; there’s a lot nour-ishing meat in God’s Word just waiting to be assimilated.

The Time Is Now

During the bloody Civil War battle of Shiloh, Sam Houston, Jr., son of the famous Texan, was shot square in the back and knocked to the ground. When later found by a chaplain, he discovered he was only bruised from the bullet. The lead ball had been stopped by his mother’s Bible, which Houston carried in his knapsack. The bullet was found still lodged in its pages, stopping near the scriptures that proclaim, “O God: Thou art my help and deliverer” (Psalms 70:5).

As we enter the last days, it will not be enough to have our Bibles in our pockets or in our backpacks—we must have the contents lodged in our hearts. Remember, we can live holy lives when we have His Word written in our hearts (Psalms 119:11). There might be a day coming when your Bibles will be taken away and all you’re going to have is what you’ve stored in your heart. You might be brought before judges to defend your faith. They probably won’t hand you a Bible, yet we’re going to need to know how to give an answer for what we believe.

When the devil tempted Christ, Jesus didn’t have a backpack full of scrolls. He had the Word of God in His heart, and the Holy Spirit brought remembrance to Him. He said, “It is written,” and we will be able to say the same as long as we are willing to open up the Word now and dive right in.

That’s what I believe God wants for His people today. He wants them to be able to stand before anyone,

anywhere, and, as Peter said, “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Peter 3:15).

And those answers are found in just one place, the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God ... the Bible.

Embracing the Bible is really the same thing as embracing Jesus. Christ is the Word incarnate. Likewise, Jesus wants His Word to be animated in our lives. So take it with your hands, read with your eyes, store it in your heart, walk it with your feet, tell it with your lips, and live it in your life—starting today! “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.’ ”

—Matthew 4:4

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