



THE
EFFECTUAL
BIBLE

STUDENT

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The Effectual Bible Student
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SAMPLE

This course can be used as a stand alone teaching tool or in conjunction with *The Effectual Bible Student* video series, available for purchase on DVD or for free eVideo download from the Way of Life web site - www.wayoflife.org.

Introduction

Outline

- Spiritual Requirements for Bible Study
- Tips for Daily Bible Study
- Sound Rules of Bible Interpretation
- Using Bible Study Tools

2 Timothy 2:15

We see that the Bible is the Word of truth. I love the Bible! It is most amazing and important book on earth (“word of truth”). There is no admixture of error. This is the Bible’s claim. It is the revelation of the God who is truth. It is pure truth in a world of lies. In its pages we can find salvation, know God, find answer to every important question of life, get practical wisdom, spiritual strength, victory over the devil, find God’s perfect will, understand the past, know the future, prepare for Christ’s judgment seat, prepare for Christ’s kingdom.

We see that understanding the Bible requires work. This is God’s plan (“study ... a workman”). The word “study” is from the Greek word *spoudazo*, which means “to use speed, i.e. to make effort, to prompt or earnest.” It is elsewhere translated “be diligent” (2 Tim. 4:9, 21), “give diligence” (2 Pet. 1:10), “endeavour” (Eph. 4:3; 2 Pet. 1:15), and “labour” (Heb. 4:11). Compare Proverbs 2:1-9, which likens seeking wisdom in God’s Word to digging for silver and seeking worldly wealth.

We see that understanding the Bible requires learning (“rightly dividing”). The phrase “rightly divide” is translated from the Greek word *orthotomeo*, meaning “to make a straight cut, i.e. (figuratively) to dissect (expound) correctly

the divine message.” This tells us that there are also wrong ways to interpret the Bible. Even in the beginning of the church age, men were already mishandling the truth. Peter reminds us of this in 2 Peter 3:16. In this course, we will see how that false teachers abuse God’s Word.

We see that understanding it requires a right relationship with God (“shew thyself approved unto God”). I can know the truth because God will show me; the Bible is not given for confusion but for light.

SAMPLE

The Spiritual Requirements for Bible Study

The effectual Bible student meets the Spiritual requirements for Bible study.

1. Effective Bible study requires SPIRITUAL LIFE (1 Cor. 2:14 - 3:3).

The first and foremost requirement for fruitful Bible study is a saved, Spirit-led life. Unlike other books, the Bible is a spiritual book and can only be understood by spiritual people.

a. There are three types of people described in 1 Corinthians chapters two and three: the natural man, the spiritual man, and the carnal man.

(1) The natural man is the unsaved person who is spiritually dead and blind (Eph. 2:1-3; 2 Cor. 4:4). He cannot understand the things of God. “The deepest biblical scholar, if he fails to find Christ, knows less of the real meaning of the Gospel than the humblest Christian who is living in the faith of the Son of God” (*Pulpit Commentary*). When the heart turns to the Lord, though, and receives Jesus Christ, the blindness is lifted (2 Cor. 3:14-17). When I was growing up in a Baptist church, I had a Bible and I studied the Bible in Sunday School and knew it well enough to win Sword Drills, but the Bible didn’t become a living Book for me until I was converted.

(2) *The spiritual man* (1 Cor. 2:15-16) and *the carnal man* (1 Cor. 3:1-4) refer to believers. The believer is either

spiritual or carnal depending on his walk with Christ, depending on whether he is walking in the flesh or the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). The carnal or worldly believer, because he is not walking in the Spirit, cannot understand the difficult things of Scripture. He can take milk but not meat. See also Hebrews 5:12-14. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus warned that the Word of God can be “choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14). In Mark 4:19 He said the Word can be choked by “the lusts of other things entering in.” In Bible study spiritual life is more important than technical skills. R.A. Torrey said, “A person who understands the language of the Holy Spirit, but who does not understand a word of Greek or Hebrew or Aramaic, will get more out of the Bible than one who knows all about Greek and Hebrew but is not born again. It is a well-demonstrated fact that many plain men and women who possess no knowledge of the original languages in which the Bible was written have knowledge of the real contents of the Bible. Their understanding of its actual teaching and its depth, fullness, and beauty far surpasses that of many learned professors in theological faculties.”

b. Since salvation is so essential in effective Bible study and since there are so many nominal Christians in the churches, let's consider some Biblical evidences of salvation.

(1) The first evidence is a conversion experience and new spiritual life and direction (John 3:3; Mat. 18:3; 2 Cor. 5:17). The testimonies we find in the Bible emphasize this conversion experience (e.g., Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10; the woman at the well in John 4:4-42; the Jews converted on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2:37-42; the

Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-39, the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:23-34; and the idolaters at Thessalonica in 1 Thessalonians 1:9). Biblical salvation is not a process; it is a conversion experience!

- (2) Another evidence is a personal relationship with Christ (John 17:3; Mat. 7:21-23). Biblical salvation is not changing religions; it is to know Christ personally and as one's Lord and Saviour, to walk and talk with Him.
- (3) Another evidence is love of God's Word (John 8:31-32, 47; 10:27-28). One of the greatest evidences of salvation is one's attitude toward the Bible.
- (4) Another evidence is love of righteousness (1 John 2:3-4). The true believer can sin, because the "old man" still resides in him, but he has an entirely different attitude toward sin. He can no longer enjoy sin. He has been converted and the Holy Spirit lives within him and God is his Father. The things he once loved, he now hates, and the things he once hated he now loves.
- (5) Another evidence is divine chastisement (Heb. 12:6-8). The true believer can sin, but if he does he is chastened by God the Father. And if he persists in sin, there is the sin unto death (1 John 5:17). This passage makes it clear that those who can go their own way year after year, living in sin and rebellion to God's will, are not saved.

Dear friends, if we want to study the Bible fruitfully, we must make certain that we are born again and that we are walking in close fellowship with the Author of the Book. This is the first and foremost requirement. Studying the Bible is something like tuning in to a radio channel. Heaven is far away, but God broadcasts His glorious message to earth on a

clear and powerful station with the call letters BIBLE. If the believer is in fellowship with Christ, he has an open channel to Heaven through the Scriptures. The closer the fellowship with Christ, the sharper the reception and the more plainly the Bible speaks. If, on the other hand, a believer walks in carnality and in fellowship with the world, the reception becomes poor, because the Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30). The static of the things of this world hinders the reception of a spiritual broadcast. Child of God, don't let unconfessed sin and worldliness rob you of the blessing of being tuned in to Heaven's glorious channel!

2. Effective Bible study requires THE RIGHT PRIORITY (Mat. 6:33 "seek ye FIRST"; this is associated with light - 6:19-24 "whole body shall be full of light")

God requires first place in our lives (Mat. 6:33); and since He has magnified His Word above His very name (Psa. 138:2), it is evident that He intends that we should make the study of His Word the very highest priority. Following are some of the ways that we can do this:

- a. The study of the Bible should come first in the day when we are still fresh and our minds are uncluttered with the concerns of life. Some have vowed to the Lord that they will not eat food until they have eaten God's Word. That is a noble and wise thing. For many years, I determined before the Lord that I would not read any other material until I had first read His Word. When I was engaged to my wife and she was still living in a foreign country and our only form of communication was by mail, I determined before the Lord that I would never read one of her letters until I had first spent my time studying His Word. I believe such things please the Lord, because they demonstrate our zeal toward spiritual matters.

- b. The study of the Bible should be given sufficient time. It is not honoring to God to apply a tiny amount of time to the study of His Word, or to read some little two-minute devotional in the place of serious Bible study. To learn the Bible properly, one must carve out significant time to read and study it.
- c. The study of the Bible should be a priority above the study of other books. It is not honoring to God to spend most of one's time reading *about* the Bible while neglecting the actual study of the Bible itself. While we do not despise the value of sound doctrinal books, they should never take the place of the Bible.

3. Effective Bible study requires PRAYER (Ps. 119:18; Prov. 2:3; 3:5-6; Eph. 1:17-18).

Bible study is not a mere intellectual exercise; it is a relationship with God

As we search the Bible, we must cry out to its Author for understanding. The Bible student must trust the Lord and "*lean not unto thine own understanding*" (Prov. 3:5-6). R. A. Torrey said, "Prayer will do more than a college education to make the Bible an open and glorious book." Charles Bridges warned: "Without this spirit of prayer there may be attention and earnestness; yet not one spiritual impression upon the conscience; not one ray of Divine light in the soul. Earthly wisdom is gained by study; heavenly wisdom by prayer. Study may form a Biblical scholar; prayer puts the heart under a heavenly tutorage, and therefore forms the wise and spiritual Christian. ... God keeps the key of the treasure-house in his own hand. ... We look for no other inspiration than Divine grace to make his word clear and impressive" (Bridges). When we pray for wisdom we acknowledge that we don't have it; we acknowledge our dependency upon God; we are

humbling ourselves. Earnest prayer to understand the Bible is the opposite of the spirit of pride of scholarship and the foolish dependency upon human intellect, and helps keep the heart humble and right. Twice the Scripture warns that God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). As the Bible student grows in his understanding of the Scriptures and has success in applying the rules of interpretation, he is ever in danger of becoming self confident and lackadaisical. The old heart can deceive me into thinking that I have “arrived” and that I no longer need to cry out to the Lord for understanding. One way to resist this is to remind myself of what I don’t understand in the Word of God rather than focus on what I do understand. No man will ever truly master the Scriptures. The Bible, as God’s Word, is an eternal book containing endless truth. A man could study any one book of the Bible for his entire life, studying it diligently every day, and never completely master even that one portion of Scripture. As you grow in understanding the Bible you realize that your knowledge is only superficial, that there is much that still lies beyond your grasp. Thus we never come to the place in our Bible study whereby we do not need to cry out to the Author for help and understanding.

4. Effective Bible study requires CONFESSIO AND OBEDIENCE (Jn. 7:17; Heb. 5:14; Jam. 1:22-25; 1 Pet. 2:1-2).

The Bible student must apply the Bible to his daily life. When he stops obeying, he stops growing and stops having good spiritual discernment.

The Parable of Sower teaches that worldly lusts and cares choke the Word (Mk 4:19).

5. Effective Bible study requires PERSISTENCE (Luke 8:15; Jn. 8:31-32; Col. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:16; James 1:6-8).

Feelings come and go. The child of God must continue in the things of Christ whether he feels like it or not, whether the situation is difficult or easy. Certainly this is true for Bible study. There will be periods in which your heart will sing and the meaning of the Scripture will literally leap off the pages of the Bible and it will come alive. There will be other times in which everything is dull and dry, even the very study of God's Word.

Why are there dry times in the Christian life?

- a. We live in a "*body of this death*" (Rom. 7:24) and we are much affected by our physical condition. I remember a pastor friend who had kidney failure. Before his illness, he had a vibrant Christian life. He would memorize entire books of the Bible and the Scriptures were his delight. After his illness, he testified to me that though he continued to read the Bible, it only mocked him. David spoke of such a condition in Psalm 119:83. "*For I am become like a bottle in the smoke; yet do I not forget thy statutes.*" David was saying that he felt all dried up like a leather bottle that was left over a fire. The child of God will go through times like that experientially, and he must do what David did, "*yet do I not forget thy statutes.*" Even if Bible study becomes monotonous and discouraging at some point, just keep on keeping on and the blessing will return. One preacher wisely said, "Read the Bible when you feel like it, and when you don't feel like reading it, read it until you do."
- b. God prunes us (John 15:1-2). Pruning is not a pleasant experience, but it is essential for spiritual growth. In Nepal and India, where we have lived for almost two decades, they grow world-famous tea. If left to itself, the tea plant grows large, almost tree-like, and in order to produce the best tea it must be carefully pruned. Sometimes the plant

is pruned back almost to the ground, and the plants look dead from a distance. But they are not dead; they are cut back so that they will produce sweeter tea. The same is true for the Christian life, and we must submit to the Lord's pruning work.

6. Effective Bible study requires CONCENTRATION (Psa. 119:97, 99).

If you can't concentrate upon the Bible, your study time will not be very profitable. It is so easy for the mind to wander as you read the Bible, and we must do whatever is necessary to keep our thoughts on the Scriptures, to hold the words of God in our hearts so that they bring forth good fruit. Not only do we live in a weak, fleshly body (called the "*body of this death*" in Romans 7:24) that gets tired and sick, and not only do we dwell in a world full of cares and troubles, but we have an aggressive spiritual enemy that seeks to hinder our progress. His name is Satan, meaning *the adversary*, the one who stands before us to resist us. Bible study is spiritual warfare, and we must do everything necessary to win this war.

The Parable of the Sower teaches us that a man must make the effort to understand and apply the Scriptures, or the truth will be stolen away from his heart by the Devil (Matthew 13:19). We must capture the truth by meditating on it and finding out its meaning.

This is why MEMORIZATION of Scripture is so important. When Scriptures are memorized, the believer can then meditate upon them at any time. It is good to write Scripture verses down on cards and keep them with you so that you can spend time memorizing Scripture as you have opportunity, such as when you are waiting on someone or something. Redeem the time!

Following are some suggestions to help you concentrate upon the Word of God:

- a. A quiet, private place is required. I have seen Christians trying to study the Bible in a room where other people are talking and a radio is blaring, etc. That is not wise and it is not honoring to the Lord who deserves our undivided attention. The Bible is the very Word of God. Would it be proper to invite God over for a visit and then have many other things going on at the same time as He was talking to us? On some occasions when I have visited people in their homes to talk to them about spiritual matters, they have kept the television on and have continued watching it. That was very disrespectful to the message that I was bringing from God's Word. There have been occasions when I have gotten into my car and driven out to a country road or, if in a city, to the backside of the parking lot of a large shopping area in order to have a quiet and private place for Bible study.
- b. Ask the Lord to help you to keep your mind on His Word. If you find your mind frequently wandering during Bible study, lay the matter before the Lord. Tell Him that you desire to grow in knowledge of Him and His Word, explain your problem to Him, and beseech Him to help you concentrate.
- c. If you are particularly worried about some matter, cast it upon the Lord (1 Pet. 5:7) and trust Him to take care of it for you; then turn your full attention to His Word.
- d. Have pen in hand as you read. Just the action of picking up one's pen and being ready to write things down or to mark in one's Bible causes the mind to focus more on the reading.

- e. Remove things from your Bible study area that are distracting. I know a pastor who removed all of the bright colored covers from the books in his office, because they distracted him when he was trying to study the Bible.
- f. Be careful about using a computer during Bible reading time. I use my computer to study the Bible, because it is so efficient, but I do not use my computer when I have my daily devotional time in the Scriptures. It is too easy to get distracted with other things on the computer.
- g. Be careful about extraneous thoughts. When you are studying the Bible, it will often happen that thoughts about other things will rush in and you will be tempted to leave the study of the Bible and to rush off to take care of those things. For this reason, it is a good idea to have pen and paper handy and to jot down such thoughts so that you can take care of them later. This way, you can put them out of your mind for the time being and proceed with your study. If you get in the habit of allowing yourself to rush off and take care of other things, you will be crippled in your ability to study the Bible fruitfully.
- h. Go back and read the passage again. When you find that your mind has wandered during the reading of the Scripture, it is important to go back and read that passage again until you understand what you are reading, even if it takes several readings. It is better to read one verse with clear understanding than to read an entire chapter with the mind drifting to other things.
- i. Try not to read the Bible when you are tired. Sometimes this cannot be avoided, and it is better to read the Bible when you are tired than not at all. But the wise Bible student will arrange his schedule in such a way that he can study the Scriptures when his mind is fresh.

- j. If you find your mind wandering, it might help to put the Bible reading first before you do anything else in the day. I have found that if I start reading and studying other things first, it is much more difficult to concentrate on the Bible later.
- k. Sometimes it is helpful to read the Bible aloud if you find your mind wandering. This can help you maintain your concentration.
- l. A larger print Bible can also help with concentration because it is easier to read and the pages of the Bible are not as cluttered.
- m. Be persistent. Don't let the Devil defeat you in your Bible reading. If you find yourself unable to concentrate for a period, don't quit. There are ups and downs in Bible study as there are in everything else in life. The best tip for effective Bible study is to keep on keeping on!

7. Effective Bible study requires PAYING ATTENTION TO THE DETAILS (Matt. 4:4).

To benefit the most from Bible study, one must understand that every word of the Bible is important. In fact, the Lord Jesus Christ spoke even of the jots and tittles, which are tiny parts of Hebrew letters (Mat. 5:18). The wise Bible student pours over the pages of Scripture looking at every detail, knowing that nothing is there by accident. Every word of Scripture has a divine purpose. It was purified seven times (Psalm 12:6). Thus, it is imperative that the student have an accurately translated Bible that brings out the details of the Hebrew and Greek. "Andrew Bonar tells of a simple Christian in a farmhouse who had meditated the Bible through three times. This is precisely what this Psalmist had done, -- he had gone past reading into meditation. Like Luther, David had

shaken every fruit tree in God's garden, and gathered golden fruit therefrom. 'The most,' says Martin Boos, 'read their Bibles like cows that stand in the thick grass, and trample under their feet the finest flowers and herbs.' It is to be feared that we too often do the like. This is a miserable way of treating the pages of inspiration. May the Lord prevent us from repeating that sin while reading this priceless Psalm" (C.H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David*).

8. Effective Bible study requires A GOOD CHURCH (1 Tim. 3:15; Eph. 4:11, 12; Heb. 13:7; Rev. 2:3 "hear what the Spirit sayeth *unto the churches*").

The church is the institution God has ordained to be the pillar and ground of the truth. To that institution He has given ministry-gifted men for the edification of the saints, and it is necessary for the child of God to benefit from this ministry. It is not God's will for a Christian to be a "lone maverick." The biblical pattern is for a Christian to join himself to a sound Bible-believing church. That is emphasized throughout the New Testament. It is particularly in the church that the Christian is to hear the Word of God. Seven times in Revelation chapters two and three we read that we are to "*hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches*" (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). We believe there is a special sense in which God speaks to the believer in his own assembly through his own pastors. As the Lord had a special message for each of the churches of Asia Minor in the first century, He has a special message for each church today. Each church is a body (1 Cor. 12:27), and the members are to be taught and edified together by the Lord through the pastors and teachers. In addition to this the Christian can avail himself of sound teaching through books and tapes. He should take advantage of every avenue of sound teaching available to him, but the first place for sound teaching is in one's own church, assuming, of course, that the church is a

good one. When I was a new Christian, I didn't know where to go to church at first. I was led to Christ by a Christian man while I was traveling, and the day after I was converted he continued on his journey and I went back to my home town. I started visiting various churches and praying about which one to join. I also obtained some books by various false teachers that confused me. One was by a Seventh-day Adventist. Others were by Pentecostals. Soon the Lord led me to a little fundamental Baptist church in Bartow, Florida, and the pastor and mature Christians there were exceedingly helpful to me and assisted me to become grounded in the truth.

Don't waste the precious opportunity of learning from your church. So many Christians are so incredibly careless about the preaching and teaching they sit under. Many are not faithful to all of the services, and many of those who are faithful hardly look at their Bibles, never taking notes, and making no effort to capture something that will benefit them later. They don't come prepared with paper and pen. Don't follow this unwise example. Use every opportunity of sitting under good preaching and teaching to capture as much as possible for your spiritual life and ministry. Even dull preachers and teachers usually have something worthwhile to say, if the student will make the effort to get it. Come prepared to capture the things the Lord shows you during the preaching and teaching. Don't come complaining; come praying, beseeching the Lord to speak through the preaching. Come with pen and paper. Come with a Bible that has a margin wide enough to jot things down. Come with pencil or colored pens to mark your Bible. Underline important things. Jot down cross-references that you find during the teaching. Jot down definitions of words. Jot down good outlines that you can use later. Jot down good thoughts and helpful sayings. (We will deal with this under the next section on "Marking Your Bible.") As you sit under preaching in an

expectant manner, earnestly seeking something from the Lord, you will find that many thoughts come to you and that the Lord will give you many things. Don't let these slip away. Jot them down in a notebook. I am thankful for the godly example of a Christian friend the Lord gave me when I was first saved. His name is Richard Tedder, and he was saved only a short while before I was, but he had become a diligent Bible student and had grown spiritually. Richard was one of the members of the first church I joined after I was saved, and he befriended me and was a great help in my early Christian life. One thing I learned from Richard, and I don't know if he even knows this, was to have a proper study Bible with me when I came to church and to take notes during the preaching. His wise example in this matter got me off to a strong start in my Christian life and helped establish me in the path down which I have gone in my ministry.

REVIEW QUESTIONS ON SPIRITUAL REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTUAL BIBLE STUDY

1. What are three types of men described in 1 Corinthians 2-3?
2. Why is it that the natural man cannot understand the Bible?
3. What verse says that the unsaved person is dead in trespasses and sins?
4. What book and chapter describes the difference between walking in the Spirit and walking in the flesh?
5. What book and chapter says that when man turns to God from his heart that the veil is lifted from his eyes?
6. What book and chapter says the baby Christian is unskillful in the word of righteousness?
7. In Bible study, _____ life is more important in Bible study than technical skills.
8. Why can the carnal Christian only understand simple things in the Bible?

9. What verse says the believer can grieve the Holy Spirit?
10. What verse says to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness?
11. What are two ways you can put the Bible first in your life?
12. What Bible character said, "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food"?
13. In what parable and in what book and chapter did Jesus warn that if someone does not make the effort to understand the Scripture that the Devil catches it away?
14. What are five of the things you can do to keep your concentration on the Bible?
15. In what book and chapter is the search for wisdom in God's Word likened to the search for silver?
16. R. A. Torrey said, "_____ will do more than a college education to make the Bible an open and glorious book."
17. In what verse did Jesus say that those who are His disciples indeed continue in His Word?
18. What did David mean in Psalm 119:83 when he said he was like a bottle in the smoke?
19. One preacher wisely said, "Read the Bible when you _____ like it, and when you don't _____ like reading it, read it until you do."
20. In Matthew 4:4 Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every _____ that proceedeth out of the _____ of God."
21. In what verse did Jesus say, "Blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it"?
22. In what verse did Jesus say, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself"?
23. In what book and chapter is the study of the Bible likened to someone who sees his face in the mirror?
24. 1 Peter 2:1-2 lists what two things that are necessary for learning the Bible?

25. What verse says the church is the pillar and ground of the truth?
26. How many times in Revelation 2-3 is the statement “I hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” repeated?

SAMPLE

A Habit of Daily Bible Study

The effectual Bible student has a habit of daily Bible study.

It is important to develop godly habits in the Christian life. Jesus had “the custom” of attending the synagogue services (Luke 4:16). It was His habit. Likewise the believer must have habits of church attendance and daily Bible study.

The Word of God has the power to sanctify the believer and build him up in Christ. It imparts conviction, enlightenment, spiritual strength, faith, wisdom, repentance.

Consider the following Scriptures: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:1-3; 119:9, 105; John 8:31-32; Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:15-17; Hebrews 4:12; 1 Peter 2:2; 2 Peter 1:19.

To grow in Christ and find His perfect will, the believer must be transformed by the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:1-2), and this is accomplished by the Word of God through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Jesus likened the Word of God to one's daily food (Mt. 4:4). As food is necessary for physical growth and health, so the Word of God is necessary for spiritual growth and health. As food must be eaten daily, so the Word of God must be studied daily. When the Israelites were in the wilderness, God gave them manna to eat, and it had to be gathered and eaten every day. It could not be left over for the next day. Likewise, the believer must have a habit of consistent, daily Bible study if he wants to grow strong and develop in God's will.

Following are some tips for daily Bible reading.