

BIBLE STUDIES OVERVIEW

Bible study ought to be three things: fun, exciting (or at least interesting), and challenging (Jeremiah 15: 16). So, if your personal Bible study, small group study, or study in a larger group, isn't fun, interesting and challenging, something is wrong. Look for, and accept, help.

Bible study is always relational. If you are studying alone, you certainly need a mentor. If relationships in a small group aren't positive and encouraging, you won't get far. And a larger group without friendships will fail as well. Besides the relationships of those studying, there is, of course, the main relationship in Bible study: between you and God (Isaiah 43: 1). If things aren't going right there, you can expect little from reading the Bible. That's where a spiritual advisor is necessary.

The Bible is meant to be God's love story (Jeremiah 31: 3b)—a love message to you! Make sure, even if you have to work at it, to appreciate the love of your Creator, Savior, Mentor, Friend and Lord. God made you and knows your needs, desires, fears and hopes (Psalm 139: 13-16 and this whole psalm). Bible study enables God to speak to these needs. To give you something for each day, light for your path and protection from all dangers (Isaiah 43: 1-2).

To study and appreciate the Bible you need to see it as a library of books. As you understand a little bit about when and why these books were written, and the different types of literature they represent, you will be better able to apply them to your own life and world.

This means you have to understand differences in culture between your world and the world in which the Bible was written. You obviously need to know what was going on when a particular author wrote the book you are reading. Study Bibles give you this information—as do Bible handbooks.

Another important thing: just as none of us can understand why God loves us so, there is mystery in why God loved and chose the Jewish people among all others (Deuteronomy 7: 6-11). God's appeals to all peoples after Adam and Eve in the garden, then after Noah and the flood, didn't work. So Genesis tells how God looked for and chose Abraham and his descendants forever (Genesis 17: 1-7). This was the foundation of the Old Covenant or Testament. In Jesus, all who believe in Him are brought into a New Covenant (1 Corinthians 11: 25-26). This New Covenant doesn't deny the Old; it fulfills and completes the Old Covenant. Christians see themselves as part of the new Israel (Galatians 6: 15-16).

God's quest for partners and a people is the story of the Bible (Isaiah 6: 8; Ezekiel 22: 30). God found the only valid human partner in Jesus Christ, his Son. But the story goes on today—God is still looking for partners to do God's will, to be part of God's Kingdom. That's where you and I come in.

Each book of the Bible contributes to this story in different ways. Some of the Bible is history, some teaching. There is poetry, proverbs, prophecy, apocalyptic visions, biographies of Jesus Christ and letters to churches. Knowing to whom and why an author was writing is important; understanding the cultural situation at that time starts us on the right path to successful Bible interpretation.

The Bible was written by many different authors over many centuries, but it claims to be inspired of God for our good (Jeremiah 1:4a; Psalm 119: 9, 105; 2 Timothy 3: 16; 2 Peter 1: 21). So we must study it with all our might and for all its worth. And make sure that our reading and study are fun, interesting and challenging—that we are finding encouragement and hope.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Why are you interested, or not interested, in studying the Bible?
2. What problems have you encountered in reading the Bible, and what benefits have you received from it?
3. How many of the Scripture verses listed above have you checked out? What helped you the most?
4. Was anything said in the article above with which you disagreed? Anything not clear?
5. What was most helpful in the above introduction to Bible study? How can you apply it?

IMPLICATIONS

1. The Bible is the “best seller” of all times. It is the most published, most quoted, most written about, and most stolen, book in the world.
2. It is understandable but regrettable that the book having the most profound effect on human history is not studied in most schools.
3. In many ways the Bible teaches about itself what Jesus said to the Temptor: “Human beings do not live by bread alone, but by the Word of God.”
4. Once we decide to live the life of faith, it must be a life of prayer and Bible reading.

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