

BIBLE STUDY

In this article on the subject of Bible study I'd like to break it up into three sections. In the first section I'd like to look at the benefits of why we study the Bible. In the second part I'd like to look at what we can study and in the last section I'd like to share some personal examples of things that I have studied over the years which might spark some ideas of things that you might like to study in the future.

So firstly what are some of the benefits of Bible study? Why do we study the Bible? Let's look at a couple of passages in the book of 2 Timothy:

2Ti 2:15 *Study* earnestly to present yourself approved to God, a workman that does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth.

2Ti 3:16 All Scripture *is* God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

2Ti 3:17 that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work.

Mr Armstrong used to say that the Bible was God's instruction manual to mankind. Life is complex and the Bible tells us what makes like work and what doesn't. We study the Bible to not just understand God's way of life but also to motivate and encourage us to stick with that path. Most of us know what is right and wrong according to the Bible but we need the motivation it provides us to keep us on the right path and not just follow the path of least resistance.

It gives us correction and instruction in the right way of life. It teaches us about God's viewpoint of life on many, many things. It teaches us the history of God's people which has valuable lessons for us to learn. It contains prophecy showing us what is in the future encouraging us that God will ultimately bring peace and happiness to this earth when His kingdom comes.

It teaches us of the way to salvation and shows us the great plan of God to redeem mankind and our ultimate destiny in His family.

When it comes to building a relationship with our heavenly Father Mr Armstrong used to say that we talk to God through prayer and that He talks to us through His word, the Bible.

Jesus said "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of *the* mouth of God" (**Matthew 4:4**).

Just as food sustains our physical life God's word sustains our spiritual life helping us grow in the grace and knowledge of God.

We've covered why we study. Let's now look at what we can study. There are two broad ways that we can study the Bible. The first is that we can read and study it a book at a time and the other way is that we can study it by subject.

Studying the Bible a book at a time helps us to get the flow of the history of God's people in the Bible. The original inspired order of the Bible is somewhat different to the order we find in most Bibles and that order helps put the subject matter of the Bible in an organised way that progressively builds on itself as you go along.

Our Good News Bible reading program has been following the original Old Testament order of the Law followed by the Prophets and then the Writings. The New Testament original

order is the Gospels, followed by Acts, followed by the general epistles of James, Peter and John, followed by Paul's epistles and then his pastoral letters concluding with Revelation. As Paul's epistles were more complex they followed after the general epistles that focused on love, hope and charity. I know of one church group that will very shortly have a whole English Bible in its original order.

What can help us as we go through a book at a time are Bible aids such as good commentaries and Bible atlases. A couple of fantastic tools for going through the Bible book by book are the ABC audio and video lectures on various Bible books that can be downloaded off the UCG website (www.ucg.org) and the Good News Bible reading program.

With the release shortly (as I write this) of the commentary on the book of Ecclesiastes, the last of the Old Testament division called the Writings, the Bible Reading Program will finally finish the whole Old Testament. If, like me, you have fallen way behind and given up keeping up with it now is a perfect time to jump back on the bandwagon as we start up in the New Testament. While I may have fallen behind like most people I've spoken to about it, I have been copying the text into a single document as it has come out and customised the format to look just like a Bible commentary so I'm excited to soon see the Old Testament completed.

One thing a few of us would do in Brisbane was having group Bible studies where we'd pick a book in the Bible and take turns reading a few verses at a time and then discussing each passage. To help with our discussion we would also read from the Bible Reading program. Those were very enjoyable and very helpful.

The other way we can study the Bible is studying it by subject. If we take this approach then the highest priority subjects we should study are those spiritual problems we struggle with or the character traits where we are weakest and want to grow in. At different times in our life we might have a particularly hard time with one sin or another. At those times it is good to have focused study on those issues. Ephesians 5:26 says that we are to be cleansed with the washing of the water of God's word. Search and study all the verses on that subject. Get a hold of every book, booklet and resource you can find on it to help you with your battle or help you grow in that fruit of the spirit you may be weak in.

A few years ago I was having a discussion with one of deacons regarding taking a systematic approach with regards to our local teen Bible studies. I felt at the time that the knowledge our young people had of the Bible if quizzed on it would probably be a little like swiss cheese where there would be a fair few holes here and there that were best filled by systematically covering the fundamental subjects of the Bible. What I had in mind was a simple page or two of the key scriptures you would use to prove the fundamental doctrines of the Bible particularly where we differed from mainstream christianity.

As I began this project a couple of pages each subject was turning into much more than that and I had to make a decision as to how I would complete the project. What I decided was to continue writing full-length lessons to my heart's content and then at the end of each lesson summarise the key points back to the page or two I had in mind originally. The 12 lesson full-length version ended up around 300 pages and the short version was a little over 40 pages.

Each of the 12 lessons are broken up into sections that answer key questions relating to that lesson. The format somewhat follows the format of Mr Armstrong's final work *Mystery of the Ages* which itself is a fantastic tool to help with your Bible study if you haven't read it in a while. I really liked the sequential way he wrote that book with the mystery of God then the angels then man, Israel, the church and the Kingdom of God. To those key subjects I have added proving God exists and the Bible is true at the beginning, as well as heaven and hell, the Holy Days, the Great Tribulation and Christianity as a way of life.

The leading questions for each of those lessons can help you to determine where your knowledge of the Bible is weak or strong and where you can concentrate on studying if your knowledge is lacking.

Another way to systematic cover the fundamental subjects of the Bible is to go through United's fundamentals of belief. In addition to the booklet we have there was also a sermon series covering each of the 20 fundamentals.

For the last section I'd like to share a few personal examples of things that I have studied over the years that might spark some ideas of your own.

When I came into the church at age 16 not having been raised in the church I felt very much like I was behind the eight ball when it came to my knowledge of the stories and the history of Israel not having been taught those growing up. One of the first things that I did was a crash course in the history in the Bible going from after the Exodus to the return from captivity and reading all the books covering it. After reading each chapter I would write a short summary of a couple of sentences to help me quickly pick up on what was covered in each chapter.

One thing that I heard in a sermon many years ago related to the Psalms and the Proverbs was that since there were 150 psalms and 31 chapters in Proverbs that you could read 5 psalms a day to go through Psalms in a month and a chapter a day would likewise cover Proverbs in a month. He also mentioned that he had his children go through the Psalms and highlighted every verse that had a promise from God even if it was something as simple as God blesses the righteous which is something that I also did.

Writing is something that comes quite naturally to me but it is not something that comes naturally to most people. I have found that the process of writing and summarising what I have learned has been the biggest help in cementing that knowledge in my mind. Our former national office manager back in Australia commented to me on a few occasions that the sermon giver gets just as much if not more out of the sermon than the audience because of the process of studying and writing it down to be presented in a sermon. While I am not suggesting doing anything as prolific as the writing projects I have done I would encourage you if you want to cement the knowledge you are learning to write and briefly summarise what you learn from the scriptures.

One other book that I compiled covered the laws, statutes and judgments in the Bible. The law or Torah in the first five books of the Bible was the constitution of the nation of Israel covering primarily the letter of the law just like the Sermon on the Mount is the christian constitution covering primarily the spirit of the law and building on the laws and statutes in the Law. There are lots and lots of little known laws that have gems of wisdom when you study them and understand the principle behind the law. Once you understand their principles you can apply those principles to many real life situations.

The Bible truly is God's instruction manual to mankind. Not only does it tell us how to live and how to receive salvation it also tells us where we are going and what is up ahead. It's our ultimate reference guide to life. I hope that some of the things that I have shared with you today will help make you make the most of it for all its worth.