

Not by Bread Alone **by RA Torrey**

There is nothing more important for the development of a Christian's spiritual life than regular, systematic Bible study. It is as true in the spiritual life as in the physical life, that health depends on what we eat and how much we eat. "Man shall not live by bread alone" (Matt. 4:4). The soul's proper food is found in one book, the Bible.

Of course, a true minister of the gospel will feed us on the Word of God, but that is not enough. He feeds us only one or two days in the week, and we need to be fed every day. Therefore, we must learn to feed ourselves. We live in a day in which false doctrine is everywhere, and only the Christian who studies his Bible for himself, daily, will be safe from being led into error.

Through the study of the Bible, one will be sound in doctrine and led to see his sins and to put them away. He will find discipline in the righteous life and be equipped for all good works. Our spiritual health, growth, strength, victory over sin, soundness in doctrine, joy, and peace in Christ come from study of God's Word. Cleansing from inward and outward sin and fitness for service all depend on daily study of the Bible. The one who neglects his Bible is bound to be a failure in the Christian life. The one who studies his Bible in the right spirit and by a constant method is bound to make a success of the Christian life. This brings us face to face with the question, "What is the right way to study the Bible?"

How to Study Your Bible

First of all, we should study it daily. "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" (Acts 17:11). This is of prime importance. No matter how solid the methods of Bible study, how much time one may put into Bible study now and then, the best results can only be secured when one never lets a single day go by without earnest Bible study. Any day that is allowed to pass without faithful Bible study is a day which opens our hearts and lives to error and sin.

A regular time should be set aside each day for Bible study. I do not think it is wise, as a rule, to say that we will study so many chapters a day, because that leads to undue haste, skimming, and thoughtlessness. But it is good to set apart a certain length of time each day for Bible study. Some can give more time to Bible study than others, but no one should devote less than fifteen minutes a day.

I set a short time span so that no one will be discouraged in the beginning. If a young Christian planned to spend an hour or two a day in Bible study, there is a strong probability that he would not keep the resolution and would become discouraged. Nevertheless, I know of many very busy people who have taken the first hour of every day for years for Bible study. Some have even given two hours a day.

The late Earl Cairns, Lord Chancellor of England, was one of the busiest men of his day. Lady Cairns told me that no matter how late at night he reached home, he always woke up at the same early hour for prayer and Bible study. She said, "We would sometimes get home from Parliament at two o'clock in the morning, but Lord Cairns would always arise at the same early hour to pray and study the Bible." Lord Cairns is reported as saying, "If I have had any success in life, I attribute it to the habit of giving the first two hours of each day to Bible study and prayer."

It is important that one choose the right time for this study. Whenever possible, the best time for study is immediately after waking up in the morning. Of course, it is good to spend a little time just before we go to bed reading the Bible so that God's voice will be the last voice we hear. The bulk of our Bible study should be done when our minds are clearest and strongest. Whatever time is set apart for Bible study should be kept sacredly for that purpose.

We should study the Bible systematically. A lot of time is frittered away in random study of the Bible. The same amount of time put into systematic study would yield far greater results. Have a definite place where you study and have a definite plan of study. A good way for a young Christian to begin the study of the Bible is to read the gospel of John. When you have read it through once, read it again until you have gone over the gospel five times. Then read the gospel of Luke five times in the same way. Then read the Acts of the Apostles five times. Then read the following epistles five times each: 1 Thessalonians, 1 John, Romans, and Ephesians.

By this time you will be ready to take up a more thorough method of Bible study. A profitable method is to begin at Genesis and read the Bible through chapter by chapter. Read each chapter through several times and then answer the following questions on each chapter:

1. What is the main subject of the chapter? State the principal contents of the chapter in a single phrase or sentence.
2. What is the truth most clearly taught and most emphasized in the chapter?
3. Who are the principal people mentioned?
4. What does the chapter teach about Jesus Christ?

Go through the entire Bible in this way.

Another and more thorough method of Bible study will yield excellent results when applied to some of the more important chapters of the Bible. It is as follows:

1. Read the chapter for today's study five times, reading it aloud at least once. Each new reading will bring out a new point.

2. Divide the chapter into its natural divisions, and find headings that describe the contents of each division.
3. Write down the most important facts of the chapter in their proper order.
4. Make a note of the people mentioned in the chapter and any light thrown on their character.
5. Note the principal lessons of the chapter. It is helpful to classify these. For instance, lessons about God, lessons about Christ, lessons about the Holy Spirit, etc.
6. Find the central truth of the chapter.
7. Find the key verse of the chapter if there is one. Mark it and memorize it.
8. Write down any new truth you have learned from the chapter.
9. Write down any truth you already know that has come to you with new power.
10. Write down what definite thing you have resolved to do as a result of studying this chapter.

A beneficial order of study for you might be all of the chapters in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts; the first eight chapters of Romans; 1 Corinthians 13; the first six chapters of 2 Corinthians; then all the chapters in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 John. Sometimes you can refresh your study by alternating methods.

Another profitable method of Bible study is the topical method. This was D. L. Moody's favorite method. Take such topics as: the Holy Spirit, prayer, the blood of Christ, sin, judgment, grace, justification, the new birth, sanctification, faith, repentance, the character of Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the ascension of Christ, the second coming of Christ, assurance, love of God, love (to God, to Christ, to Christians, to all men), heaven, hell. Get a Bible concordance and study each of these topics.

We should study the Bible comprehensively--the whole Bible. Many Bible readers make the mistake of confining all their reading to certain portions of the Bible that they enjoy. This way they get no knowledge of the Bible as a whole. They miss altogether many of the most important phases of Bible truth. Go through the Bible again and again--a certain portion each day from the Old Testament and a portion from the New Testament.

It is also beneficial to read a whole book of the Bible through at a single sitting. This lets you see the whole picture. Of course, a few books of the Bible would take one or two hours. But most books can be read in a few minutes. The shorter books of the Bible should be read through again and again at a single sitting.

Study the Bible attentively. Do not hurry. One of the worst faults in Bible study is haste. We only benefit from Bible study by learning its truth. It has no magic power. It is better to read one verse attentively than to read a dozen chapters thoughtlessly. Sometimes you will read a verse that grabs you. Don't hurry on. Stop and think about that verse.

As you read, mark in your Bible what impresses you most. One does not need an elaborate marking system, simply highlight what impresses you. Think about what you mark. God affirms that the man who meditates on God's law day and night is blessed (Psalm 1).

Memorize the passages that impress you most. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). When you memorize a passage of Scripture, memorize its location as well as the words. Study your Bible comparatively. In other words, compare Scripture with Scripture. The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. Wherever you find a difficult passage in the Bible, there is always another passage that explains its meaning. The best book to use in this comparison is *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*. This book gives a large number of references on every verse in the Bible. You may want to take a particular book of the Bible and go through that book verse by verse. Look up and study every reference given in *The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge* dealing with that book. This is a very fruitful method of Bible study.

Study your Bible and believe it. The apostle Paul, in writing to the Christians in Thessalonica, said, "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe" (1 Thess. 2:13). Happy is the one who receives the Word of God as these believers in Thessalonica received it, as the Word of God. In such a person it is especially effective. The Bible is the Word of God, and we get the most out of any book by acknowledging it for what it really is.

It requires a prompt and unquestioning acceptance of, and submission to, its teachings. These teachings may appear unreasonable or impossible. Nevertheless, we should accept them. If this book is the Word of God, it is foolish to submit its teachings to the criticism of our finite reasoning.

Correct Bible study includes absolute reliance on all its promises in all their length, breadth, depth, and height. The one who studies the Bible as the Word of God will say of any promise, no matter how vast and beyond belief it appears, "God who cannot lie has promised this, so I will claim it for myself." Mark the promise you claim. Each day look for some new promise from your infinite Father.

You must also study God's Word in obedience. Nothing goes further to help one understand the Bible than resolving to obey it. Jesus said, "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine" (John 7:17). Many passages that look obscure to you now would become as clear as day if you were willing to obey everything the Bible teaches.

It is remarkable how soon one loses his thirst for the Bible and how soon the mind becomes obscured to its teachings when we disobey the Bible at any point. Nothing clears the mind like obedience; nothing darkens the mind like disobedience. To obey a truth you see prepares you to see other truths. To disobey a truth you see darkens your mind to all truths.

Cultivate prompt, exact, unquestioning, joyous obedience to every command that clearly applies to you. Be on the lookout for new orders from your King. Blessing lies in the direction of obedience to them.

Personal Companionship with God

Studying the Bible as the Word of God involves studying it as His own voice speaking directly to you. When you open the Bible to study, realize that you have come into the very presence of God, and that He is going to speak to you. Nothing gives more freshness and gladness to Bible study than the realization that, as you read, God is actually talking to you.

Bible study then becomes personal companionship with God Himself. What a wonderful privilege Mary had one day, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His voice. If we will study the Bible as the Word of God and as if we were in God's presence, then we will enjoy the privilege of sitting at the feet of Jesus and having Him talk to us every day.

This approach makes what would otherwise be a mere mechanical performance of a duty become a wonderfully joyous privilege. One can say as he opens the Bible, "Now, God my Father is going to speak to me." Reading the Bible on our knees helps us to realize we are in God's presence. The Bible became in some measure a new book to me when I took to reading it on my knees.

Study the Bible prayerfully. God, the author of the Bible, is willing to act as interpreter of it. He does so when you ask Him. The one who prays the psalmist's prayer with sincerity and faith, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Ps. 119:18), will have his eyes opened to new beauties and wonders in the Word.

Be very definite about this. Each time you open the Bible for study, even though it is only for a few minutes, ask God to give you an open and discerning eye. Expect Him to do it.

The Holy Spirit as Teacher

How often we think as we puzzle over hard passages, "Oh, if I only had some great Bible teacher here to explain this to me!" God is always present. He understands the Bible better than any human teacher. Take your difficulty to Him and ask Him to explain it. Jesus said, "When he the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). It is the privilege of the humblest believer in Christ to have the Holy Spirit for his guide in his study of the Word. I have known many very humble people, people with

almost no education, who got more out of their Bible study than many great theological teachers. This happened because they learned it was their privilege to have the Holy Spirit for their Bible study teacher. Commentaries on the Bible can be valuable. But one will learn more from the Bible by having the Holy Spirit for his teacher than from all the commentaries ever published.

Use spare time for Bible study. Time is lost in almost every man's life while waiting for meals, riding planes, going from place to place, and so forth. Carry a pocket Bible with you and use these golden moments to listen to the voice of God.

Store Scripture in your mind and heart. It will keep you from sin (Ps. 119:11) and false doctrine (Acts 20: 29-30, 32; and 2 Tim. 3:13-15). It will give you victory over the evil one (1 John 2:14), and it will give you power in prayer. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). The Word will make you wiser than the aged and your enemies. "Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts. The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple" (Ps. 119:98, 100, 130). It will make you "thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:17).