

A Year of Spiritual Disciplines at Eagle UMC
April 2008

Study

What is Study:

Jesus calls us to be disciples and a disciple by definition is a student. The discipline of study renews our minds by bringing us into contact with those things that are important to God. Study helps release us from the bondage of fear and the anxieties that beset the spirit. It replaces them with the knowledge of God's grace, enabling the forgiveness of Christ to reach the depths of our hearts, minds and souls. The spiritual discipline of study involves attentiveness, careful observation, thought, and reflection.

While the Discipline of Study shares some common traits with the Discipline of Meditation, the key difference between the two is that meditation is devotional and study is analytical. As Eugene Peterson states "In the study of Scripture a high priority is placed upon interpretation: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture a high priority is placed upon application: what it means for me. All too often people rush to the application stage and bypass the interpretation stage: They want to know what it means for them before they know what it means!"

Think of it this way: Devotional reading is great, but it only gives us snapshots of that the book upon which we claim to base our faith. It's like looking at a photo album versus reading a book that includes the same pictures—which one gives you more information; the photo album or the book?

How to Begin Studying:

As with meditation and prayer, it is important to find a comfortable place to study with a minimal amount of distractions.

What to study

The main focus of our study should be scripture – the Bible. The Bible is called "God's Word" for a reason and we should spend the majority of our time directly studying those words.

Other Helpful Resources

While scripture should be our primary study material, there is a wealth of great writing that can add insights to our study of scripture. A study Bible in a modern translation will provide notes and references to aid your understanding (some examples are the Qwest Study Bible, The Learning Bible and the New Oxford Annotated Bible. Try to avoid themed bibles such as The Men's Daily Devotional Bible and the like.). A good Bible dictionary will provide a quick reference for names, places and relevant words. A

commentary is a bit more in-depth and will offer comments verse by verse on a book of the Bible.

Many people find “The Daily Study Bible Series” commentaries by William Barclay to be especially helpful. Matthew Henry’s commentary on the entire Bible is good, and now public domain, freely available on the internet. Other excellent authors include: St. Augustine, C.S. Lewis, J. Ellsworth Kalas, and Eugene Peterson.

Questions to keep in mind

The most obvious question to ask when reading a passage is, “What is it saying?” The answer to this question may be self-evident, or it may require learning more about the culture, language, geography and historical situation in which a story takes place. Also important is to ask, “How does this passage relate to the rest of the Bible, the rest of the book, or the rest of the chapter in which it is located?”

Finally, it has been said that any passage can be studied productively by asking three questions:

1. What does this passage tell us about God?
2. What does this passage tell us about human beings?
3. What does this passage tell us about the relationship between God and human beings?

Hopefully these questions provide a helpful starting place for the student.

How to study

- Read a whole book of the Bible in one sitting, then read a few chapters of the same book every day for a week.
- Use a notebook to record your findings (writing something down often aids the memory process, plus it will be beneficial to compare notes. What was your impression of a particular verse the first time you studied it versus the next time?).
- Use a Study Bible, Bible Handbook, Bible Dictionary or a Commentary to discover background information (history, geography, cultural practices) relevant to the passage you are studying.
- Look up any quotations or allusions to other parts of the Bible that are found in the passage you are studying (a study Bible will provide a note suggesting what verses are referenced). For example, as you study Luke 4:1-13, read Genesis 3 and Exodus 19-24. What insights do these passages (that the biblical writers were very familiar with) add to your study?
- Look up any words or concepts that are unfamiliar to you. You could consult a Bible dictionary, or other passages of scripture that use the same terms or ideas.
- Discuss what you read with someone. Ask a friend, or consider joining a small group.

Ideas for more in-depth practice of Studying:

A readily available idea for more in depth practice is to join a bible study group. Another idea is to try the following:

John Wesley read the Bible every day, usually early in the day or late in the evening. A scholar, he could read the scriptures in their original languages and wrote commentaries on the Bible. John Wesley gave Methodists advice on how to read the Bible. Read Wesley's advice and try it.

- Set apart a specified daily time for scripture study.
- Read the Hebrew Bible in conjunction with the New Testament, reading both with “a single eye, to know the whole will of God, and a fixed resolution to do it”
- Have a constant eye to the analogy of faith; the connection and harmony there is between those grand, fundamental doctrines, Original Sin, Justification by Faith, the New Birth, Inward and Outward Holiness.
- Let your reading be surrounded by earnest prayer, “seeing ‘Scripture can only be understood through the same Spirit whereby it was given.’” Our reading should likewise be closed with prayer, that what we read may be written on our hearts.
- It might also be of use, if while we read, we were frequently to pause, and examine ourselves by what we read, both with regard to our hearts, and lives. This would furnish us with matter of praise, where we found God had enabled us to conform to his blessed will, and matter of humiliation and prayer, where we were conscious of having fallen short.

And whatever light you then receive, should be used to the uttermost, and that immediately. Let there be no delay. Whatever you resolve, begin to execute the first moment you can. So shall you find this word to be indeed the power of God unto present and eternal salvation.

John Wesley
Preface to Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament
EDINBURGH, April 25, 1765.
&
John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity
Dr. Thomas C. Oden
Pub. 1994

Relevant Quotes:

- “When we open the Bible we are not interested in knowing more but in becoming more.” - Eugene H. Peterson
- “Based on the teaching and precedent of Scripture, it doesn’t seem that God ever intended our relationship with him to consist of abstract information. It rather seems that in keeping with the way he designed our minds, he always intended to interact with us in concrete and dynamic ways.” - Gregory Boyd
- “Ours is a pedestrian way, literally pedestrian: we put one foot in front of the other as we follow Jesus. And in order to know why he is, where he is going, and how to walk in his steps, we reach for a book, the book, and read it.” - Eugene H. Peterson

Biblical Basis:

- “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” Deu 6:6-9
- “For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Ezr 7:10
- “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.” Psa 119:11
- “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Psa 119:105
- “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.” John 5:39-40
- “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-his good, pleasing and perfect will.” Rom 12:1-2
- “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.” Phi 4:8
- “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”- John 8:32
- 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your *mind.*' Matthew 22:37 (*my emphasis*)
- “Study to show yourself approved before God, a disciple who isn’t ashamed; one who rightly divides the word of truth.” 2 Tim 2:15
- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom.” Col 3:16