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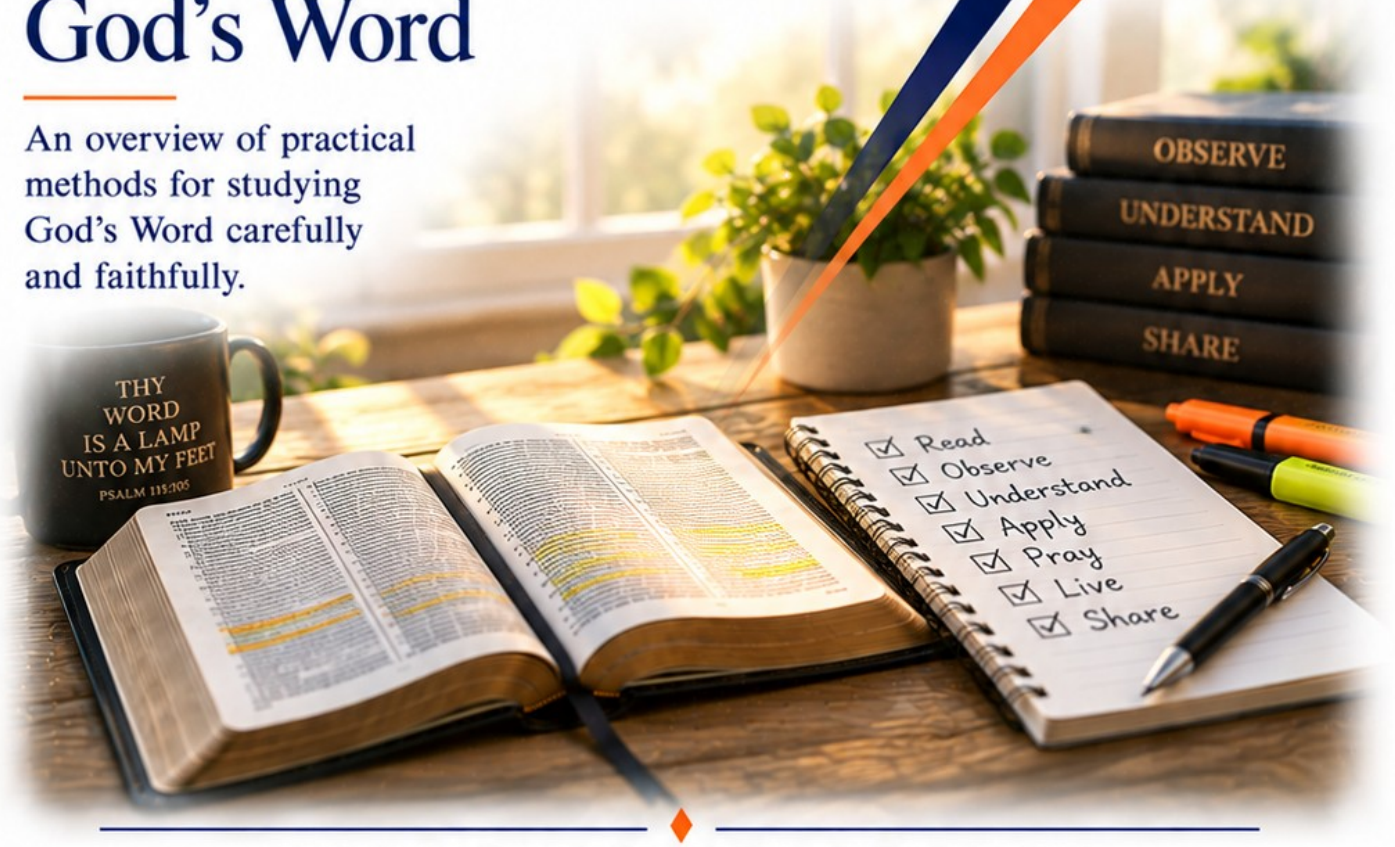
STUDY GUIDE 3

Study for Approval

STUDY GUIDE 3 OF 3:

How to Study God's Word

An overview of practical methods for studying God's Word carefully and faithfully.



EQUIPPING AND EMPOWERING FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

> *Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.*

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE: LEARNING HOW TO STUDY

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The first two Study Guides in this module established why the Word of God must be studied and how we should approach it. We now come to the practical question: How should we actually study God's Word?

Bible study requires more than simply reading a verse and accepting the first meaning that comes to mind. The serious student must learn to search carefully, ask honest questions, examine important words, understand the context, identify the timeframe, recognise who is speaking and to whom, and compare Scripture with Scripture.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

The word *"workman"* reminds us that study involves effort. A workman needs diligence and must learn how to use the right tools if the work is to be done properly.

Learning Practical Study Habits

This Study Guide will concentrate upon the practical habits that help us handle God's Word carefully. We will consider the importance of genuine interest, sincere enquiry, disciplined searching, asking the right questions, examining words, following context and harmony, recognising timeframe and audience, and using helpful study aids wisely.

These principles are not complicated methods intended only for experienced Bible teachers. They are practical habits that every believer can learn and develop through continued study.

The purpose is to help us slow down, observe carefully and avoid reaching conclusions before we have properly examined what Scripture says.

The Holy Spirit Remains Our Teacher

Study methods do not replace the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit remains our Teacher, and every study method must be used in dependence upon Him.

We can learn how to examine words, identify context and compare verses, but spiritual understanding does not come from technique alone. We must continue to approach Scripture prayerfully, humbly and with a willingness to receive whatever God reveals.

Diligent study and dependence upon the Holy Spirit therefore belong together. We do the work of searching the Scriptures while depending upon God to enlighten our understanding.

The Bible Remains the Authority

Study tools also do not become our authority. Dictionaries, concordances, commentaries and other study aids may help us investigate Scripture, but the Bible itself remains the final authority.

Every conclusion must be tested by the Word of God and must agree with the whole testimony of Scripture. A study aid may help us understand a word or provide useful information, but it cannot determine truth independently of God's Word.

The faithful student therefore uses study tools carefully while keeping Scripture in its proper place as the final authority.

Searching for God's Answer

The purpose of this final Study Guide is simple: to help you become a careful, prayerful and disciplined student of Scripture who knows how to search for God's answer rather than simply confirm a personal opinion.

As we learn these practical methods, our goal is not simply to gather more information. We want to understand the truth accurately, live by what God reveals and become workmen who can handle His Word faithfully.

The question before us is therefore practical and important: How do we search the Scriptures carefully so that we can understand what God has actually revealed?

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should a student of the Bible seek God's answer rather than a preferred answer?

Personal Reflection

When you open the Bible with a question, are you genuinely willing for God's answer to change your opinion? What makes that difficult?

Action Step

Choose one Bible question where you may already prefer an answer. How will you examine it openly, and what will you change if God's Word proves your first opinion wrong?

INTRODUCTION: FROM READING TO STUDYING

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Reading the Bible is important, but reading and studying are not exactly the same thing. Reading allows us to become familiar with the words of Scripture, while study requires us to slow down, examine what we are reading and search carefully for the meaning God has placed within His Word.

The purpose of study is not simply to gather Biblical information. We study so that we may understand God's truth accurately, know Jesus Christ more fully and learn how His Word should shape our lives.

Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

Jesus did not simply say *"Read the Scriptures."* He said *"Search the scriptures."* Searching involves attention, effort and a willingness to examine the Word carefully rather than being satisfied with a quick or careless reading.

Study Requires a Method

Effective study involves learning how to ask the right questions and gather the information Scripture provides. We may need to examine the surrounding verses, identify who is speaking,

determine who is being addressed, establish when the event occurred, examine important words and compare related Scriptures.

These principles help prevent us from taking a verse out of its setting or giving it a meaning that the Bible itself does not support. Good study does not force Scripture to fit our ideas. It allows Scripture to form our understanding.

Learning a method also helps us know what to do when a verse is difficult. Rather than guessing at its meaning or immediately accepting someone else's explanation, we learn how to search carefully for the information that will help us understand it.

Study Requires the Right Attitude

The method is important, but the attitude of the student is equally important. We must approach the Bible with genuine interest, honest enquiry and a willingness to accept God's answer even when it corrects something we previously believed.

The Holy Spirit remains our Teacher throughout this process. The purpose of a study method is not to replace spiritual discernment, but to help us search the Word carefully while depending upon the Spirit of God for understanding.

We therefore bring together the principles established in the previous Study Guides. We study diligently, approach the Word prayerfully and remain willing to bring our understanding into agreement with whatever God reveals.

From Reading to Studying

As we move through this Study Guide, we will learn practical habits that can be used whenever we open the Bible. We will learn to slow down, observe carefully, ask questions, examine important details and compare what we are reading with the wider testimony of Scripture.

The goal is not to make Bible study complicated. The goal is to help us become careful workmen who know how to search, examine, compare, understand and apply the Word of truth.

Reading brings the words of Scripture before us. Study teaches us to search those words carefully so that we may understand the truth God has revealed.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What changes when you move from reading the Bible to studying it carefully?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes stop after reading a familiar verse without considering what it actually means? Why?

Action Step

Choose a familiar verse and study its surrounding verses. What assumption or habit will you reconsider because of what you discover?

WE MUST HAVE AN INTEREST

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Interest Gives Study Its Energy

Effective Bible study begins with a genuine interest in God's Word. If we have little desire to know what God has revealed, study can quickly become an obligation rather than a search for truth.

Interest affects the effort we are willing to give. When something is important to us, we make time for it, pay attention to it and continue searching until we understand it more clearly.

Without genuine interest, studying God's Word can feel difficult and burdensome. A sincere desire to know God and His truth gives us motivation to study carefully and consistently.

Our Desire Should Be to Know Christ

The purpose of study is not simply to become knowledgeable about the Bible. Our desire should be to know Jesus Christ more fully through the truth He has revealed. Paul wrote in **Philippians 3:10**:

> *"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"*

Paul's desire was *"That I may know him."*

This gives our study the right direction. We search the Scriptures because they lead us into a clearer knowledge of Jesus Christ and help us understand how we should live in Him.

Spiritual Hunger Produces Spiritual Pursuit

Jesus described the strong desire that should be within those who seek what is right before God. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:6**:

> *"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."*

Hunger and thirst describe strong desire. A person who hungers for righteousness wants to know the right way and walk in it.

That hunger should create an interest in the Word of God, because Scripture reveals the truth we need to live faithfully.

What We Value Receives Our Attention

Our study habits often reveal what we value. We usually make time for things we believe are important, while things we consider less important are easily postponed.

Interest and discipline therefore belong together. We may not always feel equally enthusiastic, but when we recognise the value of God's Word, we choose to give it regular attention.

The goal is not excitement for its own sake. It is a settled conviction that knowing God's Word is worth our time, effort and attention.

A serious student begins with a genuine desire to know Jesus Christ, understand His truth and live according to what He has revealed. That interest gives us the willingness to open the Scriptures, study them carefully and continue searching for understanding.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does a desire to know Christ give Bible study a good purpose?

Personal Reflection

Does the time you give to learning God's Word reflect a desire to know Jesus Christ, or mainly to collect information? Explain.

Action Step

Make time this week to study a verse about Jesus Christ. How will what you learn affect your trust in Him and the way you live?

WE MUST MAKE A GENUINE ENQUIRY

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Study Begins With an Honest Question

Effective Bible study begins with a genuine desire to know what God says. We should not approach Scripture simply looking for verses that support a conclusion we have already reached. The purpose of enquiry is to seek truth.

David described the Word of God as the light that directs our path in **Psalm 119:105**:

> *"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."*

God's Word gives light because it shows us the way we should go. A genuine enquiry therefore begins with a willingness to let Scripture provide the answer.

Do Not Search Only for Confirmation

There is an important difference between asking *"What does God's Word teach?"* and asking *"How can I prove what I already believe?"*

If we approach Scripture with our answer already fixed, it becomes easy to select only the verses that appear to support our position while overlooking verses that may challenge it.

Genuine enquiry requires an open and teachable heart. We must be willing for God's Word to confirm us, correct us or completely change our understanding.

The purpose of study is not to make Scripture agree with us. Our purpose is to bring our understanding into agreement with Scripture.

Ahab Wanted the Answer He Preferred

The account of Ahab provides a warning about seeking confirmation rather than truth. Ahab wanted to go into battle and surrounded himself with prophets who told him what he wanted to hear.

Jehoshaphat, however, was not satisfied simply because many voices agreed. He wanted to know whether there was a prophet of the LORD through whom they could enquire. His question is recorded in **1 Kings 22:7**:

> *"And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD besides, that we might enquire of him?"*

Ahab's response reveals his attitude towards the prophet who spoke the truth. Ahab said in **1 Kings 22:8**:

> *"There is yet one man, Micaiah the son of Imlah, by whom we may enquire of the LORD: but I hate him; for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."*

The problem was not that Ahab had no opportunity to hear God's answer. He did not want an answer that disagreed with what he had already decided to do.

This same danger can affect Bible study. If our purpose is simply to defend our existing position, we are no longer making a genuine enquiry.

Seek God's Answer First

Jesus taught that God and His righteousness must have first place. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:33**:

> *"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."*

Seeking God first means placing His truth above our preferences. When we study, our question should not be what answer is most comfortable or familiar, but what answer agrees with God's Word.

A genuine enquiry therefore requires:

- An honest question;
- A willingness to search carefully;
- An openness to correction;
- A determination to accept God's answer.

The serious Bible student does not use Scripture to justify a predetermined conclusion. We enquire because we genuinely want to know what God has revealed, and we remain willing to follow the truth wherever His Word leads us.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a genuine enquiry leave room for an answer you did not expect?

Personal Reflection

Have you selected verses that support your opinion while overlooking others that might challenge it? What does that reveal?

Action Step

Choose one belief you have defended without careful study. How will you examine all the relevant verses and respond if your understanding needs correcting?

WE MUST DILIGENTLY SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

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Searching Requires Effort

A genuine enquiry must be followed by diligent searching. If we really want God's answer, we must be willing to spend time examining the Scriptures rather than settling for the first verse or explanation we find. Jesus said in **John 5:39**:

> *"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."*

The word *"search"* shows that understanding requires effort. We must look carefully, compare what we find and continue searching until the Scriptures themselves provide a clear answer.

Diligent study therefore requires patience. We should not rush to a conclusion simply because one explanation appears to answer our question.

The Bible Helps Interpret the Bible

One of the most important principles of study is that Scripture should be compared with Scripture. A verse that is difficult in one place may become much clearer when we find another verse dealing with the same subject.

These related verses can be described as *"mate Scriptures."* A mate Scripture does not replace the verse we are studying. It helps us see how that verse fits into the wider truth of God's Word.

This is especially important because a single verse can be misunderstood when separated from the rest of Scripture. The serious student therefore searches for the fuller Biblical picture rather than building a conclusion upon one isolated statement.

Scripture helps us understand Scripture.

Search the Whole Picture

Sometimes several verses must be considered together before an event or teaching becomes clear. For example, the final instructions of Jesus to His disciples are recorded across Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24 and Acts 1.

Reading only one account gives us the details recorded in that verse. Reading the related accounts together allows those details to be considered as part of the fuller picture.

This principle applies throughout the Bible. Truth in one verse must harmonise with truth elsewhere in Scripture.

The diligent student therefore learns to ask: What else does the Bible say about this subject? That question can lead us to Scriptures that confirm, explain or add important details to the verse we are studying.

Allow God to Guide the Search

Diligent study is not simply an intellectual exercise. We search carefully while remaining dependent upon the Spirit of God to guide our understanding. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 48:17**:

> *"Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go."*

God teaches us to profit and leads us in the right way. Our responsibility is to search faithfully, remain teachable and allow His Word to correct our thoughts when necessary.

Paul also wrote in **2 Corinthians 10:5**:

> *"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;"*

Diligent study therefore requires more than collecting information. We must examine our own conclusions and bring every thought into obedience to the truth of Jesus Christ.

Continue Until Scripture Establishes the Truth

A serious student does not stop searching simply because a convenient answer has been found. We continue examining the Scriptures until the verses relating to the subject can be brought together in harmony.

This does not mean that we must understand every detail before reaching any conclusion. There may still be questions requiring further study. However, our conclusions should be established from the wider testimony of Scripture rather than from an isolated verse or personal assumption.

The faithful student does not stop at a quick reading or convenient answer. We search the Scriptures diligently, compare related verses and allow God's Word to establish the truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should you search related verses before reaching a conclusion?

Personal Reflection

When you cannot find a quick answer, are you tempted to accept the most convenient explanation? Why?

Action Step

Choose a subject that has confused you. How will you search related verses patiently, and what will you change about the way you reach conclusions?

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

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Questions Help Us Look More Carefully

Good Bible study requires us to ask questions. Questions slow us down and help us notice details that may be missed when we simply read a verse quickly.

The purpose is not to question whether God's Word is true. We ask questions because we want to understand accurately what God has said and why He has said it.

Jesus encouraged His disciples to ask and seek. Jesus said in **Luke 11:9-10**:

> *"And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."*

A serious student therefore learns to ask clear and specific questions rather than being satisfied with a general impression of the verse.

Ask Who, Why, Where, When, What and How

Six simple questions provide an excellent starting point:

- Who? Who is speaking? Who is involved? Who is being addressed?;
- Why? Why was this said or done? What problem or purpose is being addressed?;
- Where? Where is the event taking place? Does the location help explain what is happening?;
- When? When did this occur? What covenant, period or circumstance forms the setting?;
- What? What is actually being said? What is the main subject or truth?;
- How? How does the verse explain the event, command, promise or fulfilment?

These questions often lead to additional questions. That is part of careful study because one discovery frequently helps us recognise what must be examined next.

Do Not Begin With the Answer

Questions are most useful when we ask them before reaching a conclusion. If we have already decided what a verse means, we may unconsciously shape our questions so that they produce the answer we want.

Instead, we should gather the facts first. The evidence of Scripture should lead us to the conclusion rather than our conclusion deciding which evidence we will accept.

For example, before interpreting a statement of Jesus, we should ask who He was speaking to, what had happened immediately before He spoke, what period they were living in and what important words He used. These simple questions can prevent us from applying words to ourselves that were originally addressing a particular situation or audience.

Specific Questions Produce Focused Study

A vague question such as *"What does the Bible teach?"* may be too broad to guide a useful study. A more specific question gives us something definite to investigate.

We might ask:

- Who was Jesus speaking to in this verse?;
- What does this particular word mean?;
- When was this promise to be fulfilled?;

- Why did Paul give this instruction?;
- What other Scriptures address the same subject?

The answers can then be gathered from Scripture and tested against the whole Word of God.

Asking the right questions helps turn Bible reading into careful investigation. We ask, search, compare and allow the Scriptures themselves to lead us towards the answer.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can clear questions help you examine a verse without deciding its meaning too soon?

Personal Reflection

When studying a verse, which important question do you often overlook because you think you already understand it?

Action Step

In your next Bible study, write down the questions you usually omit. How will their answers challenge an assumption you have made too quickly?

EXAMINE THE WORDS

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Every Word Matters

Careful Bible study requires us to examine the words of Scripture. It is often better to understand a few verses thoroughly than to read many chapters without understanding what they mean. Solomon wrote in **Proverbs 30:5**:

> *"Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him."*

David wrote in **Psalm 12:6**:

> *"The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times."*

These Scriptures remind us that the individual words of Scripture deserve careful attention. A small word can sometimes affect the meaning of an entire sentence or verse.

Understand the Words You Are Reading

When studying the King James Version, we should remember that some English words are used differently today from the way they were understood when the translation was made. A familiar-looking word may therefore carry a meaning that is no longer common in modern English.

When a word seems unusual or important, we should ask:

- What does this word mean in this verse?;
- How was the word used at the time of the translation?;
- Is the same word used elsewhere in Scripture?;
- Does examining the original Hebrew or Greek provide additional clarity?

A good dictionary, concordance or similar study tool can help us answer these questions. The purpose is to understand the word as it is being used in the verse rather than assuming that its modern meaning is necessarily the same.

Examine the Original Hebrew and Greek When Necessary

The Old Testament was written principally in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek. Sometimes one English word may represent different words in the original language, and those differences can help us understand the verse more accurately.

A concordance such as Strong's Concordance can help identify the Hebrew or Greek word behind an English translation. Lexicons and other reliable language tools may then provide further information about the meaning and use of that word.

These tools should assist our study, not control it. The meaning of a word must still agree with its context and with the harmony of Scripture as a whole.

An original-language definition should therefore never be treated as though it automatically settles the meaning of a verse. We must still ask how the word is being used in that particular sentence and subject.

Do Not Build a Doctrine Upon a Word Alone

Word study is important, but it must not become isolated from the rest of the verse. We should never find an interesting meaning in a dictionary or lexicon and then force that meaning into every place where the English word appears.

The surrounding verses, the subject being discussed and related Scriptures must all be considered. A word receives its proper meaning within the context in which it is used.

The principle is simple: words matter, but words belong within sentences, sentences belong within verses, and verses belong within the whole Word of God.

Examine Without Bias

The purpose of examining words is to discover what Scripture actually says, not to find a definition that supports what we already want to believe.

A faithful student therefore slows down, examines important words carefully and remains willing for the evidence to correct a previous assumption.

Study tools can help us discover information about a word, but our purpose remains the same throughout the process. We are searching for God's answer rather than trying to establish our own.

Every word of God is pure. We should therefore read carefully enough to understand the words God has given and how they contribute to the truth of the verse.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must important words be read in context rather than used alone to build doctrine?

Personal Reflection

Have you ever given the possible meaning of one word more authority than the surrounding verses? Explain.

Action Step

Choose a word you have relied upon to support a belief. How will you read it in context, and what will you do if the context changes your understanding?

FOLLOW CONTEXT AND HARMONY

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Context Gives Us the Full Picture

A verse should never be studied as though it stands alone. Context means understanding the complete setting in which a statement was made, including the verses around it, the subject being discussed, the people involved and the circumstances at the time.

A statement can easily be misunderstood when it is removed from its setting. This is why careful study requires us to ask what happened before the verse, what follows after it and how the verse fits into the message of the chapter or book.

Context therefore helps us see the complete picture or full story rather than forming a conclusion from one statement separated from its setting.

Step Into the Original Setting

When Jesus spoke in the Gospels, He was speaking to real people living at that time. Likewise, the New Testament letters were written to particular congregations and individuals facing particular circumstances.

This does not make the truth irrelevant today. Rather, we understand its application today by first understanding what it meant in its original setting.

We should therefore avoid imposing modern assumptions upon an ancient verse. Instead, we should consider the circumstances in which the words were first spoken or written.

A helpful question is: What would these words have meant to the people who first heard them?

That question can prevent us from applying a verse in a way that the writer never intended.

Harmony Means Scripture Agrees With Scripture

Context tells us how a verse fits within its immediate setting. Harmony asks how that understanding fits with the rest of the Bible.

The Scriptures are not a collection of disconnected teachings. Truth in one part of the Bible must agree with truth elsewhere. Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:9-10**:

> *"Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"*

Understanding is built carefully as the different parts of Scripture are brought together. No verse stands alone. We must allow Scripture to help us understand Scripture.

Every Scripture Has a Mate

Related verses can be described as *"mate Scriptures."* A mate Scripture is another verse that helps clarify, support or complete the truth being studied.

One verse may introduce a subject, another may explain it further, and another may show its fulfilment or application. When these verses are brought together, the fuller picture becomes clearer.

This principle protects us from building a doctrine upon an isolated verse. If our understanding is correct, it must remain consistent with the wider testimony of God's Word.

The serious student therefore continues asking: What other Scriptures speak about this subject?

Context and Harmony Work Together

Context and harmony must be used together. Context asks *"What does this verse mean here?"* Harmony asks *"Does that understanding agree with the rest of God's Word?"*

If our interpretation seems to contradict another clear verse, we should not immediately assume that the Bible is inconsistent. We should return to the context, examine the words more carefully and search for related Scriptures.

Sometimes the problem will be that we have overlooked an important detail. At other times, another verse may provide information that completes the picture. Difficulty should lead us to further study rather than to a forced conclusion.

A faithful student therefore does not build beliefs upon isolated verses. We study each verse in its own setting and then test our understanding against the harmony of the whole Bible.

When context and harmony are followed together, Scripture becomes clearer and our conclusions become more firmly established in the Word of God.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do context and the harmony of the Bible help guard against a wrong interpretation?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes settle on the meaning of a verse without looking at its setting and related Bible verses? Why?

Action Step

Reread a verse you have used to support a belief. How will its context and related verses help you identify any correction needed in your thinking?

EXAMINE THE TIMEFRAME

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Timeframe Affects Meaning

When studying Scripture, we must ask when a statement was made and what period, covenant or situation formed its setting. A verse may contain lasting truth, but it was first spoken or written within a particular timeframe.

If we ignore that timeframe, we can easily apply a statement to the wrong period or audience. We must know which age, covenant and setting a verse belongs to before deciding how it should be applied.

Timeframe therefore forms an important part of context. Knowing when something was said helps us understand what those words meant to the people who first heard them.

Understand the Period Before Making the Application

The Bible records events across different periods of God's dealings with humanity. Before applying a verse directly to ourselves, we should first establish what was true at the time the words were spoken.

This is especially important when studying verses connected with the Old and New Covenants. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:15**:

> *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."*

This verse clearly distinguishes between *"the first testament"* and the *"new testament."*

A command, ordinance or promise must therefore be understood within the covenant setting in which it appears. We must not automatically carry something from one covenant setting into another without examining whether Scripture itself does so.

Truth Does Not Change, but Circumstances Do

Recognising timeframe does not mean that truth changes from one generation to another. God's truth remains consistent, but the circumstances in which particular words were spoken can differ.

We must first understand a verse within the timeframe in which it was given and then determine how its truth should be understood and applied today.

For example, words spoken directly to people living before Calvary must first be understood within that setting. Only then should we ask what spiritual truth they reveal for us in the Gospel Day.

This prevents us from taking a statement from one period and applying it directly to another without first considering what changed and what remained.

Ask Timeframe Questions

When studying a verse, useful questions include:

- When was this spoken or written?;
- What covenant was in effect?;
- What events had already happened?;
- What events were still future to the people hearing the words?;
- Was the statement directed to that generation or intended as an ongoing principle?

These questions help us place the verse within its proper setting. They can prevent us from moving a prophecy, command or promise into a period where Scripture never placed it.

Timeframe Helps Us Rightly Divide the Word

A serious student does not assume that every verse was spoken directly to people living today. We first understand the original timeframe, then consider the lasting truth and proper application.

Timeframe therefore works together with context, audience and harmony. We ask when the words were spoken, who heard them, what covenant was in effect and what circumstances surrounded them.

When these details are understood, we are better prepared to recognise what belongs specifically to the original setting and what truth applies beyond it.

Examining the timeframe helps us place Scripture where God placed it and rightly divide the Word of truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the time in which words were spoken matter for their meaning?

Personal Reflection

Have you applied a Bible verse to yourself without first considering when the words were spoken? What led you to do that?

Action Step

Select a verse whose timeframe you have overlooked. How will you establish its original setting, and what will you change about the way you apply it?

WHO IS SPEAKING, AND TO WHOM?

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Identify the Speaker and the Audience

One of the most important questions in Bible study is: Who is speaking, and to whom are the words being spoken? Scripture records conversations, sermons, prophecies, letters and instructions given to particular people in particular circumstances.

If we ignore the speaker or the audience, we may apply a statement in a way that was never intended. Correct interpretation begins by identifying who spoke the words and who originally heard or received them.

This question should be asked before we assume that a statement applies directly to us. The original audience forms an important part of the context.

The Audience Can Change Our Understanding

Matthew 23 provides a clear example. Jesus gave strong warnings concerning judgement, but we must first identify the people He was addressing. Matthew wrote in **Matthew 23:1**:

> *"Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,"*

Later in the same chapter, Jesus said in **Matthew 23:35-36**:

> *"That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar. Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation."*

Notice the words *"upon you"* and *"this generation."* Jesus was speaking within a particular historical setting to people living at that time. The chapter also contains direct rebukes addressed to the scribes and Pharisees.

Understanding the audience helps us recognise the setting of His warning. We should not automatically move words addressed to that generation into another generation without Scriptural reason.

The Epistles Had Original Recipients

The same principle applies to the letters of the New Testament. Paul wrote to actual congregations and individuals facing real situations, including believers at Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus and other places.

This does not mean that those letters have no truth for us today. It means that we first understand what Paul was saying to those original believers before deciding how that truth applies to us.

For example, if Paul corrects a problem in Corinth, we should ask what was happening in that congregation and why the instruction was necessary. Once the original meaning is understood, we are in a much stronger position to recognise the spiritual truth that applies to us.

Ask the Audience Questions

When studying a verse, ask:

- Who is speaking or writing?;
- Who is being addressed?;
- Are the words directed to an individual, a congregation, Israel, the disciples, religious leaders or another group?;
- What circumstances caused these words to be spoken?;
- Does Scripture show that the instruction continues beyond that original audience?

These questions help prevent us from assuming that every statement in the Bible was spoken directly to us in exactly the same way.

Understand First, Apply Second

The order is important. First determine what the words meant to the original audience. Then determine how the truth applies today.

Knowing the speaker and audience works together with context and timeframe. We ask who spoke, who heard, when the words were spoken and what circumstances surrounded them. When these details are established, the verse becomes clearer and the danger of misapplication is reduced.

A careful student therefore asks not only, *"What does this verse say?"* but also, *"Who said it, and to whom was it said?"*

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why should you identify the speaker and audience before applying a verse to yourself?

Personal Reflection

Do you sometimes assume every instruction in the Bible was spoken directly to you in the same circumstances? Explain.

Action Step

Choose a verse you have applied personally. Who first heard it, and what must you reconsider about its meaning or application today?

PAINT THE SCENE

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Build the Picture in Your Mind

Another helpful study method is to paint the scene. This means slowing down and mentally reconstructing what is happening in the verse rather than reading the words as disconnected statements.

When we picture the people, the setting, the order of events and the movement from one moment to the next, the verse often becomes clearer. We follow the events step by step, like a series of frames in a story.

This helps us recognise details that may be overlooked during a quick reading and prevents us from placing events in an order that Scripture does not support.

Follow the Sequence of Events

Many misunderstandings arise because events are compressed in our minds or placed in the wrong order. A careful student should therefore ask:

- What happened first?;
- What happened next?;
- Where were the people at each stage?;
- Who entered or left the scene?;
- How much time passed between events?;
- Does another Gospel or related verse provide additional details?

These questions help us reconstruct the event from the information Scripture actually provides. Instead of beginning with a picture already formed in our minds, we allow the Biblical details to build the picture for us.

The Sign of Jonah

Jesus gave an example where careful attention to the sequence and timeframe is important. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:38-40**:

> *"Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee. But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."*

Jesus gave a specific period: *"three days and three nights."*

That statement should cause the student to examine the surrounding events carefully rather than relying only upon a timeline already accepted from tradition. Painting the scene means constructing the sequence from Scripture and allowing the Biblical details to determine our understanding.

The same method can be used with many other verses. We follow the events carefully and allow each Scriptural detail to take its proper place.

Use All the Details Scripture Provides

Painting the scene works together with the other study principles we have already considered. We identify:

- The speaker and audience;
- The location;
- The timeframe;
- The important words;
- The surrounding context;
- Related Scriptures describing the same event.

We then bring those details together into one complete picture.

This can be especially helpful when studying the Gospels because different writers may record different parts of the same event. One account may include a detail another writer does not mention, while another may help establish the order in which events occurred.

The different details should be brought together rather than treated as though each account stands alone.

Do Not Add to the Scene

Painting the scene does not mean using imagination to fill gaps in the Biblical record. We must never add details that Scripture does not provide.

Our purpose is to become careful observers of what has been written. We notice who is present, where they are, what is said, what happens next and what other verses add to the account.

The principle is simple: Paint only the scene that Scripture gives.

When we carefully follow the sequence, people, places and timing, we are less likely to confuse events or force our own assumptions into the verse.

A careful student therefore reads slowly enough to see the event unfold, follows the order of the Biblical details and allows the complete scene to help explain the meaning of the verses.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can the details the Bible gives help you understand a scene without adding to it?

Personal Reflection

When picturing a Bible event, have you added details that the Bible does not actually give? How might that affect your understanding?

Action Step

Choose a Bible event and read it again carefully. Which detail have you assumed without evidence, and how will you correct the picture you have formed?

USE GOOD STUDY AIDS WISELY

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A Workman Needs Good Tools

Careful Bible study can be strengthened by using good study aids. A dictionary, concordance, cross-reference system or study Bible can help us understand words, locate related verses and examine the Scriptures more thoroughly.

Paul showed that even an experienced servant of God valued useful study materials. Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:13**:

> *"The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."*

Paul still desired access to books and parchments near the end of his life. This reminds us that serious students continue learning and make use of helpful resources.

Study aids can make our searching more effective, but they must always remain tools that help us examine the Word of God.

Useful Study Aids

There are several practical tools that can assist us when studying Scripture:

- A good English dictionary for understanding unfamiliar words;
- A Bible dictionary for Biblical places, customs and terms;
- A concordance for locating words and related verses;
- Strong's Concordance for examining Hebrew and Greek words;
- A good study Bible with useful cross-references;
- Cross-reference resources that help identify mate Scriptures.

Digital Bible programs and online resources can also make many of these tools easier to access. The important consideration is not whether the resource is printed or digital, but whether it helps us examine Scripture carefully and accurately.

Study Aids Must Remain Aids

Although these resources can be very useful, they must never become our authority.

A commentary contains a person's interpretation. A dictionary explains how words are used. A concordance helps us locate verses. A study Bible may contain notes written by another person. None of these replaces the Bible itself, and none should be accepted as correct simply because it appears in a respected reference work.

Every conclusion must still be tested by:

- The words of Scripture;
- The immediate context;
- Related Scriptures;
- The harmony of the whole Bible.

The Holy Spirit remains our Teacher, and the Word of God remains the final authority.

Cross-References Can Be Especially Helpful

One of the most useful study habits is following cross-references. A verse that seems difficult may become clearer when another Scripture deals with the same subject.

The Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge provides extensive cross-references that can help students locate related verses throughout the Bible. These related verses can help us discover mate Scriptures and see how a particular verse fits within the wider testimony of God's Word.

This supports a principle we have already established: Scripture should help us understand Scripture.

Cross-references do not determine the meaning for us. They direct us to other Scriptures that we can examine and compare for ourselves.

Use Tools to Examine, Not to Replace Study

Good tools can save time and help us investigate more carefully, but they cannot do the studying for us. We must still read the verse, ask questions, examine the words, follow the context and test what we find against the whole Word of God.

We should also be careful not to accept a definition, note or interpretation simply because it agrees with what we already believe. Study aids must be examined with the same honest desire for truth that governs the rest of our study.

A faithful student therefore uses study aids with gratitude and discernment. Use good tools to help you search the Word more carefully, but always allow Scripture itself to remain the final judge of every conclusion.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can a study aid help you without replacing your own study of the Bible?

Personal Reflection

Do you rely on a teacher's explanation before searching the Bible yourself? What makes you do this?

Action Step

Select a verse you normally explain from a study aid. How will you first examine the Bible for yourself, and what will you reconsider if the aid's conclusion does not agree?

HOW OFTEN AND HOW LONG SHOULD I STUDY?

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Study Should Become a Regular Habit

Bible study should not be something we do only when we have a problem or when we are preparing to teach. Regular study keeps us familiar with God's Word and helps our understanding grow over time.

The Bereans provide an important example. Luke wrote in **Acts 17:11**:

> *"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."*

Notice that they *"searched the scriptures daily."* Their study was not occasional. Examining God's Word had become part of their regular spiritual life.

This does not establish a rule that every believer must follow exactly the same daily routine. It does show the value of regular and continuing attention to the Scriptures.

There Is No Point When We Have Learned Enough

Spiritual growth should continue throughout our lives. No matter how long we have studied the Bible, there is always more to understand and more truth to apply.

Paul demonstrated this attitude even near the end of his ministry. Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 4:13**:

> *"The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments."*

Paul had already spent many years preaching and teaching, yet he still valued books and parchments. A mature servant of God does not reach a point where further study is considered unnecessary.

The more we study, the more familiar we become with Scripture, but greater familiarity should not cause us to think that there is nothing more to learn.

How Long Should a Study Session Be?

The Bible does not give a required number of minutes or hours for personal study. The important principle is that we give enough time to study carefully rather than rushing through the Scriptures.

Some studies may take only a short time because the question is simple. Others may require several sessions as we examine words, context, timeframe, audience and related Scriptures.

Quality is more important than simply counting minutes. A shorter period of focused and careful study may be more profitable than a much longer period in which our attention is distracted.

The goal is not to complete a certain amount of time. The goal is to understand the truth God has revealed.

Develop a Realistic Routine

A regular study pattern should fit the responsibilities of our lives while still giving God's Word genuine priority. It is better to establish a realistic habit that continues than to begin an excessive schedule that quickly disappears.

A useful routine may include:

- A regular time for personal Bible reading and study;
- Longer periods when a particular subject requires deeper investigation;
- Keeping notes of questions that need further study;
- Returning regularly to subjects that are not yet fully understood.

The purpose is not to create a religious rule. The goal is to develop the discipline of continually searching God's Word.

Continue Throughout Your Life

Regular study strengthens our ability to recognise truth, remember Scripture and handle the Word more carefully. Like every worthwhile skill, Bible study develops through continued practice.

There will be times when a verse can be understood quickly and other times when we must continue searching for days, weeks or even longer. We should not become discouraged simply because an answer does not come immediately.

The important thing is to continue. Make time for God's Word, remain teachable and allow your understanding to grow as you keep searching the Scriptures.

Study regularly, study carefully and continue studying throughout your life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is a realistic study habit better than waiting for a long free period?

Personal Reflection

What responsibility or distraction most often keeps you from giving God's Word regular attention? What priority does that reveal?

Action Step

Choose a realistic time for Bible study this week. What priority will you adjust to make room, and how will you apply one truth you learn?

PUTTING THE METHOD TOGETHER: A STEP-BY-STEP STUDY

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The principles we have considered are most useful when they are brought together into a practical method. Bible study should not be a collection of disconnected techniques. Each step should help us move carefully from the question we are asking towards a conclusion supported by the whole Word of God.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

A workman approaches the task carefully. In the same way, the Bible student should work through Scripture patiently rather than beginning with a conclusion and then searching for verses to support it.

Step 1: Pray for Understanding

Begin by asking God to guide your study. The Holy Spirit remains our Teacher, so every study should be approached prayerfully.

Our attitude should be: *"Lord, help me understand what Your Word actually says."*

Prayer reminds us that we are not depending upon our own reasoning alone. We search diligently while depending upon the Spirit of God to enlighten our understanding.

Step 2: Identify the Question

Write down the question you are trying to answer. A clear question gives direction to the study and helps us recognise what information we need to find.

Avoid beginning with a statement you are already determined to prove. Instead, ask: What do I genuinely need to understand?

A genuine enquiry seeks God's answer rather than looking for evidence to support an answer already decided.

Step 3: Read the Verse in Context

Do not begin with one isolated verse. Read enough before and after the verse to understand the subject, conversation or event.

Look for:

- What happened before;
- What happens afterwards;
- The main subject;
- Any repeated words or ideas.

Context must come before interpretation. We need to understand where the verse belongs before deciding what it means.

Step 4: Identify the Speaker and Audience

Ask who is speaking or writing and who is being addressed.

This is particularly important in the Gospels, Acts and the Epistles. Words addressed to a particular person, group or generation must first be understood in that setting before we decide how they apply today.

Identifying the speaker and audience helps prevent us from applying a statement in a way that Scripture never intended.

Step 5: Establish the Timeframe

Determine when the verse belongs. Ask:

- What covenant was in effect?
- Had Calvary occurred?
- Had Pentecost occurred?
- Was something being promised, fulfilled or remembered?
- Was the statement directed towards an event still future to the original audience?

Timeframe can greatly affect interpretation. We must first understand when the words were spoken before deciding how they should be applied.

Step 6: Ask Who, Why, Where, When, What and How

Use the six basic questions:

- Who?
- Why?
- Where?
- When?
- What?
- How?

These questions help us slow down and notice details that a quick reading may miss. They will often lead to further questions that need investigation.

The purpose is not simply to ask many questions. We ask questions that help us gather the information Scripture provides.

Step 7: Examine Important Words

Identify words that appear especially important to the meaning. Ask whether:

- The English word has changed in meaning;
- A dictionary would help;
- The Hebrew or Greek should be examined;
- The same word occurs elsewhere in Scripture.

Use concordances and language tools when necessary, but never allow a definition to override the context.

Words matter, but they must always be understood within the sentence, verse and harmony of Scripture.

Step 8: Search for Mate Scriptures

Look for other verses dealing with the same subject. A concordance, cross-reference Bible or Treasury of Scriptural Knowledge can help locate these verses.

One Scripture may introduce a truth while another explains it more fully. Mate Scriptures help us see the fuller Biblical picture.

No verse should be made to stand alone when other Scriptures provide further information about the same subject. Scripture should help us understand Scripture.

Step 9: Check the Harmony

Bring the verses together and ask: Does my interpretation agree with the rest of God's Word?

If one conclusion appears to contradict clear Scriptures elsewhere, return to the earlier steps and examine the verse again.

The problem may be an assumption, a misunderstood word, an overlooked audience or an incorrect timeframe. Truth must harmonise with truth.

Step 10: Paint the Scene

Where the verse records an event, reconstruct it carefully. Follow:

- The order of events;
- The people present;
- The locations;
- The movement from one scene to another;
- The amount of time involved.

Do not add details that Scripture does not give. Allow the Biblical record itself to form the picture.

Painting the scene helps us follow the event as it actually unfolds rather than relying upon a picture formed by assumption or tradition.

Step 11: Use Study Aids Wisely

Consult dictionaries, concordances, cross-references, maps, lexicons or reliable study resources where they genuinely help.

These tools assist the investigation, but they do not become the authority. A commentary gives someone's interpretation, a dictionary provides information about words, and a concordance helps us locate verses.

Every conclusion must still be tested by Scripture. The Word of God remains the final authority.

Step 12: Draw the Conclusion From the Evidence

Only after examining the evidence should we form our conclusion. Ask: What does the whole body of Scripture actually support?

This is the opposite of beginning with a preferred answer and then collecting verses that appear to support it.

A sound conclusion should arise naturally from the words, context, timeframe, audience and harmony of Scripture. The evidence should lead us to the conclusion.

Step 13: Apply What You Have Learned

Bible study is not complete when we understand the answer. We must also ask: What does this truth require of me?

The purpose of study is not simply to know the way. We must know the way, follow the way and then show the way to others.

Truth must move from understanding into life. What God reveals should shape our thinking, choices, conduct and service.

Bring the Whole Method Together

A good study method therefore moves from prayer, to enquiry, to investigation, to understanding and finally to obedience.

We pray for understanding. We ask an honest question. We read the context, identify the speaker and audience, establish the timeframe, ask careful questions, examine important words and search for mate Scriptures. We check the harmony, paint the scene, use study aids wisely and allow the evidence of Scripture to establish our conclusion.

Then we live according to what God has revealed.

Pray carefully. Ask honestly. Search thoroughly. Examine the evidence. Test everything by the whole Word of God. Then live according to the truth you have found.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do prayer, careful questions, context, and related verses work together in study?

Personal Reflection

Which step of careful Bible study do you regularly leave out because it seems inconvenient? How has that affected your conclusions?

Action Step

Study one verse using the complete method this week. What assumption did the missing steps expose, and how will you change your usual approach?

APPLY WHAT YOU STUDY

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Bible study reaches its true purpose when the truth we discover begins to shape the way we live. Knowledge alone is not the goal. Scripture must be received, obeyed and practised.

John described this principle in **Revelation 1:3**:

> *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."*

Notice the progression:

- Read;
- Hear;
- Keep.

The blessing is connected not simply with reading or hearing, but with keeping what God has revealed.

Truth Must Produce Obedience

It is possible to understand a Biblical principle correctly and still fail to live by it. When that happens, the study has remained only at the level of information. James wrote in **James 1:22**:

> *"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."*

The Word of God is intended to affect our choices, conduct, attitudes and relationships. A faithful student therefore asks not only, *"What does this verse mean?"* but also, *"What does this truth require of me?"*

Understanding should lead to obedience. What we discover in our study should become part of the way we live.

Application Must Come From Correct Understanding

Application should come after careful interpretation. If we misunderstand the verse, we may also misapply it.

This is why we first examine the words, context, timeframe, audience and harmony of Scripture before deciding how a truth should affect our lives. We must first understand what God has said before deciding how His truth should be applied.

Once the meaning is clear, we can ask:

- Is there something I need to believe?
- Is there something I need to obey?
- Is there something I need to stop doing?
- Is there something I need to begin doing?
- Is there a truth I need to teach or share with others?

These questions help bring the truth we have studied into everyday life.

Know the Way, Follow the Way, Show the Way

A simple principle brings the purpose of study together:

Know the way. Follow the way. Show the way.

First, we must know the way by understanding the truth. Second, we must follow the way by living according to what God has revealed. Then, having understood and practised the truth, we are better prepared to show the way to others.

This is especially important for anyone who teaches God's Word. We should never be satisfied simply to explain truth that we are unwilling to live ourselves.

Our teaching should flow from truth that has first been received and practised in our own lives.

Let Study Change You

The greatest evidence that Bible study is profitable is not how many notes we have written or how many facts we can remember. The real evidence is whether the truth of God is becoming visible in our lives.

Study should bring us into greater agreement with Jesus Christ. It should correct wrong thinking, strengthen right conduct and help us walk more faithfully in the truth.

We therefore do not finish our study when we have found the answer to our question. We must allow the answer God has given to shape the way we live.

The purpose of Bible study is not simply to know more. It is to understand God's Word accurately, live according to what He reveals and help others walk in the same truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must a sound understanding of the Bible lead to obedience?

Personal Reflection

Is there a truth you understand from the Bible but have not yet allowed to govern your behaviour? What has held you back?

Action Step

Choose one truth you have not acted upon. How will the life of Jesus Christ within you govern a specific response this week, rather than leaving that truth as knowledge?

WORKED EXAMPLE: MATTHEW 12:32: LET THE METHOD LEAD TO THE ANSWER

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We will now bring several of the study principles together in one practical example. The purpose is not simply to explain one verse, but to demonstrate how careful study allows the evidence of Scripture to lead us towards the conclusion rather than beginning with a conclusion and searching for verses to support it.

Jesus said in **Matthew 12:32**:

> *"And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."*

The final words immediately raise an important question: What did Jesus mean by *"this world"* and *"the world to come"*?

A quick reading might cause us to assume that Jesus was speaking about the present physical world and another physical world sometime in the future. A careful student, however, does not begin with that assumption. We gather the facts first.

Step 1: Who Is Speaking?

The first question is simple. Jesus Christ is speaking.

However, knowing the speaker is only the beginning. We must now determine to whom Jesus was speaking and what had caused Him to make this statement.

Step 2: Who Was Jesus Speaking To?

The surrounding verses give us the answer. Matthew wrote in **Matthew 12:24-25**:

> *"But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:"*

Jesus was answering the Pharisees. They had witnessed His works and accused Him of casting out devils through Beelzebub.

This immediately establishes an important fact. **Matthew 12:32** was spoken to people living at the time of Jesus, before Calvary.

We should therefore begin by asking what the words *"this world"* and *"the world to come"* meant from their position in history rather than automatically reading ourselves into the verse.

Step 3: Establish the Timeframe

The Pharisees were living under the Old Covenant. Jesus had not yet died at Calvary, and the New Covenant had not yet come into force through His death.

This timeframe matters because Jesus was speaking from within one covenant period while another was approaching.

The question therefore becomes more precise: Was Jesus contrasting two physical worlds, or was He contrasting the age in which the Pharisees were living with an age that was still to come?

We should now examine the important word.

Step 4: Examine the Word "World"

A concordance or Greek study tool shows that the English word *"world"* can represent different Greek words. Two important examples are:

- KOSMOS: The physical or created world;
- AION: An age or period.

In **Matthew 12:32**, the word translated *"world"* is AION. The wording therefore concerns an age and an age to come, rather than simply one physical world followed by another physical world.

This demonstrates why examining individual words can be so important. If we assume that every occurrence of the English word world means the physical earth, we may reach a conclusion that the original word does not support.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is the meaning of 'world' in **Matthew 12:32** *not settled by that word alone?*

Personal Reflection

Before this example, did you assume that 'world' always means the physical earth? How does that assumption affect your interpretation?

Action Step

Read **Matthew 12:32** *in its setting and examine the meaning of 'world'. What assumption needs correcting before you explain this verse to another person?*

Step 5: Find a Mate Scripture

We should now ask whether another verse demonstrates the difference between KOSMOS and AION. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:26**:

> *"For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

The King James Version uses the English word *"world"* twice in this verse, but two different Greek words are used. The first occurrence is KOSMOS, while the second is AION.

Notice the importance of the second expression: *"now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."*

Jesus did not put away sin at the end of the physical earth. He offered Himself at Calvary. The use of AION therefore points us towards the ending of an age.

This mate Scripture helps confirm that the English word world does not always mean the physical world.

Step 6: What Changed at Calvary?

We can now search for Scriptures that identify the covenant change connected with the death of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 9:15-17**:

> *"And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth."*

These verses establish several important facts:

- There was a first testament;
- There is a new testament;
- The death of Jesus Christ was necessary for the New Testament to come into force.

The Pharisees in Matthew 12 were living before that death. They were therefore living under the first testament while Jesus was speaking about an age to come.

This gives us a Scriptural boundary between the two ages.

Step 7: Check the Harmony

We should not form our conclusion from the Greek word alone. We now test the interpretation against the wider harmony of Scripture.

Matthew 12:32 gives us *"this age"* and *"the age to come."* **Hebrews 9:15-17** gives us the first testament and the new testament. **Hebrews 9:26** places the sacrifice of Jesus at the end of an age.

The verses now begin to fit together. The Pharisees were living under the Old Covenant. Jesus was approaching Calvary, where His death would bring the New Testament into force.

The *"age to come"* from the standpoint of the Pharisees was therefore the New Covenant or Gospel Day.

Step 8: Now Draw the Conclusion

Notice that we did not begin by announcing the answer. We first:

- Identified Jesus as the speaker;
- Identified the Pharisees as the immediate audience;
- Established that they were living before Calvary;
- Identified the covenant timeframe;
- Examined the Greek word translated "world";
- Distinguished AION from KOSMOS;
- Found a mate Scripture in **Hebrews 9:26**;
- Examined **Hebrews 9:15-17** to establish the covenant change;
- Tested the conclusion against the harmony of Scripture.

Only then did we draw the conclusion.

From the evidence gathered, *"this world"* in **Matthew 12:32** refers to the age in which Jesus and the Pharisees were then living, while *"the world to come"* refers to the age that would follow: the New Covenant Gospel Day.

The Method Is the Lesson

The most important lesson from this example is not simply the interpretation of **Matthew 12:32**. It is how we arrived at that interpretation.

If we had simply read the English word *"world"* and assumed that it meant the physical earth, we could have built an interpretation upon an assumption.

Instead, we allowed the questions to lead us deeper: Who? To whom? When? What covenant? What does the word mean? What other Scriptures address the same truth? Does the conclusion harmonise with the whole Word of God?

This is what it means to study carefully.

Do not begin with the answer. Gather the Scriptural facts, examine them honestly, bring them together in harmony and then allow the Word of God to lead you to the conclusion.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do related verses and the change at Calvary help you examine **Matthew 12:32***?*

Personal Reflection

Has studying the context of **Matthew 12:32** *shown you that your first impression of a verse may need correction? Explain.*

Action Step

Compare **Matthew 12:32** *with* **Hebrews 9:26** *and* **Hebrews 9:15-17***. What will you change in the way you test an explanation before accepting it?*

CONCLUSION — BECOME A WORKMAN APPROVED UNTO GOD

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We began this Study Guide with Paul's instruction in **2 Timothy 2:15**:

> *"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."*

That remains the purpose of everything we have considered. God wants us to become careful workmen who know how to search His Word faithfully and handle its truth correctly.

Good Bible study begins with genuine interest and an honest desire to know God's answer. From there, we learn to ask the right questions, examine important words, follow the context, compare Scripture with Scripture, establish the timeframe, identify the speaker and audience, and carefully reconstruct the scene.

Study aids can help us, but they never replace Scripture. Human teachers can assist us, but they never replace the Holy Spirit. The Word of God remains our authority, and the Spirit of Christ remains our Teacher.

The Bereans provide an excellent example.

Luke wrote in **Acts 17:11**:

> *"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."*

They listened, but they also searched. They received teaching, but they tested what they heard against Scripture.

That is the habit we want to develop.

Bible study should therefore become a continuing part of our life. We search not simply to collect information, win arguments or defend what we already believe. We study because we want to know the truth, know Jesus Christ more fully and live faithfully according to His Word.

This brings the Study for Approval module to its natural conclusion. We have considered why we should study, how we should approach the Word of God and now how we should study it carefully.

The responsibility now is to put these principles into practice.

Search honestly. Study diligently. Depend upon the Holy Spirit. Test every conclusion by the whole Word of God. Then live according to the truth He reveals.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What does it mean to become a worker approved before God in your study of His Word?

Personal Reflection

What has this guide revealed about your attitude to Bible study, especially your willingness to receive correction and live what you learn?

Action Step

Identify one habit you need to change as a Bible student. How will you depend upon Christ's life within, practise that change this week and respond to the truth He reveals?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

Why must Bible study begin with a real desire to know God's answer? Explain how careful study differs from reading quickly or searching only for support for your own view.

2. Understanding

How do an honest question, a careful search of related verses, and attention to important words help you reach a sound conclusion? Explain why one word or verse alone may mislead you.

3. Personal Reflection

Which part of your approach to the Bible has this guide challenged most: your questions, patience, assumptions or willingness to be corrected? Explain what needs to change.

4. Response to Truth

Why should you consider context, time, speaker, and audience before applying a verse to yourself? Explain how these checks can prevent a wrong conclusion.

5. Action Step

Choose a verse you have assumed you understood. This week, how will you examine the speaker, audience, timeframe and surrounding verses, and respond if your understanding needs correcting?

6. Early Response

Have you begun the study described in Question 5? If yes, explain what you discovered and what changed in your understanding or attitude. If not, explain what has prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

How will you build a realistic habit of careful Bible study? Explain which previous habit needs correcting and how the truth you learn will affect your life.

8. Doctrinal Clarity

In the study of **Matthew 12:32***, why could the word 'world' not settle the meaning by itself? Explain how the speaker, audience, time, related verses, and the change at Calvary work together in reaching a conclusion.*

9. Living the Truth

Think of a Bible truth you might explain to someone else. What must you first examine in your own attitude or conduct, and how will Christ's life within govern your response?

10. Final Response

Bring together honest enquiry, context, related verses and the need to live what you learn. What has changed in your approach to the Bible, and what will you now put into practice?