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God's Word

Learn It! Live It! Love It!

By David Scott

words

meaning

light

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truth

way

Jesus

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God's Word: Learn It, Live It, Love It!
by David Lee Scott

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"Your word is a doorway that lets in light,
and it helps gullible people understand."

(Psalms 119:130 God's Word)



All **your words** are true.

My tongue will sing of **your word**.

Use the truth to make them holy. **Your words** are truth.

Forever, O Lord, **your word** is firmly fixed in the heavens.

Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in **your word**.

I have hidden **your word** in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

I rejoice in **your word** like one who discovers a great treasure.

I rise before dawn and cry for help; I hope in **your words**.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.

[From Psalm 119:160a NIV84, Psalm 119:172a, John 17:17 GW, Psalm 119:89, Jeremiah 15:16b,
Psalm 119:114, Psalm 119:11 NLT, Psalm 119:162 NLT, Psalm 119:147, Psalm 119:105.]

WHY THIS BOOK?

OUR BIBLE STUDY MUST BE MORE THAN BIBLE STUDY!

WE NEED TO HEAR GOD.

YOU. ME.



NOT JUST "THEM."

ALL OF US.



- **Picture This:** You have anticipated this day for many years, dreamed of this for your entire life, **and at long last you have finally “arrived.” Literally. Earth is gone. Rear-view mirror.** You are in heaven, and you are before the throne of God, and your mind and heart have exploded in amazing joy. Why? Because God is smiling ... at you. Yes, that God ... “Holy, Holy, Holy” God, Consuming Fire and Sovereign Lord. God Most High has expressed his joy for your diligence in accurately handling his word of truth.

- (2 Timothy 2:15–16 NASB95) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.

PREFACE ...

(1) We need to hear God.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we are merely messengers, God's messengers indeed, but still only messengers. Our calling is to deliver to our world what we receive from God. His words. His message. But it seems that we have lost sight of this. It seems that we have forgotten (or have not learned) who we are and whose message we carry.

- (1 Corinthians 15:3a) **For I delivered to you** as of first importance **what I also received.**
- (1 Corinthians 11:23a) **For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.**

We need an approach to Scripture which directs us first of all to hear God, an approach which enables us to receive his words and then maintain the integrity of the message in the delivery. As we study, we must understand that we have nothing to say apart from what God clearly states in his divine Book. Again, we deliver what we receive.

Also, to hear, we need to put away the crud in our lives and receive the word in humility. So we need an approach to Scripture that cuts through our subjectivity and sinfulness and reveals the plain, objective truth of the Bible. Only God's message saves and accomplishes his purposes. We need to hear the voice of God through his written word through his Holy Spirit. We do not hear God in our sinfulness and our pride. We may still study the Bible, but we are **not** hearing God.

- What we see when we think we are looking into the depths of Scripture may sometimes be only the reflection of our own silly faces (C. S. Lewis).

James tells us, "Quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Do we maybe have the order reversed in our Bible studies? Do we approach the word of God with a "hear first" attitude? Hearing God first, that is, not each other. We sometimes make great effort to hear each other but are we diligent in hearing God? Our first question must be, What does God say? What has he clearly written that he wants us to know. Not what my church or denomination says. Not what the evangelical community says. But what does God say?

- (James 1:19–21) Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

(2) We need to listen to God more than we listen to each other.

Too many people speak for God without having first listened to him. The problem is that we are listening to them as if they have heard from God, but they have not. We can see from the prophet Jeremiah that this is not a new problem.

- (Jeremiah 23:16 NLT) This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says to his people: **“Do not listen to these prophets** when they prophesy to you, filling you with futile hopes. They are making up everything they say. **They do not speak for the LORD!”**

So why is God telling his people not to listen to his prophets? Because they are making up everything they say and are not speaking for the LORD. What does the LORD identify as the problem? They speak for the LORD but have neither been in his presence nor have cared enough to listen to him.

- (Jeremiah 23:18 NLT) Have any of these prophets been in the LORD’s presence to hear what he is really saying? **Has even one of them cared enough to listen?**

(3) We need to ditch our opinions for the objective truth of Scripture.

An opinion is merely private interpretation traveling under disguise. Much of what we call Bible study falls short. Our method of approach must bring us into the presence of God to hear him, not each other. In carpentry the rule of thumb is measure twice and cut once, but in our Bible studies I sometimes wonder if we measure at all. What I have observed for years is that our Bible studies are often more opinion sharing and coffee with friends than seeking to hear the voice of God through his written word. We have discussions about the Bible and often have great fun. But very little discovery. Very little unearthing what a passage actually says. Lots of hearing each other. Very little hearing God.

- (2 Peter 1:20) Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation [opinion].

Everybody quotes 2 Peter 1:20, or so it seems. And it also seems that in spite of this that we still cling tenaciously our own interpretations, our

opinions. This should not be so. Any biblically directed approach to the Bible must address the multifaceted “seems right” way of humans. We must speak bluntly to the damaging influence of opinion in our method of approach to God and his truth. By definition an opinion is a judgment made which does not necessarily have any basis in fact or knowledge.

I wrote this book to provide a sound, practical, biblical foundation to approach God through the study of his word. An approach that directs us to reverence and discovery which in turn lead to life and transformation which fully prepare us for every good work. Reverence in our study is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the irreverence of opinion. Reverence for God will quash our opinion.

- (Psalm 111:10) The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

(4) We have a one-time-only opportunity to be wise and not foolish.

One amazing moment that whooshes by like a vapor. One life. One chance. No rehearsal. The stage is set. Actors in place. The curtain is drawn and once closed there will be no encore performance. “The End” is the end, at least for life on this planet. No redo. No mulligan. The curtain call and closing credits come before the throne of God.

Brought from death to life through Jesus Christ we now have one opportunity to serve Jesus Christ and to bring glory to God. One chance to stand against the darkness in the name of God. One chance to express pure love and devotion. One chance to make our mark to the glory of God. One chance to save souls. But we must hear the voice of God. Our theology and then our actions which are built on that theology must come from God. Clear, precise instructions from God. Only what God says is the rock solid foundation that will never be shaken.

- (Ephesians 5:15–17) Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

(5) We don't know the way.

We don't know the way. (Did I just repeat myself? Good.) Because we must understand that **we do not know the way apart from the clear instruction of God in his Holy Word.** In matters of truth, time and

eternity, life and death, salvation and damnation our opinions do not matter because we do not know.

Whatever method we use to approach God through his word must submit to this truth: **We do not know the way.** We must build only on the divine, inspired words of God. Our method must keep our “knowing” (private interpretation, secret knowledge, opinion) from corrupting the divine words.

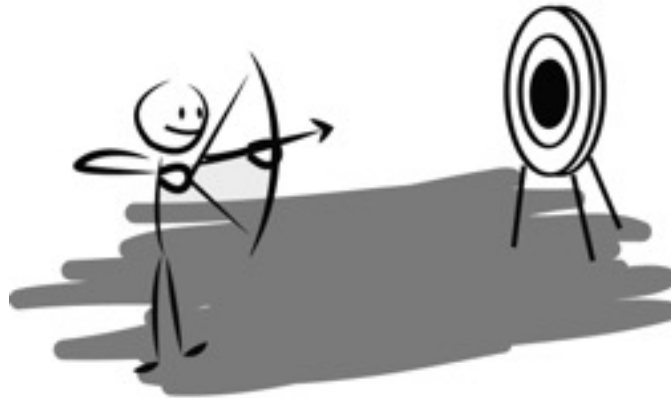
Who do we listen to more? God Most High or the grasshoppers?

- (Isaiah 40:21–23 ESV) Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ***It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers;*** who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness.



PART ONE

ESTABLISHING A BIBLICAL PURPOSE & DIRECTION FOR BIBLE STUDY!



CHAPTER 1

ESTABLISH A BIBLICAL PURPOSE IN OUR APPROACH

▶ **Our Bible Study Must Be More Than Bible Study!**

▶ **Establishing a Biblical Approach!**

It seems that we, the Church, the followers of Jesus Christ, need to rethink our approach to the Bible. We need to shift from a knowledge-based paradigm in which the emphasis is to study the Bible to gain knowledge about God to a path-based paradigm in which we also study the Bible, but we study with the biblically defined and directed purpose of changed lives: we learn the words, we live the words and we love the words.



The biblical pattern is to learn the words so that we can live them. We put on the yoke of Jesus and follow him down the path of faith. But for many it seems that even though we highly value God's word and diligently study God's word, that we are more interested in learning how to find *truth* to make our lives better than we are concerned about bowing before God. There is a difference. The first tries to implement our plan for our life, the second submits to God's plan for our life.

This book began as a "How to study the Bible" book but the issue before us is much more expansive than study methods, highlighters and a determination to discover truth. The greatest issue is the preparation of our hearts and minds to **receive** God's message when we do discover his truth. And then to live that truth.

It is not enough to believe the Bible to be true or to value its character. We must decide: Do we believe God for life? That is our real issue. Do we trust God enough to live how he tells us to live, no matter how contradictory it may seem from our human perspective?

Until we are at that place of readiness, we will not hear the voice of God no matter how diligent we are in our study because we will be neither willing nor able to receive his words. This lack of trust to believe God for life, and the inability to hear him, will produce lives that appear godly but deny the power of God. This person seems to follow God but has in fact rejected God's ways and thoughts about life for the "seems right" way of humans.

- (2 Timothy 3:5a NLT) They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly.

We need something better. Not that we deserve better but that God calls us to better. And our world needs better. We settle for human platitudes and the social comforts of “church” while God offers divine transformation set in eternity. What we typically call Bible study is too “Earth oriented.” In this limited context Bible study has become the goal, not the means, and we miss the rich goodness of God and the purpose of his word.

I hope to present an effective, biblical approach to God and his word which prepares us to stand in joy, strength, confidence and honor. That whether standing before our peers on this earth or before God in heaven in all of his holiness that we will stand without shame in faith and practice.

I also hope to present an approach to the Bible in which any willing heart can succeed. This is not rocket science. No college degree or seminary training required. Only a humble spirit presenting himself or herself before God to be directed in his ways and thoughts.

- (2 Timothy 2:15) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.

► **Practical Considerations!**

- Do I study the Bible? Why do I study the Bible? How do I study the Bible? Where did I learn to study the Bible?

► **What is our purpose in Bible study? Why study?**

- **We need to know God.**
 - (John 17:3) And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.
- **We need to know the life God offers.**
 - (John 3:16) For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.
 - (John 10:10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.
- **We need to know the will of God. We know the will of God by knowing the word of God.**

- (Colossians 3:16) Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
- (Psalm 25:4-5) Make me to know your ways, O LORD; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.
- (Psalm 86:11) Teach me your way, O LORD, that I may walk in your truth; unite my heart to fear your name.
- (Ephesians 5:15-17) Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- (Psalm 143:10) Teach me to do your will, for you are my God! Let your good Spirit lead me on level ground!
- **God tells us to live by his words.**
 - (Deuteronomy 8:3) And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.
- **God tells us to obey/keep his words.**
 - (Deuteronomy 12:28) Be careful to obey all these words that I command you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do what is good and right in the sight of the LORD your God.
 - (John 14:23-24) Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."
 - (1 John 2:3-5) And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is

not in him, but whoever keeps his word, in him truly the love of God is perfected. By this we may know that we are in him.

- **We need to be prepared for service. We need God's instruction and correction to be prepared for service.**
 - (2 Timothy 3:16–17) All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

CHAPTER 2

ESTABLISH A BIBLICAL FOUNDATION/DIRECTION IN OUR APPROACH

► What should be our approach to Bible study?

- **We must approach the Bible to receive the words of God.**
 - (Proverbs 2:1–6) My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you, making your ear attentive to wisdom and inclining your heart to understanding; yes, if you call out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.
- **We must receive the word of God as the word of God, not receive as the word of men.**
 - (1 Thessalonians 2:13) And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.
- **We must be diligent in our efforts to accurately handle the word of truth (the Bible).**
 - (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB95) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.
- **We must know that there is nowhere else to go for eternal truth.**
 - (John 6:68–69) Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.”

► What might undermine our approach to Bible study?

- **We tend to stray from the path.**
 - (Psalm 119:176) I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek your servant, for I do not forget your commandments.

- (Isaiah 53:6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- **We think we know the way but we don't.**
 - (Proverbs 16:25 NLT) There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.
 - (Proverbs 14:12 The Message) There's a way of life that looks harmless enough; look again—it leads straight to hell.

WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?

Finite beings. On the planet for seventy years average. Very limited physically. Estimates are that we use only three to ten percent of our brain.

Fallen beings. Our world is shrouded in darkness. Hearts that are deceitful and desperately wicked.

Formed beings. Our thoughts, thought patterns, behaviors, views of the world around us are formed typically by where we live. Which geographical location, country, state, province, county, city, town, etc. And formed by our family and other personal relationships.

Our opinion is formed from a myopic view of life from a very temporary presence on the planet. But we still say with such authority and confidence, "Well, I think ..." and "In my opinion ..."

- **We don't want to know the truth.**
 - (John 3:19–21 NCV) They are judged by this fact: The Light has come into the world, but they did not want light. They wanted darkness, because they were doing evil things. All who do evil hate the light and will not come to the light, because it will show all the evil things they do. But those who follow the true way come to the light, and it shows that the things they do were done through God.

► **What does the Bible say that might help us to establish our approach to God's word?**

WHERE DO WE BEGIN?

WE BEGIN WITH OUR BIBLES.

WHAT DO OUR BIBLES SAY?



START HERE
→ **X**
"Reverence for God!"

- **The Bible tells us that reverence for God is the place to begin.**
 - (Job 28:28) And he said to man, "Behold, **the fear of the Lord**, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding."
 - (Psalm 111:10) **The fear of the LORD** is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!
 - (Proverbs 1:7) **The fear of the LORD** is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.
 - (Proverbs 8:13) **The fear of the LORD** is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.
 - (Proverbs 9:10) **The fear of the LORD** is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
 - (Proverbs 14:26) **In the fear of the LORD** one has strong confidence, and his children will have a refuge.
 - (Proverbs 14:27) **The fear of the LORD** is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death.
 - (Proverbs 15:33) **The fear of the LORD** is instruction in wisdom, and humility comes before honor.
 - (Proverbs 16:6) By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and **by the fear of the LORD** one turns away from evil.
 - (Proverbs 22:4) The reward for humility and **fear of the LORD** is riches and honor and life.

Review: What is our starting point? Our starting point is the fear of the LORD. Have we begun poorly? Have we stumbled out of the gate? Have we been misdirected in our priorities? Has our lack of reverence kept us from wisdom and from God?

We all have the layers of our lives to deal with: culture, personal life experience, religious experience (often the greatest obstacle), physical and psychological hurdles, individual uniqueness, and our fallen nature. We are fallen people in a fallen world trying to relate to a God whose ways and

thoughts are higher than our ways and thoughts as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:9).

So where do we begin our quest? **One viable option.** We begin with the words of God, and the words of God tell us to begin with the fear of God. ***Beginning with the fear of the LORD is well-established in Scripture.*** God, in his Holy Book, makes it pretty clear where we are to begin our journey: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom."

The heart of the issue is the heart. Now we have seen where we must start, but why? Because the heart of the issue is the heart! We start with "the fear of the LORD" because the fear of the LORD brings us face to face with our most formidable obstacle: A deceitful heart.

- (Jeremiah 17:9–10) The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.

Before the throne of God, bowed in reverence before God, we have hope to overcome the deceit of our own hearts. We cannot miss this. If we do not begin here and let God deal with our hearts, then nothing else matters.

Beginning with the fear of the LORD deals with the heart: The heart of the issue is the heart. We must understand our most formidable obstacle. "We have met the enemy and they is us." We cannot deal with our hearts on our own.

- The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it (Jeremiah 17:9 NIV)?

Allowing the word of God to do its work in our hearts is our only hope.

- For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12 NIV).

Cannot be overstated: The absolute necessity of beginning our journey in the fear of the LORD cannot be overstated. We begin by bowing before God in reverence. The process of wisdom living begins when we place our hearts in God's hands. This is what we do when we submit to the fear of the LORD, the knowledge of the Holy One. We place our lives in the Master's hands for restoration.



We need to trust God to develop in us an appreciation for the restoration process of people, including ourselves.

The Craftsman's vision. Entering into the fear of the LORD begins a process of rebuke and restoration. If you have ever seen a craftsmen (or even better, you have done it yourself) restore a worn-out or broken piece of furniture or an automobile or an antique toy, or have just cleaned something up and made it useful again, then this may help you understand the process of submitting ourselves to the reverence of God. When we can even get a glimpse of God's vision for our lives, it helps us tremendously in our decision to submit to his process.

Allow the process of restoration to speak to us. You can appreciate this if you can appreciate the 1955 Chevrolet completely restored or a totally refinished table c.1874. Restoration speaks to us. The process of a craftsmen making beautiful what was previously junk enamors us. And even better when the craftsman was the only one who saw any value in the "junk" before it was restored.

You are a project. God's project. Look at ourselves as God's projects that he values greatly. First of all, the craftsmen sees value in the broken object or he would not waste his time, as God sees value in each of us or he would not have "wasted" his time in sending Jesus Christ to redeem and rebuild.

- (Ephesians 2:10) For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.



Be convinced of the success of the project. The entire project has already been financed—The shed blood of Jesus Christ is the full payment. God will not waste his investment. Know and learn God's truth concerning the facts of your salvation. God doesn't build junk, and he does not partially restore junk. If his name goes on it, which it does, then the finished product will be absolutely perfect.

- (Romans 8:31-32) What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Back to the fear of the LORD. Where do we start allowing the words of God to have God's intended restorative effect? When we bow before God and surrender ourselves to his process.

Know that bowing before God places us in the exact right place. Smack dab in the Master's workshop; held in his hands. Here our Savior deals with the rust, dust, grime and broken pieces of our lives, the layers that we are often blind to and helpless before. Here and no where else are we able to effectively overcome the restraints of our culture, personal life experience, religious experience and training, economic status, everything. Here in the Master's workshop everything can and will be dealt with. And you, the one created, will be perfectly restored in the image of the Creator.

A new way of thinking: Do I realize my need for restoration?

- (Romans 12:1 NCV) So brothers and sisters, since God has shown us great mercy, I beg you to offer your lives as a living sacrifice to him. Your offering must be only for God and pleasing to him, which is the spiritual way for you to worship.
- (Romans 12:2 NCV) Do not change yourselves to be like the people of this world, but be changed within by a new way of thinking. Then you will be able to decide what God wants for you; you will know what is good and pleasing to him and what is perfect.

Live in God's mercy. Since God has shown us mercy, why don't we do our best to live in his mercy and let him address every area of our lives. Simply offer ourselves to God and step into his restoration process. Don't be so concerned about changing ourselves, i.e. changes we would bring about. Accept God's invitation to a new way of thinking, renewed minds and transformed lives.

- **The Bible tells us that we are to pursue/seek God.**

Are you a truth seeker or a God seeker? You may protest that you are both, that these concepts are one and the same. So here is what I suggest. Search your Bible to see how many times God tells us to seek the truth. (I was surprised to find none, as I believe you will be.) Now search your Bible and see how many times you are told to seek the Lord. Very interesting indeed. So what are we pursuing in our Bible study? What are we after? Are we "after" the LORD?

- (Deuteronomy 4:29) But from there you will **seek the LORD** your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.
- (1 Chronicles 16:10-11) Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who **seek the LORD** rejoice! **Seek the LORD** and his strength; **seek his presence continually!**
- (1 Chronicles 22:19) Now set your mind and heart to **seek the LORD** your God. Arise and build the sanctuary of the LORD God, so that the ark of the covenant of the LORD and the holy vessels of God may be brought into a house built for the name of the LORD.
- (Psalm 105:3) Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of **those who seek the LORD** rejoice!
- (Proverbs 28:5) Evil men do not understand justice, but those who **seek the LORD** understand it completely.
- (Isaiah 51:1) Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you who **seek the LORD**: look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug.
- (Isaiah 55:6) **Seek the LORD** while he may be found; call upon him while he is near.
- (Hosea 10:12) Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to **seek the LORD**, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.
- (Amos 5:6) **Seek the LORD** and live, lest he break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, with none to quench it for Bethel.
- (Zephaniah 2:3) **Seek the LORD**, all you humble of the land, who do his just commands; seek righteousness; seek humility; perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD.
- **The Bible tells us that we are to believe God for life.**

Believing God for life. From the beginning the issue has been the same: Will we believe God for life or will we look to another source, another truth? As we shall see from the “story” that follows, Adam and Eve sought truth apart from God. They did not fully believe God for life, and as a result they brought death to themselves and this world.



- **Paradise.**

We can only imagine this ideal world. Possibly a moment from our most surreal remembrance of a perfect summer evening as a child with God's creation all around us and a "Walt Disney" view of life within us.

What a paradise Paradise must have been! The Garden of Eden I mean. Where it all began. God's perfect start for the human race. God created the heavens and the earth, divided the light from darkness, divided the waters above and below, made a dry place for human activity. Grass and trees followed, and the two great lights. This was good. God saw to it.



Living creatures in the water and living creatures on the earth. Then man, made in God's image. And woman. Male and female he created them. And he gave them sovereignty over his created order. Not stopping there, God planted a garden, the Garden of Eden. There he put the man whom he had formed.

Yes, Paradise was indeed paradise. Life as God meant it to be. Until ... (Don't you just hate to ruin a good story with the reality of it all?) Until, with the help of a snake, they (the man and the woman) began quibbling over God's words—"Did God really say ... ?" Twisting his meaning and doubting his goodness, they disobeyed their Creator. And if ever there were a time to say it: The rest is history.

Fast-forward a few thousand years later. A much different earth by now, but still God's earth. Moses and the nation of Israel stand the width of a river away from the Promised Land. Not the Garden of Eden but a paradise in its own right, hand-picked by God himself for this group of people, a land flowing with milk and honey. And the words of God were given to them so they might experience life as God meant it to be. Moses speaks to a people who stand a stone's throw from Paradise II.

- (Deuteronomy 8:3) And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

The message that followed was simple. Live by the words of God and enjoy the fruit of the land and the blessing of God. Keep the words and live life as God defines life.

Fast-forward again. Here we are. Our world has a few more miles on it but basically the same setting—God's earth, people, the words of God, as spoken by Jesus the Son of God, teaching us how to live.

- (Matthew 4:4) But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Much has changed since Paradise I (the Garden of Eden) and Paradise II (the Promised Land). But some things haven't. If we want to live life as God defines living, as God meant it to be, then we must live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. And that, my friends, is what this study is about. Learning how to believe God for life.

God's words are life.

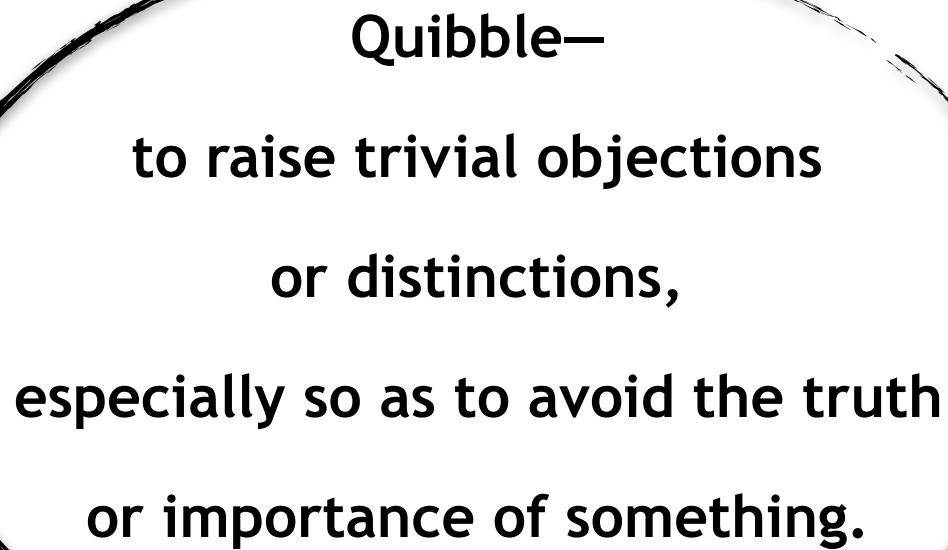
- (John 10:10) The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

“They” is us. You. Me. We have all earth history behind us. We have the examples of Paradise Lost, I & II. Quibble over the words, change the meaning God intended, doubt his goodness and purpose, disobey, rebel, die lost. Or not. Decide instead to find life in the words of God. We have the hope of heaven in front of us. And the same admonishment. Live by the words of God and live.

The intent of this study is to help us to see the value of the words, to learn them, to understand them and to live them. To live as God intends for us to live.

Blessed may we be as we travel together this Path of Jesus!

dave



**Quibble—
to raise trivial objections
or distinctions,
especially so as to avoid the truth
or importance of something.**

► **To provide a biblically sound direction our Bible study must move us past the abstract to the concrete.**

I have developed this very important concept more fully in Part Two, Lesson Nine, The Ladder of Abstraction, but let me at least lay the basic groundwork here. The abstract is the principle, the concept, such as, “love one another.” The concrete is the application, living the truth, obedience in our daily walk with God. The abstract principle guides us; the concrete acts out the reality of the abstract in everyday life.

The abstract PLUS the concrete brings life.

ABSTRACT	CONCRETE
ABSTRACT: FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER.	CONCRETE: FORGIVE BOB, MARY & SAM.
(Ephesians 4:32) Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, <i>forgiving one another</i> , as God in Christ forgave you.	I forgive Bob for spreading gossip about me at church. I forgive Mary for her snide comments about my teaching methods. I forgive Sam for listening to Mary’s unkind and untruthful words.

This is like epoxy in which you combine two tubes with different contents to form a very strong bonding material. Left separately they have no strength. Honoring the abstract and the concrete allows God to nourish our hearts with what we need at the moment: healing, strength, courage, wisdom, vision, perspective, kindness, forgiveness, peace, etc.

CHAPTER 3

CONTINUE TO GROW IN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF GOD'S WORD



We need to continue to grow in our understanding of God's word.

► **We need to develop our ability to understand the words of God by developing our learning skills and resources.**

Never stop being students. We need to labor for the food that gives eternal life. Is there anything that deserves our attention more than the words of God?

- (John 6:27) Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.

We should evaluate our study and learning skills and develop them as needed. Evaluate our learning skills. Find where we are, swallow our pride, and begin developing our study skills.

- **Reading Skills**

For instance, some people need to learn how to read, or read more effectively or develop their comprehension skills. People struggling with reading is more prevalent than some might imagine. If a person does not understand the meaning of the words, or reads the wrong words, or does not understand the relationship of words to each other (grammar), then he or she will not be able to understand what God is saying.

A common mistake: A person with poor reading skills fills in the blank. He or she reads part of word or phrase and then “auto-fills” the rest from words or phrases that are already common and familiar to the reader.

- **Listening Skills**

A person may need to discipline himself to stay attentive and to concentrate on what is actually being said. He will also benefit from disciplining himself to listen to learn.

The law of love and the discipline of listening. We can develop our ability to listen and still miss the main point if do not listen to learn the ways of God which result in renewal and transformation. Our motivation is crucial in the listening process. We can train ourselves to listen to gather facts to prove a point or bolster an argument or pass an exam. Or we can listen to learn. Actually learn. And then let God make the points of emphasis. For the student a very practical application of the Great Command—"Love God, love your neighbor as yourself"—is to discipline himself to hear what the other person is in fact saying. If he is reading someone's book with only the intent to pick out words to oppose them, then he is not honoring the Great command, and he is undermining the learning process in his life.

- **Study Skills**

Learn the value of knowing when to browse the material for an overview or when to jump into the details. Learn to discern what the situation may call for. How to "zoom in versus zoom out," big picture or little picture, detail versus broad strokes.

Learn how to prioritize. How much time to spend on what? How to take notes and organize notes. A "scribble" is all you need if you can read it enough to make sense of it later. Penmanship is not the main issue in note-taking. You need to get the content down.

We need to learn what resources are available to us and how to use them. Build our reservoir of resources. By shopping around on mailing lists and online you can find books and other study materials at discount prices. Many resources are available now at very reasonable prices as ebooks in a variety of formats on Kindle, iPad, Android and other tablets. Grow in our expertise in using them. Don't just have a collection of tools on the wall or on the hard drive of our computer. Use them.

Here is a partial list of resources we want to be familiar with:

- English dictionaries,
- Study Bibles,
- Modern English translations,

- Bible dictionaries,
- Theological dictionaries,
- Bible encyclopedias,
- Word study books,
- Bible commentaries,
- Concordances,
- Bible software,
- Online resources for all the above.

A dictionary of the English language is one of the most valuable Bible study tools we can own and use. Some people become very interested in the Greek and Hebrew words and their meanings before they understand the significance and meaning of the word in their own language. Highly educated, dedicated scholars in the Greek and Hebrew languages carefully chose the words for our English translations so it seems that we would do very well to pay attention to their efforts.

► **We need to remember the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.**

Let's not forget about the Holy Spirit of God. God the Holy Spirit lives in every person who believes in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and has received eternal life through his shed blood. We must have an active, biblical relationship with the Spirit. Our relationship with the Spirit must be guided by the written words of God.

The Holy Spirit is not an escape from the process of a disciplined study of God's word. And, likewise, disciplined study is no excuse for not walking by and listening to the Spirit. The teaching of the Holy Spirit is never to be separated from the clear, intended meaning of Scripture. If you claim to have a message from the Holy Spirit of God, then you must be able to find that message in the Holy Word of God.

- (2 Peter 1:19–21 NLT) Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

If we submit to the Holy Spirit of God, he will teach us God's intended meaning of Scripture. When a person seeks hidden meanings and mystical interpretations, it seems to reflect a shallow relationship with God. I do not say this to be harsh or critical, but the person who pursues God through the truth of Scripture has no time for idle talk and old wives tales. That person knows that God's truth is far superior to anything he would have to say.

It is unfortunate that many invoke the name of the Holy Spirit to support their private interpretation instead of allowing God the Holy Spirit to teach them his intended meaning.

► **We need an approach to Scripture that best enables us to accurately handle Scripture.**

What does God say? We need an approach that best equips us to answer "What does it say? What do the words of God on the pages of our Bibles say?"

- (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB95) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Let's look at this text.

If we are to be diligent in presenting ourselves approved before God as workers who do not need to be ashamed, then **this must be both possible and expected because God doesn't call us to do the impossible or the unnecessary.** We are given a mandate to correctly handle God's word of truth to the best of our ability.

An unexamined approach to God's word is unacceptable. We must not dishonor God and his word with a sloppy, indifferent, myopic approach to his word of truth.

► **We need an approach to Scripture that best fits the purpose of Scripture.**

- (2 Timothy 3:16-17 AMP) Every Scripture is God-breathed (given by His inspiration) and profitable for instruction, for reproof {and} conviction of sin, for correction of error {and} discipline in obedience, [and] for training in righteousness (in holy living, in conformity to God's will in thought, purpose, and action), so that the man of God may be complete {and} proficient, well fitted {and} thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Purpose, profit, prepare ...

The purpose of Scripture is to transform our lives that we may be equipped to serve God. All the words are God-breathed, inspired by God. The profit of the words is change in our lives. The change in our lives is to prepare us to work for God.

We may stop a moment and ask ourselves—**Why do I study the Bible?** What do I have in mind when I approach God's word?

—THE PURPOSE OF PREACHING AND TEACHING GOD'S WORD IS TO CHANGE LIVES.—

- (2 Timothy 4:1-2 NIV) In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

The ultimate in “big picture” perspective.

Interestingly we find ourselves in the presence of God once again as the subject becomes how we handle his word. Paul charges Timothy in the presence of God. Timothy is to be prepared to preach in season and out of season. When God's word is preached and listened to, it is to be done in full awareness of the presence of God.

Timothy is to preach to change lives: correct, rebuke and exhort. If the profit in God's word is in changing our lives, then the profit in our preaching and teaching will be to change lives. So where do we look for our "profit" in Bible study? In changed lives.

The nature and purpose of God's word is to prepare me to meet God now.

- (Hebrews 4:12-13 NCV) God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the center of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts. Nothing in all the world can be hidden from God. Everything is clear and lies open before him, and to him we must explain the way we have lived.

So am I looking for God to cut me open with his word to help me understand what is going on deep inside? His word is designed to penetrate deep darkness inside, to sift through and judge the thoughts and purposes of my heart, to completely expose me before God.

As verse thirteen explains, nothing can be hidden from God and one day we will all have to explain our lives to him. The great blessing is that the

word of God empowers me to face my life and bring it before God now. If I will allow the words of God to cut into my life now and if I open myself up to the light of God, Satan will no longer be able to make his dark threats because I am now in the process of full-disclosure. I know my High Priest understands my weaknesses, and I hold on to my confession of faith and move with boldness to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace to help in my time of need. So much in these verses. Amen and amen!

I cannot and need not hide my life from God. The absolutely great news is that there is absolutely no reason to hide any part of my life from God. The living, powerful word of God opens me up, penetrates the deepest, darkest places of my life and prepares me for mercy and grace. No one needs to hide from God. Ever!

► **An inductive approach to Scripture is simple, effective and biblically sound.**

Building biblical premises for our faith.

An inductive approach to Scripture will build biblical premises for our faith. People speak of cutting out the middle-man in business to increase profit, and in a sense that is what an inductive approach will do. We are put in more direct contact with what God is actually saying as opposed to theology and standards that are handed to us as finished units. Instead of having a pre-fab house brought in, we are building it ourselves. Please understand there is an advantage to systemizing theology, to giving structure to what we believe. What I am presenting is that the inductive, “see-for-yourself” method of Bible study should be primary. Using the house illustration, we could look at it this way. A skilled carpenter knows better than someone inexperienced in building as to what he is getting if he were to look into buying a house built by someone else. Having built a house himself he knows what to look for.

The skilled builder knows how to build, knows where to build—on the Rock, Jesus Christ.

An inductive approach is very helpful in examining the premises and foundations of our belief system. An inductive approach comprises observation, interpretation and application.

- **Observation: What does it say? Hear the voice of God.**

What do the words on the page of my Bible say?

Observation paves the way for interpretation; interpretation paves the way for application; and application will open our hearts and minds to further observations as the cycle continues.

If our observations are wrong, then everything is wrong. That is why in part two of our study we will pay a great deal of attention to developing the attitude and skill to find out: What does it say? What do the actual words on the pages of the Word of God tell us? We must get that right! That will be our primary focus.

In studying the Bible inductively we focus much attention on what the words are actually telling us apart from any preconceived ideas we bring with us. Don't jump to conclusions. Integrity calls us to make every effort to know what the words of God say before we attempt to determine what they mean.

- **Interpretation: What does it mean? Understand the voice of God.**

Beginning and ending with interpretation is very possibly the most common mistake made in Bible study. We start talking about what it means before we really know what it says.

- **Application: How do I live by that? Obey the voice of God.**

Here we ask ourselves how do we live on these words? What does this mean to me, not as far as what the passage means (interpretation), but now that I understand the teaching, how do I honor God in this?

Each part of this process is vital to a biblical approach to the words of God. Staying close to the words of Scripture also helps us deal with who we are. Fallen creatures living in a fallen world. We struggle. The next section will help us better understand this formidable obstacle we face in ourselves.

Observation	Interpretation	Application
What does it say?	What does it mean?	How do I live this truth?
Hear voice of God.	Understand voice of God.	Obey voice of God.

(In Part Two I will offer my spin off from Observation, Interpretation and Application: **Reading, wRiting, Reflecting and Responding** found in lessons two and three.)

PART ONE / CHAPTER THREE: We need to continue to grow in our understanding of God's word.

CHAPTER 4

DEAL WITH THE EFFECTS OF OUR FALLEN NATURE

- “It does not do to leave a live dragon out of your calculations, if you live near him” (J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*).

We must learn and understand the effects our fallen nature has had on our reasoning abilities from a biblical perspective. We must know who we are to prepare for the challenge before us.

► **Understanding our default settings.**

We are fallen people living in a fallen world. If we do not remember this and plan accordingly, then our plans will fail. Our “sheep-like” guidance systems are inherently flawed—We tend to stray from the path. As stated in the old comic strip Pogo: “We have met the enemy, and they is us.”

Our default settings: By default we will use our reasoning abilities to edit incoming information to agree with what we already believe. This is how our minds work. Our rationalizations know no limit as we look for evidence to support foregone conclusions. Apart from the direction of God we will contrive elaborate schemes to keep believing what we already believe and want to believe (universal sheep-like tendency).

So how do we defeat this faulty editing system? Enter center stage, God’s word, as it is profitable in transforming our thinking. Through the words of God we can approach and receive truth outside the boundaries of our current knowledge in a way that is profitable to our spiritual growth.

- (2 Timothy 3:16) All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

For a better understanding of what I mean by default settings you may want to read in **Appendix B—“A valid argument may not be a sound argument.”**

No exceptions. We are fallen creatures whether in the religious realm, the scientific realm, everywhere, everyone, you, me, no exceptions.

This is important to note because often, as Christians, we either do not realize this, or we refuse to accept this to be true. We attempt to maintain the notion that since “I am a Christian” or “I go to church every Sunday“

that I cannot fall for this. We have our well-used “frog-in-the-kettle” analogy and the “fish-in-the-water” analogy, and we would never for a moment think it possible that we maybe the ones in the kettle or the ones not realizing we are the “fish-in-the-water” who are unaware that we are dripping wet.

So could it be that we are right there in the kettle with everyone else?

- (Romans 2:1 NCV) If you think you can judge others, you are wrong. When you judge them, you are really judging yourself guilty, because you do the same things they do.

When our judgmental approach to life (and Scripture) focuses on the other person, we expose our guilt and lack of perspective. When it comes to sin, we need to examine ourselves first and foremost.

- (Matthew 7:5) You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.

We absolutely (without question, to the fullest extent) must understand our “sheep-like” tendencies.

- (Isaiah 53:6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Our sheep-like tendencies:

- Are universal and all-inclusive: We all stray. Every one turns to his or her own way by default.
- Result in death: Each person’s way seems right to her.

Christian or non-Christian, if our habit is to follow what seems right, then we have chosen death, not life. I believe that this explains why many believers do not live in the abundance that Christ speaks of in John 10:10. We choose what seems right over Bible teaching.

- (Proverbs 14:12 NIV) There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.

► **Understanding our need for a shepherd.**

Everybody needs a shepherd. Without a shepherd we are at the mercy of our own choices. For believers, Christ is our shepherd.

- **My Shepherd.**
 - (Psalm 23:1) The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

- **The Good Shepherd.**
 - (John 10:11) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.
 - (John 10:14) I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.
- **The Chief Shepherd.**
 - (1 Peter 5:4) And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.
- **The Great Shepherd.**
 - (Hebrews 13:20) Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant.

How does Christ shepherd us? What goes on in that process? How does it work? We allow Christ to shepherd us as we follow him. It helps us when we clearly examine our choices. One, follow Christ. Or, two, follow ourselves. Here on earth following ourselves may seem doable, but when our journey stretches into eternity, then we will become desperate for someone to guide and lead us. **Too late.**

► **Understanding our need for faith.**

Following a biblical approach to Scripture that promotes and cultivates a life of faith, we overcome the effect our fallen nature has had on our reasoning abilities.

- **We are to live by faith.**
 - (2 Corinthians 5:7 NCV) We live by what we believe, not by what we can see.

Our certainty is in God. If we discipline ourselves to live by the words of God, then we will learn to trust in the words of God. To live by faith means to step into the unknown as God directs. Uncertainty is part of life. By faith we live in the certainty of God and his words, but that certainty does not mean we see the road ahead, it merely means that we know God wants us on that road. We live the words and trust God for the rest.

- **We are not to live by sight.**

Faith and sight are biblical and theological opposites. If we live by sight we will fear the unknown and immobilize ourselves. Sight demands knowing

what will happen if I do this or that. Faith trusts the words of God and the character of God. Faith breeds courage; sight breeds fear.

If we do not maintain a faith approach to Scripture, then we will fall prey to our natural, fallen reasoning abilities. We may deceive ourselves into thinking the approach is spiritual, and in fact can be quite religious, but the choices are faith or sight.

- **We are not to be fearful.**

We are to avoid a fearful, sight-based approach to the words of God which often results a reactive/protective choice over a faith (as in believing God) choice.

An example of a fearful/reactive/protective approach.

I will give an example from my pastoral experience that demonstrates a fearful approach to Scripture as a result of walking by sight rather than faith. I preached one Sunday night from 1 Peter 4:8 and afterwards had an experienced “Bible student” very upset over my “loose” teaching that “love will cover a multitude of sins.”

- (1 Peter 4:8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

What was the problem? What did I say that stirred the emotions so? This is a very clear teaching and that person was very sincere and committed in his walk with God and belief in the Bible. Why was he so vehement in his disapproval? Why was he so angry with me?

Cognitive dissonance.

Here was the problem. Cognitive dissonance. He perceived something coming in on his spiritual radar that disrupted his cognitive-consistency, and he took a reactive/protective stance. It’s like shooting a missile down before it can enter your airspace. The person who struggles with this (which includes all of us to some degree) is so protective of his belief system and so wary of a potential slippery slope, that he sometimes/often struggles to see and accept the plain truth of the biblical text and struggles to trust God with the resulting truth and direction.

This reactive/protective stance skews our ability to reason and obscures the lens through which we see life and Scripture. More simply put. We jump to conclusions that are fear-based rather than Bible-based. A typical

reaction by this person would be to attempt a move to an interpretation which would relieve the cognitive dissonance and provide escape.

► **Understanding the difference between a biblically wrapped or a biblically true message.**

Is it biblically wrapped or biblically true? Later in the book we will examine this topic in more detail, but a few thoughts now.

- **A biblically wrapped message.**

A biblically wrapped message sounds true and is usually preached to a group of like-minded people who will accept its veracity based more on common agreement than on biblical exegesis.

Often a biblically wrapped message will be supported by many cross-references that seem to undergird the main idea. The problem is that referencing a large number of passages only gives the appearance of depth to the study. A large volume of references usually means only a surface examination. Like a rock skipping fifteen times over the surface of a pond, it covers a large area but has no depth.

This is not to say that if several verses of Scripture are used that the message is not biblical, but as I listen to preachers and teachers, this is generally the norm. If several verses are used, usually a good examination of what the verses actually say does not occur. This method of “volume of evidence” has been passed down through the ranks by many well-intended followers of Jesus Christ.

- **A biblically true message.**

Contrasted with a biblically “wrapped” message is a biblically true message. The preacher or teacher stays with the announced text and actually probes what the words of that text say. Staying with the text and allowing God to speak his intended communication through that text allows him to penetrate our layers of defenses and speak to our hearts, which is the purpose of Scripture, to deal with our hearts.

Now back to my example. Remember we were in 1 Peter 4:8 "love will cover a multitude of sins"? In this text two observations stood out as I studied it. One, fervent love is given priority above everything else. And, two, love will cover a multitude of sins.

- (1 Peter 4:8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

How could someone disagree with such plain teaching?

In this situation, the man feared that people would misuse this passage to justify their sinful lifestyle. So here it seems he jumped promptly to application (wrong application by the way) in an attempt to shut down a “dangerous” (in his eyes) teaching, even though this teaching was clearly the word of God.

► **Understanding that a lack of faith cultivates the presence of fear.**

Underlying this attitude would seem to be a lack of faith both in God and in his word. After all, we have to remember who wrote the Book. Since God included those words, then I taught them. We teach the word of God and trust God with the outcome. We have too many truths of Scripture that have been neutered in the process of becoming Sunday School stories. Look at the lives of David, Abraham. And by the way how did Esther actually become queen? Our fear of where a truth might lead us sometimes stifles the word of God. So our fear and lack of faith cause us to change the message.

The attitude is ...

- IF we teach this,**
- THEN they may do that,**
- THEREFORE we will not teach that truth.**

The result is that we effectively block out portions of Scripture that some in leadership fear “the people” cannot handle. Even though God included those words in his holy book for “the people.” And then, we reward this attitude by giving it “spiritual maturity” status under the category of guarding the flock. Usually people with this mind-set not only do not teach these passages, but they attack anyone who does in the interest of defending the faith. Go figure.

Another strain of this protective/reactionary/fearful attitude that we should address is the same but different; same principles at work with different circumstances and somewhat different motives; still however protecting turf but now on the more personal level.

Here is a variant strain.

- IF I believe [fill in the blank]**
- THEN I will have to change this [fill in the blank] in my life,**
- THEREFORE**

->I will ignore this teaching altogether.

->I will discredit the teaching.

->I will discredit the teacher.

->I will give it an interpretation that I can live with.

We should by now have a somewhat accurate picture of the battle for our hearts and minds both from within and without. And we should by now have somewhat of an idea how to fight that battle. And we surely must realize that there can be no letdown in our pursuit of truth.

So we follow through. Onward to the playing field. The laboratory. Life. Here is where we see what a splendid “product” God has given us. Here is where the words of God shine. When we live them.

—IF WE WANT TO REALLY LIVE, THEN WE ARE GOING TO LISTEN TO OUR GOD.—

PART ONE / CHAPTER FOUR: We need to deal with the effects of our fallen nature.

PART TWO

PRESENTING A PRACTICAL, BIBLICAL APPROACH TO BIBLE STUDY!



INTRODUCTION & GOAL

In this section my goal is to present a biblical, practical model for an honest pursuit of God and his truth through our Bible study! A beginning point, a starting place, for hands-on study.

I hope to ...

- a. Introduce you to a method of approach that fits God's design and desire—read, write, reflect and respond; simple, yet powerful.
- b. Instill valuable principles. For example—seeking God's intended meaning, not some hidden meaning; going to Scripture to learn, not to prove a point; and most of all pursuing divine words to live by.
- c. Acquaint you with a variety of helpful resources (English dictionary, exhaustive concordance, Bible software, commentaries, etc.) with the qualification that our main goal is to come into direct contact with the words of God on the pages of our Bibles so that we first hear what God has to say.
- d. Inspire you to crave and live the pure words of God, to believe God for life. God's word is amazing if we let God tell the story. He speaks, we tremble and listen. We bow in humility, God strengthens and amazes. We seek the Lord, we find his truth.
- e. Invite you to taste God's goodness.
 - (1 Peter 2:1–3) So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation—if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

We need an approach to Bible study that fits God's design. I once purchased a Microsoft Natural Multi Media Keyboard. I thought that the ergonomic design would help me deal with the limitations from a brace I was wearing on my right arm due to an injury to my biceps muscle.

And it did help because this keyboard better fits the natural design of my hands. My point is that I believe this study can help you pursue God and his truth because it fits God's design for communicating his truth to his human creation. I am not saying it is the only way or that anything presented on these pages is original with me. I am saying that it fits God's biblical purpose and intent, and it will help you overcome the limitations of your humanness and your fallenness, even as it continues to help me.

God chose to write things down. And a person writes things down with the intent that they will be read. The biblical concept goes even further. God wrote it down for us to read it and then to live it. God didn't write everything down, but he wrote enough that we could live well.

If we want to truly live, then we will live by the words of God. The Bible was never intended to be just a book to be studied. Studying the Bible was never God's primary purpose in giving us his words. Our goal should never be to only study the Bible. Our goal should be to live the truth to the glory of our God, to believe what God tells us about real life.

That is how this study will help you and me by directing us to God's purpose for his word, that we will live by the words of God, and that our lives will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. That, at least, is my prayer. I encourage you to let God create in you a new, more biblical vision of life as you pursue him through the words he has given us.

- **He wrote it down.**
- **We read it and live.**
- **Simple.**
- **Profound.**
- **We should be eternally grateful.**

Learn, live and love the words of God. That is God's design. It fits. It fits the hands of the person whose heart is bowed before God, the person who trembles in reverence before the words of our Creator and Redeemer.

May we grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Dave

LESSON 1

EXAMINING A BIBLICAL APPROACH TO THE WORDS OF GOD

- (Isaiah 66:2 GW) I have made all these things. “That is why all these things have come into being,” declares the LORD. “I will pay attention to those who are humble and sorry [for their sins] and who tremble at my word.”

Overview

- **1.1 Highlighted Resource: A dictionary of the English language**
- **1.2 Introduction to an Inductive method of Bible study**
- **1.3 Three major problems with Bible study**
- **1.4 Jumping to conclusions**

1.1 Highlighted Resource: An English dictionary

To understand our Bibles we need to understand the words. God chose the words. Understanding word meaning and placement is essential to understanding God's message. Miss the words; miss the message. English dictionaries teach us the meanings of the words.

An English dictionary will prove to be one of your most valuable tools. Look at it this way. If you do not know the meaning of a word, then you neither understand the sentence that contains that word nor do you understand the paragraph that contains the sentence that contains that word. When you do not know the meaning of a word, stop and look it up. If this is not already your habit, you will be pleasantly surprised with the insights gained from simply looking up the meaning of a word.

Some people undervalue this excellent tool. They are more interested in Greek and Hebrew meanings of words before they understand what is written in the Bibles they actually use. This is a mistake. Excellent scholars work countless hours choosing just the right words for our English translations. We would do well to pay attention to what they have given us as a result of long hours of intense labor.

—STOP AND LOOK UP A WORD IN MY DICTIONARY IF I DO NOT KNOW ITS MEANING.—

1.2 Introduction to an Inductive method of Bible study

An inductive method of study could be described as a discovery method. As a detective gathers evidence, so the person using the inductive method gathers his evidence from the text and lets the “evidence” (the text) speak to the truth of the matter. Inductive Bible study is made up of three interwoven and inseparable units: observation, interpretation and application.

OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

APPLICATION: HOW DO I LIVE THIS TRUTH?

Do not misunderstand. The lines are not always clearly drawn between these three. In fact they form a never-ending, interwoven loop. We observe, we interpret, we apply and then we “go back to the drawing board” with even more observations after we have “taken our truth out for a field trial.”

Product testing, whatever we want to call it. This is God's truth—living and active. We can't capture it and confine it to concept and theory and expect to fully understand it because doing so voids a very necessary maturation process in our hearts.

Some mistakenly believe that they can learn to distinguish good from evil, right from wrong, righteousness from wickedness without going to the playing field. They mistakenly believe that study and more study can provide their answers. But Scripture teaches us that we learn to distinguish between good and evil through constant use, not through constant study, of the words of God.

- (Hebrews 5:13–14 NIV84) Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, **who by constant use** have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

Another misconception I have observed is the idea that studying truth or hearing preaching is the equivalent of coming to the light. But listen to what John says.

- (John 3:21 NIV) But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God.

—LIVE BY THE TRUTH; COME INTO THE LIGHT; GOD GETS THE GLORY!—

The inductive method of studying God's word provides a framework for us to approach God's word in a way that fits the Master's design. We read and observe the words of God, and then to the best of our ability we find God's intended meaning in his words. Then we take our newfound truth out of the box and into our lives and God renews and transforms.

In this study I will emphasize observation as an essential first step to any productive Bible study. Maybe our first three “rules” could be: Observe, observe, observe. What does it say? What does it say? What does it say?

1.3 Three Major Problems with Bible Study

- **Not doing it.**
- **Beginning and ending with interpretation.**
- **Approaching Bible study as if Bible study were the goal.**

► **MAJOR PROBLEM #1: Not doing it.**

—DON'T KNOW, DON'T CARE—

For many people this is the main problem. They do not study their Bibles. And there are reasons for this. Some people simply do not care. They do not want more in their walk with God until they are confronted with a crisis. Then their spirituality seems to matter. But when life is good, they either do not want to hear what God has to say or they do not think God has anything to say to them or they feel that God has said everything he is going to say at this time and they remain satisfied with the status quo.

—TARGET GROUP—

However some people (many I think and hope) do care, but they do not know how to effectively study their Bibles, and they have not really tasted the goodness of the Lord in their Bible study. If this second group identifies your situation, then I believe this study will help you.

► **MAJOR PROBLEM #2: Beginning and ending with interpretation.**

When we begin and end with interpretation, opinion rules the day and ruins the exploration. To avoid this common mistake, we must discipline ourselves to follow this order of discovery: Observation, Interpretation and Application. We must know what a text says before we can know what it means. And we must know what it means before we know how to apply the teaching to our lives.

Many studies begin and end with interpretation. “What does this mean to you?” is often the focus. I can recall far too many Bible studies where people began sharing their opinion on the meaning of the text before even an initial inquiry as to what the words actually said. In fact I have found it to be common that people would not only share their opinion on the text under examination, but would not hesitate to leap to another passage to express their opinion with not even passing notice given to the text we were supposed to be studying or to the one referred to.

—BEGINNING AND ENDING WITH INTERPRETATION IS NOTHING MORE THAN SPECULATION.—

I remember one study I was leading and I asked: “From this passage what can we learn about [prayer]?” I think the subject was prayer; this was several years ago. I emphasized: Stay with the passage we are studying. Guess what? It was not until the sixth comment before anyone mentioned anything remotely connected with the text we were studying.

I remember another study in which the topic was the will of God. Immediately we were consulting reference books and the notes of a favorite theologian. I still remember the puzzled, annoyed looks I received when I suggested that one approach would be to look up all the direct references to the will of God in the Bible and begin there. There are over twenty references in the New Testament that use the words “the will of God.” After a slight pause, we soon returned to our discussion centered on the comments from our favorite reference books.

—WHEN STUDYING A TOPIC, TRY TO FIND THE MOST DIRECT REFERENCES POSSIBLE.—

How can we really know what a text means without a close examination of what it says? The words and the message they contain are our life. Just ask God (Deuteronomy 8:3 Matthew 4:4). **Many Bible studies fall short because the people involved do not understand the immense value of the words of God,** and so we hear ourselves speaking instead of God.

So ...

Good idea, bad idea? Listen to ourselves or listen to God. We may not view it this way, but we need to see precisely what is going on. When we allow our opinion to overlay God's words with a human perspective, no matter how noble or religious or well-intended, we seal off a window of opportunity for God to speak to our hearts.

- We must examine our **method**: When we begin and end with interpretation, we are assuming we already know what a text teaches.

- We must examine our **motive**: Do we have a desire to live the truth?

► **MAJOR PROBLEM #3: Making Bible study the goal.**

Similar to but different than point two—beginning and ending with interpretation. If Bible study is our goal, then what have we actually accomplished when we reach our goal? We've found truth and admired it, discussed it, raved about it. So what?

Bible study is a means to an end. We study the Bible to learn and understand the words of God so that we can live by the words of God. This is our sustenance. If we are not living by the words of God, then we are not living as God defines or explains living.

Our approach to Scripture means everything. We should ask ourselves “Why?” Why am I studying the Bible? Am I reading and studying the Bible to discover words to live by?

A word of caution: Studying the Bible to discover words of God to live by does not mean jumping directly to application. Doing that often results in adapting God's word to our lifestyle and culture because jumping directly to application assumes too much, beginning with the assumption that I already know the right thing to do. And often this is not the case. Sometimes very often. The correct approach is to allow God to renew our minds (change the way we think) as we **do** the truth, and in that process he transforms our lives to the image of his Son. God will give us a point on the horizon (the right and righteous thing to do) to move toward. Too many people allow another person, usually through guilt, to set their vision. Bad idea.

The reason I even bring this up is because there are people who “preach” application at the expense of accuracy. Their frustration has been an overexposure to theory, and they want to jump in and do something. But this is a mistake. Good, solid Bible study will lead to an exposing of God's truth and that becomes our point on the horizon to keep our lines straight.

The point I am trying to make is that we need these reference points to move toward, and we absolutely have to allow God to set the points for us, or we spend a lifetime moving toward the wrong goals. So we must know what God is saying and what he means by what he says before we can know what to do. Let God set our coordinates. And then we have a call word - “Let come what may!”

Whatever your reference point is, whatever your vision for life is, the longer you move toward that point on the horizon, the more invested you

become and the greater the investment, the harder the decision to change. But better to change after twenty years with my ladder against the wrong wall, than to never reposition my “ladder” at all. Any time before eternity is a good time to get on track with God.

- (Matthew 6:21 NCV) Your heart will be where your treasure is.

Again I will say, “Bible study cannot be the goal.” Only studying the Bible does not transform and empower the believer, does not “upset the apple cart” of the old life, does nothing significant.

We need “dangerous, threatening” Bible study, Bible study that threatens the very existence of our old way of life. We can study the Bible and safely remain the same. But if we are sincere in our desire to live by the words of God, then we must identify what we truly value. “Your heart will be where your treasure is.” **If we are too heavily invested in this earth, we will not be able to make decisions of faith.**



Effective Bible study ...

- Is dangerous and threatening to the old life, the old ways.
- Renews our minds and transforms our lives.
- Calls for faith, spiritual courage and obedience.



WHAT SONG ARE WE SINGING?

What song are we singing? When I taught piano, one of the problems I dealt with was my students' approach to their music. They relied far too heavily on memory and not enough on what was written. Because previous teachers had not taught them the discipline of playing what was written, they came up with their own songs. They played what was familiar, what sounded right to them.

The problem is that if you play different notes and a different rhythm from what is written, then you are playing a different song. What we play is still something. It is a song; it may sound better to us than what is written; we may say that it is the song written on the page; we may even look at the written music as we play the song. But it is not that song.

We really like our version of the song. What I have also discovered is that the longer we have played our version of the song, the more emotionally attached we become, and the harder it is to accept the written music as the song.

We don't like to change our tune. And here I would like to point us to a very strong parallel between learning the music as written and learning the words of God as written. Many Christians rely too much on memory; we may be looking right at the page, chapter and verse; we may even quote the words; but we are not reading for a changed heart. And many are not willing to change their tune even if someone shows them that what they are “singing” does not match the written word.

We have become too attached to the tune we have been singing all these years. We have become so emotionally attached to the “melody” of this verse that we just cannot accept what is written.

The parallel continues. In music if you play the piano without disciplining yourself to play what is written and continue in that direction, overly reliant on memory, then that becomes your method of approach. The difficulty is this: It works; at least for a time it works, at first blush. Because this method is easier you often succeed sooner. However, a caveat is warranted. You will have success sooner but it will be limited and it will be misleading.

- **Limited Success:** You can only go so far playing by memory, and you will not learn how to read music for yourself so you will be dependent on an outside source to teach you.
- **Misleading Success:** A person can memorize and play one “cool” song, and it seems very impressive until everyone realizes that this is the only song the person knows. I heard Warren Wiersbe once say that some Christians do not have twenty years experience in the faith; they have one year's experience twenty times. They keep singing the same song and refuse to change for anyone, even God.

It's my song, and I'm stickin' to it! This attitude is what I have evidenced in the professing Church over the last thirty plus years: A stubborn unwillingness to change our tune even when it does not match the written word.

So whose song does the world hear? I have to wonder with our unwillingness to change our tune, with our unwillingness to “sing” what is written, and with our unwillingness to confront the words of God on the pages of our Bibles, what do we expect the “world” to hear? What (whose) songs are we really singing?

And ... Whose music is it anyway?



1.4 Jumping to conclusions ...

—DON'T DITCH YOUR METHOD. OBSERVE THEN INTERPRET.—

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>OBSERVATION: WHAT DOES IT SAY?</u></p>
<p>The first, second and third rules of Bible study: Observe, observe, observe.</p>
<p>Disciplining ourselves to not make dogmatic assertions in our initial observations allows us to progress into the excavation of the passage.</p>
<p>Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law. (Psalms 119:18 KJV)</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><u>INTERPRETATION: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?</u></p>
<p>The question is “What does it mean?” not “What does it mean to me?”</p>
<p>First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation. (2 Peter 1:20 NRSV)</p>
<p>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV84)</p>

APPLICATION: WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Studying God's word without the intent of obedience
leaves us open to sin and deceit.

Do what God's teaching says; when you only listen and do nothing,
you are fooling yourselves.
(James 1:22 NCV)

Anyone who knows the right thing to do,
but does not do it, is sinning.
(James 4:17 NCV)

Jumping to conclusions has its consequences ...



JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS CLOSES THE DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY.

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS QUASHES THE TRUTH OF THE TEXT.

JUMPING TO CONCLUSIONS QUENCHES THE SPIRIT OF LEARNING.



... hurts when you land.

LESSON 2

DOING OUR BEST AND OUR BEST MEANS AWARENESS AND EFFORT

- (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV) Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Overview

- **2.1 Highlighted Resource: A parallel study Bible.**
- **2.2 God's holy wash cycle, Introduction, Parts 1 & 2 Reading & Writing.**
- **2.3 The boy and the basket.**

2.1 Highlighted Resource: A parallel study Bible & A Modern English Translation.

The Bible is basically written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Translators not only have to discover the meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words, but they also have to deal with multiple shades of meaning and nuance in translating these words from ancient, foreign languages to English.

Not only that but they must deal with idioms. An idiom conveys a meaning by using words outside of their normal boundaries but which someone who shares the same customs and culture will understand, e.g. I am going to “catch a flight” to Boston tomorrow. I am not going to “catch” anything, and you know that because we are contemporaries living in the same culture and sharing the same customs. You know that what I mean is that I am going to drive to the airport, park my car, walk through the airport to the correct location, board a plane and fly to Boston. Except I am not really because I will probably be home all day continuing my work on this book. **I was “pulling your leg.”**

Translators must learn the language, and they must learn the way the language is used. We should be thankful for their effort because this means that we do not have to learn Hebrew and Greek to be able to read the Bible

for ourselves, and we do not have to acquire first-hand knowledge of the customs and cultures of these ancient times to interpret their expressions.

So what does this have to do with a parallel study Bible? A parallel study Bible demonstrates the different word choices translators have made as we compare their work side-by-side. A parallel study Bible has two or more Bible translations laid out in parallel columns on one or two pages. One that I have used in the past has four translations laid out across two facing pages for quick comparison. This allows a person to get a better feel for the original text by seeing the different ways the words were translated and placed in the sentences. Very helpful.

You will also find that any good Bible software will do this very same thing with the added benefit of being able to copy and paste your selected texts into your study notes.

Using a parallel study Bible helps us gain further insight without having to use a Bible commentary or a Bible dictionary at this point in our study. This is to our advantage because we want to give the words on the page plenty of time to speak to us before someone else tells us what they mean.

**—TRY TO UNDERSTAND AS MUCH AS WE CAN ON OUR OWN
BEFORE REFERRING TO AN OUTSIDE SOURCE.—**

Also a parallel study Bible is helpful for the person who cannot yet replace their trusty KJV with a modern translation. With a parallel Bible you can have the benefit of the modern English translation and still read the text in your KJV.

—DIGITAL RESOURCES ARE GREAT—

More and more people now take advantage of current technology and have multiple translations and study helps on their smart phones, tablets and computers. This method is very powerful, fast, convenient and economical. A person usually pays less (sometimes much less, many times free) for the digital resource than they would for a paperback or hardback version of the exact same material.

Using a digital resource is powerful and fast: A person can easily and quickly search for words, phrases and concepts and then highlight or share in a variety of ways. Being able to copy and paste the text directly into your research notes is a tremendous help and time-saver.

Using a digital resource is very convenient. You can have the equivalent of your entire library on your phone, tablet or computer. I would need a

pickup truck to haul around the books I have access to on my phone and tablet. (Maybe exaggerating a little, but not much.) And newly discovered resources are usually very easy to find and download.

No visiting the library or ordering and waiting for them to arrive in the mail. Find your resource and pay (if applicable) and download. For instance, when I was preaching through James, I was waiting one morning for someone to come out of surgery at the hospital and decided that I needed another James commentary. Found it, bought it, downloaded it, used it.

Using a digital resource also can save you money. Many resources are free, especially older resources such as commentaries by John Calvin. Let's say you are studying through the Psalms and need more help. You can just go to your friendly Kindle store and download a free Calvin commentary on the Psalms. Done.

2.2 God's Holy Wash Cycle (Read, Write, Reflect, Respond)

- (John 17:17 God's Word) Use the truth to make them holy. Your words are truth.
- (Isaiah 55:10-11 God's Word) Rain and snow come down from the sky. They do not go back again until they water the earth. They make it sprout and grow so that it produces seed for farmers and food for people to eat. My word, which comes from my mouth, is like the rain and snow. It will not come back to me without results. It will accomplish whatever I want and achieve whatever I send it to do.
- (Ephesians 5:25-26 NIV) Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word.

Remember that I mentioned how the ergonomic keyboard better fit my hands because the design matched? This approach to Scripture matches God's design. We sit before God with his book, the words he chose for us and breathed to us, and we read. And we ponder and write and reflect. And we ask for God's wisdom and we seek truth to live. And then we live what God gives us. This should be the focus of our approach to the words of God. Allow the word pictures God uses to speak to your heart, such as in Isaiah 55:11 where God pictures his word as rain and snow. Powerful imagery!

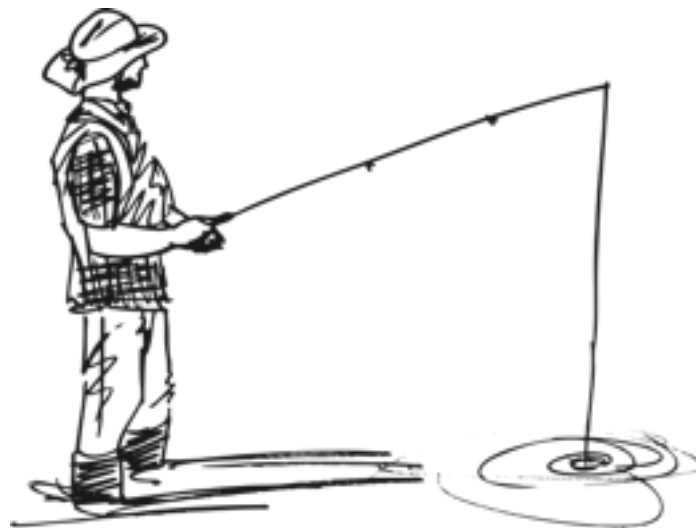
Establish a habit of reading our Bibles, writing down our thoughts and reflecting on the truth before us, and we have taken an excellent first step in drawing closer to God through the words of life that he has given us.

Sometimes I wonder if we bring **too many apparatuses** when we approach God's word. Sometimes I wonder if we begin the journey with **too much equipment**—study Bibles, commentaries, Bible dictionaries—and the equipment dominates our time. We spend more time fiddling with the equipment than reading the words. **Our initial approach should be a direct encounter with God through the words of God.** Later on there will be plenty of time to add some tools to our repertoire. This is another reason that reading through the Bible is such an excellent investment in our spiritual well-being.

GONE FISHIN' AND KNOWING WHAT TOOLS WE MIGHT NEED.

Maybe this illustration will help us understand timing and choice when it comes to tools. Let's say we decide that we are going to take up fishing as a pastime. We can choose from at least two approaches. One, we can go to the sporting goods store and start buying equipment—rods, reels, tackle box, tackle, videos, books, boat, hooks, lines and sinkers. We can buy anything and everything that we think that we are going to need. Or, two, we can get the very basics, a rod and reel and some bait, and go fishing. Which approach is going to more quickly show us what we are going to need to be a successful fisherman? Many people find their greatest happiness in purchasing the equipment, daydreaming over the equipment, talking about fishing and watching fishing shows. Others go fishing.

—DON'T BECOME MORE INTERESTED IN BIBLE STUDY TOOLS THAN IN THE BIBLE.—



Simple works ...

Reading, writing and reflecting prepare us to respond. Reading, writing and reflecting begin our journey but to complete the process of having our minds and hearts cleansed and renewed, we must respond to the Spirit's call. By faith we become keepers of the words of God. Along the way we will learn that in God's way of doing things even our failures can become part of our success ... if we continue in faith.

Reading. So simple, yet so powerful. Reading the Bible begins a process of opening our eyes to the world of God, to his “otherness,” the ways and thoughts of God that are higher than our ways and thoughts as the heavens are above the earth (Isaiah 55:9). Reading is so clean and simple and yet very powerful.

Time for the goose bumps when we read. I can (you can) pick up the Bible and—here come the goose bumps—read an overview of the entire history of mankind. Creation, redemption, kingdoms rising and falling, future events. And not only that but I can sit with my Bible on my lap and read the intimate details of the lives of people who have walked this earth thousands of years earlier. Their personal, spiritual journeys. Amazing, simply amazing, that I can read the details of Job's struggle of faith. Equally amazing that in reading the Psalms I can chart much of David's spiritual journey, whether he wrote while hiding in a cave or ruling his kingdom. The New Testament is equally revealing as Paul, the great apostle and leader, exposes his inner struggles.

- (1 Corinthians 2:3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling.
- (2 Corinthians 7:5) For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn—fighting without and fear within.

Never underestimate the dynamic of reading. Never underestimate how God can speak to your heart as you read the word of God **knowing that it is indeed the word of God you are holding in your hands.** Sometimes what we call study is more of a barrier than a connection when it comes to approaching God through the words he has given us. Sometimes we come to the fray wearing Saul's armor when all we needed was a sling and two or three smooth stones from the creek.

Reading fits our Master's design. God breathed words for us, directed prophets and apostles to write them down to be passed on, so that thousands of years after God gave the words, we still have access to them.

—SO LET'S READ.—

Read with discipline. Discipline yourself to regularly read God's word. Make yourself read, but do not enslave yourself to a system. I think it is a very good idea to have a Bible reading plan, but there is no rule saying that you have to read the Bible through in a year. So don't set your goal too high but do push yourself.

—DISCIPLINE MYSELF TO READ GOD'S WORD BUT DON'T ENSLAVE MYSELF TO A PLAN.—

Push but don't enslave yourself. Be flexible in whatever plan you come up with and do not let your plan keep you from your main goal of living the words of God and drawing closer to God. We can miss the mark two different ways. **One**, we can push through our reading, checking the boxes off, and finish but not hear God's voice. **Two**, we can fall behind and begin to feel so guilty that picking up our Bible only reminds us of our failure to keep up so we fall behind even more and give up.

—NEVER GIVE UP.—

Writing. If nothing else, writing slows us down to think through the passage. But writing does so much more. Here is a good rule of thumb. Don't teach a topic until you can clearly articulate your thoughts in writing.

Writing brings precision and accuracy to our thoughts. I agree with the suggestion that if we cannot write down our thoughts on a particular subject, then we probably are not ready to teach that subject. **If you have a passion to teach, then you need to bring the precision of writing into your study regimen.** This would seem to be part of doing our best to present ourselves to God as workmen who do not need to be ashamed.

- It is a common experience that thoughts become more precise as they are expressed. In this connection it may be said that a student can understand better with a pencil than with any other instrument; because, if a thought can be apprehended and expressed in writing, it must have been clearly understood. Another illustration of the precision of language is the difference between one's active and his passive vocabularies. It is possible to read and understand, in a general way, more words than one can use or write in a specific way. This is true because the accurate usage of words requires a more precise understanding of them, and precision is attained by expression (Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible*, Moody Press: Chicago, p.213).

Writing captures our thoughts like nothing else can. Sometimes a brief window of illumination will open. God may bring a thought to our minds in the morning, and, if not written down, by afternoon it will possibly have become a vague memory, if remembered at all. As I was writing my thoughts down I compared this one day with the coloring of the sky and earth by the sun early in the morning and late in the evening. At sunrise and sunset for what seems to be just brief moments, we have brilliant hues of colors filling the sky and the landscape, and then poof they are gone, like we had only imagined them. Sometimes God will open a window of insight as his light reflects a facet of his truth which we have not previously seen. And sometimes it is “now you see it, now you don’t.” There it is, a glimpse of truth, a reflection of his thoughts that if we do not write it down, we return later to the scene empty-handed.

When in doubt, write it down. Sometimes you may look later at what you've written and acknowledge that it wasn't very noteworthy, maybe even silly. But if you wrote it down at least you can decide that. If you do not write it down and forget it, then it is gone. There is no decision to make. Some things seem frivolous at the time but later give you insight. Sometimes it becomes awkward writing down our thoughts, we struggle and bumble about, but we come back later and God uses that to speak to us. Maybe we revise the thought. Maybe we never read it again, but the process has served its purpose in helping to clarify what is going on in our mind.

—“WRITE IT DOWN. I CAN ALWAYS THROW IT AWAY LATER.”—

Your writings can be a tremendous blessing to others. And although not ruling out published works, that is not what I am speaking of. We should write for what it does inside of us and the blessing that it can be to others. We should be authors for God. **The sincere reflections of an honest pilgrim will speak to the hearts of fellow travelers.** The truth about what is going on in your life will be meaningful to someone.

- Oswald Chambers writes this: If you cannot express yourself on any subject, struggle until you can. If you do not, someone will be the poorer all the days of his life. Struggle to re-express some truth of God to yourself, and God will use that expression to someone else. Go through the winepress of God where the grapes are crushed. You must struggle to get expression experimentally, then there will come a time when that expression will become the very wine of strengthening to someone else; but if you say lazily—“I am not going to struggle to express this thing for myself, I will borrow what I say,”

the expression will not only be of no use to you, but of no use to anyone (Oswald Chambers).

Too much borrowed truth means too much distance between you and God. And I suppose that this is one of the reasons I have put together this study. Too many professing believers in Jesus Christ live their lives on “borrowed” truth. They have either not experienced the amazing dynamic of first-hand knowledge from the word of God, or they have experienced this and for whatever reason have chosen a different course. And the community of believers is weaker.

Yes, we still learn from others. I am not encouraging anyone to reinvent the wheel or Bible study or reinvent anything. What I am strongly calling people to is a living relationship with God through the words of God. Personal and up close. I can't believe some of the expressions we have, such as the pastor gets the cookies off the top shelf and puts them down where the poor, little dumb sheep can reach them so they can be fed. Not a biblical concept. Paul rebuked people for staying with milk and cookies when they should have been going for the meat and potatoes. Weak is the Church where the members are too dependent on the pastor for the words from God. The stronger the individual's commitment to the Word of God; the stronger the church community.

Write your thoughts down. Don't qualify everything. Don't judge your thoughts at this time. Express them. Go back later if necessary and make your revisions, but don't quench your spirit and the Holy Spirit at this time by deciding whether this is good theology or not or whether someone would be mad at you for believing this. Trust God in the process to honor your pursuit of truth and your willingness to expose yourself to the light so that you can be exposed in God's presence.

The closer I am to God, then the better part I am of the community of God. **“For the strength of the Pack is the Wolf, and the strength of the Wolf is the Pack”** (Excerpt from *The Law of the Jungle* by Rudyard Kipling).

A unique perspective. You have a perspective as a child of God on this earth that no one else has, and if you so choose to share your spiritual diary or parts of it, you will bless someone in the process.

Sometimes less is more. Sometimes reading just a few verses and letting God speak to us through them and giving ourselves time to write is better than reading chapters. Sometimes our reading schedule, as valuable as it can be, puts too much pressure on us on a given day. I know

sometimes I am more in “conquer the plan” mode than learning and listening mode.

Make it special, unique, plan for a specific purpose. Your thoughts are valuable so treat them that way. Buy a notebook to write your thoughts down and reserve it for only that. Buy an ink pen that writes well and feels good in your hand. Keep your journal where you will always know where it is. Even though I still encourage the use of pen and paper, I must admit that I do almost all of my note taking now on different apps on my phone, tablet and computer. An advantage to this is the ability to sync between devices, plus (depending on what app you use) most of the time your work is seamlessly saved on someone's server, so you have an automatic backup.

Start a blog. Yes, you. There are several easy to use, free blog sites. This is a great way to journal also. Share your thoughts if you choose, or keep them between you and God. And as in the previous mention, you will have an automatic backup. Plus you will have numerous options to access.

The boy and the basket.

- **The illustration went something like this ...** Several years ago I read an account of a boy asking his dad about what seemed to him to be a waste time memorizing Scripture. The son's frustration was his own awareness of how many verses he had forgotten over a period of time. The father answered with an analogy comparing what the boy was doing in learning and forgetting Bible verses with pouring water in a basket. Pour clean, fresh water in a basket and almost all of it runs through and spills out. However, in the process of doing so the basket is cleaned by the washing of water over and through it.

When I began reading this my first thought was—another dumb illustration. But the picture has stayed with me for years now. Reading, studying and doing God's word is like stepping under a fountain and washing in God's words. Remember everything? No. Benefit from the process? Oh, yeah!

Think rain and snow. Look at our relationship with the words of God more as an opportunity for cleansing and growth, and less as achievement or a hurdle to be conquered.

- (Isaiah 55:10–11 NCV) **Rain and snow fall from the sky and don't return without watering the ground.** They cause the plants to sprout and grow, making seeds for the farmer and bread for the people. The same thing is true of the words I speak. They will not

return to me empty. They make the things happen that I want to happen, and they succeed in doing what I send them to do.

- (Hebrews 6:7–10 NIV84) **Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God.** But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.
- (James 5:7–8) Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. **See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient about it, until it receives the early and the late rains.** You also, be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

LESSON 3

BEING CALLED AND CLEANSED BY THE WORDS OF GOD

- (John 8:31–32 Msg) Then Jesus turned to the Jews who had claimed to believe in him. “If you stick with this, living out what I tell you, you are my disciples for sure. Then you will experience for yourselves the truth, and the truth will free you.”

Overview

3.1 Highlighted Resource: Dictionary of theology.

3.2 God's holy wash cycle; Parts 3 & 4 Reflecting, Responding.

3.1 Highlighted Resource: Dictionary of theology.

A dictionary of theology. *Boring. Not relevant.* Very possibly your first thoughts when seeing this resource listed. However, give this resource a chance, and you may find that it will become one of your most valuable tools. I first discovered this tool when I was a freshman at Moody Bible Institute. I was trying to better understand the concept of either redemption or sanctification, maybe both. Anyway, I could find no help in the Bible dictionary I was using, and after asking around discovered Baker's Dictionary of Theology. Later this book was expanded to become The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology, and I am sure there are others. These are the two I possess, and I have found them invaluable.

A dictionary of theology helps you make sense of words such as sanctification, imputation and redemption. Remember we need to understand the words to continue the thought that God is revealing to us. A dictionary of theology will usually give you a pretty thorough answer without completely overwhelming you with a huge amount of content. Even while saying that I would still warn you that it is very easy to be overloaded with information. We need to work to bring this information together. Sometimes even here using the English dictionary is surprisingly helpful in grasping theological terms, especially in finding a starting point or overview.

Speaking of being helpful, I sometimes look up words and concepts that I am already familiar with because it seems I always gain additional insight.

Sometimes I look up a word thinking I have a good understanding to find out I did not at all have a good grasp of its meaning.

Although you will still run into theological biases—impossible not to do—the dictionary of theology is an excellent tool for your initial excavation of the passage. Typically the words are explained, not the entire text, so you are still not having someone tell what your text means before you have opportunity to examine it.

3.2 God's holy wash cycle; Parts 3 & 4 Reflecting, Responding

Reflecting

Reflect means to think or consider seriously; meditate; ponder; to engage in contemplation; to consider thoughtfully.

We need to learn to sit in the presence of God and listen and think. Read the words of God and then just sit in silence before him. Let me say this. When I suggest reading, writing, reflecting and responding, I am only saying that this is an effective method, not the only approach. This four-pronged discipline will help open us up to the truth of God.

- (Lamentations 3:28 Msg) When life is heavy and hard to take, go off by yourself. **Enter the silence.**
- (Ecclesiastes 3:7) A time to tear, and a time to sew; **a time to keep silence**, and a time to speak.
- (Habakkuk 2:20) But the Lord is in his holy temple; **let all the earth keep silence before him.**

Sometimes the best thing to do is to sit quietly and think and listen. I love to sit in my study in the morning especially and turn off all the artificial lights and sit in the partial darkness with only the light of a new day coming through my window. And sit there with God. And pray. And listen. And quietly share the morning with God. This is such great preparation for the day because God has gotten my attention for even a little while.

But beware the thorns. Don't allow the pressures, worries and busyness of the day drag you from God's presence and choke the word.

- (Matthew 13:22 NIV) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

Reflection is not fluff. Call it meditation, spending time with God, quiet time, whatever. But I would encourage you to not downplay the role that

reflection has in your spiritual growth. Seeing God and eternity gives us the perspective we so desperately need for the day.

Responding

I wonder sometimes if this is where we most misunderstand God and his call to obedience. Being zealous is good but only as God directs us.

- (Proverbs 19:2 NCV) Enthusiasm without knowledge is not good. If you act too quickly, you might make a mistake.

God prepares us for good works as we are transformed by the renewal of our minds, renewal by learning and living his word of truth. Eagerness is good, but let's make sure that our eagerness does not cause us to miss the specific opportunities of service that God has planned for us.

- (Ephesians 2:10 NCV) God has made us what we are. In Christ Jesus, God made us to do good works, which God planned in advance for us to live our lives doing.

Learn obedience from the stories that God has given to us. So then, look at the lives of David, Solomon, Abraham, Lot, Ruth, Jacob and Rachel, Isaac and Rebecca, and on and on. Very, very imperfect people. And yet they were commended for their faith. David was a man after God's own heart, but God shows us the shocking truth of his life (as revealed in Scripture) for a purpose.

Respond to his word in spite of our failures. God calls us to respond to his word even though we fail and sin, sometimes terribly. Avoid the temptation to narrow the truth down to a set of rules and regulations which make us look and feel moral and righteous but no inside work is being done.

- (Matthew 23:25) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence.

The Pharisees in Jesus' time obeyed God in hand-picked details that made them look great in the public eye while missing the main point of God's teaching. Their pursuit of man-made morality diverted their attention away from true righteousness. Outwardly they sparkled, impressive pillars of the religious community. But inside ... rot and filth.

- (Matthew 23:27) Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness.

Pursue the righteousness of God, not the self-righteousness of the religious rebel. The path of God's righteousness is strewn with failure and the confession of sin because inside work is being done. Maybe not too impressive outside, but inside we are looking great.

We must understand the relationship between faith and failure. If we do not understand the relationship between faith and failure, weakness and strength, then we do not understand God's way of doing things. As we hold fast to our confession of Jesus the Son of God, our weaknesses will be exposed. But we continue boldly in our confession of faith in spite of our weaknesses because we now understand that we can boldly approach the throne of grace to obtain mercy and grace because of what Jesus has done, not because of what we have done or are doing.

- (Hebrews 4:14–16) Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. **For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,** but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. **Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace,** that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Besides when we are weak, then we are strong. **Got it?**

- (2 Corinthians 12:9–10) But he said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. **For when I am weak, then I am strong.**

Understand the “only” and “must” and “always” dynamic of faith and obedience. We can **only** respond to God's call of faith and obedience because of Jesus Christ, and we **must** respond to God's call of faith and obedience because of Jesus Christ. There is never a good reason to not live the words of God. The only thing in this process that will be damaged is our pride.

We have a High Priest who understands, who happens to be the same Person who paid our way. The shed blood of Jesus Christ is the **only** way we can take one more step of faith. And the reason why we can **always** take this step of faith. We move forward because of him, not us.

“I NEED NO OTHER ARGUMENT, I NEED NO OTHER PLEA,

IT IS ENOUGH THAT JESUS DIED AND THAT HE DIED FOR ME.”
(MY FAITH HAS FOUND A RESTING PLACE)

We can only properly respond to the words of God because of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the Cross. And respond we must.

ONLY RESPOND—BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS FINISHED WORK.

ALWAYS RESPOND—BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS FINISHED WORK.

MUST RESPOND—BECAUSE OF JESUS CHRIST AND HIS FINISHED WORK.

Our weaknesses will become glaring as we by faith respond to the word of God. In this process our self-righteousness will be destroyed and the Holy Spirit of God will produce his fruit in our lives.

People sometimes do not respond to the truth of God's word because their self-righteous attitude is protecting their weaknesses. And this is a shame. As long as we struggle to not be seen for who we are, we will never see who we are in Jesus Christ.

The obedient responder to the words of God keeps walking toward the light even though his weaknesses become more and more evident. **The obedient responder** has the boldness to approach the throne of grace and allows the High Priest to do his work because she trusts God to do all he has promised through Jesus Christ. **The obedient responder** knows 1 John 1:9.

- (1 John 1:9) If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

LESSON 4

EXAMINE ALL THINGS. SPIRITUAL APPROACH OR GOOD APPROACH

- (1 Corinthians 2:14–15) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

Overview

4.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible commentary.

4.2 A Spiritual Approach or a Good Approach to the Words of God.

4.3 Assumptions / Text / Conclusions.

4.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible commentary.

Bible commentaries can be very valuable tools if we use them wisely and choose them wisely. I have many commentaries in my library. We can look at commentaries in two very broad categories: quantity (size, number of pages, volumes, etc.) and quality (liberal, evangelical, fundamental, well-written, thorough, layout, etc.).

Let's take a minute and think about how and why we would use a Bible commentary. And maybe I should start with the basics and not assume everyone knows what a commentary is. Briefly put, a Bible commentary is composed of the thoughts, explanations and interpretations from a person's study which they have put in written form to be used as a resource to help others. So I may refer to a Bible commentary if I need help to understand a word or verse or passage in Scripture. Commentaries are extremely helpful, as long as they do not eliminate our own individual study. Remember our primary resource is the word of God.

Do I need to grow in my study skills? Some people do not seek more skill in Bible study because they do not believe they can do it. Some people do not develop their skills because they are lazy and indifferent. Some people do not develop these skills because they are deceived. They just don't see the need. Why not? Is the person prideful? Or maybe they just have yet

to discover the wonder of God's word? They don't pursue the treasure because they do not know the treasure is there.

Study Bibles

Study Bibles are Bibles with the commentary and notes already included for handy reference. Unfortunately sometimes people rely too heavily on the commentary and notes of certain study Bibles. And some fundamental groups have almost canonized the notes contained in certain study Bibles. I'm sorry but Mr. Scofield and Mr. Ryrie and others should not come between you and the words of God.

Let me suggest a few principles in choosing a commentary.

- Choose based on your need.
- Choose based on your finances.
- Choose based on the theological bias of the author.
- Choose based on the competency of the author.

Choose based on your need. When you are just beginning to build your library, you may want to purchase a two-volume set that covers the entire Bible. That way you have at least some help for every book in the Bible.

Possibly you are going to lead a study on a particular book of the Bible, or you have chosen a book to study on your own. You may want to buy one or more commentaries on just that book. I sometimes buy several commentaries on one book of the Bible as I prepare a series of messages, e.g. a series of messages from the book of Job.

You can also purchase large sets of commentaries covering every book in the Bible in individual volumes. Many books of the Bible such as Psalms may be presented in more than one volume. So you have many choices.

And, if you use your computer for study, then do not overlook the many resources you will find in digital formats.

Choose based on your finances. As with anything else the more money you have the more you can spend. But do you want to? Three questions you may want to consider. Do I need it? Will I use it? Would it please the Lord more if I used the money for something else? Don't fall in love with the tools. An important caution: If you buy too many resources at once, you will very likely buy things that will only end up on the shelf collecting dust. Learn what fits your style and method of study and what you will actually use

before making a purchase if at all possible. Before buying a set just buy one volume from the set and see if it suits you.

Choose based on the theological bias of the author. I am not saying only purchase or use commentaries of people with whom you agree. I am saying that if you are going to invest your money in these books that you want some common ground. Personally my main criterion is—Does the person believe the Bible is the word of God and is that evidenced in their writing? I may reference a liberal work, but I will not usually add it to my library. (The exception might be a free Kindle version of a book.) I also will not purchase books by people who are on the fringe. I will not give examples here because there is not enough room to deal with the subject. Basically I want to hear the person who values the word of God and who values the word of God over his or her own opinion and agenda.

Choose based on the competency of the author. The person writing the commentary may or may not be accurately handling the word of truth. Because it is on the printed page does not mean it is true. The better you become at understanding the Bible for yourself; the better you will be at discerning the truthfulness and help a commentary offers. I try to avoid authors who refuse to get down from their soapbox. Some people allow their theological or political agenda to drive their writing and in doing so they undermine their intellectual integrity.

Sometimes the person is not a competent writer. Maybe the person cannot write or hasn't taken the time to organize and refine. Maybe the person knows his subject but does not know how to present the material in a way that is understandable and usable. I do not want to have to read three paragraphs to learn what could have been stated in three sentences. The layout is extremely important. I do not want to waste time searching because of a poor layout. I want to be able to quickly and effectively find the necessary information.

My main test—Does it help me? Most of all I want a commentary that will actually help me when I do refer to it. My primary way of testing a commentary or a particular author is to choose a passage and see if he addresses the verse I need help on. Some commentaries seem to always, or almost always, have the verse I am interested in lumped in with a group of verses and never really addressed. So as you make your decision you may want to have two or three verses that have been of interest to you and see if your perspective author addresses those verses.

The good news. There are many excellent commentaries available, but before you invest your hard-earned dollars in a commentary, put it to the test. If you can, preview a commentary before purchasing. If I buy a commentary with my Bible software, I have thirty days to return the purchase and get my money back. This is extremely helpful.

4.2 A Spiritual approach or good approach to the words of God?

- (1 Corinthians 2:14–15) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

The Wind and the Word. From several choices—audible voice, angels, creation, conscience, visions, dreams, miracles, etc.—God chose the written word as his primary means of communicating with us. It seems to follow then that the spiritual person would want to focus on the words of God. However, we cannot find the sense of the words of God and live on the words of God apart from the Spirit of God. We need to understand the Spirit's intended role. The intent of the teaching of the Spirit of God is to direct us to words to live by, not just intellectual exercise or mystical speculations to entertain us or feed our pride.

—THINGS WE MUST KNOW.—

As with anything else in our pursuit of God we need to develop our understanding of the relationship between our spirituality and the words of God.

We must know that our natural goodness is not enough. The good efforts of a good man or a good woman are not enough. The moral efforts of a moral man or a moral woman are not enough. When I approach the words of God I must identify my “natural” tendencies toward what is right and good as insufficient in the eyes of God, falling short of God's glory. Much of what we believe to be God's truth is merely man's morality and good intentions dressed up in their Sunday best.

The natural man.

- (1 Corinthians 2:14) The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The person described here is the good man, possible a very religious person, the excellent neighbor, the wonderful co-worker. This person is fallen but exhibits the best of the image of God. This person may attend a Bible study and speak highly of the Bible and find many good principles to live by, but he cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God.

The natural man is about now, the present. The natural man is limited in his goodness to only what may help him in his present life on earth. If being religious helps him to have a better life now, then fine, but he is not capable of living in view of eternity. This good person cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God because they are foolishness to him because they are beyond his faithless horizon.

We must know that we have to look beyond ourselves. We must know that nothing can be left up to us and our natural tendencies. To hear what God has to say we have to be willing to look beyond ourselves. Everything in our lives, every teaching, every principle, must be examined in the light of God's word. We must allow the Spirit of God and the word of God to have full access to our lives.

The spiritual man.

- (1 Corinthians 2:15) The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

The person spoken of here “judges” all things. This word means to scrutinize, investigate, interrogate, ask, question, discern, examine, judge, search. This person examines everything, even his own assumptions and conclusions, based on the words of God as directed by the Holy Spirit of God. This person is willing to “leave no stone unturned” in her search for truth. See this illustrated at the end of this chapter—Assumptions/Biblical Text/Conclusions.

We must know what condition our condition is in—Am I natural man or am I spiritual man?

Diagnostics.

Do I receive truth from the Spirit of God that is past my view of goodness or righteousness? Am I willing to receive truth that is beyond my moral and religious horizon? Am I willing to believe God for righteousness that exceeds the religious experts of my day?

Jesus' paradigm shift.

Jesus gave us teaching just like this; teaching that went beyond contemporary standards. He taught the people of his day that they needed to pursue righteousness beyond the horizons of their religious leaders.

- (Matthew 5:20) For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

With his teaching he attempted to shift their perspective and raise their sights to heaven and the way the heavenly Father approached righteousness. Jesus exhorted them to look beyond the example that was given to them by the religious leaders. Jesus continued on in Matthew 5 stating several times: “You have heard ... but I say to you.” They needed to shift their thinking from a human perspective to a godly perspective. Here are some specifics that Jesus gave them.

- (Matthew 5:43–45) You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

—THAT YOU MAY BE SONS OF YOUR FATHER IN HEAVEN!—

The spiritual person lets God take him beyond himself with the words of God. The spirit-led person lives differently than she did before. Bless not curse, good for hate, pray instead of spite and payback, sunshine and rain, like our Father in heaven.

We must know that merely a good approach to Scripture is not nearly good enough. We must examine everything through the words of God and be willing to receive whatever truth the Wind (Spirit) of God would teach us as a result of our inquiries.

4.3 Assumptions / Biblical Text / Conclusions

We all live with certain assumptions, things that we acknowledge as true without necessarily having proof. This is normal, status quo, part of being human, how we are, etc. We live with assumptions and presuppositions. The person who desires to draw nearer to God will submit his "truth" to God's truth (the Bible) for correction and instruction.

In that process, conclusions will be formed that are closer to the truth of God. We will be transformed by the renewing of our minds. While "in

process" we need to remember that we are still very imperfect. So while on this earth, we should be in a continuous cycle of "running" our beliefs through the grid of Scripture for correction and instruction, a cycle that will renew our minds and transform our lives.

- This is the process into which we must submit to and enter into if we are to honor God and his word.

WASH CYCLE!

ENTER HERE!

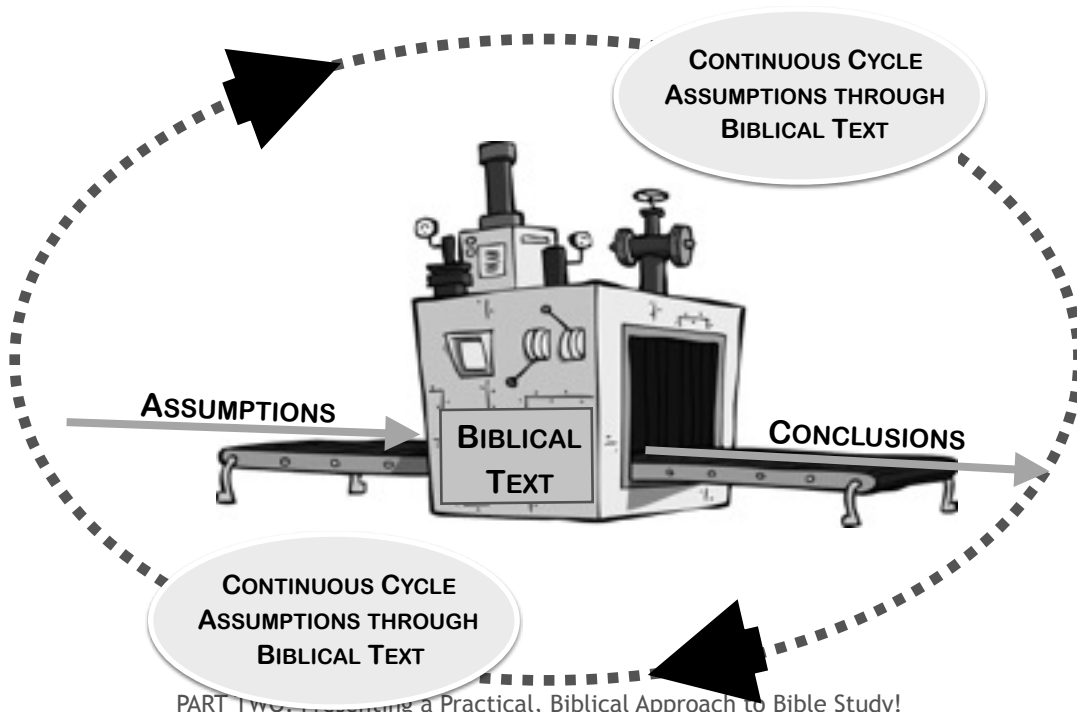
Our Assumptions
—Must Be Renewed—



Our Conclusions
—Must Be Renewed—

Biblical Text
—Stays Constant—

- Transformed by the renewal of our minds ...



LESSON 5

HELPERS AND BARRIERS

- (John 5:39-40 BBE) You make search in the holy Writings, in the belief that through them you get eternal life; and it is those Writings which give witness about me. And still you have no desire to come to me so that you may have life.

Overview

5.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible encyclopedia.

5.2 Study helpers.

5.3 Barriers to effective study.

5.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible encyclopedia.

A one or two-volume Bible encyclopedia is helpful as a general information source. This “tool” is especially helpful for someone who has just become a Christian but it also can prove to be a very useful for anyone. Maybe you are reading and would like to know what Urim and Thummim are, or would like more information on a biblical character such as Ruth or David. Grab your handy Bible encyclopedia and you have this information alphabetically arranged and at your disposal.

The preface to the Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible contains this helpful information:

How can concepts drawn from ancient civilizations, written in obsolete languages, in the context of cultures long dead, be made vibrant and understandable for today's world? This Bible encyclopedia is an attempt to solve that problem. It is designed to be a bridge between the past and the present, a mine, a source of information about those days long past that opens them up to us (Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, Walter Elwell, Editor, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988, p. v).

Also helpful is a list, from the same encyclopedia, of a dozen items that the editors felt were needed to help make the Bible understandable for today. I have summarized their points.

- Mini-commentaries of each book.
- Theological content of the Bible.
- General life and times of the biblical world.
- Information concerning nations surrounding Israel.
- Persons in the Bible.
- Extensive historical entries.
- Religious practices and groups.
- The Bible as a document.
- Selective current scholarly opinion.
- The social customs of Bible times.
- Geographical information.
- Archaeology.

One bit of advice. You probably want to purchase a Bible encyclopedia which is written from a conservative viewpoint. Although encyclopedias from a liberal perspective may have some value, most of us have decided the issues under dispute and do not have the time to wade through information that has its roots in a viewpoint very contradictory to our own.

5.2 Study Helpers

What I would like to do now is introduce you to what I call “study helpers.” Words, phrases and expressions that can help us explore passages in each aspect of our inductive study. These expressions are probably most valuable in the observation stage, but since we are to continually investigate and inquire, we will find them helpful also as we interpret and apply.

What these expressions do is help us to probe without locking ourselves into preconceived ideas. This is not brainstorming or “coming up with ideas.” This is a method to help us get our initial thoughts down before further review. Write down what seems to be true for later investigation as to whether it is true or not.

For instance we may read 1 Corinthians 11:14 ...

- (1 Corinthians 11:14) Does not nature itself teach you that if a **man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him.**

But as we think this through our mind also goes to Numbers 6:5 ...

- (Numbers 6:5) All the days of his vow of separation, no razor shall touch his head. Until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy. **He shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long.**

So in writing down our initial thoughts on the text, we may say something like “*it seems that* these two Bible texts conflict with each other.” And we may ask more questions, such as, “*It seems that if* we dogmatically assert that it is inherently wrong (nature teaches) for a man to have long hair, then how do we reconcile this text with the God-given instruction for the Nazarite vow in the Numbers 6:5 text for the man to grow his hair long?”

These are preliminary observations and preliminary observations need to be identified and treated as such. Don't jump to conclusions. Write down our initial impressions and document them for further study.

A List of Possible Study Helpers:

- “This seems to say ...”
- “Could this mean ...?”
- “What if ...”
- “What about ...”
- “Is this a command?”
- “Does this show a contrast?”
- “Is this a comparison?”

Study Helpers: usage and usefulness.

We use these words and expressions (and whatever other ones you might come up with) to instigate our thinking and to free up our writing so we do not become locked into drawing premature conclusions. Don't stop and figure it all out at this moment. Write it down. This will help the Holy Spirit direct our minds to what a passage of Scripture actually says. Remember—we read, we write, we reflect and we respond. These expressions can help us in all the stages of our pursuit to find God's intended meaning.

When we approach Scripture with this openness to learn, we will be much more confident in our discovery process of the truth of God's word as he is the one leading and teaching. Trusting in the words of God more than our system of theology is a very liberating experience, liberating as in “the truth shall make you free.”

—LEARN FROM THE MISTAKES OF OTHERS; YOU DON'T HAVE TIME TO MAKE THEM ALL.—

5.3 Barriers to effective study.

I do not have these necessarily listed in any order of importance; just some helpful observations that I have collected over the years.

- **Our opinion.**

More on this in later but if I had intentionally listed these “barriers” in order of importance, I would very likely have started here.

- (Proverbs 18:2) A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.
- (Proverbs 18:2 NCV) Fools do not want to understand anything. They only want to tell others what they think.
- **Wanting to impress.**
 - (Proverbs 25:27 NKJV) It is not good to eat much honey; so to seek one's own glory is not glory.
 - (John 7:18 NCV) Those who teach their own ideas are trying to get honor for themselves. But those who try to bring honor to the one who sent them speak the truth, and there is nothing false in them.
- **Wanting to justify/looking for a loophole.**
 - (Luke 10:25–29 NLT) One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: “Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?” The man answered, “‘You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “Right!” Jesus told him. “Do this and you will live!” The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

Please follow the sequence: The man asked a question. Jesus directed him to the written word. Jesus directed him to clarify his understanding of what was written. The man understood the meaning of the words. Jesus directed him to do this. But the man wanted to justify himself so he asked another question. More study?

- **Thinking we can't.**

- (John 8:31–32 NCV) So Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, “If you continue to obey my teaching, you are truly my followers. **Then you will know the truth**, and the truth will make you free.”

We can understand everything God wants us to understand if our heart attitude is right before God.

- **Familiarity with a passage.**

“Oh, I know what this passage is about ... click.” Too often we think we already know a passage inside and out and this blocks us from seeing what God is actually saying. This is one of the drawbacks to using highlighters and using the same Bible all the time. Your eyes will always be drawn to the same highlighted sections, and you will mentally check that off the list as something you already know.

- **Undue urgency to have the answer.**

Thinking that we have to have the answer in a prescribed period of time, e.g. during a Bible study and our pride is on the line to come up with an answer. Hint: Use the “WD-40” approach. For those of you not familiar with WD-40, it is a lubricant developed to break loose rusty bolts. Sometimes a bolt is rusted on, and you have to spray it with this penetrating oil and come back later because if you force the issue you will damage the bolt. Sometimes we have to let a passage soak. Give it some time. Come back later so we don't “damage” the passage by forcing the issue.

- **Searching for the hidden meaning.**

I remember a man in our first church talking to me about searching the Bible for the hidden meanings. Some people take the saying that “God moves in mysterious ways” as a hermeneutical principle for their study. And I have to say that I have seen over the years some very mysterious things in what some have come up with. A man approached me once and declared that he knew why we had earthquakes. I thought he was telling me a joke and was waiting for the punchline when I realized that he was serious. So in case you have not been informed, the reason we have earthquakes is that the devil is making hell bigger.

God's ways and thoughts are certainly above our ways and thoughts as the heavens are above the earth, but he gave us his written word with the



purpose that we would understand it and live it. We search for God's clear, plain, intended meaning, not hidden meanings.

- **Proving our point.**

Some people only study the Bible to prove a point, or better yet in their view, to prove someone else wrong. Sorry, but this is missing the point. We are the ones who first need to hear the words of God to renew and transform our lives. Even the text we so often use for apologetics states "give an answer to everyone who asks."

- (1 Peter 3:15) But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

In fact, the paragraph preceding the above text which sets the tone and the context deals with our attitude toward others and our tongue.

- (1 Peter 3:9–10) Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For "Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit."

If we study the Bible only to prove a point, we have fallen into a trap, and we will become too emotionally invested in our cause to accept any truth that may contradict our hoped for result.

- **Jumping to conclusions.**

Covered at the end of Lesson One. Interpreting before we really know what is going on.

- **Not living by truth we do learn.**

Possibly the worst because here we are up to our ears in deceit. We must understand the dynamic nature of knowing truth. If we do not live the truth, do the truth, we will deceive ourselves.

- (James 1:22 BBE) But be doers of the word, and not only hearers of it, blinding yourselves with false ideas.
- (James 1:22 NIV84) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

LESSON 6

CAPTIVE TO CHRIST OR FREE TO OUR OPINION

- (2 Corinthians 10:4-5 NCV) We fight with weapons that are different from those the world uses. Our weapons have power from God that can destroy the enemy's strong places. We destroy people's arguments and every proud thing that raises itself against the knowledge of God. We capture every thought and make it give up and obey Christ.

Overview

6.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible software.

6.2 Captive to Christ or free to our opinion.

6.1 Highlighted Resource: Bible software.

Okay. I admit it. Maybe, possibly, I will overuse the word amazing here but maybe not. The things that a good Bible software app allows us to do are pretty amazing. The following will be an overview addressing function, cost, and need. I am giving you a bare-bones explanation, but I think it is enough to acquaint you with this tool if you are not already familiar with it.

Function: What it does.

- Find and display.

Most, if not all, programs allow you to find information in two general ways: Search by word, combination of words or phrase. Search by book, chapter and verse. If you are looking for a verse and can only remember a word or two, or a phrase, simply enter your information in the appropriate place and the program will find and display the references matching your criteria. Or if you already know chapter and verse, you can find your text by entering the information in a dialog box or sometimes by a tree structure.

So now what do you do?

- Examine and compare.

You have your text displayed but maybe you would like to compare it with similar texts. Or maybe you would like to see the same verse in two or

more translations for comparison. You can do this, usually in a matter of seconds. You can display your verse and cross-references. You can display your verse in multiple translations. You can display commentary on the verse in another window ... root words ... word meanings, etc.

- Collect and organize.

Very easy to bring things together in a usable form. Now you can organize and collect this information to use in lesson preparation, personal study, Scripture memory, inspirational poster. All you have to do is copy the material you want and paste it into your word processor or other app. Some programs have this functionality built in. Now you can print it; add it to notes; whatever you choose. Very nice also just to print out a passage to carry with you and reference it throughout the day.

If you are using an iOS or Android mobile device, you have a variety of note-taking apps and organizational apps available, many free, others very inexpensive. The advantage here is not only availability and access but also safe storage. Most, if not all, of these apps store your information in the cloud. This means that you have an automatic backup of your data.

It is also becoming very common to have an accompanying mobile app for your desktop Bible software. My main Bible study app has accompanying apps for iOS and for Android devices. All sync if so desired.

- Access outside sources.

What I mean is that many apps now integrate everything. Search all of your resources within the same app if you choose. Or narrow the search to only certain resources: commentaries, encyclopedias, dictionaries, Bible atlases, word studies.

Many web sites perform the exact functions that I have just outlined so if you have internet access you have abundant resources available to you.

Cost: How much do I have to pay?

You can spend nothing or potentially spend hundreds/thousands of dollars depending on your study needs. There are heavy duty study and research tools and also many excellent free resources and cheap resources.

Need: Will I use it?

If you use a computer, and if you study your Bible, then, yes, you will probably use it. Don't make it too hard and increase your learning curve by

trying to do too much. Do you really need software capable of parsing Greek participles. Maybe not.

I currently use Logos Bible Software. And, yes, I do have hundreds invested, but I am a pastor. This is my go-to resource. But for many people this is not necessary. See the comments on e-Sword below. Logos has accompanying apps for Android and iOS. All very good functionality and syncing. The mobile apps are free.

Tecarta Bible app for iOS and Android.

Speaking of mobile apps, I will bring our attention to another app—the Tecarta Bible app. Five stars. Lean and mean. This is my go-to mobile app which I use predominantly on my phone and tablet for reading, finding verses and phrases. Fast, simple and powerful. Available for free on Android and iOS with in-app purchases for Bible versions. Well worth it.

And one more suggestion in the mobile department. I use the YouVersion Bible app for my read-through-the-Bible app. Excellent. YouVersion is free and is available for Android and iOS. Also you can access YouVersion online, and if you open a free account, everything syncs.

e-Sword Bible app for Windows, Mac, iOS.

This has been a powerful, free app on Windows for years and is also available now for the Mac. It installs and functions flawlessly. The desktop apps (Windows and Mac) are free, but the author Rick Meyer does accept donations to help him with his ministry. It is easy to use and very intuitive. Meyer has also built e-Sword for iOS. The mobile apps are not free. You need to purchase them separately on the App Store. Both are good, but the desktop app (Windows especially) is what is outstanding.

6.2 Captive to Christ or free to my opinion.

Captive to Christ.

Read God's word and listen, and he will eventually peel off enough layers of our preconceptions and misconceptions that there will be moments when we will be flabbergasted and have "Wow" moments. My eye-opener in this case is found in 2 Corinthians 10:5.

Please note that I am relating my experience; I am not saying everyone shares this same experience but probably many people do. Here it is. I had always (and only) heard this verse used to help someone trying to overcome temptation or break a bad habit.

- (2 Corinthians 10:5 NIV84) We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

In my mind it read **“take every [bad] thought to make it obedient to Christ”** because that is what I had always heard. If that temptation came, you would bring that bad, sinful thought in obedience to Christ. I have had others concur that they had heard this text used in the exact same way, **focusing on the “bad thoughts”** that came via temptation.

Our text again ...

- (2 Corinthians 10:5) We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and **take every thought captive to obey Christ.**

Not just the bad thoughts but every thought. Wham! We are to take captive every thought, not just the perceived bad ones. And not just the thoughts of other people, which is another way that I have seen this text used, that these verses are to be applied to other people, competing religions and philosophies for instance. But I realized that every thought needs to be brought before Christ for his approval. Beginning with my thoughts. We assume too much if we are selective at this point because we assume that we are capable of making the distinctions necessary to make an accurate assessment. However, we must submit every thought or we overstep our bounds.

Will the use of these spiritual weapons take down competing religions and philosophies? Yes. But first we have to make sure that we are “on board” with God’s truth before we look to dismantle the competition.

- (2 Corinthians 10:6 AMP) Being in readiness to punish every [insubordinate for his] disobedience, when your own submission and obedience [as a church] are fully secured and complete.
- (2 Corinthians 10:6) Being ready to punish every disobedience, when your obedience is complete.

Do we see what this is saying? We will be ready after we have put ourselves under the same scrutiny, after we first have brought our thoughts in submission to Jesus Christ through Scripture.

Bringing down strongholds.

This is how we bring down the strongholds and arguments against the cause of Christ because everything we put on display has been brought under the scrutiny of our Lord first. We get our stuff together first and then we are ready to battle.

Every thought. So we march our ideology and theology and doctrine before Christ. We drag our sacred cows before his throne. And we only march off to battle with what is left, whatever gives up and obeys Christ. The favorite interpretation of my favorite verse must be brought before the King of glory. And that soap box I have been standing on all these years? Doesn't have a chance.

Every thought we capture and make it give up and obey Christ. Before the throne of Jesus what before "seemed right" maybe now not so much. So in our spiritual battle as we pursue the truth of the words of God, let's not forget where to begin. In my heart am I willing to bring my every thought before Christ?

Building and purifying our database.

Bringing every thought captive to Christ is a purifying and refining process in our lives. As we obey our Lord in this, he filters out the contaminants that have accumulated in our theology and that were rooted in our theology via our fallen nature, our human frailty, our culture, our sub-culture, etc. until only the truth is left.

If after this filtering process, we see that the truth in our hands gives up and obeys Christ, then we allow it to become part of our database for Christian living and theology.

Free to my opinion: the fool's delight.

- (Proverbs 18:2) A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.
- (Proverbs 18:2 NCV) Fools do not want to understand anything. They only want to tell others what they think.

What is an opinion? Proverbs 18:2 connects opinion with the understanding of the fool. I once heard a professor of philosophy say, "The opinion is the lowest living life-form on Planet Earth." An opinion is only what a person thinks to be true, their thought or idea. Often held with confidence and just as often with no direct connection to any proof or knowledge. Just what a person decides or believes. No evidence necessary.

So when I hear statements such as “I have every right to my opinion” and “I have every right to voice my opinion,” I suppose I would concede a certain degree of truthfulness. God certainly allows you to make that choice. But it does seem to me that many people wrongly hold their ability to possess and express their opinion as proof of their personhood or their individuality and their significance.

And that is a shame because that is not where we actually find our individuality and significance, is it? No, we find our true selves only as we are bowed before the throne of God. And we will bow; it is merely a question of now or later. Personally, I would rather submit my “opinions” to Christ now for his “yay” or “nay” as opposed to standing in defiance of Christ until my knee is bent and my tongue confesses his lordship in a setting of judgment.

The fool tries to find significance in his defiance; the wise person finds significance as the creature bowed before the Creator. It certainly puzzles me why so many professing Christians hold such high regard for their own opinion. And how they can have any confidence in truth that they refuse to take captive and make it give up and obey Christ.

Practical application.

So when I am reading and studying and discover a “new” truth, before I become too emotionally attached, I need to bring it before Jesus Christ. Everything needs to be brought before Jesus Christ. Even what I learned in church growing up. Bring it all before Christ. This will give us a quiet confidence in our understanding of the word of truth. This will also create the necessary humility to receive and hear the word of truth.

Every thought before Christ.

LESSON 7

BIBLICALLY WRAPPED OR BIBLICALLY TRUE

- (2 Peter 1:20 NASB95) But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation.

Overview

7.1 Highlighted Resource: Exhaustive concordance.

7.2 Cross-references.

7.3 Biblically wrapped or biblically true?

7.1 Highlighted Resource: Exhaustive concordance. (An extremely valuable tool but comes with a disclaimer.)

Disclaimer. With the increased use of the computer, smart phones and tablets, the exhaustive concordance is becoming a little bit of a dinosaur. Still very important but what would take possible hours with an exhaustive concordance in book form can often be done in minutes with the current technology so prevalent.

But I will still say that an exhaustive concordance is an extremely valuable tool for Bible study. An exhaustive concordance contains every reference to every word in the Bible, even though some "exhaustive" concordances are not technically exhaustive as they do not index every word, such as, the most common articles, prepositions, pronouns, etc.-- words like a, an, are, he, then and the like.

Uses of the concordance.

- Finding words, word counts.
- Finding that elusive verse.
- Finding related verses (cross-references).
- Finding root meanings of words.
- Finding the various ways the word is translated.

With a concordance you can find any word in the Bible, the verses where it is found and even some information as to its Hebrew or Greek roots and meanings. And you can do this with no training in the foreign languages.

There are many benefits to using a concordance, but there is also one major caution to which I would like to bring our attention. A concordance allows you to often find many verses which seem to be related. The person who is studying the Bible to try to prove a point can easily be overcome by the temptation to use verses that may or may not support his thesis; to use the sheer volume of verses to overwhelm the recipients of their teaching. We have all seen it. More time spent listing and reading cross-references than actually finding what the verses say. We will have more to say about that in a moment but first let's look at what a cross-reference is.

Cross-references.

A cross-reference is a verse which is related to or connected to another verse by comparison or contrast and which increases our insight by studying both passages together. Please note that this can be a very subjective process, so we proceed with caution and discernment.

Cross-references can be associated by a word or by a concept. With the concordance we can find the same word in many verses. These are not necessarily cross-references however. To be a valid cross-reference the verses must in some way present a common connection, a shared meaning or concept. Also a verse does not have to have the exact same word to be a cross-reference. Sometimes the concept is expressed with completely different words. But probably most cross-references will have direct word associations.

Some examples of cross-references.

- ***Love and sin.***
 - (Proverbs 10:12) Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses.
 - (Proverbs 28:13) Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.
 - (1 Peter 4:8) Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.
- ***Beauty.***

- (1 Peter 3:3–4) Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.
- (1 Timothy 2:9–10) Likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.
- (Ezekiel 16:11–13,15) And I adorned you with ornaments and put bracelets on your wrists and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose and earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk and embroidered cloth. You ate fine flour and honey and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his.
- ***The ways of God.***
 - (Isaiah 55:8–9) For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
 - (Job 21:14) They say to God, ‘Depart from us! We do not desire the knowledge of your ways.

7.3 Biblically wrapped or biblically true?

Biblically wrapped

Sometimes a message is preached that sounds very biblical, not because it is actually true or biblical, but because of the way it is presented, the context in which it is presented and the way it is “wrapped” with emotion or “hot button” information, appealing usually to beliefs and desires of the target audience, i.e. what we already know or think we know and what we want to believe.

An example of a message “wrapped” in emotion.

I gave an example of this in the first part of this study concerning a message preached from Psalm 11:3: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

Usually this is a call to the faithful to stand up and fight for our country, and fight for prayer in our schools, fight to have the ten commandments publicly displayed and, generally speaking, fight to save America from crumbling further into a moral abyss.

The message carries a fearful tone impelling us to run and do something for our country to fight off this grave threat. The problem is, and it is a formidable problem at that, is that Psalm 11 teaches nothing of the sort. I heard this type message so many times that I finally went to the text and studied the entire psalm. In this psalm David ignored the doomsayers’ message of fear. His response was to seek God in worship, to come before God in his holy temple. The tone and tenor of his reply are so different than the “wrapped” message of fear and rush to judgment.

- (Psalm 11:4) The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven; his eyes see, his eyelids test the children of man.

A common tactic used in "wrapping" a message: Proving by numbers.

A common way to manipulate an audience is simply to overwhelm with sheer volume, presenting a multitude of biblical references and/or anecdotal evidence in a dramatic way that seems to bolster whatever claim is being made at the time. So the person announces a text, often makes an emotional declaration, and then proceeds to reference verse after verse after verse to substantiate his or her claim.

—MAKING A “MOLE HILL” INTO A MOUNTAIN.—

Let’s just say that this tactic seems to be attempting to be make a “mole hill” of an idea into a “mountain” of truth. Here is what we must understand. Several verses that seem to support our conclusion mean nothing. Until we take every verse, every phrase, every thought captive and bring it to obedience before Christ, then we do not have credible truth. Shame on us for so poorly “handling the word of truth.”

- (2 Timothy 2:15 NASB95) Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.

Cross-references can be great, but we still have to allow Scripture to speak for itself, and we always, always, have to ask—What does it say?

Another proven method in manipulation: You can't say “no” to me.

People sometimes use the emotional tack of an overpowering personality. The person is so charismatic or so threatening that you just cannot say no because if you do there will be a price to pay. And you know it. You will be rejected if you say no. You will become the enemy. Mix this with an emotional theme, something that you already want to believe and a long list of cross-references from the front of the Bible to the back, and you are very vulnerable unless you are firmly grounded in the word of truth.

—NEVER GIVE IN TO MANIPULATION OF ANY KIND.—

Manipulation is sin. The person who manipulates is never serving God's righteous purpose. Always say no to this person. Never feel guilty saying no to this person. To me this is always a danger sign if someone is trying to exert his will over me, even if he is well-intended, and many are. But they are still wrong. The truth of God's words has to be our ultimate goal; the truly spiritual leader will do everything in his or her power to allow me to see and make a decision for truth, personalities aside.

A New Testament cross-reference “saves Lot's bacon.”

Sometimes a message is so heavily wrapped in what we already believe to be true that we do not need an emotional hot-button pushed, and neither do we need a charismatic personality or an abundance of cross-references to drive the point home. The point has already been driven home many messages ago; we just need to ride along in the familiar.

Enter Lot, stage left, well-known reprobate in the Old Testament. He played the bad boy nephew to Abraham's good uncle. He took the low road; Abraham took the high road. Lot went left; Abraham went right. One man said, as many have and will continue to say, that Lot had lost “all sense of moral value.”

And here is where they say it all began.

- (Genesis 13:12 KJV) Abram dwelled in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelled in the cities of the plain, and pitched his tent toward Sodom.

How many messages have you heard from Genesis 13:10 which reveal how Lot turned his eyes to sin and away from God, how he wasn't separated from the world, how he compromised his faith, yada, yada, yada. When the preacher announces his text and mentions Lot, we already know where he is going. Usually we hear some cautionary tale warning us to not make a fateful decision as Lot did and ruining our lives.

—THIS HAS SLIPPERY SLOPE WRITTEN ALL OVER IT.—

I have to admit that things look pretty bad for Lot in the Genesis account. Part of the real problem with Lot is that his story raises more questions than answers, and we don't like that. So we wrap it up and make it presentable; being true to the text gets lost somewhere in the shuffle. We have preached this story and preached it again and again and said more than what God said. As a result we miss the mark.

But I would not have known this had I not read the Bible through on my own. One day as I was reading I came upon a very interesting text, a text in which I heard God's account of the life of Lot.

- (2 Peter 2:7-8) And if he rescued **righteous Lot**, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as **that righteous man** lived among them day after day, he was tormenting **his righteous soul** over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard).

“Cut. Who put that in the script?” Righteous Lot? Righteous man? Righteous soul? Huh! What? Wait a minute! Somebody's trying to pull a fast one.

No, it isn't in our “script” for Lot, but it is in God's Scripture. God's account. For all of our messages on bad boy Lot's bad decisions and waywardness, this is what counts. What does God say about Lot? Righteous Lot ... righteous man ... righteous soul.

—THE WRAPPING IS NOW OFF AND THE TRUTH CAN BE SEEN.—

How did “we” get so far off? Isn't the 2 Peter 2:7-8 text pretty clear? No interpretive problems. Very straightforward. So how did “we” miss it by so much? We listened to each other instead of reading and listening to the text.

In summary: A message is not true because someone has connected one or a hundred verses to it. We find the truth only when we are not satisfied with a surface examination. A surface examination yields only superficial results. Only when we allow the words to speak to us, penetrate our hearts and change us do we please God in our pursuit of his truth.

An Illustration: Long nails are needed for the job.

When I put new siding on my house many years ago, I found that I had to use 3 1/2 inch nails to penetrate all the layers so the siding would be secure. No way did I ever think that they would have to be that long. But if I had not used the long nails that went deep enough into the underlayers of

the house, then my siding would never have withstood the storms that inevitably would come.

Using a larger number of short nails would not have done the job, just like using many cross-references that only go surface deep will not do the job. For a while my siding job would have looked good. I could have invited family, friends and neighbors to come over and admire how nice it looked, but it would not have stood the test.



LESSON 8

BREAKING IT DOWN

- (Acts 17:11) Now these Jews [the Bereans] were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

Overview

8.1 Highlighted Resource: Resources for diagramming and mind-mapping.

8.2 Diagramming.

8.3 Parallelism.

8.4 Examples, principles & practice.

8.1 Highlighted Resource: Resources for diagramming and mind-mapping.

Diagramming (or mind-mapping) our Scripture texts is an easy to overlook technique in Bible study methods. Breaking down sentences in various ways may not at first seem very spiritual, but even a basic layout can be effective and profitable to your study. As an English dictionary helps in giving us the correct meanings of words, a method to understand the structure of the sentences and the relationship of its phrases is also valuable. Picking up even a few simple ways to break down the structure of a phrase, sentence or verse, benefits our study. Let me acquaint you with the process, and I think you will see the potential rewards.

In the past I have recommended various books and other resources. What I believe will be more helpful (and will not be so quickly out-dated) is to give you direction in performing your own search for resources. An online search for books on sentence diagramming will provide many good choices. Remember that we are talking basics here; an approach that allows you to see the section of Scripture in a more revealing way as you see the relationships between the words and the phrases. I would also recommend an online search for mind-mapping software. I use a Mac and have found several free or inexpensive apps that are very helpful. As with all things involving your online purchase, read the reviews. If the resource is free, then download and try.

8.2 Diagramming

Keep it simple. You can find many resources per the recommendations above but there is not need to overload the truck. Just find some things that give you basic ideas. I will give examples a little later in the book.

The diagram below breaks the sentence into parts—subject, verb, direct object. Illustrating the verse in this way also yields several insights and observations as we compare parts to parts. For instance, look at the parallel illustrated with the subjects. We will learn later in parallelism that this is antithetical parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.

An example of diagramming a Scripture verse loosely borrowing from Reed-Kellogg. A possible diagram of Proverbs 11:13.

- (Proverbs 11:13 NIV84) A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.



A few observations and initial deductions.

- A gossip is contrasted with a trustworthy man.
- A gossip betrays.
- A trustworthy person keeps (does not betray).
- Gossip is betrayal.
- A gossip is untrustworthy.
- Who do I not want to tell my secret to?

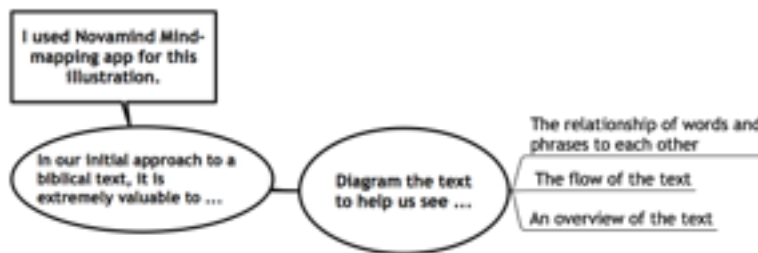
Can you see the benefit of learning to identify and organize this information? Look at what we are able to observe in just a very brief time. In the writing stage of our process we might diagram this sentence on a blank piece of paper and just start writing down our thoughts as they come. Then stop and think about it and possibly write some more.

Remember during our initial observations we want to guard against these three tendencies: (1) Being too fearful to express our thoughts freely. (2) Locking ourselves into a premature interpretation. (Jumping to conclusions.) (3) Laziness.

We must always let the text speak to us. This is one very effective way to help that process. Now let's look at an informal and extremely useful method of diagramming.

Other examples of diagramming or mind-mapping.

I find it valuable in my initial approach to a verse (or verses) to use some form of diagramming or mind-mapping to help me see the relationship of the words and phrases to each other, the flow of the verse and an overview. No rules here. The well-worn phrase “if it works for you” certainly applies.



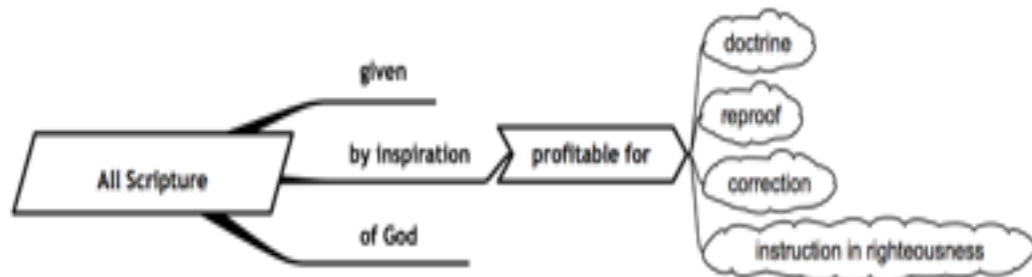
Becoming familiar with the rules of grammar and understanding the structure of a sentence will help you even with your informal methods of diagramming because you will learn to identify apples with apples, oranges with oranges. For instance in the first example I gave, you can clearly identify the subjects—gossip, trustworthy man; the verbs—betrays, keeps; and the direct objects—confidence, secret.

For some this is very easy to do, for others this may seem a daunting task. Push through the initial discomfort, and you will be rewarded.

Let's move on to some examples.

Mind Map of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 with observations.

- (2 Timothy 3:16–17 NKJV) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.



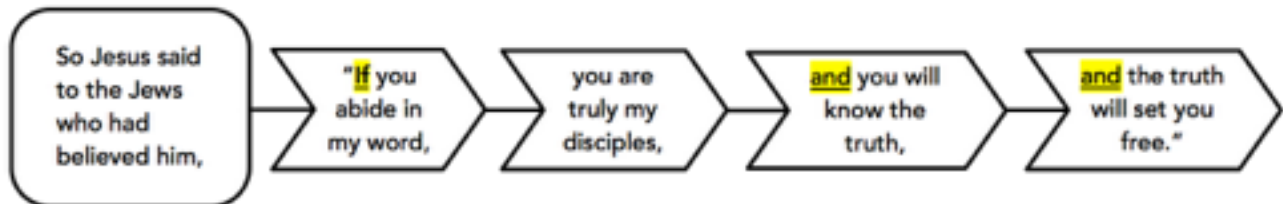


Initial observations and questions ...

- All Scripture inspired.
- Scripture—given by God.
- Profitable for four things in this text.
- What does “complete” mean?
- Thoroughly equipped. What does that mean?
- Equipped for every good work. Again what does this mean?

Mind Map of John 8:31-32 with observations.

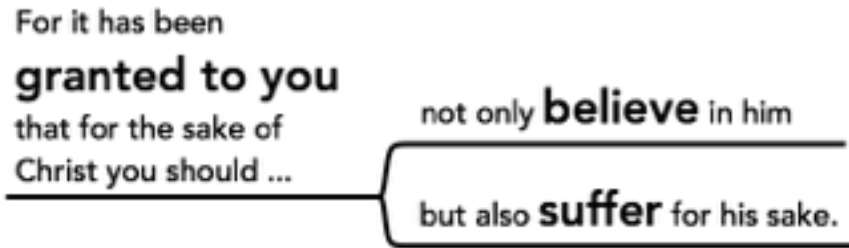
- (John 8:31–32) So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”



We hear “the truth shall make you free” quoted liberally, but look what some basic “detective” work reveals. Who is actually set free by the truth? Those who know the truth. Who knows the truth? Those who are his disciples. Who are his disciples? Those who abide in his word.

Mind Map of Philippians 1:29 with observations.

- (Philippians 1:29) For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake.

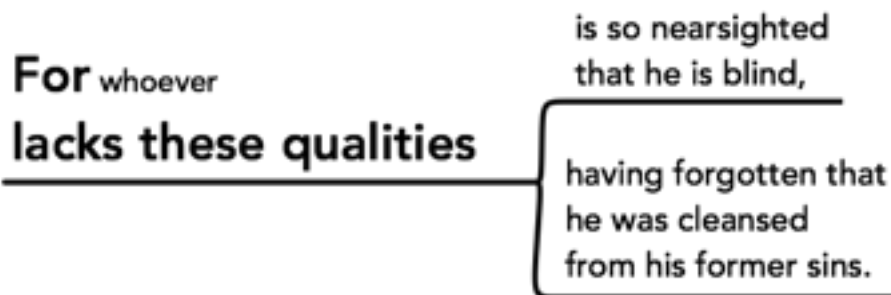
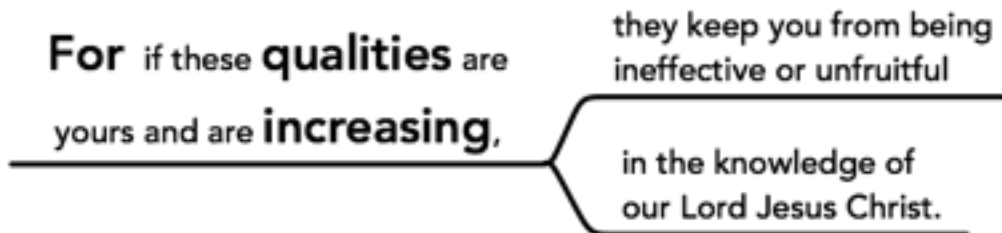


Granted to us not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer for his sake. This is part of our salvation and calling. This cut across the grain of our thinking. Suffering never seems to be a good thing. However God is pointing us to suffering in just that way, so we need to sit up and take notice.

These notes are just an example of what I would do in studying through this text. Write my thoughts down for further investigation. Even in basic forms diagramming and mind mapping will stir and thinking.

Mind Map of 2 Peter 1:8-9 with observations.

- (2 Peter 1:8-9) For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins.

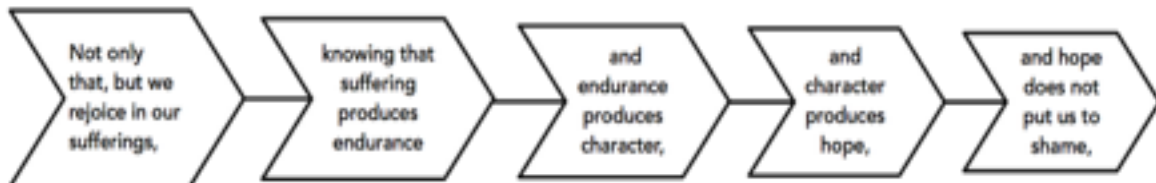


- (2 Peter 1:9 NIV) But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

The key here seems to be having these qualities in increasing measure. This seems to speak of a maturing process. This would include knowledge but the text points to shortcomings—ineffective and unfruitful—in the knowledge of Jesus Christ if we are not developing in our faith. We cannot concentrate only on knowledge as knowledge alone is not enough. Increasing measure is necessary as “treading water” is not enough. If we are not increasing in these things, then we will be nearsighted—unable to see clearly at a distance. and blind—unable to see anything. Very important to remember where we have come from; not linger there but also not forget.

Mind Map of Romans 5:3-5 with example & observations.

- (Romans 5:3–5) Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.



because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Rejoice in our sufferings? Really? Look at progression:

- **Sufferings—>Endurance—>Character—>Hope—>No shame—>God’s love poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.**

Not what we would choose but this is God’s direction if we desire to be overflowing vessels of his love. So if we avoid suffering, or if we become bitter during these times, what happens to the process?

8.3 Parallelism.

Basic tools. As we arrive at the subject of parallelism, please keep this in mind—basic tools. That has been my intent throughout this study, to introduce you to basic tools and to help you become skilled in using them.

ON TO PARALLELISM.

Parallelism defined.

Parallelism: The use of identical or equivalent syntactic constructions in corresponding clauses or phrases.

Parallel words and thoughts used to communicate God's truth.

In Scripture, especially in the Psalms and Proverbs, we can observe God using parallel words and thoughts to communicate his truth. Hopefully this concept will become clearer to you as we move through our types and examples of parallelism.

The three types of parallelism discussed in this study.

- Antithetic parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.
- Synthetic parallelism: Adds to or amplifies.
- Synonymous parallelism: Repeats in a subsequent line approximately the same thought contained in the earlier line.

For reference to and explanation of other types, you may want to search online for related sites.

Antithetic parallelism: Gives opposite ideas or contrasts.

A key word to look for in antithetic parallelism is “but.” As in the following verse, a gossip ... **but** a trustworthy man.

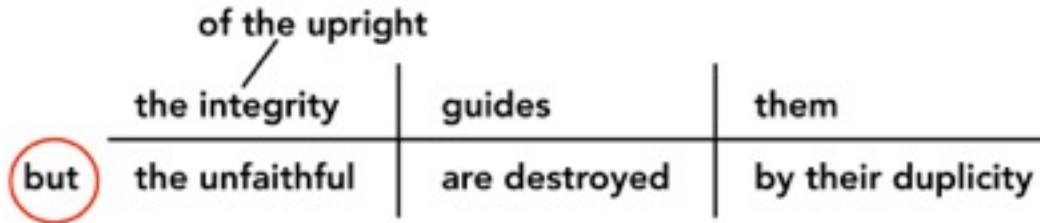
- (Proverbs 11:13 NIV84) A gossip betrays a confidence, **but** a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

A gossip	betrays	a confidence
but a trustworthy man	keeps	a secret

Notice that we learn more about the trustworthy person because of the parallel relationship with the person who is “the gossip.” The antithetical relationship (the contrast of opposites) shows us that the trustworthy person is not a gossip, does not betray and keeps a confidence.

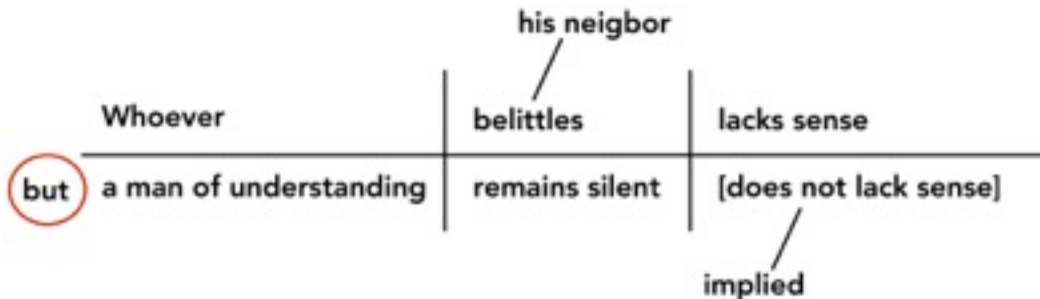
Conversely we see that the gossip is also a betrayer and a person who cannot be trusted with anything that needs to be confidential.

- (Proverbs 11:3 NIV84) The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity.



We can see that this sentence structure is not as easily diagrammed, but we can still identify the parallel relationships. Integrity guides versus duplicity destroying. What does duplicity mean? Here is an opportunity to use another tool—our English language dictionary. Duplicity means deceitfulness, double-dealing.

- (Proverbs 11:12) Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent.



How about the insight this diagram reveals about what our actions and attitudes toward my neighbors reveal about us? Very interesting. God's word. When we begin finding fault, this verse cuts us to the quick. Quite a contrast with the values of our society and unfortunately even the values of some in the Church. From a relational dynamic that many would regard as inconsequential, God makes a huge statement about the person who belittles. Remember ... every careless word. Definite food for thought.

- (Matthew 12:36) I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.

Synthetic parallelism: Adds to or amplifies.

- (Proverbs 10:18 NCV) Whoever hides hate is a liar. Whoever tells lies is a fool.

Whoever hides hate	is	a liar
Whoever tells lies	is	a fool

The character of a liar is further exposed. This person not only lies but hides hate. And is not only a liar but a fool. Synthetic parallelism develops the idea and reveals more insight.

- (Proverbs 19:9 NIV84) A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will perish.

A false witness	will not go	unpunished
he who pours out lies	will	perish

See how the synthetic parallelism develops the thought. Not only will the false witness be punished but that person will perish. And the text also develops the nature of a false witness—a person who pours out lies.

Synonymous parallelism: Repeats in a subsequent line approximately the same thought contained in the earlier line.

- (Proverbs 31:20) She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy.

She	opens her hand	to the poor
[She]	reaches out her hands	to the needy

Distinguishing between synonymous and synthetic parallelism is often a judgment call. The idea is to develop our skill in observing the insights the parallel relationship yields. Positively identifying which type of parallelism is not as important as seeing the relationships and gaining insight.

The person described in our verse opens her arms and extends her hands to the needy.”

- (Proverbs 26:28 NCV) Liars hate the people they hurt, and false praise can ruin others.

Insights we gain? We see inside the mind and heart of the liar. They not

Liars	hate	the people they hurt
false praise	can ruin	others

only are lying (not telling the truth) but they are haters. The profile of a liar is much darker than we sometimes realize. Liars are also people who give false praise; false praise that can ruin.

8.4 Principles & practice.

Principles

1) Don't force the issue.

As with your entire study approach, let things develop. More specifically give God the greatest opportunity to speak to you through your willing spirit and disciplined approach.

2) Get it right.

Pursue accuracy to the best of your ability. Try to make sure your comparisons are valid, apples to apples, oranges to oranges.

3) Don't be fearful.

Yes, get it right and pursue accuracy, but don't be afraid to make a mistake. An honest mistake is not what God frowns upon. We are all far

from perfect. What is displeasing to God is a stiff-necked, unrepentant attitude. We bow before God; we do our best; we step forward with courage and confidence.

4) Write now, qualify later.

Once you are satisfied with how you have diagrammed or mind mapped your verse, then be free in writing down your thoughts. Don't qualify at this point. Get it all down and later you can bring your thoughts under more scrutiny. You have an opportunity later to bring these thoughts in captivity to Christ.

5) Be creative and enjoy the process.

God made us all unique. We think differently, learn differently. Discipline yourself to become more familiar with the method and then allow your God-given creativity to express itself.

Discipline and freedom and creativity work great together. When I studied piano and classic guitar in college, I disciplined myself to practice scales, technique, fingering methods, etc. The funny thing that happened on the way to the store was that the more I disciplined myself in these things the more freedom of expression I enjoyed in playing.

6) Don't overlook.

We don't want to force the issue, but we also don't want to be in too big of a hurry. An insight does not have to immediately stand out to us to still be a solid and powerful truth. Sometimes we have to stare at the picture for a while to see what is actually there.

7) Persevere.

As in writing, many times the inspiration is nowhere to be seen at the start, but go ahead and take that first step. Diagram the sentence, break it down, and give God the opportunity to speak to your heart. He will.

8) Exercise freedom.

Remember what I said. There are no rules as you develop your system. If it works for you and accurately reflects the relationships within the passage, then it is good.

Don't misunderstand. There are rules in diagramming in Reed-Kellogg and other methods, but that is not what I am speaking of here. However, I will say that the more familiar we are with Reed-Kellogg, the better job we will do in seeing and illustrating the relationships in the text. Remember the earlier analogy of practicing our scales and technique.

9) Provide plenty of room to work.

Give yourself plenty of space to express your thoughts and to leave room to develop your ideas. This is one reason why I recommend using the back of previously used paper. Less wasteful, less expensive.

10) Live the words.

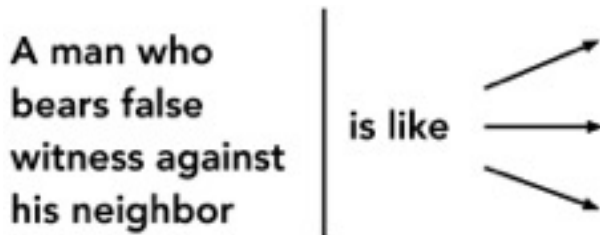
Don't fall in love with the study part. This method will yield tremendous insight, so let the words live in your life. Do not let the fear of failure, or the fear of repeated failures, or projected scenarios of “but if I do this, then this might happen” deter you from trusting God and living by his words. This is where we find life. We live by the words of God.

- (Matthew 4:4) But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

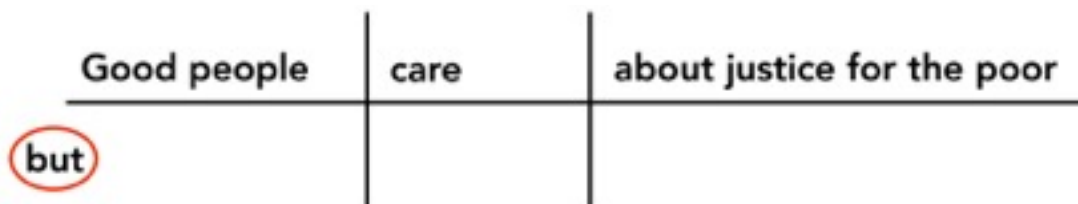
Practice

The following examples are given for you to finish. Hopefully this will encourage you to give this a try in your personal study.

- (Proverbs 25:18) A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a war club, or a sword, or a sharp arrow.



- (Proverbs 29:7 NCV) Good people care about justice for the poor, but the wicked are not concerned.



LESSON 9

THE LADDER OF ABSTRACTION

- (Matthew 12:50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.
- (John 3:21) But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

Overview

9.1 The ladder of abstraction, an introduction.

9.2 Understanding the ladder of abstraction can help us to understand which truths are most relevant and how they are relevant as we read the Old and New Testaments.

9.3 Understanding the ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the importance of focusing on the abstract and the concrete in our obedient response to the words of God.

9.4 Examples and illustrations.

9.1 The ladder of abstraction, an introduction.

Several years ago in a preaching class in grad school Dr. A. Duane Litfin introduced me to “the ladder of abstraction.” I have found the concept practical and useful, and I hope as I present the idea to you that you also will see its significance and helpfulness. Although the subject area is quite extensive, my intent is to bring the large volume of information into a workable concept for our application to Bible study. I hope to accomplish this by keeping our study basic and practical. If I can effectively pass on the central concepts, then I will have succeeded.

- **Abstract—The Biblical Truth**
- **Concrete—The Biblical Action in Response to the Biblical Truth**

Even though the concept of the ladder of abstraction sounds very theoretical, it is really quite practical. So let's explain our terms. The abstract is our standard, our principle, our guiding light, our ideal, the point on the horizon that God would call us to. The concrete is the actual working

out of the idea in real life. For instance, from the abstract we may gain an understanding of a rule or belief to govern our personal behavior. From the concrete, we will gain a specific way to carry out the belief or obey the rule.

See the examples in the table below.

ABSTRACT	CONCRETE
General	Specific
(General) Love your neighbor.	(Specific) Help your neighbor fix his roof.
(General) Love your neighbor.	(Even More Specific) You helped your neighbor, John, fix his roof in the middle of the rain storm yesterday.

I hope that we can see that both the abstract and the concrete are essential to our ability to live the truth. We need to know the right thing to do, and then we need to do it. These are inseparable concepts if we are going to honor God and be keepers of his words. The ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the relationship between the abstract/general and the concrete/specific. We will hopefully also see how this makes a difference in our treatment of Scripture. How? We will become more skilled in determining which passages of Scripture are relevant to now.

Here are some examples from the Old Testament.

Concrete	Abstract Principle
Specific action	General rule
If you see that the donkey of someone who hates you has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help (Exodus 23:5 NLT).	Love your enemy. (In this scenario we could identify this person as an enemy because they hate us.)

<p>When you harvest your crops on your land, do not harvest all the way to the corners of your fields. If grain falls onto the ground, don't gather it up (Leviticus 19:9 NCV).</p>	<p>Love your neighbor. Guard against all kinds of greed.</p>
<p>Don't pick all the grapes in your vineyards, and don't pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. You must leave those things for poor people and for people traveling through your country. I am the LORD your God (Leviticus 19:10 NCV).</p>	<p>Love your neighbor. Guard against all kinds of greed.</p>

I believe that we can see that the specific action in the concrete column is not so relevant today. We are probably not going to come up on an enemy's donkey collapsed under a load of bricks as we drive 55 mph down the highway. But what if, as we are driving down the road, we come up to a broken down pickup truck loaded with gravel and see that it belongs to someone who has been very antagonistic toward us? Not a donkey, but if we work out the underlying principle of loving our enemy, and combine that with the idea of a loaded "vehicle," then I believe that this helps us to determine the right thing to do in that situation.

In the two examples given concerning harvest, I believe that the most basic abstract principle is loving our neighbor, however, there are other principles to apply that may help to sharpen our focus. One example would be to guard ourselves from greediness.

- (Luke 12:15 NCV) Then Jesus said to them, "Be careful and guard against all kinds of **greed**. Life is not measured by how much one owns."
- (Ephesians 5:3 NASB95) But immorality or any impurity or **greed** must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.
- (Colossians 3:5 NIV84) Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and **greed**, which is idolatry.

Here is how we might illustrate the various levels on the ladder of abstraction from this particular example. I will illustrate this in more detail later in the book.

Don't be greedy. (Still abstract principle but more specific.)
Love your neighbor. (Very broad category.)
General. (Rule of thumb.)
ABSTRACT (Scripture text.)

We will look at two ways this tool can help us.

9.2 Understanding and applying the principles of the ladder of abstraction gives us solid direction as to the relevancy and application of the biblical text, especially as we try to understand the relevancy of the Old Testament in regard to sound doctrine and application in the current New Testament period.

Now we will become more detailed in our illustrations and comments.

- (Exodus 23:14–19)¹⁴ Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. ¹⁵ You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. As I commanded you, you shall eat unleavened bread for seven days at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt. None shall appear before me empty-handed. ¹⁶ You shall keep the Feast of Harvest, of the firstfruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field. You shall keep the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in from the field the fruit of your labor. ¹⁷ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God. ¹⁸ You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. ¹⁹ The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.

PART TWO / LESSON 9: THE LADDER OF ABSTRACTION.

1	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Worship God.	Abstract	Carry over
2	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Honor God.	Abstract	Carry over
3	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Obey God.	Abstract	Carry over
4	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Love God.	Abstract	Carry over
5	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Three times in the year you shall keep a feast to me. (23:14)	Concrete	Not carry over
6	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. (23:15)	Concrete	Not carry over
7	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	You shall keep the Feast of Harvest. (23:16)	Concrete	Not carry over
8	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the Lord God. (23:17)	Concrete	Not carry over
9	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened. (23:18)	Concrete	Not carry over
10	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	[You shall not] let the fat of my feast remain until the morning. (23:18)	Concrete	Not carry over
11	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God. (23:19)	Concrete	Not carry over
12	Love, obey, honor, worship God.	You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk. (23:19)	Concrete	Not carry over

You can see from the table that we have to move all the way up to #4 “Love God” before we come to an abstract principle which carries over to today because the information in verses five through twelve is specific to the

nation of Israel in the Old Testament. This table demonstrates one way to understand the ladder of abstraction.

Also I should say that going up the ladder does not mean the abstract is loftier than the concrete; this is merely a way to present and explain the process. The more abstract/general, the higher on the ladder. The more concrete/specific, the lower.

We could very generally divide the Bible into three parts: (1) Old Testament (dealing primarily with Israel). (2) Transition (time of Christ, Gospels and Acts). (3) New Testament beginning with Romans (dealing primarily with the Church). There are truths that are specific to each of these areas, and learning to differentiate between the abstract and the concrete using the ladder of abstraction will help us see what is most applicable for us.

For instance, there are commands given and promises offered to the Israelites in the OT that in their concrete terms are not applicable for the Church but the underlying abstract principles are still applicable and valuable, as in the table above. To love, honor, obey and worship God are principles we are always to follow.

9.3 Understanding the ladder of abstraction will help us to understand the importance of focusing on the abstract and the concrete in our obedient response to the words of God.

An obedient response to God's truth is the only thing that will maintain a proper relationship between the abstract and the concrete. Living God's truth in the concrete may be more difficult, but it will also be much more rewarding and pleasing to God. If we do not make the connection and follow the abstract truth with an obedient response, then God sees us as he saw the people of Israel in Isaiah's time, lip service and distant hearts.

- (Isaiah 29:13 GOD'S WORD) The Lord says, "These people worship me with their mouths and honor me with their lips. But their hearts are far from me, and their worship of me is based on rules made by humans."

Can we see what happened here? The people of Israel agreed in principle with the abstract—worship God, honor God. But in their response, they did not honor God in obedience and as a result their worship was based on human principles. When we do not complete this circuit between the abstract and the concrete, then we decide what is most important. We bring

our disobedient attitude to our study and instead of our lives coming under the authority of God's word, we change the words.

—WE USE THE BIBLE TO GIVE AUTHORITY TO OUR OWN IDEAS.—

- (Jeremiah 23:35–36 NLT) You should keep asking each other, “What is the LORD’s answer?” or “What is the LORD saying?” But stop using this phrase, “prophecy from the LORD.” For people are using it to give authority to their own ideas, turning upside down the words of our God, the living God, the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

—WE SPEAK FOR GOD, BUT WE HAVEN’T LISTENED TO HIM FIRST.—

- (Jeremiah 23:18 NLT) Have any of these prophets been in the LORD’s presence to hear what he is really saying? Has even one of them cared enough to listen?

There is a definite reciprocal relationship between the abstract and the concrete. One without the other is an incomplete, misdirected approach to God’s words. We must remember the dynamic. We are to live by God’s words. We understand the abstract better when we live the words in real life.

- (Hebrews 5:14 NIV) But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The person who does not live out the abstract truth of God stunts her spiritual growth. In fact Scripture states it more clearly and more boldly than that.

- (James 1:22 NIV) Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

An obedient response to God's truth involves more than agreement.

A proper response to God's truth does not merely involve agreement with the truth. Relating to the words of God at the abstract level is an essential but only partial response to God's truth.

I think I can correctly say that the abstract is sometimes easier to accept than the concrete. What I am speaking of here would be commonly held views of certain abstract truths, areas of general agreement, not intellectual and theological war zones, such as election vs. free will, Arminianism vs. Calvinism, baptism by immersion vs. sprinkling, infant baptism, tongues, etc. Those battles are going to be ardently contended on the abstract level or any level.

What I am speaking of, as in the abstract being easier to accept, are generally agreed upon areas such as, love your neighbor, kindness, forgiveness. The application of these truths is where these viewpoints tend to dramatically separate. And these areas often become a watershed between lip service and drawing near with our hearts.

In other words, somewhere between the abstract and the concrete, whether consciously or sub-consciously, sometimes both, we revise the idea to make it fit what we are about. The heart far from God brings God's truth down to human standards, even more specifically to a person's individual standards. The heart close to God bows to God and honors his truth as written. Usually, we find our struggle somewhere in between.

Let's use forgiveness for an example. Yes, a person would agree with the idea of forgiveness, but for many people when it comes to practice, they become very selective. "I could never forgive such-and-such person." And in so doing we have broken the line of truth between the abstract and the concrete, we have interrupted the flow, the dynamic. God's truth that we agreed on in our minds is no longer God's truth as it works its way into our lives. Something dangerous has happened as we have severed the connection between God's abstract truth and the truth that rules our lives.

People tend to hide in the abstract. This is why a person can be very involved in Bible study and be such an awful example of a Christ follower. They do not connect the abstract with the concrete. The circuit is not complete. They may assent to Christ's command to love their neighbor, sign off on the idea in group discussion, and hate their actual neighbor. And remain oblivious to their blunder.

We can find another example in our view of speaking the truth to each other. We will agree with the abstract principle, but in our minds we are already revising how this "truth" will work itself out in "the real world." How many people tell that "harmless" lie to keep from hurting another person's feelings? Or even more questionable as far as motive, when they lie to keep a friendship.

That seems for some to be the test for God's truth, adapting the Bible to "the real world." But what we have done is we have humanized (as in human rules, human perspective, lack of faith) God's truth. Now his ways are not so high above ours as we have brought them within human reach.

Here is another twist to the plot. Most Christians would agree in the abstract that gossip is wrong. But what seems to happen is that many people begin tweaking this concept in its very early stages. The less specifics the better for these folks as they rationalize God's truth to meet their individual application. The result is that when they gossip, it is not really gossip in their minds. Example: We have so successfully "spun" the idea that what God calls sin we now call "concern" and "care" and "sharing."

RATIONALIZING THE SIN OF GOSSIP.
God's word teaches that gossip is sin.
I agree that gossip is sin.
So people should not gossip.
People should not say things that are untrue or unnecessary about another person.
There are some people in church who are gossips.
My friends and I do not gossip. We may "share" information about people but only because we "care" about people and are "concerned" for their well-being and the well-being of the church.
RATIONALIZATION COMPLETE.

Our Response to God's Truth: We maintain the line of integrity from the abstract to the concrete as we obey (live) God's truth. Or we will skew the

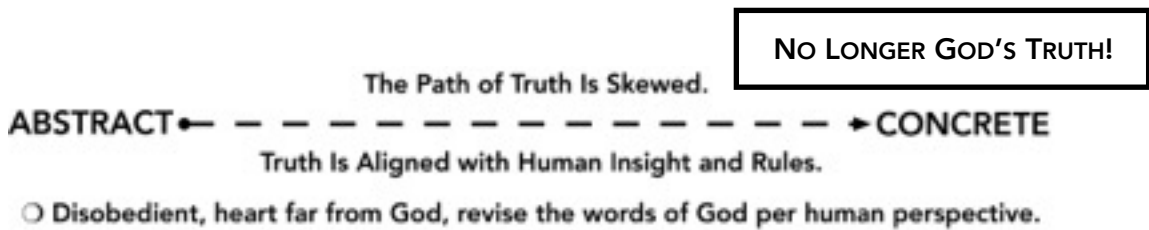
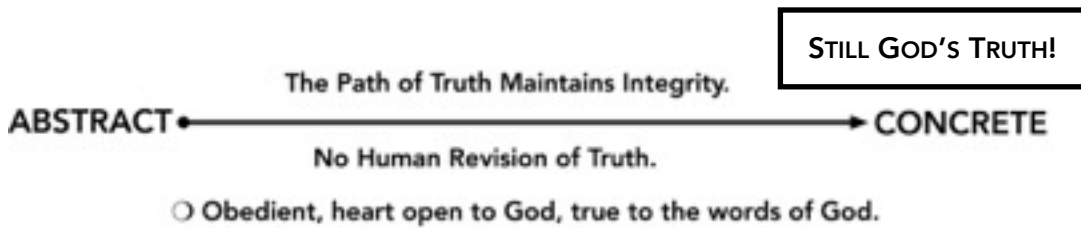
line and break the connection with disobedience. See the comparison in the diagrams below.



“BLOW IT UP!”

THAT IS WHAT WE DO TO OUR CONCEPT OF TRUTH WHEN WE DO NOT HONOR THE LINE OF INTEGRITY BETWEEN THE ABSTRACT (THE BIBLICAL TRUTH) AND THE CONCRETE (THE BIBLICAL ACTION).

As a pastor, probably the greatest divide I have seen between the abstract and the concrete is in the area of truth-telling. While we hold so firmly to our commitment to the truthfulness (the authority and inspiration) of Scripture—the abstract, we somehow failed to “deliver” God's truth in our relationships with each other, as in speaking the truth in love, or in the leadership of the church, as in leading in integrity, in the concrete.

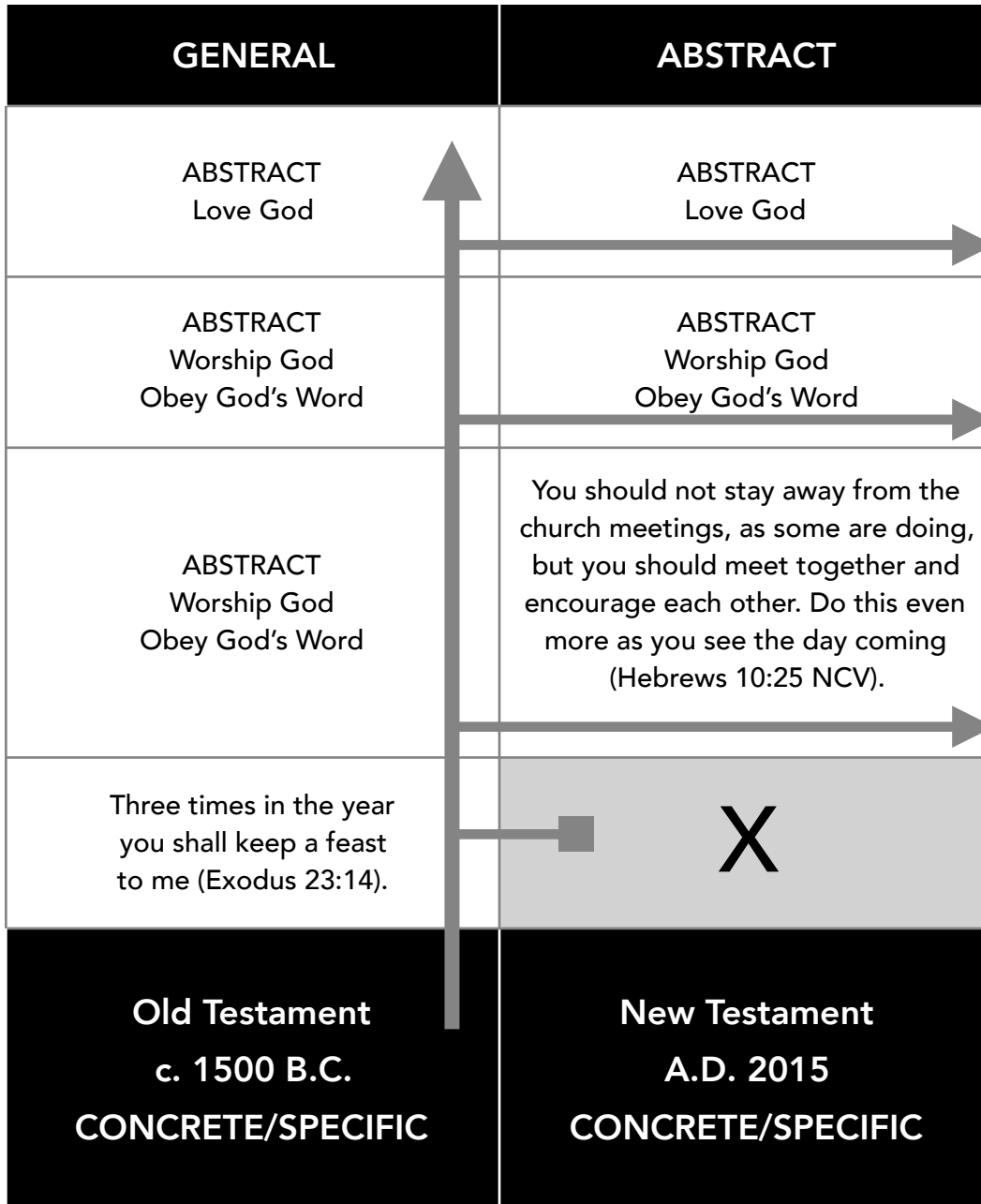


9.4 Examples and illustrations

These tables can help us differentiate between the abstract (general) and the concrete (specific).

GENERAL	ABSTRACT
Love your enemy.	Love your enemy.
Your neighbor, Joshua, hates you. You would still help him get his donkey out of from under the heavy load.	Even though your neighbor, John, really dislikes you, you are still to help him repair his pickup truck which he has overloaded with gravel.
(Exodus 23:5 NLT) If you see that the donkey of someone who hates you has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help.	(Exodus 23:5 NLT) If you see that the donkey of someone who hates you has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help.
SPECIFIC	CONCRETE

GENERAL
ANIMAL
DOG
SHIH TZU
MAGGIE
SPECIFIC



Here the abstract is to love, honor, obey God. The concrete application is found in the Exodus text—“Three times you shall ... feast.” If we move up one level, we see that we have an abstract truth which we can carry over to NT times. We are to worship God. No, we do not keep three feasts as prescribed by OT law, but we can live this out in concrete ways. I have drawn our attention to the Hebrews text that exhorts us to continue to meet together. This is not a direct line of obedience from the Exodus text, but it is

a way that we can honor God by observing the abstract truth of obeying his word and worshiping him.

This table illustrates an example where a person could apply the more specific teaching in the OT but would not be required to.

GENERAL	ABSTRACT
<p>ABSTRACT Love God/Love your enemy</p>	<p>ABSTRACT Love God/Love your enemy</p>
<p>ABSTRACT We should show concern for our enemy's possessions.</p>	<p>ABSTRACT We should show concern for our enemy's possessions.</p>
<p>CONCRETE but general Help with the care of his livestock.</p>	<p>CONCRETE but general Help with the care of his livestock.</p>
<p>CONCRETE and specific If you come upon your enemy's ox or donkey that has strayed away, take it back to its owner (Exodus 23:4 NLT). If you see that the donkey of someone who hates you has collapsed under its load, do not walk by. Instead, stop and help (Exodus 23:5 NLT).</p>	<p>CONCRETE and specific but not law What if your neighbor's daughter (who is mean to your daughter in school) is in 4-H and you see her goat has escaped its pen? Are you required by OT law to get it back to her? We are not under the law but this is a close parallel to the abstract. In the same way, as you come home you see her dad (who is also very antagonistic) broken down beside the road. Do you stop to help? Are you required by OT law? Are you required by God?</p>
<p>Old Testament c. 1500 B.C. CONCRETE/SPECIFIC</p>	<p>New Testament A.D. 2015 CONCRETE/SPECIFIC</p>

LESSON 10

CONTEXT. SURROUNDING GOD'S WORDS WITH GOD'S WORDS

- The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (Psalm 119:130 NIV).

Overview

10.1 Context defined.

10.2 The value of context: Reducing “me factor,” increasing “God factor.”

10.3 Examples of commonly misunderstood verses.

10.4 “Formulas” for context illustrated and explained.

I believe that the importance of context has been implicit in the study. The inductive approach that is discussed relies on context. Reading and writing build context. A disciplined approach to reading the entire Bible is all about context. But I want to make sure that I emphasize the importance of context, so what better place than in this last lesson.

—DO I SURROUND GOD'S WORDS WITH GOD'S WORDS OR MY WORDS?—

So I will begin by asking a question. ***Do I surround God's words with God's words or my words?*** If you haven't asked yourself that question, and it seems many people have not, then you are missing it. If we are truly interested in what God has to say, and if we truly believe the value of God's words as we so vehemently profess, then we will be more than willing to do anything to discover the pure milk of God's words, even if it means limiting our own words.

10.1 Context defined

To define context we will once again we turn to our trusted English dictionary for help with an excellent working definition.

Context: 1. The part of a written or spoken statement that surrounds a word or passage and that often specifies its meaning. 2. The circumstances in which a particular event occurs: situation (Webster's New Riverside Dictionary, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1988).

The words that surround the words ...

Maybe we could put it like this. Context: The words that surround the words that help us specify the meaning. So in your study of God's word, do you surround God's words with God's words (staying true to the context) or do you surround God's words with your own words?

And if we do not surround the words of God with the words of God, then what is our excuse?

- Ignorance—I was uninformed.
- Laziness—I didn't care to be informed.
- Deceitfulness—I was more attentive to my purpose than God's glory.

10.2 The value of context: Reducing the “me factor,” increasing the “God factor.”

Paying proper attention to context drives us closer to God's intended meaning and further away from our opinion. Studying the context helps specify God's intent, throws light on what he wants us to see and understand. I desperately need (not overstating) the context to avoid foisting my opinion (my private interpretation) on a Scripture text.

I have to somehow grasp how many things influence me as I read God's word seeking truth. If I make an honest attempt to surround God's words with God's words, then I am much closer to the truth of the passage. Let's look at some examples.

10.3 Examples of commonly misunderstood verses

- ***“The truth will set you free.”***

We hear this famous quotation in church, in personal conversations, movies, books, public speakers, in just about any social setting. For the sake of our study I would like to ask two questions.

—TWO QUESTIONS—

—IS IT TRUE? IS IT TRUE AS IT IS USED?—

Let's look at the text.

- (John 8:31-32 NIV) To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Is it true? Is the sentence “The truth will set you free” true? We see this in Scripture so we know that the teaching itself is true. It is God breathed,

inspired. So, we see in the context of Scripture **the answer to our first question. Yes, it is true.** The truth will set us free.

But in what context? **Second question—Is it true as it is used?**

Answer: It is often not true as it is used, and a basic study of the context reveals why. Here are the keys: “And, then, if.”

“And” points to the preceding phrase in verse 32—“you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” So we discover that when you know the truth, the truth will set you free. “Then” also points us backward to the previous verse and the phrase—“you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth.” The context now tells us that Christ is addressing his disciples. And who are his disciples? “If” is our clue. “If” you hold to, live in, abide in, continue in, dwell in my teaching, you are really my disciples.

To the Jews who had believed him,
If you hold to my teaching,
[then-implied]	... you really are my disciples.
Then you will know the truth,
And the truth will set you free.

- (John 8:31-32 NIV) **To** the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "**If** you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. **Then** you will know the truth, **and** the truth will set you free."

So we now see this teaching—“the truth will set you free”—in its proper context as God intended it to be understood. It begins with living in God's word (here the teaching of Christ) and the result is being a disciple, knowing truth and that truth setting you free.

Is it true to a lesser degree taken out of context as a universal principle? Yes, it is possible in certain situations to be true a lesser degree, but who wants to pursue truth at a lesser degree as opposed to pursuing a life of truth to the glory of God?

- ***“Casting all your cares on him.”***

We have songs using this phrase, posters, wall plaques—all urging us to cast our cares on God. Here is the text.

- (1 Peter 5:7) Casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

Here is what happened. My progression of discovery. I was reading through the Bible one day, and I saw this verse in its rightful context. I had not begun with this statement in isolation from the context but read these words in the flow of the context.

Too often we begin with a verse totally isolated from its surroundings and somehow think we understand what God is saying to us. To be exhorted to cast all our care upon God because he cares for me is a very comforting thought. But shared as it usually is, it is only a partial thought; it is in fact incomplete to the point of being misleading.

—REMEMBER THE TWO PREVIOUS QUESTIONS? IS IT TRUE? IS IT TRUE AS IT IS USED?—

As we read through 1 Peter, we will see that “casting all your cares on him” is said in almost the same breath as “humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.”

- (1 Peter 5:6–7) Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

We miss so much by coming in on the tail-end of the “conversation.” In fact, we mislead people by leaving out the previous teaching on submission, humility and pride. So we need to “paint” in the background or we may direct someone to a promise that is not true for them.

- (1 Peter 5:5) Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Casting our cares on God comes as we bow before God and submit to one another, clothing ourselves in humility. Casting our care on God does

not stand alone. If we are not dealing with our pride before God, then we are not understanding the truth of this passage.

It is more than can merely be explained by saying that the offer is invalid. Unless we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God and trust him to work in “due time,” then we learn nothing of the might of the mighty hand of God, and our faith in him falters because we miss believing in his greatness.

So is it true? Yes. Is it true as we use it? Not if we are not directing people to the issues of humility, pride, submissiveness, and trust as presented by the context. The person who cannot bring himself to bow before God cannot in the same breath trust him with his cares and worries. He has undermined his ability to trust God.

10.4 “Formulas” for context illustrated and explained.

Bear with me as I try to explain some common approaches as to how we build our commentary or interpretations of various texts. Here are four possible “formulas” in our pursuit and presentation of the truth of God's words.

Here are our possibilities.

God's words	+ my words	truth	Yes/No/Maybe
God's words	+ more of God's words	truth	Yes/No/Maybe
God's words in context		truth	Yes/No/Maybe
God's words in context	+ more God's words in context	truth	Yes/No/Maybe

Now let's examine the various possibilities.

- **God's words + my words = truth.**

Some people will believe anything if a Scripture verse or even a fragment of a verse is mentioned or attached or loosely paraphrased in a message. Here I will remind us. By default we believe what we want to believe and what we already believe. So mix just a smidgen of Scripture with a thought

popular to an individual or a group of people and it must be God's truth. Remember the lesson on biblically wrapped or biblically true.

We have all heard politicians, celebrities and preachers use a "line" from Scripture and then surround it with their own words to shape it to their own intended purpose. Just because the Bible is quoted does not mean, often does not mean, that God's truth is being presented or pursued.

Will this method of context provide the truth? ***Verdict: Probably not.***

- **God's words + more of God's words = truth.**

This formula is more readily accepted in Christian circles. With this approach the speaker seemingly surrounds God's words with God's words by directing his or her listeners to several cross-references in the Bible. However, because the speaker does not respect and explore the context of either the main text or the cross-references, then too much subjectivity enters our equation and that usually means that truth suffers at the hands of private interpretation, a.k.a. opinion.

Using a multitude of Scripture references does not mean that we are surrounding God's words with God's words. Usually we are only wrapping our own thoughts in Scripture and purporting to speak for God. An ever present danger in this approach is the temptation to rationalize the process of presenting our opinion as God's because, after all, look at all the Scriptures we looked up.

Using a flood of references usually means a surface examination of the text and as previously stated this yields only superficial results. If we only touch the surface, then we will only change the surface.

- ***God's words in context = truth.***

This has to be our preferred approach if our desire is truly to let God speak to us beyond ourselves. Let God build the house.

- ***God's words in context + more of God's words in context = truth.***

Same as above with the addition of using cross-references but allowing the context in the cross-references to also direct us to the truth of the passage.

A FEW THOUGHTS AS YOU CONTINUE ALONG THE WAY.

Not everything ...

I have put a great deal of time into this study, agonizing over details and direction, but as I stated early on, this is just a beginning, a starting point, a place to join the path.

But enough ...

You don't need another cute technique or more highlighters and colored pencils. You just need a good shovel and the desire and skill to use it. I hope you will find enough in these pages to help you dig down deep and build on the solid Rock, Jesus Christ.

My part ...

This study has been my calling over many years now. I heard an illustration once concerning a railroad track that was built over the Alps before there was even a train that could climb the mountainside. I don't know if the anecdote is true or not but the thought stayed with me. My spin on this is that I also have built a track, not knowing if or when the train is supposed to arrive. I only know I was supposed to build the track.

Your part ...

If you want to handle God's word of truth in a way that pleases him and live by that truth, then this study will help. The track is ready. May God bless your journey!

- (Luke 6:47-49 NIV) I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

I encourage you to picture this opportunity.

One day each of us will stand before Jesus Christ and give an account of our lives. Earth is over, done, finished. Relief, triumph, joy. Tears wiped away. Heaven is more real than we could have imagined. And now we are

face to face with the Person responsible for our joy unspeakable and full of glory, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord.

How satisfying it will be to know that we did not wait until that moment to listen to and bow before our King. How satisfying it will be as we bow before our King to know that we “got it” while still on the dark planet and listened to him above all others and served him with honor.

MAY GOD BLESS OUR JOURNEY.



Love in Christ,

dave

- (Jude 25) To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

APPENDIX A: TO GOD BE THE GLORY, OR NOT!

Overview

- 1) To God be the glory!
- 2) Quenching our thirst for life.
- 3) Answering the question in our hearts.
- 4) How do I actually do that? How do I glorify God as God?
- 5) Do we want to know?

-
- 1) To God be the glory!

The Westminster Shorter Catechism A.D. 1647

QUESTION 1:	What is the chief end of man?
ANSWER 1:	Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.
QUESTION 2:	What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?
ANSWER 2:	The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

If we glorify God as God, then the Spirit of God will give us a vision of God as we have never before experienced. Not a vision as in some manufactured religious experience but a vision of life as God intended it to be, as taught in his word; a vision of God's plan of life for this world; a vision of God's plan for me personally. Jesus stated that he came that we might

have life and that we might have it in abundance. I believe that this is the way to step into that abundance: That we learn what it means to glorify God as God and give him thanks and that we live it.

God's intent: Enjoyment.

God's intent has always been our enjoyment of him and the life he has provided. Enjoy God, enjoy life as God has given it. Go for the gusto and live life to the fullest. Nothing wrong with that as God planned our enjoyment from the first moments of creation. Over and over in the creation account as God created the earth and sea, the sun, moon and stars, grass and trees, every animal, and then people, man and woman, the refrain in Genesis went like this: "It was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was good, it was very good, now it's all yours" as he handed over stewardship to us for our enjoyment.

From the very beginning, we learn from God's first offer of life that our thirst for life is God-given. Our desire to enjoy life is a legitimate, God-given desire.

- (Genesis 1:27-28 BBE) And God made man in his image, in the image of God he made him: male and female he made them. And God gave them his blessing and said to them, Be fertile and have increase, and make the earth full and be masters of it; be rulers over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing moving on the earth.

2) Quenching our thirst for life.

So where do I quench my thirst for life? From the earliest account we observe that God created us with a thirst for life and the freedom to make our own choices concerning life. (Read on in Genesis for details.) So it seems fair to ask: Where do we go to quench that thirst? What well do we drink from? Have we learned anything from Adam and Eve who left the words of God for refreshment elsewhere?

Food for the soul. A Pontiac commercial several years ago portrayed their automobiles as "food for the soul." Mazda calls us to "zoom, zoom, zoom." So what is our soul food? Beautiful homes, designer clothes, diamonds, expensive vacations all call us to a place beyond our humdrum existence as we search for significance and meaning. The offer, whether or not as explicit as the Pontiac commercial, is buy this, own this, wear this, drive this, live here, visit there and your soul will be fed.

We all sense the universal call to something beyond eating and drinking and sleeping. But the only true soul food is Jesus Christ. The only water that quenches our thirst is God's living water. And the only way we eat and drink the abundance which God offers is when we glorify God as God and give him thanks. Whether professing Christians or devout sinners, as long as our "soul food" is automobiles or nice homes or sports or sex or anything other than Jesus Christ, we will remain hungry and thirsty.

The choices come down to the glory of God or the passion of men. Who will feed my soul? Many profess the glory of God as can be clearly seen from the vast religious influence on this earth through the centuries. And just as obvious it is that many openly embrace the passion of men. By passion I am speaking of that driving force that keeps us going, keeps us reaching beyond ourselves. Some people's passion is their art, for some it is family, for some their gun collection or their home.

- (Jeremiah 2:13) For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

We either drink living waters (glory to God) or we dig our own wells (the passion of men).

3) Answering the question in our hearts.

Where are you? Where am I? I am not concerned here with your profession of faith, theological background or philosophical stance. I don't care about your hypothetical line drawn in the sand. I want us to examine where we are before God. At issue is—Where are you? Where am I? Not my stated position, but my actual position.

If I am wrong, do I want to know the truth? An evangelist I listened to several years ago on the radio stated that he asks unbelievers a question regarding their worldview: "If you are wrong, would you want to know the truth?" I think it is only fair then that we ask ourselves as professing Christians as we tackle the various issues of life: "If we are wrong, do we want to know the truth?"

Do I want to know the truth? If we want to know the truth, if we want to know where we are, then what we say with our mouths must defer to what we say in our hearts. If you want to find out what you are saying in your heart when it comes to the glory of God, then read on. If you want to drink some encouragement that goes beyond what any person can offer in your pursuit of life, then read on. But if you are satisfied with the abstract

clutter of religion or the common sense of your neighbor or the philosophy of your academics, if you want to maintain the obscure glaze of denial between what you profess and what you really know and live to be true, if you are satisfied with what you have, then I have no help to offer. As Paul describes it in Romans 1, you have that choice and God will leave you to it.

But if you want to answer the question in your heart. If you want to know, then ask God to help you answer the question in your heart. Where are you? Where are you before God? God asked this very question to Adam after his initial rebellion.

- (Genesis 3:8-10 BBE) And there came to them the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the evening wind: and the man and his wife went to a secret place among the trees of the garden, away from the eyes of the Lord God. And the voice of the Lord God came to the man, saying, Where are you? And he said, Hearing your voice in the garden I was full of fear, because I was without clothing: and I kept myself from your eyes.

We need to ask ourselves that same question. Not what am I saying I believe about God; not am I active in church; but where am I before God? What am I saying in my heart?

- (Psalm 14:1) The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good.

I found this striking as I read Psalm 14:1 some time ago. The fool says – “No God!” If you read this verse in the New King James or King James versions, you will see that the words “There is” are in italics because they are supplied to help the meaning. The world-view of the fool is—“No God!” Many of us are familiar with this text, but what leaped off the page at me during this reading were the words “in his heart.” Both in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 we read the same thing—“in his heart.”

- The fool may profess to know Christ;
- The fool may be very religious;
- The fool may be active in an evangelical, fundamental church;
- The fool may appear very righteous and say all the right things.
- The fool will say anything it seems,

—BUT THE PRESSING ISSUE IS—WHAT IS THE FOOL SAYING IN HIS HEART?—

- For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools (Romans 1:21-22 NIV).

The fool actually claims to be wise, but his foolish heart is darkened. Why? Given the opportunity to respond to the truth that he had and to glorify God as God and give him thanks, he chose not to.

4) How do I actually do that? How do I glorify God as God?

Crucial steps to identifying and living the reality.

First, I have to actually live in view of eternity. To make decisions in my daily existence regarding eternal truth I need to have a working perspective of eternity. Second, I need to be prepared to lose anything and everything on this earth to follow God and give him glory. Third, God must be the food for my soul. With those three thoughts in mind, let's try to move from the abstract to the concrete and ask: What feeds my soul?

—WHAT FEEDS MY SOUL?—

Does owning and maintaining my home feed my soul? Landscaping? Gardening? Home-improvement? All good things unless they become more important to me than God.

When I make a decision for truth to the glory of God, I must be willing to lose my earthly home. Possibly I have to change employers and accept a lower paying job because of ethical conflict. I just cannot continue to tell my clients untrue and misleading things to keep their accounts. So, less money, less home.

Do family relationships feed my soul? Is my focus on the family greater than my focus on God? In spite of our popular trend that family is everything, Jesus pointed to the conflict caused in families when choosing to follow him.

- (Matthew 10:34–39) Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Please note that the first mention of taking up our cross and following Christ and losing our life to find it comes in the context of family relationships. Jesus warned of the danger of family coming before God and disabling a person from following him.

When I make a decision for truth to the glory of God, I must be willing to lose family. Maybe this means I offend a family member by addressing his spiritual condition. Possibly I alienate a child by not accepting her ungodly behavior. I may have to choose between having Sundays as God's day or family day.

What happens is that sometimes we broker a deal. You make me look good in the church and in the community, and I will reward you. If the child/teenager/adult makes the parent look good in the church and community the parent will in turn overlook indiscretions, help financially, etc. The parent knows that if she confronts her teenager's life style that she risks being embarrassed in her church and being perceived as poor at parenting thus not very spiritual.

With this mindset appearances are everything. Appearances to people, that is. How this appears to God is only an afterthought. Living in view of eternity means living more consciously with how our behavior and relationships appear before God rather than people. We might ask ourselves: Who am I really seeking to please?

What else do we feed our souls on? Sports, guns, cars, women, men, entertainment, music, our jobs? To find out if I am glorifying God as God, I must identify on what do I feed my soul.

—DO I GIVE GOD THANKS?—

... **and give him thanks.** How can I tell if I am glorifying God as God? Am I giving him thanks no matter how life turns out? Am I honoring him to the degree that I am still thankful when all my earthly soul food is gone (or so it seems)? Is my God big enough to be seen above the turmoil, heartache and discouragement of life? When the pantry of earthly "goodies" is empty, does God fill my being? Is my greatest desire to honor God above all?

Living in view of eternity, living in view of God, I am willing to lose anything and everything, and now God feeds my soul with food from heaven.

I learn that in the wilderness he prepares a table for me. And it's a pretty good feeling.

5) Do we want to know?

Do you want to know?

Here is the question for the person who wants to know what she believes in her heart. Am I following the vision of the glory of God as I live my days on this earth, or am I following the passion of the glory men? Every choice I make is influenced by this decision concerning the glory of God or the glory of men! If I choose to walk the path of God's glory, I choose wisdom and light. If I choose not to walk the path of God's glory, in my heart I choose "no God" and become a fool claiming to be wise. The person claiming to be wise doesn't seek wisdom.

—I HAVE TO FIND OUT: WHAT AM I SAYING IN MY HEART?—

In every area of my life I must ask myself this question: Is it the vision of the glory of God or the passion of men? On my job, do my choices reflect a vision of the glory of God? At home, the way I relate to my wife and children, does that reflect a vision of the glory of God?

—HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM REALLY GIVING GOD THE GLORY IN MY LIFE?—

Some helpful questions if we want to know.

Am I willing to not get the glory or credit when I serve God? Am I willing to lose my life, understanding that concept for everything God intended including daily giving myself to others for no other reason than to honor God?

Is God's glory more important to me than my position in the church? Or am I drinking the few drops of water from the man-made well of self-importance and spiritual pride?

Is God's glory more important to me than the perceived well-being of my church? Many decisions that are made in local fellowships are based more on a desire to keep the church going than bringing God glory. In doing this, truth is sacrificed in the pulpit and in personal relationships within the church. Many in church leadership are more concerned with keeping people happy in the church than choosing what is right. This brings them glory. This is their water of significance, and in drinking these waters they show that possibly they have not even tasted living waters.

Many people busy themselves in what appears to be serving the Lord but in fact they are seeking glory for themselves; they spend their time and energy to win the admiration and applause of those whose goal it is to keep the wheels of the church turning. They drink in the kudos of men as opposed to the living waters of God. Often with their investment of time and energy they buy acceptance and power. If you asked them why they were doing it, they would say that they were doing it to the glory of God. Sometimes this is true but often it is not. Their goal is to appear spiritual before others in their fellowship. How can we tell this to be true? One prominent way this is demonstrated when a person will not stand for what they should for fear of losing their friends or their social standing. They remain silent and hope for the best, silently undermining their integrity and their faith in God.

APPENDIX B: A VALID ARGUMENT MAY NOT BE A SOUND ARGUMENT

A VALID ARGUMENT MAY NOT BE A SOUND ARGUMENT.

A VALID CONCLUSION MAY NOT BE A SOUND CONCLUSION.

A VALID SYLLOGISM MAY NOT BE A SOUND SYLLOGISM.

Overview

- 1) A valid argument may not be a sound argument.**
- 2) By default we give validity to what we already believe and what we want to believe.**
- 3) Some helpful examples.**

A valid argument can be very convincing and compelling, but that does not mean it is sound (as in true). This is why we must learn to distinguish between valid and sound. Whether it is a message someone preaches on the radio, the lesson in our Bible study or a coworker's political commentary, we should be able to distinguish the difference.

A valid argument is sound logically. The relationship between conclusion and premise is correct, but this does not mean the premise is true. We might say a valid argument sounds logical because it is logical but that still does not mean it is true. Confused yet?

(1) We need to understand that a valid argument may not be a sound argument.

In deductive reasoning, a conclusion is proved if it follows logically from the premises, whether or not those premises are true. A conclusion is logically valid if deductively derived. A scientific argument requires not only validity but soundness, i.e. a conclusion derived from true premises.

Let me try to explain this concept and its importance. We agree with certain things that someone teaches us because they sound so valid (correctly inferred or deduced from a premise). These teachings seem right based on our existing knowledge base—premises which we have already accepted. These things seem especially true to us if they are taught by a respected teacher, such as the pastor of our church or our favorite professor at the university.

The problem is that (as stated above) “a conclusion is proved if it follows logically from the premises, whether or not those premises are true.” So the teaching can be logically, powerfully, convincingly presented (sounding very compelling and valid) even if the premises are not true.

Add some Bible verses and how could we argue with that?

FOR INSTANCE:

If ...	our country’s decline in morality is a direct result of prayer being taken out of our schools,
Then ...	getting prayer back in schools will improve the morals of our country,
Therefore ...	we need to work to get prayer back into our schools.

—THROW IN THE BIBLE VERSE AND THIS IS READY TO PREACH.—

- (Psalms 11:3 KJV) If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?

This “message” pushes all the right buttons to move us toward accepting its validity.

appeals to our reason	prayer out of school, country has gone downhill since
appeals to our emotions	we should be fearful for our children
appeals to relationship with speaker	he is such a man of God

—SEEMS VALID, BUT IS IT SOUND, TRUE?—

However valid this argument seems, and it does seem valid for many people, we should in the interest of truth investigate how sound the argument is. ***For us to prove the soundness of this argument we must***

be able to prove the premise to be true. Can we do that? Can we prove that our country's decline in morality is a direct result of prayer being taken out of our schools?

Being in agreement with each other is not proof. It just means that we are all either right or wrong. It just means that we agree; it does not mean the premise is true. Having large numbers of people in agreement is not proof. But still, we let popular opinion drive our decision-making even in the Church.

—PUBLIC OPINION IS A DRIVING FORCE IN DECISION-MAKING, BUT SHOULD IT BE?—

Why is this important? Because it seems we are of the mind that if enough people believe it then it must be true. What we need to understand is that **the way we approach truth in general is the way we will approach truth in the word of God.** Because the majority believe it to be true does not make it true in the world. And because the majority believe it to be true does not make it true in our Bible study, our morning worship service, our seminary, our university, our church, or our denomination.

Validity is not soundness. As we read, or as we are taught, we need to remember that the premise or premises must be true.

(2) By default we give validity to what we already believe and to what we want to believe.

What do I mean by default? The default settings are the factory settings. When you buy a new computer, it comes with preset conditions. For instance, if you purchased a computer that included a word processor as part of the software package, it has default settings for the font type, style and size.

There are some default settings in places where many of us do not even know we have places. Deep inside the inner-workings of the computer in the BIOS the system settings lurk that determine whether or not our computer recognizes our hard drive or CD player, the order the system starts, etc. Settings that most of us are unaware of and do not need to be aware of. However, human beings “come from the factory” with default settings that we do need to be aware of.

- **Default: Computer Science**—A particular setting or value for a variable that is assigned automatically by an operating system and remains in effect unless canceled or overridden by the operator.

Example: I changed the default for the font in the word processing program from Times Roman to Trebuchet.

- Default: A situation or condition that obtains in the absence of active intervention.

As explained above, default settings remain in effect unless canceled or overridden. We are born into this world with preset conditions which once we come to Christ he begins resetting. Here is a biblical representation of what I am talking about.

The Bible teaches us to change the default settings.

- (Ephesians 4:22 NCV) You were taught to leave your old self--to stop living the evil way you lived before. That old self becomes worse, because people are fooled by the evil things they want to do.

The Bible teaches us that new person settings must be made.

- (Ephesians 4:23-24 NCV) But you were taught to be made new in your hearts, to become a new person. That new person is made to be like God--made to be truly good and holy.

A couple thoughts concerning default settings that are relevant to our current study.

- By default we automatically give validity to ***what we already believe.***
- By default we automatically give validity to ***what we want to believe.***

This is how we “come off the line.” Now some of the things we already believe are true, and some of the things we want to believe are true. But not all of them. In fact many of the things that seem entirely valid to us are entirely wrong.

- (Proverbs 16:25) There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

There is a way built into each of us to which we automatically (by default) give validity, but we need to review and change the settings where necessary because this way of validating life leads to death. We do not realize this without the help of God, and we cannot change the settings without the help of God. Some of the settings are like our CMOS settings in our computer; we don't even know they are there.

- (Romans 12:2 NASB95) And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
- (Psalm 139:23–24 GW) Examine me, O God, and know my mind. Test me, and know my thoughts. See whether I am on an evil path. Then lead me on the everlasting path.

Becoming a Christian does not mean all the settings are changed immediately. Becoming a Christian does mean that the process has started, and we need to recognize our problem and bring it before God for his scrutiny.

- (Jeremiah 17:9–10a NLT) The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives [settings].

Let God run the diagnostics. Let him search the system and test our programs for living. The nature of his word allows him to penetrate the deepest places and restore the system.

- (Hebrews 4:12 NIV84) For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

(3) Some helpful examples.

Thought the following examples might be helpful.

- A valid syllogism is a syllogism in which the conclusion follows through logically from its premises. A valid argument may not be a sound argument. The validity of an argument does not depend upon whether its premises or conclusions are true. It merely depends on the formal relation between the premises and conclusion. Valid syllogisms can have false premises or false conclusions. An argument is sound when it is valid and has true premises.

Examples of different types of syllogisms.

Categorical Syllogism

- All humans are mortal / All Greeks are human / All Greeks are mortal

Hypothetical Syllogism

- If all humans are mortal / And all Greeks human / Then all Greeks are mortal.

Examples of valid but not sound

- All philosophers are men / Judy is a philosopher / Judy is a man
- All people who do not eat red meat believe in New Age philosophy / John does not eat red meat / John believes in New Age philosophy
- Global warming is an imminent danger to the planet / Global warming is caused by human industrial activity / We should regulate human industrial activity to prevent global warming

Syllogism

- Good Christians go to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Bill goes to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Bill is a good Christian
- Good Christians give ten-percent of their income every week to the church / Bill gives ten-percent of his income to the church every week / Bill is a good Christian

Enthymeme

- Good Christians go to church twice on Sunday and every Wednesday / Sam only goes to church on Sunday morning
- Good Christians give ten-percent of their income every week to the church / Sam gives five-percent of his income to the church every week

APPENDIX C: STANDING ON THE PROMISES OR FALSE PREMISES?

—HOW DO WE KNOW THE CONCLUSIONS THAT WE HAVE REACHED ARE SOUND?—

—HOW DO WE KNOW THAT WE ARE BASING OUR LIVES ON PREMISES THAT ARE TRUE?—

Some Guidelines - An Overview

- 1) Do the work: Examine the premises of our stated beliefs.
 - 2) Be careful not to fall in love with concept or idea before proved true.
 - 3) Let go of your theory when the facts do not support it.
 - 4) Oops: When you see you are wrong, and you will, change your mind.
 - 5) Give it a rest already: Do not allow rhetoric to be your argument.
 - 6) Some relevant excerpts.
-

In this appendix I have included several excerpts of articles addressing academic fraud and liberal biases in general. Because of copyright restrictions I have limited the number of articles. Also note that per the nature of the web, links come and go as far as remaining active. However a quick search of academic fraud, global warming, gun control, etc. will give you more than enough information to help you in your study. My point of emphasis for the study is not so much the information itself—although I have given you some **very interesting and relevant articles**—but how we handle the data stream that enters our world. How we examine content, premises, etc. How we remain open to new information that may change our minds. How we organize and present data that supports our premises. How we avoid having our emotions dictate our course.

Some Guidelines

- 1) Examine the premises of our stated beliefs. Do the work.

Our premises must be true. What we need to understand is that validity and soundness are two different parts of our “equation.” An argument can be valid—follow through logically—and not be sound (true). If the progression of thought from the premise through the conclusion remains logical, then the argument/belief is valid. But if the premise is false, then validity does not matter as far as the truthfulness of the belief.

The validity of an argument does not depend upon whether its premises or conclusions are true. It merely depends on the formal relation between the premises and conclusion. Valid syllogisms can have false premises or false conclusions. An argument is sound when it is valid and has true premises. Validity is only part of what it takes to make an argument sound.

Premises are like the foundation of a house. You can build a very impressive house on a poor foundation, but it will not stand the storm. And it will not stand the test of time. We need to be sure of our salvation. We must build on Rock. We must have a foundation that can withstand life now and forever.

- (Matthew 7:24–25) Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

Premises are the foundation under the path we walk. I was a heavy equipment operator, and as an operator, I would sometimes build or repair roads in our gravel pit. What is most important? The foundation. If the foundation is not solid, the upper layers will fail from the weight of the truck—or the weight of the truth—and break apart when the trucks drive over it no matter how solid it looked or how smooth it appeared before being put to the test. My satisfaction in building a road, especially over an area that was previously undeveloped, comes in watching the trucks successfully travel the new road.

Of course we cannot do original research in every area we study. We cannot reinvent the wheel in every topic, but when it comes to our search for truth then we should establish some priorities.

We need to examine how we and others process information. How our biases come into play. Our laziness. And our habits. We develop habits, or patterns of thinking, which carry over into all areas of our lives. Whether consciously or not we pretty much handle all information the same because that is how we have trained ourselves. In other words if I do not handle truth well in my job as a researcher, then I will not handle truth well when I study the words of God. The same strengths and weaknesses will be evident. We may think that we study God's words differently, but we will study as we have trained ourselves through experience.

What I would like us to do is to view the issue not necessarily as a Christian versus non-Christian way of thinking, but as a proper or improper methodology in accurately handling the incoming information. If I, as a Christian, am not walking by the Spirit, then I will fulfill the desires of my fallen humanity (Galatians 5:16). We need to remember this as we look at the various examples I have given and others that you will come across. And not judge. Because when we become judges Paul tells us that we do the same things as the ones we are judging (Romans 2:1-3).

2) Be careful not to fall in love with a concept or an idea before it is proved to be true.

This is something I deal with on a regular basis as a pastor in preparing messages. I sometimes have to let go of an idea or change the emphasis of a message as my study dictates a different direction. We have an expression—"That'll preach"—when a thought just begs to be shared. We have to try to temper our emotions so we do not blind ourselves to the text in case the words of God direct us elsewhere. Do not be so enamored with a thesis that we ignore the evidence.

(From History News Network on Web / Subject: Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud / Posted By: Jerome L. Sternstein / Date Posted: June 17, 2002, 6:58 PM)

There was no reason to have suspected that Poulshock was deliberately seeking to deceive, though, as I mentioned in my article on the case, **Poulshock's dissertation adviser was so enamored by the thesis Poulshock argued that he believed it to be true even after the book's evidence supporting that thesis proved to be fraudulent.**

Similarly, I think, some historians today who are unwilling to pronounce judgment on Bellesiles' book without leave from a higher authority—perhaps Emory's panel—are constrained not so much by their commitment to "due process" but by their unwillingness to believe the worst about a book whose thesis they find very appealing.

3) Let go of your theory when the facts do not support it.

(Joan Ryan columnist for San Francisco Chronicle / Terre Haute Tribune Star / 08-23-02)

When facts collide with the activists' cause.

The Northern California Cancer Center sits in a nondescript industrial park in Union City, a few minutes off the 880 freeway. The scientists work quietly in separate small offices crammed with three-ring binders and stacks of paper. They spend their days looking for clues, for connections, for even one tiny piece of the picture that advances the confounding jigsaw puzzle of cancer.

So when the results of the long-awaited study of breast cancer on Long Island, N.Y. hit newsstands last week, the NCCC epidemiologists—like cancer epidemiologists everywhere—examined the data like detectives at a crime scene.

One thing became clear to them right away: The controversial results would further strain the delicate relationship between the hard-working activists who raise money for cancer research and the scientists who carry it out. The Long Island study found no solid environmental link to breast cancer. The seven-year, \$8 million project concluded that a woman isn't any more likely to get breast cancer if she has high levels of four toxic chemicals in her blood than if she has low levels.

This is not the conclusion that the Long Island activists, or other environmentalists, expected when they pushed Congress to mandate the elaborate study. ***It is so contradictory to their long-held assumptions that they are unwilling to accept the findings.*** They remain convinced, as do many reasonable women across the country, that the high rates of breast cancer in their communities are the result of toxins.

(Newsweek May 20, 2002 / The Last Word George F. Will)

Gunning for A Bad Book

In a large event, much commented on, the Justice Department last week told the Supreme Court that the Second Amendment (“A well regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms, shall not be infringed”) “broadly protects the rights of individuals,” not just the right of states to organize militias. This event was pertinent to a small event two weeks earlier, noticed by almost no one. The National Endowment for the Humanities demanded a review of “the serious charges that have been made against Michael Bellesiles’ scholarship,” which the NEH helped to finance.

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Bellesiles's thesis is startling. It is that guns were not widely owned, or reliable enough to be important, at the time the Second Amendment was written. The implication is that the amendment should be read to protect only the collective rights of states, not the rights of individuals. The book pleased partisans of a cause popular in the liberal political culture of academia – gun control. Reviews were rapturous: “exhaustive research,” “intellectual rigor,” “inescapable policy implications,” “the NRA’s worst nightmare.”

Not exactly.

What has become Bellesiles's nightmare began when a historian, suspecting nothing and hoping to build upon Bellesiles's data, asked for more details about the 18th and early-19th-century probate records that Bellesiles says show that guns were infrequently listed among the estates of deceased people. He also purported to find that many of the guns that were listed were in disrepair.

When Bellesiles's evasive response led to more tugging on the threads of his argument, it unraveled. The unraveling revealed a pattern of gross misstatements of facts and unfounded conclusions. His errors are so consistently convenient for this thesis, it is difficult to believe that the explanation is mere sloppiness or incompetence. It looks like fraud.

4) When you see you are wrong, and you will, change your mind.

(Steve Chapman columnist for Chicago Tribune / Indianapolis Star / November 1, 2002)

Skeptical environmentalist now optimistic about Earth.

Anthrax in the mall. The Taliban hanging on in Afghanistan. The economy sliding into recession. O.J. beating the rap once again. Lately, all you've been hearing is bad news. Today's subject is the environment, and you're no doubt expecting more of the same. We all know there is never any good environmental news. Surprise.

The tale begins in 1997, when a Danish professor saw a magazine article about a University of Maryland economist, Julian Simon, who disputed the prevailing view that the state of the environment is bad and getting worse. To political scientist and statistician Bjorn Lomborg, a leftist and vegetarian,

this sounded like “simple, American right-wing propaganda.” So he decided to prove it wrong.

He put 10 of his best students at the University of Aarhus to examine Simon’s absurd claims in depth. What they found was not what he anticipated. “A surprisingly large amount of his points,” reports Lomborg, “stood up to scrutiny and conflicted with what we believed ourselves to know.” **Faced with these chastening facts, Lomborg did something rare among committed political activists: He changed his mind.** His new book, *The Skeptical Environmentalist* (Cambridge University Press), is the result.

5) Do not allow rhetoric to be your argument.

(Jerry Taylor / director of natural resource studies at the Cato Institute / senior editor of Regulation magazine <http://www.cato.org/dailys/9-15-97.html>)

September 15, 1997/The Heated Rhetoric of Global Warming by Jerry Taylor

As the nations of the world busily prepare an international treaty to address greenhouse gas emissions, the public debate over global climate change is heating up. Yet the political debate over what to do about global warming is far different from the scientific debate surrounding the issue, and the gulf between the two is widening, not closing. Politics—not science—is increasingly driving this debate, and truth is increasingly the casualty.

.....

On July 19, the distinguished British journal *New Scientist* published a cover story titled “Greenhouse Wars: Why the Rebels Have a Cause.” After a thorough review of the scientific evidence marshaled by both sides, the magazine concluded that the skeptics are “among the world's top scientists.” The unmistakable if unspoken bottom line of the article is that these skeptics have the better of the scientific argument at present.

Have Babbitt and Gelbspan somehow failed to notice this genuine debate in the world of science? Of course not. As the old lawyers adage goes: When you have the facts on your side, hammer the facts; when you have the law on your side, hammer the law; when you have neither, hammer the table.

6) Some Relevant Excerpts.

Here I have tried to share several excerpts that I believe are not only relevant to the points in this appendix but also relevant to things discussed earlier in the study concerning our approach to the data around us.

Left to ourselves we will not only interpret information according to our vision of life, or our world-view, or our philosophy of life, but we will change it to fit our design and agenda. Whatever we decide to call it we need to be aware of this obstacle to truth and allow God to grow a measure of humility in us and dependence on him as we realize how formidable our task is.

The excerpts I share here are just a glimpse of our world. Once you understand the principles we have discussed earlier in the study, you will begin to see these things everywhere. It's like after I put new siding on the house I began to notice all these siding jobs. "That one looks nice." "That one was a lot of work." "Looks like they nailed too tight."

I have tried to include web addresses where applicable. Search the web. Go to Google or Yahoo and key in "academic fraud" or "how our minds work" or ...

*(Washington, D.C. -- MEDIA RESEARCH CENTER REPORT: ABC News' Michael Guillen: Beware of Climate Hype -- Thursday, August 13, 1998
<http://www.globalwarming.org>)*

One Reporter Punctures Global-Warming Hysteria. Others at Networks Prove His Point.

Something unprecedented happened on ABC's Good Morning America on Tuesday: A correspondent questioned global-warming hysteria. Unfortunately, such basic skepticism was missing in every other report on climate change this week, as other network reporters continued to parrot Al Gore's warnings that the Earth is catastrophically warming.

The sole dissenter from the party line was ABC News Science Editor Michael Guillen. "The earth does things in cycles," Guillen noted. "Everything from the 24-hour day-night cycle, to a woman's 28-day menstrual cycle, to the yearly seasonal cycle, what goes up must come down and what goes down must come up. And from a geological point of view, we were in an ice age not so long ago, and what we've been doing for the last 10,000 years, if you take a really big picture, is warming up since then, rebounding from that ice age. So this might be just part of that."

Other reporters went further. Jim Moret, anchor of CNN's The World Today, told August 10 viewers that July "was the hottest month ever recorded on earth." Reporter Sharon Collins then claimed that "this year's extreme weather adds to the body of evidence that climate change is not only real, it's already here."

She did note that there are skeptics of global-warming theories, and even ran a quote from Fred Smith of the Competitive Enterprise Institute, but then proceeded to taint the credibility of skeptics: "The oil and coal industries bankrolled a multi-million dollar campaign to throw cold water on predictions of a warming earth." Collins then falsely claimed that "most climate scientists agree with Al Gore's general assessment."

(Science / May 15, 2003 <http://www.globalwarming.org/>)

Making the Data Fit the Model

The standard dataset is produced by a team at the University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH), led by John Christy.

.....

Christy cast doubt on the reliability of Santer's model, telling Reason magazine science correspondent Ron Bailey, "It's a lot easier to model the stratosphere because you only have to consider radiational effects. The troposphere is much messier. It contains complicated things likes clouds, convection, moisture and dust."

He went on to tell the Oakland Tribune, "It does not bother me that our data do not agree with their virtual model of the world ... It's a curious way to do science, to use a model to verify data rather than the other way around. If you follow this too far down that road, you're in danger of saying, 'It's my theory that's correct and the real world that's wrong.'" (Ron Bailey, Tech Central Station, May 1).

(John Crace / February 11, 2003 / <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2003/feb/11/highereducation.research>)

Peer trouble: How failsafe is our current system at ensuring the quality and integrity of research? Not very, says John Crace.

Last year wasn't the greatest for US science. First the journal Nature withdrew its support for an article it had published the previous November

alleging that GM genes had contaminated non-GM crops in Mexico, after serious doubts were raised about the scientific data. Then the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in California admitted that one of its scientists, Victor Ninov, had fabricated the discovery of two new chemical elements. And in October, Jan Hendrik Schön, the wunderkind of nanotechnology at Bell Laboratories, based in New Jersey, was outed as a fraud. Of the 25 papers he had published in the previous three years, 16 were deemed to be entirely false, with a further six under suspicion. The journal Science has since withdrawn eight of Schön's papers.

Some see this as just bad luck. After all, they argue, academic fraud has been around since the year dot and it's just coincidence that three high-profile cases come along at once. Others are less certain, and believe that the past 10 years have seen a marked increase in malpractice as competition for research funds, development money and jobs has intensified. A recent study by the university of Minnesota of 4,000 researchers in more than 100 faculties found that one in three scientists plagiarized, 22% handled data "carelessly" and 15% occasionally withheld unfavorable data.

Acknowledging Academic Fraud

(By Tanya Metaksa / FrontPageMagazine.com | June 13, 2002)

IT'S SPRING CLEANING time in the academic world. The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) has recently admitted bias in their research. Historian Doris Kearns Goodwin has resigned from both the McNeil-Lehrer Newshour and the Pulitzer Prize Board in the wake of a plagiarism scandal involving her book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*. Now it is time for Columbia University follow suit by rescinding its award of the prestigious 2001 Bancroft Prize for History to Michael Bellesiles, author of the fraudulent and discredited anti-gun tract *Arming America*.

Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud

(From History News Network on Web / Subject: Bellesiles, Poulshock and Academic Fraud Posted By: Jerome L. Sternstein Date Posted: June 17, 2002, 6:58 PM)

I was amused by James Oakes post about the experience of the historian he referred to, whose original comment about giving Bellesiles' book to a group of students to parse for errors in citations and quotes says they found

none. I, too, read her comment on H-NET—which was slightly different than what Prof. Oakes relates—and thought to respond then about a similar experience of mine dealing with a book of acknowledged fraud, S. Walter Poulshock's, "The Two Parties and the Tariff in the 1880s", but didn't. Let me relate this story now, because it might add something to the discussion about how academic fraud reveals itself. Also, since Ralph Luker referred to Poulshock's fraud, which I uncovered in 1966 and wrote about last February on HNN, I'd like to clear up one of Luker's misapprehensions. Not EVERY citation was fraudulent, but 173 out of 195 that I and three other historians were able to check in manuscript collections were, as well as scores from other sources.

.....

What this indicates is not that students are poor checkers of citations but that Poulshock ***included accurate citations with his fraudulent ones, as any intelligent person who sets out to deceive would do.*** And remember his deception fooled at least three distinguished scholars in late 19th century American History at the University of Pennsylvania and several outside readers, also specialists in the field. But I mention this not to criticize them but merely to demonstrate that skillful fraud is not obvious. The only way they could have uncovered Poulshock's fraud earlier was to travel to the Library of Congress and go through the manuscript collections Poulshock cited. And why should they have done so? There was no reason to have suspected that Poulshock was deliberately seeking to deceive, though, as I mentioned in my article on the case, Poulshock's dissertation adviser was so enamored by the thesis Poulshock argued that he believed it to be true even after the book's evidence supporting that thesis proved to be fraudulent.

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prayer
faithful
Jesus
meaning
words **path** study
teach **Bible** culture
know life **Theology** believe
ways follow
God light
spirituality
understand
diligent