

## How to Avoid the Bible Reading Rut

My love for God's Word began shortly after I was saved. God's Word had so much to say to me! Realizing its relevance to my life for the first time, I began underlining verses that seemed pertinent to me or verses that seemed particularly appropriate to my life. Soon almost the entire New Testament was underlined.

But after I had learned much about the Bible, these familiar verses no longer stood out the way they had when I was first discovering them. Parts of the Bible had become so familiar that the words no longer penetrated my mind. It was then that I realized my need for deep, continuous study of God's Word. Reading alone would no longer suffice. Through experiments with many types of Bible study, I have found five favorites that still continue to open the Bible to me in a fresh and vital way.

My favorite study methods are: Six Ws, Six Questions, Biography, Outlining, and Topical Study.

The first of these was recommended by a speaker I heard in Bible college. I don't remember his name, but he gave me a tool that has continually helped me in my Bible study. The six Ws are: Who? Where? When? What? Why? and Wherefore?

In studying the Bible using this method, look first for persons, including God, angels, and demons. When you have noted all the persons involved, try to decide who are the central or most important characters.

Then ask, Where? Note all mention of geographical location and consult appropriate maps.

Then ask, When? Note references to time in the Scripture itself, first of all. Then consult chronologies or marginal notes on the date of the event, remembering that scholars sometimes disagree on these matters.

When you have noted the persons, the location, and the time involved, turn your attention to the action itself. What happened in the biblical narrative?

Another thing you should note is what objects are involved. Sometimes, these are of great importance, as in the tabernacle.

When you have noted all these things about a portion of Scripture, you are ready to apply the next steps and apply the Word to your life.

Ask, Why? Examine the motives and the characters. Why did they act as they did? Why did God give the command He gave? Why did the event happen as it did? This is interpretation. Decide what it means for you in your own life.

“Wherefore” asks what you would do about the Scripture. How would you obey it in your life?

I have used the Six Ws method often in my personal Bible study and have found that it helps me to notice things about the Scripture that I might otherwise overlook. It encourages me to take a careful, deep look at Scripture and discourages me from skimming over words without allowing them to pierce my consciousness.

Another favorite method of Bible study is what I call Six Questions. I do not know who originated this method. I first encountered it in a follow-up letter I received after making a decision at a Youth for Christ convention. Like the Six Ws, the Six Questions force me to look more deeply at the Scripture under consideration.

The six questions are: Does this Scripture have a command to obey? Does it teach a principle to follow? Does it condemn a sin to avoid? Is there an example to follow? Can I see a teaching to believe? Is there a problem to investigate?

Unlike the Six Ws, a Scripture will seldom answer all of these. Many Scriptures will receive an affirmative answer to one of the six questions. The strength of this method is that it forces a deeper look at the passage under consideration. This method is less time-consuming than the first one. In fact, if the questions are firmly in mind or in a convenient spot in your Bible, this method takes little extra time beyond reading. Yet it helps to fix in mind something definite about the passage -- something that is likely to come into your mind for further meditation throughout the day.

At one time I kept a partitioned notebook in which I wrote each of these questions. In the “Commands to Obey” section, I wrote every command I found, paraphrased in my own words. In the “Sins to Avoid” section, I kept a list of sins – again in my own words. In the “Sins to Avoid” section, I kept a list of sins – again in my own words. This proved to be a valuable project that helped me see how much God’s Word has to say to me personally.

The “Problem to Investigate” question is one that should be written down, even if the other questions are answered only in your mind. This notebook or list is for verses you may not fully understand, passages that raise a question in your mind, or problems you would like to investigate further. Often help can be obtained from Bible study books, commentaries, a pastor, or other Hebrew or Greek scholars. Sometimes just writing down a problem or question and thinking about it over a period of time will give you new insight.

Another valuable method of Bible study is biography, or character study. Simply choose a Bible character and study all the passages that mention him. These passages can be found by looking up the name to be studied in an exhaustive concordance. A study of lesser Bible characters can often yield rich rewards.

In studying a character, try to study his life in chronological order. Look for outstanding characteristics; try to understand what kind of person he was, and why. What were his victories? What were his failures and problem areas? What were his sins? Did he have trials? In what way might I be like the character? What can I learn from his life?

Another favorite method of study is outlining. This is valuable because it helps one to understand how a book or a chapter is structured. This is especially important in the epistles where the author's thought is often difficult to follow.

One easy method of outlining is simply to title chapters. I studied the entire Bible through once, simply entitling each chapter. For this purpose one needs a Bible without headings – a simply text Bible, not a study or reference Bible. It is difficult to be objective or original when titles, divisions, and outlines are right before you.

This method not only causes you to look carefully at the passage, but also focuses your attention on the unity of the passage within the chapter and the book. How does this passage and this verse contribute to the development of the chapter? How do they contribute to the book as a whole? Outlining a book of the Bible will help you to see these relationships.

A fifth favorite method of Bible study is the topical approach. Everyone has favorite topics or subjects that are particularly intriguing with which he would like to become more familiar.

I am currently doing a major topical Bible study on women in preparation for leading a women's Bible study group. In the past I have studied all that the Bible says about many other subjects. The advantage of topical study is that you have the privilege of considering all that the Bible teaches on a subject; that is important to interpretation.

Many Bibles have a topical index giving partial listings of references on hundreds of subjects. You may choose a subject of almost any magnitude. You may investigate a subject that troubles you or about which you know little. You may find new insight into a subject about which you already know much.

Serious Bible students – and that should include every believer – should try a variety of Bible study methods. The things you notice using one method are not always the things you will notice using another method. Using a variety of methods will keep you finding new insights and new truths from God's Word.

A few times I have had the terrifying experience of picking up my Bible and not knowing what to read. I have skimmed here and there, read a chapter from one book one day and a chapter from another the next. With no continuity and no direct purpose, I did not receive as much from my reading as I should have. It is easier to get out of the habit of daily study when you do not concentrate on a particular thing. By using these methods of Bible study, I have retained more interest, anticipated my Bible study more, and learned more facts and helpful spiritual principles.

I have found that it is an advantage to me to use many good translations in my study. I often compare translations. This helps to clear up the meanings of obscure words and helps me avoid the problem of the words becoming so familiar that they fail to pierce my mind leaving my inner self unaffected.

Bible study does take more time than light reading, but the time used is an investment that helps you to become more familiar with the mind of God and the basis of your faith.

My Bible reading is not in a rut anymore. When there are so many exciting methods of Bible study, it's hard not to be excited!