

## Practical Ways to Learn the Bible II

### Guidelines VII

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~ After our last report from our Spiritual Safari concerning practical ways to learn the Bible, this second sub-guideline of the same title may seem rather oversimplified. In our last report we made a list of the seven sub-guidelines and number two is “Read the Bible.” Someone asked a great Shakespearean Scholar many moons ago, “How do you study Shakespeare”? – I am almost guessing that you dear readers can figure that answer out. If we want to know what the Bible has to say – we have to actually read the Bible. Whether or not you follow the safari recipe laid out in our first six Guideline reports regarding daily Bible study, it is all-important that we read the Bible alone, in constant prayer and in the peace of quiet as part of a diligent study.

Dr G Campbell Morgan has written some excellent books on the Bible. He has a series called “The Living Messages”, which is a collection of books about all 66 books of the Bible. These books by Dr Morgan have been more influential than most other books in the lives of many seminary students. It is said of Dr Morgan that he would not put a pen to paper until he had read the book that he was writing at least *fifty* times! Think about that - and don't forget to read your Bible. If you read your Bible the first time and don't quite understand it – just read it again. If you read it again and still don't understand it – read it a third time. If, after three legitimate attempts, you read it and it isn't making sense then pray about it and read it again. God will reveal it to you, or He will provide someone who can explain it to you. Your effort will not be a waste of your time.

You and I are instructed, as children of God, to get the facts for ourselves. We are going to be held responsible for digging out the facts and learning about God from His Word. The Lord reveals the spiritual things, but He makes us responsible to get the history, geography, culture and the basic background of the Bible on our own. God is just not going to hand out the answers to the test when you could have easily searched them out for

yourself. After all, it is an open book test when it comes. The problem, quite frankly, is that most people are simply too lazy to study the Bible properly, correctly and completely.

We have said that the Bible is a divine book – but we have also said it is a human book. There are certain things that, if you really want to know the meaning of those things, you are just going to have to study them. I told you this might all seem simplistic. If you want to be a doctor or a lawyer, a brain surgeon or an astronaut - or anything else - you will have to study that subject. If you want to be any of those things you will read much, much more and study much harder to understand that subject than you ever will in the Bible. Further, don't expect to put the Bible under your pillow one night and have all the names of the kings of Judah come wafting up through the pillow, either. You're going to have to actually read the Bible through - and then read it again and again and again.

In the Book of Nehemiah, the returning remnant of the children of Israel from Babylonian captivity constructed a water gate and a pulpit from which Ezra read the law to them. Nehemiah said, *"...all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law"* – Nehemiah chapter eight verses one through three. Then he goes on in verse 4 to name these men that were probably stationed throughout the city and who were priests of the tribe of Levi. It would seem apparent from the passage that they would gather together and read the law; and then they would stop and the people who were listening were probably given an opportunity to ask questions of the men that were stationed about and by whom the law was read. *"...so they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and (it) gave the(m) (common) sense, and caused them to understand the reading"* – Nehemiah chapter eight verse eight.

Well, to “read in the Book of the law of God distinctly” means reading it properly, correctly and completely. Reading it correctly means it will become common sense to us. When we have common sense, we can begin to properly understand. To completely understand, you must read and study the Bible under a competent teacher and in a structured curriculum. If you just open up the Bible and dive in recklessly you will be hopelessly lost at sea. This is all very, very simple stuff – and it’s just that complicated, too, by the way - it is vital that God’s children read and understand the Bible. These men *caused* those people to understand the Bible.

There are so many distractions today that can easily keep us from studying the Word of God. It is VERY easy to not study the Bible. It's even easier to make excuses not to have to! The biggest distraction of them all is the church, in many cases. People get so busy on committees and in organizations and having banquets and entertainment, not to mention promotional schemes and Jesus rock concerts - that the Word of God is usually dealt with very briefly – if it’s dealt with at all. Some churches have disbanded the preaching service altogether! These churches actually advertise that they are not going to have a service of teaching; but rather, a service where the people can get together and express themselves and say what *they* think. I can’t think of anything more nonsensical or more of a waste of time than that!

I understand that eliminating the teaching service and saying, “....I don’t need any man to teach me” is a good way for a lazy preacher and a pitiful congregation to excuse their neglect of studying the Bible – but - I’ve always thought that liberals were wasting their time preaching anyway, because they don’t have anything to preach about; and I say these things as kindly as I can but somebody needs to say these things today – and I just don’t happen to mind being the man that says them. You’re not fooling anyone but yourself with that error, friends; God teaches His Word by His Holy Spirit through the man of God. That’s His method. Always has been. Always will be.

*Psalm 36:9 ....for with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light ~*

Studying the Bible and reading the Bible are a tandem topic but we can separate them for the sake of good measure. Someone said to Dr G Campbell Morgan, “You speak as though you are inspired”. Dr Morgan replied, “inspiration is 95% perspiration”. The Bible needs to be studied. Many people are very pious in an attempt to cover up the vacuum of knowledge in their mind relevant to the Word of God. Many people who appear as though they are extremely religious – and they probably are religious - don’t know the first thing about what is really in the Bible! They can usually be found in some kind of group speaking in tongues - like many choirs do before a service in some churches – or they use the excuse that they were praying. Praying is very good, of course, but these people always seem to be praying that God will increase their territory and make them rich. They never seem to get around to praying that He will cause them to grow in the knowledge and grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. I hate to be so hard-boiled right here, but the study of the Bible is the only place God will speak directly to your heart.

A student once complained that the subject given to study by the teacher was too dry. So the professor told the student to dampen it with some sweat from the brow of study. There is certain knowledge that the Spirit of God will not open to you outside of the Bible’s interior. I don’t think God wastes much time revealing truth to lazy people; in fact, I KNOW He doesn’t! The study of the Bible must be put in the category of other studies, too; you simply aren’t going to learn logarithms or geometry or the Greek language by just glancing at it tiredly for a few minutes before you go to sleep at night. So, with that said, you may be shocked to read what I am about to say about devotional reading of the Bible. I discourage that type of reading wholeheartedly. I know many people that have done devotional reading of the Bible for many years and yet they are some of the most ignorant people of it. To begin with, devotional reading always seems to be done at a time when it ought not to be done. Children at a breakfast table will leave the devotional reading like they have been shot out of a cannon. They won’t be thinking about anything except where they are going – probably late for school or something. Old Pop’s slams it shut and he’s out the door and can’t remember where he left off without a bookmarker. Of course, mom’s left with the mess to try to deal with it and clean it up the

best she can. She has never heard anything he has ever read or said, either, by the way.

So, I encourage you to read it on your own. Read and study a passage that a competent teacher has explained to you. Say a private prayer in which you confess all of your sins and then ask the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the text. Tell Him that you *want* to understand it – and you will – maybe not immediately, but when you do have revelation you will know it is absolutely divine. I don't think you should study right before bed, either. You're already tired and have one eye shut – no real comprehension will take place. We need to be fresh, alert and sober and wide awake to really undertake a meaningful study of God. Now, I have woken up in the middle of the night and read it for a while because I find that reading it will make me sleepy. If reading the Bible doesn't put you to sleep then listening to these reports sure will – but I digress! So, be awake and alert and make time to study and pray and study. It works both ways.

If you don't have time you need to make time; time that you set apart. I don't really want to make an attempt at a rule – but each person should read it for him or herself. That is one way to encourage others to also read and study the Bible. You will be amazed at the way in which that type of encouragement really does work, too, by the way. Further, and I know this may shock some people who have had that daily devotional reading for years and years and who are accustomed to reading it together, but if that's the way the Lord leads you to do it then I am wrong and you keep right on doing it that way; but I don't think I am. I don't think God is asking you to do it that way, either. I say that because: you'll never be an intelligent Bible student that way – even after twenty years of doing it like that.

We have to study the Word of God intelligently under a competent, educated, sincere, systematic, Spirit-filled and Spirit led man chosen and ordained by God Himself to teach the Bible, friends. Not everyone fits that description. I cannot overemphasize that. Remember the Ethiopian Eunuch in the Book of Acts. He was reading the Scriptures – but he had no idea what he was reading. The Spirit of God moved Phillip to go and join himself to the Eunuch and Phillip asked the man, “Do you know what you are

reading”? The man, who was the treasurer, said, “How can I understand if there is no man to teach me?” There are many people who seriously need to realize that today.

That brings us to the fourth basic and fundamental way to learn the Bible: meditate on the Word of God following prayer, reading and study. Meditation is something that God taught His people. The Word of God was to be before the children of Israel at all times; they were to meditate and become saturated with His Word, or, as it is in the Old Testament – His law. Moses said, “...and these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” – Deuteronomy chapter six verses six through nine.

The children of Israel were commanded to keep the Word of the Lord before them at all times. They were to carry a bound book that everyone would know as the Bible and would signify them as His children. When the Bible says to teach it to your children it means by example; by the way you live your life. Don’t think you are going to tell them one thing and do another and then expect your children to obey you. That’s not going to happen. This is the most amazing statement we have seen yet in this collection of reports; they were to write the Word of God *everywhere!*

This is rarely – if ever – taught any more. Most Christians have forgotten about it altogether. Oh, every once in a while you will see some difficult to read prose pop up perniciously and presumptuously and presented in a most preposterous and puerile way. Or on an old, beat up ’63 Galaxy with Bible verses painted all over it; and a man driving with nasty hair that’s down to his ass, which is what he usually speaks out of, when he is standing on a street corner holding up a cardboard sign that says, “Jesus is Coming Soon.” Well, I am absolutely humiliated when I see that type of thing. I can only bow my head in shame and sorrow because of the way in which this type of thing positively shuts people out from a life in Christ.

By contrast, I observe the alcohol advertisements and how utterly dignified the people are made to appear in them. Or, at least it used to be that way. Now they depict fat, stupid, ugly guys with beautiful chicks bringing them endless beer – they call it reality TV – it is, in reality, a bad joke - but that's not really the point here. Sometimes, I get just plain sick and tired – not to mention more and more ashamed – to be fellow citizens with these people who label themselves “Christians.” I know, I'm a square, friends; but if I weren't a square, I would still be chasing my tail in circles – and I wouldn't have such sharp points, either! The only way I developed my sharp corners is from some serious pounding from the Hammer in the Hand of the Lord Jesus Christ; through His Word in prayer, reading, studying and meditating thereupon. It is not always pleasant. In fact, this so called safari is going to get downright ugly before it's all over. I know many people may find this hard to believe - but I don't guess at what I am writing when I'm writing these reports.

Having become a sophisticated society today we have removed the sin from most things – like being a drunkard, for example. A drunkard today, according to the psychologist, is not a sinner; he is just sick, that's all. All he needs is a little group of other sick people that have healed themselves - and some vague, shadowy outline of a spirit that may or may not be higher than their own free will – and they are miraculously cured. The people that do not need that group have “adapted” and they say they drink responsibly. Well, they sure are responsible for millions of deaths, car crashes, serious injuries, wrecked lives, broken homes, abandoned and abused children, ruined careers, bodily illnesses that plague health care - and that's the short list – you don't want the entire report right now. It is on it's way though, I assure you.

Meditate on the Word of God and these things will become common sense to you; because they are common sense. God said His Word is to be given prominence, priority and presence by His people. If you and I are to understand the Word of God we must meditate on it. That means to think about it all the time and to ask ourselves continually, “How does this apply to my life right now in this situation”? Read and study the Bible and then discuss it with a loved one that does likewise – that is meditation. Personally, I like to go back over the Bible text again and again. New truths

break open from old verses like the waves on the beach. What do you think about or listen to or read or watch on TV when you don't have anything else to do and those things have become boring? What do you do when the news reports, intellectual papers and scholarly findings continually conflict with each other and then change altogether? What happens when the daily news has become re-runs with new actors? When you can't sleep at night do you count the sheep or talk to the Shepherd? What does it mean to you to meditate on the Word of God?

*Psalm 1:1 "...Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. 2 But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night" ~*

A serious undertaking regarding the original Hebrew word used for meditate in verse two of Psalm one - and the meaning thereof - is probably the best starting place I could possibly recommend for you. Be prepared for a shock. I'll not go into that as you can easily get the answers yourself; but the picture is not pretty. The picture is, well, sick. Why would God make these pictures for our minds? – Well, we need to get our thought process in the proper order for the picture of meditation. When God speaks – be prepared for anything. We must take the things that we read and study and meditate on them. It will be one of the keys that unlock the doors of revelation. If you don't use the keys you can stand there and knock or bang or ring the doorbell – you may even try to break in – but you will just not succeed that way. There is only one way for the door to the answers of the mysteries in Scripture to ever be unlocked; it is a process – a lifelong process ~

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