

THE SECRET OF REWARDING BIBLE STUDY

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My topic this evening as you saw this morning's bulletin is "The Secret of Rewarding Personal Bible study." It's no secret. There is no topic I enjoy looking at more and am more enthused about presenting. Because I feel sometimes that maybe the normal tendency which emerges in a church is the pastor's job to study the word and for us to dutifully show up and listen to him as he tells us in one hour all that it has taken him a week to learn. But I have a tremendous vital concern for all of us in the regard to our own personal habits of Bible study.

Some years ago, over ten years ago, I discovered an essay that is now nearly a hundred years of age. I'm going to read that essay to begin with this evening for it lays out a kind of a principle of study which when I discovered it absolutely revolutionized not only my study of scripture but my whole attitude toward studying in general. So I think there's kind of a spill over effect of this message this even particularly for those of you who are still engaged in academics work. I don't have a biblical text to begin with although there are many I could possibly use. I would appeal to the analogy that the Lord frequently taught by use of parable. So accept the reading which I give this evening as a kind of a parable of study.

It was written by a student of a professor of zoology in the later half of the nineteenth century. He described an experience he had in a laboratory with the professor. Remember this was written about 1880.

"It was more than fifteen years ago that I entered the laboratory of Professor and told him I had enrolled my name in the scientific school as a student of natural history. He asked me a few questions about my object in coming, my antecedents generally, the mode in which I afterwards proposed to use the knowledge which I might acquire, and finally whether I wish to study any special branch. To the later I replied that while I wish to be well grounded in all departments of zoology I proposed to devote myself especially to insects. When do you wish to begin? he asked. Now, I replied.

This seemed to please him and with an energetic *Very well!* He reached from shelf a huge jar of specimens in yellow alcohol. "Take this fish and look at it. We call it a haemullm. By and by I will ask you what you have seen." With that he left me but in a moment he returned with explicit instructions as to the care of the object entrusted to me. "No man is fit to be a naturalist," said he, "Who does not know how to take care of specimens." I was to keep the fish before me in a tin tray and occasionally moisten the surface with alcohol from the jar, always taking care to replace the stopper tightly. Those were to the days of ground glass stoppers in elegantly shaped exhibition jars. All the old students will recall the huge necklace glass bottles with the leaky waxy smeared corks half eaten by insects and begrimed with cellar dust. Etymology (that is the study of insects) was a cleaner science than ichthyology but the example of the professor who had unhesitatingly plunged to the bottom of the jar to produce the fish was infectious. Though this alcohol had a very ancient and fishlike smell I really dared not show any aversion within these sacred precincts and treated the alcohol as though it were pure water.

Still I was conscious of a passive feeling of disappointment, for gazing at a fish did not commend itself to an ardent etymologist. My friends at home too were annoyed when they discovered that no amount of cologne would drown the perfume, which haunted me like a shadow.

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In ten minutes I had seen all that could be seen in that fish and started in search of the professor who had however left the museum. When I returned after lingering over some of the odd animals stored in the upper apartments my specimen was dry all over. I dashed the fluid over the fish as if to resuscitate it from a fainting fit and looked with anxiety for the return of a normal zombie appearance.

This little experiment over nothing was to be done but to return to a steady fast gaze of my mute companion. Half an hour passed. An hour another hour. The fish began to be loathsome. I turned it over and over, looked it in the face – ghastly. From behind, beneath, above, sideways, at a three-quarter view – just as ghastly. I was in despair. At an early hour I concluded that lunch was necessary. So with infinite relief the fish was carefully placed in the jar and for an hour I was free.

On my return I learned that the Professor had been at the museum but had gone and would not return for several hours. My fellow students were too busy to be disturbed by continued conversation. So I drew forth that hideous fish and with a feeling of desperation again looked at it. I might not use a magnifying glass, instruments of all kinds were interdicted. My two hands, my two eyes, and the fish. It seemed a most limited field. I pushed my fingers down its throat to see how sharp its teeth were. I began to count the scales and the different rows until I was convinced that that was nonsense. At last a happy thought struck me. I would draw the fish. Now with surprise I began to discover new features in the creature.

Just then the professor returned. “That is right,” said he. “A pencil is one of the best eyes. I’m glad to notice too that you keep your specimen wet and your bottle corked.” With these encouraging words he added, “Well, what is it like?” He listened attentively to my brief rehearsal of the structured parts whose names were still unknown to me. When I had finished he waited as if expecting more. Then with an air of disappointment “You have not looked very carefully.” He continued more earnestly “You haven’t seen one of the most conspicuous features of the animal which is as plainly before your eyes as the fish itself. Look again.” And he left me to my misery.

I was peeked. I was mortified. Still more of that wretched fish! But now I set myself to the task with a will and discovered one new thing after another until I saw just how the professor’s criticism, how just it had been.

The afternoon passed quickly. Then toward the close the professor inquired, “Do you see it yet?” No I replied. I am certain I do not. But I see how little I saw before. “That is next best,” said he earnestly. But put away your fish and go home. Perhaps you will be able with a better answer in the morning. I will examine you before you look at the fish.

That was disconcerting. Not only must I think of my fish all night, studying without the object before me, what this unknown but most visible feature might be. But also without reviewing my new discoveries I must give an exact account of them the next day. I had a bad memory. So I walked home by Charles River and in a distracted state with my two perplexities.

The cordial greetings from the professor the next morning was reassuring. Here was a man who seemed to be quite as anxious as I that I should see for myself what he saw. “Do you perhaps mean” I asked “that the fish has symmetrical sides with paired organs.” He was thoroughly

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pleased. "Of course!" repaid the hours of the previous night. After he had discoursed most happily and enthusiastically as he always did upon the importance of this point I ventured to ask what I should do next. "Oh, look at your fish!" he said. And left me again to my own devices.

In a little more than an hour he returned and heard my new catalogue. "That is good! That is good!" he repeated, "But that is not all. Good." So for three long days he placed that fish before my eyes forbidding me to look at anything else or use any artificial aid. Look! Look! Look! Was the repeated injunction.

This was the best entomological lesson I ever had. A lesson that has extended to the details of every subsequent study, a legacy the professor had left to me as he left to many others. Of inestimable value, which we could not buy, with which we could not part.

The fourth day a second fish of the same group was placed beside the first and I was bidden to point out the resemblance and differences between the two. Another and another followed. Until the entire family lay before me and a whole legion of jars covered the table and surrounding shelves. The odor had become a pleasant perfume and even now the sight of an old six-inch worm eaten corpse brings fragrant memories. The whole group of were brought into review and whether engaged upon the dissection of the internal organs, preparation and examination of the bony framework or the description of the various parts and the method of observing facts and orderly arrangement was every accompanied by the urgent exhortation not to be content with them. Facts are stupid things, he would say, "Until brought into connection with some general law."

At the end of eight months it was almost with reluctance that I left those friends and turned to insects. But what I gained from this outside experience has been of greater value than years of later investigation of my favorite group."

What has that got to do with the secret of rewarding Bible study, I went through this essay and traced some principles of Bible study that are here that are absolutely crucial to effective personal Bible study program.

The first crucial thing is make up your mind to get started.

The student had to enroll in the course and that enrollment indicated he was going to take it for better or worse and hopefully come out of it. I fear that sometimes in Bible study we get all charged up because of the devotional message or because we can better renew our devotion to the Lord. There's maybe more stop and go attempts at Bible study that possibly anything going. It's like rededicating your life to the Lord. If you've rededicated your life a number of times and then you turn around and fall back from the dedication it becomes increasingly harder and harder to rededicate.

Bible study is kind of the same way. I find that people have such difficulty knowing where to begin. I know I have. My family has taught me that the best thing to do is to read through the Bible and I made it a goal to read through the Bible. I must admit that by the time I was about fourteen I think I had read through the Bible once or twice. That doesn't mean I understood anything that was there but I had read it. Maybe I picked up some things along the way.

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My mother has read through the Bible now probably about 200 times. She reads it through about every 3 or 4 weeks it seems. She's an avid Bible reader. I found that reading the Bible through Leviticus was a real tough book for me. Those of you who were in the Leviticus series several years ago know that at that time my testimony was that more wagons had broken down in Leviticus than any other part of God's word. So if I didn't break down in Leviticus, Numbers I would be sure to break down in. That was very futile. So at the end of January having vowed that New Years to read the Bible through, having broken down in Leviticus, the next year I vowed to read the Bible through.

Of course I knew that Revelation brought a special blessing if you read it. In many a Sunday afternoon in my youth and childhood since we couldn't do anything else on Sunday afternoon but sit, I have read the book of Revelation. Because my mother always told me this will bring you a special blessing if you read this book. I didn't know what a blessing was. But I figured if it was anything, I wanted it. So I would set down and read the book of Revelation through. I had not the foggiest understanding of what was going on in the book.

Romans again was kind of tough for me. Psalms I got confused with other psalms. I really had a tough time knowing where to begin. It was when I finally began to understand that the place you begin the serious study of scripture is with the gospel. That only leaves four options then – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I personally feel that the easiest gospel to begin with is Mark. But set it as your goal to begin somewhere. Rather than trying to use a happenstance method of Bible study. So if you don't have a regular program of Bible study, this is really directed tonight to those of you who are trying to find a regular system of Bible study. Mark is a great place to begin. If not Mark, another gospel.

Have you ever done what I've done when I didn't have a regular program of Bible study or just trying to read the Bible before you go to sleep at night, just put in your three chapters before you knock off. Your mind isn't taking in too much at that time of night. Finally in desperation you'll get up and say, Lord show me where to read.

This practice originated I guess in about the seventeenth century with the Plymouth brethren. I still read and hear testimonies of person who was in desperation and opens the Bible and there it is! There can be special signs of blessing but there can be more organized.

Get started. Make a determination once you get started to keep going.

A second principle that comes I think in effective personal Bible study is stay on one thing. At least for a while.

The Prof handed the student a fish – one thing. He was going to have to stay on that for a while. If you're kind of a restless person like me, your tendency is to take on more projects and not finish all of them or even half of them. What is a real temptation in Bible study is to begin reading through a book in the Bible then saying, "I'm getting bogged down. I'm not getting a lot out of this. Let's pick up somewhere else, some other theme." So right away your devotion and your energy gets channeled into something else.

I found that in staying with one thing, what is best to do is to put in mind a project of covering a complete book of the scripture. It's better than just staying in one chapter or one verse or one paragraph. In reading a book you get the totality of something first.

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So a good thing to do if you're beginning to study the scripture, like the gospel of Mark is to take it and read it at first from beginning to end. Just get kind of a feel for the whole of it so you can get kind of a gist of what is going on with the book. Stay with something. Particularly if it's the gospel. Stay with it as a complete unit until you get it really down.

My goal in the study of scripture is to know a particular part of the word of God so well that it becomes like information built into a computer. It's in me. The psalm says "Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against God." The kind of intensive study that's really involved and the repetitive sort of a thing that's described in this essay is one in which you really stay with something until it becomes kind of a second nature to you.

I have a friend who said you are not to read the Bible. Better to study the Bible. If something is to remain with you, in your life it must be digested and worked over.

A third principle of Bible study that I have found really crucial is to follow some basic directions. Basic habits of study.

The Prof handed the student the fish and told him to keep the fish wet with alcohol. That's kind of a basic simple direction.

When I study a passage of scripture I have three systems in my mind that I run through. I found that if I go through these systems inevitably I will get to the meaning of the text of scripture.

What did this particular text say? What did this paragraph say? In its original setting what did it mean? At this point I'm trying to do my best to understand precisely what the writer had in mind.

The second question, What *does* it say to me now? I have found, I know when I preach or teach when a sermon or a teaching is being listened to and when it is not. I know when it's not. If it's not it's because I have failed. Most generally it's because I've failed to answer one of these two questions I the preparation of the message. What did it say? Is concerned with history, background. But the question, What does it say? is concerned with application. How does it reach me now?

I used to be bored to death setting through the lessons of the kings of Israel. I still today have a rough time keeping the kings straight from one another and remembering them in succession. Why did I get bored? Because so often the tendency is to deal with So and So did this, this long ago. What was relevant to me to day?

But if I just emphasized what does this say today, my first time I pick up a scripture my immediate jump is what does it say to me? I may neglect some very obvious things, which are important for study. And if I immediately begin my jumping to application I can easily wind up with wrong deductions, which lead, to wrong doctrine and wrong understanding.

A second system in terms of following directions is a five-fold pattern of Bible study, which involves this. Look at a passage and the first thing you do to observe. Try to note all the facts I can pick up in looking at it. For this I have a pencil and paper and jot down all the things that come to me as I look at that text.

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A second thing to do is interpret what is there. What did it mean?

A third thing I try to do is correlate. Correlate that particular passage I am studying with what other teaching may either come before it or after it or in the book itself that I'm studying. For example 1 Timothy 4 which deals with false teaching. Right away I'm looking at this after I'm done observing what it's saying and interpreting it I'm saying where else in this book does Paul in Timothy real about false teaching? I know he talks about it in chapter 1. I know he talks about it in chapter 5 and 6. I take all of these together and get a composite of what is being said about false teaching in 1 Timothy.

Then if I want to see what else is being said about false teaching in the scripture I can leap over to Mark or Galatians or any of the other passages and do some comparison. This is correlation. You can do word correlation and all kinds of things.

An example of correlation is two weeks ago. I talked about the Christian role of women. I took that difficult passage in Timothy "Women will be saved through child bearing." How do you understand that? You understand it by comparing it to other scripture.

A fourth thing to does to apply. The purpose of Bible study is to be a scholar. It's to be a devoted disciple. It's to know the Lord Jesus Christ. It's to take that word and apply it to me. I seek the Lord beyond the Bible study that I'm having. So really the purpose is to meet the living Christ.

A fifth thing involved in Bible study is to communicate.

The minute I tell somebody else what I have learned it reinforces what I have just learned. I've learned more through preaching and teaching. I remember the first time I stood before a class in a teaching relationship. I had been through four years of college and three years of seminary. But never had I prepared a course syllabus or really hadn't given any decent series of lectures. Maybe taught once or twice, maybe for an hour at a time. Now I had this massive task in one semester of coming up with the content for three whole courses I never taught before. And students asking me questions for which I did not have the answers. For which I had stayed up the preceding morning staying those few hours ahead of them in the lecture. What an enormous thing.

I found that by transmitting, by communicating I learned an awful lot. This by the way is the purpose of getting together with others in a Bible study in a small group type setting. And by simply sharing with someone, This is what I pick up from scripture. Communication is a tremendous reinforcement.

Another basic direction, which is kind of a third mental system which I go through in the study of scripture is to ask one of the following six words which is basic to all learning: What? Who? Where? When? Why? How? There's some overlapping between these various systems as you can see the question is simply these. What is the writer saying? Who is he talking about? Who is involved? Where is it happening? When is it happening? Why did the Holy Spirit see fit that this writer put this in the scripture? And how does it apply to me? Here again, always we come to this application.

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One thing I've noticed in Bible study is that sometimes we are too quick to try to answer the question, How does this apply? Application is much more stronger if at the beginning we really do the good kind of study that's significant to the text.

An example from the fourth chapter of John. A nobleman comes to the Lord. The Lord is at Cana and the man is from Capernaum. He says to the Lord, My son is lying ill at home. That's what's going on in the text. This man is coming to Jesus and saying my son is ill. Who is involved? The nobleman, Jesus, his son and some servants. Where is it happening? Jesus is at Cana. The man is from Capernaum. It's about 15 miles away. In biblical days that would have been about a five hour walk. When is it occurring? About the 7th hour or one o'clock in the afternoon. Two days of time are involved. The day in which the man comes and the day in which he returns home at which he puts the conclusion together it was about the same time that Jesus spoke the words the previous day his son began to mend.

So I answer those four questions right away. Then I say, Why is this in the scripture? I begin thinking about John. John says he's writing to people that they might believe that Jesus is the Christ. That these writings communicate faith. He's writing to people that have never seen Jesus. What's important then about this? Why of the seven miracles, which John writes about, should this be one of the seven?

Then it begins to dawn on me. *I've* never seen the Lord. If he's going to heal any of my needs he's going to have to do it in effect by long distant. He's not going to be personally there. He's going to be spiritually there but not personally there. It strikes me therefore that I read that text in John 4 that one of the reasons why John put this in the gospel was the Holy Spirit had him put it in is to bring great courage to us so that we can know that the Lord doesn't have to be physically present to heal.

Then how does this apply to me? I look at this man's faith who came to Jesus. I know what it is to have a little boy that gets sick, have a high fever. Here's a man who comes to Jesus perhaps around one o'clock in the afternoon and Jesus says to him, Your son is going to be well. It's going to be ok. You know what he does? He doesn't get on his horse and ride home and see, Is he well? He had time to get home before the night came. It was only about one o'clock in the afternoon. But what does he do? He evidently stays at Cana. And it isn't until the next day, the middle of the afternoon that he's on his way home.

Therefore this is a beautiful story saying, when Jesus speaks the words to you and you have the assurance in your heart, trust. Take him at his word. Kind of working through a simple paradigm like this helps me. Not always can we answer the question. Maybe there is no time element or geographical element. But these three systems have really helped me. I hope this is helpful to you.

A fourth principle, and it's crucial. Once is not enough.

Remember that the student's first impression when he hauled out the fish was to look at it for ten minutes. In ten minutes he said I've seen everything there is to see. I have the tendency every week. This week I'll take for exhaustive study, 1 Timothy 5. After I've spent 15 minutes to half an hour with the text I'll say, I've got a pretty good idea what's going on there. Then another process starts. I recognize always that if I'm really going to be thoroughly absorbed in the text of scripture that it's going to take more a process.

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I recommend for your personal Bible study that you maybe not take more than a chapter a week or maybe three or four paragraphs a week and thoroughly know those so well that they just become part of your life. Something that is always there. Just know that when you first study scripture and think you understand it a little better. I wish I could be a personal monitor for your Bible studies. I would probably say, That's wonderful but you haven't been it all. Keep there until you've seen more.

I've been through the gospel of Mark now at least maybe 25 times. Every time I go through that gospel which I feel I know frontward and backwards, 115 paragraphs, there's something new there every time. Sometime I missed before. That's the incredible thing about the word of God. Full of life. You really know it's inspired when you study it.

A fifth principle of Bible study and one we can't ignore and that is expect tedium. That's a polite way of saying expect times when you're bored to death.

I'm a pastor. How could I ever say that? I say that because probably most of you in studying the scripture or reading scripture may have at one time or another in your life had not gotten the point or maybe had gotten tired. Anytime you get involved in study. Sometimes when you are simply going on the basis of commitment, not enthusiasm. Sometimes I think that the deep Christians are separated by then not so deep Christians by the fact that the deep Christians will keep on running on commitment when the enthusiasm has been long gone for a while. They'll keep on with the commitment until the enthusiasm comes back.

A sixth principle of Bible study and this will greatly relieve you: stay away from outside help. Particularly in the beginning stages. Stay away from outside help.

Remember the Prof told the student just use your eyes and the fish. We ministers I think can so destroy people's confidence in their study of the word. We can get up and say, It says this in the Greek. You're sitting there going, I guess I'll never know the Bible unless I know Greek because I'll never get the meaning of that word. It's so easy to just totally undermine your confidence in scripture.

One of the things I've really learned to have a great deal of confidence in is the English text is there. The word of God can come through in English without your ever knowing a Greek word or having to break out a lexicon. If you want to learn Greek that's great. But it's not a requirement. There have been persons who have gotten great insight and understanding from scripture and the mass of Christendom in America learns from the scripture and never know another language.

You don't have to own a bunch of books either. I recommend you stay away from commentaries in regard to your study of scripture. You know why? Because your tendency is going to be to read the paragraph and then see what his guy has to say. The better he is, I find some guys are so good I don't read them until I get my teaching prepared. If I'm going to teach on a particular passage. They're going to wipe me out of any originality, of any wrestling with the text myself, any spiritual evidence I can have. They're going to be like the guy who comes along and strips the stuff off a cocoon with a butterfly is emerging. Then when they do the butterfly is going to be weak. I need to get through that myself.

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So I try as much as possible, if I'm going to use outside help I the beginning, I might use a Bible dictionary or an concordance or a lexicon in terms of the Greek. But by and large, what do you see on your own.

As you learn I think there can be more freedom to use commentaries because you don't get swamped by them. You realize that even the commentaries disagree and that gives you the courage to say, I disagree with you commentator. It's a pretty exhilarating feeling when you can talk back to a commentator and say, I think you're wrong.

I encourage you also to stay away – and this is really a heretical statement – stay away from reference bibles because they have a tendency to do your thinking for you.

Another good principle. Observe with paper and pencil or pen. Set down with the scripture when you're going to have your private study time with the scripture set down with kind of a little notebook a personal journal.

Writing things down is an enormous help to you. If you ever really begin to study the scripture when you first begin writing things down you think, This is so ordinary. Nothing special. Nothing earthshaking. Nothing enlightened that has happened to me I've just written a bunch of stuff down that I see.

But there's a kind of discipline that comes through this. That as you keep doing this all of a sudden you begin writing things down and seeing things that you just never dreamed were there. Scripture becomes a personal oasis for you. I believe very much in the law of the gospels, To him who has more will be given. As you stay at this kind of faithful principle of taking notes of your thoughts and your interaction with scripture, the better you'll be over the course of years.

I've got a few more principles. The eighth principle is – back to the student for a moment. There came a point at the end of the day in which the Prof told the student to summarize. Summarize what he had learned. So the student puts back to the Prof the kinds of things he has picked up in his study of the fish.

I find this to be invaluable in Bible study. When I've been away from scripture like for a day and I come back and I want to start a new chapter, anew paragraph, immediately I'll try to put myself in context. What was going on before? We can come for example to the gospel of John and if I can read John 21 and at the same time mentally think through what the content of John is, then that chapter becomes all so much more powerful. Or when I come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7 and I read about Jesus saying there are two men that set out to build. One built on solid rock and the other built on sand. Then I think what's the nature of this? I go back and think though the totality of the Sermon the Mount, what Christ was saying. The kinds of ways we can build upon rock. Then it becomes so much more meaningful if I can review where I've been. Again it becomes a part of me.

Another principle. That is imagination. A spirit of inquiry which won't let a text go until you have the meaning for it. And until you can really apply it to your life. The student had to stay there with that fish sad keep at it and keep at it and keep at it. The Prof said even though you've been able to summarize all you've learned this day you still haven't seen the most basic thing that's involved.

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Here is a kind of fermenting process in our hearts, in our spiritual lives as we work with the scripture. One of the good things to do in regard to a scriptural passage is maybe set out in the early part of the week by looking at the scripture. Maybe a chapter for the week or a few paragraphs that you're going to really intentionally study that week. Try to learn all you can about those chapters. Then in your thought life and in your prayer life as you're driving, as you're going through the week begin saying to the Holy Spirit, How would you want me to apply this to my life? How do you really want me to understand it?

I have found that the most successful fruit of Bible study is not when I'm simply setting down there with my pen or pencil. That's needed. That's important. But it's when I get away from that and I'm consciously beginning to integrate what I'm learning in the scripture in my daily life. I'm doing this through the process of meditation or prayer or both.

In the early part of the week is the time for the real skullduggery in terms of working with the text. But in the later part of the week is the time to ask the Holy Spirit, Which direction, Lord, do you want this to go? What are the principle things that you want to emerge? How can you help me see this so that with clarity and forcefulness and imagination and application I can share this with the people whom you have called to this church?

There's kind of a simple thing tool that will help you to listen to me if you take notes or anything like this. Here's what I always do when I'm preaching. It's kind of like the guy who can only draw a fish one way. It's the only way I know to preach. I start out with an introduction. In that introduction I'm going to introduce you to the sermon. At some point I'm going to try to get your interest and try to say here's what the scripture is opening for us today.

Then I'm going to do a second thing. That is my message and I'm going to really watch carefully. Normally I have three or four or sometimes two leading concepts from that text that the Holy Spirit has shared with me and I want to share with you.

Finally I'm going to come to a spot hopefully, in which I conclude and say, Now in light of this what do we do? Even though it might appear to be disorganized it's really not.

Imagination and meditation. The student as he went home he had to keep thinking about it. I find that there are two methods of memorizing scripture. I enjoy both of them. One way is to memorize literally, word for word. Memorize passages at a time. That's an enormously challenging experience.

But another way to memorize the word is to memorize in paraphrase form. It becomes part of you. You couldn't quote it word for word but you sure can think through the scripture.

I recognize that to do this with intensity that's involved in Bible study that I have to set out for myself certain goals. One of the things I want to do is get everything done this minute. I'm a modern American. I want to press a button and instantly deliver.

But I had to back off and say it takes time to really thoroughly know the scripture in a way that would satisfy me and minister deeply in my heart.

So what I want to do is keep moving toward the goal. My eventual goal is to be able to get involved in some conference ministry and on occasion get together with a group of people and

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go off for about one week and do nothing but just explore the scripture. I think that would be so exciting to be able to go from Genesis to Revelation and really talk about God's plan, how it has existed, how it's worked itself out in prophets and priests and kings and men and women of God all through the ages. What it's implications are. How it interrelates to one another. That enormously excites me to do that. But it takes time to do that. I know that in my haste to get things done I can't ignore the real cooking process, which it really is. After you get the ingredients together then you've got to cook it. It's got to lay in the fire of your spiritual heart and do some boiling.

Real quick: thoroughness or a pattern of study is very important in Bible study a pattern of study. You'll notice what happened when the student got done with one fish, the Prof then laid before him the species in the same family and compared them. It is an immensely exciting – I can't really communicate to you the exciting experience it is to be able to mentally and spiritually lay the gospels side by side in your heart and mind and compare the emphasis that are in each. And who they apply to. And the insights that are there. There's just no way to describe it.

I think in regard to the study of scripture that a kind of systematized program of study where you set as a goal, for example, learning a gospel. Then perhaps learning another Gospel. Then perhaps learning a major epistle. Then maybe a key book in the Old Testament. Going back and forth between the old and the new so that gradually you begin to take in a totality of the scripture. Leviticus is not a good place to begin. It's a rewarding book but it's not necessarily the best one to begin with

Then finally, the work of correlating the scripture. Beginning to put it all together.

I think for example of the situation where I just finished teaching a course at the college of the book of Revelation. I had some of the same students in Gospels and in Acts. The enormous experience it was to see the development that had come to the disciples in respect of the concept of Jesus Christ. To see Jesus in the gospel as one who walked a dusty lane and sandy beaches. As one who was human who could be touched, who could touch himself. Someone so close you could lay your head upon his bosom. And travel through the metamorphosis of the disciples as they became used to him in another dimension. The Lord in heaven and the Spirit working through them.

Then finally we come to the end of the scripture. In Revelation you see the picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, now in such awesome dazzling proportions as we see in Revelation 5 and 17 that your mind gets boggled with the grandeur and the immensity and majesty of the Lord God. Those that kind of transition take place being able to integrate it, put your study together over a period of time is an incredible experience.

I really trust and pray that these kind of things can maybe help get things started if you're having difficulty in studying. And that you can kind of follow this as a method. Or at least take some of the principles here for methodology in scripture.

I might just share in closing one thing that came to me when I came to this church. Years ago decided if I were able a pastor I was going to take the people I pastored through the Bible. That was an integral. I've witnessed since it was right. It must have come when I was in my early twenties. All through seminary I really believe that God was preparing me for that kind of ministry.

THE SECRET OF REWARDING BIBLE STUDY

An illustration really stood out to me which indicated what God could do where the faithfulness of a congregation and pastor to God's word. The word from which we derive our spiritual support.

I'm going to run out of tropical messages after a while. I'm just not a creative person in terms of topic. Some people God has gifted them in terms of topics. He hasn't me.

Criswell in Dallas, Texas when he came to the church some 35 years ago he began in Genesis. I guess it took him 20-25 years of faithful preaching through the scripture before he came to the end. In the course of time God has added and added to the church. So that from a small congregation to this incredible congregation. I'm learning more and more it isn't the size but the quality. The individual relationship to the Lord that's crucial you could have a crowd of 10,000 people who are to really living for Christ and put them up against a group of 200 people that are really committed to the Lord and doing his work there is no comparison. But the Lord heard the word as it was proclaimed.

That struck deep within my heart as something that God wanted to do. Every time we look at the scripture whether it's in personal study or when I'm preaching or teaching or someone else is preaching and teaching the scriptures we are testing once more the doctrine of inspiration. That doctrine is this: is the word of God sufficiently from God that has the authority and the power not only to be inerrant and accurate in all of its parts but have the power to change our lives. Does it have the power to feed us, to guide us, to lead us to truth, to cleanse our life until we're pure with the right emotions and the right qualities emerging within us? Every time we look at the word we're putting that to the test. The word: does it have the power? Yes, I believe it does.

Lord, we just want to thank you for your word. There are so many ways in which you speak to us through it. We dare to think backward through the thousands of years in which your word has been in the process of coming to us, how you hammered out your truth in men who were faithful to you. How you faithfully preserve these writings in an incredible way. How persons have in times of adversity literally have taken this word in its living form to themselves and at the risk of their life have guarded and protected it and have been nurtured by it. We, Lord, today are in a time of immense opportunity to be involved in the word. I guess Lord, like the kid who hadn't had candy for a while and all of a sudden he could eat all the candy he wants, maybe if he has too much he doesn't take any. Lord, with the incredible number of translations of the Bible today, with the incredible possibility of ourselves to the scripture to accept through radio and television and through church and through Bible study groups, a tendency might be emerging which says in our own life, Let someone else teach me. I don't want to bring myself to study. I can live off someone else's experience. But Lord, you want each of us to learn ourselves to learn from your word that it might be very living and precious to us. I pray, Lord, that these words which I've been able to share this evening would have a measure of life tonight for those who listen tonight. That studied of your word my emerge in their lives. So that in our individual lives be aware of you and glorify you in all of our ways. Through Christ, our Lord. Amen.