

## **How to Study the Bible Devotionally**

General principles and helpful hints by Bruce Gordon

I have been studying the Bible and theology intensively for 40 years, and teaching in churches and conferences since the mid-Eighties. The following advice is drawn from all that I have learned over that time.

If possible, have a certain time & place that you plan to read. Try to eliminate distractions. Try to turn off your phone and other notifications for a while.

The Holy Spirit is the best Bible study teacher, make sure to ask Him to lead you (Ps. 119:18 + Eph. 1:17-18).

Start slowly, reading at a lingering pace. Better to read one phrase slowly and have it sink in, than a chapter that never touches the spirit. Good places to start are the Gospels, Epistles, Psalms, Proverbs.

Try quietly reading aloud, so that you can hear your own voice. This is more powerful than you imagine.

Read the sentence or passage in as many translations as you can. This gives multiple perspectives on the Word. You Version and BibleHub give good ways to do this. Parallel Bibles help too.

Go back & forth between translations, repetition is very helpful and gives deeper insight as you go.

If you have a Bible with cross-references, get used to using them, and you will be glad that you did. Bibles with above average references are the ESV Reference Bible, NIV Reference Bible and NIV Study Bible. The Thompson Chain Reference Bible is also very helpful for topical study, and even though it takes a while to get really comfortable with it, I highly recommend it. There are easy ways online to link to the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, which is very thorough. Using references also helps you see more about the passage itself, and you will also get to know the Word better overall.

- Notice the context.
- Who is speaking?
- What is the setting?
- What is God doing?

- What is the passage saying?

Finally, if you have study notes, consider them, but it is best to get into the habit of using them after you have developed your own basic understanding of the text. Habitually using them early on will generally short-circuit the development of your own approach to developing Spirit-led insights that God is reserving for you. This leads to your understanding becoming influenced or even shaped by a certain theology or school of thought. I use commentaries and study notes, but I try to delay turning to them after I have done the work that I already mentioned. Doing this will take a little longer, but over the long run, your ministry will be much stronger, and your reliance on the Spirit will benefit you in every part of your life.

Don't put a lot of emphasis on a teaching or interpretation that is supported by only one translation or commentator. This is especially true of versions such as the Message or Passion. They both contain a good deal of interpretation, not all of it sound. Both Peterson & Simmons come up with some terrific renderings, but always check their renderings alongside other versions.

Lastly, be sure to apply what you read. The following questions are adapted from Rick Warren: The following section can help you get much more out of any passage in the Bible:

1. Is there a SIN to confess?
2. Is there a PROMISE to claim?
3. Is there an ATTITUDE to change?
4. Is there a COMMAND to obey?
5. Is there an EXAMPLE to follow?
6. Is there a PRAYER to pray?
7. Is there an ERROR to avoid?
8. Is there a TRUTH to believe?
9. Is there something for which to PRAISE God?

This is a fairly short essay to communicate the basics. If there is much interest, I may be constrained to write something on word studies and other more advanced issues. God bless you.

*If our articles and prayers help or bless your, we would love to hear from you!*