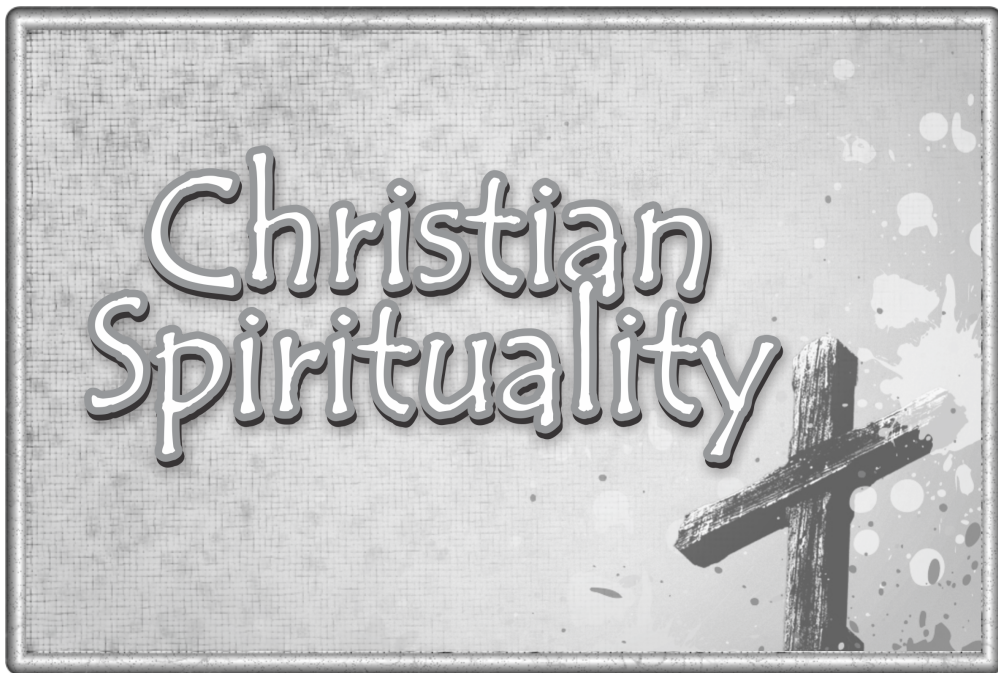


Section: Walking with Jesus
Category: New Disciple Mentorship (Personal Spiritual Development)
Action Item: Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual Disciplines:

Bible Study



How to Experience Intimate Communion with God

By Dr Derek Morris
(Used with permission, adapted and expanded by
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I. The Discipline of Bible Study

A. Why Study Scripture? ¹

1. 2 Timothy 3:15-17 – makes us *wise unto salvation and gives us instruction in righteousness, guidance, and correction* so we can be complete and equipped for good works.
2. Romans 15:4 – *gives us hope* for daily living.
3. 2 Peter 1:4 – *fortifies our mind with the God's promises* so we can gain victory over our sinful desires.
4. Psalm 119:11 – *keeps us from sin*.
5. Psalm 119:105 – *gives us guidance* for daily living.
6. Isaiah 50:4 – *prepares us to be a witness for God* during the day.

B. Insights on the Discipline of Bible Study

1. The Scriptures should be our primary source

There is nothing more calculated to strengthen the intellect than the study of the Scriptures. No other book is so potent to elevate the thoughts, to give vigor to the faculties, as the broad, ennobling truths of the Bible. If God's word were studied as it should be, men would have a breadth of mind, a nobility of character, and a stability of purpose rarely seen in these times. ²

We should not take the testimony of any man as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves. ³

2. Study the Scriptures to meet with God

The word of the living God is not merely written, but spoken. The Bible is God's voice speaking to us, just as surely as though we could hear it with our ears. If we realize this, with what awe would we open God's word, and with what earnestness would we search its precepts! The reading and contemplation of the Scriptures would be regarded as an audience with the Infinite One. ⁴

3. Study the Scriptures with an earnest desire for divine light

Those who read and study with an earnest desire for divine light...will soon discover in the Scriptures a beauty and harmony which will captivate their attention, elevate their thoughts, and give them an inspiration and an energy of argument that will be powerful to convict and convert souls. ⁵

The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says. ⁶

4. Study of nature aids our understanding of Scripture

...as we observe the things of the natural world, we shall be enabled, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, more fully to understand the lessons of God's word. It is thus that nature becomes a key to the treasure house of the word.⁷

As we contemplate the beauty of nature, as we study its lessons in the cultivation of the soil, in the growth of the trees, in all the wonders of earth and sea and sky, there will come to us a new perception of truth.⁸

C. Bible Study Tools

The following tools greatly assist in making Bible study come alive:

1. A concordance
2. Hebrew and Greek lexicons
3. Bible maps
4. A Bible dictionary
5. Cross reference resources (like *Treasury of Scripture Knowledge*)
6. A journal, highlighters, pens, etc.

D. Online Bible Study Tools⁹

1. E-Sword (www.e-sword.net)
2. Bible Study Tools – Bibles, commentaries, lexicons, dictionaries, cross references, etc. (www.biblestudytools.com)
3. Studylight – Hebrew and Greek lexicons for looking up original meanings of any word found in the Bible (<http://studylight.org/lex/>)
4. Biblos – Bibles, commentaries, lexicons, concordances, encyclopedia, atlas, etc. (www.biblehub.com)

Note: Doing biblical word studies can often be complex (because of the grammar, syntax, semantics, etc., of language), even with user-friendly tools as found in the websites above. So proceed with caution and verify your findings with those who are more familiar with the original languages.

E. Principles for Studying the Bible¹⁰

1. 2 Timothy 3:16. Remember that **ALL Scripture is inspired by God**. It is “God-breathed.” This means it contains power – Hebrews 4:12.
2. Ezra 7:10. **Prepare your heart to seek, to do, and to teach** when you open God’s Word to study.
3. John 5:39. **Remember that Jesus is at the center of Scripture**. So make your relationship with Him the focus of your Bible study.

4. 1 Thessalonians 2:13. **Take Scripture not as the words of men but as the words of God.**
5. 2 Peter 1:20, Isaiah 28:9, 10. **Allow Scripture to interpret itself.** Don't make your own interpretation. Compare Scripture with Scripture to discover the meaning.
6. John 7:17. **Be willing to accept and follow the truth the Holy Spirit reveals to you.** Obedience is the fastest way to increase your Bible knowledge and understanding.

F. Things to Consider Before Studying Scripture

1. Make a personal covenant with God that gives Him permission to transform your life through Scripture, no matter what the cost. Understand that the Bible should be approached, not merely to gain more information, but with a willingness to be transformed through a personal encounter with God in His Word.

The student of the Bible should be taught to approach it in the spirit of a learner. We are to search its pages, not for proof to sustain our opinions, but in order to know what God says.¹¹

2. Have a **systematic approach** to the Bible. A random, "God will give me something today" approach while flipping open the Bible, is not the best consistent plan. It is a good idea to follow a daily reading plan so you always have something to read.¹²
3. Prioritise devotions. An 'if-I-have-time' attitude does not work. Put it into your **daily** schedule.¹³ Learn to say no to activities that will compete with, or replace your devotions. Be careful about taking on new assignments or responsibilities since it may affect your devotions.

We must resist with all our strength the temptation to make our spiritual reading a lesser priority in our daily routine. In the constant competition for our time and attention, nothing must be allowed to usurp the time we consecrate to God.¹⁴

4. Make a covenant with a friend who will phone you each day to find out if you have spent time in devotions - a friend who really loves you enough to ask tough questions like: "Are you spending too much time in front of the TV?" or who makes arresting statements like: "I can see your devotional life slipping!" Accountability helps provide strength when you have little strength.¹⁵

When choosing a spiritual friend, ask God to lead you to someone who can help you to be attentive to God's leading in your life. Meet regularly, at least once a month, with the specific intention of examining the progress of your spiritual journey.

G. How to Study Scripture

1. Find a place and time where you will be undisturbed for at least an hour (see Matthew 6:6). Make sure you are wide-awake. It is best to do your devotions before a meal when your mind is clear and focused. Early in the morning is usually best.

2. Ask for the Holy Spirit's enlightenment in prayer before you open the Word of God. John 16:12-14.

Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given.¹⁶

A true knowledge of the Bible can be gained only through the aid of that Spirit by whom the word was given.¹⁷

3. Avoid the temptation to rush. Take your time, go no farther or faster than you are able to understand what you've been reading. Allow the reading to sink in, let it impact on the very core of your being.¹⁸ If you are following a Bible reading plan, you may choose a short passage within your reading for the day, and concentrate on that portion for your focused study.

There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive instruction gained.¹⁹

In daily study the verse-by-verse method is often most helpful. Let the student take one verse, and concentrate the mind on ascertaining the thought that God has put into that verse for him, and then dwell upon the thought until it becomes his own.²⁰

4. Use a modern word-for-word translation of the Bible, preferably the New King James Version (NKJV) as your basic version. There are 3 types of translations:
 - a. *Formal/literal translations* which are word-for-word translations. Basically, each Hebrew or Greek word is translated into the English equivalent of that word. Examples of such translations are the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the English Standard Version (ESV) and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).
 - b. *Dynamic equivalents* provide a meaning-for-meaning translation. These translations ask the question: What was the meaning to the original hearers and how can that same meaning be brought across today? Some examples of dynamic equivalents are the *New International Version* (NIV), the *New English Bible* (NEB) and the *New English Translation* (NET).
 - c. *Paraphrases* are written in fresh, contemporary language, which are almost always done by one individual scholar and show what that particular scholar understands the texts to be saying. Examples of these are the *New Living Translation* (NLT), *The Message*, and *The Living Bible* (TLB). [*The Clear Word* is an expanded paraphrase; and is more of a devotional book than a Bible]

To illustrate the 3 types of translations, consider Lev 18:8: 'The nakedness of your father's wife, you shall not uncover. It is your father's nakedness' (NKJV literal translation). The NIV says: 'Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonour your father' (dynamic equivalent). The Message states it this way: 'Don't have sex with your father's wife. That violates your father' (paraphrase). It is good to consult all 3 types of translations in studying the Word of God.

It is good to consult all 3 types of translations mentioned above in studying God's Word.

5. Read the story through once to understand its meaning and read also the preceding and following chapters to grasp the context.
6. Read it through a second time, taking more careful note of the details. Write down the key words (names, places, time, verbs and nouns) that seem significant to the passage or story. For example how many loaves and how many fishes were used (John 6)? How long was the invalid lying beside the pool in John 5? What time of the day did the woman at the well come to draw water (John 4)? Place yourself in the story as one of the characters experiencing the scene as though you were there. Allow your imagination to make the story come alive.
7. Look up key words in your passage.
 - a. Use a Hebrew / Greek lexicon to look up the definitions of the words.
 - b. Use a Bible dictionary to look up names of people and places.
 - c. Use Bible maps to find the location of certain cities and events.
8. Ask questions of the passage:
 - a. What did this text mean to the original hearers?
 - b. What is the context of the passage?
 - c. How does this passage relate to the message of the whole book?
 - d. For what purpose did the author write these words?
9. Compare your text with other similar passages (by using a concordance). By doing this, you allow the Bible to interpret its own meaning and you get a fuller meaning of the text.

We should day by day study the Bible diligently, weighing every thought, and comparing Scripture with Scripture. ²¹

Some portions of Scripture are, indeed, too plain to be misunderstood; but there are others whose meaning does not lie upon the surface, to be seen at a glance. Scripture must be compared with Scripture; there must be careful research and patient reflection. And such study will be richly repaid.²²

[**Caution:** The 19th century *Strong's Concordance* has become a popular tool for many. However, this volume is simply a listing of words of the King James Version of the Bible. Though it does have some dictionary helps in the back, these

are unfortunately woefully inadequate, and thus misleading (especially since it does not show the reader the appropriate contextual usage of even the few definitions it does provide).

Thus, the only real value of *Strong's* is in locating the reference for a text. Some better concordances are: *BibleWorks* (for computers), *Young's Analytical Concordance*, *Englishman's Hebrew Concordance to the Old Testament & Englishman's Greek Concordance to the New Testament* (George Wigram)]²³

10. Read inspired commentaries from the writings of E.G. White to give further insights into your passage.
 - a. There is a classic series, based on the whole Bible called *Conflict of the Ages*, which consists of the 5 volumes mentioned below. Most of the chapters in this series have a note at the bottom of the first page of each chapter that specifies which Bible passage it is based on. That will guide you to find the commentary on the Bible passage you're studying. A quicker way to locate Mrs. White's commentaries on various Bible passages is to use the 'Scripture Index' on the 'EGW Writings' App.
 - Vol 1: **Patriarchs and Prophets** (*Genesis to 1 Chronicles*)
 - Vol 2: **Prophets and Kings** (*2 Chronicles to Malachi*)
 - Vol 3: **The Desire of Ages** (*Matthew to John*)
 - Vol 4: **The Acts of the Apostles** (*Acts to Revelation*)
 - Vol 5: **The Great Controversy** unveils the unseen battle between Christ and Satan from the first century to the end of sin's reign
 - b. Some other useful E.G. White resources directly based on Scriptural passages include:
 - **Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing** (*the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7*)
 - **Christ's Object Lessons** (*Christ's parables*)
 - c. Modern adaptations of E.G. White writings in today's language:
 - **Beginning of the End** (*modern adaptation of Patriarchs and Prophets*)
 - **Royalty and Ruin** (*modern adaptation of Prophets and Kings*)
 - **Humble Hero** (*modern adaptation of The Desire of Ages*)
 - **Unlikely Leaders** (*modern adaptation of Acts of the Apostles*)
 - **Love Under Fire** (*modern adaptation of The Great Controversy*)
11. Now answer the following *personal* questions as revealed in the passage you have read.
 - a. What does it teach me about the character of God?
 - b. What does it teach me about how God deals with people?

- c. Is there in this chapter an example for me to follow?
 - d. Is there an error for me to avoid?
 - e. Is there any duty for me to perform?
 - f. Is there any promise for me to claim?
 - g. Is there a prayer for me to echo? ²⁴
12. Note insights and lessons gained from all of your study in a prayer journal / spiritual diary. These insights will help direct your prayer time. You may also want to spend some time in meditation upon the passage you have studied. Consider a time of fasting and prayer when you are wrestling with an important Bible truth or difficult issue in your life.

Incidentally, a prayer journal / spiritual diary is a great way to reflect on one's life. Most people rarely stop to think: "What am I doing from day to day? Does it make any real difference in the world? Am I sensitive to God's leading? How am I raising my children? Was I the kind of parent I wanted to be yesterday, or were there some real flaws in the way I dealt with my children? Am I a godly spouse, hard-working employee, caring employer, etc." A spiritual diary is the best way of preventing oneself from drifting into unproductive behaviours. ²⁵

13. Now you can talk to God ***about what you have learnt in your study***
- a. Thank Him for the positive truths you have discovered about Him.
 - b. Take time for personal reflection, asking "How does this relate to ***my*** life, to ***my*** heart?"
 - c. As the Holy Spirit brings insights to your mind, determine to act upon them immediately.

It is the first and highest duty of every rational being to learn from the Scriptures what is truth, and then to walk in the light, and encourage others to follow his example.²⁶

- d. Surrender your life to God, giving Him the freedom to do His work.

A successful devotional life impacts one's whole day. Spending time with God in the morning does not negate the need to commune with Him throughout the day. *Both* are essential. The one feeds on the other. Personal time with God refreshes and empowers one to walk in the Spirit for the rest of the day.

See how the two are related below: ²⁷

Devotional Time (morning)	Continually Abiding (rest of day)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receiving God's fullness • Studying God's Word • Waiting on God • Praying about particular issues • Receiving from God 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintaining God's fullness • Remembering God's Word • Walking with God • Praying moment by moment • Imparting to others

II. A Few Examples of Thematic/Topical Bible Study Methods ²⁸

A. Colour Coding

Colour-coding is a fun, colourful way to discover many treasures in the Bible. After each sentence ask yourself if one of the following was found in that sentence and then highlight it with the corresponding colour. This will help you to discover God's message to you and also help you to find these gems more easily again in the future.

Red - God's part (red = His blood shed for us)

Blue - Our part (blue = obedience)

Green - Examples of faith or a call to live by faith (green = faith)

Orange - Cautions, warnings, reproofs

Purple - Characteristics of God (purple = royalty)

Yellow - Principles

Pink - Results of obedience

Brown - Results of disobedience / sinful heart

B. Biographies

This Bible study method looks at the life of a Bible character and seeks to learn from their strengths and weaknesses. Write what you learn in a notebook.

1. **Read** every passage that mentions your Bible character
2. **Ask Questions** about the background of your character
 - a. What is the ancestry of this person?
 - b. What advantages in training did this person have?
 - c. Where did this person live? What affect did this environment have on him or her?
 - d. Was there a crisis in this person's life? If so, what? How did he/she meet it?
 - e. What influence did this person have upon others?

- f. What dominant traits did this person display throughout his/her life?
 - g. What friends did this person have? How did they influence him/her?
 - h. What was the person's religious experience - prayer life, faith in God, service for God, courage in testimony, attitude in worship?
3. **Use Resources** to help you understand the life and times of your character
- a. Footnotes
 - b. Bible book introductions
 - c. Maps
 - d. Bible encyclopedias
 - e. Charts and tables
4. **Apply** what you have learned to your own life
- a. What character qualities do you admire in this person?
 - b. What faults do you see in this character?
 - c. How do you see yourself in this Bible character?
 - d. What has this person taught you about following God?
 - e. How can you avoid repeating the same mistakes this person made?
 - f. What is the one great lesson in this person's life for you?

C. Parables

1. **Select** a parable you wish to study
2. **Look** at the background information
 - a. Where is the parable being given?
 - b. Who is the parable being directed to?
 - c. What circumstances surround the giving of the parable?
3. **Observe** the details of the parable
4. **Discover** the meaning
 - a. What questions are being asked?
 - b. What answers are given?
 - c. What is the problem or question the parable is addressing?
 - d. What is its overall purpose?
5. **Compare** the parable to other parables with similar thoughts. Is the emphasis on the same lesson? Is the audience the same?

6. **Conclude** by drawing lessons from the parable
7. **Personally Apply** the lesson of the parable to your life

D. Prayers

1. **Choose** a prayer of a Bible character
2. **Ask Questions** about the prayer
 - a. Who is the one praying?
 - b. Is he or she a child of God?
 - c. What circumstances led to this prayer?
 - d. What are the physical aspects of the prayer? Time, place, public or private, outdoors or indoors, position of the body?
 - e. What are the subjects of the prayer?
 - f. What needs are mentioned?
 - g. What requests are being made?
 - h. Is there a sequence in this prayer?
 - i. What is the result of the prayer? For the one praying, for others?
3. **Apply** what you have learned to your own life
 - a. Have you been in circumstances similar to those that led to this prayer?
 - b. Can you identify with the needs or requests expressed?
 - c. How has this prayer helped you to understand God and His will for you?
 - d. What part of this prayer meant the most to you?

E. Doctrines

1. **Select** the Bible doctrine you would like to study
2. **Gather** every verse you can find on the subject
3. **Organise** similar thoughts together
4. **Work** with the clear texts on that doctrine and then move to the more difficult ones. The former gives clarity to the latter.
5. **Compare** each thought and how they relate to each other
6. **Draw** a conclusion as to what the doctrine is or means

7. **Personally Apply** by asking how this doctrine relates to you or what God is asking you to do?

F. Commitment

Share below how you would like to start / improve / restructure your daily Bible study time over the next 3 months? Be specific with regard to the time, place, and content of your time with Jesus?

IV. Endnotes

1. Osterman, *Deeper Devotions*, unpublished article.
2. White, *Steps to Christ*. pg 90.
3. Ibid, pg 89.
4. White, *Testimonies to the Church, vol 6*, pg 393.
5. White, *Testimonies to the Church, vol 4*, pg 526.
6. White, *Education*, pg 189.
7. Ibid, pg 120.
8. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, pg 126.
9. Osterman, *Deeper Devotions*, unpublished article.
10. Ibid.
11. White, *Education*, pg. 189.
12. Osterman, *Deeper Devotions*, unpublished article.
13. Ibid.
14. Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, pg 136.
15. Paulien, Jon, *Present Truth in the Real World*, pg 106.
16. White, *Steps to Christ*, pg 91.
17. White, *Education*, pg 189.
18. Paulien, *Present Truth in the Real World*, pg 92
19. White, *Steps to Christ*, pg 90.
20. White, *Education*, pg 189.
21. White, *Great Controversy*, pg. 598.
22. White, *Our High Calling*, pg. 205.
23. Input given by Dr. Ron du Preez
24. Questions largely drawn from HMS Richards' *Special Bible Subject Helps*.
25. Paulien, *Present Truth in the Real World*, pgs 92-93 (adapted)
26. White, *Great Controversy*, pg. 598.
27. Comiskey, *How to be a Great Cell Group Coach*, pg 24 (adapted)
28. Osterman, *Deeper Devotions*, unpublished article.

For a complete bibliography of this devotional series, see the last module, viz., **Christian Spirituality: Scripture Memorization**