

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

How to Study the Bible



SESSION 3

Prayer

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Prayer: An Overview

SESSION OVERVIEW

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LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- explain why prayer is so important for studying Scripture
- speak some prayers you might use during your study of Scripture
- describe how to improve your listening to what Scripture is saying

Prayer: An Overview

INTRODUCTION



Serious study of Scripture involves four practical components: Prayer, Observation, Exploration and Application. We will focus upon the first of these in this lesson and the other three components in each of the subsequent lessons.

These components are like steps that move in a natural progression from beginning to end, but they also reoccur throughout the process. Application can emerge during the Observation and Exploration steps, while Observation may become sharpened during the Exploration and Application steps. Ultimately, our most fruitful study of Scripture will begin, continue, and end with Prayer.

WORDS FROM GOD



NOTES

Prayer is important and effective for studying Scripture because of the nature of the Bible. As we noted in the previous session, the Bible is more than just history and great literature. It is inspired revelation. That is to say, the Bible contains words from God that tell us about God.

From the earliest days, Christians have affirmed that the mind of God stood behind each word of the Bible. In one of his letters, Peter put it this way: “Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:20-21). For Peter, the Old Testament prophetic books contained the very words of God. Prophets did not look at their world and come up with their own ideas about what to do. They simply spoke what God put in their hearts and minds.

Paul expressed a similar understanding when he wrote to his friend Timothy: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Paul coined the term “God-breathed” in order to describe his view of the Old Testament. For him, God infused the words of Scripture with His very breath. Just like when God first created humans in Genesis 2:7, God breathed His life into the words of the Bible.

Eventually Christians began to use the term “God-breathed” to describe the very letters that Paul wrote as well as the rest of the New Testament books. Whether Paul, Luke, and the other New Testament writers realized what they were doing is a question scholars discuss. The important thing is that early Christians quickly recognized that God ultimately authored those books as well as the Old Testament books.

So while human authors penned the words of the Bible, Christians over the centuries have affirmed that God guided them to write those words. Whether God spoke in an audible voice or simply impressed the ideas into their hearts and minds, God remains responsible for their content.

TALKING WITH GOD



NOTES

If Christians are correct in their understanding of Scripture, then prayer is simply conversation with the author of the Bible. Prayer engages the One who determined and formulated the content of Scripture.

Book publishers frequently have authors do book signings and give interviews in order to promote their books. In these situations people can ask the author about certain parts of their book in order to gain more understanding of what the author intended to communicate. Similarly, in prayer we have opportunity to talk with God about what He wanted to say in His word.

At the beginning of our study of Scripture then, we might pray a prayer for understanding. It could go something like this: “Lord, teach me what You would have me know from Your Word this day.”

At the end of our Bible study we might pray another kind of prayer, a prayer of application. This might be: “Lord, help me apply Your truth to my life this day.”

Even during our study, we can pause at times to seek wisdom from God. This prayer might be: “Lord, I need help understanding Your Word just now.”

We will frequently find ourselves puzzled by what the Bible says. We may notice that a passage might be understood in several different ways; yet we also realize God likely intended to communicate something particular through those words. Since we desire to know what God meant and not simply what we or someone else thinks, we can ask God for understanding. In those moments God may provide or simply direct us to a new source of information that could help or even give insight to our minds.

God might also have us put our questions on hold and wait for further understanding later. This can be difficult at times because we like answers immediately. But the truth is, we may not be ready for what the Bible is saying. Our minds are consumed with the thoughts and concerns of the moment. Often it will take some time for the Bible’s message to make full sense to us.

This does not mean that we are to give up quickly in trying to understand God’s Word. We will want to continue praying over a passage and seeking divine insight. The most challenging passages to comprehend are frequently the most life changing. Often our preconceived ideas need adjustment, and that is the



reason we need time to struggle with the message of the Bible. Readjusting our thinking takes time. But as we wrestle with difficult texts, something important takes place: we are being transformed by the renewing of our minds, so that we no longer conform to the pattern of this world. This is what Paul urged Christians to do in Romans 12:2.

LISTENING TO THE SPIRIT

**NOTES**

Prayer is not only about us talking to God. It involves listening as well. Effective prayer during Bible study includes listening to the voice of the Spirit. Unfortunately, many of us are not very good listeners.

One of the best ways to help us hear what the Spirit wants to say is to pause at times and ask what caught our attention in the passage we just read. Some word or phrase made us pause and think deeply. Once we take note of this, we can ask ourselves why it stuck out. What is it about this term or these words that caused us to take special note of them? Often the answer to that question opens the way to hear what God desires to say to us.

Over the centuries, Christians have practiced a method of reading the Bible called *Lectio Divina*, which is Latin for “divine reading.” This ancient discipline focuses particularly upon listening to the Spirit while slowly reading through a passage of Scripture. It begins with a moment of silence to prepare the heart for what God might say. Then it calls for times of reflection, meditation, submission, and application of Scripture while remaining in constant conversation with God. Those who practice this discipline find it extremely valuable for personal spiritual growth. It highlights the importance of dialoguing with God while we study Scripture.

CONCLUSION



NOTES

This session is not very long, but it is extremely important. We might accomplish the steps outlined in the following chapters and use all the best resources in our study of Scripture. But if we are not engaged with the Author of the text during that process, our study will be fruitless. Our mechanics might be flawless, but our understanding could be flawed. We can miss the whole goal of Scripture if we do not remain in conversation with the Author of its words.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - explain why prayer is so important for studying Scripture
 - speak some prayers you might use during your study of Scripture
 - describe how to improve your listening to what Scripture is saying
2. Read the prayers of the psalmist in Psalm 119:18, 27-29, 33-37, 65-66, 133-135, and 169-173. Copy down or underline the prayers you could pray as you study Scripture.
3. Memorize Psalm 119:105, and say it to God before you begin studying His Word.

EXAM - SESSION 3



NOTES

1. The reason prayer is so important for Bible study is that _____.
 - A. prayer makes us feel better about ourselves
 - B. prayer puts us in conversation with the Author of the Bible
 - C. prayer earns us favor with God
 - D. prayer makes us smarter
2. When we say the Bible is inspired revelation, we mean _____.
 - A. the Bible inspires us when we read it
 - B. the Bible reveals helpful insights into people
 - C. the Bible contains words from God and words about God
 - D. the Bible is great literature
3. Paul believed that all Scripture is _____.
 - A. God-breathed
 - B. useful for teaching, rebuking and correcting
 - C. useful for training in righteousness
 - D. all of the above
4. Peter believed Old Testament prophets spoke _____.
 - A. their own interpretation of things
 - B. what people wanted to hear
 - C. the best insights from the priests and Levites of their time
 - D. from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit
5. Some prayers we might pray as we study Scripture are _____.
 - A. "Lord, teach me what you would have me know from your word this day"
 - B. "Lord, I need help understanding your word just now"
 - C. "Lord, help me apply your truth to my life this day"
 - D. all of the above
6. The author of this session suggests that we might improve our listening to Scripture if we ask, "Why did a certain word or phrase in the passage catch my attention?"
 - A. True
 - B. False

 **NOTES**

7. When we encounter a Scripture passage that is difficult to understand, we should _____.
- A. be willing to set it on a shelf and wait for an answer later
 - B. continue to ask God for insight
 - C. realize that difficult passages can be the most life changing
 - D. all of these
8. Lectio Divina is an ancient Christian discipline for reading Scripture that focuses upon _____.
- A. reading through the Bible as quickly as possible
 - B. listening to God while reading the Bible
 - C. thinking about our friends and relatives while reading the Bible
 - D. listening to what other people say while reading the Bible

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT



NOTES

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Why is prayer so important for studying the Bible?
2. What prayers could I pray while I study Scripture?
3. How could I improve my listening to God while I study Scripture?