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## How to Study the Bible and Interpret the Scriptures

### THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING THE SCRIPTURES

I was born again in a church that specialized in evangelism. There was far more preaching done in this church than there was teaching. But as I committed my life to the Lord and got baptized in the Holy Spirit, I found that I had such a passion for studying God's Word. So much so that I just shut myself off from all relationships and recreational activities because I wanted to spend every waking moment I had studying God's Word. It was my passion! I would choose listening to teaching tapes, studying commentaries, etc. over anything and everything else. Then I believe the Lord moved me to a church that emphasized more of the teaching of God's Word. It was at this point of my Christian life that the Lord gave me the opportunity to minister.

My reason for bringing this up is because I remember a couple of different occasions when someone had gotten a hold of one of my first teachings... These two different individuals that I am thinking of both came to me and asked what kind of study materials that I used to get the information that they heard me teaching. I thought- "What materials? It is more than just having the right books!" It was from this that I believe the Lord laid on my heart to teach a series called "How to Study the Bible." I approached my Pastor with this idea and he penciled me in to teach this series to our church for three consecutive Sunday evenings.

I mentioned a moment ago that I believe this is the most beneficial teaching I have to offer... The reason I believe this is because if I can teach other believers how to study the Word for themselves and extract all the treasures therein, then they can discover the truth for themselves and not be totally dependent on others like myself who teach.

You see, the Body of Christ needs teachers and preachers, but it also needs to know how to study the Word for itself. You cannot live off another man or woman's revelation! You have to be able to study and interpret the Scriptures for yourself.

You do understand that even anointed men and women of God who are called to share the gospel can miss it, right? To be honest with you, every minister that strives to teach the whole council of God is wrong in some teaching that they have. Nobody has a perfect and complete understanding of the things of God. It is for this reason that it would behoove us to study the Scriptures ourselves to see if what we are hearing is accurate or not. In my opinion, it is foolishness to build our lives, base our rewards, or even place our eternal destiny into the hands of another minister's interpretation of God's Word. Therefore, I chose a long time ago that even

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though I do listen to other men and women of God, I won't build my life upon another's foundation. I will study the Scriptures for myself and find out what I believe it says first hand.

So now let's get into our teaching and learn how to study and interpret the Scriptures for ourselves...

## **PART ONE**

# **THE FOUNDATIONS OF EFFECTIVE BIBLE STUDY**

I stated earlier that there is more to studying the Scriptures than just having the right methods and materials. This is so true! There are more foundational aspects that we need to be grounded in before we can move on to the more practical aspects. So before we get into the practical areas of this series we need to first deal with the foundational areas.

You know, the more time spent on the foundation is an indication of how high the building will be. Likewise, the more grounded you are in these "must have" foundational principles of effective Bible Study, the further you will go in understanding the Word of God. On the other hand, if you are not established in these foundational aspects of Bible Study, your foundation will be shoddy and, therefore, what you build on it will not be unshakeable and solid.

The three major foundational issues to effective Bible Study that I have seen in my short term experience as a believer are...

- 1. Valuing the Word of God (i.e. being a disciple of the Word)**
- 2. Purity of Heart**
- 3. Knowing the Author of the Book**

Some of these things will seem elementary to some of you but as I have said, if you are not established in these three foundational truths, your time spent studying the Word will lack the life and productivity that it should have.

### **VALUING THE WORD**

The first level of the foundation to effective Bible Study that I want to discuss with you is how important it is that we really see the value of God's Word.

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The Word of God has a lot to say about things like hungering and thirsting for the things of God and seeking after them with all of our hearts. You see, the condition of our hearts is the real key to everything in the Christian life. The more I learn and grow in my understanding of the kingdom of God, the more I see just how simple the things of God are. They are so simple that even a child can get its results. The church today has complicated things so much by believing that you have to go through these three steps or that you have to operate in these seven principles, but the kingdom of God does not operate in steps and principles... **The kingdom of God has to do with the heart!**

You see, our hearts have the ability to transform us to whatever we set them on. So if you want to see success in the kingdom of God, your heart has to be set on the things of God. In regards to the Word, if there is not a real desire in your heart to understand the Word, you won't really apply yourself to it. There is no substitute for hungering and thirsting for the Word. You will obtain whatever you really desire in your heart! Again, whatever you devote yourself to is what your soul will adapt to (see Matthew 5:6 & Matthew 7:7-8).

In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon gives us some great descriptions of this subject of valuing the Word of God that really shows us some characteristics of the person who has set his or her heart on the Word of God. Let's begin in Proverbs 4:20-23...

He begins admonishing us by saying, "My Son, give attention to my words." This "giving attention" describes the giving of one's undivided attention to something. Another way of saying this is that you are honoring and respecting God's Words through paying attention and listening attentively. Then he says next, "incline your ear to my sayings." This phrase describes putting yourself in a better position to hear like tilting your head towards the one speaking. Do you know what this phrase denotes? It denotes that there must be distractions present because if we have to put ourselves in a position to hear better, there must be a lot of commotion going on around us. And this commotion comes from the world...

You see, in the world that we live in, there are many things that will vie for our attention- such as television, relationships, our careers, etc. Therefore, we have to discipline ourselves to shut out the distractions- give attention to God's Word and put ourselves in a better position to hear what the voice of truth is saying. Someone will inevitably say, "But Trey, I just don't have the time to do this!" Well, first of all let me say that you make time for what is important to you. But I also understand that there are certain responsibilities that we have to take care of while we are in this world and that is when you have to get creative. Perhaps verse 21 will explain this...

In verse 21 he goes on to say, "Do not let them depart from your eyes." Just as with the ears spoken of in the previous verse, this is referring to the eyes of our heart and not just our physical eyes. You see, you cannot continuously be "physically" looking at your Bible all day because you have responsibilities to attend to. But there are some practical things that you can do... As the Lord taught His chosen people Israel, you can put the Word all over your home. For example, you can write some scriptures on sticky notes and put them on your bathroom mirror or the dash of the car. You can listen to teaching CD's while you are getting ready in the morning and

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while you lay down at night. You can listen to the Bible on tape while you are in the car. There are many ways that you can keep the Word of God ever before you, but the best way is to do what Solomon said next- “keep them in the midst of your heart.”

Why is this the best way to keep the Word before your eyes? Because if you get it in the middle of your heart, you are giving His Word the proper place and value in your life and then you can effectively meditate on the Word without having to have your Bible open in front of you. (We will further discuss “Biblical Meditation” the month after next).

Now let’s go over to Proverbs chapter two where Solomon gives us a similar exhortation as we just covered in chapter four. What I like about the following passage of Scripture is that Solomon gives us a progression that needs to take place before we will increase in the knowledge and understanding of the Word.

In Proverbs 2:1, he starts off by saying, “My son, if you receive my words.” This word “receive” describes accepting His Word as opposed to rejecting it. You see, it is important that we keep a teachable heart and do not reject wisdom as it constantly cries out to us. He goes on to say, “treasure my commands within you.” You see, it is not good enough to just accept God’s Word... You also have to treasure it in your heart- that is, making it one of the most valuable things in your heart. Then in verse 2 he says, “so that you incline your ear to wisdom.” The prior two things- receiving and treasuring His Word- will make your inner ear attentive to wisdom’s voice (which is how to apply the Word you’ve received and treasured and how to apply it to your daily circumstances). Praise God! That’s good stuff! But that is not all that receiving and treasuring His Word does... It will also produce understanding because Solomon then goes on to say, “...And apply your heart to understanding.” The word “apply” means to “stretch out or extend.” So when you receive His Word and then treasure His Word in your heart, you will put yourself in a better position to grow in wisdom and you will also extend yourself towards understanding it. Hallelujah!!! In other words, **Wisdom and understanding are a result of receiving and treasuring God’s Word in your heart.**

Then in verses 3-4, Solomon gives a couple of descriptions of how hungry we should be for the Word... He says in verse three- “Yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding...” First of all, this verse denotes a sense of urgency and desire, similar to a baby’s cry when he is hungry. You see, this phrase indicates having a total dependency upon Him and a need for help, and we express this heartfelt attitude through prayer... You need to cry out for it with such a hunger- like a baby cries out for milk! 1 Peter 2:3 says that we are to desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow thereby. We need to be this hungry for the Word that we “cry out” and “lift up our voice” to the Lord for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding!

Verse four goes on to say, “If you seek her as silver and search for her as for hidden treasures...” You know, nothing valuable is ever found on the surface. That is why we must dig deep into God’s Word- that is, putting forth effort and desiring the truth like it is actually buried treasure. When we get this hungry for understanding, look at what Solomon says happens... “Then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God.” **If you want to find the**

**knowledge of God, you have to get this passionate about God's Word!** You need to seek for the truth like you would for hidden treasures! It all comes down to hunger and value... If our hearts are in this condition, we will absolutely, positively find the knowledge that is buried in the Word of God!

### THE WORD'S DISCIPLES

In Matthew chapter thirteen, Jesus said something very interesting along these same lines that I want us to conclude this month's teaching with...

In verse nine He said, "He who has ears to hear let him hear." If you skip down to verse twelve, this will help you to understand this hard to understand verse... It says, "*For whoever has (has what? ears to hear!) to him more will be given (more what? the ability to hear!), and he will have abundance (abundance of what? An abundance of revelation, understanding, knowledge, etc!); but whoever does not have (i.e. ears to hear) even what he has (i.e. the ability to hear) will be taken away from him (i.e. not by God, but by them hardening their own hearts [verse 15]).*" Do you see how much more sense this verse makes when we do not take it out of context?

But let's look back at verse eleven because I want us to pay particular attention to who Jesus was speaking to in this passage of Scripture who had these "ears to hear"... He says, "*Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven...*" Who was He talking to? He was talking to His disciples- those that had forsaken everything else to follow Him!

You see, there is a difference between your average Christian and a disciple. A disciple of Jesus is one who leaves everything behind- all the distractions and the weights of life and is completely committed to Jesus. But you see, to become disciples of Jesus, you also must be a disciple of God's Word because Jesus and the Word of God are one in the same (see John 1:1)! Therefore, **we need to become disciples of the Word of God- that is, a people that abide with and in the Word of God and forsake all that would distract or would vie for our attention.** You see, these disciples of Jesus were continuously with the Word, hearing and hearing and hearing His teaching. This is why they had "ears to hear" and, therefore, were enabled "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." Wow! Do you see that? It takes a committal of one's time, efforts, and energy to truly dig up the treasures of God's Word! One of the most important things in gaining knowledge, revelation, and wisdom is having a desire in your heart for it! You see, if you really want it bad enough, you will invest your time in it!

So in conclusion, we have seen that one of the three major foundational issues that you must be grounded in is a love for God's Word. If you want to be able to rightly divide the Word of Truth, you must love God's Word more than anything else- seeing it as it is in truth- a valuable treasure! When you get this hungry, I guarantee you, you are well on your way to growing in your understanding of it! This is a "must have" foundational principle to studying God's Word, and once your heart is in this condition, you can build from there.

Now let's delve into the other two foundational aspects of effective Bible Study and then after that I will share with you some practical things that I have learned that I believe will help you.

### PURITY OF HEART

As I already made a point of, there is a lot to say for the condition of your heart when it comes to studying the Word of God. I have personally seen and experienced the pitfalls that people fall into simply because their hearts are corrupted by wrong belief systems.

Matthew 5:8 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The word "see" literally describes "perceiving" something. So those that are pure in heart shall be able to perceive God better. I believe this principle is also applicable to our studies of God's Word... **If your heart is impure through wrong beliefs and wrong desires, then you will not be able to "perceive" the truth of God's Word.** In other words, if your heart has "thorns" corrupting it, you will have a tendency to unconsciously try to make certain verses back up what you want to believe about God. So if you truly want to perceive the things of God in truth, then the condition of your heart is an extremely important factor.

I heard a statement recently that just stuck with me... **"You have to believe what you read, and not read what you believe."** I know that might seem a little confusing at first glance, but just think about it for a second- so many people do just this. Let me explain... many people find their little "pet doctrines" and then they see that particular topic has the only truth instead of letting the Word of God shape and mold their theology. In other words, they read what they want to believe! A good example that I have personally experienced because of the circles that I have run with is the subject of financial prosperity. I have seen how people get an understanding of the legitimate truth that God wants us to prosper in every area of life- including our finances. But so many people, because of the conditions of their hearts, have gone over into the ditch of covetousness. And a result of this is that in an attempt to back up their unbalanced theology, they twist certain Scriptures. For example, I have heard some "ministers of the gospel" teach out of Mark chapter 4 in the Parable of the Sower that when you sow financially, you will reap thirty, sixty, and one hundredfold. And although there is a truth of sowing and reaping in the financial arena, that is not at all what Jesus was teaching in that parable. What was being sown in that parable was the Word of God- or more literally, the Word of the Kingdom (see Matthew 13:19). In other words, this parable was a teaching about the gospel being preached and the four different types of ground were the four different conditions of people's hearts that will hear the Word and how they will produce. But you see, people love to read what they believe! But no, **we do not need to make the Word of God conform to our beliefs; we need to make our beliefs conform to the Word of God!**

In my own personal life, I have a specific subject that I believe God has called me to emphasize, but do you know how I came to the understanding of this subject? It was through an unbiased study of God's Word! In other words, I would study verse by verse through the books of the New Testament with an objective heart, and it was through this open minded study that I saw a common theme in the Bible that just exploded on the inside of me! That is how I developed my

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beliefs, but most people do not do that. Most people take verses out of context because those verses in and of themselves back up what they want to believe. That will get you in a lot of trouble.

You see, the Word of God is perfect! There are no contradictions, and everything from Genesis to Revelation correlate perfectly to reveal to us God's perfect ways.

I once had a guy who came into the Christian Bookstore I worked at right after I was saved, and this guy claimed to be a Christian, but he liked to read these secular books that talked about how the Bible contradicted itself. After he went on and on saying, "Well, what about this Scripture? What about that Scripture?" I finally just took him over to 2 Timothy 3:16 and had him read it to me ("All Scripture is given by inspiration of God..."). I then asked him- "Do you believe that verse?" He responded, "Well, of course I do." Then I said to him- "Then you need to have more faith in that verse than in your own intellectual capabilities to understand the rest of the Bible!" Man, you would have thought I slapped the guy! But, you know what? That was from the Holy Spirit because I am not smart enough to make that stuff up☺! My point is, you will always be increasing in knowledge and in understanding the Scriptures, so you have to just believe that the Bible is, in fact, inspired by God and that all of it (including Ecclesiastes☺) is profitable for us to grow in our faith.

We always need to remain open to what God's Word shows us! It is our foundation- what we base all of our beliefs upon and what we build our lives on. And if you find something, particularly in the New Testament, that doesn't line up with what you thought was truth, don't just ignore it, but ask the Holy Spirit to show you, and He will! It might just be something that you do not understand yet and lines up perfectly with what you thought to be truth or it might be something that will partly change what you previously believed. It is wise to not try and sweep apparent contradictions under the rug because (and this might be a shock to some of us☺) we do not know it all and have a corner on the things of God. Be open and teachable! Keep your heart pure and do not let it be cluttered with wrong ideas. Believe what you read! Love the truth more than anything else- even your own little pet doctrines!

Let me tell you another story about something God showed me one time... A year or so after I was born again, God had really established me in the truth that His Word is the final authority. Well, I remember the first time I read the Book of 1 Timothy. Man, it shook up some of my initial theology! Things that I thought were true didn't seem like it after I read that book, and this put a godly fear in me about ever believing anything that was not based on the Bible. I remember praying to God that same night- "Lord, I know you have called me to teach your Word, but please do not let me believe or preach anything untrue!" The next morning I was wide awake at about 6 am... Now if I wake up at 6 am without an alarm clock it is either God or I ate pizza the night before☺. As I lay there, the words, "2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter" kept going off on the inside of me. After laying there for a little bit, I finally realized that the Lord wanted me to get up and read that book. And to make a long story short, He showed me from 2 Peter chapter one that there is a lot in His Word that I don't understand, and all that I need to do is walk in the light that I know, and He will always keep me out of darkness (i.e. error).

What the Lord was teaching me was that all I need to do is walk in the truth that I do understand, and I will keep myself in the position to be taught what I don't currently understand. You see, "knowledge puffs up but love edifies." If you just want to gain knowledge just to know more, you'll become haughty and arrogant, but true and godly wisdom will always result in right living. This is why it is so important to get God's Word in your heart and not just in your head. It is not until you get it in your heart that it will change you! But if you are just studying God's Word to get more head knowledge, you are wasting your time. You need to be a doer of the Word- that is, applying what you are learning into your everyday life- and not just a hearer of the Word that does nothing with it. When you do this, you will be in the best position to receive further revelation!

### KNOWING THE AUTHOR

The third and final foundational issue to effective Bible Study that I want to mention is also one of the most important aspects to having vibrant and life-giving times of Bible study.

Let me begin by asking you a question... If you really wanted to understand William Shakespeare's writings, what do you think would be the absolute best way to understand them? It would be to have William Shakespeare right there with you to explain what he meant! Well, even though that would be impossible, it's not impossible with the Bible! Someone might argue, "No... that is impossible because Moses, Luke, Paul, and all the rest of the writers of the books of the Bible are in heaven." Sure all those that penned the books of the Bible are in heaven, but I am not referring to those that literally "wrote" the Bible... I am referring to the real Author that inspired them to write what they did. You see, the real Author of the Bible is still among us- and His name is the Holy Spirit! Let me explain a little further... although God physically penned the Holy Scriptures through man, the One who inspired them to write what they did was the Holy Spirit (see 2 Timothy 3:16)! Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the true Author of the Word of God! And since we have the Holy Spirit living on the inside of us that means **we have the true Author of the Word of God living on the inside of us!**

Since this is the case, we do not have any excuse to not understand the Bible. The key is getting to know the Author of the Book! You see, by getting to know the Author of the Book, you will have greater insight into the Book itself. So knowing Him is the real key, because when you have a relationship with Him, you'll be in the position to be taught by Him.

Let me put it this way... How would you like to have Jesus with you to teach you and expound the Word of God to you all the time? Most Christians would give anything for that opportunity! Well, Jesus Himself said that it was to our advantage for Him to go away because if He did not go away then the Holy Spirit could not be sent to us (John 16:5-7). In essence, what Jesus was saying was it will be better for us to have the Holy Spirit than it would be for us to have Him still walking on this earth. Wow! If that would not have come out of the mouth of Jesus Himself then that statement would seem almost blasphemous, wouldn't it?

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You see, it is to our advantage to have the Holy Spirit rather than having Jesus physically with us today because He is just like Jesus. Let me explain... Look back over at John 14:16 and notice how Jesus called the Holy Spirit “another Helper.” If Jesus called Him “another Helper” then a good question is- Who was the original and other “Helper?” It was Jesus! Jesus was the original comforter, counselor, teacher, intercessor, advocate, & strengthener (def. “Helper”)! But, to me, the most impacting word that Jesus used was “another.” The Greek word that He used here literally meant “an exact duplicate, a complete representation, or a twin.” This means that the Holy Spirit is exactly like Jesus in everything He thinks, says, and does. In order to understand what the Holy Spirit is doing in the earth today, all you have to do is go read the Gospels because whatever you saw Jesus doing is what He does today. So why is it more advantageous for us to have the Holy Spirit rather than Jesus? It’s because He lives within us! Therefore, each one of us has our own personal “Jesus” to lead and teach us. Wow, that is awesome! You see, when Jesus walked this earth He could only minister to a certain number of people at a time because He was limited in His physical body. But that is not the case with the Holy Spirit... His ability to teach us is not limited because He operates in the omnipresence of God. Therefore, **the Holy Spirit is to us today what Jesus was to His disciples then!** Hallelujah!!! The Holy Spirit lives within us to teach us all things, to bring to our remembrance the things we have already heard, and to guide us into all truth (see John 14:26; 16:13; & 1 John 2:18-27). He is our own personal “Rabbi”! So it would behoove us to pursue a relationship with Him, receive His instruction, and learn of Him.

So a wise question to now ask is- How do I take advantage of the Advantage? How can I practically begin to benefit from this ministry that He has been given? Well, the answer is very simple and is found in James 4:2- “You have not because you ask not.” You see, He’s your instructor but you have got to go to class to be taught. And this school of the Spirit is found simply through developing a relationship with Him- acknowledging Him when you open your Bible to study and asking Him to guide you, bring scriptures to your remembrance, and to teach you. As you begin to cultivate this relationship with Him, you will be amazed at the revelation knowledge that you will begin to walk in. It is that simple... It’s not easy, but it is that simple.

So in conclusion to this first part of our study, we have seen that there are three major foundational issues that you must be grounded in if you want to be able to rightly divide the Word of Truth- **We need the love of the Truth... we need to live in the Truth... and we need to know the Spirit of the Truth.** Number one, you must love the truth more than anything else- valuing the Word so much that you are willing to do whatever it takes to seek first the truth of God’s Word. Number two, you must live in the truth- that is, keeping your heart clean and pure so that you do not get off into error. As I emphasized earlier, believe what you read and don’t read what you believe. And last but not least, you must know the Spirit of truth and be able to receive His instruction. If you want to have an effective foundation for studying the Bible, these three things are absolutely essential!

What I want us to move on into now is something that I believe is one of the most important principles that I have ever learned to help me rightly divide the word of truth.

## **PART TWO**

# **HOW TO MEDITATE THE WORD**

I want us to begin in Proverbs chapter four... Proverbs 4:7 says, *“Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom, and in all your getting get understanding.”*

What I want you to see in this verse is that while wisdom is the highest and the best virtue that we can increase in, understanding is also very important. The Lord has really taught me a lot about the virtue of understanding. You know, I have talked to many people that say that they have a hard time understanding the Bible. This should not be so! God has given us all the tools that we need to understand what we are reading. We have been given the mind of Christ- the Holy Spirit- and He was sent to guide us into all truth and teach us all things! So there is no excuse for a believer not understanding the Word of God.

So what I want to do now is to teach you some practical principles I have found that have helped me increase in understanding. These principles that I will share with you are what I believe to be the nuts and bolts of what the Bible refers to as MEDITATION.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF MEDITATION**

The best way I have found to understand the Bible has been to know these laws of meditation. Understanding the Biblical methods of meditation have been the single most helpful part of my ministry. By knowing how to “rightly divide” the Word I have been able to see things that I would not have seen if I had not learned these principles that I am about to share with you.

So let’s begin by turning to the first Psalm... In Psalm 1:2 David says, “But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night.”

Notice that David first says that his delight is in the law of the Lord. This reiterates to me that the first step to understanding Scripture is delighting in Scripture. In other words, you have to love and value the Word of God. You see, if understanding the Word is not a desire of your heart then you won’t get much out of it. This is the first and foundational key to understanding the Bible. But notice what David says next... “...And in His law he meditates day and night.” Wow! That means he meditates all day long and all night long! Now many people have read this and thought this is an impossible statement. “How can I meditate the Word of God all day and night long?” they ask. Well, the way to understand this is to understand what meditation simply is... So what is Meditation?

### **WHAT IS BIBLICAL MEDITATION**

When the Bible speaks of “meditation” it is just a fancy way of saying- “to focus your thoughts on something.” “Meditation” just simply means “to ponder, to consider, to reflect, to contemplate, to muse, or to imagine.” In other words, you could say it just means to think about something.

So get the picture out of your head of meditation being in a certain position making a humming sound. True Biblical meditation is not some kooky eastern religious practice. Their kind of meditation is not Word-based which is what the Bible is talking about when it speaks of meditation. You see, the enemy has always tried to pervert God’s principles and meditation is one of those principles that he has definitely perverted.

You see, you’re meditating on something all the time whether you know it or not because, as we have already seen, meditation is simply to just think about something. You are always thinking aren’t you? If I were to tell you to not think right now, you would not be able to do it because you would be thinking about not thinking☺ It is impossible not to think so what David is telling us to do in Psalm 1:2 is just to subject those thoughts to the Word and in so doing, we won’t subject them to the devil because you can’t effectively think about two things at once.

### WHAT BIBLICAL MEDITATION IS NOT

So now that we have described what meditation is, let’s talk about what Meditation is NOT. Meditation is not...

- 1) **Memorization-** I am not a big fan of memorizing Scripture. Of course it is better than nothing, but in my opinion, it is only getting the Word into your head which is not incredibly helpful. Now if you just use memorization as a step to meditation- that can be beneficial. But memorizing Scripture by itself is just cramming a bunch of information into your mind. But by taking those scriptures that you have memorized and contemplating them- thinking about the context before and after- you can see the Word take root in your heart and extract the understanding from them.
- 2) **Reading-** You can just read and read and read the Word and that does not mean that you are meditating the Word. I can say this because how many times have you ever caught yourself “reading” something and your mind was off somewhere else? It is very easy to be reading something and not to be thinking about or imagining what you are reading. A good way that I believe you can turn “reading” into meditation is to read sections of a book in the Bible repeatedly without trying to get anything out of it. By doing this, you are painting a picture that the Holy Spirit can describe to you.
- 3) **Studying-** This is where I am most imbalanced when it comes to the Word of God. Since I am by nature a teacher, I have a tendency to always want to study the Word every time I pick up the Bible - that is, using commentaries, doing word studies, etc. Although studying is good in its place, it is not always appropriate. Studying is good and can lead to meditation, but it in and of itself is not necessarily meditation.

You see, although these three methods of studying can assist meditation; they are not all there is to meditation.

### METHODS OF MEDITATION

Let me now give you three Biblical methods to meditation...

- 1) Speaking it-** In Psalm 1:2 the word “meditate” in the Hebrew language means “to mutter.” It was generally applied to the roaring of a lion when he has caught his prey. This refers to, after we have gained what we were hungry for and we are feasting on it and digesting it, we are going to let people know. In other words, when we extract the truth from God’s Word we will be so excited about it that we will just have to tell somebody. This is why it is so important to have a spiritually mature individual or group to bounce your thoughts off of. You see, we all have the Holy Spirit and if maybe we are a little off in our interpretation of a Scripture then by bouncing it off of other believers we are more likely to hear the truth and be corrected. Another benefit of “speaking” the Word is that I have found I get more revelation as I explain the revelation I already received. Speaking the Word while you ponder it is beneficial because you are adding another attribute to the assimilation of the Word. It is important to use all of your gateways- hearing the Word, seeing the Word, and also speaking the Word.
- 2) Seeing it-** It is also very important to use your imagination when you are reading the Scriptures. For example, in Joshua 1:8 we are told- “This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth (see previous method), but you shall meditate in it day and night, (now notice this) that you may **observe** to do according to all this is written in it.” Notice that he was told by the Lord that by meditating he will be able to observe the Word. You see, one method of meditation is being able to see the scriptures. You see, you imagination is not evil nor is it childish if you use it properly. Now I know that today in some cults they put great emphasis on using your imagination to bring world peace and all kinds of other flaky things but these are just perversions of what God intended. God gave us our imagination, and there is a beneficial reason why He gave it to us. And I believe this is one of the major reasons- to be able to build a mental imagery of the Scriptures and be able to see the truth of God’s Word in your heart.
- 3) Living it-** This leads me into my next point of biblical methods to meditation- “Living it.” In 1 Timothy 4:15 the Apostle Paul told his spiritual son Timothy- “Meditate on these things; (and notice what he says next. I believe this is another description of meditation...) give yourself entirely to them...” Biblical meditation is giving yourself entirely to the Scriptures. In other words, it is living in the Scriptures. Meditation is becoming immersed in the Word that you are actually living in and experiencing the Scriptures that you are reading. You see, by putting yourself in the story so that you can feel what they felt, see what they saw, and think what they thought you are giving yourself entirely to the Word and this will cause revelation and truth to assimilate into your heart. One of the best examples of this that I can think of is when people have taken trips to Jerusalem. The common feedback you will get

from these people is- “Man, the Bible just comes alive to you when you are over there!” Do you know why? Because they are fully experiencing and visualizing all the stories that they read since they were little kids and those stories are coming alive to them. But, you see, you do not have to go to Jerusalem or any other place to get this revelation. You can get it simply by “giving yourself entirely to” the scriptures you read.

### HOW TO MEDITATE THE WORD

So now that we have talked about what meditation is, what meditation is not, and the different methods that meditation has, let me conclude this edition of the Living Logos by sharing with you some practical things that I have found to be very helpful keys to understanding and interpreting Scripture...

- ✓ Don't let chapter/verse and subtitles dictate the context of the Scriptures that you are meditating. So many times we read the Bible like it was written in chapter and verse, but that is not the way it was originally written. It was originally written in one unit of thought. For example, Jesus' teachings in certain chapters of the Gospels are not always correctly divided. You have to look for key words that show where Jesus' teachings begun and ended. By doing this you can catch the spirit of what the author was saying.
- ✓ Pay attention to words like “for, therefore, that, and, but, etc” that begin sentences. The word “for” can also mean “because.” So if you see the word “for” beginning a sentence, know that the writer is explaining “why” he said what he did in the last verse. As many have heard before- When you see the word “therefore” you need to read the verses preceding it to find out what it is “there-for.” The word “that” can also mean “in order that.” This means what follows this word is the result of the previous statement. When you find conjunctions like “and, but, etc” you need to understand that two thoughts are being tied together. Through paying attention to these words and interpreting them in this light you will begin to have a better understanding of those Scriptures.
- ✓ Read a book or context several times before you ever try and interpret a verse in it. Like I previously said, many of the books of the Bible were written in one unit of thought. It is a lot easier to interpret a small portion of a painting if you have already seen the full picture rather than trying to describe to complete painting by just looking at that small portion. Selah.
- ✓ Pray in other tongues a lot either while you are reading the Scriptures or at other times. Your prayer language is an integral part to growing in revelation knowledge.
- ✓ Do your best to understand the purpose, history, and context of the Scriptures that you are reading. This is extremely important to understanding the heart of the Scriptures that you are meditating. By doing this, you will begin to see “why” the author said what he said. For instance, most of the New Testament epistles were written to refute some wrong teachings of their day. And while I am not a big advocate of studying the counterfeit, it is very helpful to have a basic understanding of what the error that was being taught in those days was so that you can understand the thinking of the writers of the epistles.
- ✓ And, last but not least, here is a biggie©... Ask yourself questions as you meditate the Scriptures- “Who is he talking to?, Why did he say that?, What is he referring to?, How can

apply this truth into my life?, etc.” By asking yourself these types of questions you will stir up your mind to really think about what you are reading instead of just going through the motions of reading the Word without giving any real thought to it.

You see, meditation is a process that transfers the spirit, life, and truth of the word into your heart. While I am in no way trying to discourage having times of just reading and studying the Word, I am just attempting to show the absolute importance of applying biblical meditation to our times in the Word. Without learning the principles of meditation, we will never fully digest and be nourished by the truths in God’s Word.

You see, **as food cannot nourish the body without digestion, which assimilates its nutrients into the substance of the body, so spiritual food in order to profit us needs to be digested through meditation.** In other words, without the slow and lengthened process of digestion food would not nourish the body. Likewise, without meditation on the Word we will not nourish the spirit or the soul.

I pray that these truths that I have taught will take root in your heart and that you will begin to benefit from them similarly to the way that I have. They will transform your times of Bible Study and you will get so much understanding you will be gloriously transformed yourself. Selah!

## PART THREE METHODS AND MATERIALS

Now I want to wind up this teaching by giving you some very practical and relevant study methods as well as give you some recommended material that I believe will help you in your studies of God’s Word...

### SYSTEMATIC VERSUS TOPICAL

First of all, let me spend some time explaining the many different methods that you can use to study God’s Word...

The first ones that I want to mention are the **systematic** and **topical** methods. Let me define them... The **systematic** study of the Bible is the study of the sections of the Bible. For example, to systematically study the scriptures would be to study Romans chapter eight or to study the Book of Galatians straight through. The **topical** study approach is the study of specific subjects found throughout the Word of God. Some examples of this would be to study the subject of healing or to go on a journey through the Bible and study the topic of God’s grace.

Both of these methods are extremely pertinent and are not to be taken out of balance. Let me list a few of the positives of each...

The positive of the systematic approach to studying the Word of God is that it is extremely safe... The reason why it is so safe is because by studying the sections of the Scriptures you are less likely to take verses out of context and misinterpret them. This enables you to see the intent of the section of Scriptures and catch the "spirit" of the Word. A good example of this is studying through the Book of Romans... If you would study this particular book from beginning to end, you will get a complete picture of the salvation that God has freely given us, but if you only focus on chapters 3-5, then you will get a misbalanced view of salvation and tend to slip into erroneous doctrine.

Now the positive of the topical approach to studying God's Word is that it is the best way to get a specific subject in your heart and receive the revelation of it. For example, if you are sick and are in need of healing, then you do not need to be studying through the Book of Ecclesiastes. You need to pull out your concordance and look up all the Scriptures on healing and meditate on them until God's promise of divine healing gets in your heart.

As you might be seeing already, there are negatives to both of these methods as well as there are positives.

The negative about the systematic approach is that although it is the best way to get "pure knowledge", it is not the best way to get "revelation knowledge." You see, if I am suffering from a lot of condemnation and a sense of unworthiness, the best thing for me to do is not study verse by verse through a book in the Bible best thing for me at that time is to find every scripture I can on God's unconditional love and grace and focus on those verses. My need at that time would be to get that subject in my heart and not to, for instance, understand the Book of Revelation.

The negative of the topical method is the exact opposite... Although it is the best way to get "revelation knowledge", it is not the best way to get "pure knowledge." In other words, while my heart might want to understand God's will concerning prosperity, my heart can deceive me into thinking that this subject is all that is important and then I begin to misinterpret and misapply certain verses.

So what is the solution to this? The answer is found in one word- BALANCE! You see, we need to apply both of these methods to our study times. **We need to study systematically so that we can grow in "pure knowledge", but we also need to study topically so that we can grow in "revelation knowledge."**

One of the greatest examples I could give you of this is the subject of faith, grace, and works. This seems to be one doctrinal area where people end up in ditches. I have seen people who were under such legalism and bondage to the letter of the law that when they got the revelation of righteousness by faith and the grace of God, they flat hop from one ditch over to the other. Now I understand that sometimes we need a concentrated dose of a certain subject to get ourselves

healthy similarly to how a sick person needs a concentrated dose of Vitamin C, but these people seem to become vehement towards the word “work.” I mean, you might as well curse in front of them instead of mentioning “works” around them because they will attempt to bite and devour you! But how many of you know that there is a balance there?

Someone who was a great leader in our church history made this mistake... Martin Luther did awesome things and God used him to head up the Reformation, but tradition has it that when he got the revelation of salvation by grace through faith he wanted to throw the Book of James out of the Bible because he thought it contradicted Paul’s writings. How many of you know that is not the right way to handle the Scriptures?☺ You don’t just try and rip some pages out because they seem to contradict what you believe. All of the 66 Books that are in there are inspired of God and are profitable for doctrine. Well, let me move on before I get plum off the subject.☺

### REFERENCING

Another important method of studying the Scriptures is **referencing**.

Referencing is the study of finding other related passages to the verses that you are reading. It either can be used to show you where in the Bible the author is quoting from or another place that “refers” to the same subject. Basically referencing can be defined as “what the Scripture is referring to.”

Referencing is a good form of study with similarities of the topical method. Therefore, it carries with it the same positives and the same negatives as the topical method. For instance, since you will be referred to another verse, you might take something out of context. On the other hand, that topic that is contained in the verse you are covering will get in your heart more and you will get more understanding of it. As a matter of fact, through this method you will find that the Bible actually will comment on itself most of the time. So a good rule of thumb is that whenever the author stops and quotes from an Old Testament passage go back to it and read it in its context because you might find that subject expounded on more in the Old Testament.

For example, in Matthew 21:16, we have a great instance of the benefits of referencing... Jesus answered the indignant religious leaders who had a problem with the children giving glory to Him with- “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise?’” If you have a Bible with references in the margin, you will find that Jesus was quoting directly from Psalm 8:2. And if you go and read that Scripture you will notice that it says something different... It says, “Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained *strength*, because of Your enemies, that You may silence the enemy and the avenger.” Notice that King David used the word “strength” and not “praise.” The Hebrew word used here is ‘oz which means “strength, power, and security” and does not in any way imply “praise.” Why is this so significant? Because Jesus was basically giving us a commentary on what strength, power, and security is synonymous with- PRAISE! In other words, what we can learn from this is that through praising God we are releasing not just words, but we are releasing strength, power, and security. Praise God! The joy of the Lord is our strength!

I just noticed something else through Psalm 8:2 as well... What does he say at the end of the verse? "...Because of your enemies, that you may silence the enemy and the avenger." When the enemy is proclaiming his lies in your mind, praise is not only the way to release God's power and strength into your situation, but it is the solution to shutting him up at the same time! Hallelujah! Do you see how awesome using this method of Bible Study can be? Now let's go on to another method.

### HISTORICAL STUDY

I have found that understanding the **history** behind a book of the Bible is extremely important as well.

Studying the Bible historically is the study of the background and setting of a specific book in the Bible. And while you do not want to spend more time studying the history of the Bible than the Bible itself, there is a major benefit of being able to see where the authors of specific books in the Bible were coming from and why they were writing them.

For example, did you know that most of the New Testament epistles were written to counter the false doctrines and heresies of their day? A couple in particular (Colossians & 1 John) were written to refute some of the teachings involved in "Gnosticism." Now, as I alluded to earlier, we do not want to spend too much time studying the counterfeit when we have the truth before us. But, on the other hand, it really helps to understand *why* Paul and John said what they did in these two epistles by understanding what this major heresy was propagating during the first century.

### WORD STUDIES

And, last but not least, the final method of Bible Study that I want to mention is one of my favorites... **Word Studies**.

Word studies are the studies of the definitions and backgrounds of different words. This is a powerful method of Bible study because words transmit thoughts. You see, sometimes we have a tendency in our times of reading the Bible to just skim over specific words and never give any real thought to what they mean. And by doing word studies it forces us to take the time to give real thought to what was being communicated in those scriptures.

Let me give you an example... Most of us know that the word "baptism" literally means "to be totally immersed or dunked." Well, if some denominations would take the time to look up what the word means and forget their religious traditions, they would find that water baptism means to be completely dunked in water and not just sprinkled. But although this is not a problem with most of my readers, do you know where many of us are in the dark? In understanding what it means to be *baptized* in the Holy Spirit. Why is the word "baptized" used in reference to the second experience of grace for the believer? The Lord answered this question for me as I

pondered how we could have received the Holy Spirit when we were born again and then how we could have received Him after that as well. You see, the key to understanding this is in understanding the meaning of the word “baptized.” As previously stated, this word means to be completely immersed. So to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be completely immersed in the Holy Spirit. Now based on Romans 8:9-10 we see that when we receive the Holy Spirit at the initial salvation experience He comes to reside in our spirits- the part of us that has been filled with the life and righteousness of God- but when we are baptized in the Holy Spirit that is when we are totally “dunked” in Him- that is the other two parts of us (our soul and body) become immersed in Him as well. You see, this is when the power and ability of God really begins to affect our walks and is released through us. Praise God! This is what it means to be “baptized” in the Holy Spirit.

You see, just a simple word study can open up the door to a great revelation like that. Now there are dangers to doing word studies as well because you have to be careful about going and building doctrines around what a word means in the original language. You see, not even all the so-called experts agree on the meanings of certain Greek and Hebrew words. (And while I am at it, let me throw this little bit of wisdom at you- Do not just use an English dictionary to find out the meaning of a word used in the Bible because then you are just taking what the translator thought the best English word was and basing your hope on their interpretation).

### TOOLS FOR YOUR TIME

So in conclusion to this teaching, let me give you just a few of the materials that I personally use and that you too can use to enhance your times of study...

The first thing I would recommend that every believer have is a **Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance**. In my opinion, having a good Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance is the most important study help that a believer can own. The reason I mention this specific type of concordance is because the Strong’s Exhaustive edition has a Greek and Hebrew Dictionary in the back which gives you a concordance and dictionary all in one volume. In fact, I own a Strong’s that has both of these as well as a Nave’s Topical Bible (a great resource for the topical study method) called “The Strongest Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance.”

Another good recommendation is that you own a good Study Bible... Now there are a lot of good study bibles out there, but in my opinion, by far the best one (especially for all the charismatic believers out there) is **The Spirit Filled Life Bible**. This study bible is full of great tools to help you in studying the scriptures. It has a commentary on the bottom and several different teachings and word studies mixed throughout the different books of the Bible. In my opinion, this specific study bible is a must have for everyone.

Now in regards to commentaries, this is a tricky one... The vast majority of commentaries were written by believers who do not believe like we- the tongue talkin’ believers- do☺. Therefore, the only ones that I highly endorse are the ones that were put out by Andrew Wommack Ministries

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(see Life for Today commentaries @ [www.awmi.net](http://www.awmi.net)). But not even these cover all of the books of the Bible.

But, you see, there are some other really good commentaries out there. I would just stay out of 1 Corinthians 12-14 in most of them.☺ The commentaries that I personally use are ones written by Warren Wiersbe (The Bible Exposition Commentary), John Phillips (Exploring the Bible Series), anything written by Arthur Pink, and a three part volume called the Jamison Fausset Brown Bible Commentary. But a good attitude to have when using commentaries is- “just eat the straw and spit out the sticks”☺ and also let the Holy Spirit be your teacher- guiding you into all truth.

There were many more little nuggets that I could have included but this covers the pertinent areas. So if you have any questions concerning something I have written or failed to cover, feel free to write us and we will get back to you. I pray that this study has been a blessing to you.

Victoriously,

