



Life-Changing Bible Study

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

When you examine the disciples described in the New Testament, what kind of people do you find? Jesus had disciples like Peter, James and John—stalwart in the faith. But He also had Judas—a hypocrite and a thief. The Jerusalem church had members like Stephen and Barnabas—faithful and generous to the end. But it also had members like Ananias and Sapphira. Paul had men travel with him like Timothy and Titus—strong teachers who taught others. But he also had Demas—who forsook him for this present world. It is no wonder that Paul, in **II Timothy 2:20-21**, speaks of a large house with some vessels for honor and some vessels for dishonor. The vessels for honor are men and women who lead changed lives, while the vessels of dishonor revert back to worldly ways. The honorable vessels are cleansing themselves, becoming “prepared for every good work.” But they do not do this alone. According to **II Timothy 3:15-17**, God provided the Scripture so we can be vessels of honor, equipped and prepared for every good work. Because of the Bible, we lead changed lives and continue to change our lives, growing to become more and more like Christ. Regrettably, however, many of us get to the point that we think, “Sure, I have a problem here or there, but overall, I am a pretty good person.” With that mindset the Bible becomes useless as a life-changing tool. We begin to read the Bible differently. In many cases, it ceases to be a guide and simply becomes a reference book. When that happens, we no longer grow. If we quit growing, we are no longer ensured salvation (**II Peter 1:5-11**). Therefore, we must ask ourselves, “How do we read the Bible?” Examine some common methods of Bible study and how they fall short of changing our lives. Then examine the Bible model for life-changing Bible study. Finally, examine yourself. How do you read your Bible?

Discussion:

- I. *Common Bible study methods that will not change your life.* In the following list are methods that should not ever be used, methods that are proper for certain goals but not for changing your life, and methods that are a good start but do not go far enough.
 - A. The Procrastination Method: We can be masters at putting off Bible study. Too many people plan to study their Bibles, but never get around to it. In the end, they rarely study. This method should never be followed. Good intentions will never change your life.
 - B. The Study by Proxy Method: Some people only “study” their Bibles on Sunday, when they listen to a preacher. This is study by proxy because the listener is not studying at all. Rather, he is allowing someone else’s study to substitute for his own. This method should never be used. Do not get me wrong; sermons should be listened to carefully. You may learn a lot from a sermon (especially this one). But listening to a sermon is not intended to be your Bible study. Rather, it is intended to be a jumping off place for your own study (**Acts 17:11**).
 - C. The Bible Class Preparation Method: Perhaps some Bible class lessons are so difficult, challenging, and thought provoking that when you have prepared for them you have performed some life-changing study. Typically, however, preparing for class is no more than answering simple questions and writing down what you already knew. Everyone should prepare for every class. But rarely will this change your life.
 - D. The Debate Method: This is studying to prove a point. Many spend hours studying with this method. But, this type of study will not lead to a changed life. No doubt, there are times when we must study so we can improve our defense of the truth. However, this method will not change our lives because it is not intended to change our own lives, but someone else’s. Keep in mind that many people who have become masters at proving their point have fallen into sin. Their study did not change their lives.
 - E. The Studying to Teach Method: We all know we learn more when we are teaching a class. We may, therefore, think that studying so we can teach is the study method that changes our lives. But it is not. Studying to teach others is still focused on others. Its purpose is to give information to others, not change our lives. Allow me to illustrate. I spent my last year and a half of college in Florence, AL, working with Harold Comer and David Thomley at the College View church in a training program. Around the time of my graduation, David and I went out for a cup of coffee and some conversation. David asked me two questions that stunned me and impacted my thinking forever. He first asked me if I thought I was a better preacher than when I had moved to Florence. “Of course,” I answered. I knew more and I was better at presenting it. His second question floored me. “Are you a better

Christian?" I learned that day that I can know more Bible and be better able to communicate it, but still not be a better Christian. Changing your life is not about teaching others. It is about applying your knowledge to your life.

- F. The Devotional Method, also known as the Read Through the Bible in a Year Method: Most people who study their Bibles at all use this method. In this method, the student spends a little time every day reading a passage from the Bible and then praying. Allow me to say, I think every Christian should do this. However, devotional study by itself rarely changes our lives. Why? Because devotional style reading is more emotionally based. These types of study are usually designed to make people feel good, so they can face the day strengthened and encouraged. That is wonderful and necessary. But to change our lives, typically we have to feel bad. In fact, Jesus put it this way in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (**Matthew 5:4**). We do not make changes when we feel good about the way we live. We make changes when we feel sorrow.
- G. Are these your methods of study? If so, can I challenge you to dig deeper with your Bible? Some of these methods are great starts, but are not life-changing. In order to change your life, you must first make sure to approach your Bible and your life with the proper attitude. Then you must conduct your study with personal change in mind. **II Timothy 3:15-16** instructs us regarding both of these aspects of study.

II. The attitudes with which I must approach the Bible (**II Timothy 3:15-16**).

A. The Bible is sacred (**II Timothy 3:15**).

1. I understand that the paper and binding of the book is not holy. There are no rules about cleanliness and touching a Bible. I remember once when I was placing my Bible under the pew in front of me so I could retrieve it easily, my grandfather said, "I never put my Bible on the floor." "Why not," I innocently asked. "Because," he replied, "that is where people's feet have been." "Oh," I responded, "Where do you put your Bible?" "Next to me on the pew," he said. "What part of their body has been there?" I asked. We are not to teach "bibliolatry," that is, the worship of this book. Thus there are no rules about how to handle the book itself. But when we open our Bibles to drink in what we find inside, we are walking on holy ground.
2. The scriptures are sacred and holy. The messages contained therein are not to be taken lightly. We are to revere what we read in the Bible. As Moses was afraid and trembled at the burning bush (**Exodus 3:6**), accordingly we should tremble and be afraid as we read the Scriptures. Though it contains many stories, the Bible is not a novel to be read for entertainment. Though it contains much teaching, it is not a textbook to be read dryly and without life. Though it contains much history, it is not a reference book about dead people and distant events. This book contains Jesus' words of life (**cf. John 6:68**). As such, it is the most important book on the face of the earth. Every time we open it we should handle it with care, approach it with caution, and expect to be changed by its sacred message.

B. The Bible will give me wisdom that leads to salvation (**II Timothy 3:15**).

1. I do not have the wisdom that leads to salvation. I have to get it from the sacred message of the Bible. When we have been Christians for a while, we sometimes want to tell the folks in the denominations that they do not have the wisdom that leads to salvation. They need to read their Bible's better. We think we have already accomplished this task. But notice to whom Paul is speaking. He is speaking to Timothy, a man who had been reading and learning the scriptures from his childhood. He was a preacher of the gospel. Yet Paul reminded him to get wisdom from scripture. He did not already possess all of it.
2. If I ever believe I have all the wisdom that leads to salvation, I will approach the Bible with a different attitude. I will no longer be able to change when necessary. I will quit growing. If I quit growing, I have died. Thus, I must always approach the Bible with the attitude that I am supposed to get something out of it. Getting this wisdom will lead me to salvation.

C. The Bible is inspired by God (**II Timothy 3:16**).

1. I must approach the Bible understanding from Whom it has come. Though God worked through man, the Bible is not a man-made book. The words contained in this book did not come by an act of human will. Rather, men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (**II Peter 1:21**). I must read it accordingly. When men write a book, I can take it or leave it. I can take from it what I want and leave the rest behind to rot. When men write something I can often allow their writings to mean what I want them to mean. When I approach the Bible, I cannot do this. God has written this book and I am not allowed to add to it or take away from it. God has written this book and I must get from it what God wanted me to get. I cannot change the message in any way. If I do so, it is to my own destruction (**II Peter 3:16**).
2. We have all heard the popular saying, "God gave the 10 commandments, not the 10 suggestions." We chuckle, but this statement encapsulates the way we must approach all God's Scripture. What we read is not simply good advice. The Bible is God's way for our lives. We need to understand that God's way works and ours ends in death (**Proverbs 14:12**). When we approach the Bible, we must be quick to hear and apply it and slow to speak and get angry with it (**James 1:19**). When I open my Bible, I must prepare to be told how to

live by the One who has the authority to tell me and by the one who cares enough to show me the way that works. I can either keep going my own way and suffer the consequences, or I can surrender to God's way and reap the benefits and promises.

III. Four questions that will change my life when I study my Bible (**II Timothy 3:16**).

A. Teaching: *What do I learn from this study?*

1. This is the most basic question we will ask. It has to do with information and facts. To answer this question we will use different study aids: dictionaries, lexicons, commentaries, etc. We will solicit others for help. At all times, we must study in the Biblical context, never missing the forest because of the trees. We should never get so caught up in studying a character, a word, a verse, or a chapter that we take it out of its place in the Bible. Whatever information we find must coincide with everything else the Bible says.
2. Some of the methods we described earlier will take us this far. The "Studying to Teach Method" will help us answer this first question far better than any other approach. But, please, keep in mind, when you have accomplished this much study you have only asked one of the four questions. You have only gone 25% of the way to a changed life. Never be satisfied with simply knowing more about the Bible.

B. Reproof: *Where do I fall short according to this study?*

1. To reprove someone means to convict or convince them regarding sin in their lives (**Luke 3:19; Ephesians 5:11; et al**). **Romans 3:23** claims we have all fallen short of God's glory. It stands to reason then that when I approach the Bible it should strike me somewhere.
2. When I open my Bible, I must recognize that I am going to find out something that is wrong in my life. I hope that is not seen as negative. I know we like to be told all the good things we are doing. There will be lots of study that shows us what we are doing right. But if I am going to change, I must find out what I am doing wrong.

C. Correction: *What must I change according to this study?*

1. The term "correction" in **II Timothy 3:16** refers to seeing something that is knocked over and restoring it to its upright state. When we answered the last question, we learned there are some things toppled over in our lives. Answering this question allows us to determine what changes to implement to set things up right again. We have now gone from determining what is wrong, to determining how to fix it.
2. We must ask several subordinate questions: "What must I stop doing according to this study?" "What must I start doing according to this study?" "What must I improve and grow in according to this study?" Without answering these questions, our lives will never be changed. If you make it this far in studying your Bible, you are close to a changed life.

D. Training in righteousness: *What habits must I develop according to this study?*

1. Training focuses us on discipline and habit. Righteousness has to do with living a right life before God. Scripture helps us form habits that discipline us to be right with God.
2. There are things that are toppled over in our lives. We have determined what must be corrected to set those things aright. Now, we apply our earlier answers to our lives. We turn from inward examination to outward application. Answering this question changes our lives because we answer this question with actions not with words. At this point, we may use the "Devotional Method" of Bible study to encourage us in our daily actions, strengthening us to face the day and do what we know we must even when it does not come naturally.

Conclusion:

How do you read your Bible? Is it a book that sits waiting for a convenient time to be opened? Is it a book you simply take with you to Bible class and the assembly? Is it a reference book to be searched when you are trying to prove a point or simply wanting to learn how to teach? Or is it a book that changes your life daily, drawing you closer to the Master, making you more useful in His kingdom and more equipped for every good work (**II Timothy 2:21; 3:17**)?

Change does not come easy for us. We like our comfort zones. But we can change. We can break free from the chains of spiritual mediocrity with which Satan would like to bind us. We must approach the Scripture with the intent to be changed. Before figuring out what to teach others, we must see where we need to be changed and let our study change us.