

# Be a Bible Student!

by R. Stanley

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being diligent students of the Bible to grow in faith and understanding of God's Word.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 4:8, Job 23:12, Psalm 119:105, Hosea 4:6, Mark 13:31, John 5:39, John 19:28, Acts 17:11, 1 Peter 2:2, 2 Peter 1:19

**Topics:** "Bible Study", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

R. Stanley emphasizes the significance of the Holy Scriptures as a precious gift from God, highlighting the eternal nature of God's Word amidst the temporal world. Jesus and great men of God like D.L. Moody and George Muller exemplified a deep reverence and reliance on the Scriptures in their lives. The sermon stresses the importance of personal Bible study, encouraging believers to be diligent students of the Word to grow in faith and understanding. It also provides guidance on choosing Bible translations, study Bibles, concordances, commentaries, and dictionaries to enhance one's study of the Scriptures for spiritual growth and maturity.

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## Transcript

The greatest gift of God to man, next to His Son and His Spirit, is the HOLY SCRIPTURES. Dr. Oswald J. Smith observed, Our attitude towards the Scriptures settles everything. All that we see today are temporal, but with one exception--the Bible! Heaven and earth shall pass away but God's Word shall remain forever (Mk 13:31).

Jesus is the perfect pattern for our earthly life. Both His life and ministry were saturated with the Scriptures. Even while agonizing on the Cross, He said, I thirst, "in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (Jn 19:28). Job testified, "I have treasured the words of God's mouth more than my necessary food" (Job 23: 12). God honours those who honour His Word and despises those who despise His Word. He says, "Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children!" (Hos 4:6). The greatness of Israel was in their possession of God's Word (Dt 4:8). God has magnified His word above all things! (Psa 138:2).

Without the Bible we have no light or direction in this world of darkness and chaos (Psa 119:105; 2 Pet 1 :19). Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? These are questions puzzling even the best of minds. But the Bible answers all these questions without a shadow of doubt. Dr. Billy Graham once declared, "I am an optimist because I have read the Book of Revelation!"

## Men of the Bible

All great men of God have been men of the Bible. D.L. Moody was called a man of one Book! There was a great demand for his marked Bible. George Muller was once asked about the secret of his great faith. He replied, "I claim to have no gift of faith, but I have read the Bible on my knees 48 times. Every time I read my Bible my faith grows!" C. T. Studd during his closing years of missionary career in Africa was one day reading in a dimlight an old copy of the Bible with great difficulty. "What are you doing?" asked his friend. "I am again turning the pages of the Scriptures to find out if there is any commandment I have not cared for!" was the answer in a faltering voice. Hudson Taylor, that great missionary to China, spent several hours each morning with his Bible. It is my conviction that an average believer today does not spend sufficient time with his Bible. This explains why there are so many spiritual pygmies in our churches (1 Pet 2:2).

Pastors and preachers should not aim at producing sermon-tasters but sincere and hard-working students of the Scriptures. Guidance to personal Bible study and informations concerning the study aids available must be given to the congregation. Jesus taught His disciples the Scriptures and at the same time He commanded them to "search the Scriptures" themselves (Jn 5:39). We have too many Thessalonians and too few Bereans! No doubt the people at Thessalonica were receptive to the Word, but those at Berea went one step further. "They (the Bereans) received the Word with all readiness, AND searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11). Therefore the Bereans were "more fair-minded" than the Thessalonians!

## Which Translation?

Get a bold letter Bible of a good translation. The King James Version is excellent but the present generation cannot understand its language easily. We should choose a translation suitable both for our meditation and communication. The New King James Version follows the KJV style but has deleted obsolete words. The New International Version and the New American Standard Bible are faithful and easily readable translations. The Living Bible is essentially a paraphrase and so it should not take the place of a translation. The Amplified Bible may be used alongside to find various shades of meaning of the Hebrew and Greek words in original. These are two very energetic languages and so finding the exact word in translation for several words of these two languages has been quite difficult. The KJV, NKJV, NIV and NASB are good for memorisation. The New Living Translation (NLT) is the latest (1996) and it is excellent. Stick to one and refer to the rest.

## Study Bibles

There is an abundance of study aids today for which we have to thank God. Majority of Christians will have no opportunity to study in a Bible Seminary, but that need not be mourned as a disadvantage today if only one will give himself to disciplined study using the available aids. I never had the privilege of studying in a Bible College but my self-study with the help of study aids, sitting under the umbrella of the Holy Spirit, all these years, has been rewarding. It is not less spiritual to refer to the works of other men of God for our study. God has given "teachers" to the Church for its maturity and growth. Teachers can both be "heard" and "read." They may be of the present or the past. Paul was original but Timothy was commanded to teach others what he learnt from Paul and they in turn others and so on (2 Tim 2:2). The chain was thus to continue. The students, who listen to a Chemistry or Physics Professor who says he never refers to any textbook or reference book but speaks from his own knowledge, are sure to fail!

Each Christian should possess atleast one Study Bible. The Scofield Reference Bible is one of the oldest. The original notes of Dr. C. I. Scofield are very helpful. His reference system is excellent. His interpretation of the Scripture is dispensational. The Scofield Bible is available in KJV and NIV. Then we have the Thompson Chain Reference Bible. This was published by Frank Charles Thompson in 1934. This is good for topical studies. This Bible is also available in KJV and NIV. The Dake's Annotated Reference Bible is another monumental work, completed by Finis Jennings Dake in 1963. This contains both notes and references; and facts are given in great detail. The Dake's Bible is available in KJV only. Of most recent scholarship are the Ryrie Study Bible by Dr. Charles Ryrie, and the MacArthur Study Bible by Dr. John MacArthur. The first one is available in KJV, NKJV, NIV, and NASB, and the next one is available in NKJV only. If you can afford to buy only one Study Bible, I recommend the NIV Study Bible or the Nelson Study Bible (NKJV). Pentecostals would prefer the Full Life Study Bible (NIV) by Zondervan Publishers and the Spirit-filled Life Bible (NKJV) by Thomas Nelson Publishers. The New Open Bible (NKJV) by Thomas Nelson Publishers is quite good for its Topical Index.

The Study Bibles mentioned above are sometimes said to be expensive. But compared to what we spend on food, clothing and shelter, it's nothing. Let's remember, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Mt 4:4.)

#### Concordances

We must also use Bible Concordances. Three Concordances are known worldwide. They are Cruden's Complete Concordance, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and Young's Analytical Concordance. The adjectives--complete, exhaustive and analytical--are suggestive of the nature of each concordance. For a very serious student the Young's Concordance is a must, but for average use the Cruden's Concordance is sufficient. These three are based on KJV. Concordances help not only to locate a particular verse but also to pick up all the references on a particular subject. The Bible software is an added facility in this computer age. Sometimes one wonders at the amazing knowledge of a preacher when he quotes so many references for one subject. But we should not forget that these things are possible essentially because of the Concordances. Preachers should freely tell the people how they prepare sermons and what study aids they use, and so on. They should not think they will go jobless if they leak out these "trade secrets!" Unless we are free and open, we cannot produce Timothys and Tituses.

#### Commentaries

D. L. Moody said, The Bible is the Bible's best commentary. This does not mean we should not refer to commentaries. Again, as I said earlier, the God-given "teachers" (Eph 4:11) in the Church may be both "heard" and "read," present or past. One of course need not accept all the views of a commentator. But just because one or two things he says are contrary to our belief, we should not throw away the whole. We must learn to swallow the flesh and spit out the bone! Growing in discernment is the work of the Holy Spirit whose "anointing" is on us to guide us what to receive and what to reject (1 Jn 2:26,27). For example, considering the authors of the Study Bibles, Scofield, Thompson, Ryrie and MacArthur are all non-Pentecostal whereas Dake is Pentecostal. There is so much of helpful material in both the schools. The main point we must ascertain is whether the author or the commentator is basically evangelical in faith.

The Matthew Henry Commentary is one of the oldest and it is liked by many for its devotional quality. The Bethany House Publishers have done an excellent job of producing the Bethany Parallel Commentary

which contains the three classic commentaries, namely Matthew Henry, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown and Adam Clarke, in three parallel columns. This work in two volumes, OT and NT, is a valuable possession. The Dallas Seminary Faculty has produced the Bible Knowledge Commentary in two volumes. It is brief and excellent. Similarly the notes of C. H. Spurgeon, known as the Prince of Preachers, may be freely consulted. There are still so many other Commentaries. Consult your pastor or a sound evangelical leader before buying one.

### Bible Dictionaries

Another aid to Bible study is the Bible Dictionary. A Bible Dictionary gives the details and background of the persons, places, animals, birds, incidents, habits, festivals, etc., of the Bible. The Dictionaries also give a detailed background for each book of the Bible. The New International Dictionary of the Bible, the New Bible Dictionary, and the Unger's Bible Dictionary are some of the well-known ones. The 2-volume IVP Bible Background Commentary explains the cultural background for understanding the Bible passages. A person who regularly refers to Bible Dictionaries will have more knowledge than even one who has visited the Holy Land several times! The Bible Handbooks are also helpful. A Bible Atlas may be added to this list.

It is not enough if we just buy these study aids, we must use them REGULARLY. We should set aside study hours on a daily or weekly basis and work hard. Apostle Paul instructed young Timothy to "give attention to reading" (1 Tim 4:13). Whatever course of study you choose, you must overcome the temptation to leave it in the middle unless it is unprofitable. Thank God for a Book of lifetime occupation!

It is important our head knowledge of the Scriptures becomes the heart experience. A lad was praying for his dad repeating the words, "Lord, lower one foot!" The pastor who overheard him asked him what he meant. He answered, "I am praying for my dad who knows the Bible cover to cover, but it's all mere head knowledge. I am praying that the knowledge may come down by one foot to reach his heart!" Yes, beloved, mere knowledge puffs up (1 Cor 8:1). The threefold purpose of Bible study may be stated thus: What does this passage tell about GOD? About ME? About my responsibility to OTHERS? Learn to apply the answers to these questions in the actual life situations. The Bible is intensely practical. If we are not "doers of the Word," we are simply deceiving ourselves (Js 1:22). Our life and ministry will be judged and tested by God's Word on the last day (Jn 12:48; Mt 7:24-27; 1 Cor 3:12-14).

There are some who hold the view that the Bible just contains the Word of God. We totally reject this view. We believe and hold that the Bible is the Word of God. Also the Bible is a completed revelation. With the "Amen" of the Book of Revelation, the Scripture is complete. What is revealed is sufficient for our life and conduct. Beware of extra-Biblical revelations!

I cherish the chorus learnt in the Sunday School--

The B-I-B-L-E,

Yes that's the Book for me;

I stand upon the Word of God,

The B-I-B-L-E!

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