

Effective Study

by William MacDonald

William MacDonald emphasizes the importance of discipline, faith, and methodical study in understanding the Bible effectively.

Duration: 29:44

Scripture: Leviticus 13:23

Topics: "Study"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of starting with a short portion of scripture rather than trying to study a whole chapter. They highlight the value of breaking down a big task into smaller, manageable ones. The speaker also shares their experience of seeking answers to their questions from a knowledgeable person and the value of the insights they received. They discuss the need to search for a deep understanding of the passage and the importance of being able to explain it in simple terms to others. Additionally, the speaker reflects on the challenge of getting young people interested in studying the Bible and identifies TV as a major distraction.

Transcript

I'd like to speak with you this morning about keys to effective Bible study. We're really building up, bringing up keys. This is the next one, keys to effective Bible study.

For the production, I'd like to say that I spend an awful lot of time thinking, you know, how can we get young people interested, really motivated to study the Word of God. I really lie in bed at night, pondering this whole subject. And I guess most of my life has been lived in this area.

And I realized that I have an enemy. And that enemy today is TV. If it wasn't TV, it would be something else.

You know, not every generation had TV, but there was always something to lure you away. But, you know, why is it that TV is so much more attractive than Bible study? Ever think about that? Why is it that, like the sound of music or the late night show or something like that can really grip people? And Bible study seems kind of drab by comparison. Ever think about that? Why is it that it's really so exciting to see these fine young specimens of humanity competing in the Olympics? But it really doesn't seem quite as attractive to see a young person out in Bombay preaching in the open air.

Can anybody tell me the key that solves that problem in one word? Well, I'll tell you what it is. Faith. Faith sees beyond all the glamour and pimple of this life and sees what really counts and what really is important.

And it's when we're not walking by faith that the attractions of the world, which I admit seem so alluring, get a hold of us. And when we really neglect that which matters. Pretty something to think about, isn't it? Now, I'd like to say also at the outset that as far as I know, there's no royal road to Bible study.

No easy way. I'm glad Brother Sheridan spoke before me because he's a living example of what we're going to be talking about. You say, oh, he just went to sleep and put on the tape recorder and he got it by osmosis.

Don't believe it for a minute. Don't believe it for a minute. He did a look at Brother Sheridan as he ministered the word of God.

Well, I could never do that, you know. You think, well, it just came to him easy. He has a gift for it.

No, no. I have to use a word here that's very, very unpopular today, and that word is discipline. It comes by discipline.

And I have never discovered an easy way to Bible study. We have instant potatoes and we have instant soup and we have instant printing, but there's no instant knowledge of the word of God. I've never designed it that way.

So, let's start out with that in mind that we're going to have to work if we're going to get into the word of God. Then let me also say that what I'm going to say today is not the method of Bible study. There's just a method.

And you might have a different method and it might be far better. All I can tell you is some of the keys that I have followed myself that I found effective in my own life, but I certainly don't force them on you. Key number one, carefully select the books to be studied and start with a short portion.

Carefully select the book. You have to begin somewhere, don't you? Okay, Brother McKenzie here this morning. Well, Brother Sheridan, if a young person came to you and said, where would I start? Where would you recommend him to start to study the word? Romans.

Romans, good. Okay, Romans is a good, it's foundational. Somebody else, if I ask somebody else, they might say the Gospel of John.

There's no right answer to it. The idea is to get before the Lord and pray and ask the Lord to lead you to the place. And then start with a short portion.

The reason I emphasize that is that a lot of us try to bite off more than we can chew. Some people say, well, I'm going to study a chapter a day. Well, maybe you will, but maybe five verses would be better, depending on the material.

Maybe five verses would be better. If you could get those five verses and get something out of them, it would be far better than doing a skim on a whole chapter. And I learned long ago that a big job is composed of many little jobs.

And I can't do a big job, but I can do many little ones. And they have a way of adding up. 1947, I got down on my knees before the Lord, and it was one of the goals of my life.

I told the Lord I wanted to go through the New Testament verse by verse and write out my own, for my own private study, write out my own commentary on every one of those verses. It's not a terribly big job. I couldn't do that all at once.

It was too much to think about. But I could do three or four or five verses a day. And I did.

I started doing it. Do you know how it accumulates over the period of years? So I say, prayerfully start. Ask the Lord to lead you to some book to start with.

As a matter of fact, I started with Romans in that. Strange that Father Sheridan should say that. I started with Romans.

And I'll tell you, Romans isn't easy. The Bible is a wonderful book. It's so wonderful that a young believer can go and get food for his soul.

And no matter how old you are in the Lord, you can go there and still there are tremendous problems too. It's really a wonderful book. Second, and this is my number, write down in question form everything in the passage that is not absolutely clear.

Write down in question form everything in the passage that's not absolutely clear. People say to me, how do you study the Bible? I say with a question mark for a brain. And that's true, really.

Now don't misunderstand me. I've never doubted the Word of God. When I come to the Bible, I come with my mind on its knees.

I come in submission to the Word of God. Not doubting. I don't doubt the Word, but I have a lot of questions.

And I know there are a lot of people here in the meeting today who are very, very humble. And they read the Word of God and they say, well, I don't understand that. But Brother McDonald does.

Brother Sheridan does. Brother McKenzie does. They understand.

Listen, one of the first places you have to come to is just to be willing to ask the question. Say, I don't know what that means, but I'd like to know. And I'd like to give you some illustrations of that before we go on.

Would you turn in your Bible to John chapter 13? And I'm going to read verses 31 and 32, and I'm just going to ask you to raise your hand if you can explain these verses to me. Verse 31, This is John 13, verses 31 and 32. Now I'd like to know, how many people are there in the meeting this morning? I don't doubt that there are some.

Please feel free to raise your hand. But how many are there who could explain those two verses to me in simple, understandable language? Do I see any hands? You see, a brother gets up and reads this in the meeting and you say, well, he understands it, but I don't. So I'll just blunder on in my ignorance.

Listen, there are very few people that could explain those two verses in simple, living Bible English. But you'll never get the answer if you don't know the question. I'll give you another illustration.

I think it's the preceding page. I'm going to ask you, I'm going to ask you, really, to speak out on this one if you can. John chapter 12.

This puzzles me for years. Puzzles me for years, this passage. John 12, 20.

And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast. The same came, therefore, to Philip, which was of Bethsaida, of Galilee, and desired him say, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew, and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus.

And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. But if it dies, it bringeth forth much fruit.

What was the problem in those verses I read? Can anybody tell me? Don't be afraid if it's not what I'm thinking of. Can anybody tell me what the problem there is? What is it, Harold? The hour has come. Okay.

That's good. See, there's more than one problem. He just reminded me there's more than one problem.

Anybody else see a terrific problem in that? That's the idea that I have. Brother Edmondson? I want you to carry a true resurrection. That's very good.

That's very good. The problem I have for years when I study this is they come and they say we would see Jesus, and Jesus says something that doesn't seem to have any connection with what went before. That's what Brother Al was suggesting here.

They said we would see Jesus. But they come to Jesus, and Jesus says, except the corn and wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. You say, what's the connection? You know, when you read something, you expect it to be a flow of thought.

But it seems to be very abrupt and very jerky. Well, Brother Edmondson has suggested a good solution. I pondered over this for years.

That was a question that I had written out that I wasn't getting an answer to. But, you know, somebody suggested I read this within the last few months, and I liked it very much. The Greeks loved wisdom.

They loved philosophers. And they were intrigued by the teachings of Jesus. And maybe they came to Jesus and they thought, we'd like to bring you back to Athens, you know, and set you up there on Mars Hill, and the people will come out to hear you in droves.

And Jesus said, you missed the point. Before I can ascend the throne of glory, I have to ascend the altar of sacrifice. The way up is down, except a corner.

We fall into the ground and die. I didn't come into the world to be a philosopher sitting in the marketplace in Athens. I came to speak and to say that which is lost, and I have to die.

Now, I'm not saying that's the answer to it, but it's a suggested answer to it. All I'm trying to say is, unless I can see the problem in a passage, I'm not going to see the answers. And please, don't be ashamed of asking questions, even in the quietness of your own soul.

The old Chinese proverb says, he who asks a question is a fool for a minute. He who asks no question is a fool forever. That's the second key.

Write down in question form everything in the passage that is not absolutely clear. Number three, pray that the Lord will keep you teachable and help you to find the answers. Pray that the Lord will keep you teachable and help you to find the answers.

I pray on my regular prayer list, Lord, keep me teachable by the Holy Spirit. I never want to get to the stage where I think I've arrived, where I think I know it. I always want to press on and find new truths in the Word of God.

And you know, it really is marvelous how God answers that prayer. You don't get the answers overnight. Sometimes you wait many years to get them.

And I want to tell you, when I see some of these things like that about Philip and the Greeks and the Lord Jesus answered, I get more joy out of that than if I struck a vein of silver. Really, I do. To me, that's one of the great joys of living, to see these tremendous things in the Word of God and the moral beauty of the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Number four, re-read the passage often. Let's say you're starting with the first verses of Romans. Re-read the passage often.

Memorize it if possible till your mind is thoroughly saturated with the words of Scripture. This is a wonderful thing in studying the Word of God. Re-read it, memorize it, go over it till your mind is thoroughly saturated with the words of Scripture.

You say, why do you do that? Well, because you're pondering it. It's in your heart and in your life. And that's how the Spirit of God is able to bring light on the subject to you.

Meditate on the passage, comparing it with other portions of the Word. Do you notice how Brother Sheridan did that? He's in Leviticus 23 now, and then he's over in 1 Corinthians finding the spiritual applications of what we have here in the Old Testament. Meditate on the passage, comparing it with other verses.

Number five, not all my brethren might agree with me. I say read it in as many different versions as possible. You know there are different versions of the Bible.

Some are better than others. But I must confess, I have as many of them as I can find. And I read the passage in as many different versions as possible.

And I get help from them all. Not all in the same way. Just let me give you an illustration of that.

Jay and Darby, I think somebody here has Darby's translation. 2 Corinthians 4, a verse that used to baffle me. I didn't know what this meant.

2 Corinthians 4, it says, verse 6. I'm reading it in the King James, which I use in public ministry. But I certainly use the other versions. 2 Corinthians 4, 6, For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Well, now probably that's clear to you, and I don't doubt that it is. But it was a difficult verse to me. And so, especially that passage, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

Didn't get too much out of it. Then I read it in Darby, and I can't quote it exactly. You get this idea that the same God who at creation said, let there be light, has shined in our hearts.

At creation, he said, let there be light. But he himself has shined in our hearts. Why? I think Darby says, for the outshining.

For the outshining. The outshining of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. What it's saying is that God shined in our hearts so that it might shine forth through us.

What it's saying is that God never intended us to be the terminal of his blessing, but the channel of his blessing. Now, I don't get it in the King James, but I did in Darby. When I read it.

So I would suggest to you to read as many different versions of the Bible as possible, and here and there you'll pick up real help. I really, the book of James never really clicked in my mind and my heart till I read it in Philip's version. I know it's just a paraphrase, but I think the Lord gave that man help as he put that together.

Read James sometime in Philip and you'll get a real thrill for your soul. Read as many versions as possible. Number six, read as many commentaries as you can find.

Read as many commentaries. I'm speaking of good commentaries, you know, evangelical commentaries. Now, here's where a rub comes in.

Most of us are intellectually lazy. I'm not criticizing you. I'm speaking about number one.

We're intellectually lazy. I'm reading, and for instance, I come to a word and I don't know the meaning of it. I'm lazy.

It takes tons of, to overcome that inertia, to reach over and grab Western fiction every and see what that word means. Don't you find that? You'd rather blunder on and think it means something even if it's wrong. So this is true with commentaries too.

We're intellectually lazy and we have to discipline ourselves. We have to drive ourselves to go to these folks and study them and get food from them. And you say, what about that? Brother McKenzie already has recommended the use of commentaries.

And I agree with him. There are some who just read the Bible. Well, that's okay.

The Lord bless them. But God gave teachers to the church to build up the saints for the work of the ministry. And to me, it makes little difference whether I hear that teacher speaking orally or reading in a voice.

And I can get help from almost all of these evangelical commentaries, but that doesn't mean you can endorse everything that's in them. My colleague says to the students that we're working with, eat the orange and spit out the seed. That's a good thing to do.

You eat the orange and you spit out the seed. You prove all things and you hold fast that which is good. You separate the precious from the vile.

You say, how do you do that? You're just a young believer. But a young believer has the spirit of God and the spirit of God is the one who enables him to discern truth from error. Absolutely.

So read these commentaries and read discerningly and make notes on helpful passages that you get. I write them down, make a note, and tuck them away in my file under that chapter. Just let me give you, and not only commentaries, but Bible dictionaries and all the rest.

I could give you many illustrations of this. For instance, the parable of the fig tree. You know, Jesus comes and he doesn't find any figs on the tree and he curses it and it says it wasn't yet the time for figs.

In fact, a lot of the critics of the Bible say, well, Jesus acted excellently there. You know, he lost his cool and he cursed the tree because it didn't have any figs on the word. It wasn't the time for figs anyway.

Well, it does seem strange, doesn't it? You say, how do you get around that? Well, I'll tell you how to get around it. Go to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia and look up under the word fig. That's all you have to do.

And it explains the whole thing. It explains that the figs there in Bible land, they had an early crop that was edible, but it wasn't the real fig. Those trees came out, first of all, with an early crop of, they were kind of a harbinger of the crop that was to come.

And that's when Jesus went to the tree, when that early crop should have been there. Not the real time of figs, but the first figs. Jesus knew that if those first figs didn't come, the later crop wouldn't come either.

And that's true. If there wasn't that early crop of figs, there never would be any figs on it when he cursed the fig tree. Well, I've just given you a brief sketch of it, but International Standard Bible Encyclopedia under figs explains the thing very satisfactorily.

In fact, I would go so far to say that there are very few subjects in the Bible that you couldn't get help on right up at the bookstore this morning. Do you believe that? The books that are there at the bookstore, I could go there and get help on almost any subject in the Bible. Sounds shocking, but it's true, just to say.

Okay, number seven. Discuss the questions with other Christians and try to get more answers. Discuss the questions that you have.

We were talking yesterday about That's a wonderful thing, isn't it? A wonderful way to redeem the time. Say these questions and discuss them. I've made a practice of doing this down through the years.

I've always tried to have an older man as a mentor. For many years, it was Robert Little up there in Chicago. And I used to say my questions in my little seven-star diary, and then every once in a while, I'd ask Mr. and Mrs. Little out for supper.

He had to work for supper. I'd bombard him with these questions. And he enjoyed it, of course.

He wasn't complaining. He really loved every minute of it. But it's wonderful, some of the answers you'd get.

Not all, because nobody knows all the answers. Not even Robert Little. But it was really wonderful, some of the answers that I got, and I'm grateful for them today.

Okay, number eight. Keep searching until you can give a simple, concise explanation of the passage in your own words to somebody else. I don't think that I've really got the passage until I can sit down and explain it to you in such a way that you can understand it.

Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him. If God be glorified in Him, God shall glorify Him in Himself and shall straightway glorify Him. I don't think I understand those verses until I can sit down and make them clear to you.

And I worked towards this in the study of the Word of God. Brother Sheridan today, he takes the Feasts of Jehovah and he explains them so even I can understand them. That's it.

That's Bible study. You have the passage there. Number nine, and this is very, very important.

Study with the intention of obeying what you read. I can't overemphasize this one. Study with the intention of obeying what you read.

Do not evade the plain teaching of the Word of God. People say, oh yes, Brother Sheridan has an IQ that I don't have. I've got news for you.

It isn't the IQ that counts, it's the OQ that counts. You say, what do you mean OQ? I mean obedience quotient. I know people that don't have such a high IQ but they're masters in the Word of God.

It doesn't have to do with formal training at all. One of the glories of the assembly is to see men and women who have not had a lot of formal training but they've gone to the Word of God and become educated people. I believe that with all my heart.

My own father probably never went beyond the eighth grade of school but he became a Christian and studied the Word of God. It's obedience that counts. Somebody has said obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge.

Obedience is the organ of spiritual knowledge and it really is. If you go to the Word of God with this mind, if God shows it to me, I'm going to do it. I want to tell you something.

You're going to make progress in spiritual things. Years ago, we had a young fellow come to the mayor. Some of the folks here know him.

When he was unsaved, he was down at Fort Bragg, I think it was Fort Bragg in North Carolina and he was a parish preacher there and all the rest. He was practically illiterate when he went into the service and he was so bashful he couldn't even look at a person. And in a wonderful way, God saved his soul and he had that attitude.

He came to the Word of God. I don't care whether I see anybody doing it or not, I'm going to do it. And that fellow started to grow and he grew by leap and by bound.

He's over in the mission field now and I've been with him on the mission field. I've served with him in France. I've served with him in Vienna, Austria, and other countries.

That fellow can preach the gospel in Spanish, German, and French today. He knows some Polish and a smattering of Russian. He calls himself the Emmaus Dropout.

Praise God for dropouts like that. That's all I can say. Why? Because he had a heart to obey the Word of God.

He was a fanatic of the Lord Jesus and if he saw it in the Word, that's what he wanted to do. So be encouraged. Just have that attitude.

Come to the Word of God. Maybe there's somebody here this morning that's unsafe. And the same thing is there.

If a person is unsafe, he's not a decided Christian. But he wants to know. I would tell him, just go to the Word of God and say, Oh God, if this is your Word, if I'm a sinner and lost on the way to hell, if I can be saved and have eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, show it to me now as I read your Word.

Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Go and start in the gospel of John. Read the gospel of John.

You know what will happen? You'll get saved. That's what will happen. You'll get saved.

If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be a style or whether I speak for myself. Wonderful, isn't it? What a wonderful book this is. Shakespeare never turned me on like the Bible.

Study with the intention of obeying what you read. Don't evade the plain teaching of the Word. And we can think of 60 theological reasons why that doesn't mean what it says.

I'll tell you, you'll never go on in the study of the Word of God if you have that attitude. If God says it, believe it and practice it and you'll go on for Him. And finally, number 10, pass on to others what you have learned.

Pass on to others what you have learned. You see, you could just spend the rest of your life studying the Word of God and just become like the dead sea, all inflow, no outflow. You don't want that.

I would tell a young person to come up to have a Sunday school class where you get that outflow. Come up to have a home Bible class or a class at school, something like that where you can share what you're learning. And even if you don't have a class, share it with some other Christian during the day.

And this has a tremendously beneficial effect in your study of the Word of God. A hundred years from today, a lot of the things that we're learning won't make any difference. The butterflies of vermin, mineral deficiencies of the tomatoes and the cockle bears.

The browning reaction of potato chips. You know, a lot of the knowledge that we're getting today won't make any difference a hundred years from today. But I'll tell you, dear friend, the knowledge of the Word of God will really count.

Let's all be Bible students. Shall we?

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