

Foreword: Learning Bible Study Methods and Techniques ¹

Would you like to learn how to study God's Word? Or learn how to write a study guide for yourself? Or learn how to develop study guides for your Sunday School class? Or learn how to write a study guide for your small group Bible Study? Amos 3:3 says that two can only walk together if they are agreed, and so, if you agree, *join the journey* to learn how to Study the Bible and use it for your enrichment.

Journeys are sometimes planned and other times they just happen. Planned journeys have a set of parameters. Before we set off we plan; we pack; and we let others know of our destination and our time frame---usually. And then there are those who pack a backpack and set off with no destination in mind, wandering from place to place. Which is your lifestyle? This author's journey has been a combination of both. It began with a plan to learn more by gathering all of the books I could gather, making a plan to spend time each day but I did not necessarily tell anyone what I was doing. I actually was "wandering in the desert" looking for answers.

So, how did my planned/unplanned journey to learn how to study begin? It began similarly to the children's fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel. As children we heard and rehearsed the tale of these children who dropped breadcrumbs so that they could find their way back home. The difference in my journey is that it was not me who dropped the bread crumbs to find my way to and from my "unknown destination." Instead, it was Jehovah Jireh, The God Who Provides. It was He who dropped "bread crumbs" before me enticing me to follow Him to an appointed destination He had pre-determined. They would be my source of "angel's food," as Irving Jensen so often called it, so that this author could find the way to God's Word and all Truth. Along the way, this author more readily identified with the Pilgrim's search in Pilgrim's Progress where he finally understands the Truth and releases himself to God and so it was with this author.

On my journey this author has feasted upon God's "angel's food" for daily sustenance and much to my delight it has been both nourishing and has led to a peace that passes all understanding. Have I finished my journey? Do I have all the answers for which I was seeking? Some have been left unanswered until God knows I am ready to find those precious bread crumbs within His Word *or* when my journey will come to a close, and, like Jacob, I draw up my feet, breathe my last and join the great cloud of witnesses to cheer on the remaining ones left behind. Until that time I have purposed in my heart to study to show myself approved, a proven worker who does not need to be ashamed, teaching the message of truth accurately. ² My goal is to hide His "angel's nuggets" within my heart that I might not sin against Him. Further, it will assist me in seeking to fulfill a favorite verse: "But solid food is for the mature, whose perceptions are trained by practice to discern both good and evil." (Heb 5:14)

¹ All scripture herein is quoted from the NETBible.

² 2Tim 2:15

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Although this is a noble goal, at the same time I am also reminded of A.W. Tozer's warning: "The devil is a better theologian than any of us and is a devil still."

With this as a reminder, this author's goals and passion continues onward that the word of Paul might become true: "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." (Php 3:10)

A second warning comes from scripture in which God reminds us of the blessings and/or curses in the teaching of the master's Words in the parable of the talents. We are wise to not build doctrine from parables yet in this "story" Jesus teaches us wise principles. In this parable, three servants were entrusted with portions of the master's wealth while he goes on a journey. It is interesting that no directions were given to the servants, but we see through the eyes of Matthew, the recorder, the hidden principles which, if we are discerning, teach us wisdom. Of the three, two servants went and doubled their portions but the remaining servant dug a hole in the ground and hid his portion. Upon the return of the master, two servants reported their gain while the third arrogantly responded that the master was a hard man, harvesting where he did not sow, gathering where he did not scatter seed. The master commented to the first two "well done thou good and faithful servant" but the one servant who had only returned what he had been given, to him the master said: "evil and lazy slave." Not only was the master extremely displeased with him but also the scriptures tell us that he took what had been given to him and gave it to another. Thus the warning: we have been entrusted with the Master's wealth found in His Word. We read that Jesus told the disciples: "go and make disciples and teach them." (Matt 28) Further on in the New Testament we come across words written by the Apostle Peter who had heard this command and went forth. One can almost hear Peter counseling us from what he learned from "The" Master for he wrote "his divine power has bestowed on us everything necessary for life and godliness." (1 Peter 1:4) Therefore we are without excuse if we fail to be obedient to His command. Do we not also desire to hear our Master, Jesus, say that we have been faithful? Our Master has given to each of his servants, (you and I) a talent; He has gone on His journey, but one day He will return. The challenge is this: are we doubling our talent or are we hiding it in the ground? Will you *join the journey* and learn how to multiply your talent for Him so that you meet your own personal needs as well as the needs of your "students?" The Master has allotted to each of us the number of talents according to our ability. All He desires is that we be faithful and gain more talents for Him.

A third warning comes to us from the pen of James. "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters; because you know that we will be judged more strictly." (Jam 3:1) This in itself is a cautionary note to those who feel led by God to teach His Word to others. Matthew as well has a similar cautionary word: "But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a huge millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the open sea." (Matt 18:6) May we humbly submit our learning and our endeavor to relay God's Word to others so that we bring glory to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

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On this journey, this author, having been a Sunday School teacher, Sunday School Superintendent, AWANA leader, Adjunct College Professor, Elementary teacher and Bible Study teacher, observed and heard the lack of the “how to’s” of Bible Study in many of the classes in which I taught or interacted with students. But I also became aware that people wanted to know, they wanted to study but they did not know how. When asked, they often received this answer from their churches, SS teachers, and Bible Study leaders: read the Bible, or begin a personal *journey* in a Bible Study. But, if left to themselves these precious students often became discouraged and disheartened without someone saying “this is the way, walk ye in it.” (Is 30:21) In the last 15 yrs, God has opened doors for this author to learn the techniques of Bible Study through the guidance of Precept Ministries³ as well as serving as a Discussion Leader for Bible Study Fellowship⁴. Using the skills taught in both helped to bring to the forefront the satisfaction for how to study the Bible, gaining in knowledge as well as spiritual maturity. After 10+ years using the skills learned in Precepts and BSF, this author was asked to design study guides for an adult Sunday School Class. One of the goals of this exercise was to transfer what I had learned by making studying easy, memorable, expedient, and efficient in design. “Marrying” the skills used in the college classes I had taught as well as both skills honed in Precepts and BSF helped to bring about a modified inductive study method. I designed a basic study guide chart which I could replicate each week both for paper/pencil or on my computer as the beauty of being in the technological age is work may be saved now as well as for the future.

This course⁵ is the answer that God has placed upon my heart to fulfill a passion to use the talents that God has entrusted to me at this point in my life journey. As a participant or one who joins me in this journey, it is hoped that you too will have a desire to dig into the Word and from there impart the Word of God to many. If you choose to join the journey, we will seek the answer that gives one hope and be able to do as Peter said “be ready to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope you possess.” (1 Peter 3:15)

A last thought; Paul told us to study to show ourselves an approved workman. He also commended the Bereans for their diligence to study. In chapter 12 of his second epistle to the Corinthians, Paul reminded them that he took no monetary gain from them lest he become a burden to them. In the same way this author also desires that this study guide be *free* and available to anyone across the globe. Please enjoy it and gain from it so that you may in turn pass on to others what you have learned so that you are being obedient to what Paul told Timothy, “And entrust what you heard me say in the presence of many others as witnesses to faithful people who will be competent to teach others as well.” (2 Tim 2:2). Just as Pilgrim found that his journey led him down many different paths, so this spiritual journey will take you far and wide, but always, *if you are*

³ www.precept.org

⁴ <http://www.bsfinternational.org/>

⁵ Dictionary defines course as : a prescribed number of instruction periods in a particular field of study

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committed, you will find it will lead to a place of a renewed hunger for God and His Word along the pathways, and a new passion will be revealed from the Holy Spirit.

Just as Columbus gathered many men, items and ships to begin his journey which would take him to many new and exciting ports of call we will be doing the same. But, in the confines of today's world we will not be using ships but God's Word. We will have our tackle and our charts but only one compatriot sailor...that is Jesus Christ. He calms the winds and the seas and He will calm our fears and give us the faith to sail forward from one side of the Sea to the other. We will meet those whose faith is strong like the Syrophenician woman and those whose faith is hidden like the demoniac in the Gadarenes. Perhaps we will find that we have the characteristics of both at times but along the way as we encounter the wind and waves we will hear Him guide us lovingly one paddle stroke at a time. We have one goal: to seek to arrive at the distant shore and stepping out find that we are on heaven's shore and our Sailor is there to meet us.