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Reason #6 - A believer's maturity and growth are at stake which is contingent upon an accurate understanding of God's word.

Every believer should strive to carefully and accurately understand the Scriptures because their entire spirituality and growth is contingent on this very point.

I Peter 2:2 teaches us that we are to long for "the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation." Being fed the pure, true milk of the word of God is vital for this.

II Timothy 3:16-17 teaches us that the key to us becoming a mature, thoroughly furnished, completely equipped believer is an understanding of "All Scripture." This is a daunting challenge.

Philippians 1:9-11 teaches that we are to grow in "real knowledge and all discernment" that leads to us being filled with the righteousness of God. We have much at stake in accurately understanding the Bible.

The fact is if our interpretations aren't right, then our spirituality is not right. One may read the Bible and have a warm, fuzzy feeling, but no spiritual depth that pleases God.

QUESTION #3 – What is the goal of this study?

The goal of this study is not to replace the need for church or for gifted men who can teach the Scriptures because nothing will replace that. There are some goals of this study:

Goal #1 - To Glorify God. **I Cor. 10:31; Ps. 138:2**

In I Corinthians 10:31 we read, "whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." In Psalm 138:2 we read, "For you have magnified Your word according to all Your name."

So the word of God is the most majestic thing on this earth and when we are learning how to study to accurately understand it, we are doing something to the glory of God.

Goal #2 - To gain true, deep knowledge of God. **Eph. 1:16-17**

When we read a prayer like Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers in Ephesians 1:16-17, it is clear that God wants His people to have a "knowledge-upon-knowledge" level or deep knowledge of Him. To have that knowledge one must be wise and knowledgeable of the written Scriptures. In Paul's armor against Satan, he said the "the sword of the Spirit" is the "word of God." Eph. 6:17

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Goal #3 - To actually transform our minds. **Rom. 12:2**

There is nothing on this earth that can and will transform a mind and renew a mind like careful study to come to an accurate understanding of God's word. **A true course on how to study and interpret the Bible should cause a believer to be a very careful thinker.**

Goal #4 - To give God's people the tools necessary so that there is a measure of Spirit-produced independence in being able to see God's truth and know it is God's truth in what is being studied, taught or preached.

Just having the skills to study and interpret the Bible does not mean we may eliminate those who have special gifts of God to be able to teach the Scriptures (**Eph. 4:11**). God still gives gifted men to the church and those men are needed to preach and teach the Scriptures. These gifts are still needed and will always be needed for the equipping of the saints.

But we do see in **I Corinthians 14:29** that Paul expected the people in the church to be able to listen carefully to what was being said in order to be able to pass some sort of judgment as to whether or not it was right and true. **This kind of ability requires thinking and not just reading, memorizing or feeling.**

When Paul and Silas went to Berea and opened up the word of God, we learn that they were "examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so" (**Acts 17:11**).

So the goal of this study is to present God's people with some of the skills necessary to come to a proper understanding and right interpretation of the word of God.

QUESTION #4 – How do people actually read the Bible?

Whenever anyone picks up a Bible, he/she has made some personal, intentional decision to attempt to read it. We don't necessarily know the reason or motive for reading it, but some decision has been made to read it. In fact, we believe the Bible is the best book one can read.

But there are at least seven different ways one may read the Bible.

Way #1 - One may read the Bible skeptically.

A skeptic may read the Bible, but he does so with the goal of questioning everything and not ascertaining truth or changing his mind about anything. Skeptics do read the Bible, but they are suspicious of it and very critical of it. Their goal for even reading it is sinister. They read it looking for supposed contradictions or mistakes. They are not after truth and they are not interested in coming to accurate conclusions.

I read of a skeptic in London who read the Bible and said that it was almost impossible to believe in any book whose authorship is not clearly known. Well, a Christian man was in the audience and he asked if the compiler of the multiplication table was known. The skeptic said “No.” So the Christian said, “Then of course you don’t believe in it?” The skeptic said, “Oh yes, I believe in it because it works well.” The Christian responded, “So does the Bible.” That silenced the skeptic.

Way #2 - One may read the Bible casually.

In a casual reading, one is not too concerned with technical matters in a text. Casual reading makes no attempt to actually dissect a text. Casual reading is done for pleasure. One can just casually read the Bible without much thinking at all. Quite honestly, casual reading does not require much thinking. Running our eyes over words on a page is relatively easy; as we will see, Bible study is not easy. The Bible is one of the most interesting books one can read.

Years ago, one famous General in the military said he loved to read the war stories in the Bible. He said it was fascinating. The stories in the Bible fascinate all ages of people. One problem with reading the Bible casually is that one is not really focused on the author’s true meaning of the text. **Reading the Bible casually is not the same as studying the Bible.**

Way #3 - One may read the Bible devotionally.

In a devotional reading, one reads the Bible with the idea that God will speak to your heart and mind. Many people pick up their Bibles and read it devotionally, realizing God does speak through His word. Truly, God does speak to His people through His word.

One does not need tools or helps to read the Bible devotionally and it is a good thing to do. Probably all of us have done this in our lives. For example, when going through a difficult and dark valley, many read the Psalms with the idea that it will minister to our hearts. It does minister to our hearts.

But picking up a Bible in search of a feeling in the heart is not Bible study. At the heart of Bible study is deep search to accurately understand what a biblical text actually says and means. Some have closed their eyes and opened to a passage and put their finger on a verse and read it believing God will speak to their hearts. The problem with just reading the Bible devotionally is that what you come to believe and feel may not be accurate.

Years ago, there was a minister who was touched by the story of the Exodus and he led a group of people to the Lake truly feeling that God would part it. Well God didn’t part it and it was his devotional reading that left him standing there looking like he was out of his mind.

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Dr. Michael S. Heiser made a great observation on this point when he said the goal of Bible study is not some “Spiritual Buzz.” “Bible study is not about you. It is about gaining the knowledge of God...” (*Brief Insights On Mastering Bible Study*, p. 29). The Bible is not man’s view of God; it is God’s view of man, Himself and everything else.

If one is always reading the Bible devotionally, how do we know what we believe in our hearts is really the meaning of the text?

Way #4 - One may read the Bible historically.

Many archeological discoveries have occurred in various countries, such as Israel and Turkey, because scholars have read the Bible with historical locations in view. They read the Bible as a history book. There are literal archeological trips taken to these parts of the world just to do historical, archeological work.

One of the latest archaeological discoveries was made last year in 2021. Archaeologists working near Jerusalem discovered an ancient wall that was five meters wide (5.4 yards) that proved biblical accounts of Jerusalem being fortified were accurate (i.e. Psalm 89:40). Many read the Bible looking for historical things like this.

William Ramsey was one such man who read the Bible historically. He was an attorney who initially was an atheist and took the Bible to historically track Paul’s journeys through Greece and Turkey. He had been told by his professors that Luke’s history in Acts was inaccurate and was not right. Ramsey believed them. He specifically took the book of Acts and went to Turkey and Greece and started tracking the record to see if the historical documentation was accurate. He discovered the history was completely accurate. Because of his reading the Bible historically and tracking it down, he became a believer and one of the great defenders of Biblical Christianity.

Way #5 - One may read the Bible inquisitively.

One may read the Bible to simply be inquisitive of what is in it or what it says. This does not mean one is pursuing a real personal relationship with God or a real focus on an accurate interpretation and application.

There is an interesting account in **Matthew 2:1-5**. When Herod heard from the Magi that the King of the Jews had been born, he gathered the chief priests and scribes together to have them research exactly where the Messiah was supposed to be born. They went to the O.T. book of Micah and determined that He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2). They simply went to the Scriptures to inquire the facts of what Micah wrote and that was the interpretation they gave to Herod. They read it and reported it.

If one reads the Bible with an inquisitiveness to know truth, God can do some very positive and powerful things. Many who pick up a Bible are inquisitive as to what is in it.