
Study

“. . . but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is – his good, pleasing and perfect will.” – Romans 12:2

Dallas Willard says, “As solitude is the primary discipline of abstinence for the early part of our spiritual life, so study is the primary discipline of engagement.”¹ Therefore, it is very important that we understand the practice of this discipline in our lives. It is different than meditation. Meditation is more devotional in nature whereas study is more analytical. Study is the primary way we engage ourselves with the written and spoken Word of God. Study can also focus on the reading of good books. An often neglected area of study involves the observation of things and people. Study can also be enhanced by listening to gifted teachers who help us to understand the Bible in deep and refreshing ways, and challenge us to deeper personal levels of study.

While some might be turned off by the idea of study being a spiritual discipline, it is important to understand both the experiential nature of this type of study and the consequential results. Richard Foster defines study as

*a specific kind of experience in which through careful observation of objective structures we cause thought processes to move in a certain way. Perhaps we study a tree or book. We see it, feel it. As we do, our thought processes take on an order conforming to the order in the tree or book. When done with concentration, perception and repetition, ingrained habits of thought are formed.*²

The discipline of study will provide the basis for knowledge and understanding as you venture on your journey. It is always important to undertake study with an attitude of humility and teachability since any practice of increasing knowledge can have a tendency to feed one's pride or arrogance.

- Using a concordance (either book form or computer), choose a topic of interest to you that you have been desiring to learn more about. Look up the word/concept in the concordance, reading each portion of Scripture where it is found. After you have done this, write several paragraphs summarizing what the Bible has to say about the topic.
- Obtain a series of CDs or tapes on a portion of Scripture by a good Bible teacher. Spend some time listening to these tapes where you can really concentrate, take notes, and reflect on the passage(s) of Scripture being studied. After listening to the tapes, spend some time on your own studying the same portion of the Bible to see what other observations, principles, or application you come up with.
- A significant aspect of study is the constant reading of the Bible as a whole. If you read 3-4 chapters a day, you can read the entire Bible in one year. Many people find it helpful to use a Bible reading calendar to keep track. There are also Bibles that are designed and laid out to be read over the period of a year. If you find it difficult reading the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, you might try reading a chronological Bible instead.
- Choose a book on a topic of interest. If you do not have one, visit a local bookstore. As you read the book, spend at least a half hour in reflection for every hour you spend reading. Use a highlighter or pen to mark sections of the book you find especially helpful. Write down specific page numbers or notes in the front or back of the book that will help you return to portions you find significant. When you are finished reading the book, you might want to write a one page summary listing six to eight key quotations, as well as a paragraph critique describing how the book has had impact on your spiritual formation.
- One of the easiest ways to begin studying people more closely is to go “people watching.” Go to a mall or some place where there are a lot of people participating in a variety of activities. It is even better if you can hear many of them talking. Spend at least an hour just observing and listening. You might choose to go with someone who you can discuss your observations with. How do the things you have observed support what the Bible says about people? What concepts that you are currently learning can be observed?

¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 176.

² Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), 55.