

Bible Study

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[0:00] What do you think of this quote from R.A. Torrey? Ninety-nine Christians in every hundred are merely playing at Bible study.

I, for my part, don't like it very much.

Besides being, it seems a bit uncharitable, but if you get past that, I don't like it very much because I very much doubt that I am that one person in a hundred that is really giving myself to Bible study.

And I don't like it very much because I think he's put his finger on maybe the reason why I am not a giant, but a weakling. And it's not because of my circumstances.

It's not because God is stingy with His grace towards me. It's because I'm lazy. And I don't like to think about that.

[1:30] And I'd rather not think about that. And maybe you think the same way. So you'd rather not think about study. Perhaps that's you.

You'd rather not face these afternoons together because we've been talking about spiritual disciplines or aspects of spirituality because they leave you beat down.

They leave you feeling discouraged about the things that you haven't been doing or the things that you need to do. I hope that hasn't been the case. I've been trying to make it a point to encourage you in these things and not to discourage you.

And I hope today, as we talk about the discipline of study, that this would encourage you as well and not leave you feeling discouraged. I don't want you to walk away thinking, wow, that guy just does not get it.

That I am really busy. And I'm so busy, I don't have time for one more thing. I know many of you are very busy and I don't want to weigh you down with extra baggage that you can't carry.

[2:36] So we're going to talk about later, at the end, we're going to talk about some easy ways to incorporate study into your life. And I hope those are easy ways that don't weigh you down.

But if we would be honest, for others, that's not you. You aren't so busy with all sorts of necessary and good things that you can't do study.

Perhaps you're busy with unnecessary and useless things like TV, like the internet. The average American watches two and a half hours of TV a day.

And for some of you, if you were honest with yourself, you'd have to say, I'm pretty much an average American on that score. I'm not that much different. Well, if that is you, and if it's not you, today is a plea to use your mind.

It's a plea to use your mind. We live in a very anti-intellectual culture. And we would be lying to ourselves if we didn't realize that, to a great degree, we are carried along on the tides of our culture that says thinking is unimportant.

[3:56] The Bible says all over, and in very many ways, that thinking is important. So study then. That's our topic. We have three questions.

What, why, and how? First, what do I mean by study? I mean intentionally learning more truth. Intentionally learning more truth.

And each of those words is important. Study is intentional. All of us are like dust bunnies under the bed. As we roll along through life, we gather up more stuff.

We gather up more learning. We pick up something here or there. That's not what I'm talking about when I talk about study. I'm talking about something intentional. It's done on purpose.

Learning is the second word. So by learning, I mean more than just knowing the facts. I mean being able to connect the facts with the other things that you know.

[4:58] And be able to put that information into use in your life. And when the need really comes up, it's on hand to be used.

So, I mean, just say if you gave me a piece of paper, let's say my transmission need had changed, and you gave me a piece of paper with the directions of how to change my transmission. And I memorized that piece of paper, and I looked up all the words in my automobile dictionary to find out what those, everything meant. And I had that down, and I understood all the steps. Does that mean I have learned how to change my transmission? Well, kind of. But not really at all. I mean because what would happen is, if I took my paper and I'm armed with that information, and I were to go out and to change my transmission, in 20 minutes, the whole car would be a wreck, and it would be a mess, and I would not have changed the transmission. I wouldn't know how to fix it. So not until I can actually change my transmission have I learned how to do it. And so do you see what I'm saying?

[6:07] It's not good enough to be good at Bible trivia. That's not what I'm talking about when I say learning. To be good at Bible trivia does not mean that you've learned what you need to learn.

And the last word is truth. Intentionally learning more truth. Truth is everything that's true in God's world, isn't it? And so that includes a big, wide range of things, and includes everything from birds and flowers and stars and you name it.

And I think there's a place to talk about all those things. But today I'm specifically talking about the truth of God's word and the history and the doctrine of the church.

That is what I'm talking about when I say study. And so study is intentionally learning those things. That's what I'm talking about. So that is the what.

Study is intentionally learning more truth. Now here's the second question. Why study? Why study? And some of you know, I know you're thinking that right now.

[7:21] Intentional learning is hard work. Why should I go to the trouble of that? Isn't that your job? Isn't that what pastors are supposed to do?

Don't you understand? I'm busy. I'm tired. You know, I'm sold on reading the Bible. I believe in that. And I'm sold on praying. I know that's biblical. But study?

Why do that? Why should I go out of the way to use my brain? Well, the Bible has some answers for you.

And this is how the Bible answers. And these are just, I came up with three. And I really think there's probably six, seven, eight more that I could have come up with. But just these three.

The first. The battle that we are in is a battle of ideas. The battle that we are in is a battle of ideas.

[8:23] So, brothers and sisters, we are in a spiritual battle. And we don't, the battle isn't fought in fields or in airplanes. It's fought in the minds of men and women.

It's fought in your mind. It's fought in your children's minds. It is fought in your neighbor's minds. And this battle is going on all the time.

And it's a battle of ideas, of thoughts. So, what is the difference between a capitalist and a Marxist? Well, can you look at and tell from the outside what they look like?

Or what they wear? Not at all. Maybe some of you are saying, I have no idea how to tell the difference. Well, the difference is in how they think.

What ideas have captured their minds? So, what's the difference between a Christian and an unbeliever? It's not how they look. It's not what color of skin they have.

[9:24] It's not how tall they are. It's not what they wear. It's how they think. And so, we are in a battle of ideas.

And your weapons are not guns and knives. Your weapon is a mind filled with divinely empowered truth.

Listen to what Paul writes. For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. I want to stop there for a second. And I want you to notice something that struck me.

Paul is saying, we wage war. This is not a defensive battle that we are in. This is an active war. We are to wage it. We are to make war. We are on the attack.

And so, as we attack this world, what is our weapon? We do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.

[10:27] We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God. And we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

And so, we are on the offense. And we are taking on these strongholds. And what are the strongholds? They're arguments. They're thoughts. They're ideas.

And so, it's a battle of ideas. And the weapon that we are armed with is a mind filled with divinely empowered truth. Divinely empowered ideas.

And so, our weapon is our mind. So, brothers and sisters, let me ask you. Are you using a rusty sword?

Are you sort of like Barney Fife? You know, he had one bullet. And he was able to keep it in his pocket. Is that how you are armed? For the fight that we are in?

[11:34] Well, how long does a soldier last if he has a rusty sword and one bullet in his pocket? Well, he doesn't last very long in battle. He doesn't take thoughts captive.

He is taken captive. And a person like that isn't waging war. He's not there with Paul. He's not there with Jesus Christ.

He's not waging war. And brothers and sisters, God calls us, every single one of us, not just the pastors, not just the academics, but every believer to wage war.

And so, a person with a rusty sword and one bullet in his pocket will watch others wage war. And he will retreat when he is attacked.

But he won't follow his captain into strongholds. He will not demolish them. And so, we are in a battle of ideas. And the battle is fought in the minds of men and women.

[12:34] And so, we must study or lose the battle. So, why study? Secondly, there's no growth in godliness without a transformation of the mind.

There's no growth in godliness, no growth in godliness without a transformation of the mind. So, turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 6.

And you know this passage. It's the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus is talking in this passage that I'm going to read about worry.

So, Matthew chapter 6, verse 25. These are the words of our Lord.

So, you go to Jesus.

[13:59] Jesus. And you say, I struggle with worry. And Jesus answers, okay. Let's think about this together. Your body is more important than the clothes you wear, right?

Yeah. And your life, it's more important than food, right? Right? So, look at the birds. Your father feeds them.

Goes on to say later, look at the flowers of the field, the grass of the field, how your father clothes them. Won't he feed you?

Won't he clothe you? So, Jesus is saying, if you worry, it's because you haven't been thinking right. You haven't studied enough.

You haven't thought through things to the width that you need to, to the depth that you need to. And so, the answer to the sin of worry, the solution, the growth, the way you grow out of worry and grow into godliness is to have your mind transformed.

[15:07] And the way you do that is to study. And you say, but my problem isn't worry. I have a problem getting along with people. I struggle. I'm in these relationships with people.

And I have a difficult time. It's just, the gears are grinding. It's hard. Or, I'm struggling sexually. I have sexual sins.

Well, the Corinthians had those problems. So, turn over to 1 Corinthians chapter 6. 1 Corinthians chapter 6.

What is the answer to sexual sin? What is the answer to disagreement between people? Turn over 1 Corinthians 6.

The Corinthians were fighting in the church. They were sexually immoral. And so, what does Paul say? How does Paul address this problem? Look at verse 2. Do you not know?

[16:09] Now, look at verse 3. Do you not know? Now, go to verse 9. Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?

Look at verse 15. Do you not know? Verse 16. Do you not know?

Verse 19. Do you not know? What was the Corinthians' problem? They weren't thinking right.

They were ungodly. They were acting ungodly. Because they weren't remembering certain things. They weren't understanding certain things. They hadn't studied, grasped, and owned the truth.

They hadn't been transformed by a renewing of their mind. And so, Paul is bringing this truth to them again. And he's saying the problem is that you are not thinking.

[17:13] You're not knowing as you ought. And this is the Bible's consistent message. Romans 12.2. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of

your mind.

The only alternative to worldliness is the renewing of your mind. And that is done through study. And so, if we wanted to abbreviate that, we could say this. The only alternative to worldliness is study. And so, when you study, you dig down deep into the truth.

When you listen to godly men and women, and you think about what they say, something happens. You dig down, and something begins to happen. It doesn't just land on your brain and sit there.

When truth lands on your brain and is empowered by the Holy Spirit, your mind is renewed. And that renewing of your mind transforms you. And it changes the shape of your life.

[18:18] And so, you were like a Plato man, and you were conformed, you were pressed into the image of the world. And so, the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, that was your DNA.

That was your pattern. And you were perfectly conformed to that. And then God saved you. And when God saves a Christian, He takes the Christian, and He takes them off the mold of this world, and He puts them onto a different mold.

He puts them onto Jesus Christ, and He slowly begins shaping, and conforming, and pressuring the Christian. And the primary way He does that is through your mind.

through truth going in and changing you. And so, as you study God's Word, as you study the truth, God conforms you to the image of Christ.

And so, the way you grow in godliness is through study. If you're sitting there, and you're wondering, why am I not growing as a Christian? Why am I struggling with these sins in this way?

[19:36] Well, there's lots of answers, but one answer really could be that you're not studying, you're not thinking through the Bible in a deep enough way in order for that truth to transform you and to renew your mind.

Well, let's think through an example. Perhaps you don't have a very good marriage. On a scale of 1 to 10, it's 4.5 or 5.

Now, assuming you both profess Christ, you're both Christians, why is that? Well, maybe you say, it's our circumstances. Life is hard right now.

There's all this stuff in our life, and it makes it hard to do marriage right. It's our personalities. We don't click. We're different kinds of people, and the gears are always grinding.

It's our children. Well, perhaps it's something, I'm not discounting those things. Maybe there's something in all of those things. But I know that one reason you struggle to do marriage is that you are ignorant.

[20:46] And I don't mean to say that, I don't mean that in a mean way. I looked in the thesaurus, and I couldn't find any other word. I'm saying you lack knowledge.

You don't know how to do marriage. Or if you know how, you don't know why you should be doing it that way. So you know what the Bible says, but you don't know why you should do it that way.

And that is hard to own up to. See, it's easy to blame our circumstances and our children and our personalities and all sorts of other things.

But it's hard to own up to the fact that I need to be transformed by the renewing of my mind. I'm ignorant. And I need to learn more. Well, you need to study marriage.

You need to carefully think about what God says about marriage. How do I do it? Why do I do it? How do I practically love my husband better? How do I practically love my wife better? And so it's easy to say, oh, I know those things.

[21:50] I mean, I know, you know, I know the passages. I know what to do. But it's another thing to take the path of humility and to say, you know what, I need to grow in this area.

I need to learn more. And when you throw yourself into the path of godliness, into the path of change, that happens when you throw yourself in the path of humility and owning up.

You know what? I don't know what I need to know. Well, what would happen if you were, if you're in this troubled marriage, if you were to carefully read through a good book on marriage, I think God will honor your humility with His help.

He will honor your humility with His help. And you will grow as a wife, as a husband. And if you were both to do it together, well, then your marriage would improve.

Because growth in godliness, it comes through study. It comes through thinking things through.

Well, that's the first two reasons. Why study? Thirdly, because fools don't.

[23:02] Why not study? Or why study? Because fools don't. Proverbs 122. How long will you, who are simple, love your simple ways?

How long will you, will mockers delight in mockery? And fools hate knowledge. Fools hate knowledge. They don't care about study. They think learning is a waste of time.

They look at it and say, what's the point? I know enough to get through life. I can handle this. But wise people never can get enough learning. They never have that feeling of, you know what?

I know enough about this. I don't need to learn anymore. Listen, listen to the Proverbs. Proverbs 15, 14. The discerning heart seeks knowledge. Proverbs 10, 14.

The wise store up knowledge. Proverbs 18, 15. The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge and the ears of the wise seek it out. Wise people actively, intentionally seek to learn more truth.

[24:07] See, they're not the dust bunnies under the bed just rolling around picking out more fluff as they go along. They're intentionally pursuing knowledge. They seek it. They store it.

They acquire it. Their ears are open to it. And so, which one are you? Wise or foolish? Well, you don't have to take a hundred question quiz to figure out the answer.

There's just one true or false question on this quiz. True or false? I study to grow in my knowledge of truth.

I study to grow in my knowledge of truth. True or false? And the wise person says true. You know, I don't do it like I should.

I don't do it as much as I like to do it. I wish I had more time for it. I wish stuff wasn't happening in my life so much. I really want to know more. And the fool says, that's a dumb question.

[25:09] That is a dumb question. You don't have to be, you don't have to study to be wise. At least I don't. Well, why study? Because fools don't.

They don't. And we don't want to be fools. We want to be wise. Now, finally and briefly, we've asked what, and we've asked why, and now we're going to say, we're going to ask how.

How do I begin to study? Now, the best way to study is to read a book with a pen in hand. Read a book with a pen in hand.

So, choose a book in an area that interests you, in an area that you need to grow in, and sit down with a pen and paper, and as you read, write what you're thinking.

Write questions. Look for answers. Try to summarize what the author is saying in your own words. And, maybe some people here are saying, oh, brother.

[26:15] Really? Really? You want me to do that? I mean, that sounds painfully slow, and horribly tedious. And, I just never could see myself doing that.

Well, perhaps it is slow, and it is tedious. But, reading two good books like that in a year will do much more for you than reading 12 books in a year.

Because learning does not come with quantity. It comes with quality. And so, you don't need to be a fast reader to be a serious reader.

You don't need to be a fast reader to grow in godliness and wisdom. You need to exercise self-control. And the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

So, I'm not putting you out there on yourself and saying, just work harder. I'm saying, rely on the Holy Spirit. Ask Him for grace. Ask Him for help. And, as you do this, as you pursue it, then you will grow.

[27:22] Well, serious students have always read with a pen or a pencil in hand. Timothy Edwards was Jonathan Edwards' father, and he knew the importance of avoiding undigested reading.

He realized how worthless undigested reading was. And so, he taught his son, Jonathan, from a very young age to read a book with a pen in hand and to write down what he thought.

And that was a habit that Jonathan never went away from. So, for the rest of his life, he was reading and writing. And that had a profound, just that simple habit had a profound influence on his heart and his mind and his life.

That habit, under God's grace, and I'm sure with a lot of other influences, it changed Jonathan. It made him into a godly man. Well, reading with a pen in hand is the ideal way.

But I understand some of you are busy. You're very busy. And that's not going to happen. Well, what do you do? Perhaps the best thing for you to do is to commit 15 minutes before you go to bed at night to read a good book.

[28:29] To read a good book. And if you're a modestly fast reader, if you're just, you know, if you're a modest reader, you should be able to read one 250-page book in a month.

And 12, 200, that's 12, 250-page books in a year. And what kind of good would God do in your life if you were to just make that one little habit of I'm going to read 15 minutes in a good book every night before I go to sleep?

What kind of good would God do in your life if you read 12 good books in a year? Well, why don't you find out? See what happens next year, 2010.

Someone says, that's all good but I don't read well. I'm a slow reader and I have attention problems and I don't even see the point in trying. I've always been a slow reader and nothing I can do to become a good reader.

And I guess I've already sort of answered that, but a slow reader is not necessarily a bad reader. A slow reader could be the best reader of all. And if you have attention problems, and I mean this kindly, have you tried turning off your TV?

[29:52] I mean permanently turning off your TV. Everyone knows it's been scientifically proven that TV destroys your attention span.

But believe it or not, it's not permanent damage. you can actually recover your attention by just pressing one button. It has the word OFF on it.

And if you press that button, your attention span will probably come back. It won't be like it was as a child, but it will come back and you will be able to read to some extent.

And then for others, if you have legitimate reading problems, I'm not being sarcastic about this, if you have legitimate reading problems, then thank God, that we live in such an advanced, technologically advanced age.

Because you could go into our church library right now and there is lots of movies that you could watch that would be a great way for you to study. And there's whole classes in our church library on a single CD.

[31:01] Whole classes that you could study a subject in depth. And you never have to read a book. That's not bad. on the internet. I know of one location where there are literally thousands of classes available on all sorts of Bible study.

And you can download it all for free. It's all out there. You just have to click on the button. And I mean everything. They have classes on church history, books of the Bible, eschatology, marriage, raising children.

And this is just one site. And if you were to go there and download some things and start listening routinely to that, that would be a great way for you to study.

And so the bottom line is this. There's no reason that you can't study. That you can't say, you know what, I want to intentionally learn more about the Bible.

I want to intentionally learn more of what God has done in the past. and what the Bible says about marriage and raising children and philosophy and music and art and you name it.

[32:09] And we want to remember the ultimate reason why we're doing this. This is the aspects of spirituality. This is how we deal with God. This is how we love and have a relationship with God.

And you remember the greatest commandment. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind.

And so we don't study to put feathers in our cap and to make ourselves look good. That's not the point. The point is to love God who loved us and he gave us his son.

And so we ought to love him in return. John Milton who penned Paradise Lost wrote these words, The end of learning is to know God. And out of that knowledge to love him and to imitate him.

That's what this is about. It's about loving God, knowing God, imitating God. And that is something that we all need to do better. And that is why I'm pleading with you, not just to pass this over, but to think, how can I incorporate more study, intentional learning into my life?

[33:22] So will you become an intentional learner? learner? Where will you start? There's lots of ways you could start. When will you start?

When will you start? Let's pray. our heavenly father, we thank you that you have given us a book that we can read and understand.

Thank you that we have it in our own language. And you have been so good to us. You have planted us in the part of the vineyard that you have watered and you have taken such good care of. you have given us so many resources to study and to grow and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Will you help us to make good use of these things?

To make good use of all the opportunities that we have. To not be lazy, but to strive to be that one in a hundred Christian who is not playing at Bible study and who is striving to become a giant in faith and love and works.

[34 : 39] Father, will you please help us? Will you put Christ before our eyes in such a way that we long to know him better and we long to serve him better and we need to know how to do those things.

So will you please give us the grace, open our eyes, open our hearts, drive away laziness, give us self-control, that we would do these things for his glory.

Because he has loved us, he has known us, he has taken care of us, will you help us to love him in return as we use our minds for his glory.

Lord, too often in the past the churches discounted the mind. And we ask in our culture is discounting thinking.

And we ask that you would make and do something different here for your name's sake. And in Jesus' name we pray, amen.