

How to Make Bible Study a Priority in 2014

During my first year of college, a woman from my church in suburban Atlanta introduced me to the experience of being baptized in the Holy Spirit. Her name was June Leverette.

I sat down with June in her family room and she shared some Scriptures with me from Luke, Acts and 1 Corinthians. Her insights into God's Word led me into a powerful encounter with God that radically changed my life.

I will never forget when June opened her Bible on that August afternoon. The pages were worn and there were colored tabs sticking out from the edges. Many verses were highlighted with blue, yellow and pink, and June had written her own notes on the top, left and right margins of many pages. I had never seen a Bible that had been studied so much!

June's example shaped my core spiritual values. I wanted the power of the Holy Spirit, and she showed me how to find that anointing. But she also showed me that Spirit-filled Christians should be serious students of the Bible and that our charismatic experience must always be rooted in the solid foundation of Scripture.

Today, many Christians are far too casual about the Bible. Many only read it when their pastor flashes a verse on a screen in church. Personal study is becoming a lost art. We no longer dig for the deeper truths of Scripture. The result is a pitifully shallow Christianity. And in many cases, biblical illiteracy leads to deception.

Bible study is not a popular pastime in our high-tech, media-driven, overstimulated culture. But if you want to go deeper in your relationship with God when so many people are backsliding, you must set aside the time to soak in His Word.

Don't take shortcuts in the journey of discipleship. Here are some practical tips for Bible study that I've learned over the years:

1. Use a study Bible. You wouldn't understand a Shakespearean play if you simply read the original manuscript from 1595. The English language has changed a lot since then. The only way to understand a Shakespearean play is to read an annotated version that explains difficult words and passages. In the same way, study Bibles provide helpful footnotes.

2. Choose a readable translation. Modern translations, such as the New International Version or the New American Standard Bible (my personal favorite), are easier to read. Don't believe people who say the archaic King James Version—published in 1611—is the “holiest” Bible. Keep other translations handy, including the Amplified Version, to compare verses. You can use an online Bible like YouVersion to read different translations at once.

3. Use study helps. I use several online references to help me in my study. *Strong's Concordance* allows you to look up any word in the Old Testament Hebrew or the New Testament Greek. You can find out the original meaning of the word to enhance the meaning. I also love to refer to *Matthew Henry's Commentary of the Bible*, which is available online.

4. Expect to gain revelation. Before you read the Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to shine His light on your mind and reveal truth to you. Ask the Lord to give you insights into His Word. Proverbs 2 says, “Make your ear attentive to wisdom, incline your heart to understanding ... if you seek her as silver and search for her as hidden treasures; then you will discern the fear of the Lord and discover the knowledge of God” (v. 2, 4-5, NASB). It is important to come to the Word with a seeking heart!

5. Develop a plan for your study. Some people open the Bible

haphazardly and start reading. That is a lazy approach. Develop a method and a plan. I personally like to tackle one book of the Bible at a time and squeeze as much out of it as possible. If you choose to read the book of Acts, for example, study one chapter a day for 28 days. Soak up every chapter and look up words you don't understand. Read commentaries and study notes for each chapter. After you have soaked up the meaning, you can move on to a new book of the Bible.

6. Keep Jesus at the center of your study. It is great to read the entire Bible and to learn as much as possible from the Old and New Testaments. But I like to keep the Gospels at the core of my Bible study because the entire Bible revolves around Jesus. Be sure to spend lots of time reading Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. I consider these books the heart of the Bible. Everything else points to them.

7. Become a gold miner. Studying the Bible is like mining for precious metals or jewels. Expect to find treasure! One way I do this is to look at a passage from different angles. When you read the book of Acts, for example, you can look for references to the Holy Spirit's supernatural power and find much revelation. But then when you read it a second time, look for references to crossing racial and ethnic boundaries. A third time you can read it from the angle of prayer. Every book of the Bible is like a multifaceted diamond, and light will sparkle from every angle.

8. Write down your insights. Keep a notebook or your iPad nearby so you can record what God is showing you. I personally like to write in my Bible to record revelations I receive. Writing these down will help you remember them.

9. Learn to meditate on Scripture. God told Joshua that he would be successful if he would meditate on His law day and night (Josh. 1:8). But how do you meditate? One way is to memorize a verse and repeat it in your heart during the day—while you work out, while driving, etc. The Hebrew word

for *meditate* refers to a cow chewing its cud. You should learn to “chew” a verse of the Bible over and over and make it personal.

Do you want stability, peace, wisdom and spiritual growth in 2014? You must soak your life in God’s Word. British preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote, “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” There is no possible way we can see a revival of faith in our backslidden nation without a dramatic return to the Bible in the church. Please make this a priority in this new year.

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