



**Desert Tree Ministry**

**Bible Training Center**

# **The Word of God**

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## Introduction

This short course on the Word of God is not intended to be a complete course. The purpose is simply to show the importance of the Word of God and to encourage you the student to faithfully read and study it.

### **Desert Shrub or Fruitful Tree?**

As we look around us, we can see a variety of trees. Some keep their green leaves all year long. Others lose their leaves, or even die when the heat becomes intense. What is the difference between the flourishing tree and the brown shrub nearby? Perhaps they are both growing in the same desert climate on the same piece of land. Yet, during the hottest part of the year, one remains green and bears fruit while the other shrivels up and loses its leaves.

The key to a flourishing tree is its roots. The mango tree, for example, reaches its roots down to the water table. The shrub has only shallow roots that dry up in the heat.

Some people are like the brown shrub in the desert. Their spiritual life is dry and lifeless. They do not bear fruit. They are not interested in spiritual things. Others, however, are like flourishing trees. No matter what comes their way, their faith in God remains firm. They enjoy studying God's Word. They are joyful in their spiritual life.

We want to learn how to be like a fruitful tree. When our spiritual life is flourishing, people notice and wonder how we are flourishing in the desert environment of life. They come near to investigate and discover that we are connected with Jesus, the Word of Life.

Let us look at several Bible examples of flourishing trees and see what lessons we can learn for our own lives.

#### **Flourishing tree #1 (Daniel 4)**

Nebuchadnezzar was flourishing (v.4) in his palace. Some of us dream about finding riches and wealth. But riches are dangerous.

They give a false and temporary sense of achievement and satisfaction. It is hard for a rich man to enter heaven. God loved Nebuchadnezzar and sent him a warning in a dream.

Nebuchadnezzar dreamed about a flourishing tree with lovely leaves and abundant fruit (v.10-16). It gave shelter to animals and people. But then the tree was cut down to a stump, to be left in the dew for seven years.

The flourishing tree represented Nebuchadnezzar. (v.22) His kingdom was indeed flourishing. His city was large. He was wealthy. He seemed to have everything he could want.

But God gave him a warning (v.27) to break off his sins and to show mercy to the poor. As he did this, he could remain like a flourishing tree. It seemed like Nebuchadnezzar accepted the warning for a time. But the Bible says that after one year, he no longer followed the advice he had received. In the selfish spirit of Lucifer (Isaiah 14:13), he glorified and exalted himself and his works rather than forsake his sins (v.30). “Look at this city that I have built,” he said. “Look how great I am.”

For seven years, the king wandered around in the fields like an ox eating grass and being wet with dew from heaven. After being humbled for seven years, his dry heart finally had allowed the Water of Life to soak in again (v.33-37). His last recorded words are praise and honor to God.

What brought about the change in Nebuchadnezzar’s life? How did he become like a flourishing tree again?

- The dew of heaven represented Jesus, the Living [Water]. When he allowed Jesus to work, Jesus changed his heart.
- Nebuchadnezzar no longer put his confidence in himself, but recognized God as the source of all blessing.

### **Flourishing tree #2 (Psalm 1)**

The first psalm talks about a flourishing tree and gives us further insight on how we can become like a flourishing tree. It talks about two groups of people: the righteous and the ungodly.

Verse 3 says “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” Where is this tree planted? By [water]. Because this tree is planted by water, it produces fruit, it’s leaves stay fresh, and it prospers. This verse starts with “He shall be...” Who shall be? To find the answer, we must look at verse two.

Who is like a flourishing tree? The one who delights in the law of the Lord. The one who meditates on that law day and night.

Look at verse 1 for more answers. Who is like a flourishing tree? The one who doesn’t walk in the counsel of the ungodly. The one who does not stand in the path of sinners. The one who does not sit in the seat of the scornful.

The one who does all this is a blessed man, and he is like a fruitful tree planted by streams of water.

As we continue reading verse 4, we read, “The ungodly are not so...” The ungodly are not like what? The preceding verses can answer this for us. The ungodly are not like a flourishing tree planted by water. They do not meditate day and night on God’s law. They do not find delight in God’s law. They sit in the seat of the scornful. They stand in the path of sinners. They walk in the counsel of the ungodly. They are not blessed.

Continuing in verse 4 we read that they “are like the chaff which the wind drives away.” The ungodly are like what? Like the chaff. When the wind blows, the chaff and dead leaves travel with the wind. When the wind blows from the east, the chaff is blown from the east toward the west. When the wind blows from the north, the chaff is blown from the north toward the south. There is no stability with the ungodly. When times of difficulty come, they have no sure place to attach themselves. They first accept this doctrine and then when they feel different, they accept that doctrine, not basing their beliefs on the solid Word of God. They are “tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting.” Ephesians 4:14

“A man is not established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous cannot be moved.” Proverbs 12:3 The righteous are unmovable. Their roots are deep. Their commitment to follow truth is solid because they get receive their strength from God and His Word. They delight in God’s Word.

What kind of tree are you? Do you find delight in God’s law? Or when you try to read it, does it seem dry and uninteresting? Do you meditate on spiritual things day and night, or are you continually meditating on your work or family problems or neighbor problems or on selfish thoughts?

A flourishing tree is one that is planted by [water]. A person who is like a flourishing tree is one who:

- drinks from Jesus the Water of Life continually.
- He finds his delight in studying God’s law.
- He meditates on God’s Law continually.

One who accepts Jesus' offer of the [New Covenant] will have God's law written on his mind and heart, and thus will ever be conscious of God's law. “I delight to do Your will, O my God, And Your law is within my heart.” Psalm 40:8

### **Flourishing tree #3 (Jeremiah 17:5-10)**

In this passage we again find the contrast between a desert shrub and a flourishing tree. The desert shrub does not see good when it comes and is in a waste land. The flourishing tree has many roots by water. When the heat comes, it remains green and flourishing, bearing much fruit.

A person who is like a desert shrub:

- Is cursed
- Trusts in man
- Makes flesh his strength
- His heart departs from the Lord

This person has an [Old Covenant] way of thinking.

A person who is like a flourishing tree:

- Is blessed
- Trusts in the Lord
- His hope is the Lord

This person has a [New Covenant] way of thinking. God's law is in his heart. When difficulties come, he is stable and flourishing.

### **Job 8:11-13**

A plant needs a water source to survive. A plant that withers is like a person who forgets God. This implies that a person who does not forget God is like a flourishing plant. With His law in my heart, I will not forget Him.

The hope of the withering plant person dies. The hope of the flourishing plant person is in God (Jeremiah 17:7).

### **A sure water source**

John 4:10, 14 Jesus gives living water that leads to everlasting life.

Revelation 22:1 The river of water of life flows from God's throne.

Revelation 22:17 Whoever responds to the Spirit's invitation has free access to the water of life.

### **Personal Application**

Both water and God's law affect my entire life. When I drink physical water, it's life-giving properties permeate into every cell in my body. So it is with living water. If I choose to block off some area of my life from receiving this water, it will die and become life-threatening to the remaining part. Also, when God's law is in my heart and mind, it will be the source and motivation for all of my actions. A flourishing tree is a 100% transformed tree.

I want to be like a flourishing tree.

- My heart is naturally hard, but I want to allow the Holy Spirit to fall as dew on me and to change my heart.
- In my life, I want to recognize God as the source of all blessing.
- I want to put my roots down and drinks from Jesus the Water of Life continually.

- I want to find joy and delight in studying God’s law.
- I want to learn how to meditate on God’s Law continually.
- I want to put my trust completely in the Lord.

As God helps me to implement these things in a practical way in my life, I become more like a flourishing tree and abundantly bear the fruit of the Spirit in my life. And I prepare for life in heaven where we find another flourishing tree.

### **Flourishing tree #4 (Revelation 22:1-2)**

When I get to heaven, I want to taste the wonderful fruit of this tree of life. I want to drink from the clear river of life until I am full. Now is the time for me to prepare for heaven. Now is the time for me to become a flourishing tree.

In this last example of a flourishing tree in the Bible, we find a beautiful illustration of the ideal life of a committed Christian. The life-giving tree continually takes in the fresh living water so that it may give and be a blessing to others. It gives healing in its leaves and abundant fruit.

What kind of tree are you today? What kind of tree do you want to become? Today is the time to spread out your roots a little deeper. Ask God to make you flourish. Spend time with Jesus, the Living Water. Study God’s Word. Meditate on it. Put your trust in God and forget about trusting yourself. You will begin to flourish and to bear fruit.

## **Scripture vs Philosophy**

### **Love of Wisdom**

What makes the Bible different from other books? Why have we chosen the Bible as our textbook in this course instead of other books? Throughout this course, we will come again and again to the Bible as our base. Some people may try to bring in other ideas and questions from their study of philosophy. But our goal is to study God’s Word and to discover the truth that is there.

What is philosophy? If we look at the root words, we can divide this word into two: philo and sophy. Philo means love. Sophy means wisdom. Perhaps the most simple and broad definition of philosophy is “the love of wisdom.” But what do most people mean when they use the word “philosophy”? Webster’s dictionary helps us. It is a general term to describe the explanation of the reasons of things, or an investigation of the causes of all phenomena both of mind and of matter.

God created us with curiosity. He created us with intelligence and intends for us to exercise our brains in thinking about and studying the world around us. God wants us to love wisdom and to search for it. And there are many different branches of philosophy to study including theology (things of God), natural philosophy (things of nature), moral philosophy (things of logic or ethics), and metaphysics (things intellectual or mental).

To love wisdom is good. But is it possible that there is more than one kind of wisdom? Is there some philosophy that is good and some that is harmful? Let us look at some of the claims of worldly philosophy and the fruit or results of it. Then we will contrast that with godly philosophy.

### **Pagan philosophy**

Pagan literature (Homer, Plato, Cesar, etc) is often studied in philosophy class or literature class. Those who study it suppose that they are enlarging and developing their mind and becoming smarter. Imagine that you study this literature and you develop an immense capacity for thinking. How has your capacity improved and with what have you enlarged your ability to think and reason? What are you now prepared to think and reason about? If your enlarged capacity is empty of anything of real or eternal value, it is worse than empty.

Take a look at the fruit of some of this literature on the culture of its day. This is the same literature that caused the ruin of the empires of Greece and Rome. It is fascinating to see what happened to these

empires once the population widely accepted and practiced the teachings of these philosophers. These people were affected by what they read and thought about and the entire empire became overwhelmed with immorality and then ended.

How can a Christian today study this literature and benefit from it? {November 7, 1899 ATJ, ARSH 715.5} If I observe somebody eating a meal and they soon thereafter become sick and die, will I go and help myself to a meal from the same pot? Even if I do not see obvious error, even if the smell and flavor of the food is good, the results of eating the poisoned food are obvious. Why then do we Christians study that which is poisoned, and that which leads to destruction?

Philosophers like to think deeply. They sit and think and try to come up with solutions to various dilemmas or problems. They look to themselves and their own thoughts and their own intelligence for solutions. The problem is that we humans want to follow our own inclinations. We think that we are pretty smart and have a lot of great ideas and we try to follow those ideas in our lives. But unless the Bible and the Holy Spirit is our guide, our ideas lead to confusion and disappointment. Only the wisdom and power of God can work on our hearts and change us in an upward direction.

Philosophy today is used a little bit here and a little bit there to introduce doubts and questions about God's Word. It leads people to distrust Scriptures. Little by little doubt grows.

Some problems with philosophy

- God is not acknowledged {MH 439.2}
- The impression is given that if these educated men are correct, God's Word cannot be {MH 439.2}
- Skepticism is attractive to the human mind {MH 439.2}
- People cannot harmonize false science with truth in Scripture {1SM 42.3}
- Scriptural difficulties cannot be solved using the same methods (like relying on self) used with philosophical problems. {GC 599.1}

- Pride keeps the philosopher from accepting truth which would destroy his personal beliefs. {AA 273.1}

Some stories showing the weakness of philosophy without God.

- Philosophers in Noah’s time were destroyed by the flood they declared to be scientifically impossible. {PP 103.3}
- Pharaoh’s wise men could not give the meaning of his dreams. (Genesis 41:8)
- Wise men in Nebuchadnezzar’s day could not give the meaning of the dream. (Daniel 2:10-11)
- Philosophers in Paul’s day – some scoffed, but some became Christians. (Acts 17:15-34)

James 3:13-18 shows us the difference between earthly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.

### **Biblical philosophy**

Our goal in Bible study is not to develop your powers that are in you. The power in you is self, and self is definitely not something we wish to develop. That is not true education, because self-sufficiency cuts us off from the source of truth. True education is putting the good into the person. True education is to “restore the image of God in the soul.” We will be introducing truth in this course.

Colossians 2:8-10 Be on guard not be deceived by philosophy. We are complete in Jesus. Philosophy is not needed.

1 Timothy 6:20 Some people think they have knowledge but are led away from the truth.

2 Timothy 4:3-4 People will turn from truth to fables.

2 Timothy 2:15-16 Be diligent; rightly divide the truth. Shun these other things which tend toward ungodliness.

We will learn that the Bible is the source of all truth. In the Bible we find a simple and complete system of theology and philosophy. In the Bible we find the knowledge that is essential for all students—the knowledge of Jesus Christ. As we study the Bible, we will learn about the philosophy of our Lord. It is plainly explained and we are

to follow it in our lives. The more we study the Bible, the more our mind and manners will improve. {CT 422.1} {FE 129.1}

As we study the Bible, we actually become smarter and more intelligent. This applies to all people, especially to the simple minds. Psalm 119:130 Nothing else in this world can develop the mental capacity and intelligence like the Bible.

Here's how the Bible increases capacity. The Bible is understood by faith. Faith grows as it is exercised on our part. [like muscles that grow stronger with use] As our faith grows, the righteousness of God is revealed proportionately. So as our faith grows by exercise, we can take in more of the righteousness of God which is growing to match our faith. An ever-growing cycle of development is established.

Colossians 1:9-10 Pray to be filled with a knowledge of God and His will. Ask for wisdom and spiritual understanding. This is what pleases God.

Colossians 2:3 All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Jesus (not in worldly philosophy).

We have the Bible, the book of all books, which develops the mind more and better than any other thing. And we have that which fills all the capacity as fast as it is developed.

The Bible is the one book that has led the most people to know Jesus. No other book has brought as many people to Him. How long do we have to study other books to become a Christian? Will everything in these other books help me to become Christ-like? These other books are not the way.

Scriptures are inspired by God, Who is the Source of knowledge and wisdom.

John 8:31 Whose disciple are you? You are Christ's disciple if you continue in His word.

The Scriptures are our base. If you ask a question, accept answers only from Scripture. We will not allow long discussions based on philosophical arguments. Discussions must be settled with Scripture

truth, not with your idea or my idea.

Some people might ask, “Isn’t it important to study worldly philosophy so that we can know how to debate with others and counter their arguments?”

- By studying truth, we will be able to recognize the counterfeit. I have never before seen a counterfeit 10000cfa bill until 2014, but I knew it right away when I saw it. I recognized it because I was familiar with the true 10000cfa bill.
- I do not need to sleep with a prostitute to be able to explain why it is wrong.
- I do not need to eat poison to prove that it can kill me.

## **A bit about the Bible**

### **Facts**

In your Bible there are 66 books. They came from three different continents. It is a collection of books written over a time of about 1600 years. 43 Different people wrote these books. Some authors were herdsmen, government officials, fishermen, preachers, kings, etc.

### **Purpose**

The Bible is useful for many things. Here is a partial list of texts that talk about the purpose of the Bible.

John 5:39 shows us Jesus’ character

Psalms 19:7 makes the simple wise

Psalms 119:9 cleanses us

Psalms 119:11 reminds us not to sin

Psalms 119:105 guides us

2 Peter 1:4 God’s promises enable us to be free from sin

Matthew 4:4 gives us something to live by

John 5:24 leads us to everlasting life

Romans 15:4 to teach us and give us hope

2 Timothy 3:15 brings us salvation

2 Timothy 3:16 to teach us doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness

## **Unity**

The Bible speaks of many different topics, but there are no contradictions. Some people study the Bible with the purpose of finding statements that appear to contradict. Those who do not know their Bibles well can easily fall for the deception that the Bible is full of contradictions. But those who faithfully study God's Word will find that the Bible truly agrees with itself.

Think for a moment about what it means if you believe that the Bible contradicts itself. This is a dangerous road. Scripture is inspired of God. It is the Word of God. If we conclude that Scripture contradicts itself, we must also conclude that God contradicts Himself. And if He contradicts Himself, how can He be trusted? Thus, the argument that the Bible contradicts itself is a dangerous argument that undermines God's faithfulness and destroys our faith in Him. Later in this course we will study how to deal with texts that appear to conflict.

## **Originated in God**

2 Timothy 3:16 How much of Scripture is inspired of God? All of it.

2 Peter 1:20 How is Scripture to be interpreted? Not on our own.

2 Peter 1:21 How then can we understand it? We recognize that Scripture is from God, not from man. It came through man by the wisdom of God.

## **Amazing Claims**

If I make an ordinary claim (I ate rice this morning and I have 2 brothers), you don't need much evidence to accept my claim. But if I make an extraordinary claim (I know the President of Chad and I have 20 brothers from the same mother), then you will need more evidence.

In the Bible, we find some amazing claims. And the evidence to support those claims is clear. For example, in Isaiah 46:9-10 we read, “I am God. There is no other.” The evidence is given, “I know the end from the beginning.” Nobody else can make that claim. Yet God does. And He gives us evidence to help us us to believe His claim.

God knows the end from the beginning. This is evident in the many prophecies recorded in Scripture. Jesus told His disciples the future so that when events happened as He foretold, they would believe in Him. Prophecy establishes belief.

For example, Daniel made some amazing claims in his prophetic interpretation of the king’s dream in Daniel 2. Amazingly, nearly all of the prophecy has been fulfilled accurately. The remaining portion is Jesus’ second coming. Because we have ample evidence that the first part is true, we are encouraged to believe that the last part is true. Jesus really is coming again soon. It is a sure event. We do not know the exact time, but we know by studying the prophecies that the time is near.

### **Culture Appropriate**

The Bible speaks to all cultures. This is unusual! Most books are popular to a certain culture during a certain time. For example, you may write a book on how to build a house. The details you provide are accurate for your culture and for your time. You describe how to make the bricks out of mud and how to construct a grass roof. Now, I take this book to America and try to sell it to the people there. There are no mud bricks there, and there is no grass long enough to make a roof. Everybody there keeps their grass cut very short with a machine. While your book is a good book, it is limited in its usefulness to your culture and your time.

The Bible is different. While understanding Bible culture certainly helps us to understand the Bible, the messages it contains are applicable to all cultures. The Bible does not become outdated. It contains principles we may use to guide our everyday lives and the decisions we make. The Bible is not limited by time or culture.

## **Personal Testimony**

Share my personal experience with the Bible and how it speaks to me and encourages me.

### **How to Find Truth**

Melody was studying the Bible with a friend of ours. They enjoyed studying together and studied many things. For several weeks, they studied the truth in Scripture. Melody would ask, “Is it clear?” Her friend would reply, “Yes, it is clear. I understand it well.” Finally, Melody asked, “If it is clear, what are you going to do about it in your life?” The lady responded that if she changed her old beliefs, her father would not be happy. True, her father is now dead, but she knew that if he was living, he would not be happy with her if she changed. Her father taught her this way and she would remain this way. Her father was a sincere Christian. How could he have been wrong?

This lady made a sad decision. She chose family for her source of truth. Some people choose their pastor for their source of truth. Others choose their church or their culture or a book they like.

Why are so many people confused about what is truth? Why are there so many differing beliefs in this world? Because people fail to recognize that there is only one unique source for truth. They claim to be Christians (Christ-followers), but choose to follow a church or a pastor or a family member rather than Christ.

In this world of so many beliefs, it is important that we understand how to find truth. So many people claim to know what is truth. How do we verify that something really is the truth? In this study, we will look at four points that will help us know how to find truth. These are not the only four points, but these are some of the most foundational.

### **One Source of Truth**

God is not only the Source of truth, but He is the complete Source of

truth. We find this truth in the Scriptures. Scripture is our final authority, not anybody or anything else.

John 17:17 God's Word is truth.

Psalms 119:160 The entirety of God's Word is truthful.

2 Timothy 3:15-16; 2 Peter 1:21 All Scripture is inspired and is useful to us.

Note: All Scripture is inspired. But things like chapter and verse divisions and punctuation were added later. They were not in the original languages. Even though you might find modern notes and explanations in the back of your Bible, these are not Scripture and need to be compared with Scripture for accuracy.

Here is an example that may help us to understand that God is the Source of truth. One day you eat at my house and want the recipe for the sauce. Will you ask me for the recipe or will you ask my wife who made the sauce? If you ask me I can give you an idea, but my idea will not be able to replicate the exact flavor of the sauce. If you ask my wife, she can tell you because she is the one who made the sauce and knows how to reproduce its flavor.

### **Pray for Wisdom**

Ask God for wisdom and understanding. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach and guide you as you study.

James 1:5-6 If we lack wisdom, God will give it liberally when we ask for it in faith.

John 14:26 The Holy Spirit teaches us and brings things to our memories.

Luke 11:13 God is very willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

Psalms 119:18 Pray for open eyes to see wonderful things from the law of God.

Ephesians 1:17 Pray that God will give wisdom and revelation to know Him.

Proverbs 2:3-6 Ask and search and you will find a knowledge of God.

### **Compare Scripture with Scripture**

Find as many texts as you can on the topic. Base doctrines on a foundation of multiple texts, not one only.

Isaiah 28:9-10 Build your study with one verse complimenting another verse until you have a clear view of your topic. Study here a little, there a little, building text on text.

1 Corinthians 2:13 Compare spiritual things with spiritual things.

### **Commit to Obedience**

Commit beforehand to obedience (have faith) to any truth you discover. God's Word is life-changing. Be willing to have your life changed!

James 1:22; Luke 11:28 Be doers, not just hearers.

James 4:17 If we know something is truth but do not follow it, we sin.

Hebrews 4:7 Listen, and do not harden your heart.

John 7:17 If you want to do God's will, if your heart is willing, you will know what teaching is from God.

Psalms 119:9 We will heed God's Word if we want to cleanse our ways.

### **EGW**

God desires man to exercise his reasoning powers; and the study of the Bible will strengthen and elevate the mind as no other study can. Yet we are to beware of deifying reason, which is subject to the weakness and infirmity of humanity. If we would not have the Scriptures clouded to our understanding, so that the plainest truths shall not be comprehended, we must have the simplicity and faith of a little child, ready to learn, and beseeching the aid of the Holy Spirit. A sense of the power and wisdom of God, and of our inability to comprehend His greatness, should inspire us with humility, and we should open His word, as we would enter His presence, with holy awe. When we come to the Bible, reason must acknowledge an

authority superior to itself, and heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM. {SC 109.3}

God intends that even in this life the truths of His word shall be ever unfolding to His people. There is only one way in which this knowledge can be obtained. We can attain to an understanding of God's word only through the illumination of that Spirit by which the word was given. {SC 109.2}

The Bible is its own expositor. One passage will prove to be a key that will unlock other passages, and in this way light will be shed upon the hidden meaning of the word. By comparing different texts treating on the same subject, viewing their bearing on every side, the true meaning of the Scriptures will be made evident. {CE 85.1}

## **How can I understand Scripture?**

### **Believe that You Can Understand Scripture**

I often hear people say, “The Word of God is very complicated. We can only understand it if somebody teaches us.” Or, “The Bible is very philosophical; I can’t understand it.” Is that really true, or is this a deception of the devil?

Satan wants us to look to man in the place of God. He wants us to look to the pastor or professors of theology or priests as our guides instead of searching Scripture to learn our duty ourselves. He has successfully used this deception throughout history. He likes it, because as he controls one leader, he can easily control the multitudes through the influence of that leader.

In contrast, Jesus spoke to the common people and was understood by children, the illiterate, the poor and uneducated as well as by the rich and highly educated.

But the church leaders did not accept Jesus. They rejected clear evidence of truth. Those who revered the authority of the church leaders were deceived and rejected Jesus as well. They said to themselves, “We are many. Our church is popular. We will follow our leaders rather than a small handful of poor fishermen.” But in so

doing, they rejected truth.

The Catholic church has been using this technique for hundreds of years. They said that the Bible was not for the common people, and that only the priests and church leaders had the right to interpret Scripture. They kept copies of the Bible chained inside the church. And even those copies were in Latin, which none but the more educated people understood. The common people in the lower classes were taught that they were not educated or competent enough to explain God's word.

But thank God that His Word was like a lamp that brought great light to the world. The Reformation gave the Bible to the common people. People could read the Bible in their own language and could study it for themselves.

But even now in our day, when the Scriptures are available to the multitudes, people accept this same teaching. The people in protestant churches are taught to accept the teachings of the Bible only as interpreted by their church. They will not accept even the plainest teachings in the Bible if those teachings differ from the tradition their church teaches.

And although the Bible is full of warnings against false teachers and false doctrines, people still do not search the Scriptures. Thousands of people base their beliefs on what their church says, not on what the Bible says. Many people can only say that they were instructed so by their religious leader. They cannot give Bible support for what they believe.

### **Search and Verify Scripture for Yourself**

Acts 17:10-11 We should search the Scriptures for ourselves, like the Bereans did.

It is not enough to have good intentions. It is not enough to be sincere.

A sincere man is walking on the road and he comes to a multi-way split. He disregards the signs, sincerely believing he knows which

road is right. But in the end, he is on the wrong road and ends up at the wrong destination. [illustration: The destination village is straight ahead, but you can't see the deep swamp between you and the village. The sign says bear right on the other trail, but you ignore the sign and take the trail straight ahead. You end up in the swamp.]

Some say it does not matter what you believe if only you live a good life. It is not enough to live a "good life." This is a false argument because the life is molded by the faith.

It is not enough to do what you think is right. The way that seems right to man leads to death. Proverbs 16:25

It is not enough to follow your convictions or to be confident. Many are convicted of falsehood and confident in error.

Truths are plainly revealed in Scripture to anybody who searches for them. It is our duty to search. If you want to know truth, it is there and you can know it. John 7:17 The Jews claimed that truth was secret and difficult to understand and that only the educated people could understand it. But Jesus said that they were in error for not knowing the Scriptures. Mark 12:24 They claimed to be guardians of the truth and very knowledgeable, but they were in error.

### **Ask For a Teacher to Help You**

Do you want a personal teacher? The very One who inspired Scripture is ready to help you! We must recognize that we cannot understand Scripture on our own. We must have Divine help.

John 14:26 God sends the Holy Spirit to teach us and to help us remember what we have studied.

Psalms 25:4,5,8,9,12 With humility, ask God to teach you. Wait for Him, and He will.

Psalms 32:8; 73:24 God will guide you

1 Corinthians 2:9-11 The Holy Spirit can explain to us things we cannot see or even imagine.

1 John 2:20 Being anointed by the Holy Spirit gives us access to

knowledge.

1 John 2:27 The Holy Spirit can teach us directly. We don't have a need for other teachers.

Clarification: I am not saying we do not need our pastors. They are placed in a position of authority by God over us to guide us. We should listen to our leaders. But we should never accept a teaching solely because a pastor or leader said so. Our beliefs should always be rooted in Scripture, and we should rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

### **Apply All Known Truth**

In order for us to continue understanding truth, we must accept and apply truth in our lives as we learn it. If we repeatedly reject truth, God does not continue giving us more. Sometimes we do not see truth clearly because we have closed our eyes and want to be ignorant.

Scripture talks about those who have a form of godliness but deny its power. These people are "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." 2 Timothy 3:7 If you want to grow in a knowledge of truth, apply what you know. Follow truth that you have.

John 12:35 Jesus said, "A little while longer the light is with you. Walk while you have the light, lest darkness overtake you."

Psalm 25:10 "All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, To such as keep His covenant and His testimonies."

### **EGW**

"Many a portion of Scripture which learned men pronounce a mystery, or pass over as unimportant, is full of comfort and instruction to him who has been taught in the school of Christ. One reason why many theologians have no clearer understanding of God's word is, they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish to practice. As understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of

purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness.” {GC 599.2}

“God desires man to exercise his reasoning powers; and the study of the Bible will strengthen and elevate the mind as no other study can do. It is the best mental as well as spiritual exercise for the human mind. Yet we are to beware of deifying reason, which is subject to the weakness and infirmity of humanity. If we would not have the Scriptures clouded to our understanding, so that the plainest truths shall not be comprehended, we must have the simplicity and faith of a little child, ready to learn, and beseeching the aid of the Holy Spirit. A sense of the power and wisdom of God, and of our inability to comprehend His greatness, should inspire us with humility, and we should open His word, as we would enter His presence, with holy awe. When we come to the Bible, reason must acknowledge an authority superior to itself, and heart and intellect must bow to the great I AM.” {5T 703.3}

“We shall advance in true spiritual knowledge only as we realize our own littleness and our entire dependence upon God; but all who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit, to study its utterances as the word of God, will receive divine enlightenment. There are many things apparently difficult or obscure which God will make plain and simple to those who thus seek an understanding of them.” {5T 704.1}

“It is sometimes the case that men of intellectual ability, improved by education and culture, fail to comprehend certain passages of Scripture, while others who are uneducated, whose understanding seems weak and whose minds are undisciplined, will grasp the meaning, finding strength and comfort in that which the former declare to be mysterious or pass by as unimportant. Why is this? It has been explained to me that the latter class do not rely upon their own understanding. They go to the Source of light, the One who has inspired the Scriptures, and with humility of heart ask God for wisdom, and they receive it. There are mines of truth yet to be discovered by the earnest seeker. Christ represented the truth as treasure hid in a field. It does not lie right upon the surface; we must

dig for it. But our success in finding it does not depend so much on our intellectual ability as on our humility of heart and the faith which will lay hold upon divine aid." {5T 704.2}

The Bible was not written for the scholar alone; on the contrary, it was designed for the common people. The great truths necessary for salvation are made as clear as noonday; and none will mistake and lose their way except those who follow their own judgment instead of the plainly revealed will of God. {SC 89.2}

Read The Great Controversy chapter 37.

## **Consistency in the Word**

A study of the sanctuary in the book of Exodus will help us to understand the importance of spending regular time with God. Just as there were three pieces of furniture together in the daily portion of the tabernacle (the Holy Place), so we should incorporate the meanings of these three things together in our lives daily. The table of bread represents Jesus, the Bread of life. He is also the Word, and we have the word of God in our Bibles. The oil in the lampstand represents the Holy Spirit. The altar of incense represents our prayers to God.

These three things are together and need to happen daily and continually. We should never study God's Word without prayer or without inviting the Holy Spirit to help us understand what we read.

### **Daily, Read Your Bible (Table of Bread)**

The bread on the table represents Jesus, the Bread of Life, the Word of God. As the bread was daily on the table, we should daily spend time with Jesus, eating the Word of God.

John 6:35; 1:1; 5:24 Jesus is the Bread of life, the Word.

Matthew 4:4; Luke 4:4 Man lives not by bread only, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

Joshua 1:8 Meditate continually on God's word. It will "not depart from your mouth."

Psalm 1:2 Meditate night and day

### **Daily, Rely on Holy Spirit (Lamp stand)**

The oil in the lamp stand represents the Holy Spirit. We are to be the light of the world, but the light cannot shine without the oil. Ask for the Holy Spirit and allow Him to work through you so that you can be a brilliant light and a witness to those around you.

John 16:13-14 The Holy Spirit guides us into all truth.

1 Corinthians 2:13 The Holy Spirit teaches us to compare spiritual things with spiritual things.

Ephesians 4:30; Hebrews 3:7-8 Do not grieve the Holy Spirit. Today, listen to Him and do not harden your hearts.

### **Daily, Pray (Altar of Incense)**

We should never study the Bible without prayer. When we pray before studying and during our study, we recognize that God is the source of wisdom and understanding and we ask Him to teach us wonderful things from His Word.

Psalm 141:2 Our prayers are like incense.

Psalm 25:4-5; 86:11 Ask God to lead you in truth.

Matthew 7:7; John 16:24 Ask and you will receive, if you ask in Jesus' name.

1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.

### **EGW**

Let those who want the bread of life go to the Scriptures, not to the teaching of finite, erring man. Give the people the bread of life that Christ came from heaven to bring to us. Do not mix with your teaching human suppositions and conjectures. Would that all knew how much they need to eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of God--to make His words a part of their very lives.-- Manuscript 44, 1904. {1SM 160.3}

Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its

pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given. ...Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance. {SC 91.1}

## **General Bible Study Principles**

No matter how you study the Bible, whether you are alone or with a friend, with a concordance or without a concordance, here is a simple outline to follow when you study your Bible.

### **Commit to scheduling regular time reading the Bible.**

If you do not have a plan or a schedule, often Bible study becomes an irregular occurrence. Make a plan and follow it. For example, I will study the Bible for 20 minutes every morning starting at 05:30.

### **Always start with prayer.**

In your prayer, acknowledge your need of wisdom. Ask God to guide you to truth. Ask Him to reveal to you something practical you can apply to your life today.

“Never should the Bible be studied without prayer. Before opening its pages we should ask for the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and it will be given... Angels from the world of light will be with those who in humility of heart seek for divine guidance.” {SC 91.1}

### **Read for quality, not distance**

Ask your self, “How much can I learn?” and not, “How much can I read?” Read, re-read, meditate... read, re-read, meditate... Use effort to dig deep and discover hidden treasure that a quick reading will not uncover.

“But there is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through, and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning. One passage studied until its significance is clear to the mind, and its relation to the plan of salvation is evident, is of more value than the perusal of many chapters with no definite purpose in view and no positive

instruction gained. Keep your Bible with you. As you have opportunity, read it; fix the texts in your memory. Even while you are walking the streets, you may read a passage, and meditate upon it, thus fixing it in the mind.” {CE 58.2}

### **Apply to your life**

You may be convinced of truth in your head, but that is not enough. You may see the beauty and depth of truth and find it fascinating. But it is not enough to believe. The Bible says that Satan’s angels believe and tremble, but they do not allow truth to change their lives. When we study truth, we must allow God to change our hearts and characters. Instead of saying, “That is nice,” we need to ask God to teach us how to make a personal, practical application of that truth in our lives. Try asking some of these questions:

- How does this passage show that my character is unlike Jesus’ character?
- Is there a habit in my life that I need to develop by God’s power?
- Is there a habit in my life that I need to destroy by God’s power?
- Do I desire to make this change? If not, ask God to give me the desire to follow truth.
- Do I trust God so little that I am not willing to allow Him to change me in this point?

“Then there is yet another work to be accomplished, and this is of a progressive nature. The soul is to be sanctified through the truth. And this also is accomplished through faith. For it is only by the grace of Christ, which we receive through faith, that the character can be transformed.” {3SM 191.3}

“To us have been entrusted the truths of the gospel for this time. It is a wonderful, wonderful treasure, and the Lord desires us to have our eyes enlightened and our hearts quickened. He desires us to be nerved and strengthened by the power that He will give us if we will only be true to Him. He desires every one of us to perfect a character after the divine similitude. The Christian who does not do this casts

a reflection on God. He dishonors his Saviour. Those who have access to the words written in Scripture are without excuse if they do not apply these words to themselves, if they do not thus cleanse their hearts from sin. By the lights shining from the throne of God upon our pathway, we shall be judged at the last great day. . . .” {UL 159.3}

## **How to Study the Bible without a concordance**

Most people here in Africa cannot own a concordance. Concordances are rare, and those that exist are very expensive. While a concordance is a very useful tool for Bible study, it is not necessary. There are lots of ways you can study your Bible without a concordance.

One idea is to try to find a Bible with cross references or with a center reference column. Some Bibles also contain a small concordance in the back. These are helpful, but even if you cannot find one of these Bibles, you can learn how to read and study using some of the ideas here with only a simple Bible.

### **Take Notes**

Perhaps this is obvious, but you can benefit greatly from studies other people have done already. Attend Bible studies whenever possible. Attend Sabbath School and the church service. Bring a notebook and a pen with you and record all the verses from the study or sermon in your notebook. Any time you encounter a verse of interest, make note of it. Later, you can study the topic at home.

### **Chronological**

This is useful to get a big picture view of a book or a section of the Bible. For instance, to get a big picture view of the life and character of Jesus, read the book of John. Or read the entire Bible through. Or read the New Testament from beginning to end. Watch for recurring themes or ideas.

One disadvantage of using this technique is that sometimes you get bogged down in more difficult books such as Leviticus.

## **Read easy books**

If you are new to the Bible, try starting with some of the books that are easier to read. The gospels have a lot of stories and parables that are fascinating. Samuel has a lot of good stories, too. The book of Psalms contains a lot of prayers and hymns. Africans like proverbs, and the book of Proverbs is full of them! The book of James talks straight and is fairly simple to understand.

## **Bible reading plans**

With no plan, any project does not progress very well. Having an organized plan will help you to set goals and achieve them and will encourage you to make Bible study a regular habit.

- How many days are there in this month? Try reading the book of Proverbs in one month. If today is the third, read Proverbs chapter 3. If it is the 20th, read chapter 20.
- How many chapters are there in the Gospels? 89. You can read all four Gospels in a month if you read 3 chapters per day. If that is too much, try reading one chapter a day. You will read all four Gospels in three months.
- Be creative and make your own plan. But remember, quality is better than quantity. If you only get one verse read, but in that verse you discover a gem, you have done well. Do not feel like you must absolutely read a big passage if you have already gained a blessing from a small passage. Use the tool of a reading plan to help you, but don't let it hinder you.

## **Study stories**

Children like stories, and so do adults. Here are a few books of the Bible that contain a lot of stories.

- Genesis, Exodus, Kings, Nehemiah, Esther, Ruth, Jonah, gospels, Acts

## **Bible promises**

As you study, as you listen to sermons, as you attend Bible studies, you will come across wonderful promises. Record these in a promise

book. Buy a notebook and record each Bible promise you encounter. In a later study, we will learn how to claim these promises in a practical way.

### **Levels of Bible study**

- **Book.** Read a book through and get the big picture. What are the themes in this book? What are the ideas that were repeated?
- **Chapter.** Spend the time to read the entire chapter. What is the main point of this chapter? What is the message?
- **Verse.** Read a single verse. If the verse is not clear or complete, try reading the verses before or after. To help you meditate and really understand the verse, try asking the following questions. It is not necessary to ask all six for each verse, but choose the questions that apply.
  - How? When? Where? Who? Why? What? In asking these questions, it is important that you find your responses directly in the verse, not from your head or your thoughts.
  - For an example, read Psalm 1:3: “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.”
    - Who shall be like a tree? The answer is not in verse 3. Look back to verse 2. The person who meditates day and night on God’s law is like a tree... The person who delights in God’s law is like a tree... You can continue looking back to verse 1 for more answers.
    - He is like what? A tree.
    - Where is this tree planted? By the rivers of water.
    - Why do the leaves not wither? Because the tree is near a source of water.
    - When does the tree bear fruit? In its season.
    - How much of what he does prospers? Whatever he does.
- **Word.** Do you understand the meaning of this word? If not, look it up in the dictionary. Can you think of another place in the

Bible that uses this word?

- What are the key words in this verse? Notice the nouns. Notice the verbs. Use these things you discover to try to understand the verse and how it applies to you.
- For an example, read Matthew 28:18-19: “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,’”
  - What are some key words? them, Jesus, authority, heaven, earth...
  - What are the significant nouns in this passage? Jesus, disciples
    - Who is speaking? Jesus is speaking.
    - Who is Jesus speaking to? Them. Who are “them”? The eleven disciples (verse 16).
  - What are the significant verbs in this passage? Go, make, baptize
    - What did Jesus command them to do? To go, make disciples, baptize, etc
  - How will I apply these findings to my life?
    - Jesus gave the command with authority. I do not need other authorization to spread the gospel.
    - This command involves action, and I must be active in going, making disciples, preparing people for baptism, etc.

We have discussed a variety of methods for how to study the Bible without other books or resources. There are other techniques, but these should give you a practical way to start studying the Bible. Remember not to focus on the technique, but focus on what the Holy Spirit is teaching you from Scripture.

# How to Study the Bible with a concordance

## What is a concordance?

A concordance is a big index of all the major words in the Bible. It is arranged alphabetically like a dictionary. The first word on each spread is on the upper left of the left page. The last word on each spread is on the upper right of the right page. ...

## What you need to know to use a concordance

- The alphabet (The words are arranged alphabetically.)
- The spelling (You need to know how to spell the word you are looking for.)
- How to choose a good key word

## Tips

- Choose a topic to study. It might be a doctrine or a question you were discussing with your friends the other day. You might study a certain person or a certain object or a certain verb.
- This French concordance is divided up into two sections. The first section is for common words (like tree, food, river). The second section is for proper nouns (like Jesus, Jerusalem).
- Here are a few ideas on how to choose which word to look up.
  - Identify the keywords in the verse. These are often bigger words, but can be very small words. Often the key words are nouns or verbs. What word or words are the most important in this verse?
  - When you choose one word, remember to search the different forms and tenses of the word. For example, when studying “baptism,” look up the word “baptize.” Also (came, come, will come).
  - Remember to search both the singular and plural form (animal, animals).
  - Use your imagination and try to think of synonyms, words that have a similar meaning (Sabbath/Saturday/seventh day/rest/first day) or similar words (water/rain/well).
  - You can often learn interesting things about something by studying

its opposite. When studying “life,” it might be useful to study “death” since death is the end of life. When you study the word “hot,” you might discover some interesting lessons by studying the word “cold” at the same time.

- Search for Bible definitions. Dictionaries can be helpful in understanding the meaning of words, but they can be misleading. The Bible is the best source for word definitions. For example, while the Bible says that the seventh day is the Sabbath, a modern French dictionary will say that the sixth day is the Sabbath. The Bible is our ultimate authority when we discover differences like these.

### **Exercises**

Divide the students into groups of 5 or 6, or as concordances allow. Give one concordance to each group. Each exercise is designed to teach a certain point, noted in [brackets]. As you give each exercise, help the groups who are struggling by giving tips or suggestions.

- [How to use the word count] What is the reference to the text, “Thy Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.”?
  - Don’t give the reference (Psalm 119:105), and tell each group to not say the reference until everybody has found it. Instruct the students to choose a keyword from the verse, but don’t tell them which keyword to choose.
  - Students who choose keyword “parole” have a big task; the word appears 808 times in the Bible. “Pied” is in the Bible 386 times. “Lampe” is the best keyword, appearing 68 times. Searching for any one of the three will eventually help you find the reference. But “lampe” is the best choice because the list of references to scan in the concordance is much smaller than the other two choices of “pied” or “parole.”
- [Importance of synonyms; difference between common and proper names] Look up the word “samadei.”
  - This word is not in the concordance.
  - But try words like “sabbath,” “repo,” “septeime,” etc. The word “Sabbath” will be in the proper name section. The

words “repo” and “septeime” will be in the common name section.

- [Sometimes if you are stuck, choose a different key word] What verse in the Bible mentions all three of these people together: Dathan, Abiram, Koré?
  - Don't give the reference (Numbers 16:27). The way the verses are cut to fit in one line in the concordance, you may not see all three names listed. There may not be space for that. It may be helpful to look up two or three of the names in the concordance before beginning your search in the Bible.
- [Finding keys to unlock mysteries] The Bible contains keys for unlocking itself. A verse uses \_\_\_\_\_. What does that represent? What does it mean? When the answer is not clear in the verse, look for other verses that help solve the difficulty.
  - Read Revelation 12:17. The dragon was enraged with the woman. Who or what is this dragon?
    - Look up the word “dragon.” Both Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 tell us that this dragon is Satan.
  - You hear the story of the sower and the seed. What does the sower represent? What does the seed represent?
    - Look up the word “semence.” Luke 8:11 tells us “The seed is the word of God.”
    - Look up the word “sème.” Matthew 13:37 tells us “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man.”
- [Building a simple Bible study] Our next lesson is on meditation. How was this lesson prepared? We will do a simple exercise now with the concordance to show one technique how to make a Bible study.
  - Look up one of the words: “médite” or “méditer” or “méditerai” or “pensées”]
  - Instruct each group to pick a verse that uses one of these words. Each group should pick a different verse. (Which book talks the most about meditating? Psalms. Perhaps you

- could begin your study in Psalms.)
- Once a verse is chosen, that group answers some questions about that verse and puts their answers on the blackboard or on a sheet of paper. For the word “méditer.” ask the questions:
    - “Meditate when?”
    - “Meditate on what?”
    - “Why meditate?”

<b>Meditation Verses</b>				
Verse	When?	What?	Why?	Where?
Gen 24:63	evening			in the field
Jos 1:8	day and night	the law	to observe the law and to prosper	
Ps 1:2	day and night	the law of God	he finds pleasure	
Ps 63:6-7	night	God	God is my help	in bed
Ps 119:23	others speak evil of me	God's statutes		
Gen 50:20		evil against Joseph		
Ps 119:48		God's statutes	I love God's commandments	
Ps 119:97	all the day	God's law	I love God's law	
Ps 119:27		God's wonderful works		
Prov 3:29		not on evil against your neighbor	so you can live peacefully near each other	

Some observations after this exercise:

- Notice that not every verse answers every question. The questions are only tools to help us understand what the text is saying.
- Look for repeated ideas and group those verses together. For instance, many verses talk about meditation on God's law, His

ordinances, His statutes, His commandments—these are all similar verses. Study those together.

- Some verses will not fit the pattern, but it is important not to ignore these. Perhaps the verse is really insignificant relative to your study. Or perhaps you will discover another aspect to this topic that you didn't think about before.

## **Meditation**

### **How to meditate on good things**

“The mind needs to be educated. Meditating on good things will not come naturally or easily. Education takes time. But this education is worth any effort you can put into it.” {2T 267.2}

“If your habit is to think about earthly things, it will be difficult for you to change your thoughts. You have developed habits of thinking about anything your eye sees or your ear hears. We need to learn how to change those habits to think about the words and character of Jesus and even talk about those things each day.” {SL 91.3}

“Learning to meditate on good things replaces the desire to meditate on earthly and sinful things. Your craving for wisdom and knowledge will be satisfied with the truths from God's Word.” {HP 161}

Recognize that we normally meditate, but usually on bad things. Learn to replace those with good things.

- Stop complaining and recognize God's numerous blessings. Talk about those with other people. {SD 116}
- Stop criticizing and thinking about the faults and defects of other people. Think of their good qualities.
- Do not worry about tomorrow. Worry is a symptom of faithlessness. Choose to have faith in God and praise Him for what He will do.
- Being too busy with worldly goals separates your affections from God. Choose to take time to meditate and read and pray and make that time a first priority. {4T 54.2}

## **What to meditate on**

David meditated on the things that God had done. Psalm 77:12

We want our meditation to be acceptable to God. Psalm 19:14

The precepts and ways of God. Psalm 119:15, 78

The law of God. Psalm 119:23, 48

The wonderful things that God has done, His majesty, and His creation (nature lessons). Psalm 119:27; 143:5, 145:5

The testimonies of God. Psalm 119:99

God's word Psalm 119:148

The name of the Lord. Malachi 3:16

Whatever is true, pure, ... Philippians 4:8

Lessons of Jesus, His life and character

things to come, end time events

## **When to meditate**

- You can choose a time to do nothing but meditate.
  - Choose a time and a place with few distractions. Get away from the edge of the road or away from the children at home. Be alone with God.
  - Ask God to help you meditate on Him throughout the busy day. Pray for the help of Holy Spirit.
  - Meditate at night when you cannot sleep. Psalm 119:148; 63:6; 77:6
  - Lamentations 3:23 God's mercies are new every morning.
  - Genesis 24:63 Isaac went out to the field to meditate in the evening.
- You can meditate throughout the day as you are busy with other things.
  - At the market, as you walk to your field, as you cultivate your field, remember a memory verse
  - Sing a scripture song

- You can meditate on God’s law all the day. Psalm 119:97
- The Scriptures did not depart from Joshua’s mouth. Joshua 1:8 He was like a ruminating goat.
- The righteous man meditates day and night on God’s law. Psalm 1:2
- “Take scripture with you wherever you go. If your Bible is too big, copy a passage onto a piece of paper. Pull it out at the market or in the field or whenever you have a bit of time to wait.” {CT 463.1}

## **Why meditate**

A righteous man meditates, and he flourishes. Psalm 1:2

God takes note and listens when we meditate. Psalm 5:1

“We grow spiritually in proportion to how much time we spend meditating. If we meditate little, we grow little. If we meditate much, we grow much.” {TMK 193.2}

By beholding, we become changed. If we are meditating on Jesus and heavenly things, we will not become discouraged and will always be changing to be more like Him. 2 Corinthians 3:18

John 6:63 Jesus' words are life.

Hebrews 4:12 Meditating on God's Word has the power to change our thoughts and our intentions.

2 Corinthians 10:5 God is able to bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

## **How to Claim a Bible Promise**

I prayed for \_\_\_\_\_ but it didn’t happen. Perhaps I asked for wisdom, but I am not wise. Did the promise of God fail? Or is there another problem? The condition is to ask with faith and I exercise faith by obeying... Am I obedient to God?

## How to personally apply Scripture to my life

“We are to be living interpreters of Scripture.” {LHU 105.5}

“If we are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we will know how to practically apply Scripture to our lives. Out of our heart will flow words and actions showing that the Holy Spirit is our teacher.” {RC 130.6}

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you lessons in Scripture and how to apply those to your life.

### Suggestions

- Psalm 119:105
  - Ask the questions who? why? when? where? how? what? to yourself.
    - Who? God’s word is a lamp to my feet. To whose feet? My feet. Is it a lamp to my feet or do my feet go where they want regardless of instruction in God’s word?
    - What? God’s word. Not other people or other books. God’s word is the source of light.
- Psalm 119:9
  - Which verbs and nouns apply to you?
    - Is my way pure? Do I want to cleanse my way? This verse tells me how I can cleanse my way. Do I take heed or obey God? Do I live my life according to His word?
- 2 Peter 2:9
  - What does this verse tell me about God?
    - He knows about temptations. He is strong and able to deliver me.
  - What does this passage tell me about myself?
    - It is not wrong to be tempted. Godly people are tempted. But when I am tempted, I need to turn to the Lord Who can deliver me out of the temptation.
- Bible stories

- Try to imagine yourself as one of the people in the story. Think about what you would do in the same situation.
- Is this a good example that I am to follow?
- What character qualities are good/bad?
- How can I make the same good decision? or How can I avoid making the same mistake?
- Longer passages, prophecies, etc
  - Try to understand the big picture, or the overview. Example: Daniel 2. All the short kingdoms have come and gone. The next part of the vision is the rock. Scripture is accurate. Jesus is coming soon. Are you ready? Is there anything in your life preventing you from being ready?
  - It is important to learn to apply these lessons as well. For now, practice applying simple lessons and verses. As you grow spiritually, you will find greater ability to understand how to apply more complex and longer passages.

### **Unclear Texts**

The Bible is for everybody. That means even a simple child can understand what is necessary for salvation. Yet, we need to recognize that the Bible does contain things difficult to understand. If we understood everything, we would be God. But we are not God and do not know everything.

2 Peter 3:15-16 Paul wrote some things difficult to understand; some people twist the meaning of these things to their own destruction.

Hebrews 5:12-14 Some passages are easier to understand than others. But when we put forth effort to learn, our capacity for learning increases.

“In the natural world, we are surrounded by mysteries. It is no surprise that we find mysteries in the spiritual world.” {SC 106.2}

“We should think and use our minds as far as we can. But there is a limit. Some things can never be reasoned out with a finite brain. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned.” {6BC 1079.7-8}

### **Ask the Author for help.**

Isaiah 55:9 God's ways and thoughts are way higher than ours.

1 Corinthians 2:10-14 Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. We cannot understand these things without wisdom from God.

John 14:26 The Holy Spirit teaches us and brings things to our memories.

Luke 11:13 God is very willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him.

James 1:5-6 If we lack wisdom, God will give it liberally when we ask for it in faith.

### **Some things are not revealed.**

We must trust that God will reveal to us what we need to know.

Deuteronomy 29:29 We can understand those things revealed to us. There are secret things that belong only to God.

We should not spend much time on questions such as, "Why did God put Satan on the earth?" or "How can God be eternal?"

Why does God give us things that we cannot "décortiquer"? God wants us to think less of ourselves and more of Him. Our minds are weak and narrow. These difficult things are only strong evidence of the divine inspiration of Scripture.

### **EGW Comments**

"The word of God, like the character of its divine Author, presents mysteries that can never be fully comprehended by finite beings. The entrance of sin into the world, the incarnation of Christ, regeneration, the resurrection, and many other subjects presented in the Bible, are mysteries too deep for the human mind to explain, or even fully to comprehend. But we have no reason to doubt God's word because we cannot understand the mysteries of His providence. In the natural world we are constantly surrounded with mysteries that we cannot fathom. The very humblest forms of life present a problem that the wisest of philosophers is powerless to

explain. Everywhere are wonders beyond our ken. Should we then be surprised to find that in the spiritual world also there are mysteries that we cannot fathom? The difficulty lies solely in the weakness and narrowness of the human mind. God has given us in the Scriptures sufficient evidence of their divine character, and we are not to doubt His word because we cannot understand all the mysteries of His providence.” {SC 106.2}

“The apostle Peter says that there are in Scripture “things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest . . . unto their own destruction.” 2 Peter 3:16. The difficulties of Scripture have been urged by skeptics as an argument against the Bible; but so far from this, they constitute a strong evidence of its divine inspiration. If it contained no account of God but that which we could easily comprehend; if His greatness and majesty could be grasped by finite minds, then the Bible would not bear the unmistakable credentials of divine authority. The very grandeur and mystery of the themes presented should inspire faith in it as the word of God.” {SC 107.1}

“Satan is busily working with all who will give him encouragement. Those who have the light, but refuse to walk in it, will become confused, until darkness pervades their souls, and shapes their whole course of action. But the spirit of wisdom and goodness of God as revealed in His Word, will become brighter and brighter as they follow on in the path of true obedience. All the righteous demands of God will be met through sanctification of the Holy Spirit....” {1SM 166.1}

## **“Conflicting” Texts**

Sometimes we come across two or more texts that appear to contradict each other. What should we do when somebody presents us with two “conflicting” texts? Before we look at some specific ideas, let us look at some helpful principles in Scripture.

First, we must understand that any apparent conflict within Scriptures is only a misunderstanding on our part, not an error of

Scripture. Read these passages in your Bible and then think about their meaning together.

- 2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God.
- Psalm 119:160 All of God's Word is true.
- John 17:17 God's Word is truth.
- John 1:1 Jesus is the Word, and the Word is God

All of Scripture is inspired by God and it is all true. In fact, it not only contains truth, it is truth by nature. Jesus is the Word of God. If these statements are true, and we know that they are, there can by definition be no conflict in Scripture. To say two verses in the Bible conflict with each other is to say that the Bible is not truth, or that Jesus made a mistake, or that Jesus is not true.

Clearly, there cannot be conflicting texts in the Bible. Any apparent conflict, then, is based on our misunderstanding, not on an error or mistake of God.

Now, we will look at two ideas for resolving conflicting texts: reading the context and studying similar passages.

### **Read the Context**

The following example is very simple, but it illustrates clearly how verses out of context can appear to conflict.

- Read Leviticus 26:4. In summary it says, "I will give you rain and the land will produce much fruit."
- Now, read Leviticus 26:20. In summary it says, "No matter how hard you work, your land will not produce fruit."

In both texts the same God is speaking but the messages appear to conflict. The first promise is opposite to the second promise. But the Bible never contradicts itself. In this case, we only need to look at the context to clear up the issue. We find that each promise is preceded by a condition.

Leviticus 26:3 basically says, "If you obey, then I will send rain."

Leviticus 26:18-19 basically says, "If you disobey, then I will stop the rain."

The context clears up the text. Often, people on one side of a discussion will say one thing and prove their point with a Bible text. The people on the other side say an opposite thing and prove their point with a Bible text. It then appears that the Bible is false or that a dilemma exists. But reading the context shows that the Bible is clear and that it does not contradict itself.

### **Read similar passages**

Reading the context is very important and helpful, but searching for similar texts in other locations is another important method for resolving texts that seem to conflict. Take for example

- Some texts seem to say that the law was done away with.
  - Colossians 2:14 The law was nailed to the cross.
  - Romans 6:14 You are not under the law, but under grace.
- Other texts seem to say, in apparent conflict, that Jesus did not come to do away with the law.
  - Romans 6:1,15 We are not free to sin when we are under grace.
  - Matthew 5:17 Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill and magnify it.

At first glance, it seems like both sides have a provable point. Some say the law was done away with. Others say the law is eternal and unchangeable. A deeper study of the context of these passages and similar passages in other locations will reveal that the Bible is not confusing, but clear on this topic.

You might be confused if you read one verse, Romans 6:14. It says that we are not under law but under grace. It would be easy to conclude that the law is no longer binding if we stopped here. But read the following verse, and you will discover the balancing thought that “we certainly should not break the law.”

Once you have looked at the context, search for and read passages that address the same topic in other books of the Bible.

Picture a row of bricks in a straight line. The masons are building a wall. Now imagine that you see one or two bricks out of line. What

will you say to the mason: “You need to try to move all of these bricks to match the two over here.” or, “You need to fit those two bricks in with the rest of the straight wall.”? The obvious answer is to move the one or two bricks that are out of line to be in line with the rest of the wall.

As you study Bible texts on a particular topic, you will find that the majority of texts support one point. The few that may seem to conflict with that point only appear to conflict because you do not understand them fully, not because God made a mistake or forgot to inspire that verse. All of God’s Word is truth, and truth, by definition, cannot contradict itself. Persevere. Study. Search. Ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and to show you the solution.

The following texts are practical examples of some texts that appear to conflict at first, but after further study are in harmony.

### **Example #1: Peter’s dream**

Peter’s dream in Acts 10 is a commonly misunderstood text that illustrates the importance of context and similar texts.

### **Example #2: “Forever”**

The word “forever” sometimes confuses Bible students who do not understand that the Bible uses this word differently in different places. Sometimes a word in the Bible has more than one meaning.

- Forever can mean “eternally”
  - Isaiah 40:8 The Word of God endures forever
  - Revelation 4:9 God lives forever and ever
    - 1 Timothy 6:16; Psalm 90:2, 93:2

How do we know that in these cases the word “forever” means “eternally?” Because other verses in the Bible are very clear that God is eternal, lives forever, has no end or beginning, etc.

- Forever can mean “as long as he lives” or simply, “a long time”
  - 1 Samuel 1:22 Samuel was to dwell in the temple forever.
    - 1 Samuel 25:1 says that Samuel died and was buried.
  - 1 Samuel 28:2 David was made a guardian forever.

- Acts 2:29 says that David died and was buried.
- Jonah 2:6 Jonah was in the belly of the fish forever.
  - Jonah 1:17 says Jonah was there three days and nights.
  - Jonah 2:10 says the fish vomited Jonah onto dry ground.
- Revelation 14:11; 20:10 The wicked will be tormented day and night forever.
  - Malachi 4:3 says the righteous will walk on the ashes of the wicked.
  - Jude 1:7 says Sodom suffered eternal fire. 2 Peter 2:6 says Sodom burned to ashes as an example for the ungodly.
  - Psalm 37:9-10 says the wicked will be cut off, and will be no more.
  - Revelation 22:3 says there will be no more curse.

The Bible uses the word “forever” differently in different places. So how do we know which meaning to use when reading a verse? The key is usually to study other verses that talk about the same thing. If the majority of texts on that topic clearly teach one thing, they can help you to interpret the few texts that may not be clear.

### **Example #3: Peace or War?**

“How, then, can the gospel be called a message of peace? When Isaiah foretold the birth of the Messiah, he ascribed to him the title, “Prince of peace.” When angels announced to the shepherds that Christ was born, they sung above the plains of Bethlehem, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” [Luke 2:14.] There is a seeming contradiction between these prophetic declarations and the words of Christ, “I came not to send peace, but a sword.” [Matthew 10:34.] But rightly understood, the two are in perfect harmony. The gospel is a message of peace. Christianity is a system, which, received and obeyed, would spread peace, harmony, and happiness throughout the earth. The religion of Christ will unite in close brotherhood all who accept its teachings. It was the mission of Jesus to reconcile men to God, and thus to one another. But the world at large are under the control of Satan,

Christ's bitterest foe. The gospel presents to them principles of life which are wholly at variance with their habits and desires, and they rise in rebellion against it. They hate the purity which reveals and condemns their sins, and they persecute and destroy those who would urge upon them its just and holy claims. It is in this sense—because the exalted truths it brings, occasion hatred and strife—that the gospel is called a sword.” {GC88 46.2}

### **EGW Comments**

“So infidels frequently study the Scriptures more diligently than some who profess to be guided by them. Some of the ungodly search the Scriptures that they may become familiar with Bible truth, and furnish themselves with arguments to make it appear that the Bible contradicts itself. And many professed Christians are so ignorant of the word of God, through neglect of its study, that they are blinded by the deceptive reasoning of those who pervert sacred truth, that they may turn souls away from the counsel of God in his word.” {2Red 21.3}

“All truth, whether in nature or in revelation, is consistent with itself in all its manifestations.” {CE 193.3}

## **When We Disagree**

People love to debate. In my experience, people like to debate more than they like to study the Scripture. When we debate, we are sharing around our thoughts and ideas. When we study together and disagree, we should be using Scripture and sharing God’s ideas.

### **Sometimes we are mistaken**

Sometimes we do not know Scripture or God's power as we should. We like to argue and discuss, but we do not really know Scripture.

Matthew 22:29 Not knowing Scripture leads to mistakes.

### **No arguing allowed**

Job 6:24-25 Right words are forceful, but arguing proves nothing.

Develop an attitude of teachability.

2 Corinthians 10:5 Our weapons are mighty; we cast down arguments and bring every thought into captivity to obedience to Christ.

1 Timothy 6:3-5, 11 Stay with wholesome words, God's words; disputes and arguments lead to strife and evil suspicions. If somebody wants to argue, withdraw yourself from the argument. Flee from those things.

2 Timothy 2:14-19 Do not argue and discuss things not profitable. Remain on the solid foundation of God's Word.

### **When we disagree, who is right?**

Nothing but God's Word is the final authority.

Isaiah 8:20 If they do not speak in agreement with Scripture, there is no light in them.

Ephesians 4:11-15 God has given us what we need so that it is not necessary to be deceived or tricked.

Revelation 22:18-19 Do not add to or take away from what Scripture says.

Proverbs 14:12 Sometimes something seems right to a man, but the end is death.

2 Peter 3:16 Twisting Scriptures leads to destruction.

2 Peter 1:19-2:2 We are not to invent private interpretations. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers. Let God's Word interpret itself.

### **If science says one thing and Scripture says another?**

1 Timothy 6:20 If science conflicts with Scripture, avoid it.

## **Spiritual Malnutrition**

### **Widespread Problem**

In some parts of the world, malnutrition is a large problem that causes hundreds of babies and even adults to die. Sometimes a baby dies from malnutrition only. Other times a malnourished baby may

die from another disease such as malaria because malnutrition decreases the capability of a baby to fight against disease. Commonly, the mother is fairly healthy, while the baby is nearly starving to death. Proper nutrition is often available, but the people are not educated on how to find or use it.

While physical malnutrition exists and is fairly widespread in some areas, spiritual malnutrition is a much more common problem. Spiritual malnutrition is far more widespread than physical malnutrition.

In Jesus' time, the church people claimed that they were God's special people and that they were authorities on Scripture. But in reality, although they had access to the Scriptures, they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God. Jesus commented to these people, "Are you not therefore mistaken, because you do not know the Scriptures nor the power of God?" Mark 12:24

Today, many people are in the same situation. They claim to be Christians. They claim to follow Christ, but do not show by their actions that their claim is true. God's Word is available, but collects dust on their shelf.

### **Too Much, Too Fast**

Some babies are critically malnourished. They need nutrition right away or will die. To save that baby, one must act urgently and rapidly, at the same time carefully, intelligently, and tenderly. A malnourished baby is not able to eat more than simple milk for a while. If we try to feed it too much too fast, we can overload the system and actually kill the baby with good food.

1 Corinthians 3:2 You are fed with milk and not with solid food because you are not able to receive it yet.

### **Mind Development**

The lack of proper nutrition leads to a lack of proper mental development among children and permanently affects their capability to think. Milk of the Word is important for proper

development of the mind. Properly used, it will lead to development of the mind and solid food.

1 Peter 2:2 as a newborn, desire milk of the Word

Hebrews 5:12-14 Newborn Christian needs milk of the Word. A milk-only diet is for babes. Those who are more experienced grow out of the need for milk. By reason of use, their senses are exercised and they can begin to discern good and evil.

Even though the people are possibly somewhat mentally limited to some degree, I believe their mental capacity can be increased somewhat by a study of Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:15 Scriptures are able to make you wise to salvation

Psalms 119:130 God's Word gives understanding to the simple

### **Bad from Good**

In some cases, one contributing factor to the malnutrition problem is that people take the good food and use it to make bad substances. People take good rice and other good grains and make beer and wine.

2 Peter 3:16 unlearned people twist Scripture to their own destruction

### **Solution to Malnutrition**

Just as we need physical food regularly to keep us physically nourished, so we need spiritual food to keep us spiritually nourished.

John 6:35 Jesus is the bread of life that truly satisfies hunger.

Matthew 6:11 give us this day our daily bread

Acts 17:11 search the Scriptures daily



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