

Practical "Tools" for Bible Study

A) Pray for wisdom and understanding. Before you ever open your Bible, pray. "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col. 1:9). Do not neglect this. It is absolutely necessary for understanding.

B) Read it. That is right. Read it. Now read it again. What do the individual words mean? If you do not know, look them up in a dictionary. What do they mean together? How do the sentences tie together? Are there parallel thoughts in the context or elsewhere? Note carefully, what I call signal words, like "therefore, for, and, by, that, in, be, from, to," etc., to help you understand. Read it!!

C) Keep the text in its context. That may be the verse before or after or both, or a paragraph of verses, or a chapter, or a book. And, study the same topic in other parts of the Bible.

D) Start with what is easy to understand. Start with something you already think you understand. Search to see if your understanding is correct. For example, find, learn, remember where those texts are that teach a person how to become a Christian. Leave harder, more complex topics for future study.

E) Make notes - in your Bible and/or a notebook. No one can remember everything. Use your Bible's margin for recording other texts or ideas you have found that are helpful to understand the text you are studying. The next time you read that text those notes will be there

F) Always observe who is talking in the text you are reading. Sometimes the Devil is quoted, or sinners speak, or uninspired people. Note their words, but obey only God's words or the words of His inspired people.

G) Always remember in which Bible time you are studying. Is it during patriarchal times, before Moses? Is it during Israel's time, before Christ? Remember we are Christians, followers of Christ, and what He authorizes, in His words or through His inspired writers, is what is acceptable for us to believe and do.

H) Apply It. All you have done to this point is useless unless you are willing to apply it to your life. Does what you read change and remove from your life unacceptable attitudes and conduct? Does what you read lead to improving and strengthening good attitudes, to increasing your doing of right things? This is the final, all important test of the quantity and quality of your faith and whether you are really studying the Bible. Knowledge of facts alone will not save.

- by Ronny E. Hinds

When It Was a Crime to Read the Bible

By the start of the third decade of the 16th century, William Tyndale had already been on the run for five years. The king of England, Henry VIII, had declared him a felon. Fleeing Roman Catholic authorities in London (never to return to England), he went first to Cologne, France, and then Worms, Germany. What crime had this "evil" man committed? Of what rebellious act of treason was he guilty? He dared to translate and then print the New Testament in the English language!

In England in the 1520's (indeed, throughout Europe during the middle ages), unless you were literate in Hebrew, Greek or Latin, reading the Bible for yourself was impossible. You had to rely upon what the Roman Catholic clergy said the Bible contained. You would not have been able to study the Bible for yourself to discern the truth for yourself - much less be free to practice what you learned therein. Rome ruled with an iron hand.

The Catholic Church did not want nor permit a wide transmission of the Bible and its contents. When Tyndale's NT was published in Worms, 6,000 copies were shipped back to England. Medieval historian William Manchester reports, "To the bishop of London this was an intolerable, metastasizing heresy. He bought up all that were for sale and publicly burned them at St. Paul's Cross. But the archbishop of Canterbury was dissatisfied; his spies told him that many remained in private hands. Protestant peers with country houses were loaning them out, like public libraries. Assembling his bishops, the archbishop declared that tracking them down was essential - each was placing souls in jeopardy - and so, on his instructions, dioceses organized posses, searching the homes of known literates, and offered rewards to informers - sending out

the alarm to keep Christ's revealed word from those who worshiped him." (A World Lit Only By Fire, 204-205)

Tyndale was eventually arrested and imprisoned for sixteen months in the castle of Vilvorde, near Brussels. In 1536, after being tried and convicted for heresy he was publicly executed, being tied to a stake, strangled to death, and then his corpse burned.

As we consider Tyndale's struggle and sacrifice to provide the common Englishman with readable, discernable scriptures, we are made to thank God for the daily ease and convenience with which we can open the Bible and study it for ourselves. We are made to cherish the privilege that is ours to pour over the divine text, understand it, reflection upon it, think over it so as to bring our hearts and lives into harmony with it, as well as also teach it to others (Eph. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:18; 2 Tim. 2:2).

If you have been neglecting to read, learn and live God's word, please remember the good fortune you have: education and access - the abundant opportunity to read and know God's word. To not drink deeply from its well is to squander a precious blessing (cf. Jas. 4:17).

The next time you pick up your Bible and read it, remember the sacrifices of countless others who have made that simple act possible. But above all, remember the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His life on the cross and was then resurrected from the dead so that you know the truth, abide in His word and thus be freed from your sin (Jno. 8:31-36; 1:1-3, 14-18).

- by Joe R. Price

Unsung Heroes

Our society has made a tradition of honoring heroes of one sort or another. The idea is that some folks deserve special attention and praise. It is understood that these individuals will become models for the rest of us to imitate. By their acts of courage and selflessness, or by the display of other admirable traits, they have become sources of encouragement for all others.

Unfortunately the assignment of "hero" status has taken a wrong turn in recent times. These days the popular heroes are sports figures and popular music stars. A very casual examination of their personal lives shows many of them to be indecent, immoral, and downright disgusting. There is nothing in them to be honored or admired. Their example is one of total lack of self-control or discipline. They are not legitimate heroes. Their influence is for the bad, not for good.

May we suggest some better "heroes"? The people we have in mind will never receive front page coverage in the newspapers or make the cover of magazines. Yet, they are heroes in the truest sense. They give generously of themselves to help others. Their actions are selfless - they do not seek anything in return. They simply aim to do good, to glorify God, and to help their brethren and fellowmen. They are the faithful Christians found in every place. They carry their share of the load. They teach classes, work to reach lost sinners, live pure lives in a wicked world. They are elders, deacons, Bible class teachers, dedicated mothers and fathers, respectful teenagers . . . simply Christians who are striving to live as God has commanded. May God bless them all.

- by Greg Gwin