

# **VARIOUS SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDYING and THINKING ABOUT THE BIBLE**

## **1) When you study Scripture, it is good to focus your attention on the words and the way they fit together.**

Try to understand what unfamiliar words mean. Look for words that connect or modify other words and phrases. This will help you see how the various parts of the sentence relate to each other - something which is necessary for accurate understanding of what is being said. (When you are studying Scripture, the more your mind is active - and spirit submissive - the more you will benefit from your efforts.)

It may be helpful for you to write the verses on paper, breaking them down into phrases and visually arranging them in such a way as to show which part of the sentence connects to which other part. This is something like the diagramming of sentences, which you might have learned in some English class in your past. But I am suggesting a simplified form: simply break the sentences into phrases, rather than splitting them up into individual words and arranging them on something that resembles a huge flowchart or a tree!

## **2) It is good to ask questions.**

In these study guides, questions will frequently be asked. At times, there is no specific "right" or "wrong" answer. Some questions are designed to make you think - a mandatory activity for anyone who desires to become more like Christ.

You do not need to immediately provide the full answer to each question that is asked. Understanding is a growing process. The best answer often takes time to develop.

There is no need to speed through a Bible study. In fact, it could actually be detrimental to your spiritual growth. If you do find yourself "progressing" at an exceptionally high rate of speed, try to slow down. Not doing so could suggest that you haven't learned to stop and think - to learn and (as a result) to act in accordance with what you have learned.

**3) When you use a Bible study guide, you are welcome (yes, encouraged!) to find other verses that might help you develop a greater understanding of what the Bible says.**

Look for other passages that express a *similar* concept. Also look for passages that express other concepts - even "complementary" ones, which might appear to be the *opposite* of what is being studied (and which might have been accidentally omitted when the study was being written). Since all the Bible is true, and we want to learn what the *Bible* says (rather than what someone's man-made teachings tell us), we have nothing to hide! The only requirement we have (which the Bible itself has) is that we accept the message the Bible *itself* gives us, without adding to it, or subtracting from it. (If we don't understand something, or if it doesn't fit our views, we don't need to change it or ignore it. We can simply acknowledge that our comprehension of God's perfect Word is not yet perfect.)

**4) You are free to use different translations of the Bible.**

In these specific studies about meditation, the New International Version translation will be used whenever verses are written (unless specified).

There may be occasions when there is a question as to the exact manner that a verse should be translated. At such times, different translations might not always agree. Yet in comparison to the whole of Scripture, this is not a major problem. Even though there may, at times, be disagreements in the exact wording of a specific verse, the overall message will always be the same.

**5) Remember that the primary emphasis of the Bible is not "knowledge accumulation."**

A mind packed to overflowing with Bible knowledge is no closer to God's kingdom than one totally devoid of any comprehension of the Bible - *unless* that knowledge has an impact on the person's life. A person with lots of knowledge may even be worse off than the one without knowledge, since with increased knowledge comes increased accountability (compare to Luke 12:48b). Remember that even the Devil understands Scripture. [Example: James 2:19.]

What we know must influence what we do. Our goal is *not* simply an ability to win at some "Bible Trivia" game, but a transformed life. For a study of the Bible to be successful, it must make us *more like Christ*.

**6) Always remember that NO teacher, study guide or commentary is totally perfect.**

When the Bereans first met Paul, they did not know who he was. They needed to make sure that what he said was accurate, before they accepted his teachings. (This is in obedience to commands found in Deuteronomy 13 and 18.) In the book of Acts, the Bereans are praised for their resolve to remain faithful to the Word. Do as the Bereans did, and make sure that what is being said is correct.

The apostles and prophets who wrote the Scriptures gave us a totally perfect message. *We*, in contrast, cannot make such a guarantee when we write something. So if it was commendable for the Bereans to make sure that *Paul's* message was accurate (when his message proved to be *Scripture*), how much more important it is for a person to check the accuracy of people who cannot make such a guarantee!

Think about Acts 17:11 -

**And the people of Berea were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, and they listened eagerly to Paul's message. They searched the Scriptures day after day to check up on Paul and Silas, to see if they were really teaching the truth.**