

HOW TO HAVE INTENSE STUDY

Studying the Book: Six Ways You Can Get More out of Your Bible

by Claire Cloninger

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1. Suit yourself

Pick a course of study that suits you and stay with it. There are many excellent daily devotionals and study guides available.

To find one, ask your friends or pastor to recommend their favorites. Also, salespersons at Christian bookstores are happy to help you make a selection.

Spike and I rely heavily on Barclay's commentaries for our teaching. I also find myself returning time and again to Oswald Chamber's *My Utmost for His Highest* for meditation. It never fails to challenge me to do deeper with God.

A current favorite of mine is a small volume of daily meditations on the four Gospels entitled *Becoming Fire*. In it, author Jeanie Miley draws the reader into each New Testament drama as an on-the-scene participant, relating our own thoughts and struggles to those of the Bible characters.

2. A fresh word

Try reading a favorite passage of Scripture in a translation you are not used to. See how fresh insights spring to life. Try, for instance, reading 1 Corinthians 13 in the J.B. Phillips translation: "Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy." The meaning here is so accessible! (Overall, this is a beautiful and poetic translation of the New Testament--worth adding to your library.)

Pam, my Bible teacher, teaches from the Amplified Bible, which is excellent for providing additional adjectives and expanding meaning.

Or try one that our whole family is enthusiastic about, the Bible paraphrase by Eugene H. Peterson entitled *The Message*. Though a paraphrase is not meant to replace a translation, it can bring invigorating new insights to familiar passages.

3. Praying your way through the Scriptures

"Pray your way through" a chapter or book of the Bible. This is one of the best ways I know to appropriate the truth of God's Word for our everyday lives. Verbal or written prayer can be used (I prefer to write). Here's how it works:

As I read through whatever book of the Bible I'm studying, I stop at every verse that speaks personally to me and write out a prayer pertaining to that verse. I try to make these prayers as personal and relevant to my own life as I possibly can.

Here's an example, using Romans 8. First, read the verse or verses:

For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Romans 8:5-6).

Next, write a prayer in simple, conversational words of your own, pertaining to what you have read:

Lord, it's real easy to tell when I'm living "according to the flesh" by what my thoughts keep returning to--what my mind keeps dwelling on. If my thoughts return time after time to anything other than You, I'm usually not "in the Spirit." Sometimes I get totally stuck on shopping for clothes, or redoing the house or something like that. Then, before I know it, I have squeezed You right out of my mind. There's nothing wrong with clothes or wallpaper-- I know that. It's just that when they take over my brain like that, they start competing with You. Father, teach me to live "according to the Spirit." Everything else is dying. Only You are life and peace. Those are the qualities I hunger for! Amen.

4. Character study

Do a study of one particular Bible character. Trace that person's life in Scripture. Read other books and commentaries on his or her life. Try to "get inside this character's head" and figure out how he thought and why he did the things he did. In what ways is he or she like you? Different from you?

5. The acts of your life

Realize that though the Bible is complete, the Book of Acts (the story of God's church) is still being created in the lives of each one of us who follow Jesus. Write out your own story. Who are you and how is your life affecting the coming of God's kingdom on earth? Don't overglamorize yourself, but try not to be too hard on yourself, either. Make your story as factual and complete as possible. Someday you will be asked to give your testimony, "to give an account for the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15), and you'll be prepared!

6. Consider the benefits

Go through Psalm 119 and make your own inventory of the benefits mentioned that are available to the man or woman who studies God's Word.

GOD BLESS YOU

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