

## PART TWO: PREPARATION FOR STUDY

# CHAPTER FOUR

## BEFORE YOU BEGIN

### OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this chapter you will be able to:

- C Write the Key Verse from memory.
- C Identify prerequisites to effective Bible study.
- C Identify two ways God provided for studying His Word.
- C Recognize the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- C Explain the difference between the milk and meat of the Word of God.
- C Identify three steps for moving from the milk to the meat of the Word of God.
- C List three practical suggestions for studying God's Word.

### KEY VERSE:

He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. (John 8:47)

### INTRODUCTION

Many people try to begin Bible study the same way they study any other book. They take their Bible, open it, and start to read. But often their study does not last long. They find it difficult to understand what they read. They do not recognize how the Bible relates to everyday living and may even think it is a rather dull book. The Bible explains that only certain people will be able to understand God's Word. People fail at Bible study because they are not spiritually prepared to study the Word of God.

The Bible is like a door which leads into the presence of God. Behind that door are great spiritual treasures. But you must have the key to unlock the door or you will never be able to enter in and explore these treasures. The Bible reveals how to understand God's Word. It provides the key to unlock the door to spiritual understanding.

## PREREQUISITES TO BIBLE STUDY

A prerequisite is something you must do before you can do something else. The Bible is the Word of God. It is not like any other book and you cannot study it as you do other books. There are prerequisites--things you must do before you can begin--if you are to understand the deep spiritual things of God.

If you want to understand the Bible you must first know the Author of the Bible. Jesus said:

He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God. (John 8:47)

You cannot understand God's Words without knowing God. How do you come to know God? Jesus told Nicodemus, who was a religious leader in the nation of Israel:

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God. (John 3:3)

A man may be educated, learned, cultured, and even religious, but the understanding of Scripture will be hidden from him until his spiritual eyes have been opened by the new birth.

Nicodemus asked Jesus, "How can these things be?" He did not understand what Jesus meant. Jesus answered and said:

Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? (John 3:10)

Nicodemus was a religious leader of Israel, yet he did not know about being born again. In fact, he asked . . .

How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? (John 3:4)

Jesus explained to Nicodemus that the new birth of which He was speaking was a spiritual birth. This new birth experience comes through faith in Jesus Christ. You must confess you are a sinner. You must believe Jesus died for your sins, ask forgiveness for your sins, and accept Him as your personal Savior.

The person who has not been born again cannot receive the truth of God's Words:

But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are

spiritually discerned. (I Corinthians 2:14)

The unsaved man may admire the Bible for its literary beauty and value. He may study it historically or geographically. But the spiritual truths of God's Word will remain hidden until he receives forgiveness of sin:

For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. (I Corinthians 1:18)

### GOD'S PROVISIONS

From the moment you accept Jesus as your Savior and experience the new spiritual birth, your mind will begin to understand spiritual truths in God's Word. Just as a new born baby in the natural world needs physical nourishment from food, a person who is spiritually reborn needs nourishment. Their food for this spiritual growth and development is the Word of God. There are two ways God has provided to help you study His Word:

#### TEACHERS:

God chooses certain believers as leaders in the Church. One of the special leadership positions is that of being a teacher of God's Word:

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers . . . (I Corinthians 12:28)

And He gave some apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors, and teachers;

For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ;

Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

God provides teachers to explain God's Word and guide you to spiritual maturity.

#### A SPECIAL TEACHER:

God has a second way for you to learn His Word. He commands you to study it yourself:

Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be

ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)

God has provided a special Teacher to help you when you study His Word. When Jesus was living on earth He personally taught His followers the truths of God. But Jesus knew that after His death and resurrection He would be returning to Heaven so He told His followers that a special Teacher would be sent to help them understand God's Word. That Teacher is the Holy Spirit:

But the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. (John 14:26)

Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak and He will shew you things to come. (John 16:13)

The coming of the Holy Spirit is recorded in Acts chapter 2. Read this chapter in your Bible. God wants you to experience this same infilling of the Holy Spirit.\* Through the Holy Spirit you receive a special ability from God to understand His Word:

But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him. (I John 2:27)

The Holy Spirit is a creative power. It was the Spirit of God that breathed into man the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). It was that same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. (Romans 8:11). It is that creative power of the Holy Spirit that takes ordinary study and turns it into CREATIVE study of God's Word.

We said in the introduction to this course that to be creative is to produce something new. The teaching of the Holy Spirit produces a new flow of spiritual understanding. The Holy Spirit makes the Bible new, fresh, and relevant to your life.

### GOD'S WORD: MILK AND MEAT

There are two levels of spiritual depth in God's Word. We call these the "milk" level and the "meat" levels. The "milk" of God's Word refers to simple truths that even a child can understand, such as the plan of salvation. The "meat" of God's Word refers to deeper spiritual truths which are not so easy to understand.

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\* If you have not received the infilling of the Holy Spirit, order the Harvestime International Institute course "Ministry Of The Holy Spirit."

Some people have received Jesus as their Savior and been filled with the Holy Spirit, but they do not seem to grow in their understanding of God's Word. They are still feeding on the milk of the Word.

In the natural world there is nothing wrong with milk for a newborn baby. The same is true in the spiritual world. When you are first born again you should desire the milk of God's Word:

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. (I Peter 2:2)

But there comes a time in the natural world that a baby must start to eat solid foods if he is to mature physically. This is also true in the spiritual world. There is a time when you must move on from the milk of God's Word to the meat:

For every one that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.

But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason and use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (Hebrews 5:13-14)

Paul said that when it was time for believers to move from spiritual milk to meat, some were not ready:

For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. (Hebrews 5:12)

Why was this so? Why is it that some believers go deep into God's Word while others never get beyond a surface understanding of the Bible? Why are some people always hungering for "deeper things" in God's Word instead of experiencing them? Paul wrote:

And I brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ.

I have fed you with milk, and not with meat; for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

They could not move from milk to meat because they were carnal Christians. This means they were spiritually immature. They had envy, strife, division, and other sins in their lives. When a Christian is carnal, he will not be able to understand the deeper truths of God's Word. He will remain on milk until he repents and grows up enough spiritually that he can digest meat.

It is God's desire that you move from the milk to the meat of His Word. This is how you increase your knowledge of God's Word:

Whom shall He teach knowledge? And who shall be made to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts.  
(Isaiah 28:9)

It is important that you move from the milk to the meat for it is upon spiritually mature believers that God pours out His Spirit:

Whom shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breasts.

For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little;

For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people.

To whom He said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. (Isaiah 28:9-12)

God wanted to bless His people with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He wanted to revive them and give them spiritual rest, but they could not enter in because they had not heard His Words. They could not move on to spiritual meat because they were not weaned from the milk of the Word.

## HOW TO MOVE FROM MILK TO MEAT

Now, the big question is . . . How does a newborn Christian move from the milk to the meat of God's Word?

### DESIRE THE MILK:

First, you must desire the milk of the Word. You must gain an understanding of the basic principles of the Word of God:

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow

thereby. (I Peter 2:2)

You cannot start with spiritual meat. You must first desire and learn to digest spiritual milk.

#### BE OBEDIENT TO GOD'S WORD:

This is the most important step. Carnal Christians do not obey what they learn in the milk God's Word so they are not able to mature on to meat. The Bible teaches that it is not enough to hear His Word. You must be obedient. You must become a "doer" of the Word and not a "hearer" only:

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.  
(James 1:22)

An increase in spiritual understanding comes through meditation on and obedience to God's Word. This is how we move from milk to meat. David wrote:

Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies. . .  
I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation.

I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts . .  
.Through thy precepts I get understanding: Therefore I hate every false way  
...  
(Portions of Psalm 119:99-104)

Because David kept God's precepts and was a doer of the Word, his understanding increased. God will not take you on to the deeper revelations if you have not acted upon what you have learned in the milk of the Word.

#### SEARCH FOR THE MEAT:

In the natural world, chewing meat requires more physical effort than drinking milk. The same is true in the spiritual world. Discovering the meat of God's Word requires more spiritual effort than living on the milk of the Word.

Proverbs chapter 2 tells how to search for the meat:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee;

So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to

understanding;

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding;

If you seekest her as silver and searchest for her as for hid treasures:

Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. (Proverbs 2:1-5)

These are the steps to discovering and understanding the knowledge of God:

1. Receive my words: You must be teachable.
2. Hide my commandments with thee: You must accept the Word and integrate it into your life and spirit. Do not try to change the Word to agree with your way of living.
3. Incline thine ear unto wisdom: Really listen to what God is saying to you through His Word. Listening requires changes in living where indicated.
4. Apply thine heart to understanding: Apply yourself diligently to understanding (interpreting) the Word.
5. Seek her as silver and search for her as for hid treasures: If someone told you there was a hidden treasure in property you own, what would you do? You would start digging. You would conduct a systematic search until you found the treasure. It would become a priority of your life.

When you make God's Word a priority and begin to systematically search for His wisdom, you will find it. But it must become a priority of life. You must approach it with as much excitement and dedication as if you were searching for treasure.

If you follow these guidelines and search for the meat of God's Word, these are the results:

1. Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord: Verse 5
2. And find the knowledge of God: Verse 5
3. Then shalt thou understand righteousness, and judgment, and equity; yea every good path: Verse 9



4. It will be pleasant unto thy soul: (You will find satisfaction) Verse 10
5. Discretion shall preserve thee: Discretion is the ability to make sound judgment and decisions. Verse 11
6. Understanding shall keep thee: Verse 11
7. You will be delivered from all evil: Verse 12

### SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

Here are some practical suggestions for Bible study.

#### SET A SPECIAL TIME:

Set a special time each day when you will study. The time you select will depend on your personal schedule or preference. Some prefer to study early in the morning when they are fresh and rested. Some find their best time to be late at night when everyone else in their household has retired. Whatever time you select, set it apart as a regular appointment time with God to study His Word.

#### SELECT A SPECIAL PLACE:

Select a place that is as free from noise and interruption as possible. Be sure to have good lighting to enable you to read without eye strain. If it is possible, select a place where you can leave your study materials, i.e., Bible, pencil, paper, and any Bible study books you may have. This way you do not have to spend time each day collecting these items before you start your study.

#### START A SPECIAL WAY:

Start each study session with prayer. Ask God to open your understanding so you will be able to receive His Word. The Psalmist David prayed:

Let my cry come near before thee, O Lord; give me understanding according to thy Word. (Psalm 119:169)

## FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. Turn to I Corinthians 3:1-3 in your Bible. List three words Paul used to describe carnal Christians.

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2. From Proverbs 2: 1-5, list five steps given for searching for the meat of God's Word.

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3. Study Proverbs 2:5-12. List seven results of applying these steps to the study of God's Word.

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