

## **Bible Study Methods for Nurturing Your Relationship with God**

Embarking on a journey of faith involves more than just believing; it's about actively pursuing a relationship with God. Just as any strong bond requires communication, understanding, and trust, so does our relationship with our Creator. One powerful way to nurture this connection is through intentional Bible study. The Bible isn't simply a collection of stories and rules; it's a living testament of God's character, His plan for humanity, and His boundless love for you.

As we delve into the Scriptures, we gain invaluable insights into God's heart, learn how to live a life that honors Him, and discover our true identity as His beloved children. The Bible equips us with the tools to navigate life's complexities, make wise choices, and experience the abundant life Jesus promised. But how do we approach this vast and profound text in a way that's both meaningful and applicable to our daily lives? Let's explore two powerful methods that can unlock the transformative power of the Bible.

## Methods for Studying the Bible

- The SOAP Method: The acronym "SOAP" stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. Here's a brief overview of each step:
- ◆ **Scripture**: Begin by selecting a passage of Scripture for your study. It can be a verse, a few verses, or a larger portion, depending on your preference. Write down the chosen passage.
  - ◆ **Observation**: Reflect on the passage and make observations answering these questions –
    - Who is speaking? Who is the intended audience?
    - What is the passage about? What problem is the passage addressing? What solution to the problem is given? What commands need to be obeyed?
    - When, in history, is the event taking place?
    - Where is the passage taking place? Where does the passage fit in the overall message of the Bible?
    - Why is this passage needed? Why does this apply to a disciple's life in the present day?
  - ◆ **Application**: Consider how the passage applies to your life. What lessons can be drawn from it? How can you apply its principles to your thoughts, actions, or relationships? Write down specific applications that resonate with you.
  - ◆ **Prayer**: Conclude your study with a prayer. Based on your observations and applications, communicate with God. Thank Him for the insights gained, ask for guidance in applying the Scripture to your life, and seek His wisdom. Write down your prayers.
- The Verse-mapping Method: Verse mapping is a hands-on approach that encourages a deep dive into the details of a single verse. It's a method that allows for personal reflection and exploration of the richness of Scripture on a smaller scale. There are websites such as BibleHub and Bible Gateway, which a disciple can utilize as a tool for the verse-mapping method. Here's a general guide on how to practice verse mapping:
- ◆ *Select a Verse*: Choose a specific verse or a short passage you want to study. It can be a verse that resonates with you, a theme you want to explore, or part of a larger study plan.
  - ◆ *Write the Verse*: Write out the chosen verse in your own words. This helps you engage more actively with the text.
  - ◆ *Define Key Terms*: Identify and define key terms or words in the verse. Use a concordance or dictionary to explore the original meanings of words in their biblical context.
  - ◆ *Explore Cross-References*: Look for cross-references to the chosen verse. This involves finding other passages in the Bible that relate to or expand upon the themes presented in your selected verse.

- ◆ *Consider Context:* Examine the broader context of the verse. Read the verses before and after to understand the flow of thought and the overall message.
- ◆ *Highlight Observations:* Highlight any observations, questions, or insights that come to mind as you study the verse. This could include cultural or historical context, literary elements, or personal reflections.
- ◆ *Apply the Verse:* Consider how the verse applies to your life. What lessons, principles, or guidance can you draw from it? How does it relate to your experiences and challenges?
- ◆ *Summarize the Verse:* Write a brief summary of the verse, capturing its main message and significance.

### **Example One - The SOAP Method**

This example follows the SOAP method to provide a structured approach to understanding and applying **Matthew 6:25-34** to one's life.

Scripture: **Matthew 6:25-34**

Observation:

- Who is speaking? Jesus
- Who is the intended audience? Jesus is addressing His disciples and the crowds listening to His Sermon on the Mount.
- What is the passage about? The passage is about not worrying about our basic needs such as food, drink, and clothing because God knows our needs and will provide for us.
- What problem is the passage addressing? The problem of worry and anxiety about material needs and the future.
- What solution to the problem is given? Trust in God's provision and seek His kingdom and righteousness first.
- What commands need to be obeyed? Do not worry about your life and seek first God's kingdom and righteousness.
- Where does the passage fit in the overall message of the Bible? This passage emphasizes reliance on God and His provision, aligning with the broader biblical theme of faith and trust in God.
- Why is this passage needed? This passage is needed to remind me of God's care and to encourage me to prioritize my relationship with God over material concerns.
- Why does this apply to a disciple's life in the present day? This applies today as many people struggle with anxiety and worry about their material needs and future. It reassures us that God is aware of our needs and will provide for us.

### Application:

- *Personal Reflection:* This passage encourages me to trust God with my daily needs and to focus on seeking His kingdom first. It challenges me to shift my priorities from worrying about material things to focusing on my relationship with God.
- *Specific Application:* I can apply this passage by starting each day with prayer, asking God to help me trust Him more and worry less. I will also make a conscious effort to spend time each day reading the Bible and seeking His guidance.
- *Actions to Take:* I will create a habit of acknowledging my worries and then praying over them, asking God to take control. Additionally, I will look for opportunities to help others and focus on God's kingdom work rather than my own material concerns.

### Prayer:

Father,

Thank You for reminding me that You are aware of my needs and that You will provide for me. Help me to trust You more and to worry less about the material things in life. Teach me to seek Your kingdom and righteousness above all else. I pray for wisdom and guidance to apply these truths to my daily life. Please help me to shift my focus from my worries to Your promises and to rely on Your provision. Thank You for Your constant care and love.

In Jesus's name, Amen."

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## **Example Two- The Verse-Mapping Method**

This detailed verse mapping of Matthew 6:33 helps us delve deeply into the meaning and application of the verse, drawing connections with other Scriptures and reflecting on how it applies to our daily lives.

1. Select a Verse: **Matthew 6:33** - I chose this verse as the '*key verse*' for this method. This is because the verse reads as a command from Jesus within the passage **Matthew 6:25-34**.
2. Write the Verse: "*But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you.*"
3. Define Key Terms:
  - **Seek:** To look for or strive after something earnestly.

- First: Prioritize above all else.
- Kingdom of God: Refers to God's reign or rule, both in the present spiritual sense and the future physical sense.
- Righteousness: The quality of being morally right or justifiable; living in accordance with God's standards.
- All these things: Refers to the basic needs of life (food, drink, clothing) mentioned in the preceding verses.

4. Explore Cross-References: I found these using the internet...

- **Psalm 37:4**: *"Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you your heart's desires."*
  - This verse aligns with Matthew 6:33 by emphasizing the importance of prioritizing one's relationship with God. Delighting in the Lord parallels seeking His kingdom and righteousness, and the promise that God will fulfill the desires of your heart reflects the assurance that God provides.
- **Philippians 4:19**: *"And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."*
  - Philippians 4:19 directly supports the promise in Matthew 6:33 that God will provide for all our needs.
- **Matthew 5:6**: *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled."*
  - This Beatitude from the Sermon on the Mount highlights the blessing of seeking righteousness, which corresponds to Matthew 6:33's call to seek God's kingdom and righteousness. The promise that those who pursue righteousness will be filled underscores the fulfillment that comes from prioritizing spiritual pursuits.
- **Romans 14:17**: *"for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."*
  - Romans 14:17 clarifies the nature of God's kingdom, emphasizing that it transcends physical needs like eating and drinking, focusing instead on righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. This perspective aligns with Matthew 6:33, encouraging believers to seek spiritual virtues over material concerns, with the assurance that God will take care of their needs.

5. Consider Context: Matthew 6:25-34 is part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In this passage, Jesus addresses the common anxieties about material needs, urging His followers to trust in God's provision. He emphasizes the futility of worry and redirects their focus to seeking God's kingdom and righteousness as their primary concern, promising that their needs will be met as a result.

6. Highlight Observations:

- Jesus contrasts the priorities of His followers with those of the "pagans" who worry about material needs.
- The command is to "seek first," indicating a deliberate and primary focus on spiritual matters over material concerns.
- Jesus promises that God knows our needs and will provide for them if we prioritize His kingdom and righteousness.
- This verse encapsulates a core principle of Christian living: trusting God for provision while focusing on spiritual growth and alignment with God's will.

7. Apply the Verse:

- Personal Reflection: This verse challenges me to evaluate my priorities and ensure that seeking God's kingdom and righteousness is my foremost goal.
- Specific Application: I can apply this by dedicating time daily for prayer and Bible study, seeking ways to serve others in my community, and trusting God to provide for my needs rather than worrying.
- Actions to Take: Make a list of current worries and intentionally pray about each one, surrendering them to God. Set specific goals for spiritual growth, such as joining a Bible study group or volunteering at church.

8. Summarize the Verse:

Matthew 6:33 teaches that prioritizing God's kingdom and righteousness should be the main focus of a disciple's life. By doing so, we can trust that God will provide for our material needs. This verse reassures us of God's care and encourages us to live a life centered on spiritual growth and alignment with His will.