

The Spiritual Habits of Jesus Series

Jesus' Habit of Bible Study

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At A Glance:

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These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.

Jesus' Habit of Bible Study

- I. Introduction
 - A. Video: What do you think about the Bible?
 - B. This video accurately reflects several modern perspectives about the Bible. Most people approach the Bible today with the attitude that the Bible needs to be sifted through to determine what is good and useful from that which is fairytale and fiction.
 - C. While there are a variety of views about the Bible, along with some common ones, Christians are to be most interested in what Jesus' view of the Bible is. Jesus defines Christianity, and His views about the Bible define the Christian view of the Bible. While it is common today for people to disagree with Jesus yet still claim to be a Christian, Jesus doesn't allow for this to be a valid option.
 - D. As we continue to learn about the life, ministry, and teachings of Jesus, it will become clear that knowing and understanding the Bible is very important to Jesus. The fourth noticeable spiritual habit of Jesus is Bible study.
- II. Command to Study the Bible
 - A. While Jesus doesn't give disciples a specific command to be reading or studying the Bible, He had a lot to say about the importance of understanding and applying the Bible to our lives. A well-known principle demonstrating the importance of the Bible to Jesus is found during His temptation:

⁴ But He answered and said, "It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'" (Mt. 4:4)
 - B. For Jesus, the word of God (the Bible) is as necessary for life as food. Human life is sustained "on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God."¹ How does Jesus define the word of God? Later, while quoting from Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, and Isaiah, Jesus refers to these as "the word of God" (Mt. 15:6). According to Jesus, God's word is "written" in the Bible, as He also says:

¹⁷ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others *to do* the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Mt. 5:17-19)
 - C. Clearly, when Jesus is talking about a "letter or stroke" (v. 18), He is referring to a written document. People don't speak in letters and the stroke is the stroke of a pen which is used for writing. The word of God is the Bible. Jesus is telling us that human life is sustained by knowing and responding to the written message of God in the Bible. The phrase Jesus uses, "the Law or the Prophets," is the Jewish way of referring to the Bible—our Old Testament.²

¹ Luke 11:28

² While the Jewish Bible grouped and arranged the various writings differently, all 39 of our current Old Testament books made up the Jewish Bible.

- D. So important is God’s word to Jesus that success in life is defined by a person who “keeps and teaches” God’s word to others. This is the definition of successful living and being a person of high position. The world operates according to what is found in God’s word. God accurately describes human existence and the nature of the world in the Bible, “until all is accomplished” (v. 18). The Bible is a reliable explanation and guide for reality according to Jesus. No word of God will fail or not be fulfilled as it is written in the Bible. On Jesus’ view, human history plays out the way it does because of what is recorded in the Bible (Mt. 26:54).
- E. This perspective of the Bible helps us understand why Jesus expected people to know and follow the Bible—including His words (Jn. 12:48).³ Jesus, in a variety of ways, consistently asked the question, “Have you never read?” (Mt. 12:3, 19:4, 21:16, 21:42, 22:31, Mk. 2:25, 12:10, 12:26, Lk. 6:3, 10:26). Jesus regularly expected people to know what God said in the Bible. Jesus faulted people when they didn’t understand God’s word because the reason behind it is spiritual insensitivity and hardness. Ignorance of God’s word caused people to make mistakes (Mk. 12:24). While we may think there is nothing wrong with not knowing the Bible, Jesus does not agree. The moral response to the Bible is to know and believe it, which is what Jesus even told the disciples (“²⁵ And He said to them, “O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!” Lk. 24:25). Anytime someone does not know or believe the Bible, it is due to a heart problem.
- F. Jesus not only expected people to know the Bible, He modeled what it looks like. Jumping back to our original text of Matthew 4:4, Jesus didn’t just say how important the Bible is, He quotes it from memory. Jesus demonstrates that He knows the Bible when He points to what is written in it, “it is written” and then He goes on to quote, word for word, from Deuteronomy 8:3 which says in part, “man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD”. Jesus lives consistently with the teaching He is offering here. He knows what the Bible says, so much so, that He can recall it accurately from memory. Jesus obviously has spent time learning the Bible.
- G. While being familiar with the Bible was expected, this was only the beginning. Jesus also expected people to think through the implications and principles of Scripture (Mt. 7:24, 9:13, 12:7, 13:23).⁴ Jesus wanted people to understand the Bible and use it effectively in life. He didn’t simply want people to be able to regurgitate information and facts by rote. Jesus wants disciples who have the capacity to connect the word of God to real life by putting it into practice. Once again, in His temptation, Jesus does just that in His use of Deuteronomy 8:3.
- H. Jesus had a point of view on the Bible in which knowing the Bible is an important aspect of human life—just as critical as food. He went so far as to expect people to know and understand the Bible even at a time when very few people had a personal copy of the Bible. Most people in Jesus’ day couldn’t simply pick up a Bible and read it. They would have to go to the synagogue to find a copy. Not only did Jesus expect people to know the content of the Bible, He expected them to understand it well enough to put its’ principles into practice in their own life. Jesus

³ Jesus puts His words on equal ground and authority as the word of God (Mt. 24:35).

⁴ John Wenham, [Christ and the Bible](#), Third Edition. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 24.

expected them to recognize the Bible’s relevance for daily life and decision making. Jesus requires a deeper level of familiarity with the Bible than simply knowing facts about it.

III. Jesus’ Habit of Studying the Bible

- A. The life of Jesus clearly reflects the idea that Jesus had a tremendous understanding of the Bible. By observing how Jesus interacted with Scripture in His conversations, teaching, preaching, and debates, it is obvious that Jesus knows the Bible better than anyone else. In fact, He silenced the brightest and most knowledgeable opponents of His day.⁵ He was never shown to be incorrect in His views of the Bible despite many attempts to trap Him. While the gospels don’t record instances of Jesus studying the Bible, we can observe the results of His time in God’s word. Jesus’ habit of Bible study is seen in His use of Scripture and in how people responded to Jesus’ understanding of the Bible.
- B. The closest example we get to witnessing Jesus study the Bible is when He read Scripture and taught from it:

¹⁶ And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, ¹⁹ TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD.” ²⁰ And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Lk. 4:16-21)
- C. Notice that regularly attending the equivalent of “church,” where God’s word was central, “was His custom” (v. 16). Jesus had a habit of going to the place that housed the word of God and the place that taught the word of God. This is a significant factor when it comes to Jesus’ habit of studying the Bible. Jesus had been doing this since He was twelve (Lk. 2:46-49)—apparently even learning from the Bible for days at a time.
- D. Not only did Jesus put Himself in a position to have access to the word of God, He read from it (“stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written...” vv. 16-17). Jesus knew how to navigate and read from the Bible.
- E. At this point in time, Jesus was so experienced in His Bible study habit that He was able to teach others in a public setting (“He began to say to them” v. 21). While we don’t see Jesus studying the Bible for His own benefit here, we see Him moving beyond Bible study to using the fruits of His Bible study to teach others.
- F. In His teaching, Jesus showed familiarity with all parts of the Jewish Bible (Lk. 24:44). While there are different ways to refer to the Old Testament (only one of which is a quotation), Jesus expresses an awareness of content by pulling information from Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 1 Samuel (includes 2 Samuel), 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Nehemiah (includes Ezra), Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Jeremiah (includes Lamentations), Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Jonah, Habakkuk, Zephaniah,

⁵ Mt. 12:1-8, 22:23-28, 22:34-36, Mk. 2:23-28, 3:1-6, Lk. 6:1-5, 6:6-11, Jn. 5:1-18, 7:14-24

- Micah, and Malachi.⁶ Not only did Jesus demonstrate mastery of all these books of the Bible, He was familiar with the entire historical timeline of the Old Testament (Mt. 23:35, Lk. 11:51).
- G. How did people typically respond to Jesus teaching the Bible? One instance that captures the common response to Jesus' understanding of the Bible puts people's reaction to Jesus this way:
¹⁴ But when it was now the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and *began to teach*.¹⁵ The Jews then were astonished, saying, "How has this man become learned, having never been educated?" (Jn. 7:14-15)
- H. Astonishment, amazement, and awe is a regular response when listening to Jesus ("The Jews then were astonished" v. 15).⁷ While wonder was the common response to Jesus' perspective of the Bible, there are different reasons mentioned for it. In this case, Jesus is speaking broadly to a very large crowd during a Jewish festival in Jerusalem at the temple. Jesus was teaching everyone, including the academics and religious elite. There is an interesting statement included with the reaction. Part of the reason people were astonished by Jesus was because Jesus, "having never been educated" (v. 15).
- I. In other words, Jesus' wisdom and insight into the Bible surpassed His education level. The statement, "having never been educated," could refer to Jesus not attending any school of any sort. While this is possible, it is probably not what is meant, since it is likely most Jewish children received some sort of education starting at the age of about 6 (perhaps 5) up to the age of 12. This statement could refer to Jesus not receiving higher levels of instruction like the brightest students, who continued their education until age fourteen or fifteen. Only the best of the best would be accepted by a rabbi to be educated until they became a rabbi themselves at age 30. The strongest option is that Jesus was not educated or trained as a rabbi, yet His understanding of the Bible surpassed the professionals.⁸ This is one of the reasons the people were astonished by the teaching of Jesus.
- J. The very large crowd also recognized the depth of knowledge, insight, and wisdom concerning the Bible that Jesus possessed ("How has this man become learned" v. 15)? Jesus had immediate credibility with the wide audience simply in virtue of the content of His teaching. The crowd recognized the depth of knowledge regarding the Bible so much so they wondered where He had gained this knowledge because it didn't come from His academic education or background.
- K. All of this indicates that Jesus knew the Bible incredibly well because of His habit of Bible study. Next time you read through the gospels, pay attention to and take notes on how Jesus interacts with and uses the Bible. You will be blown away at the depth of His understanding. A deep knowledge and understanding of the word of God will quickly emerge. He even masterfully uses obscure passages that most people simply skim over in effective and useful ways. Jesus can use religious groups own primary texts to discredit their own views when they are mistaken. No one in all of history knows the Bible the way Jesus does.

⁶ New Testament use of the Old Testament "Jesus" Interactive Tool in Logos 10 Bible Study Software. For more on this see Norman Geisler and William Nix *A General Introduction to the Bible Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986) 83-88.

⁷ Mt. 7:28, 13:54-56, 22:33, 22:46, Mk. 1:22, 6:2, Lk. 2:46-47, 4:32, Jn. 7:46

⁸ A similar statement is found in Acts 4:13 about the apostles as well.

IV. How to Practice Studying the Bible

- A. Knowing, believing, and understanding the Bible was a high priority for Jesus and a regular part of His life. Now that we are aware of this fact, we are positioned to start to respond to this reality. If disciples are going to follow the example of Jesus by recognizing the importance and role of the Bible in our lives, what can we do practically to begin studying the Bible? This is where another helpful tool has been used by the church called the REAP method of Bible study. REAP stands for Read, Examine, Apply, and Pray.
- B. This method of Bible study starts with Read. A disciple selects a portion of the Bible to read. Reading should be done humbly with an attitude and desire to learn what God is saying. If possible, the passage should be read several times in one sitting. Focus on observing as much as you can about the passage as you read. It is impossible to study the Bible without first reading the Bible.
- C. Examine the passage carefully by looking at the specific details. What is happening in the passage? What are the main ideas? What is being emphasized? What might the purpose or intention of the author be? What does this reveal about God and how to relate to Him? Other passages can be used to help better understand the portion that is being examined. This is where a brief study of the passage takes place. Specifically look for items that can teach you more about God and your relationship with Him, show you where you are in the wrong, reveal how to correct what is wrong, and help you live in a godly way (2 Tim. 3:16).
- D. Apply the Bible to yourself and your life by using the acrostic SPACEPETS. At this point in the Bible study, the focus is on a personal response to what has been learned in the Bible study. The following list of questions can help us apply the Bible more deeply: Sin to confess? Promise to claim? Attitude to change? Command to obey? Example to follow? Prayer to pray? Error to avoid? Truth to believe? Something praiseworthy to emulate?
- E. Pray in response to what you have learned or remembered through your Bible study. Ask God to empower you to carry through on your application commitment. The purpose of Bible study is not information but transformation. God did not give us His word to make us smarter, although that does happen; it was given to change us to be like Him. Thank God for any insights you gained.
- F. For those new to Bible study, the REAP method is a basic approach that many disciples have found helpful. Using this method will hopefully assist you in developing a deeper and more meaningful experience with Scripture.

V. Conclusion

- A. The word of God, the Bible, was central to the life and ministry of Jesus. The Bible is a clear priority for Jesus. The perspective of the Bible is the way Jesus understands and interprets the world. He expected people to be familiar with it. He wanted people to know how to use it. He knew it is problematic when people don't recognize the relevance of the Bible and its principles. Jesus assumed the Bible ought to be the guiding moral standard for people's lives.
- B. So critical is a person's response to the Bible that Jesus says, "blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it." (Lk. 11:28).

VI. Questions for Further Thought

- A. Have you ever been excited about something you learned directly from the Bible? If so, when?
- B. What are your Bible reading/study habits, if you have any?
- C. What do you learn about the importance of the Bible from Jesus (Mt. 5:17-18, 13:52, 22:29, 23:2-3, 23:23, 26:54, Mk. 12:24, Lk. 11:28, 16:28-31, Jn. 5:46-47, 8:31-32, 10:35)?
- D. What have you learned about Bible study? How should it be done?
- E. What prevents people from spending more time with the Bible?
- F. What practices have helped you spend time in the Bible more consistently?