

Devotional Reading

One of the easiest—yet most difficult—methods of studying the Bible is devotional reading or quiet time. This is simply a time of one-on-one fellowship with God through the reading of His Word, worship, and prayer.

First and foremost, make sure you set aside a reasonable amount of time and a quiet place where you can read and pray without distractions. This is time you're setting aside to spend with God. You don't want anything to interrupt you during this time.

Have a plan of action. Whether you want to read through the Bible in a year, study one of the gospels in depth, or focus on a single person, there are many resources that can help you in those areas. A good starting point is simply to read a chapter of Scripture a day and keep on going.

Don't rely too much on outside sources. Devotional books are not bad, and can be a good supplement to your Scripture reading. But remember that the focus on your quiet time should be on reading God's Word and meditating on it, not what someone else wrote.

Once you've read through the passage, consider what God is communicating to you through that piece of Scripture. Maybe it has to do with something you're going through. Maybe it's something you're going to experience, and you just don't know it yet! Regardless, allow God to speak to you in His still, small voice as you contemplate His Word.

Now, it's time to pray about it. Talk to God about what you have read, seeking His insight and His will. Ask that He would help you take what you've read and apply to your life today.

A great way to remember the things you're learning is to keep a journal. Write down what you read and what the Lord is speaking to you through it. Write out how it applies to you and how you will respond. This way, you can come back later, see how God has been teaching you all along, and be encouraged by it.

And last but not least, put what you learn into practice. All the quiet time in the world won't help you if you're not willing to live out what you've learned.

Directed Study

A directed, or deductive, study is meant to bring about an understanding of Scripture by applying it to everyday life. A directed study will be biblically-based, providing specific biblical principles and ways in which we can put those principles to work each day or in a particular situation.

A sermon at a church service is a form of directed study, but there are also many published Bible studies that fall into this category too.

Discovery Learning

Also known as inductive Bible study, discovery learning is more of an individually-based study of God's Word. Rather than relying on a speaker or a book to direct the process, discovery learning puts on the emphasis on your willingness to get into Scripture.

This could be likened to a search for treasure, in which you are exploring an area and examining everything you find for something of value. In fact, the writer of Psalm 119 uses this analogy when he writes, "I rejoice at Your word as one who finds great treasure" (Psalm 119:162).

There are three basic skills that come into play with an inductive study:

- **Observation.** This involves asking who, what, when, where, and why questions about the passage you're reading. When studying Scripture, it's important to understand the context of the passage. Think about the people, places, and events mentioned in the section you're reading. Don't be afraid to look at biblically-sound outside sources to provide a complete picture; just don't rely on it solely.
- **Interpretation.** Now that you understand the background of the passage, it's time to look for the meaning. What does this Scripture teach about God? What does it say about man? Is there a command to obey? A promise to claim? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid? The Bible is filled with principles—the building blocks that form the foundation of what we believe and how we behave toward God and others. Simply put, a principle is a spiritual lesson.
- **Application.** This is where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. Now that you've gained knowledge and spiritual understanding, you need to put it to work in your life. What is God trying to teach you through this passage? How does what you've learned apply to your life? How will you cooperate with God in living what you have learned? One thing you can do is write a statement of how you will put the spiritual lesson into practice. For example: I will be a consistent and faithful student of God's Word so I will grow.

Inductive study sounds like a difficult task, but it is something that anyone can use, no matter where you are in your walk with Christ. The secret lies not in having a head for facts, but in having a heart to listen, learn, and obey.