

## METHODS OF BIBLE STUDY

*by Rev. R. A. Torrey*

Introductory note by WORDsearch: *In this article Rev. Torrey often mentions using the "Textbook". He is referring to his New Topical Textbook, but any book that organizes the Bible into topics can be used with this study method. Books in this category include, but are not limited to, Nave's Topical Bible, Thompson's Chain Reference, and Torrey's New Topical Textbook. He also mentions a "concordance". Concordances let you quickly look up every occurrence of a particular word in the Bible. WORDsearch Bible accomplishes this via the Find command. Rev. Torrey also recommends The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, which is a large collection of cross-references. WORDsearch Bible contains all of the study aids he recommends, and many more besides.*

**1.** First of all make up your mind that you will put some time **every day** into the study of the Word of God. That is an easy resolution to make, and not a very difficult one to keep; if the one who makes it is in earnest. It is one of the most fruitful resolutions that any Christian ever made. The forming of that resolution and the holding faithfully to it, has been the turning point in many a life. Many a life that has been barren and unsatisfactory has become rich and useful through the introduction into it of regular, persevering, daily study of the Bible. This study may **not** be very interesting at first, the results may not be very encouraging; but, if one will keep pegging away, it will soon begin to count as nothing else has ever counted in the development of character, and in the enrichment of the whole life. Nothing short of absolute physical inability should be allowed to interfere with this daily study.

It is impossible to make a rule that will apply to everyone as to the amount of time that shall be given each day to the study of the Word. I know many busy people, including not a few laboring men and women, who give an hour a day to Bible study, but if one **cannot** give more than fifteen minutes a great deal can be accomplished. Wherever it is possible the time set apart for the work should be in the daylight hours. **The very best time is in the early morning hours. If possible lock yourself in with God alone.**

**2.** Make up your mind to **study** the Bible. It is astounding how much heedless reading of the Bible is done. Men seem to think that there is some magic power in the book, and that, if they will but open its pages and skim over its words, they will get good out of it. The Bible is good only because of the truth that is in it, and to see this truth demands close attention. A verse must often-times be read and re-read and read again before the wondrous message of love and power that God has put into it begins to appear. Words must be turned over and over in the mind before their full force and beauty takes possession of us. One must look a long time at the great masterpieces of art to appreciate their beauty and understand their meaning, and so one must look a long time at the great verses of the Bible to appreciate their beauty and understand their meaning.

When you read a verse in the Bible ask yourself, **what does this verse mean?** Then ask: **What does it mean for me?** When that is answered ask yourself again: Is that all it means? and do not leave it until you are quite sure that is all it means for the present. You may come back at some future time and find it means yet a great deal more. If there is any important words in the verse weigh them, look up other passages where they are used, and try to get their full significance. God pronounces that man blessed who "meditates" on the Word of God "day and meditation, night" (Ps 1:2,3). **An indolent skimming over a few verses or many chapters in the Bible is not and there is not much blessing in it.** Jeremiah said: "Thy words were found and I did eat them." (Jer 15:16).

Nothing is more important in eating than chewing. If one does not properly chew his food, he is quite as likely to get dyspepsia as nourishment. Don't let anyone chew your spiritual food for you. Insist on doing it for yourself. Any one can be a student who makes up his mind to. **It is hard at first but it soon becomes easy.** I have seen very dull minds become keen by holding them right down to the grindstone.

**3. Study the Bible topically.** Take up the various subjects treated in the Bible, one by one, and go through the Bible and find what it has to say on these subjects. It may be important to know what the great men have to say on important subjects; it is far more important to know what God has to say on these subjects. It is important also to know all that God has to say. **A great many people know a part of what God has to say and usually a very small part and so their ideas are** very imperfect and one-sided. If they only knew all God had to say on the subject, it would be far better for them and for their friends. The only way to know all God has to say on any subject is to go through the Bible on that subject. To do this it is not necessary to read every verse in the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It would be slow work, if we had to do that on every subject we took up. This would be necessary were it not for topical guides and **Concordances**. But in these we have the results of the hard work of many minds. Here we have the various passages that bear on any subject brought together and classified for use, so that now we can do in a few hours what would otherwise take months or years.

The topical method of Bible study is simplest, most fascinating and yields the largest immediate results. **It is not the only method of Bible study**, and the one who pursues it exclusively will miss much of the blessing God has for him in the Bible. But it is a very interesting and fruitful method of study. It was Mr. Moody's favorite method. It fills one's mind very full on any subject studied. Mr. Moody once gave several days to the study of "Grace"; When he had finished he was so full of the subject that he rushed out on the street and going up to the first man he met he said: "Do you know anything

about Grace?" "Grace who?" the man asked. "The Grace of God that bringeth salvation." And then Mr. Moody poured out upon that man the rich treasures he had dug out of the Word of God. That is the way to master any subject and get full of it. Go through the Bible and see what it has to say on this subject. This is easily done. Take your Textbook and turn to the subject. Suppose the subject you desire to study is "Prayer." There will be found a long list of the various passages of Scripture that bear on this subject. Look them up one after another and study them carefully and see just what their teaching is. When you have gone through them you will know far more about prayer than you ever knew before, and far more than you could learn by reading any books that men have written about prayer, profitable as many of these books are. Sometimes it will be necessary to look up other subjects that are closely related to the one in hand. For example, you wish to study what the teaching of God's Word is regarding the atonement. In this case you will not only look under the head "Atonement," but also under the head "Blood," and under the head "Death of Christ." To do this work a concordance is not necessary but it is often very helpful. For example, if you are studying the subject "Prayer" you can look up from the concordance the passages that contain the words "pray," "prayer," "cry," "ask," "call," "supplication," "intercession," etc. But the Textbook will give most of the passages on any subject regardless of what the words used in the passage may be. Other passages will be found in the section on Bible Doctrines under their proper headings.

There are four important suggestions to make regarding topical study of the Bible.

- First: **Be systematic.** Do not take up subjects for study at random. Have a carefully prepared list of the subjects you wish to know about, and need to know about, and take them up one by one, in order. If you do not do this, the probability is that you will have a few pet topics and will be studying these over and over until you get to be a crank about them, and possibly a nuisance. You will

know much about these subjects, but about many other subjects equally important you will know nothing. You will be a one-sided Christian.

- Second: **Be thorough.** When you take up a subject do not be content to study a few passages on this subject, but find just as far as possible every passage in the Bible on this subject. If you find the Textbook incomplete make additions of your own to it.
- Third: **Be exact.** Find the exact meaning of every passage given in the Textbook on any subject. The way to do this is simple. In the first place note the exact words used. In the next place get the exact meaning of the words used. Finding how the word is used in the Bible does this. The Bible usage of the word is not always the common use of today. For example, the Bible use of the words "sanctification" and "justification" is not the same as the common use. Then notice what goes before and what comes after the verse. This will oftentimes settle the meaning of a verse when it appears doubtful. **Finally see if there are any parallel passages. The meaning of many of the most difficult passages in the Bible is made perfectly plain by some other passages that throw light upon them.** Then parallel passages are given in the margin of a good reference Bible and still more fully in The Treasury of Scripture Knowledge, a volume worthy of a place in the library of every Bible student.
- Fourth: **Arrange the results of your topical study in an orderly way** and write them down. One should constantly use pen and paper in Bible study.