

RANSONM™

Bible Study Method

By Joe Thorn and Jimmy Fowler

© 2018 Doctrine and Devotion

Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

You may copy and redistribute this material in any medium or format so long as it is not altered and proper attribution is given.

INTRODUCTION

As Christians, we love the Bible. We do not love the Bible because we love books (though some of us do love to read). We love the Bible because it is God’s book in which he reveals himself to us. We love the Bible because in a world of lies and an age of skepticism God has given us something that is perfect, sure, right, pure, and true.¹ 1

Despite the kindness and power of this gift, the Bible today is seldom read thoughtfully, applied personally, or interpreted theologically. For many, the Bible is an overwhelming collection of various genres of literature written by various authors long ago and from a very different cultural context than our own. To make matters worse, many churches are not modeling or teaching their people how to read, interpret, and apply the Bible on their own.

Because of the value of the Holy Scripture and the current need of the church, we have developed a simple method for studying the Bible that can lead believers to truly know God, themselves, and their world in life-transforming ways. Yet, this method is no replacement for the hard work of hermeneutics or the discipline, science, and art of rightly interpreting the Scripture. It is important that all Christians become familiar with the different genres of literature in the Bible and the proper principles for interpreting such works.

The RANSOM Bible Study Method is a simple guide that can help the reader through the Scripture with the proper aim and helpful steps to take while reading.

The aim in our reading of Scripture should be to know and glorify God, to better understand ourselves and our world, to see the supremacy of Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners, and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. We hope this method encourages you to read the Scripture thoughtfully, apply it personally, and interpret it theologically.

THE VALUE OF THEOLOGY

Theology is much more than the study of God. It is not merely a collection of doctrines or an assembly of abstract affirmations about the divine being. Theology is the knowledge of God personally experienced and publicly expressed.

The word theology comes from two Greek words; *theos*, meaning “God,” and *logos*, meaning “words.” Theology is, in a real sense, God-words, or God-talk. There are two underlying principles in theology that are often neglected today that the word theology itself pushes us to embrace.

¹ Ps. 19:7-9

The first principle is that theology, as the knowledge of God, is not fundamentally academic, but experiential. To know God is not to know about him, but to know him personally. The knowledge of God is relational. God himself is passionate about making himself known and being known. In Jeremiah 9:23–24 the Lord says,

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.

The second principle of theology is that the knowledge of God is intended to be experienced and then communicated. It is not meant to only be known, but shared. As Peter says in 1 Peter 2:9, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

To proclaim the excellencies of God in teaching, singing, and in our lives is a theological act. The value of theology is found in the knowing and glorifying of God.

THE SOURCE OF OUR THEOLOGY

Because theology deals with truth, and not opinion or speculation, it is not found in our imaginations or creativity. And because our minds are both finite and corrupted by sin, we cannot approach theology as if the source of the knowledge of our infinite and Holy God is found in ourselves. God has given us the Bible as our only source for theology.

Of course, we all benefit from great theological works written by men and women, but such books are only as good insofar as they are explaining the truths revealed in Scripture. The Bible is the only inspired, infallible, and inerrant book we have and so we devote ourselves to it as our authority in all faith and practice.²

Below we suggest your reading and study of the Bible will be greatly helped by following the six practices of the RANSOM Bible Study Method.

² 2 Tim. 3:16–17; 2 Pet. 3:15–16; Matt. 15:3, 6

THE RANSOM BIBLE STUDY METHOD

The **RANSOM Bible Study Method** is a simple six-step process reflected in the word RANSOM that functions as an acrostic, where each letter of the word stands for an action to take as you read the Scripture.

R: READ

A: ASK

N: NOTE

S: SUMMARIZE

O: OBEY

M: MEDITATE

READ

Begin by reading a passage of Scripture slowly. Then read it multiple times to become familiar with the passage. Whether you are starting in the Book of Genesis, the Gospel of John, Paul's Letter to the Philippians, or one of King David's Psalms, determine how much you will read in one sitting, and then commit yourself to that passage.

If you are starting a study through an entire book of the Bible it is a good practice to first read the entire book in one sitting if possible. This will help the reader see the big picture and some of the main emphases within that portion of Scripture. After that, for daily readings, take it one chapter, or scene, or paragraph at a time, and then read the passage three or four times. Some people find it helpful to write out the passage by hand and even memorize a key verse.

ASK

One of the most important things you can do when reading the Bible is to ask it questions. You shouldn't expect an audible voice to come down from heaven with an answer, because the answer is already given in the Word God sent down from heaven in the book you have before you.

Some of the questions you should be asking of the passage of Scripture you are studying are:

- What does this passage tell us about the person and work of God?
- What does this passage tell us about human nature and the world we live in?
- What commands are explicitly or implicitly given?

- What sin is highlighted or condemned?
- Is this passage revealing God's commands or God's promises?
- How does this passage connect to the whole of Scripture?
- How does this passage demonstrate the need for a Savior?
- How does this passage relate to the person and work of Jesus Christ?

Many more questions can be asked, but these are some of the foundational questions we should be thinking through as we read the Bible.

NOTE

As you read the Scripture that is before you, note the main idea, key or repeated words, and prominent doctrines being emphasized. This will be easier as you work through the answers to the questions you have been asking of the text.

A helpful habit at this point is to grab a pencil and write out what you are observing. In other words, you should literally "take notes." Whether you use an inexpensive spiral notebook, a Leuchtturm 1917 Notebook, or an expensive leather-bound journal, what matters is writing things down.³

SUMMARIZE

At this point in your reading of a passage of Scripture, it is good to summarize the main idea of the passage in your own words. This sounds easier than it really is. Take your time and work at boiling the main idea down to one brief sentence. You will wind up reworking this summary throughout all six steps. For example, after spending a lot of time in Luke 9:57–62 for a sermon this summer, I (Joe) struggled with the summary. It wasn't an unfamiliar passage, but the act of summarizing is challenging as it is clarifying the main idea as it intersects with our own lives.

³ The ESV Journaling Bible and ESV Scripture Journals published by Crossway are great tools to use for this process.

As they were going along the road, someone said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

I summarized the passage and my sermon as, “Jesus demands everything from you because he is worthy of everything in you.”

Again, the value of journaling cannot be overstated. Writing down what you are learning forces you to articulate things clearly which will help you better understand the Bible, and later on better communicate the knowledge of God you have gained.

O B E Y

This is where your study of Scripture gets very personal. It’s one thing to ask of the passage, “Is there a command to be obeyed, or a sin to be forsaken?” It is something else to ask yourself what would obedience to this passage look like in your life? Where do you fall short in what is commanded? How is the sin depicted here present in your life?

It is often said, “God has not given us his Word for our information, but for our transformation.” Part of the process of transformation is identifying what God is calling us to do in response to what we read in his Word. Where do you need to repent, and how do you need to obey? What does this passage call you to believe? Why do you tend to doubt?

To respond to God’s Word in faith and repentance specifically is what it means to receive the Word. You were given this book to not merely read it, but to receive it. This is the act of obedience.

M E D I T A T E

It is important to be in the Word, and to be in the Word often. But it is even more important to keep the Word in you, and to keep it in you always. You may only have enough time for a few minutes in the Scripture on a given day, but what you read can be taken with you throughout the day through the ongoing work of meditation.

To meditate on the Scripture is to revisit the passage, your questions, the answers, and the central truths of the passage as you go about your day. Some will open their Bibles or their Bible apps while on break at work or in between tasks at home. Some will work on memorization. In all of this, what is emphasized is the work of deep and ongoing thought concerning the very Word of God that you have read and received.

CONCLUSION

The RANSOM Bible Study Method is simple, but not easy. Bible study is hard work because it is heart work. You must wrestle with your own doubts, sins, fears, and questions as you are confronted with God's character, works, laws, promises, and answers.

We hope this simple approach to the Scripture will serve as a means of your personal and deep investment in the Word of God so that you may know the Lord and make him known in your life.