**Christian Growth Seminar**

***Creative Approaches to Bible Study***

**Why Study the Bible?**

Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). God speaks to us through the Bible. As our Bible knowledge grows, we learn more about God’s nature, love, wisdom, and power to save. The Bible gives us hope, builds our faith, and guides us to heaven. Bible study helps us commune with God and teaches us the joy of Christian service. In God’s Word we can learn God’s will and avoid religious error. This is a growing process, “from milk to meat” (Heb. 5:14). In this seminar, we will approach Bible study as a spiritual exercise that leads to spiritual growth.

**Focus of the Bible Study Seminar**

1) Lectures will inform us about the origin, purpose, and composition of the Bible. 2) In group discussions we will explore Bible study methods that encourage us to read our Bibles regularly, systematically, and reverently. 3) A three-week period of focused Bible study follows the seminar. 4) After the reading phase, we will reconvene to exchange Bible study experiences.

**Methods of Bible Study.**

Some popular methods of Bible study are described on pages 3-7. Several Bible texts appropriate for this seminar are listed on page 8. You may choose other texts if you wish. For each day of the three-week practical phase, you can make notes about your daily Bible study. Write down what God has said to you through the passage you have read. Sample Bible study charts are given on pages 9-11.

We wish you success in your Bible study. May you grow closer to God through your study of His Holy Word.

**Bible Study Seminar Schedule**

**Bible Study Seminar / /**

**Practical Bible Study Phase / / to / /**

**Sharing Experiences / /**

1

**Creative Approaches to Bible Study**

A survey by a large automobile club revealed that traffic signs are scarcely noticed by the people who live near them. In many situations, including Bible study, attention decreases when familiarity increases. Scriptures that we read or hear often tend to lose their spiritual impact. Why? Among other factors, it has been shown that our Bible comprehension is affected by 1) the Bible translation we read and 2) the way we read the Bible.

**Investigate other Bible translations**

Many Christians read almost exclusively from a single Bible translation. The expressions and vocabulary of that translation have become so familiar to them that they can recite many passages by heart. They are comfortable with their Bibles, as with a trusted friend. Many personal Bibles are filled with colorful notes and markings added during many years of study.

Ironically, this familiarity can have negative effects. We become used to a religious vocabulary that other people may not understand, particularly if the translation is a very old one that contains archaic language. Familiarity causes us to read the Bible in a casual, businesslike way. Even the colorful markings in the margins can become mental ruts that discourage reflective Bible study.

Many regular Bible readers find it helpful to try other translations now and then. Comparing various translations could improve Bible comprehension. A slight difference in language may lead to greater spiritual insight. Moreover, we are more likely to put into practice that which we understand. ”I never noticed that before!” and “Is that really in the Bible?” are remarks that indicate a new awareness in Bible study.

**Explore creative methods of Bible study**

Our Bible comprehension may also be improved by one or more of the creative study methods described on the following pages. We invite you to explore these Bible study methods with us in this seminar.

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**1. Inductive Bible Study**

Our understanding of everything we read, including the Bible, is influenced by the lens, or perspective, through which we read. As readers, we are never neutral. Our culture, education, experience, and many other factors shape our understanding of scripture. It is important for Christians to adopt a reading perspective that is itself shaped by God’s Word. *The inductive method* of Bible study provides three lenses or steps through which we can view the Bible text.

**Step 1. What does this text mean?**

We want to notice the factual content of the Bible passage. We ask questions to clarify meaning (Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?). The accumulated information gives us insight into the meaning of words and the context of culture and time. For example, the text found in Acts 3:1-10 yields a large amount of information when this method of reading is applied. Peter and John *(who?)* went to the temple *(where?)* about the ninth hour *(when?)* to pray *(why?).* At the gate of the temple *(another where*?) a lame man *(another who?)* received healing *(what?)* in the name of Jesus *(how?).*

**Step 2.** **What does this text mean to me?**

We don’t want the text to simply remain information on the page. It has something to do with us and our spiritual lives. God wants to speak to us. If we dig deeper, we may be surprised or excited, perhaps even inspired to make important changes in our lives. Personal change is the ultimate goal of personal Bible study.

**Step 3. How can I apply this text to my life?**

With some texts, it is enough simply to understand what the Bible says about a matter. At other times, we need to apply to our own lives the principles contained in a passage. In this way, we shape our lives to conform to God’s will (Romans 12:2). This is the essential difference between Bible reading and Bible study.

**Note:** The inductive study method is a fundamental approach to Bible study. It may be used independently with any book or topic in the Bible and can be combined with all other Bible study methods.

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**2. Associative Bible Study**

*Associative Bible study* uses word pictures to connect familiar objects and concepts with spiritual ideas. Jesus used this approach when He taught in parables. Through association, the Bible text is connected to the reader’s experiences, feelings, and knowledge. In fact, most of what we learn is understood in the context of our previous knowledge and experience. A gardener or farmer will easily understand the parable of the vine and branches (John 15:1-8). Parents will sympathize with Jacob’s dilemma as he considers the (assumed) loss of his son, Joseph (Genesis 37:32-35). Those familiar with yeast will understand the spiritual meaning associated with the effect of leaven (Matthew 13:33). In Romans 12:2 Paul speaks of spiritual change as a type of transformation. When we note that Paul uses the Greek word that means *metamorphosis*, we see the image of a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. In the same way, God is able to transform sinful people into a “new creation” that seeks to do His will.

*Associative Bible study* creates windows to better understanding, helping us make connections between scripture and our own lives. Just as the rain refreshes the earth, God’s Word gives us new spiritual life. Each time a baby is born, we can be reminded that the “new birth” through baptism gives believers a new beginning with God. With practice, we will experience spiritual lessons in nature, work, relationships, and many other aspects of our daily existence that were once “ordinary.”

**Note:** *Associative Bible study* can be combined with other Bible study methods to make the text more meaningful and personal. When we allow our imagination to place us in the scene of the Bible text, the scripture becomes a living part of our lives and draws us closer to God.

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**3. Devotional Bible Study**

While every form of Bible study can be a spiritual undertaking, *devotional Bible* *study* places a special emphasis on meditation and prayer. The Bible is not just a book of historical events. It is a personal message from God. It reveals and makes more intimate our relationship with God. It seeks the answers to such questions as, “What did I learn about God (or Jesus, or the Holy Spirit) in this passage?” “How should my life change in light of what I have read?”

*Devotional Bible study* is a contemplative and reflective approach to scripture that seeks contact with God’s will. It is not to be confused with self-centered philosophical meditation. *Devotional Bible study* is God-centered. The very personal nature of *devotional Bible study* makes it equally suited to the novice Bible reader and the mature Christian. The intent is to grow closer to God. God meets you where you are and leads you to the place where you ought to be. It is the outworking of the idea that we are to “look into the perfect law of liberty…” (James 1:25) and then do God’s will.

The key to *devotional Bible study* is consistency. 1) Set aside a regular and specific time for your devotional study. This practice will add stability to your life and give you a daily appointment with God. 2) Choose a place that is quiet and suited to study and meditation. Gather study materials in this place that will help you understand the Bible. 3) Pray for God’s guidance and enlightenment. God has promised to bless those who seek His presence. 4) Read with the intent to discover what God wants to say to you. Spiritual treasures lie undisclosed that you cannot yet imagine. 5) Meditate on the passage; visualize and imagine as you pray and read. God can only speak to those who are listening. 6) Look for ways to apply what you have learned. God is waiting to enrich your spiritual life.

**Note:** Meditation is usually considered to be an individual spiritual exercise. However, if we reflect on Scripture in a small group, we can share experiences that might suggest a spiritual direction we would not have realized on our own. Such an exchange can enhance Christian fellowship and spur us to greater action.

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**4. Listening to the Bible**

**The traditional spoken word**

Traditionally, God’s will has been revealed to His people through the spoken word (Deut. 31:10-12; Neh. 8:1-13; Rom. 10:17; Rev. 1:3). In fact, listening to a speaker was the only means by which most people could receive biblical teaching before the introduction of printing. Today, gospel sermons, Bible lessons, and devotional messages still convey God’s Word in a direct and personal way through the spoken word.

**Electronic technology**

Through modern electronic technology, the Bible has been recorded in many languages. The visually impaired and those who do not read well may benefit from listening to recordings of the Bible text. The Bible can be easily and inexpensively downloaded to computers, iPods, MP3-Players, and cell phones. Christians may hear God’s Word as they travel and during quiet devotional times. Skilled listeners might even realize connections and meanings they would not have gotten through traditional reading methods. Christians can easily hear the entire Bible in less than a year in electronic format.

**The benefits of simultaneous listening and reading**

Bible comprehension can be further increased by reading the Bible while listening to an electronic recording. In this way, understanding is increased by listening and seeing at the same time. Benefits of reading while listening include:

* Improved comprehension skills.
* Improved listening skills.
* Increased vocabulary.
* Proper pronunciation of words.
* A better sense of narrative structure.
* Improved visualization of the narrative without illustrations.

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**5. Learning To Listen As We Read**

The art of Bible study consists of reading and listening attentively in our own minds to what the Bible is saying to us. Remember, God wants to speak to us through the Bible. Therefore, we should pay attention to every word. This requires that we first concentrate and absorb the message in order to reflect upon it. In this way, we can explore several levels in a story or spend considerable time on a particular level that interests or challenges us.

At first we are simply aware of facts in the story we “hear”. Later, we interpret what we have learned according to our own experiences. This deeper understanding gives us a better basis upon which to communicate with God. Difficult passages require more reflection and can often be interpreted in the light of similar but clearer passages. We can also ask for the advice of mature Christian friends. We ultimately reach our goal of communion with God when we are able to react to the Bible passage according to His will.

In effect, this is what happens in a Bible class when various members express their understanding of a particular portion of scripture. The individual Bible reader seeks to imitate this variety of perspectives by looking at scripture in a variety of ways. This is the goal of *the Bible Study Seminar*. When we reflect on what we have read and “heard,” we can more clearly see whether or not we have understood a situation. When we try to formulate the matter in our own words, we can know if the real meaning of the text has come through to us.

The “listening as we read” approach requires dedication and commitment on the part of the individual Bible reader. Naturally, the more mature reader will gain a deeper understanding of a passage than will the novice. Ultimately, every Christian who wants to know and do God’s will can achieve a more thorough understanding of scripture by “listening” while reading.

**Note:** If we give the same full attention to pulpit preachers and Bible teachers, we will gain more from the gospel message.

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**Suggested Bible Texts**

Perhaps you’re wondering which Bible texts you ought to read during the practical phase of the program. If you have no particular starting place in mind, you could choose from the following \*Bible topics that have been grouped according to a biblical theme.

**Teachings of Jesus**

Sermon on the Mount-Part 1: Matthew 5:1-6:4

Sermon on the Mount-Part 2: Matthew6:5-7:29

The Kingdom of God: Matthew 13:1-58

The Good Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

Lost—and Found: Luke 15:1-32

**Jesus Performs Miracles**

Feeding of the 5,000: Luke 9:1-36

Jesus walks on water: Matthew 14:22-36

Jesus heals a blind man: John 9:1-41

Jesus heals a demon-possessed man: Mark 5:1-20

Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead: John 11:1-57

**Jesus and the Cross**

The Lord’s Supper: Luke 22:1-46

Arrest and trial: John 18:1-40

Crucifixion: John 19:1-42

Resurrection: John 20 & 21

Return to heaven: Acts 1:1-11

**The Church of Christ**

Sending of the Holy Spirit: Acts 2:1-47

Life in the early church: Acts 3:1-4:37

The persecuted church: Acts 6:8-8:8

The spreading of the gospel: Acts 8:26-40

The Good News for all: Acts 10:1-11:18

**Paul and the Churches**

Overcoming sin: Romans 8:1-39

Fruit of the Spirit: Galatians 5:16-6:10

Christian Armor: Ephesians 6:10-20

Back to the roots: Colossians 1:1-23

**The Teaching of the Apostles**

The best way: 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

New creation in Christ: 2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2

Living hope: 1 Peter 1:1-2:12

Faith and works: James 1:1-2:26

Love one another: 1 John 3:11-4:21

\*Deutsche Bibellesebund (German Bible Reading Association)

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**Personal Bible Study Charts**

Use the charts on the following pages during the three-week practical Bible study phase of the seminar. Examples are included as illustrations. Here are some further suggestions for your Bible study.

**Be Expectant:** Anticipate your meeting and communion with God and look forward to the truth you will learn. Think of your Bible study as a journey of discovery, and imagine your transformation as you go deeper into the Word.

**Be Prayerful:** Begin every Bible study with a prayer for understanding and enlightenment. Ask God to reveal a promise to trust, a command to obey, or an example to follow or avoid. Seek a deeper insight into God’s will. Ask Him to guide the actions you will take in response to what the Bible has said to you.

**Be Honest:** Be aware that God already knows your heart. You can be candid about your struggles and your joys. Your openness will allow you to receive unexpected spiritual blessings.

**Be Consistent:** Consider your Bible study an appointment with God. Choose a regular time and place for your appointment, and it will become the highlight of your day.

**Be Observant:** Read your chosen passage carefully, noting words, phrases or ideas that make connections for you. Put yourself in the passage and try to experience all that the scripture has to say to you. Take note of specifics that you see. Who is there? What, when, where, why, and how is this happening?

**Be Thankful:** Take time to worship God and respond to His love for you. Thank Him for speaking to you through His living Word.

**Be Generous:** Be sure to share with others the joys you experience in your Bible study. Consider studying with another Christian or a small group on a regular basis.

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**Sample Bible Study Chart (Inductive 1)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bible Text: Hebrews 13:14\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Study Method(s): **Inductive** ( **1** or 2 ) / Associative / Devotional

**Step I: What does this text mean?**

Like Jesus, who had no earthly dwelling, we are not to regard this world as our permanent home. In chapter 11, the Hebrew writer records the names of several faithful people who gave up their homes, or were driven from them. Jesus promised an eternal reward to disciples who would forsake earthly possessions for His sake (Matt.19:29). God’s people in every age should be willing to endure hardship and temporal poverty in order to gain the crown of life. See Hebrews 11:10-14.

**Step II:** **What does this text mean to me?**

I am a pilgrim in this world. My permanent home is in heaven. This means that all wealth and possessions I accumulate beyond life’s necessities are unessential. These may even distract me from my heavenly goal. How can I make a greater investment in the things that will last forever?

**Step III. How can I apply this text to my life?**

I will take seriously my commitment to lay up treasures in heaven. Realizing my own mortality, I will take a greater interest in eternal matters. I will share my surplus wealth with the less fortunate. I will teach others to “set their affections on things above.” With God’s help, I will attach less value to earthly things and devote more time and strength to my preparations for heaven.

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**Sample Bible Study Chart (Inductive 2)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bible Text: Revelation 3:20\_\_\_

Bible Study Method(s): **Inductive** ( 1 or **2** ) / Associative / Devotional

**Step I: What does this text mean?**

**Who** is speaking? Who lives here? Who is being called?

**What** happens if I open the door? What happens if I don’t?

**When** does Jesus knock? When will He stop knocking? When should I respond?

**Where** is Jesus standing? Where am I? Where does Jesus want to be?

**Why** is Jesus knocking? Why have I not yet answered? Why does God love me so much?

**How** do I let Jesus in? How will Jesus save me? How will I serve Jesus?

**Step II:** **What does this text mean to me?**

If Jesus is standing outside, knocking on the door of my heart, I have not yet let Him in, or I have pushed Him out of my life. This means that I am lost and cannot enjoy the salvation that Jesus offers me. It means that I cannot share the fellowship of believers who have let Jesus into their hearts. It means that the blessings and promises of Christ are not mine.

**Step III. How can I apply this text to my life?**

If I have never been redeemed, I must respond to the invitation of Christ and be baptized. If I have fallen away from the faith and shut Jesus out of my life, I must renew my fellowship with Him. In either case, I have the key and must open the door of my heart to Jesus. Otherwise, He will remain outside, and I will remain lost.

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**Sample Bible Study Chart (Associative)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bible Text: 2 Samuel 12:1-15\_\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Study Method(s): Inductive ( 1 or 2 ) / **Associative** / Devotional

**Step I: What does this text mean?**

Nathan wanted to make David aware of his sin with Bathsheba. Nathan uses a word picture (parable) of the rich man, the poor man, and the lamb. David could see the injustice suffered by the poor man when the rich and powerful man took his pet lamb. David became angry and wanted to punish the unjust person. Nathan said to David, “*You* are the man!” David immediately saw his own sin and repented. Though forgiven, David had to bear the consequences of his sin.

**Step II: What does this text mean to me?**

My human nature causes me to see the sins of others while ignoring my own. This text will help me to examine my own life for sins and neglect that rob me of spiritual power and separate me from God.

**Step III.** H**ow can I apply this text to my life?**

The example of David teaches me that even godly people are subject to temptation and sin. I will try to become more aware of my own faults and weakness. In light of my personal flaws, I will be less judgmental when I see others sin. I will try to learn from my own mistakes and from the mistakes of others. I will ask God to give me spiritual strength when I am tempted.

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**Sample Bible Study Chart (Devotional)**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Bible Text: Psalms 10:1\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Study Method(s): Inductive ( 1 or 2 ) / Associative / **Devotional**

**Step I: What does this text mean?**

When David is suffering, he does not feel the presence of God. David believes that God forsakes him in times of trouble. Even though David prays for God’s favor, God seems far away. In reality, David has moved away from God. His sin has separated him from God (Isaiah 59: 1-2). To be near to God, David must remove sin from his life.

**Step II: What does this text mean to me?**

Like David, I am sometimes far from God. But God does not move. This means that I have moved. My sin separates me from God. More sin means more distance between me and God. Repentance and God’s forgiveness will remove sin and bring me back to God.

**Step III.** H**ow can I apply this text to my life?**

When I feel that God is far away from me, I must seek the cause of separation. What separates me from God? Is it my attitude? My work? My thoughts? The way I spend my leisure time? What must I do to come closer to God? What must I give up to regain God’s favor? I will ask God to answer these questions. Then I will do His will. David realized (Psalms 1:17) that God will eventually hear the prayer of the humble. My prayer will also be heard if I am serious about getting closer to God.

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Date: \_\_\_ Bible Text: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Bible Study Method(s): Inductive ( 1 or 2 ) / Associative / Devotional

Step I: What does this text mean?

Step II: What does this text mean to me?

Step III. How can I apply this text to my life?

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