

CHRISTIAN WORKER

“We are workers together with Him...” (2 Corinthians 6:1)

VOLUME 110, NUMBER 1

14 SUGGESTIONS FOR BUILDING YOUR DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Neal Pollard

Maybe you have resolved repeatedly to become a better, more faithful Bible student, person of prayer, or simply one who truly desires to build a closer relationship with God. While a lot of that will be personal and peculiar to you as an individual, you may lack direction about how to get started or give yourself the best chance to succeed in that goal. Perhaps these few suggestions can prove helpful to strengthening your daily connection with your Creator.

- **Adjust your wake up time.** 15 to 30 minutes head start will prove the most vital moments of your day.
- **Find a quiet, solitary place.** Distraction can equal detraction.
- **Study and pray with pen and paper or computer nearby.** This will aid specificity and memory.
- **Do not rush.** Better a paragraph or chapter pored over than ten chapters glossed over.
- **Take advantage of the commute.** Pray through it or play the Bible on audio, if you can.
- **Pick a book or topic of interest and drill down.** Pick it for its relevance to your weakness, need, ignorance, or curiosity. Drink it in deliberately and carefully.
- **Be specific and transparent in your prayers.** In the solitude of prayer, drop all pretense, denial, and pride. He knows it all anyway.

- **Always seek application in the Bible text you are reading.** This is not a history lesson or academic exercise. This is spiritual food, armor, and survival.
- **Create a list of ways you can enact the principles you read from Scripture.** See yourself in the text of Scripture, and challenge yourself to think, say, do, and be what God desires of you.
- **Ask questions of the text.** Don't pass over what you don't understand. Don't skim the surface. Mine for meaning.
- **Build a prayer list.** Challenge yourself and add people that many others may overlook in your local circle—

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

JANUARY 2024

IN THIS ISSUE:

Building Your Devotional Life NEAL POLLARD.....	1
Getting to Know God's Word CODY WESTBROOK.....	2
Shortcuts for Bible Study KEVIN W. RHODES.....	3
Two Basic Rules for Reading the Bible STEVEN LLOYD.....	5
From the Director's Desk TRENT KENNEDY.....	8

FROM THE EDITOR:

GETTING TO KNOW GOD'S WORD

Cody Westbrook

One of Scripture's most tragic statements is found in Hosea 4:6—"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge..." God provided His people with everything that they needed to know in order to please Him. His Divine Will was clearly revealed in the Law and proclaimed by His servants sent time and again to plead with His people. But they continually rejected Him, and consequently He rejected them (Hos. 4:6b). Another tragedy is found in Amos 8:11—"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord God, that I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord." How sad it is that God's people had neglected one of God's richest blessings—His revealed will.

Even more tragic is the fact that there are still so many in our own time who have not learned the lessons of the past, and still fail to learn and embrace God's Word. Evidence abounds, anecdotal and otherwise, to show just how dire the situation is. The latest State of the Bible survey concluded only 39% of Americans are "Bible users." That is the lowest number ever recorded. A 2022 Gallup poll found that only 20% of people view the Bible as the actual Word of God and take it literally. One wonders what the results would be if similar studies were conducted among God's people.

The news is not all bad, however, because the world still stands and we still have time to learn God's Word! What better time than the beginning of a new year create new Bible study habits? Here are some suggestions to help get started.

- **Be convinced of the need to study.** It is possible for us to spend time in God's word that is completely fruitless. If our heart is not in it then it will be completely unprofitable. We must be convinced and convicted that studying God's word is vital to spiritual success; otherwise we will never devote ourselves

to it as we should. We must remember what God told Israel in Deuteronomy 6:6-15. We must be like Ezra, who "prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

- **Make it a daily habit.** Those in Berea were more noble than those in Thessalonica because they "received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). In order to truly be a diligent bible student, we must invest ourselves in studying it every day. Designate a time during your day to open the scripture to read and meditate. Turn off the TV, silence your cell phone, and concentrate on God's word. Make it a non-negotiable priority. One who is truly blessed is one who "meditates on God's word both day and night" (Psalm 1).

- **Memorize scripture.** The only way to truly hide God's word in our hearts is to memorize it. Admittedly, memorization is easier for some than others, but everyone can do it. Start by memorizing one passage per day. Write it down on a piece of paper or an index card and take it with you wherever you go throughout the day. Read it routinely and recite it aloud. There are a number of different methods and even websites and phone apps that will help with this process. Remember, the key to memorization is repetition.

- **Emphasize meditation.** There is a vast difference between bible reading and bible study. Meditation is the key. Bible meditation is defined beautifully in Psalm 1. There are two parts. First, chew on the passage. Memorize it, read it, and think about it over and over again. Ask questions about the passage, look of the definition of words, and see how it fits in context. Second, actively look for ways to make application. For example, if you're studying a passage about proper

use of the tongue, look for opportunities during the day to use your tongue for good, like expressing thanksgiving to someone or offering a word of encouragement. The key to proper meditation is answering two questions: “What does it mean?” and “How do I apply it?”

- **Study topically.** Choose a topic like love, joy, or peace. Get out a pen and a notepad, then open up the bible and look for passages that deal with that topic. Write the passages down and categorize them. Once you have finished that step, organize your notes to see the full picture of how the bible discusses the topic. Then commence meditation.

- **Study textually.** Choose a text. It can be a small section, like a parable, an entire chapter, or a book. Read it several times (preferably aloud). Look for key words and phrases. Look for passages to memorize. Look for transition words like “therefore,” and petition verbs like “urge” and “beg.” Ask questions about the text. What is the historical background? What is the main idea of the text? What is main point being emphasized?

Christians are to have a positive influence on this world. We are salt and light (Matt. 5:13-16) in a world that desperately needs both. We recognize this fact but sometimes wonder how to begin chipping away at darkness. Why not begin by increasing our knowledge of God’s Word so that we may help others to do the same?

CW

SHORTCUTS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Kevin W. Rhodes

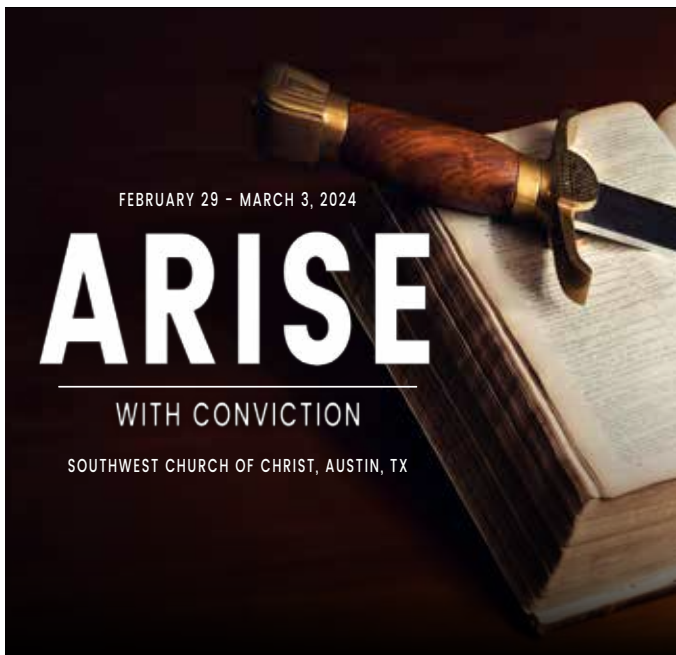
Anyone who studies the Bible has longed for tips that could reduce the effort needed to exegete a passage, prepare a lesson plan, or write a sermon. When an especially difficult passage or topic comes along, the time crunch feels truly oppressive, mocking your efforts and exposing your weaknesses. The expectation for the preacher to know every answer exacerbates the problem, pressuring ministers to find an answer more quickly than wisdom warrants. However, pride and impatience can rear their heads, seemingly justifying shortcuts in study. The workload of preachers alone sometimes creates the impression that shortcuts are not only valuable but also inescapable. But they assume, at their core, that they will lead to the same destination that time and diligence promise. Of this there is no guarantee. And even if shortcuts ultimately do lead to the truth, the person who takes the shortcut cannot speak from faith, because a shortcut in study necessarily places its trust in something other than God’s Word. This happens because men stop studying too early in the process and take a shortcut—often unwittingly.

1. **They accept what they have always heard.** In training preachers, I have found it amazing how wrong conclusions from someone’s background can linger despite having heard those ideas debunked and the truth presented with clarity. It is no wonder Jesus began multiple paragraphs in the Sermon on the Mount with “You have heard” (Matt. 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43).

2. **They accept what their mentor believed.** Having a good mentor as a preacher is invaluable. Treating that mentor’s views as gospel is inexcusable. If you hold a position on some controversial subject simply because that is what your mentor believed, you are following tradition rather than scripture (Matt. 15:9).

3. **They accept what they have read or heard elsewhere.** Legion are the number who think that the way to decide what to believe on a biblical subject is to read all the books they can and watch all the videos they can. Ridiculous. Study the scriptures. It is good to be aware of the various positions. But if you want to stand with God on His

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5



Third Quarter Class Schedule/January 2024 - April 2024



Southwest School of Bible Studies

Chapel @ 8:30 AM / Lunch @ 11:50-1:00

Time	First Year	Time	Second Year
Monday			
9:00-10:20	John- Steven Lloyd	9:00-10:20	Greek 3-Trent Kennedy
10:30-11:50	GSP	10:30-11:50	GSP
1:00-2:20	Expository Preaching - Steven Lloyd	1:00-2:20	Daniel & Chaldee History-Trent Kennedy
2:30-3:50	Christian Doctrine-Trent Kennedy	2:30-3:50	Ezekiel - Steven Lloyd
Tuesday			
9:00-11:50	Acts 1-Carl McCann	9:00-11:50	Preaching Practicum 1 - C. Westbrook
1:00-2:20	1, 2 Samuel - Clay Bond	1:00-3:50	Phi., Col, Phile. - Carl McCann
2:30—3:50	Judges & Ruth, Matt Gibson		
Wednesday			
9:00-10:20	John- Steven Lloyd	9:00-10:20	Greek 3-Trent Kennedy
10:30-11:50	GSP	10:30-11:50	GSP
1:00-2:20	Expository Preaching - Steven Lloyd	1:00-2:20	Daniel & Chaldee History-Trent Kennedy
2:30-3:50	Christian Doctrine-Trent Kennedy	2:30-3:50	Ezekiel - Steven Lloyd
Thursday			
9:00-11:50	Geo. & Arch. - Matt Gibson	9:00-11:50	Minor Prophets - Clay Bond
1:00-2:20	1, 2 Samuel - Clay Bond	1:00-3:50	Biblical Counseling - Steven Lloyd
2:30-3:50	Judges & Ruth, Matt Gibson		
Friday			
9:00-11:50	Advanced NT- Trent Kennedy	9:00-11:50	2. Corinthians - Matt Gibson
1:00-3:50	Joshua-Jim Lloyd	1:00-3:50	1, 2 Peter & Jude, R. Scherffius

See Academic Calendar for Special Events

position, you need to focus on the book He authored (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

4. They accept what is the consensus opinion. Some people are politicians, some do not believe they are smart enough to figure out the problem, and some are just lazy, but what they share in common is putting their beliefs up for an unofficial vote for what is most acceptable within the church as they know it. The Pharisees, among other things, tried to argue against Jesus based upon scholarly consensus (John 7:48). It was wrong for them; it is wrong for us.

5. They accept what their friends believe. Like in politics, the social democratization provided by the internet has led to cloisters of doctrinal echo chambers with friends reinforcing one another's opinions without significant critique or examination. Friendship rules, and relationships reinforce. Such an approach encourages division and supports the most extreme ideas uncritically, all while participants congratulate themselves on their wisdom, soundness, and integrity. Paul dealt with Judaizing teachers with the same attitude. He was not impressed (2 Cor. 10:12).

6. They accept what is emotionally satisfying. A simple but dangerous shortcut that has gained momentum in recent years is allowing intuition and emotion to determine positions more than serious Bible study. When there is an emotional need, a preacher may choose the interpretation that best satisfies that need. This leads to letting the heart govern biblical interpretation instead of biblical interpretation governing the heart (Deut. 28:19).

7. They accept their earliest conclusions and spend the rest of their time defending prior conclusions. It is certainly true that many false teachers have justified their error through the phrase, "After much prayer and study," but the answer to false teaching is certainly not LESS prayer and study. Yet some have tied themselves and their reputation to a particular doctrine instead of to the search for truth. As a result, they see no need to study it anymore other than to confirm their previous conclusions. Pride will not let them admit they missed something, and so they defend it for life rather than studying it even more diligently to ensure they understand the truth. They search the Scriptures, but only for confirmation—not for truth (John 5:39).

These shortcuts should act as a warning to us all—a reminder to check ourselves more regularly through an honest evaluation that can withstand scrutiny. Most people understand that just checking a commentary is a dangerous shortcut, but people still do it. So it is with these failures. But perhaps our greatest blunder is attributing these failures

CW

TWO BASIC RULES FOR READING THE BIBLE

Steven Lloyd

Another hallmark of the literary approach to the Bible is its emphasis on the unity of books and passages. Literary critics look for literary wholes. A pioneer in the literary approach to the Bible rightly commented that 'no principle of literary study is more important than that of grasping clearly a literary work as a single whole.' A literary approach to the Bible is thus characterized partly by attention to unifying patterns in biblical texts. (Words of Delight, p. 21).

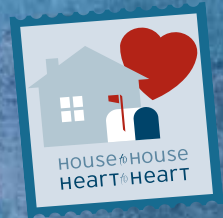
Rule #1: Read each book as a whole.

There is a difference between saying we should read the whole book and saying we should read a book as a whole. The former may mean that we could read each book as disconnected unrelated parts like reading the whole encyclopedia. To say that we should read each book as a whole implies that all the parts have something to do with one another. In the latter case, we read each book as an integrated whole.

When it comes to reading the Bible, the anecdotal evidence is that we read here a little...there a little. We have favorite verses, but we do not know the context in which the verse appears.

I recall driving to worship one Sunday morning during a very challenging time. It was not a good morning. I did not like the way life was going. I did not like the demands life required of me at the time. I was overwhelmed. A passage came to mind, at least a part of a passage. All I could remember was "he that would love life and see good

House to House Heart to Heart



*Come
Home*

**A special issue for inactive
members of churches of Christ**



Fallen away. Inactive since Covid. Moved and never found a new congregation.

Our communities are full of once-faithful brothers and sisters. We miss them. We love them. Let's work together to win them back. For the first time, House to House has an issue to reach former members. Contact us before April 4 to send the issue: An Invitation to Come Home. Call us toll-free at 1-877-338-3397 or email matt@housetohouse.com.

days, let him...”. Let him what? I would have given anything at that moment to know how that passage ended. Come Monday morning, I was on the hunt for the end of and the context of that sentence.

One of the most important lessons I have learned is to read each book of the Bible as a complete whole. We need to put an end to only remembering a verse here and there without knowing the context in which that verse is embedded. This approach tends to atomize the text and often leads to trouble.

Marshall McLuhan wrote the oft-quoted line, “the medium is the message.” Let’s consider what he might mean where reading the Bible is concerned. If the medium is the message, the medium or vehicle or means by which an author conveys the message varies. Just think of the various types of writings we find in the New Testament: narrative, epistle, wisdom as in James, and apocalyptic as in Revelation. It is the entire book that constitutes the message. (This seems so self-evident that it should not need to be said, but I have found that some of the most self-evident truths are often overlooked.) As a case in point, the message of the Gospel according to Matthew is the entire book of Matthew. The message of 1 John is the entire epistle. Statements that summarize a book are just that, summaries.

The main point here is to learn to keep the entire book before your mind to gain the most benefit from reading the book. I must admit, this is not easy, but it is most beneficial. Many valuable things in life are not easy or cheap, but the results are worth every effort.

Rule #2: Read each part of the book in light of the whole.

The second basic rule for reading is to consider every part of a book in light of the whole book. As a case in point, look at First John. First John is intent on damage control. Troublers did their damage to the recipients of this letter and left. They were no longer part of the congregation, so they are not addressed directly, but the people left behind were troubled by the false ideas, in particular, concerning the Christ.

When considering any text in the letter, we should ask questions like, “what damage was done by those who went out from among them.” And, “how does any particular text contribute to the message of the whole?” If you begin asking questions like these of First John texts that may have

puzzled expositors in my lifetime can be better understood than if we disconnect the passage under consideration from the context of the whole letter. In particular, what are we to make of the “sin unto death” in the last chapter of the book? And, why does John end his letter with the admonition to “guard yourselves against idols”?

I encourage you to read First John as a whole, and in an effort to answer the last two questions of the previous paragraph, see what you conclude considering the “sin unto death” in light of the entire letter. Hint: reread the letter with a view toward highlighting those texts in which John condemns people for positions they held—in particular with reference to Jesus. Is there a connection to be drawn between the statements about Jesus throughout and the reference to the “sin unto death”?

CW

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

widows, little children, new Christians, struggling folks, those facing an anniversary of loss, leadership, missionaries, non-Christians where you work and play, the poor, etc. This ever-expanding prayer list will bless lives in ways you won’t know here on earth.

- **Mean what you say.** When you tell someone you’ll pray for them, have integrity. Make an honest effort (write it down, put it in your phone) and honor your word. Ask the people you encounter how you might pray for them, then do it.
- **Review.** Revisit prayer lists or notes from Bible study periodically. Make it live on through reflection.
- **Pray for what to study and study prayer.** You will find that these two spiritual strength-building exercises are interconnected. This is about relationship with God. Spare no exertion.

Consider these “jump starters.” You will come up with more and far better ways to help yourself to a closer walk with God. These days, we’re being pulled in every direction and most lead away from Him. You will have to be deliberate to swim against the tide. May God bless you as you let Him bless you through a vibrant devotional life!

CW



www.swsbs.edu

SOUTHWEST

SOUTHWEST SCHOOL OF BIBLE STUDIES

Southwest graduates serve as preachers, authors, campus directors, missionaries, and school leaders on five continents. Whatever your passion, with strong academics and hands-on training, our collegiate program will empower you to serve Christ and His church.

FACULTY

Trent Kennedy: Director
Steven Lloyd: Assoc. Dir.
Clay Bond
Matt Gibson
Carl McCann
Ronnie Scherffius
Cody Westbrook

- Two year full-time program for men and women
- Well-respected Bible faculty
- Verse-by-verse study of the entire Bible
- Training in expository preaching
- No tuition
- Living expense assistance available
- Studies in Biblical languages

"To Know Jesus and...make Him known"

From the Director's desk



Trent Kennedy
Director
SWSBS

Some Christians love to be spoon-fed long after they pass the newborn stage. Correspondingly, some preachers love to keep spoon-feeding Christians even when they should have matured long past that stage (cf. Heb. 5:12-14)

We all understand that if a thirty-year-old is still being spoon-fed, something has not developed correctly. At times, this can happen because of mental or physical handicaps. However, if we were to see a grown man being spoon-fed and coddled by his mother, a grown man who was fully capable of feeding himself, we would correctly observe that something was not right.

Unfortunately, we have pews full of people who have been Christians for ten, twenty, thirty, or more years who are still holding open their mouths and taking in whatever the preacher gives. They do not test nor discern the words, they simply swallow. If someone does not feed them, they do not eat. Unfortunately, there are preachers who relish in this control and desire that members only listen to them, only filter knowledge through the preacher, and only digest what the preacher approves.

This system is much closer to the man-made religious world around us than to the New Testament. In the Bible we find ready preachers (Rom. 1:15); we find ready hearers (1 Thess. 2:13). We find preachers who desire to speak only the words of God (1 Pet. 4:13), and we find listeners who are willing to search the scriptures (Acts 17:11). We find preachers who are fallible (Gal. 2:11-18), weak (2 Cor. 12:10), and maybe unsure of themselves (2 Tim. 1:6-8). This is okay because preachers are simply the vessels who carry God's precious message of salvation; we are not the savior (2 Cor. 4:7). Members, those who sit in the pews from week to week and serve faithfully, are not expected to sit with idle hands awaiting the sermon. Instead, we are to read (1 Tim. 4:13), learn (2 Tim. 2:15), grow (2 Pet. 3:18), test (1 Thess. 5:21), prove (1 John 4:1), and teach (Heb. 5:14).

Preachers must plainly put forth the Word of God, but we must also allow members to read, struggle, test, prove, study, and grow - because we should be doing the same things! And members must open their hearts, minds, and Bibles as we encourage good and godly preaching.

www.swcofc.org