

TOOL: Going Deeper in Study

Scripture before screen • Daily



Introduction

In our hurried society, it can be really hard to slow down, including when it comes to studying scripture. So often we want to get through the Bible in a year, or we want to finish that book or chapter. And these aren't bad goals, but sometimes there is a benefit in slowing down, picking one section of scripture and sinking deeply into it.

Of course, sinking deeply into scripture brings with it some potential concerns. The primary one: within a few days of trying to study a text deeply, we feel ill prepared or untrained. We don't know enough, we don't get it, we feel like we're in school again...and so we might Google the answers and move on to save ourselves from the feeling of frustration that comes from not being good at something.

But, there is a sweetness with God we can find if we tolerate those terrible feelings of not knowing the answers, and just sit in the confusion and wrestle with the text, turning it over and over until we stumble across a gem. Our hope is that this practice helps you grow in that.

Pause and consider

- What is your past experience with studying scripture?
- What makes you nervous/excited about thinking about studying this way?
- How do you usually handle it when you don't know the answer?
- What are some obstacles (logistical or emotional) you anticipate with this practice?

Practice

A great place to begin is a New Testament epistle. Pick a short one! We'll use Philippians as an example here, so feel free to use that one.

STEP ONE: Get a sense of the background of the book. Don't just Google it. Start by reading through the book, and in a notebook, make all the observations you can about what's going on. If there are cross references to the book of Acts, look those up. See what you can figure it out.

- What observations can you make about who this letter is to?
- What is going on with the writer? What does the writer want for the recipients?
- What do you notice about what might be going on with the recipients?
- What's their relationship like?

Write a summary of what you think is going on, and then feel free to look up someone else's findings and see what else they noticed.

STEP TWO: Read through the whole letter a few times. Don't focus on noticing too much, just get a sense of the big picture.

STEP THREE: Begin dividing the text into small chunks, maybe two to five verses at a time - whatever seems doable to you as you go. This might be different every day!

Then, each day, practice three things:

1. **Making as many observations** as you can about the verses. What words are repeated? What is emphasized? What language is used? How do the phrases relate to one another?
2. **Try to discern the main point.** Summarize what you think is going on, what the writer is saying. Keep in mind the writer's intention: why is he saying these things to these people? What is he emphasizing and why? What does he want the recipients to do, and what truth or idea is he using to motivate them?
3. **Apply.** Are you in any situations that might be similar to the recipients? Why do you think God had you read these verses today? What does God want you to do, and what idea or truth is God using to motivate you?

Let go of the desire to be perfect. Studying deeply is hard. And there are so many resources available for you. It's easy to feel incompetent or frustrated and just want to look up what someone else says about the text (and there is nothing wrong with using commentaries or outside sources) or we just say, "*Forget it!*" and move on all together. But, sometimes we miss the opportunity to learn from God directly. For just one week, try to train your brain to wait a little longer than feels comfortable. When you hit a wall, read the verses again. Write them out. Pray. Walk away and come back to them tomorrow. Wait on God.

Debrief your experience

After practicing with this tool, debrief your experience with your Praxis Group. Below are some questions to process together:

- Check in on life. (Where are you experiencing Christ's presence this week? What burdens are you carrying?)
- What did you learn from this practice?
- Describe your experience with this practice. (What feelings came up, what went well, what got in the way? How has it impacted your relationship with God?)
- What is the next step for you?