

Galatians

How can we be sure that God is pleased with us?

The world bears the Gospel a grudge because the Gospel condemns the religious wisdom of the world.

- Martin Luther, Galatians Commentary, chap 1

For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not be subject again to the yoke of slavery.

- The Apostle Paul, Galatians 5:1, NET Bible



NAUNAVS.ORG

GALATIANS BOOK STUDY INTRO

(1) THIS IS A “PREP” STUDY:

This Bible Study is intended to be a “preparation” study. That means, you should plan to do the personal study prep on your own during the week before you get together to discuss it.

There are 2 reasons to value preparation-style Bible study.

First, you will get something like 50x more out of this semester’s study if you prepare beforehand. Just showing up cold with no prep will have some benefits for you. And of course some weeks will overflow with schoolwork or things that come up and so you may not always get all the prep done. If you can’t get the prep done, still come to study to be with your friends, but realize that you won’t have as much to contribute to the conversation as on the weeks when you prepare on your own beforehand.

Second, we care about your life-long relationship with God. If you learn how to work your personal Bible study prep into your life now, you will be setting a direction for yourself to continue to discover new things in God’s Word and to hear His voice in Scripture, long after you have left college.

(2) WHOLE BOOK → SECTION-BY-SECTION → WHOLE BOOK

This is the approach we will use in this study, and it is an approach you can use to understand any book of the Bible. Start with the big picture, looking at the whole book. Then, you go section by section through the book in more detail. Finally, you zoom back out to see how the book fits together.

This approach will give you life-lessons and convictions that can shape who you are. You will have a growing grasp on God’s word, God will have a deeper role in your life, and you will be better equipped to minister those truths to others as well!

GALATIANS STUDY OVERVIEW

Week 1 Getting to know each other & the book of Galatians

Week 2 Book Survey (Overview, Themes and Questions)

Week 3 Book Survey Part 2 (Background and Key Questions)

Week 4 1:1-10

Week 5 Topic Study on Circumcision, Word study on Justification

Week 6 1:11-2:21

Week 7 3:1-4:7

Week 8 4:8-5:1

Week 9 5:2-15

Week 10 5:16-25

Week 11 6:1-18

Week 12 Book Summary & Personal Impact

God's Message in Galatians

Creative Expression

My list of questions about Galatians

My Key Question #1

My Key Question #2

My Key Question #3

Additional Study Tools and Techniques

WEEK 1 GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER & THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

- Get to know each other a little bit.

- Share what brought you here and what you hope to get out of this study.

- Read *Galatians Book Study Intro* together.

- Read through the whole book of Galatians out loud. Listen for any repeated or emphasized ideas. This will take about 20 minutes.

- Discuss what you noticed as you read or listened through this short book of the Bible.

- Look together at the *ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP* for Week 2. These are the things you should each do on your own before you get together for next week's discussion.

- Each person share a prayer request. Then, you might try going around the circle, praying for the person on your right.

- Plan something fun to do together this week.

WEEK 2 BOOK SURVEY (OVERVIEW, THEMES AND QUESTIONS)

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 2x.
- ***Record any theme words, repeated ideas, whatever is emphasized.***

- Begin a list of questions that the book makes you wonder about.

Try to come up with 10 or even 20 questions. Don't skimp on this part of your study. You need to keep reading and thinking about the book long enough for the author's own questions to become noticeable. This process is a key to all good reading (of any book) and it is at the core of deep Bible study. As you keep re-reading and thinking about the book, you begin to think the author's thoughts after him. On page 10 of his book *Future Grace*, John Piper says, "*Raking is easy, but all you get is leaves; digging is hard, but you might find diamonds.*"

Here are some of the kinds of questions that you might list:

- What is Paul so upset about in 1:6-10 and 3:1-3?
- What did circumcision originally mean when God told Abraham to do it?
- I wonder what the “law” is. I know God gave the law to Israel (and circumcision too); why is Paul bashing it? Or is he bashing it? What exactly is he saying about the law?
- How do the law and the Spirit relate?
- If we don’t have some rules for living the Christian life, doesn’t that lead to just doing what we want and sinning? What is Galatians saying about “freedom” and the law?
- What does eating with Gentiles (or not eating with them) have to do with the gospel?

You can keep a running list of your questions on the page *My list of questions about Galatians* at the back of the study.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Bible study discussions go best when each person contributes. So, each week, everyone in the study (not just the leader) should plan to ask a question that you'd like to discuss.

Choose one of these discussion questions below, or bring up one of the questions you listed in your study preparation.

- What do you see as significant themes and words in Galatians?
- Share a few of your questions, especially ones you feel particularly drawn to study. Why is that issue something you feel is important to know?
- Why do you think all people want to be right? Why do we feel the need to justify our choices, words, actions, and even our mistakes?
- Do you tend to evaluate yourself (or others) as a “good Christian” when you’ve had a good quiet time or gotten your Bible study prep done or been consistent in praying for someone? Do you tend to feel that God isn’t quite as pleased with you when you fail in these or other ways? Do you think those feelings reflect how God actually sees us? How do you see Galatians speaking to these issues?

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 2x.
 - Why are we reading through this book so many times? Because reading and re-reading a book of the Bible is hands down the most effective way of understanding what it says. Every other approach we will use (outlining, giving titles to paragraphs, looking at cross-references, etc) are all supplementary to this basic, most essential approach: simply reading it again. Suggestion: Try reading in a different translation from time to time.

- Continue to write down any more questions that arise as you read Galatians.

- Select your “**3 key questions.**” Write one of these on each of the “Key Questions” pages. Select questions which seem most crucial to central themes of the book or those that are most pressing for you to understand about Galatians. These are your key questions, and they will probably be different to what others come up with.

- Take notes on your 3 Key Questions pages. As you continue to revisit these questions each week, it will be exciting to see how God helps you understand things that initially puzzled you.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- Every New Testament epistle was written to address specific issues. What was the situation that prompted Paul to write this letter to the Galatians? What passages (in Galatians, Acts or other books of the Bible) help you understand the background?
- Share one or two of your Key Questions and why you want to know more about that topic.
- If the Galatian believers had trusted in Jesus, why would they be moving toward taking on Judaism or at least many aspects of Old Testament religious laws? What were some of the factors that were making the law seem attractive to them? Which passages support your thoughts on this?
- Have you ever felt that simply trusting in Jesus wasn't quite enough to make God happy with you? What are some of the things you do that you think make God pleased with you, willing to forgive your, or even to love you?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- Take a look at the greeting section of a few of Paul's other letters. For example, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 Thessalonians. What are some similarities and differences with the way Paul starts the letter to the Galatians?
- Why does Paul seem to be so much on the defensive as he writes this letter? How does Paul's defense of his apostleship relate to the doctrinal issues going on in Galatia?
- Paul describes the Galatians as deserting Christ. How would you describe the "different gospel" to which the Galatian believers were turning to? Even if it is hard to define exactly, what seem to be some elements in it?

WEEK 5 TOPIC STUDY ON CIRCUMCISION, WORD STUDY ON JUSTIFICATION

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 1x. You can choose to do this before or after you do the topic and word studies. You could also do this in a few sittings throughout the week.

This week's study prep will focus on doing more focused study on two words/ideas: circumcision and justification. If we don't understand what these terms mean, we won't understand what Paul is saying about them in Galatians. And that means that we will miss what God is saying in this book. So, let's study these key words.

Because there is a lot of explanation of the methodology and how-to, this week's preparation section is very long. But, most is easy reading. You should be able to do a decent amount of study on these two words in just an hour or so.

TOPIC STUDY ON CIRCUMCISION

- Learn how to research a topic at blueletterbible.org.
 - Read **How to Search the Dictionaries** on www.blueletterbible.org/help.
- Using blueletterbible.org, read the entries for circumcision in these 2 resources:
 - *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*
 - *Nave's Topical Bible*
Be sure to read some of the verses in Acts, Romans and Galatians, since those passages will help you understand why circumcision was a contentious issue in the New Testament.
 - *If you want even more detail, read the entry in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.*

- Why were some people were teaching the Galatian Christians that they had to be circumcised? In other words, why did they think that this rite was so important?

- Why Paul was so adamant that the Galatians **not** get circumcised?

WORD STUDY ON *JUSTIFICATION / JUSTIFY / RIGHTEOUS*

First of all, why are we doing this kind of word study?

- to deepen and sharpen our understanding of Biblical terms and to avoid 3 common Bible reading errors:

- Error #1: Assuming that we already know what the word means.

Reading the Lexicon entry and list of verses is a great way to clarify the range of meanings of words. Highly traditional and theologically loaded terms (love, faith, salvation, baptism, etc) are especially likely to be muddied over in the way most people use them. We can regain clarity and accuracy by reading how these words are actually used in the Bible itself.

- Error #2: Assuming that “Bible words” have only one meaning or one core meaning in any verse in which they occurs.

We don’t use language in this way. For example, just take three of the words you just read: use, language, way. Each of these English words has numerous meanings. We all use words in various ways. So did the Biblical authors and the Holy Spirit.

- Error #3: Assuming that “Bible words” mean every possible shade of meaning every time they occur. The Amplified Bible unfortunately strengthened this erroneous way of reading the Bible.

In normal English conversation, no one thinks of every possible nuance of words every time they say or hear them. We all understand that context narrows down the range of possible meanings. When someone tells you to “take the next left,” you probably don’t get ready to kidnap a Democrat.

Ok, so how do we do a word study?

In brief form, here is the method we'll be using, with more detail given below:

- (1) Find the Greek word which was translated into the one you are studying.
- (2) Read the brief concordance entry of the several meanings that Greek word can have.
- (3) Read every Bible verse in which that word appears.
- (4) Re-read the concordance entry which lists the several meanings of the Greek word.
- (5) Now, you are ready to go back to the passage you were studying, such as Galatians 2:16 and other places where “justify” and related words appear. Try to determine which of the various possible meanings is intended in each place where that term shows up.

Ok, so here is how you do this study using blueletterbible.org.

- Learn how to use the “Lexiconc” feature of blueletterbible.org.
 - Watch the Youtube video “**BLB Tutorial 5.1 - The Lexiconc**”
- Using blueletterbible.com, search for “justify” and then go to the Lexiconc tab.
 - Click the **Strong’s number G1344** to go to the **Strong’s Lexicon entry** for that word.
 - Read the **Outline of Biblical Usage** to see the basic categories of meaning for this word.
 - Read through that list of verses near the bottom of the Strong’s Lexicon page to get a feel for the various ways this Greek word is used in the New Testament.
 - For an even better understanding, read the entry in Thayer’s Lexicon. Thayer gives a great deal of Old Testament background and New Testament usage of Greek words.
 - Once you know all the ways a word is used in the New Testament, you can go back to your specific verse or passage in Galatians and consider which of those possible meanings is likely there.

Doing this type of study is the essential if you want to understand for yourself the pivotal words of the Bible.

- ***What are the various possible meanings of “justify”? List an verse reference that illustrates each meaning.***

- ***Write down some personal implications of what you just learned about justification. Don't let your study stay in your head only. Connect it with your feelings, your own life experiences, your view of yourself and others. You might consider answering these questions: How do you get justified? What results from being justified? How do you feel about being considered righteous in God's eyes?***

- ***If you have time, briefly visit your 3 Key Questions pages. Are you learning anything new about these issues?***

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- How did this week's study go for you? Briefly (yes, briefly) discuss any issues with the technical side of it, how to use the website blueletterbible.org, and things like that. Don't take more than 10 minutes for this.
- Was anyone struck by anything new in your study of the meaning, importance and abrogation of circumcision in the Bible?
- What verses show the importance of circumcision in the minds of many Jewish-background Christians in Acts, Romans or Galatians? How would Paul try to convince them that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, no one needs to be circumcised for their salvation?
- How was Abraham reckoned (considered) righteous by God in Genesis 15:1-6? Why is it important to be considered righteous by God?
- What were the range of meanings for "justify" that you found using Strong's Concordance or Lexicon?
- Are you gaining any more insights into your Key Questions? Share those with the group.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these. There are a lot to choose from today. Just pick the ones that look interesting to you or seem like they are central to this section of Galatians.

- As Paul responds to the distorted gospel being taught in the Galatian churches, why do you think he emphasizes the origin of the true gospel as having been received from God Himself? (1:1, 11,12, 15-17)
- What is Paul's logic in going into extensive detail about his conversion, his visits to Jerusalem, and his interactions with the other apostles?
- Peter, one of Jesus' key disciples and the one on whom Christ said he would build his church, fell into anti-gospel behavior. It appears he did not really think about the harmful impact his actions would have. If Peter, as a mature Christian leader who had personally known Christ, could so easily fall into a false gospel, what will help you and me stay in the true gospel? Do you think this very letter to the Galatians is part of our defense system against false gospels?
- What are some situations this past week where you have proved yourself to others or tried to make sure you looked ok in their eyes? Do you think God is wanting to help you break free from the need to be right in peoples' eyes?
- What does it mean in verse 4 that the false brothers were "spying on our freedom in Christ"? How do you think that connects to the freedom talked about in chapter 5?
- Read Galatians 6:15. If circumcision is "nothing", then why is Paul making such a big deal about it in chapter 2 (and following)? Why does circumcision seem so important to Paul in chapter 2 (and throughout the book) and yet he concludes by saying that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything"?
- Personal sharing: What do you sense God is saying to you in Galatians so far? What passages communicate that to you?
- In verses 11ff, Paul confronts Cephas and even mentions James and Barnabas as those propagating or falling into anti-gospel living. It seems rather confrontational and just plain "not nice" to mention the faults & sins of others. Why does Paul take such a confrontational approach to the situation, even mentioning specific people by name?

- Restate in your own words Paul's response to Cephas in verse 14-16.
- What truth was the essence of Paul's argument against circumcision? How do we attain justification or righteousness in God's eyes? How does Paul teach that it is not attained?
- What is an improper use or improper understanding of the Law according to 2:11-21?
- How are God's grace, justification, law and Christ's death related in verse 21? How else could you state the verse in your own words?
- Verse 19 says that Paul died to the Law, so that he might live to God." Using your own words, describe what verse 20 teaches that "live to God" looks like?

WEEK 7
3:1-4:7

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 1x
- Read this section 3:1-4:7 at least 3x
- ***How is Paul developing his thought in this portion of his letter?***

- ***Give brief titles to each paragraph in this section.***

- ***Choose one of the Additional Study Tools and Techniques to dig a little more into this section of Scripture.***

- Do you have any new questions that have come up as you have gotten this far into the book? Are you beginning to get some clarity on your key questions? Be sure to visit your Key Questions pages and add any new thoughts.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- How would you explain to a friend what Paul is saying in this section of Galatians? Try to put it in your own words (or use your paragraph titles as a guide) and condense the main points in 3 or 4 sentences.
- Personal sharing: Have you sensed God speaking to you through Galatians this week? In what way?
- Paul challenges the Galatians for beginning their relationship with Christ through the Spirit, but then trying to become perfect through the flesh. What does life look like for us when we are relying on the Spirit, and what does it look like when we are relying on the flesh?
- Verse 9 describes Abraham as “the believer.” This is a common identifying term for Christians today. How would you define this word according to verses 2:5-9?
- What insight does Galatians 3 give to God’s blessing to Abraham in Genesis 12 where He promises Abraham, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” What does “blessed” mean in this passage?
- In order for the blessing God promised the nations through Abraham (see Genesis 12) to actually reach the Gentiles, so that Gentiles receive the Spirit, what had to happen?
- Verses 15-18 teach that when the Law was introduced, that it did not invalidate God’s plan for us to inherit the Spirit by means of a promise. In other words, God’s system of blessing us with the Spirit did not get changed when the Law was given 430 years after the promise was made to Abraham. What then was the purpose of the Law?
- Describe how God desires for us to view ourselves in our core identity in light of verses 28 & 29.

WEEK 8
4:8-5:1

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 1x
- Read this section 1x (you'll read it two more times later, but start with just one reading first).
- ***Read Genesis 17-21 to learn the history of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac which Paul has in mind in Gal 4:8-5:1.***
- Read this section (Gal 4:8-5:1) another 2x, now that you have the historical background in mind.
- ***What are the big points Paul makes here in Galatians? Why is he bringing up Hagar and Sarah, and what points is he drawing from their story?***
- ***Give brief titles to each paragraph in this section.***
- Jot down any thoughts from this section that relate to your 3 key questions

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- Personal sharing: What do you sense God is saying to you in Galatians so far? What passages communicate that to you?
- Describe sonship according to this chapter. How did it take place? What are its characteristics? To what is it contrasted or compared? Are there any other passages that come to mind that speak to this same theme?
- How does Paul describe the false teachers who were influencing the Galatians? What were their tactics? What did they strive for? How does that relate to Paul's illustration of the bondwoman?
- How does Paul use the law to argue the Galatians out of their deception?
- As you think of your own life, what are some of the ramifications to being a son or daughter of God? How would your life be different if you knew, deep down, intuitively, absolutely, that God is your Father and absolutely loves and accepts you as His son or daughter?

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- If Paul was writing this letter today, which kinds of things might he mention (instead of circumcision) in today's world / church / in your own life?
- Personal sharing: What do you sense God is saying to you in Galatians so far? What passages communicate that to you?
- Freedom is mentioned in 5:1 and 5:13. Are these freedoms the same in both places, or is Paul talking about slightly different things? What are we free from doing or being? What are we free to do or be? In what way or ways does our flesh want to abuse our freedom?
- Why can't a believer start with faith in Christ and then continue on with the works of the Law? Also, what does "fallen from grace" mean? How would Paul answer those questions?
- What does this chapter teach about love?
- What is the "stumbling block" or "offense" of the cross mentioned in verse 11?

WEEK 10
5:16-25

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 1x
- Read this section at least 3x
- ***Many religious people are very rule-oriented. How does being rule-oriented become a problem for Christians? When does having too few rules cause problems? How is living by the Spirit different from either a rules-based morality or a non-rules-based morality?***
- Give brief titles to each paragraph in this section.
- ***Verse 24 says that those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its lusts. Read Romans 6, where Paul teaches on this same topic. Take some notes on these kinds of questions: What is his main point about our death with Jesus? When did that happen? How do we make that truth “work” in our lives? What is the result supposed to be from our death with Jesus?***
- Jot down any thoughts from this section that relate to your 3 key questions

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- Christ came to give us freedom (walking in the Spirit) yet the Galatians were returning to a yoke of slavery (walking in the flesh). Using this chapter of Galatians, describe these two different ways of life and the outcomes of each.
- Verse 24 says that those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. How did Romans 6 help you understand this truth? What do you think might make this truth (that we died with Christ) more of a practical reality in our lives?
- What is the difference between living by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit? (5:25) Can one live by the Spirit and not walk by the Spirit? Why or why not?

WEEK 11
6:1-18

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Read through the whole book of Galatians 1x
- Read this section at least 3x
- Give brief titles to each paragraph in this section.
- Jot down any thoughts from this section that relate to your 3 key questions
- **Choose one of the Additional Study Tools and Techniques to dig a little more into this section of Scripture.**

GROUP DISCUSSION

Each person ask one of your own questions, or pick one of these:

- Personal sharing: What do you sense God is saying to you in Galatians so far? What passages communicate that to you?
- By giving a specific list of sins (acts of the flesh) in 5:19-21, we could misunderstand Paul to be creating a new list against which we can evaluate and judge one another and begin living a new “Christian” legalism. How does 6:1-5 help correct against that error in our relationships with one another?
- What is the primary message of 6:6-10? Hint: look for the “therefore” or “so then,” depending on your translation. How do the rest of these verses give light on or elaborate on this message?
- What does Paul say about the motives of the false teachers?
- “Boasting” appears several times in this chapter and also in chapter 5. Describe what Paul teaches about boasting in this book and how it relates to the themes of circumcision and justification.
- Do verses 8-9 mean we actually earn our salvation? How are we to understand this sowing & reaping in light of the whole rest of the book which points to salvation by faith in Christ and not by our works?
- In what way does verse 6:14 echo chapter 1?
- What is Paul saying in his final comments about circumcision and the cross of Christ in verses 12-16?
- What does the last part of 6:16 mean? Paul is writing this letter to Gentiles (non-Israelites). Why is he saying there is peace upon Israel? And more specifically, why does he use the phrase “the Israel of God”?

WEEK 12 BOOK SUMMARY & PERSONAL IMPACT

ON-YOUR-OWN BIBLE STUDY PREP

- Seek the Father of glory for “a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17). Ask for understanding into what He wants to communicate to us in His book of Galatians.
- Write out your conclusions on your key questions. Again, try to do it as concisely and accurately as possible.
- Look back over your chapter studies & write up a 1-3 paragraph summary of the book. Strive to capture what you think God is communicating in the book of Galatians. You can write this out on the page titled God's Message in Galatians at the end of the study material.
- Now that you've written out your summary, check it by reading through Galatians again to see if your summary captures the content, tone and intent of the book. Tweak your summary as necessary.
- Exercise your creativity:
 - Draw a picture that illustrates the key concept(s) in the book.
 - Think of an illustration from daily life that communicates an aspect of the book.
 - Share a song you know (or wrote?) that connects with themes from Galatians.
 - Interpretive dance, anyone?
 - Feel free to use the Creative Expression page, but don't feel like you're limited to paper...
- What major lessons is God speaking to you personally through Galatians? How has God been shaping your thoughts, touching your heart, challenging your lifestyle...?

GOD'S MESSAGE IN GALATIANS

HOW GOD IMPACTED ME THROUGH GALATIANS

CREATIVE EXPRESSION

MY LIST OF QUESTIONS ABOUT GALATIANS

MY KEY QUESTION #1

Main issue/question:

Related issues & questions:

Verses in Galatians that touch on this issue:

Other passages/ cross-references that come to mind:

General notes:

Conclusions / Applications / Remaining Questions:

MY KEY QUESTION #2

Main issue/question:

Related issues & questions:

Verses in Galatians that touch on this issue:

Other passages/ cross-references that come to mind:

General notes:

Conclusions / Applications / Remaining Questions:

MY KEY QUESTION #3

Main issue/question:

Related issues & questions:

Verses in Galatians that touch on this issue:

Other passages/ cross-references that come to mind:

General notes:

Conclusions / Applications / Remaining Questions:

ADDITIONAL STUDY TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

From time to time, try one of these tools and techniques to liven up and deepen your time in God's word.

AUDIO BIBLES

We intake Scripture differently when we listen to it than when we read it. Listen to an audio Bible while you walk around to keep your mind active while you listen to God's word.

COVER AND UNCOVER

Pick a verse with a logical connector word (therefore, but, however, so....). Cover up the part of the verse after the connector word and think about different ways you might naturally complete the sentence. Then, uncover the whole verse and see what it actually says. You can also reverse it by covering the first part of the verse and considering how you might start the sentence.

This simple practice is a very effective way to notice and meditate on what God actually says. Meditating on Scripture like this helps you think the way God thinks on the topics he talks about. (Source: I learned this tip from a sermon by John Piper).

CROSS-REFERENCES

If you do not have a Bible with cross-references, you should get one. This is one of the most powerful Bible study tools. I do recommend printed Bibles rather than simply apps or websites, since care and editorial work went into the selection of the cross-references in printed Bibles.

The more you see how Scripture interprets Scripture, the greater your understanding of

God's word. God will reshape your beliefs and values as you open yourself to His thoughts on life.

INDENTING

This is another flow-of-thought exercise that is very easy to do either on paper or on a computer. Cut and paste a verse or paragraph into a document. Set the page layout to Landscape and the tab-stops to something small like 0.1", so that you have lots of flexibility. Start the verse on the left margin and insert returns every time there is a subordinate thought or a descriptor word. Put the indented portion under the word it modifies.

This is a great way to see the flow of thought of a verse or paragraph. It is often difficult to do this for a large section, since the indents often run you off the page. But, for short sections, it is a fantastic way to pay attention to the words and really meditate on what God is saying.

Here is an example from 2 Timothy 2:8:

*Therefore do not be ashamed
of the testimony about our Lord,
nor of me his prisoner,
but share in suffering
by the power of God,*

What this simple technique helps me see in 2 Timothy 2:8 is that being ashamed of Jesus and suffering for Jesus are parallel thoughts; that is, they are directly opposite one another. If I am ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, then I will not suffer. But, if am bold and unashamed, I will suffer. Also, this diagram reminds me that I can suffer by the power of God. God is the one, and he is the only one, who can help me suffer for Jesus and keep doing so. This is probably the reason we hear such amazing testimonies about martyrs and those who are persecuted. When they rely on God's power, they gain tremendous ability to testify about Jesus and accept whatever their enemies give them. Now, can you see how powerful this simple technique is?

MARKING THE TEXT

Use a simple system of underlining, circling, placing stars, etc, to help you highlight key words, repeated thoughts, commands, the names of people, the names of God, etc. Try different colors and symbols until you find a system you like. This will make you a much more active reader and student of God's word and will keep you engaged in the text.

I sometimes do this kind of marking directly in my Bible. Most of the time, I prefer to print a copy of the book I am studying, using wide margins for making notes. The NET Bible publishers are very generous with their text. They allow the entire Bible to be printed and even given out, as long as you do not charge even for the copies.

NET BIBLE TRANSLATORS NOTES

If there are specific word choices in a verse, such as where the English versions translate things differently from each other, you may find some helpful information in the translation notes of the NET Bible. You can read those at lumina.bible.org.

OUTLINING

When studying an epistle, try creating an outline of the passage you are studying, perhaps of a chapter or a section. Don't worry about getting the exact same outline as someone else. And don't look at too many study Bible or commentary outlines before you have wrestled with the passage yourself.

As you outline, look for logical flow through words like therefore, so, and, but. Try to determine which thoughts support each other, and when the author has moved to a new topic.

PRAYING THROUGH A PASSAGE

Find a quiet place where you can literally pray through a passage. You might put your Bible on a bench or chair, kneel in front of it. I also love to hold my Bible in hand as a walk or pace outside in a park, so that I can read and pray out loud without being overheard or considered too weird. :) Alternate reading a short portion, then praying what comes to mind, then reading, then praying. Reading and praying through a passage is a tremendous way to connect with God who inspired the Bible in order to talk to you. God's Word is a spiritual book that we cannot understand without the Spirit's help.

VERSIONS

Reading the Bible in a different version is a great way to notice aspects of meaning that you miss in your regular Bible version. Sometimes we are so used to one way of phrasing that we miss what it says. Also, different versions will choose to translate differently at points where the underlying Hebrew or Greek allows for a variety of translations. Here are a few good options in each of the three categories of translational approach:

More literal or word-for-word versions include: KJV, NAS, ESV, NET

Dynamic-equivalent: NIV

Thought-for-thought / paraphrase: NLT, Living, Philips