

SOLID ROCK #3 Digging Tools

(If you can find it, read Toni Evans book "Get Serious" week 3, Monday.) So if you got a handle on last weeks class you were reading your Bible this week, right? Well if you didn't it may be my fault for not giving you the tools. Well, get those work gloves on cause I'm about to pass you some. But remember like all tools you got to grab a hold of them to use them, so get your mind and heart ready to grab hold.

First, enjoy it! This book is life's instruction manual. It's a love letter from God to you! So read it that way. Personalize it! Ps 119:18. One of the ways to enjoy it the most is to just read it straight through a book at a time and be attentive to what God is saying to you. Use a paraphrase like the Living Bible or the Message. I like to read a Psalm every morning. I like to think of them as cookies and the Proverbs (31 one chapter for every day of the month) as milk. MMMM!

Once you've read a book that really had a lot to say to you, go back and read verse by verse in a study Bible like NIV, NASB or NKJ. Read the notes on each verse and think about how you would say the verse in your own words. Look up the cross-references. If a particular word peeks your interest go to a concordance and look that word up in its other uses. Then try to summarize what you think the Bible is saying in regards to that subject. You may want to buy or borrow a commentary on a book that you are particularly interested in. Commentaries are written by scholars that understand the original language and have read other's works on that book. Some have a particular bent or personal agenda, but many are very fair. I prefer John McArthur's commentary. Barclay's has lots of good info but is a bit liberal. New American Commentary is good.

Like any study time, make it alone and in quiet. Watch for personal applications. Write them down and see how you are doing applying them. Take time to think about what you are reading, and when done, sum it up in your mind. Avoid rushing through it because you feel like you have to. If you find yourself in that mode, stop and pray, and if that doesn't seem to help you may want to set a time later. I like to set my watch alarm to remind me I committed to it daily, and my hourly alarm to review the key point throughout the day.

As you are reading and studying, write down a verse that really grabs you. Then commit it to memory. I try to do at least one a week. Then let that verse speak to you during the day. Share it with someone! I've found God gives you more as you give it away.

A suggested order for reading the Bible the first time: James, Mark, Romans, Luke, Acts, John and 1 John, 1&2 Peter, Galatians, Ephesians, Matthew, for starters. In the Old Testament, Genesis, Exodus, Isaiah, Deuteronomy, Samuels, Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, Ecclesiastes, and as suggested a Psalm and Proverb daily. Set an easy goal. 3 chapters a day? And if that is easy and you're still hungry, increase it. If something you read bothers you, ask several people who have been studying the Bible what they see in the passage.

Consistency is more important than quantity. Develop a life long habit! Remember to major on the majors and minor on the minors. Many first time readers get overly excited on issues that are not the main theme. Men and women have been studying this book for hundreds of years and written rooms full of comments on every verse. It's not too likely you are going to find some new thing. New to you, yes, and exciting but most likely someone else has seen the same thing. Consider other people's input and compare your interpretation with the rest of Scripture. Not everyone will see the same thing. Be glad for different perspectives, not threatened by them. Let that challenge you to dig deeper to be clear on what the passage says.

You have a shovel (different versions of the Bible), a pick (concordance), a crow bar (commentaries), and one more handy little tool is a Bible Dictionary(hand pick). It can help you with tough words or to find some background to the word. One last tool, if you have a computer there is some great software (TNT) for Bible Study. I've found the best buy to be "Bible Explorer". It will have all the above tools plus many more at the click of a mouse. Student versions run around \$70 and the scholar editions with whole libraries for \$300. Try CBD as a source or your local Bible bookstore.

Now you just have to set up a work schedule and start diggin'. There's gold in them there pages! The psalmist said, "Thy Word is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver."

A few years after writing this class I changed my study habits. I would recommend the above for people reading the Bible for the first time. Now I do what is referred to as the "Inductive Method". Take a small portion – a paragraph or two. First dig out all the facts. Who is speaking? To whom? Can you find more information on them? What is the time period? What are they referring to? Once you dig out all the facts in that paragraph and understand them all, then go on to interpreting what is being said. What message is being conveyed? What did the original reader understand the author to be saying?

Now once that is clear move to the really fun part, application. How does this apply to me today? Ask yourself questions like, would I? Could I? Should I? How can I? related to the message before you. I write notes under the verses and then summarize any application in my daily journal. Sounds like a lot of work but with practice you can do a passage in 30 minutes to an hour. By the time you are done with that book or letter you will know it and what it says to you very well. Some days you will really sense the Holy Spirit speaking to you. Be sure and write that down (even if you don't journal) and follow up. God speaks to us through his word. The more you respond, the more you will hear.