

1.5 How can a teacher keep on growing?

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- **Teach yourself first.**

Have you ever filled the tank of a motorcycle with fuel? For awhile the bike will serve you well, but if you do not refill the tank, you will eventually run out of fuel and the machine will be worthless to you until you refill it. Teachers are constantly giving out. Therefore, they need to be constantly taking in. They need to refill their tanks.

Who is your first student? Is it the one who always arrives early? Look at Romans 2:1 and write what you think.

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 Teacher, your first student is you yourself. One of the most valuable principles of Christian education I have gleaned from Scripture is this: Teach yourself first.

I have found no truth ever comes across as clearly to my class as that which God has first burned into my heart to the point it has changed my own life. While it is not appropriate to share every struggle of our lives, the trials we have faced are often relevant to our students – even children. The moments my students have been quietest and most attentive are when I have shared what God has been teaching me. Far from thinking less of me, my students’ esteem has grown with my willingness to be honest.

Read Matthew 5:19 carefully and write down what you think Jesus is saying.

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 Jesus taught that observing God’s commandments and teaching others to do the same are inseparable. Ultimately our students will do not what we say but what they see us do. A teacher’s example is his most powerful lesson.

Consider, for example, teachers who teach the importance of gathering together for prayer, but who rarely attend prayer meeting themselves. If the students accept their teachers’ words, they may decide to “try out” prayer meeting. After they attend several times and their teachers are not there, will they continue to take seriously what they have heard those teachers say?

We know from the writings of the Apostle Paul that he struggled with sin (Romans 7). Yet he confessed his failures and lived his life in such a way that he could beg those under his teaching to follow his example. Carefully consider 1 Corinthians 11:1. Why do you think Paul has such boldness to urge the Corinthians to follow him?

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 Paul sought to follow Christ, and so he could confidently urge others to follow him – as he followed Christ.



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James also understood the necessity of teachers teaching themselves first. What kind of a judgment is awaiting teachers and leaders because of their great influence on others? Carefully consider James 3:1.

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A stricter judgment is awaiting teachers and leaders because others are following us, and we are responsible for our influence on them as well as for our own lives.

How can we meet God’s inspection with confidence? First, we must look at our own lives. In preparing each lesson we can ask God what the principles mean for us before we ask what they mean for our students.

Second, we can ask God for more humility. We can admit we are still learning to conform our lives to God’s plan for us.

So your first pupil should be you, teacher. In your preparation, teach yourself first. Then you will go on to teach your students more effectively. Fill your own tank every week. You will need a full tank of fuel for teaching your students. How do you feel you are doing in this area? What needs to change?

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• **Maintain a vibrant devotional life.**

Here’s a scenario from my own life: “I really should have my devotions before I do anything else,” I reminded myself as I reached for my Bible. Leafing through the pages, I wondered, “What should I read today? I like the epistles, but maybe I should read in the Old Testament for a change. I don’t feel like tackling a long book. Proverbs is my favorite. No, I read Proverbs last month. Psalms? The minor prophets? Maybe the New Testament would be better. Let’s see, I could read through the gospels. But, I haven’t looked at Revelation for a long time.”

Finally, I settled on an epistle. “It seems as if I read the epistles more than anything else,” I thought. “Is it because they’re practical, or is it just because they’re short?” Glancing at the clock, I realized that I had been sitting there for over half an hour. I couldn’t have been reading more than five or ten minutes when I began to get tired.

The next day I leafed through my Bible again, but I couldn’t decide what to read. Then the phone rang, and I forgot about devotions that day. After a few days, I thought of it again. What to read – finally I read a random chapter. I wished I could find a way to make Bible reading more exciting – and to keep it going!

Through years of experimentation with Bible reading and devotions, at last I have discovered the answers to my own questions. First, I have realized that I am able to maintain a daily habit of Bible reading and prayer only when I am resolutely determined to do so. If I have devotions only when I

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feel like it, I usually find myself neglecting to have a consistent devotional time. Satan seems to have other suggestions for my time whenever I give him that option.

I read that a man once asked Abraham Lincoln’s advice on how to become a lawyer. “If you are resolutely determined,” Lincoln replied, “the thing is half done already.” A resolute determination to have a daily devotional time is a prime requisite for success, I have found.

Then, I have noticed that sometimes when I intended to have devotions, the affairs of everyday life so pressed me that I found no time in my busy day for Bible reading. Only when I have set aside a definite time, scheduled my day around it, and guarded it jealously have I found the time I needed. A help in understanding and applying all that I have read.

“Not devotions again!” has been my attitude at times, I am sorry to confess. But certain steps have helped me maintain a more successful devotional time.

- I have resolutely determined to have devotions.
- I have set aside a special time and guarded it jealously.
- I always have a special project to keep my interest high.
- As I read, I add to my list of projects for future study.
- I summarize in writing the main idea that God impresses upon me each day.
- I pray before, after, and sometimes through my reading.

Teacher, I challenge you to try these steps. I believe that they will lead others to success, too. When following these steps, it’s easier to keep my devotions fresh so that I keep on growing as a teacher.

Think about this: How does your experience compare to mine?

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 What Bible study methods have you found most helpful?

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 Which of these ideas would you like to try for yourself?

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- **Keep from getting in a rut.**

My love for God’s Word began shortly after I was saved. God’s Word had so much to say to me! Realizing its relevance to my life for the first time, I began underlining verses that seemed pertinent to me or verses that seemed particularly appropriate to my life. Soon almost the entire New Testament were underlined.

But after I had learned much about the Bible, these familiar verses no longer stood out the way they had when I was first discovering them. Parts of the Bible had become so familiar that the words no longer penetrated my mind. It was then that I realized my need for deep, continuous study of God’s



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Word. Reading alone would no longer suffice. Through experiments with many types of Bible study, I have found five favorites that still continue to open the Bible to me in a fresh and vital way.

My favorite study methods are: Six Ws, Six Questions, Biography, Outlining, and Topical Study.

The first of these was recommended by a speaker I heard in Bible college. I don't remember his name, but he gave me a tool that has continually helped me in my Bible study. The six Ws are: Who? Where? When? What? Why? And Wherefore?

In studying the Bible using this method, look first for persons, including God, angels, and demons. When you have noted all the persons involved, try to decide who are the central or most important characters.

Then ask, Where? Note all mention of geographical location and consult appropriate maps.

Then ask, When? Note references to time in the Scripture itself, first of all. Then consult chronologies or marginal notes on the date of the event, remembering that scholars sometimes disagree on these matters.

When you have noted the persons, the location, and the time involved, turn your attention to the action itself. What happened in the biblical narrative?

Another thing you should note is what objects are involved. Sometimes, these are of great importance, as in the tabernacle.

When you have noted all these things about a portion of Scripture, you are ready to apply the next steps and apply the Word to your life.

Ask, Why? Examine the motives and the characters. Why did they act as they did? Why did God give the command He gave? Why did the event happen as it did? This is interpretation. Decide what it means for you in your own life.

“Wherefore” asks what you would do about the Scripture. How would you obey it in your life?

I have used the Six Ws method often in my personal Bible study and have found that it helps me to notice things about the Scripture that I might otherwise overlook. It encourages me to take a careful, deep look at Scripture and discourages me from skimming over words without allowing them to pierce my consciousness.

Another favorite method of Bible study is what I call Six Questions. I do not know who originated this method. I first encountered it in a follow-up letter I received after making a decision at a Youth for Christ convention. Like the Six Ws, the Six Questions force me to look more deeply at the Scripture under consideration.

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The six questions are: Does this Scripture have a command to obey? Does it teach a principle to follow? Does it condemn a sin to avoid? Is there an example to follow? Can I see a teaching to believe? Is there a problem to investigate?

Unlike the Six Ws, a Scripture will seldom answer all of these. Many Scriptures will receive an affirmative answer to one of the six questions. The strength of this method is that it forces a deeper look at the passage under consideration. This method is less time-consuming than the first one. In fact, if the questions are firmly in mind or in a convenient spot in your Bible, this method takes little extra time beyond reading. Yet it helps to fix in mind something definite about the passage -- something that is likely to come into your mind for further meditation throughout the day.

At one time I kept a partitioned notebook in which I wrote each of these questions. In the “Commands to Obey” section, I wrote every command I found, paraphrased in my own words. In the “Sins to Avoid” section, I kept a list of sins – again in my own words. This proved to be a valuable project that helped me see how much God’s Word has to say to me personally.

The “Problem to Investigate” question is one that should be written down, even if the other questions are answered only in your mind. This notebook or list is for verses you may not fully understand, passages that raise a question in your mind, or problems you would like to investigate further. Often help can be obtained from Bible study books, commentaries, a pastor, or other Hebrew or Greek scholars. Sometimes just writing down a problem or question and thinking about it over a period of time will give you new insight.

Another valuable method of Bible study is biography, or character study. Simply choose a Bible character and study all the passages that mention him. These passages can be found by looking up the name to be studied in an exhaustive concordance. A study of lesser Bible characters can often yield rich rewards.

In studying a character, try to study his life in chronological order. Look for outstanding characteristics; try to understand what kind of person he was, and why. What were his victories? What were his failures and problem areas? What were his sins? Did he have trials? In what way might I be like the character? What can I learn from his life?

Another favorite method of study is outlining. This is valuable because it helps one to understand how a book or a chapter is structured. This is especially important in the epistles where the author’s thought is often difficult to follow.

One easy method of outlining is simply to title chapters. I studied the entire Bible through once, simply entitling each chapter. For this purpose one needs a Bible without headings – a simply text

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Bible, not a study or reference Bible. It is difficult to be objective or original when titles, divisions, and outlines are right before you.

This method not only causes you to look carefully at the passage, but also focuses your attention on the unity of the passage within the chapter and the book. How does this passage and this verse contribute to the development of the chapter? How do they contribute to the book as a whole? Outlining a book of the Bible will help you to see these relationships.

A fifth favorite method of Bible study is the topical approach. Everyone has favorite topics or subjects that are particularly intriguing with which he would like to become more familiar.

I am currently doing a major topical Bible study on women in preparation for leading a women's Bible study group. In the past I have studied all that the Bible says about many other subjects. The advantage of topical study is that you have the privilege of considering all that the Bible teaches on a subject; that is important to interpretation.

Many Bibles have a topical index giving partial listings of references on hundreds of subjects. You may choose a subject of almost any magnitude. You may investigate a subject that troubles you or about which you know little. You may find new insight into a subject about which you already know much.

Serious Bible students – and that should include every believer – should try a variety of Bible study methods. The things you notice using one method are not always the things you will notice using another method. Using a variety of methods will keep you finding new insights and new truths from God's Word.

A few times I have had the terrifying experience of picking up my Bible and not knowing what to read. I have skimmed here and there, read a chapter from one book one day and a chapter from another the next. With no continuity and no direct purpose, I did not receive as much from my reading as I should have. It is easier to get out of the habit of daily study when you do not concentrate on a particular thing. By using these methods of Bible study, I have retained more interest, anticipated my Bible study more, and learned more facts and helpful spiritual principles.

I have found that it is an advantage to me to use many good translations in my study. I often compare translations. This helps to clear up the meanings of obscure words and helps me avoid the problem of the words becoming so familiar that they fail to pierce my mind leaving my inner self unaffected.

Bible study does take more time than light reading, but the time used is an investment that helps you to become more familiar with the mind of God and the basis of your faith.

My Bible reading is not in a rut anymore. When there are so many exciting methods of Bible study, it's hard not to be excited! As I keep in God's Word and allow Him to speak to me through my own study, I find it easier to keep on growing as a teacher.

Think about this: What about you? What Bible study methods have you found helpful, and why?

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What new method would you like to try first? Second? What do you need in order to get started?
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• **Learn to meditate on God’s Word.**

Have you ever seen how a cow eats? When a cow eats grass, it goes into the cow’s first stomach. Later, she pulls it up and chews it again. Finally she swallows it down to a second stomach.

Meditating on God’s Word works something like that. You read until you find a verse that God is impressing on you. Then you write that verse down on a card or in your agenda or just tuck it away in your mind. As you go through the day, you think about the verse. Sometimes it’s helpful to think about each word and each phrase. At other times it’s helpful to think of applications to your own life. As God brings ideas to mind, jot them down in your notebook. It’s surprising how relevant the Bible will become when you begin to let it seep deep down into your heart by meditating on it every day.

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Choose a verse and meditate on it today. Then jot some of your observations here. How did you find this helpful?
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LET’S REVIEW

Name four things you can do to keep on growing in your knowledge of God’s Word.

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____

Name at least two methods of Bible study. Pretend another teacher has asked you for ideas on how to study the Bible. Write out an explanation of these methods to your teacher friend. (Use extra paper if needed.)

- 1. _____
 - 2. _____
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LET’S PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Teacher, what are you doing to keep on growing in God’s Word? What will you begin to do to improve and stretch in this area?

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