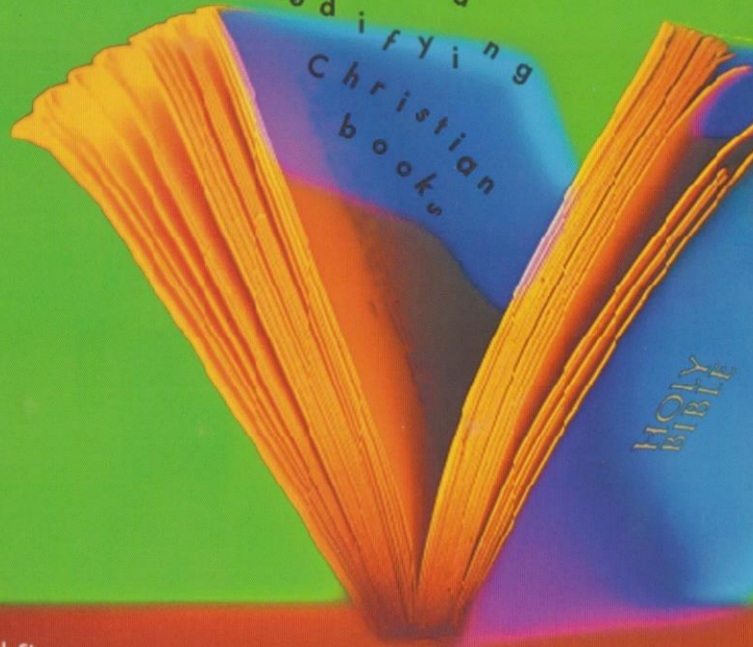


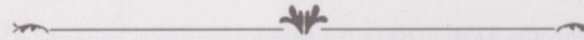
# How to study the Bible profitably and read edifying Christian books

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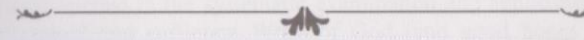


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Dedicated to  
leaders and members of  
*Covenant Bible-Presbyterian Church,  
Bangalore, India*  
and the participants of the  
*Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures,  
Singapore*



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## Foreword

*'Study to shew thyself approved unto God,  
a workman that needeth not to be ashamed,  
rightly dividing the word of truth.'*  
2 Timothy 2:15

This publication is designed primarily for the purpose of the Bible interpretation workshop at the 8th anniversary of Covenant BP Church of India in early July 2013 and also for the participants at the Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures Seminar on the Art and Science of Understanding the Bible.

Studying and meditating on the Bible is a Christian duty, a joy and a sacred discipline and it is needful for believers to know some basic principles in interpreting the Bible correctly, lest we get it wrong and be misled from the true meaning of the biblical text altogether, with disastrous consequences. There is also an article on how to read books profitably, as many today are enthralled by the Cyber world of virtual games and movies and the good habit of reading sound Christian books is sadly on the decline.

There is even a section on practical tips to study effectively for many of our students who are going through the academic pursuit of an exacting educational curriculum today in Singapore and beyond.

It is our prayer that this booklet will enthuse and arouse a greater spiritual interest in the systematic examination and application of the inspired and sufficient Word of God (and good books and studying habits) that is so necessary to the spiritual vitality and health of every believer, covenant family and church.

May the Lord be glorified and saints be edified in the knowledge of the Word.

*Jack Sin*



## How to Study the BIBLE Profitably



### Introduction

From the very beginning, Christianity was and is a **religion with a book** (Gresham Machen, *The New Testament, An Introduction to its History and Literature*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1976, 13). It was revered and read by devout men of the day. The Jews based their entire life upon the Old Testament. It was the sum and substance of education and the supreme judge in every controversy to them. The Christians consider the Old and New Testament to be the **ultimate and sufficient authority and rule of faith and practice for their daily Christian life**. The cry of the Protestant Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was *Sola Scriptura*. The 66 books of the Bible, which are also called the canon (the rule) are the inerrant, infallible, perspicuous, verbally and plerarily inspired Word of God, which is kept pure for us today (2 Peter 1:20, 21; Isaiah 40:8). The uniqueness and coherence of Scripture, despite its diversity, is simply astounding. The Scriptures were written over a 1,500 year span, over 40 generations written by 40 authors from

all walks of life. They were written in different places at different moods on three continents. Written in three languages; Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic, with its subject matter covering many controversial subjects, yet it has an amazing harmony and theme, "God's Redemption of Man" (Josh McDowell, *Guide to Understanding Your Bible*, Here's Life Publisher, 1982, 4). The veracity and authenticity of the Holy Scriptures is attested by its **internal and external consistency and its amazing accuracy with the fulfilment of the prophecies** that are found in this peerless book. The authority of the Scriptures is clearly stated in the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chap 7, Part IV.

**The authority of the Holy Scriptures**, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or Church, but **wholly upon God** (who is truth itself), **the author** thereof; and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God (2 Peter 1:19, 21; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; 1 Thessalonians 2:13).

### The Goal of Bible Study

The good example of Ezra is given clearly for us in Ezra 7:10 (the motto of Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures and my life verse) says, "*For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments.*" The order is important here; to study, then to apply or do and finally to teach. Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*" and Jeremiah 15:16 says, "*Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts.*"

What do you consider to be the ultimate objective of Bible Study, either personally or corporately as a Bible Study group, in Neighbourhood Bible Class, Sunday School or Church? The final

goal of any Bible Study endeavour should not be just mere intellectual knowledge or fellowship or for the sake of interpretation alone, but a practical appreciation and experiential application of it in our lives to the glory of God. In other words, the ultimate goal of Bible Study is a changed life in the will of God. What does this mean to me today? Many of the practical insights that one learns from the Scriptures come from our daily Quiet Time or devotion, a personal Bible Study programme when one meditates on certain passages for a certain period per day. It must be said here also that a meaningful Bible Study is a laborious and vigorous task. It requires honest hard work to dig, delve and search out the deep gems and treasure of God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15). There are no short cuts to a meaningful exercise of the study of the word. We have to use the stairs of diligence and then reap and enjoy the delights of understanding the eternal truths of God (Jeremiah 15:16; Psalm 119:105).

The method that we teach here is the literal method, or what is commonly called the **Grammatical-Historical Method**. The Grammatical-Historical method teaches that we should interpret Scripture by taking into consideration the contextual background of the passage, the grammatical rules in the uses of the words, and the historical setting in which they were written. The literal method, therefore, only allows for Scripture to interpret Scripture. It is an old method that is time tested and is the sound method in which one can interpret the Scriptures accurately (2 Timothy 2:15).

If a word or words are used in a figure of speech, (i.e. parables, metaphor, similes, riddles, hyperbole, etc.) then that figure needs to be identified and understood. We need to determine the usage, the context and the purpose of its use. As a diligent student of the Word, we are to carefully study and examine the figure of speech for the purpose of discovering and learning the truth that is taught

there. The study of figures of speech in the Bible is relevant and important and the Bible is written with it in conjunction with the literal understanding of the study of a passage of Scripture. Some content may require a limited allegorical approach to the Bible to have a correct and proper interpretation of the meaning of the particular text (i.e. often in positions of the poetic or prophetic books or the book of Revelation).

### The Role of the Holy Spirit



We cannot study the word of God in our own depraved minds without the help and illuminating work of the blessed Holy Spirit.

Ron Rhodes and Richard Anthony quip below on the work of the Holy Spirit,

“Scripture tells us that we are to rely on the Holy Spirit's illumination to gain insights into the meaning and application of Scripture (John 16:12-15, 1 Corinthians 2:9-11). It is the Holy Spirit's work to throw light upon the Word of God so that the believer can assent to the meaning intended and act on it. The Holy Spirit, as the "Spirit of truth" (John 16:13), guides us so that "we may understand what God has freely given us" (1 Corinthians 2:12). This is quite logical: full comprehension of the Word of God is impossible without prayerful dependence on the Spirit of God, for He who inspired the Word (2 Peter 1:21) is also its supreme interpreter.”

Illumination is necessary because man's mind has been darkened through sin (Romans 1:21), preventing him from properly understanding God's Word. Human beings cannot understand God's Word apart from God's divine power (Ephesians 4:18). This aspect

of the Holy Spirit's ministry operates within the sphere of man's rational capacity, which God Himself gave man (Genesis 2-3). Illumination comes to the 'minds' of God's people - not to some non-rational faculty like our 'emotions' or our 'feelings'.

The ministry of the Holy Spirit in interpretation does not mean interpreters can ignore common sense and logic. Since the Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth" (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13), He does not teach concepts that fail to meet the tests of truth. In other words, **"the Holy Spirit doesn't guide into interpretations that contradict each other or fail to have logical, internal consistency."**

(See <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/8-rules.html>)

It is instructive to note here that the Bible, as the infallible Word of God, cannot contradict itself. No teaching can be right if it creates contradictions with the clear teaching of other scriptures. We must not take the position that there are contradictions in the veritable Word of God, but, if we are faced with an apparent contradiction or so called error, we are to study it carefully by the wisdom of God and to continue to work at it until we understand that the Word of God fits together coherently. Patience, prayer and diligent research and study are needful here, in handling the Word faithfully and respectfully.

### **Helpful Pointers to Bible Interpretation**

There are generally three pointers that are used by Christians and they are :

1. **Observation** : Study the biblical facts; be attentive to notice details and sift out the important facts from the incidentals (See)
2. **Interpretation** : Understanding the biblical facts; we need to

make sense out of the facts in their proper context and get the right meaning out of them correctly (Learn)

3. **Application** : Knowing and practising the biblical facts are two different things. The most important element is to demonstrate or to apply the biblical truth which is our purpose for studying the word (Do)

A good principle is this : if the plain sense of the Bible makes common sense, seek no other sense. If it does not, then, look out for the figures of speech and interpret them correctly and in their proper context and meaning. Hank Hanegraaff came up with the acrostic, L-I-G-H-T-S in the study of the Word of God which stands for : Literal Interpretation, Illumination by the Holy Spirit, Grammatical Principles, Historical Context, Teaching Ministry, Scriptural Harmony (see <http://www.equip.org/articles/principles-of-biblical-interpretation/>). We will consider the following 5C's in this spiritual exercise.

### **Content**

There is direct relationship between the immediate content and the spiritual meaning. The actual content of a passage is the raw material, the database with which you will interpret the text. Observe and scrutinise every word, phrase, conjunction, preposition, verb, noun, adverb and the structure of sentences, literary form and ask the 5W's (i.e. Why, When, Where, Who and What) and 1H (How). Look for things that are emphasised, repeated, related, alike, unlike (antithesis or ironies) etc. (E.g. see Proverbs 4:22-25 on the different parts of the body, Psalm 136 on the mercy of God and 2 Corinthians 6:10-18 on the different pairs of opposites).



## Context

The context of a text or verse refers to its setting within a larger portion of Scripture. It refers to the verses or statements that occur before (i.e. check out the etymology of it) and after the text. This would include the paragraphs of word, the chapter and the verses related to it. The situation surrounding the text is relevant in understanding its meaning. The writers of Scripture wrote in the environment in which they lived and this is why knowing the background, culture and current situation of the Scripture passage is necessary to interpreting scripture. The content can refer to that which is preceding or after the text given. So do not only read the stipulated passage given to you, read before and beyond what you have to in order to fully understand the context of the passage.

**Without a proper understanding of the context, our interpretation of the passage can be erroneous.**

For example, do you know that the Bible teaches us that there is no God? Technically, this is true but I did not tell you the context and that is; "The fool has said in his heart there is no God" (Psalm 53:1; Psalm 14:1). Watch out for these five kinds of context. Figures of speech like metaphors, parables, hyperboles, synecdoche, types, similes, allegories, personification, etc. The phrase, as patient as Job or as wise as Solomon is a simile and the trees shall clap their hands is a good example of personification (i.e. giving life to non human objects). A parable is an ex-



tended metaphor often with various points of reference. The use of the phrase if I "speak with tongues of angels" in 1 Corinthians 13:1 is an example of an exaggeration or hyperbole.

**Examples include the following :**

### Literary Context

What is the genre or type of passage you are reading? Is it narrative (Kings) or poetic (Psalms) or prophetic (Isaiah) or apocalyptic (Revelation)? Some background and word study are also important. Understanding the original languages in Greek and Hebrew is an advantage though not a must. For example, the word 'gymnazo' in 1 Timothy 4:7 reminds us of the vigorous and strenuous effort that we should put in developing holiness. (Note that the book, Song of Solomon is different from the Book of Acts as it is a poetic vs. narrative genre).

### Historical Context

Every event has its place in a certain time dimension. Is there an important historical fact or events preceding the passage? For example, to understand Jeremiah and his writing of the book of Jeremiah, we need to know that he preached to the Israelites during the reign of 5 kings and the fall of Judah into the Babylonian captivity for 70 years and this will help us to appreciate the sentiments of the prophet better.

### Cultural Context

What are the social norms and cultural distinctives at that time? To appreciate why the prophet Isaiah emphasised and modest dressing for the ladies, we are to know that prostitutes and immoral women would parade on the streets and as believers, we are to be different from them. Consider the ladies wearing a veil in Corinth, or Paul saying,

give one another a holy kiss or the washing of the feet of weary travellers as was practiced in the first century is a kind of oriental hospitality. To fully understand the Bible, some familiarity with the Jewish language, (Hebrew) beliefs, and cultural practices and mores at the time is helpful. Or else some of terms, statements or phrases, and sayings may have little or even no sense to us today.

### **Geographical Context**

Can you place the physical location to which the scripture text refers? What are the salient topographical features, i.e. rivers, (Jordan) seas, (Dead Sea) distance, landscape, mountain (i.e. Mt Carmel). When you read Joshua 1, you can see the geographical demarcation of the boundaries of the land of Israel and take the example of the prophet Elijah running all the way from Mount Carmel to Beersheba which is more than 300 kms in 2 King 19:1-2 (i.e. that is why the Lord allowed Elijah to rest and to eat some food first) or the long route of the Exodus journey through the wilderness by the Israelites to the Promised Land).

### **Theological Context**

Is there a doctrinal basis in this text that will influence our understanding of the whole passage? That is important for us to get to its meaning correctly. For example, when we read 1 John 4 and his strong words of admonition, we note the theological implications of the false teachings of Gnosticism (secret esoteric knowledge and dualism) and Docetism (i.e. matter is evil) in the first century that John was defending against (consider also the doctrine of election in Romans 8:29-39 and justification by faith in Romans 3 which affect the understanding of progressive sanctification in Romans 12:1 and beyond).

### **Comparison**

Scripture corroborates Scripture (Westminster Confession of Faith, Part IX).

The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the **Scripture itself** and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly (2 Peter 1:20, 21; Acts 15:15, 16).

**The most accurate interpreter of Scripture is Scripture itself.** Someone once said that you very rarely have to go outside of the Scripture to interpret Scripture. The entire canon has only one real author, the Holy Spirit and the Holy Writ is interpreted in a coherent whole. Look at other cross references that are relevant to comment on and complement the text that you are dealing with. For example, to understand Abraham's faith in the Lord in the sacrifice of Isaac, it would be necessary to look into Romans 4:16-24 and Hebrews 11:8-19, in addition to Genesis 22:1-14. Check out also both Kings and Chronicles for cross reference on the different kings during the Divided Kingdom period. To understand David's feelings and response after the sin with Bathsheba in 2 Samuel 11, it is best to read the penitential Psalms of Psalm 32 and 51. Moving to the New Testament, the harmonisation of the four gospels gives a more comprehensive study of the life and teachings of Christ.

### **Culture**

A careful understanding of the socio-cultural context of the times mentioned in that particular text is vital to an accurate interpretation of Scriptures. To understand the book of Daniel better, it is helpful to know the Babylonian culture at that time (i.e. its idolatry and polytheistic practices with food offered to idols). Consider as an illustration by turning to Ruth 1:1-18 and the use of the term

“kinsman redeemer.” The story of Ruth is famous for its import of love and courage shown by a young woman for a character named Boaz. But most people overlook the fact that the story takes place during the period of the Judges, one of the darkest periods in the Old Testament History. In Judges 21:25, we discover that the nation is in a cesspool of iniquity as every man did what was right in his own eyes. This book has to do with God’s covenantal plan of redemption. In the midst of the sins of Israel, the rays of God’s salvation shone on a Gentile Moabitess and later selected her to be an ancestor of King David and more importantly of the Greater David who was to come in the fullness of time which is Christ Jesus our Lord. Keep a sharp lookout for the historical and cultural context of the texts and study them with its proper usage and relevant application.

### Consultation

Consultation involves the use of primary or secondary resources like concordances, commentaries, dictionaries and atlases. They can shed light on the text that will help you make more sense out of what you are looking at, but one word of caution. **Never forget the order, first seek the text of Scripture, then these secondary sources or helps.** To go directly to the secondary sources without consulting the Bible is unhelpful and does not honour and give the Word of God its rightful priority and place. There are generally eight helpful tools that are given below.

- Concordances: Strong’s and Young’s Concordances, etc.
- Bible Dictionaries: The New Bible Dictionary, Hastings Dictionary, Illustrated Bible Dictionary.
- Bible Handbooks: Eerdman’s Handbook to the Bible.
- Atlases: Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas, Moody Atlas.
- Bible Commentaries: Matthew Henry, Calvin’s, Eerdman’s Bible Commentary, Preacher’s Homiletics, Tyndale,

Expositors, Matthew Poole, Evangelical Commentary on the Bible.

- Study Bibles – Thomson Chain, Defenders, Reformation, Geneva, The Parallel KJV Commentary Bible.
- Encyclopedias – Baker Encyclopaedia of the Bible, etc.
- Additional Resources: Willmington Guide, Archaeology Reviews, relevant reference books of the Bible, theological journals and Evangelical Times
- Relevant books on the subject under study.

Be prepared to invest in some of these resources (see Maranatha Resource Ministry) if you are serious about studying the Bible. For a start, a good study Bible like the Defender’s Bible, Parallel KJV Bible or the Matthew Henry or Geneva Study Bible will be a great help for all serious students of the word (and use it for life). I have about 4,000 books in my personal library for my reference on all the major themes of the Bible and other biblical aids although now, most of them are available in an electronic format. The better half of knowledge is knowing where to find it. You never know when you will need that book and have your library properly organised as well along different theological themes or genres. Always study the Bible with a pen or pencil to jot down salient points learnt along the way on the borders of the Bible.

Remember short notes are better than long memories (Acts 17:11). Someone once quipped ‘Dirty Bible, Clean Christian’. There is some truth in it.

On the importance of the analogy of scripture to determine a doctrine, Cooper P Abrams adds this meaningfully,

“No doctrine should be built on only one passage or verse of Scripture. Any true doctrine of God will be found in many places in the Bible. The Mormons falsely base their doctrine of baptisms for the dead on only one obscure verse in the Bible (1 Corinthians 15:29). No where else is the practice even mentioned. If you can-

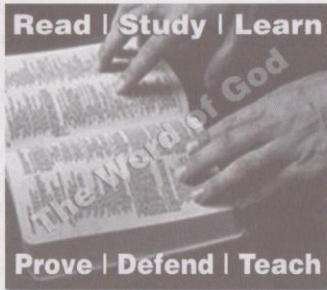


not find other places in the Bible that teach the doctrine, this should alert you to a problem. If the supposed doctrine is only found in one place you should seek to find out why. In every case you will discover that what is being taught is not a doctrine. To arrive at the correct understanding of a teaching (doctrine) in Scripture you must study all related texts and then put them together. Until you do this, it is difficult to know that you have all the truth revealed on a particular subject. Thus, using this holistic view of the Bible the interpreter will not go astray.”

### Conclusion

Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16, 17 that there is one thing that will thoroughly equip us for every good work and that is the inspired sacred Scriptures. In another section he told Timothy to be diligent to study the Scriptures as a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (2 Timothy 2:15). Ezra has the right principles in Bible Study and in the right order and sequence as well. The motto of Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures for our students when it was incepted in 2009 was “*For Ezra had 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). The Psalmist calls God’s word a Lamp unto his feet and a Light unto his path (Psalm 119:105). The Word of God is likened to a Sword (Hebrews 5:12, 13). Jesus says in John 8:31, if we continue in His Word, we are His disciples indeed.

Luke says of the Berean Christians in Acts 17:11, that they received the Word with readiness of mind and searched the Scrip-



tures daily to see if those things taught by the Apostle Paul were so. Do you check back with the Bible on what you read in other books to see if they are consistent with Scriptures? What place and priority has the Word of God in your life now? Do you begin the day with the reading of the Bible and prayer (Psalm 5:3)?

To grow in your faith and be more like Christ, study, meditate, memorise and apply His Word in your life daily (Joshua 1:8; Revelation 1:3). May this informative study or booklet be a turning point in your life to give a firm commitment to diligent examination of the sufficient, inspired, authoritative and perspicuous Word of God, kept pure through the ages. Study it well to the spiritual nourishment and for the health of your soul. Note the 6 practical tips below.

### The Principles of Effective Bible Study

1. **Read** the passage objectively and clearly (at least twice).
2. **Reflect** on your life meditatively.
3. **Realise** the principle learnt practically.
4. **Respond** to the message / lesson learnt personally.
5. **Resolve** to act soberly.
6. **Recollect** the changes/results joyfully.

Finally, consider this succinct statement below (adapted) :

To know God as far as He can be known  
is the noblest aim of the human understanding.  
To serve Him is the most honourable  
and delightful purpose to which we  
can devote our time and talents.  
To love Him is the most worthy  
exercise of our affections.

Jack Sin

*How to Study the Bible Profitably*

(Works consulted include The King James Parallel Study Bible (Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1994 and Gresham Machen, *The New Testament, An Introduction to its History and Literature*, Banner of Truth Trust, 1976, Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics, Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*, 2007, <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/8-rules.html> and <http://bible-truth.org/Principles.htm> and <http://www.truthortradition.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=68>)

**Definitions**

*Allegory.* Taking the literal meaning of a story, discourse, or something written and giving it another spiritualized or non literal meaning.

*Analogy.* Similarity between things partial resemblance. Comparing something point by point with something else noting its similarity. As applied to Bible study, it means the scriptures are alike and do not contradict each other.

*Context.* The parts of a book, passage or verse, which shows the whole situation and relevant environment in which it is found.

*Expository.* Setting forth facts, ideas, and an explanation from a detailed examination of a passage.

*Exegesis.* Critical analysis or interpretation which seeks the meaning from the passage and does not impose meaning on the passage.

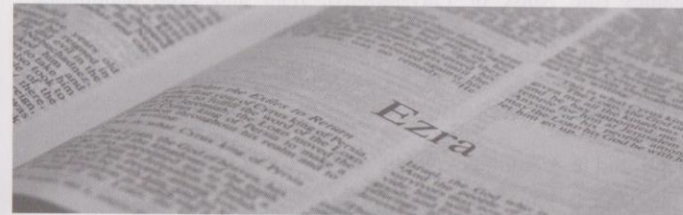
*Interpretation.* To arrive at the original meaning the writer intended when he penned the words.

*Hermeneutics.* The science of interpreting written language to derive the original meaning of the author.

*Syntax.* Syntax is the study of the word in its grammatical setting showing it in relation to other words.

*For Ezra had 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



## The Discipline of Fruitful Reading of Edifying

### Introduction

Jeremiah 15:16 says,

*Thy words were found, and I did eat them;  
and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for  
I am called by thy name,  
O LORD God of hosts.*

**To some extent, you are exactly what you are except for the books you read, the people you meet and the places you go to** (and what the Holy Spirit does in your life). Think about it. Reading as a good habit is on the decline among the younger generation in the post modern era as it is slowly substituted by the addictive watching of TV, surfing the net (Youtube), playing computer games (the Xbox or Playstations), iPad and even handphome games, social media like Facebook, Twitter, or the excessive use of SMS or WhatsApp.

### The Case for Reading

Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:13,

*'The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus,  
when thou comest, bring with thee,  
and the books, but especially the parchments.'*

**Readers are leaders and they are generally far better equipped in life and in the service of the Lord as effective Christians**, teachers, in the Christian Education Department, Neighbourhood Bible Class, fellowships or any department of the church. They will be more knowledgeable and their minds are far more active minds throughout their lives. Intelligence and mental

## Christian Books

energy will be stimulated and will continue growing, bright and sharp into a ripe old age (combating dementia). **Regular reading enlarges the ability to think, and increases our powers of expression.** Avid readers of Christian books are in a better position to understand, withstand, defend and expose false teachings so that they do not fall prey to the avalanche of spiritual errors of these last perilous days. **The word of God well read is an anchor in the lives of the elect and the church** (Psalm 119:105). Christian reading boosts spiritual discernment and application too. Readers of good books are greatly helped by the experiences of others (i.e. good authors). As authors share deep trials and their barren times, readers are given a clearer view of how God deals with His people. This sees them through to victory in life's trials and tribulations by reading these experiences.

### The Benefits of Disciplined Reading

It has been said that disciplined and avid readers generally have these advantages :

1. Know more, write better and can concentrate better.
2. Are generally able to appreciate and understand other themes and subjects.
3. Have a perspicuous mind in processing new information (i.e. read Chinese books as well to improve your Mandarin).
4. Have a better command of the language, vocabulary and better expressions in their speech and conversations with others.

5. Have more interest to do well in a wide variety of other subjects generally.
6. Develop an ability to understand events and people better.
7. Acquire the ability to sift through information faster and to understand how key facts can fit into a whole.
8. Tend to be more flexible and agile in their mental capacity and have more creative thoughts.
9. Able to handle interpersonal communication and relationships better and with the easy availability of information in the world today in both book and ebooks, avid readers can stay well informed with relative ease.

### **Growing a Personal Library**

I enjoy reading good edifying books and have a personal library of about 4,000 books and other publications (and Angie, my wife has about 500 books). I will often invest in a good Christian book for the nourishment of the soul, just like how one would do in getting good food for the physical health of our bodies. We

have to encourage people especially children and youths, to read more too (do not be engrossed with just You Tube videos, computer games, novels and romantic stories only). Beware of unedifying books like Harry Potter series or Mr. Midnight for children.

I like to give a good relevant Christian book to our church members and regular visitors for their birthdays and pray that it will be a blessing to their souls as they read and apply them and perhaps one day share the contents or teach others also. Ezra 7:10 which says,



*'For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments'* is my life verse since 1992 when I entered into full-time ministry by the higher hand of God.

Paul said in 1 Timothy 4:13,

*"Till I come, give attendance to reading,  
to exhortation, to doctrine."*

To a young pastor who is in the ministry, the veteran Apostle gave a most practical needful advice so that Timothy would be more equipped and prepared for the ministry. In those days they were not thinking about any other literature but the very word of God. This refers to both the private and public reading of scriptures for the edification of the saints. There is something lacking in a Christian or servant of God who is not familiar with the scriptures and does not possess good Christian literature. I must admit that I owe my theological heritage to some godly men who opened great doctrinal and devotional themes to me in print. These have helped to nurture and mould my thinking and appreciation of spiritual things in no small way. It was the writings of Thomas Watson, C. H. Spurgeon, A. W. Pink, J.C. Ryle, Jonathan Edwards, John Owens, Martin Lloyd Jones and many other reformed writers that have given me a deeper comprehension of the word of God and spiritual things.

How then can one develop a good reading habit? I would like to suggest a few things. Firstly, **one must cultivate a disciplined and industrious spirit**. A lot of what goes on in a Christian life is diligence, discipline and determination. You must learn to be disciplined in the way you manage your time and to get the right things done in your life. I would normally mark off for myself about an hour of reading Bible or a good book / article a day if not more. Good planning on what, where and when you would read and when you want to complete it are also important.

Secondly, **have a healthy appetite for spiritual things. Strive to**

**be inquisitive** and grow in practical knowledge of things (1 Timothy 4:7, 8). One of the reasons why I read so much is because I am inquisitive about spiritual things. I have read a book entitled *The Puritan Reformed Spirituality* by Joel Beeke and benefited from it. I have read quite a few books on church history because I am interested to know what happened in the past and how it has affected the church. I will also read books on the Covenants, Old Testament, New Testament, Apologetics, Biblical Counseling, Reformation, Eschatology and Soteriology because I am keen on knowing these important and practical doctrinal themes. Cultivate a healthy sense of curiosity or inquisitiveness for spiritual things. **Search, delve, scrutinize, dig deeply to find gems and teachings out of God's Holy Word and good books.**

Thirdly, if you can afford it, **start a small library in your house.** Start visiting Christian bookstores, investing in good Christian books. Francis Bacon says, "Reading maketh a Full Man, Writing an Exact Man." It is worthwhile and prudent if we can purchase some good books for our own edification and preparation to serve the Lord in the work of preaching and teaching. I have always felt that books have a multiplier effect. It not only benefits the one who reads it but also the people who will be blessed as a result of you applying and sharing of what you learn from the edifying habit of reading.



### Tips on Effectual Reading

Consider the following to read more effectively :

1. **Consider the place, pace and time of the day that suits you best** (i.e. one book a month or more in the morning or night time).

2. **Pray first for a clear mind and read and think carefully.** Let good Christian books give you the food for thought. Assess critically what you read and analyse the content. Think and muse it over in your spare moments. Is it true and relevant or is there something to avoid? Write down your thoughts, if any, in a book when you learn a new phrase, fact or word and use it the next time you can (i.e. how one may improve his vocabulary).

3. **Read and talk about it.** Share with others the impressions that you have about the book and make recommendations verbally on books to others. Let them share with you their thoughts as well. This will greatly enrich edifying spiritual conversation and it is one of the best ways to test and share your knowledge.

4. **Read and write about it and be challenged.** Let a good Christian biography like William Carey, Adoniram Judson or David Brainerd fire you up and write a review or summary of it and give credit to the author when credit is due. Let a sound doctrinal book (i.e. on Christology or Soteriology or the second coming of Christ) lead you to understand God better (i.e. William Guthrie, *The Christian's Great Interest*). **Let a devotional book stir up self-examination and a greater consecration and service to Christ.**



5. **Read systematically and widely.** Do not read only one genre of book (e.g. fiction or science only) so that your knowledge is not lopsided. Read a full range of vital topics in theology, church history, Old Testament or New Testament books on eschatology, Christian education, apologetics, Christian ethics, prayer, worship, economics, world events, youth issues or family matters, marriage etc. Read the local newspapers and Newsweek or Time Magazine if possible.

6. **Read always with a pen or pencil to underline, make remarks or write down key points and lessons learnt.** Short notes are better than long memories. Always have a book 'on the go'. However little time you may have to spare in any week, try to read even if it is only a few pages. Once formed, the reading habit will stay with you with constant discipline and practice (1 Timothy 4:13).

7. Your first priority throughout life is to read, study, masticate, meditate and apply God's Word. **Other types of reading must never replace Bible reading time.** Only the Word is infallible and authoritative, and all other books are good only as they promote Bible understanding and sound application and the use of true knowledge (2 Timothy 2:15).

**Reading is a spiritual and mental discipline.** Let us resolve to read the Bible daily and to read at least one Christian book per 1-3 months (i.e. with half an hour a day, you will finish reading a book very soon and be blessed by its content).



John in Revelation 1:3 says,

*'Blessed is he that readeth,  
and they that hear the words of this prophecy,  
and keep those things which are written therein:  
for the time is at hand.'*

I have read a few books recently, namely by Robert W. Pazimo on "Foundational Issues in Christian Education", "John Owen and Family Religion" by Matthew Henry and benefitted much from them. Angie Sin has read "God's Priorities for Today's Women,"

and she shared with me some of the lessons learnt from it.

For starters, I would recommend you to read or include in your personal library among others the following and this is not meant to be exhaustive (**the better half of knowledge is knowing where to find it**) :

- "Biblical Creationism" by Henry M. Morris
- "The Attributes of God" by A.W. Pink
- "Welcome to the Reformed Church" by Daniel Hyde
- "Life In Thy Father's House" by Wayne Mack and Dave Swavely
- "Practical Religion" by J.C. Ryle
- "Your Family, God's Way" by Wayne Mack,
- "How to Continue the Christian Life" by George Sweeting
- "The Happiness of Heaven" by Maurice Roberts
- "The Mystery of the Holy Spirit" by RC Sproul
- "Why Believe The Bible?" by John MacArthur
- "Major Points from the Minor Prophets" by John Blanchard
- "A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith" by Robert Raymond
- "Disciplines of a Godly Man" by R. Kent Hughes
- "The Doctrine of Repentance" by Thomas Watson
- "God Centered Evangelism" by R.B. Kuiper

The Apostle Paul asked for the Old Testament manuscripts to read when he was in a Roman prison before his execution in AD 67-68 by Emperor Nero as recorded in 2 Timothy 4:13 which says, 'The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.'

### **Books and Spiritual Burdens**

**We are greatly impoverished today by a profound indifference to the diligent reading of good books.** 2 Timothy 3:15 says, 'And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in

*Christ Jesus.* If we love God, we should be interested in reading God's word and listening to the exposition of it on the Sabbath when His word is preached to us. Let us engage in personal reading of the Bible, good Christian books, Christian fellowship and daily prayer as well.

I have been greatly challenged by reading the puritans' deep burden for fervent, persevering, intercessory prayer, family outreach, their holiness, their salvation, their diligent meditation of the word, and the burden for the saving of souls (read *Meet the Puritans or Puritan Reformed Spirituality* by Joel Beeke).

2 Corinthians 1:11 says,

*'Ye also helping together by prayer for us,  
that for the gift bestowed upon us by  
the means of many persons  
thanks may be given by many on our behalf.'*

Their books challenge me to pray and serve more, to fear God and to visit homes to encourage, comfort, care for, catechize or evangelise the young and old with the gospel and the word to grow in the knowledge of God. Should we not be burdened in our hearts to reach out to souls while the Lord tarries in these last days?

### **Conclusion**

Finally, we need to humbly seek the Lord's help to consciously discipline ourselves to read more of the Bible first, followed by good Christian books, to be more prayerful each year, more fervent for the Lord's cause in faithful stewardship, reverential worship, gospel missions and evangelistic outreach, more committed to the sharing and effectual practice of His Holy Word, and not just be hearers only but doers also (James 1:22).

*Jack Sin*

*Then I said, I will not make mention of him,  
nor speak any more in his name.  
But his word was in mine heart  
as a burning fire shut up in my bones,  
and I was weary with forbearing,  
and I could not stay.*

**Jeremiah 20:9**

*For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word  
of righteousness: for he is a babe.  
But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full  
age, even those who by reason of use have their  
senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

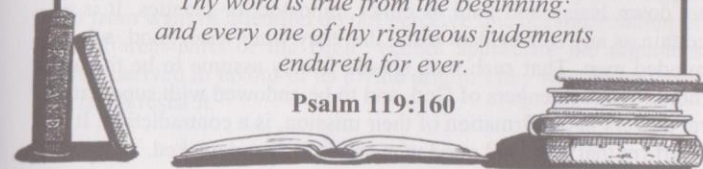
**Hebrews 5:13-14**

*Take heed unto thyself,  
and unto the doctrine;  
continue in them:  
for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself,  
and them that hear thee.*

**1 Timothy 4:16**

*Thy word is true from the beginning:  
and every one of thy righteous judgments  
endureth for ever.*

**Psalms 119:160**



## **A High View of the Bible and of God**

Charles Hodge (1797-1878) the late-Presbyterian minister, theologian, and seminary professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, in his *Systematic Theology* lays out seven reasons why the Bible must be received as the only Word of God :



“Admitting the possibility and even the necessity of a supernatural revelation, has such a revelation actually been made? This, the Deistical Rationalist denies, and the Christian affirms. He confidently refers to the Bible as containing such a revelation, and maintains that its claims are authenticated by an amount of evidence which renders unbelief unreasonable and criminal.”

1. In the first place, its authors claim to be the messengers of God, to speak by His authority and in His name, so that what they teach is to be received not on the authority of the writers themselves, nor on the grounds of the inherent evidence in the nature of the truths communicated, but upon the authority of God. It is He who affirms what the sacred writers teach. This claim must be admitted, or the sacred writers must be regarded as fanatics or impostors. It is absolutely certain that they were neither. It would be no more irrational to pronounce Homer and Newton idiots, than to set down Isaiah and Paul as either impostors or fanatics. It is as certain as any self-evident truth, that they were wise, good, sober-minded men. That such men should falsely assume to be the authoritative messengers of God, and to be endowed with supernatural powers in confirmation of their mission, is a contradiction. It is to affirm that wise and good men are foolish and wicked.

2. The Bible contains nothing inconsistent with the claim of its authors to divine authority as teachers. It contains nothing impossible, nothing absurd, nothing immoral, nothing inconsistent with any well-authenticated truth. This itself is nearly miraculous, considering the circumstances under which the different portions of the Scriptures were written.

3. More than this, the Bible reveals truths of the highest order, not elsewhere made known. Truths which meet the most urgent necessities of our nature; which solve the problems which reason has never been able to solve. It recognizes and authenticates all the facts of consciousness, all the truths which our moral and religious nature involve, and which we recognize as true as soon as they are presented. It has the same adaptation to the soul that the atmosphere has to the lungs, or the solar influences to the earth on which we live. And what the earth would be without those influences, is, in point of fact, what the soul is without knowledge of the truths which we derive solely from the Bible.

4. The several books of which the Scriptures are composed were written by some fifty different authors living in the course of fifteen hundred years and yet they are found to be an organic whole, the product of one mind. They are as clearly a development as the oak from the acorn. The gospels and epistles are but the expansion, fulfilment, the culmination of the protevangelium, “The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head,” as uttered to our first parents (Genesis 3:15). All that intervenes is to the New Testament what the roots, stem, branches, and foliage of the tree are to the fruit. No one book of Scripture can be understood by itself, any more than any one part of a tree or member of the body can be understood without reference to the whole of which it is a part. Those who from want of attention do not perceive this organic relation of the different parts of the Bible, cannot appreciate the argument thence derived in favour of its divine origin. They who do perceive it, cannot resist it.



5. God bears witness to the divine authority of the Scriptures by signs and wonders, and divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost. The leading events recorded in the New Testament were predicted in the Old. Of this any man may satisfy himself by a comparison of the two. The coincidence between the prophecies and the fulfilment admits of no rational solution, except that the Bible is the work of God; or, that holy men of old spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. The miracles recorded in the Scriptures are historical events, which are not only entitled to be received on the same testimony which authenticates other facts of history, but they are so implicated with the whole structure of the New Testament, that they cannot be denied without rejecting the whole gospel, which rejection involves the denial of the best authenticated facts in the history of the world.

### **Argument from the Effects of the Gospel**

Besides this external supernatural testimony, the Bible is everywhere attended by "the demonstration of the Spirit," which gives to its doctrines the clearness of self-evident truths, and the authority of the voice of God; analogous to the authority of the moral law for the natural conscience.

6. The Bible ever has been and still is, a power in the world. It has determined the course of history. It has overthrown false religion wherever it is known. It is the parent of modern civilization. It is the only guarantee of social order, of virtue, and of human rights and liberty. Its effects cannot be rationally accounted for upon any other hypothesis than that it is what it claims to be, "The Word of God."

7. It makes known the person, work, the acts, and words of Christ, who is the clearest revelation of God ever made to man. He is the manifested God. His words were the words of God. His acts were

the acts of God. His voice is the voice of God, and He said, "*The Scripture cannot be broken*" (John 10:35). If any man refuse to recognize him as the Son of God, as the infallible teacher, and only Saviour of men, nothing can be said save what the Apostle says,

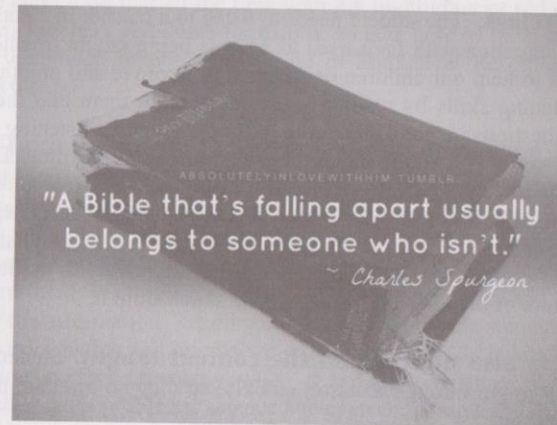
*"If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."*

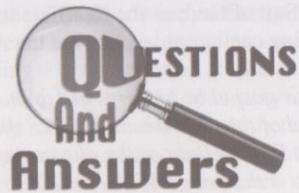
2 Corinthians 4:3, 4, 6

(See Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* [edited by Edward N. Gross], P & R Publishing, 1997)

<http://www.erictyoung.com/?>

s=Seven+reasons+why+the+Bible+must+be+received+as+the+only+Word+of+God





## QUESTIONS And Answers

**Q : I have many assignments and tests and I am struggling in my studies. How do I develop effective study habits or skills to improve on my studies?**

That is a good question. In life we form habits over time and then they form (or influence) us back in return. It is important to nurture some basic educational habits, in us or in our children to be better students for the Lord and we need the discipline and diligence of the Lord. Consider the following tips :

**1. Listen with your ears and eyes and pay attention during class.** The student needs to listen to a teacher in a class and pay attention with their eyes to what is being taught or said. We need to help our children or students to improve and practice their listening skills by reading short passages to them and then asking questions. A good beginning in proper attentive listening is half the battle won and it should become our habit over time. Do not be distracted by SMS, WhatsApp, Twitter, MSN, computer and games, Facebook or your friends talking to you or even sleeping. One of the keys to improve your study skills is to be quiet and minimize distractions. Be focused and listen attentively to the lesson, lecture or message and you will gain much from it.

**2. Try to also understand the content taught.** Students just want to get through a lesson quickly, so they do not take the

time and energy during the lesson to digest and clarify information in their minds. Take responsibility for yourselves to make sure you understand the previous lesson before moving on to the next topic. Chew and ponder over it and discuss the problems, if any, with the teacher. It is not impossible to learn effectively if we make it a point to practice it diligently.

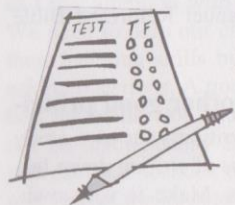
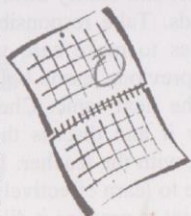


**3. Learn to read quickly but carefully and browse through the chapter title, subtitles or section titles in a book.** Look at charts or graphs used if any, and understand the first few sentences of each paragraph in order to get an idea of the most important information from the lesson. If you can keep the main idea(s) in your mind, it is easier to identify the key points to the lesson that are important to remember. Part of a good studying technique is identifying and narrowing down to what is important to remember and not that which is not important. Note the important points as the teacher emphasises them during the class. I do that all the time with my highlighter or red or black pen. Teachers give hints for exams, so take note of them carefully in your book or notes (as we do in Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures).

**4. Taking good and clear notes is another good principle and practice.** Be responsible for writing your own study notes. Students should go through the process of writing down lesson notes and make their own study notes. Make it your own. Learn to rewrite or rephrase things in order to remember and to learn them. Writing is necessary for a student to learn and remember the information. Reading it out aloud allows the student to hear the information and internalize it. It is a great study habit! Practice makes perfect especially when it comes to writing, doing the Mathematics problems, science and even economics and the Bible.

### 5. Make a plan or schedule for the day or the week and follow it.

When I was a student in National University of Singapore and in Pensacola, if I had a quiz, assignment, test or exam or paper coming up, I would work on it early even before the due date through the night if necessary to get it done well in advance. Procrastination is the thief of time. Try to get the home work done as soon as possible when your mind is still fresh on the subject (DIN or Do It Now or Delay It Not) and not do it only at the last minute. This is helpful and even necessary for us to teach our children or when we give tuition to others. (I was a relief teacher in English in 2 secondary schools in the mid 1980s during my tertiary vacation and spent 10 years teaching in a Bible College from 1997 - 2007). Plan a study schedule and set aside specific days and times for studying (and for leisure, rest, Bible reading and games too). We are more likely to study daily ahead of time instead of waiting till the last moment before the examination, when we get stressed, panicky and worried.



### 6. Give yourself a test or quiz

from time to time to reflect and review the information and write or type the information out in a manner that you can remember. Try to use acrostics or acronyms to help you to remember. For example to remember the lakes of Canada and the USA, I remembered in my

Geography class that you can use HOMES which stands for Huron, Ontario, Michigan, Erie, and Superior. Why do we remember the reformed doctrines of Calvinism easily? It is by using TULIP, (those studying in Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures in DIN) or Do It Now. Note other acrostics too, i.e.

Pauline prison epistles in ECPP i.e. Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians and Philemon and the first 5 books of the Bible - Go Eat Lunch Not Dinner for Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Study the text book or notes over and over again while making your own notes. Then take the test to review the information, and do it again and again on different subjects. Make sacrifices and turn off the TV or computer or iPad and the HP if necessary.

### 7. Revise and reread information often!

Even if there is no test or examination coming up soon, remind yourself to read over each day's lesson and the information from previous lessons frequently. We are to dutifully read our class notes and pay close attention to important details. Read other related books and articles as well to broaden your knowledge of that subject. When I was studying in the Bible college, I used to read my lecture notes or try to memorise my Greek or Hebrew vocabulary and declensions / conjugations in the toilet or the MRT ride, from small cards that I wrote on. Attempt to recall the information from time to time by constant review. Then, when a test or exam comes, you have already started and know and remember some of the important facts! **The three Rs - Remember, review and revise!**

### 8. Ask good questions

(and discuss with other good students and learn from one another) and insist on getting the answers and writing them down. I shared with the Church History class in the Emmanuel Reformed Bible Lectures, that we should not to be afraid to ask good questions for it is a good way to ensure that we understand and grasp the content correctly (and it does not mean that the lecturer has all the answers but he is to find it out if he does not have it). Write down the answers, and I always believe that **short notes are better than**



Q & A

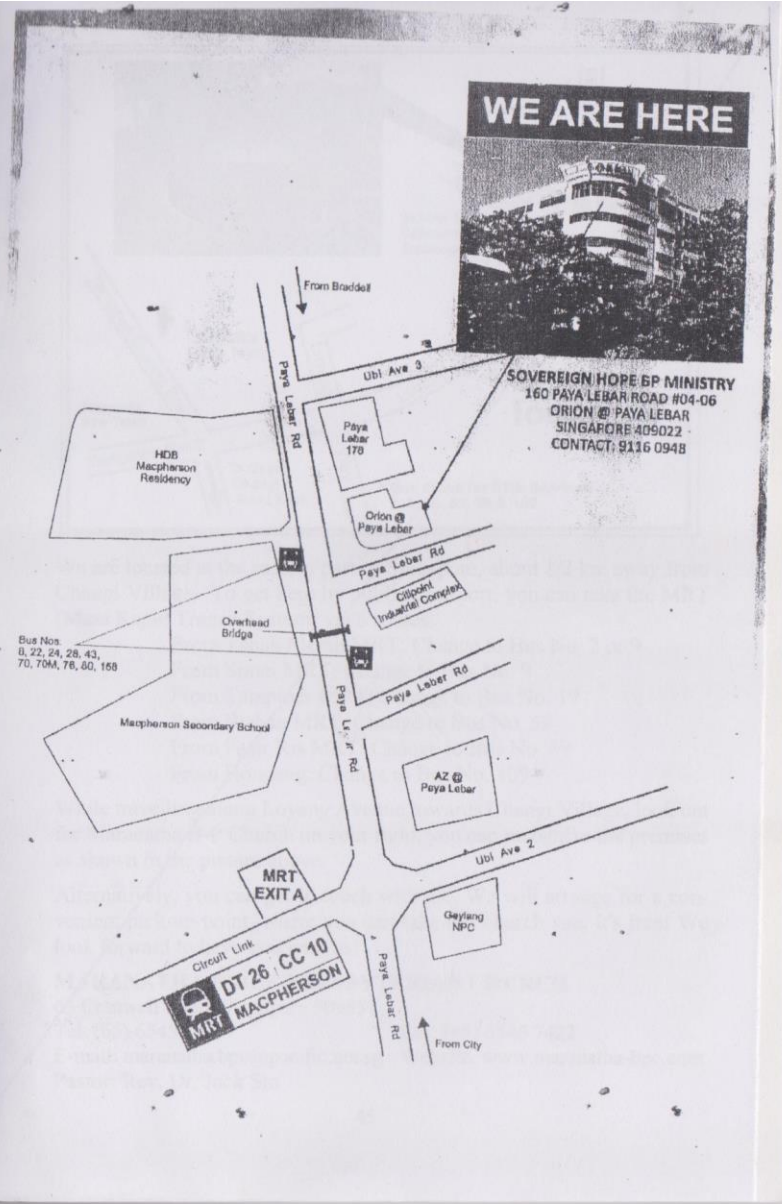
**long memories.** We are all forgetful people and we need help to remember things like prayer items and names (i.e. I cannot remember all the names of the Chinese workers unless I write them down). To err is human, to forgive, divine and I would add, **To forget is also human, to remind, divine.** Thank God for divine reminders as in the Lord's Supper to do it in sober remembrance of Christ's atoning death for us till He comes.

**Conclusion**

Acts 17:11 says, *'These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.'*

Studying, reading, writing and learning from the Word of God is a great privilege and joy from the Lord and not a chore and we can enjoy our studies as it is the will of the Lord. **Laziness is a curse but industry is a blessing from the Lord.** These are just a few tips on how to develop effective studying skills. Learning is for life and I make it a point to read at least one if not a few Christian books a month. Above all, **do not neglect Sabbath worship, prayer and daily devotion of the word of God.** I hope that you are able to use this information to help yourself or others to nurture good studying habits and skills for the Lord! Press on and do not give up. Pray to God for wisdom and diligence and do your part as well to glorify God in your studies as this is our sacred duty and privilege. Grow in your knowledge and seek to use it for God one day and be a more knowledgeable person and a good example to others. Try it! I hope this helps you to be more effective in your studies for the glory of the Lord.

Jack Sin



## The Bible

Where childhood needs a standard  
Or youth a beacon light,  
Where sorrow sighs for comfort  
Or weakness longs for might,  
Bring forth the Holy Bible —  
The Bible! There it stands!  
Resolving all life's problems  
And meeting its demands.

Though sophistry conceal it,  
The Bible! There it Stands!  
Though Pharisees profane it,  
Its influence expands.  
It fills the world with fragrance  
Whose sweetness never cloy;  
It lifts our eyes to Heaven,  
It heightens human joys.

Despised and torn in pieces,  
By infidels decried,  
With thunderbolts of hatred  
The haughty cynics pride —  
All these have railed against it  
In this and other lands;  
Yet dynasties have fallen,  
And still the Bible stands!

To Paradise a highway,  
The Bible! There it stands!  
Its promises unailing,  
Nor grievous its commands.  
It points man to his Saviour,  
The Lover of his soul;  
Salvation is its watchword,  
Eternity its goal!

*James M. Gray*

<http://www.wholesomewords.org/poetry/bible.html>