

Session 1: Study His Word His way.

Jen Wilkin describes in her book *Women of the Word* that she was a pretty faithful reader of the Bible. She could tell you the books of the Bible, she could recite passages long and short that she'd learned in Sunday school or memorized on her own, and she heard preaching her whole life. But she describes to her dismay that one day it hit her – she *knew* a lot about her Bible, but she didn't feel she *understood* her Bible.

Have you ever felt this way? Not sure where to turn when an issue arises or when a friend asks a tough question. Reading your Bible at any time is profitable – God's Word says it is. But to know God's Word, it requires more than just 'reading'; it requires study.

Now, studying the whole Bible seems a daunting task – there's a lot packed in there.

So here's my question – *How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.*

Just like Jen Wilkin writes of in her book, there is hope to know and understand the Bible! It may seem a daunting task, but we just have to take it one verse, one chapter at a time. By studying consistently and systematically, we can study God's Word and understand it – and it will change our lives.

Transition – God gives a lot of guidance on how to study His Word! Let's turn to 2 Corinthians 3:12-18.

Because God gives direction on how to read the Bible, we must study His Word His way.

Pray

1. Prerequisite for Understanding

- **Explanation:** What's the difference between when an unbeliever reads the Bible and when a believer reads the Bible? The believer has a **relationship** with the author.
 - Without salvation, a **veil** is intact. (15-16)
 - In modern day America, we tend to think of the word "veil" as like a bridal veil, where it's light and frilly and you can pretty much see through it. That's not what we're talking about here. "Veil" meant something that concealed, that hid. The unbeliever cannot understand.
 - Without salvation, true spiritual understanding is **impossible**.
- **Illustration:** Have you ever run into someone you love in a place you never expected? Earlier this summer, we got the opportunity to help with Harvest teen rally. We help set up for a bit and head to the first session. As we are getting ready to sit down, Joe Fant comes walking by. You know what happened when I saw Joe? Well, first I looked for his wife, obviously. 😊 But I got so excited that I started to tear up as we went to hug him and catch up. Here's the thing – strangers see Joe and Becky Fant all of the time, so why was it anything special? Because we have a *special relationship* them that makes them mean more to us than strangers walking by.
- **Application:** Do you have a *relationship* with God? Without salvation, understanding is hidden from us. While unbelievers can have an appreciation for principles or certain passages of the Bible, it doesn't – *it can't* – touch their minds, hearts, and lives as it does believers. If you've read and read and read your Bible and have

never gained understanding or a warm heart towards God, examine yourself.

2. Mode for Understanding – “beholding the glory of the Lord”

- **Explanation:** “Beholding” – seems that it is from the same root as the word that would be translated as “mirror.” In fact, the King James Version even translates this as “beholding as in a glass.” By the context, we understand that this “beholding” is more than just a glance. It’s intent – so much so that it even results in action.
- **Illustration:** Now for the most part, as women we understand this, right? Take a junior high boy. Do you know what he does in the morning? Perhaps the most time he spends looking at the mirror in the morning is the glance he gets as he brushes his teeth...if he brushes his teeth. As women, young or old, this seems ridiculous. When we look in the mirror with purpose. We look to see if we’re having a good or bad hair day. We check our teeth after we brush them. We brush our hair in the front of the mirror, do our hair in front of the mirror, do our makeup in front of the mirror, and confirm [or change] our outfits based on what in front of the mirror. We look in the mirror intensely. Just as we stare in the mirror intensely so we can look our best, we should be looking in the mirror of God’s Word intensely to find out who He is.
- **Application:**
 - So first off, we have to ask ourselves the question – *Are we beholding?* Are you there? Do you look in the first place? If not, we can’t tell when we have a bad hair day. We wouldn’t even know how to fix it if we did.
 - *Who are we beholding?* In Scripture we find God’s **character**.

- In the pages of Scripture we find God’s glory. Are you confused with why God would allow something to happen? Search for his character in His Word. Do you desire to understand how God’s love and mercy coincides with his justice and wrath? Search for His character in His Word. We will not understand everything about God’s character, but in his Word he put everything he wants us to know. When we fail to read God’s Word, we develop a distorted view of God’s character...and he tends to look a lot like us. Read your Bible. Because when you read the Bible, you get to know the very character of God. He’s not playing hide and go seek – *He wants you to understand.*
- *How do we behold?*
 - Turn to James 1. Verses 19 through 25 give us further insight on how we should be beholding.
 - Eagerness to **hear** (19)
 - **Slow** to argue with or be angry with God for what we find (19)
 - Does a passage ever feel confusing to you? Unfair? Not give you the “rights” you believe you should have as a believer or as a woman?
 - We must respond to these times of confusion by 1) studying the confusing piece out, and 2) trusting **God’s** sense of justice over our own
 - After all, verse 20 shows us that our anger does **not** produce the righteousness of God!
 - **Put away** sin (21)
 - Receive the word with **meekness** (21)
 - **Persevere** – if you don’t understand, keep studying! If you think you do understand, keep studying!
 - Be **action-minded**; be doers! (22)

- If we study God’s word and don’t allow it to penetrate our hearts, we are **deceiving ourselves** (23, 26)

3. Reward of Understanding – “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another”

- **Transformation** “Are being transformed” – present progressive verb tense means this **IS** happening; we **are being transformed**
 - This is a supernatural work that God does in us as we choose to behold his glory
 - “one degree of glory to another”
 - **Explanation:** God’s word tells us that we change progressively over time.
 - **Illustration:** Why do people go to medical school? To learn the human body and its functions so they can help. Why is the process so long? I mean, four years of undergrad in something, four years of medical school, boards throughout the whole process, residency, and then maybe even a fellowship after that. Personally, I’d expect when someone I love goes through open heart surgery that that surgeon understands more about the human heart and its functions in the body than when they began their pre-med program. But he couldn’t learn all of that in six weeks, or even a year. The process takes time. Furthermore, unlike in academics, our study of God’s Word doesn’t just result in head knowledge acquired over time, it results in heart change as well.
 - **Application:** Think for a moment of who you were at your lowest point spiritually. I mean, at your worst spiritual time. You’re different now, aren’t you? Be encouraged, because if we’re

beholding God's glory properly, we're not who we once were. Think again, but this time think of a spiritual example that you treasure and look up to. For me, I tend to think of Elisabeth Elliott as an incredible woman of great spiritual understanding and courage. By God's grace, we can become women like that. Be encouraged, because by beholding God's glory properly, in 2018, 2028, even 2048, we will be closer to Christlikeness than we are now. How encouraging God's Word is to show us that God doesn't expect our change to happen overnight – but He does expect change.

- **Blessing** – God promises we will be “blessed in our doing” when we read His Word. It gives joy, wisdom, peace, and a reason to fellowship with Christians. Not feeling this? Perhaps examine yourself in this area.
 - You may be disappointed lately in how you've backslidden felt spiritually dry, but look back and look ahead. You aren't who you used to be – and you have hope that God can make you more Christlike this year than ever before.

4. **Agent for Understanding** – “For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit”

- **Explanation:** As though to remind us that studying God's Word isn't exactly a “plug and chug” deal, where if we take all of the right steps on our own, we will gain spiritual understanding, God reminds us that all of this is only accomplished **by Him**.
 - God calls us to **salvation**
 - God removes the **veil**
 - God gives us the **desire** to read and know him
 - God **empowers** our mind, heart, and action changes.

- **Application:** Lest we think if we just take the right steps without the right heart, God reminds us here that we are dependent on Him. Friends, take the necessary steps to read and *understand* God's Word, but do it prayerfully and with a warm heart – and God will transform you into greater Christlikeness.

Prayer & Break

Workshop: Eat the Elephant

Introduction: So, in the first session, we learned how important it is to study the Bible, and the directives and promises God gives for those who do. Now, we're going to get into the weeds. And it's good!

- **Illustration:** Okay, so God has given us all of this, and we have the responsibility (and acute pleasure) to know it. *All* of it. So let me ask you this question: *How do you eat an elephant?* One bite at a time. How are we going to study so we know God's Word? One verse, one chapter, one story at a time.

Getting Started – Pick a study!

If I gave you an anatomy textbook and told you that you needed to understand it all, how would you start studying? Perhaps you'd start at the very beginning, or start in at a certain chapter, or even search out everywhere it discusses the kidneys to fully understand them. But you wouldn't just open to a random page every day – you would go about it systematically and thoughtfully in order to really understand.

1. Be **mindful**. Don't just expect to open your Bible to a random place every day and expect to walk away with something profound.
2. Consider what **books** may be particularly helpful.
 - For example, Romans will help you understand salvation. Philemon will help you understand our standing with Christ as redeemed (and it's pretty short), and Leviticus helps you understand just how holy God is.
3. Vary your **testaments**.
 - Don't spend all of your time in the New Testament – God gave us the Old Testament too, and not just Psalms and Proverbs. We need the Old Testament and the New Testament.

4. Vary your genres.

- As Single Focus is seeing in our study of Hosea, God gives precious truths and clear application in the prophets. There's no wonder Even understanding the history books gives us truths to understand, meditate on, and put into action!

5. Vary your **study**.

- **Book** studies (Hosea, James)
- **Character** studies (Saul, Joseph)
- **Topic** studies (joy) Biblical manhood and womanhood

Resources

- Study Bible
- Bible Dictionary
- Commentaries (many are free online)

Method – adapted from the Wilds “Keys to Your Own ‘God & I Time’”

1. Prepare your **heart**.

We often come into our time with God distracted, worried, confused, etc., and it is helpful to take a moment to pause in prayer before digging in. Pray and ask God to give you “understanding, that we may keep your law and observe it with my whole heart.” (Psalm 119:34)

2. **Observation**: What does it say?

Read the passage a couple of times, maybe even the verses before or after it to get the context. Look for the obvious, simple observations about the text, and then probe more deeply for further understanding.

Simple Observations:

- What genre is this book of the Bible (history, narrative, poetry, letter, etc.)?
- Who wrote it/said it? To whom? About whom?

- When was it written/when did/do/will the events take place?
- What happened? How?
- What are the major ideas and themes?
- Where did it happen?
- Why was it written?

Outline the chapter and label the major sections in your own words. Grammar is a great too here!

Deeper Digging:

- Look up cross references.
- Read the passage in more than one translation (some helpful ones may be the ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV).
- Use Hebrew and Greek dictionaries to look up the meaning and usage of words in the passage.
You can also look words up in the English dictionary that you don't understand – the translators did use them for a reason.
- Paraphrase the passage and put it in your own words.
- Consult commentaries and study Bibles *after* you have done your own reading and study. This can help you see where you may have misunderstood or confirm what you found.

3. **Interpretation**: What does it mean?

Ask the following kinds of questions to help understand the implications of the text, keeping in mind the genre of the book:

- What does the passage teach me about God? About the Father/Jesus/Holy Spirit?
- What does this passage teach me about man?
- What does this passage teach me about sin?
- Are there any warnings to heed?
- Are there any promises to claim?
- Are there any commandments to obey?
- Are there any examples to follow?
- Is there a particular key verse?

4. **Application:** What should I do?

Record your responses to the passage and plan to use what you learn!

- How does this truth apply to my life? To a particular situation?
- In view of this truth, what changes need to be made in my life?
- Is there sin I need to confess to God? To others?
 - If so, confess it to God right now and ask forgiveness.
 - 1 John 1:9 – “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”
 - If you need to ask someone for forgiveness, make plans to do so and carry them out as soon as possible.
 - Matthew 5:23-24 – “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.”
- Is there something I am doing correctly according to this passage? Thank God for helping you to grow in that way, ask him to help you keep growing, and keep growing!
- Is there something you need accountability for (i.e. someone to keep up with you on devotions, attitude, etc.)?
- Is there someone you can encourage with this passage or a way you can serve as a result? Do that thing!

As you're thinking of ways to apply this passage, write them down so you can look back at them through the day or reference them later.

5. Close in Prayer: Thank God and ask for help.

Thank God for what he showed you, ask for continued understanding, and pray through the applications you identified. Ask God to help you know him better, change, ask others for forgiveness if necessary, and continue growing in love and obedience