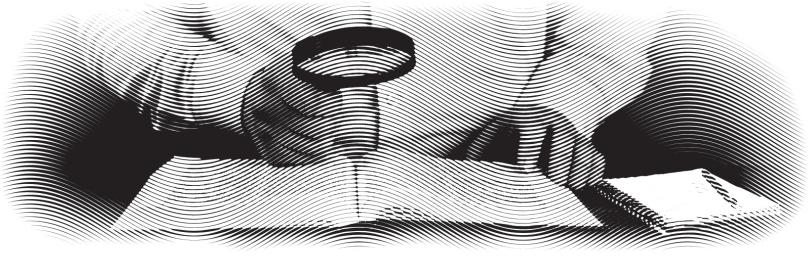
LESSON 5 *April 25–May 1

(page 38 of Standard Edition)

How *to* Study *the* Bible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 15:1–8, Mark 1:35, 1 Chron. 16:11, Ps. 119:105, Isa. 50:4, Isa 55:1–13.*

Memory Text: **" 'So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' "** *(Isaiah 55:11, NKJV)***.**

Think back to when you received your first Bible. Perhaps you were a child, and it was given to you by a Christian relative. Or perhaps you purchased it yourself as an adult. However long you've had your Bible for (perhaps you have more than one copy), consider the value that you place on this Book. Is it one of your most precious, treasured possessions, or do you take for granted that you have the Living Word of God at your very fingertips? Do you struggle to be consistent in reading it? Have you ever wondered: *Where do I start? How do I read this Book to grow closer to God?*

Martin Luther said, "For a number of years I have now annually read through the Bible twice. If the Bible were a large, mighty tree and all its words were little branches, I would have tapped at all the branches, eager to know what was there and what it had to offer."

Whether you experience a thriving, daily Bible study time, or whether your Bible mostly sits closed on a bookshelf, the reality is that we can all develop stronger Bible study times with God. This week we'll explore some practical ways to study the Word of God better.

** Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, May 2.*

Time

Have you ever set your alarm a little earlier than usual in order to wake and read your Bible? Have you ever struggled to drag yourself out of bed and then looked at the clock and thought, *I have 15 minutes before I need to begin the day. I better hurry!* Have you ever gone through the motions of having a brief prayer or skimming a chapter, only to find your conscience appeased but your heart unsatisfied with the result before you rushed into the day?

"There is but little benefit derived from a hasty reading of the Scriptures. One may read the whole Bible through and yet fail to see its beauty or comprehend its deep and hidden meaning."—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 90.

While there are indeed blessings that come from reading the Bible—like drinking from a fire hydrant (lots and fast)—it is possible to read the Bible through quickly and miss so much. God gave us His inspired, precious Word so that we would come to know more about Him (and, in the process, more about ourselves, too). When we take time to see the indescribable, beautiful character of God and the ways He has interacted with humanity throughout history, we can only love Him more. The record of His interactions is right there in our hands—but we must find time, and take time, to know God through reading His Word *(Acts 17:11)*. Consider the following suggestions:

Ask God to place a desire in your heart for Him. Claim the promises in Jeremiah 29:13 and Psalm 37:4. Invite Him to wake you up earlier than usual or to free up some time in your day to do so.

Surrender your time to God. Yes, you're busy, and there are so many urgent things to do. But time with God is invaluable. Go to a quiet place by yourself and read Psalm 46:10. Read the words or sing to God the hymn "I Surrender All." Think about the areas of your life that may not be surrendered and offer them to God.

Spend time with God even when you may not feel like it. Just as it takes a conscious choice and an action plan to be healthy (exercise, eat well), it takes a conscious choice to have a close relationship with God. Remember that new habits can take at least 21 days to form, and we can never succeed without the Holy Spirit's help.

Read again John 15:1–8. What is Jesus telling us about abiding in Him, and why is this so crucial to our faith?

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A Place

Jesus is our perfect example in all things, and when it comes to personal devotions, it is no different. What does Mark 1:35 tell us about Jesus' time with His Father?

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Although Mark 1:35 is just one verse, we can learn so much here from Jesus' example. Long before the sun came up, He removed Himself to a solitary place of quiet so He could be with His Father. Can you imagine the scene—Jesus, sitting by the Sea of Galilee or on the side of a hill, praying and communing with His Father before the world around Him woke up? Although this verse describes Jesus' commitment to prayer, we clearly see that it was a priority for Him. No doubt this time was what gave Him strength to face all that He endured. If Jesus needed this to start every day, how much more do we?

God tells us, " 'Seek My face,' " and He hopes our response will be " 'Your face, LORD, I will seek' " *(Ps. 27:8, NKJV).*

What does 1 Chronicles 16:11 say about how we should seek His face?

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Do you have a place you can go each morning to be with God? Perhaps you can find a chair by a window, a quiet spot outside, or even the kitchen table, where you can come daily to sit at the feet of Jesus to learn from God's Word. Sitting at the feet of Jesus is the best place to be *(Luke 10:39–42)*. By forming a daily habit of going to a certain place to spend time with God, you'll be more likely to return there each day. Don't become discouraged when you miss a day here or there, because emergencies arise, and you may not be able to spend time with God. But try not to let too much time pass without spending time with God. Remember that having an abiding relationship with God is a daily decision, one that you can start again, today, if you choose to.

During the past week, how much time have you spent in prayer and Bible reading? What does your answer tell you about changes you might have to make in your priorities?

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Deep Bible Study

Even if you don't have to be a scholar to study the Bible, how can you study the Bible deeply?

Pray: It's impossible to overstate the importance of prayer as bookends to (and bookmarks throughout) your Bible study time. Ellen G. White tells us that when we come to read the Bible, we are not alone. By inviting the Holy Spirit to be our guide, we reject all other distractions, and the enemy flees. "The Bible should never be studied without prayer. The Holy Spirit alone can cause us to feel the importance of those things easy to be understood, or prevent us from wrestling truths difficult of comprehension."—*The Great Controversy*, pp. 599, 600.

Read and Write: It could be said that a main difference between merely reading the Bible and studying it comes down to one key act: writing. Writing helps us slow down our thoughts, reflect on God's Word, and work through it at a pace where observation, interpretation, application, and commitment can occur. It also helps our initial scattered ideas to work themselves out—from our head, to our pen, and then into our hearts for the day. We are also more likely to remember something that we've written down *(Ps. 119:15, 16)*. If you're unable to write your thoughts down, try reading the Bible aloud (or listening to it), followed by your thoughts as a prayer to God.

Share: Tell someone what you've learned. This will solidify it in your mind and encourage someone else.

Select a short book of the Bible to begin with (such as Jonah, Mark, Philippians, or 1 John), and slowly work your way through it. Here is a simple approach you can apply to one verse (the verse-by-verse method), a passage, or an entire chapter:

1. **Pray that the Holy Spirit will guide your mind and soften your heart as you read.**
2. **Choose a Bible verse or passage.**
3. **Write the passage in a journal or portions of the passage that stand out as you read.**
4. **Prayerfully read the passage again and underline the key ideas.**
5. **Write down what the underlined ideas tell you.**
6. **Pray over these ideas and how they impact your relationship with God.**
7. **Consider whom you might share this with today.**

"Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, pp. 38, 39.

In what ways have you found the message in the quote above to be true for you? See also Psalm 119:105.

A Double Blessing

There are many ways we can study our Bibles, such as the verse-by-verse method (mentioned already), a chapter study, a theme study, a word study, or a book study. We can study with a concordance and Bible dictionary, and we can read the Bible alongside the Conflict of the Ages series for additional insight. We can go for a walk outside in nature and listen to the Bible being read to us, or meet with a friend or small group to study together.

In the same way that we keep our friendships alive with variety and new adventures, we should keep our daily appointment with God fresh and vibrant by using different methods as we study the Bible. There is always more to learn!

Something that will help keep your Bible study time vibrant is sharing with others what you've discovered. When we explain what we've learned, the summarizing, synthesizing process consolidates our thoughts. This helps us retain knowledge. The double blessing is that when we share and discuss with others, the spiritual conversation will often challenge and strengthen both of you. It's often when we share or teach others that the deepest learning occurs in our own minds.

You also will come to see that what you study each day is not only God's message for you but a message for others.

Read **Isaiah 50:4. What is this verse telling us about having a relationship with God and how it can impact our relationships with others?**

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Our personal Bible study time not only strengthens us, but it enables us to encourage others we may meet during the day. It can become a double blessing.

Our spiritual lives are a marathon. Ask the Lord to keep you running your race with constancy, keeping your eyes on the goal *(Phil. 3:14)*. Don't feel discouraged if you've gone a bit slack for a while, but make any necessary changes in your life to keep your relationship, and specifically your Bible study and prayer time, vibrant. For truly, this is eternal life, that we may know God today *(John 17:3)*. Our daily commitment to abide in Him and in His Word is life-changing.

Read this week's memory text and consider its meaning. What are you studying at the moment? With whom could you share this?

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'Tis So Sweet!

Think about your favorite dessert. Is it good for your health? Perhaps you use honey as a sweetener, or you may even use Manuka honey for its purported medicinal benefits. If you've ever tried honeycomb, you'll know how sweet the soft texture is as it melts onto your tongue.

In Psalm 119:103, 104, the psalmist describes the Bible as a honeycomb—a metaphor for delight: "How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding" *(NKJV)*.

What does it mean that "through your precepts I get understanding"? ***(Ps. 119:104)*****. Why is this idea important in grasping what Bible study does for us?**

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Yes, God's words are indeed sweet to our souls and unlike anything else the world offers us. Unlike many desserts, the sweetness of God's Word is healing to our souls and life-changing for our characters. If you've been distant from God, you can fall on your knees, open His Word, and drink from the living water that alone will satisfy.

In Isaiah 55:1–13, the prophet expands on the message mentioned above. Spend some time reading this chapter now, and then answer these questions:

- **What does the Lord give to those who come to Him, to "eat" from His Word?**
- **What is His invitation to you here?**
- **What is His challenge?**
- **What is His promise?**

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God's living and powerful Word cuts straight to our hearts, minds, and souls as it challenges us to grow in Christ. But it can do this for us only to the degree that we take the time and effort (and yes, it takes effort) to delve into the Word with an attitude of submission and humility and a willingness to follow what it teaches.

What are concrete ways you can "seek the LORD while He may be found" ***(Isa. 55:6, NKJV)*****?**

(page 44 of Standard Edition)

Further Thought: The purpose of Bible study is to know God and to grow in your relationship with Him, for this is what life eternal is—to be forever with the God we love *(John 5:39, John 17:3)*.

Part of any relationship is mutual engagement. We read in Revelation 3:20 that Jesus seeks to have this with us, yet we must realize that, as created beings, we can always learn more about our Creator. Like a miner digging for precious jewels, we should be constantly searching in the Bible. There is always more to glean, no matter how many times we've read certain stories or Bible passages. "Whatever may be man's intellectual advancement, let him not for a moment think that there is no need of thorough and continuous searching of the Scriptures for greater light. As a people, we are called individually to be students of prophecy."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 41.

We also should not try to make the Bible fit into our own human opinions or thoughts. "How shall we search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrine one after another, and then try to make all Scripture meet our established opinions? or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth? Many who read and even teach the Bible, do not comprehend the precious truth they are teaching or studying. . . . Many give the words of Scripture a meaning that suits their own opinions."—Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, p. 36.

Discussion Questions:

❶ What attitude do you usually come to the Bible with? Is there anything that needs to shift? Why is an attitude of humility and surrender to the Word so crucial?

❷ Are there any established opinions that you might need to lay aside to allow Scripture to speak for itself? If so, how can you start praying about them right now?

❸ How might originality become a stumbling block in a person's outward relationship with God? That is, how might the desire to find something new and innovative lead someone astray, especially if they are doing it for selfish purposes?

Summary: Personal Bible study is at the heart of having a vibrant and enduring relationship with God. God's Word speaks into our twenty-first-century lives in meaningful ways, just as it has during past centuries. In a similar way to keeping any friendship alive, we should look for ways to keep our devotional lives vivid as we abide in Jesus, trusting His promise that His Word " 'shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it' " *(Isa. 55:11, NKJV)*.

INSIDE *Story*

Cows Lead Boy to the Sabbath

Rompas was born into a Maasai tribal family of one father and nine mothers in Kenya. He has 82 siblings. He is number 62.

When he was 13, he was tending his father's cattle in the bush when he noticed that the animals seemed to have a mind of their own. They kept moving in a single direction. He followed the cattle and found himself at an outdoor religious meeting led by a missionary from the United States.

Rompas was intrigued. He had never been to school, so he could not read the Bible. But he liked to listen to sermons on the radio on Sundays. He enjoyed memorizing what he heard and preaching the sermons to his family. His love for preaching had earned him the nickname "Pastor."

But the missionary was preaching a message that he had never heard. He said the Bible teaches that Saturday, not Sunday, is God's holy day.

Rompas ran off to find a friend who knew how to read and write. He asked the boy to copy down the Bible verses from the sermon. The boy jotted down 33 verses about the holiness of the seventh-day Sabbath.

That evening, Rompas took the cattle home. But he didn't stay. He then walked four miles (six kilometers) to the home of a pastor and handed him the list of 33 verses. "Does our Bible contain these verses?" he asked.

The pastor looked up the verses in his Bible and said ominously, "You have gone to a meeting of devil worshipers."

Fear seized Rompas. He began shaking. "Oh Lord, save me," he said.

The pastor struck the boy repeatedly on the cheeks with his Bible. "In the name of Jesus, I rebuke the devil who has possessed this boy," he said.

It was late when Rompas returned home. After falling asleep, he had a dream. He saw the missionary preaching about the Sabbath again. Waking up, he was afraid that he had been possessed, and he rebuked the devil.

For the next three years, Rompas had the same dream every night. He saw the missionary preaching about the Sabbath. For three years, he lived in fear that he had been possessed. For three years, he kept rebuking the devil.

Then he thought, *I wonder if this might be a message from the Lord. Let me find out if what the pastor said is true.*



With that, the boy nicknamed "Pastor" took a first step toward becoming an Adventist pastor. Today, he knows the truth and is teaching it to others in Kenya.

Part of this quarter's Thirteenth Sabbath Offering, also known as the Quarterly Mission Project Offering, will support projects in Kenya and elsewhere in the East-Central Africa Division. Read more about Rompas next week, and watch a YouTube video of him at bit.ly/Rompas-IS.

Provided by the General Conference Office of Adventist Mission, which uses Sabbath School mission offerings to spread the gospel worldwide. Read new stories daily at AdventistMission.org.

Part I: Overview

Key Texts: *Isaiah 55:11, Psalm 119:105*

Study Focus: *Psalm 119.*

In the midst of his prayer, the psalmist compares the Word of God to a lamp, which gives light to his feet *(Ps. 119:105)*. The psalm opens with blessings conferred upon the undefiled who choose to walk in the law of the Lord and who keep His testimonies *(Ps. 119:1–3)*. The psalm also ends with the image of a walker, albeit one who has gone astray and prays for God to find Him *(Ps. 119:176)*.

In this lesson, we shall endeavor to walk with the psalmist in his search for a deeper understanding of the Word of God. Our sojourn is a continuation of our study from last week, in which we discussed the importance of studying the Scriptures.

As we move forward in our sojourn, we shall reflect upon principles for best approaching the Scriptures. The image of the lamp lighting a dark path at night suggests a slow, cautious walk in which we cannot see much beyond the single step we are taking. Such a walk takes time, for it is a step-by-step progression. At the same time, such a walk is also an adventure, containing an element of the unknown: we do not know exactly where we may end up or to what exalted heights our journey may take us.

To get the most out of our study, any text under consideration should be read candidly, with no presuppositions or biases. Rather, we must read with an open mind; and to continue the metaphor of walking, we need to step out in faith and go wherever the Spirit may take us. A candid reading of the biblical text will help us to hear and receive the voice of God speaking to us from His Word. In this way, we will encounter Scripture as meaningful, beautiful, inspired, engaging, and moral.

Part II: Commentary

Introduction. Six principles of reading the Scriptures are suggested for our consideration in the commentary that follows. The first few (1–3) concern the reader's attention to the text. The final three (4–6) relate to the reader's response.

Section 1: Attention to the Text

The Text as Meaningful. Over the course of Psalm 119, it could be said that the psalmist meditates on God's Word *(Ps. 119:15, 48)* only twice: "all the day" *(Ps. 119:97)* and through the night *(Ps. 119:148)*, which is

to say, the psalmist is continually meditating upon the Scriptures because they are his delight *(Ps. 119:44, 47)*. Love for God's Word is the motivation for the psalmist's study *(Ps. 119:97, 113, 127)*. Indeed, God's holy words are like a love letter to be read and reread, inspiring the psalmist to search for its deepest thoughts and intentions.

The psalmist is practicing the method that recent scholarship identifies as the close reading approach. This method consists of reading the text carefully, word by word, with the assumption that every word, every syntactical feature, and every grammatical form is meaningful. In this approach, one reads the text several times. Such a reading is always meaningful and enjoyable, as the psalmist testifies *(Ps. 119:14, 111)*. This approach ensures that there are always more riches to be found.

The Text as Beautiful. Before being meaningful, however, the biblical text is beautiful. Its music and imagery often are appreciated before its meaning is fully comprehended by the mind. For this reason, the first exercise of the reader is to pay close attention to the text's poetic expression. The literary structure that organizes the whole passage will orient the reader in its meaning, enabling him or her to grasp the general intention of the biblical author. The parallelisms and linguistic echoes that relate words and phrases with one another will help the reader to better understand their respective meanings.

Components of Beauty. Psalm 119 is an alphabetic psalm (acrostic). This psalm has 22 stanzas, one for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Each of the 22 stanzas has eight verses, which make for a total of 176 verses. The intention of this literary device is to instruct us in the perfection of the Word of God, which is referred to everywhere in the psalm.

In the stanza of the letter *NUN (Ps. 119:105–112)*, every verse refers to the law of God with a different term: "Your word" *(Ps. 119:105, 107, NKJV)*, "Your judgments" *(Ps. 119:108, NKJV)*, "Your Law" *(Ps. 119:109, NKJV)*, "Your precepts" *(Ps. 119:110, NKJV)*, "Your testimonies" *(Ps. 119:111, NKJV)*, and "Your statutes" *(Ps. 119:112, NKJV)*. This literary feature points to all the various aspects of the Law of God, thereby suggesting its perfection.

The Text as Scriptural. We will focus here only on the literary context of stanza *NUN (Ps. 119:105–112)*. The *NUN* stanza is preceded by stanza *MEM (Ps. 119:97–104)* and is followed by stanza *SAMEK (Ps. 119:113–120)*. The main motif of stanza *MEM* is the love of the law, the right way that God has taught *(Ps. 119:102)*, in contrast to hatred of the false way *(Ps. 119:101, 104)*. The same line of thinking reappears in stanza *SAMEK*, which reconnects with the same motifs that we saw in the *MEM*

stanza *(Ps. 119:113, 119)*. Stanza *NUN* should, therefore, be analyzed in light of this context.

The contextual consideration of stanza *NUN* also includes the larger framework of the Scriptures (inter-textual connection), as well as the immediate and narrow context of Psalm 119 (intra-textual connection), insofar as allusions can be established. It is this approach to the biblical text that Ellen G. White promotes when she says, "The Bible is its own expositor. Scripture is to be compared with scripture. The student should learn to view the word as a whole and to see the relation of its parts."—*Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p. 462. "Scripture interprets scripture, one passage being the key to other passages."—*Evangelism*, p. 581.

Section 2: The Reader's Response

The Text as Inspired. The biblical text is different from any other literary work. That is because the Holy Scriptures are "God-breathed" and thus inspired. It is, therefore, imperative that we use a spiritual approach in our study *(1 Cor. 2:13, 14)*. As students of Scripture, we should approach the biblical text with prayer and continuous self-checking to make sure we are guided objectively from above and not influenced subjectively by our personal agendas and biases.

Because we are not prophets, we should not expect that the meaning of the text will be revealed to us through a dream or a vision. On the other hand, we are advised to pray for understanding from the God who has inspired these writings. God will then send His Spirit to guide us in our study of the text as we diligently and sincerely search for its meaning. Often, the divine response to our request for understanding may come unexpectedly in ways that we do not anticipate or perhaps even desire *(see the prophet Jeremiah's response to the false prophet Hananiah, in Jeremiah 28)*.

Another important way to cooperate with God's Spirit in our search for understanding of the biblical text is to consult with our brothers or sisters in the faith. This "corporate" reading also will test our humility; the back-and-forth exchange of ideas will allow for the Spirit of God to blow "where it wishes" *(John 3:8, NKJV)*, thus cultivating and expanding our perspectives.

The Text as Engaging. As you read and study the biblical text, apply it to your present life. Read the biblical text as if it is speaking to you personally and directly (which it does).

Additionally, ponder how the Word of God may illuminate your various paths in life: your job; your problems; and your relationships with family, friends, and colleagues. Commit yourself to keeping God's

commandments *(Ps. 119:106)*. Pray that God will help you to receive, and understand, His teachings *(Ps. 119:108)*. Continue to remain faithful to God's laws *(Ps. 119:109, 110)*. Enjoy God's commandments as you observe them. Do not just do the commandments; make sure your obedience flows from your heart *(Ps. 119:111)*. Put your entire life in touch with eternity as you practice and obey each commandment *(Ps. 119:112)*.

The Text as Moral. The inspired words of God contain potential "explosives." That is, Scripture contains teachings that may detonate or trigger resistance or certain negative responses within the human heart, as it calls for the sacrifice of our idols or long-cherished errors. Thus, we must handle these truths with care, wisdom, and love in our dealings with others.

Sad to say, the biblical Word often has been used by people to brutalize and batter instead of to redeem and uplift. The list of these abuses is long and painful. Many crimes have been committed in the name of the Bible, and that is tragic. Prophecy points to more coming, too *(see Revelation 13, 14)*. Thus, instead of being a word of comfort and the good news of salvation, the Bible has been used as a pretext to judge, put down, and harm people.

Thus, humility and a teachable heart are necessary when we read Scripture, lest we turn the divine words of life into words of death. Ethical awareness should also be present, as when we read the *NUN* stanza of Psalm 119. God's Word of light *(Ps. 119:105)* should restrain and shape our words and actions toward others. The word "righteous" (*tsedeq*) is a technical term that carries the notion of ethical behavior. As such, Psalm 119, in its entirety, could, therefore, be heard as an appeal for moral sensitivity and responsibility, not only in life but also in our reading of the Holy Scriptures.

Part III: Life Application

Teacher's Tip: The following activities are designed to build your students' Bible study skills and increase their joy in reading the Bible. Activities 3–5 can be done outside of class. Assign one or more of these activities to class members for the coming week and ask them to come prepared to discuss the results of their research the following Sabbath.

Activity 1 (in class): Select a stanza from Psalm 119:

1. Apply the six principles of "how to study the Bible" to the stanza of your choice in Psalm 119 (except for stanza *NUN*, Psalm 119:105–112, which we just covered).

2. Divide your class into small groups. Invite each group to focus on a stanza of their choice, applying the six principles of study.
3. After 10 minutes, ask each group to share and discuss their respective findings.

Activity 2 (in class): The challenge of studying the Bible:

1. Discuss with the class the importance, the relevance, and the difficulty of Bible study.
2. Why should we study the Bible? Is studying the Bible really necessary? Explain.
3. Address the arguments that oppose studying the Bible.
4. Find biblical texts that promote the study of Scripture itself.
5. Also, find in the Old Testament (see wisdom texts) and New Testament (see Jesus' method) material and guidelines for studying the Bible.

Activity 3: Adaptation:

1. Ask your students how they would adapt the principles of Bible study in this lesson to audiences other than their Sabbath School class.
2. How would you present a Bible study to intellectuals (academics), atheistic-secular people, Muslims, Jews, those who are poor, and wealthy individuals?

Activity 4: Stories:

Encourage your students to find extrabiblical stories that help illuminate the lessons and teachings of your selected text for study (for example: biographies, humorous accounts, personal experiences, etc.).

Activity 5 (Just for Teachers): Technical tools:

1. Research additional tools and study aids for the Bible.
2. Present your class with a list of these resources for Bible study, such as textbooks and videos.

Notes