

# How to study the Bible

R.A. Torrey

Summarized by: David C. Mills

Mr. Torrey's book has brought about many improvements in my current study methods. If I had to pick one thing that has been a deterrent to my learning it would be that I find myself rushing through the Bible, as in a mad panic to learn as much as possible. When in reality, as Mr. Torrey has pointed out, I am only learning a fraction and probably retaining much less of what God has to teach us.

Mr. Torrey was very clear in his introduction as to conditions for a profitable Bible study. He pointed out our necessity to be born again in Christ, realizing that without God it is an unprofitable journey. He also points out that we must have a love for the Word of God, a willingness to work hard and a willingness to submit completely to God, putting immediately into practice the commands of God. He stresses that this must be done with childlike behavior, going to God's word to find out what his ideas are and not to confirm our own. It is critical that we study the Bible with unquestioning acceptance of its teaching, with absolute reliance and prompt obedience, as if we were in God's presence. Mr. Torrey, in the closing of his introduction, points out the utter and essential importance of prayer, which I am sure we all agree upon.

Mr. Torrey conveys two basic study methods in this book. The first of which he entitles "Individual Book Study", rightfully so. This is his guide for a study of a single complete book of the Bible. He begins by cautioning us as to the selection of the correct book to study. He gives three basic criteria for selecting a book to study. He recommends that it is a short book, comparatively easy, and rich enough to display the advantages of this method so as to enhance our appetite for more studies of its kind. He then recommends that we read through the book of our choosing multiple times, without stopping, in an attempt to master the general contents of the book. After getting a good general comfort with the contents of the book, Mr. Torrey then suggests that we prepare an introduction to the book, in which he has provided a twelve-question outline.

Mr. Torrey then proposes that we divide the book into its proper sections, marking the principle divisions and the natural subdivisions within the principle divisions, and then assigning a memorable and impressionable caption to each of the principles and subdivisions. This, Mr. Torrey states, will enable you to fix them in your mind.

He then presents the idea of taking each verse in order and studying it to get the exact meaning of the verse and the words used. There are two classes of meaning, the first is the apparent meaning and the second is the doubtful meaning. To be safe in our studies we must study the usage as it relates to the Bible and particularly the Bible writer. We must find the meaning of the verses by carefully noticing the context and by examining parallel passages and passages of the same subject. Only after taking these steps, Mr. Torrey suggests that we consult commentaries to see how our conclusions line up. We must continue to ask ourselves as we study, what was intended to be taught, not what this can be made to teach.

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Mr. Torrey's next step is to analyze the verse. He suggests that we look steadfastly at the verse and ask ourselves, what does this verse teach? Then begin to write down what the verse teaches, continuing to re-visit it time and time again. He states that three rules must be observed; First, don't add anything that isn't there, second, find relatively everything you can in the verse, and thirdly, state what you find precisely.

The next step in Mr. Torrey's book is to classify your results. He suggests that we carefully analyze, classify and note the various subjects within the epistle.

The finally step is how to retain your studies. Now that we have selected a book, mastered its contents, prepared an introduction, divided it into its proper sections, taken each verse and studied it, analyzed it and classified it, it is now time to retain it. He suggests now that we complete the meal that we have created by repeatedly meditating on it.

The next study that Mr. Torrey details is the Topical Study. This type of study consists of searching through the Bible to find out what its teaching is on various topics. Mr. Torrey suggests repeatedly that there is a danger of imbalance and a danger of getting one-sided through this study. He also recommends a few rules that should be followed during a study of the nature as follows:

1. Don't follow your fancy in the choice of topics
2. Don't take up any topic that happens to suggest itself.
3. Make a list and study it one by one logically.

Mr. Torrey stresses also the importance of being thorough, in finding every applicable passage, being sure to get the exact meaning, and the follow-up of post study organization.

Mr. Torrey mentions briefly the Biographical Study that consists of studying the life, work, and character of various persons mentioned in Scripture. This study should follow the guidance of the previous studies as well.

He then moves into the Study of Types, where he mentions the following instructions:

1. Be sure you have a biblical authority for your type.
2. Begin with simple and evident types
3. Be on guard against an overstrained imagination
4. Look up all the Scriptural references available.
5. Study carefully the names of all persons, places and things mentioned.

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Mr. Torrey then writes of the Study of Biblical and Chronological Orders, where he basically visualizes a “start to finish” reading of the Bible in order to get an idea of the book as a whole and get an understanding of the entire scope of God’s revelation.

He then mentions the Study for practical use in dealing with people. This study encompasses writing the names of the various types on a sheet of paper, reading the Bible through slowly and writing down a personality type next to each useful verse as you read it. This type of study also involves a complete reading of the Bible.

Mr. Torrey then makes some final suggestions for a profitable and rewarding Bible study. He suggests that our study be daily in nature and be conducted preferably early in the day. He recommends that we should be looking for Jesus, memorizing His Word and utilizing every spare minute of day.