

The Joy of Discovery

Bible study can be fun! Maybe that statement startles you. Possibly you have always thought that Bible study should be somber and serious. Maybe you are thinking, “Aren’t we studying the book which is inspired by God’s Spirit? Shouldn’t we approach Bible study in a spirit of humility and seriousness? *Fun is merriment, playful action, a game.* Does this mean that we are to treat Bible study like a playful game?”

By *fun* we do not mean any of these things. We are not speaking about the purpose of Bible study, but the process. It is possible to find the process in Bible study engaging, challenging, and a joy. It is possible to have been involved in a study and afterwards say, “Wow, we had a good time today in our study!” This is the kind of fun we mean—a joyful experience because we were learning how to become discoverers of God’s Word and we found the process of discovery a joy!

The Joy of Discovery—a Possibility for All

One of the yearnings of my heart is to enable you to become a discoverer and experience the joy that can be yours in the process. While all Christians agree that the Bible should be studied, many do not find joy in their study. They know very little about the Bible and feel that it is difficult to understand. To them it is a strange book, seemingly too hard or too dull, and they have little inclination to read or study it. This is a tragedy, because Bible study can be a most rewarding, challenging, and exciting study. It can really be fun!

Maybe you are one of those who is saying, “I don’t know how to study the Bible. When I read it, I often have difficulty understanding what I read. I haven’t found my studying to be a joy. Is it possible for me to learn how to study so that I can become a discoverer?”

The purpose of this book is to enable you to become a discoverer and in the process experience *the joy of discovery*.

As I write, I am well aware that not all of you feel the same way about Bible study. Some of you have been students of the Bible for many years and already know the joy there is in the study. I realize that you can be a variety of ages. Maybe some of you are still in high school. Many of you may be students in a college, Bible school, or seminary. Some of you are leaders, teachers, or missionaries who are guiding others in Bible studies.

I ask myself how I can write a book which will be a challenge to such a variety of people in terms of age, experience and background. I couldn't if it were not that I think you all have one thing in common. You are using this book because you have a deep yearning to learn more about how to study your Bible. My hope and prayer is that you can begin where you are and, through the suggestions in this book, you can develop your potentials as *discoverers*.

Why Become Discoverers?

According to the dictionary, to *discover* is to obtain insight or knowledge the first time, to ascertain, unearth, explore. A discoverer is one who finds out things for himself.

William Barclay, in his book *Daily Celebration*, says, "It is only when truth is discovered that it is appropriated. When a man is simply told the truth, it remains external to him and he can quite easily forget it. When he is led to discover the truth himself it becomes an integral part of him and he never forgets." The pattern in many Bible study groups is for the leader to be the *discoverer* and share his discoveries with others. Since the participants are not helped to become discoverers, they can quickly forget what was taught. My hope is that through the suggestions in this resource, you will learn how to become your own discoverer and never forget what you discover in God's Word.

Maybe you think that this emphasis on Bible study skills sounds cold and unspiritual. Can't a person just read the Bible and let the Holy Spirit guide us in discovering truths? Won't emphasis on skills make Bible study too mechanical and unspiritual?

It is very possible to learn the skills in study and come out only with intellectual knowledge, but this need not be, nor is it likely to happen. The pianist or the star baseball player is the one who has mastered the skills of playing so that mechanics have become second nature and he is free to play his best. In the same way, when you learn some of these rather mechanical skills of study, you will gain deeper insights into the truths in the Bible and the Holy Spirit will have a freer course in your life.

Practice, patience, and perseverance are needed for learning any skill. As you practice the skills described in this book, I am confident that gradually you will experience

- the joy of discovering truths in the Bible yourself.
- the joy of realizing that the Bible has something special to say to you personally.
- the joy of discovering your own potentials as a student.
- the joy of sharing with others the truths which have special meaning to you.
- the joy of knowing that the Holy Spirit is the Revealer of truth as you seek to discover it in his Word.
- the joy of discovering Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word.

Discovering with Others

You can become a *discoverer* in Bible study by yourself. It is possible to follow the suggestions in this resource and learn some of the keys to Bible study. But you can multiply the effectiveness of your study by working together with others in a small group. If you are using this book with a group in a congregation or school situation, you are already involved with others in the study. If you are all alone and want to use this resource, invite three or four others to study with you.

The traditional pattern for many Bible studies has been for the “students” to learn from the “teacher.” The leader was the expert. Possibly the leader would involve the student in discussion, but in the main he or she was the chief resource. This is what we might call “leader–student learning.” Students learned from the leader.

In discovery Bible study we want to involve you in “student–team learning.” While you may still have a *leader* to be your guide, your most significant learning will be from persons in your small group—from your team members. Even though you are in a large class, you should work together in small teams of about four. This is how you work together as teams:

1. Each of you works individually on the suggested practice exercises in each section entitled Discovery Skills.
2. Then you come together and share with one another your insights, enlarging your understanding as you share.
3. Sometimes you may divide the tasks and each concentrate on only one segment of a passage. This way you can do a more thorough study and gain greater insights as you share and receive from the others.
4. The role of the leader is to be your *enabler*—the one who enables the members of your group to become discoverers and sharers.

Value of Team Learning

DEVELOPS SELF-RESPONSIBILITY: Team learning helps you exercise self-responsibility for your own learning. But it also calls for shared responsibility on the part of your teammates. You cannot expect to learn from one another until you first do some discovering yourself.

REQUIRES SELF-COMMITMENT: Team learning requires self-commitment on the part of all the team members. If you do no individual study, you will have nothing to share with your team members, and you will receive little from what they tell you. In the measure that you invest time in individual study, you will be enabled both to share and receive.

INCREASES SATISFACTION AND LEARNING: Two heads are better than one. As all of you study a segment, you will find that each one of you will discover different things. Your satisfaction will be derived first through your own discoveries and secondly through those received from others. No person can ever discover all of the riches in God's Word by himself.

DEVELOPS YOUR CREATIVE POTENTIAL. Team learning can help you develop your creative potential. Like many persons, you may have a low opinion of yourself as a student. By practicing some of the skills described in this resource, you will find you can discover some of the truths in Scripture and that others are enriched with your discoveries. Effective team learning is dependent on the willingness of all members to study, to share, to listen, to challenge and question each other. Through this process you will learn to clarify your own thinking, refine your insights, broaden your concepts, and correct faulty ones. You will discover that you have much more potential as a student than you realized.

NOTE: Read Chapter 14—*Discovering with Others*, for a more detailed discussion on the value of discovering Bible truths together with others.