

English Transcript

How to Study the Bible

Lesson 1: Why Study the Bible?

Welcome to our GTN course, How to Study the Bible. This is one of our twelve core courses in our GTN curriculum for pastors and leaders in Senegal and Gambia. As you begin this self-paced study, please be sure to download, and if possible, print the course handout. The handout will be helpful for you as you listen to the course. The handouts are available in English, French and Seereer.

The transcripts of each audio lesson may also be helpful for you. These are currently available in English, French, and Wolof.

As we begin all our training, we emphasize two important points.

Head – Heart - Hands

First, we always teach to the Head, Heart, and Hands. When we think of the Head, this is where we take in biblical truth. We will call this **Information**. Biblical truth should impact our hearts through deeper belief and conviction. We call this **Inspiration**. This Information and Inspiration should impact our lives. We should put these truths into practice. This represents our hands leading to **Transformation** into the likeness of Christ.

So, **head equates with Information**, the **heart means Inspiration**, and **hands lead to Transformation**.

2 Timothy 2:2

This also relates to the key verse for all GTN training, 2 Timothy 2:2. The apostle Paul was teaching Timothy, who was responsible for teaching others, who would be responsible for teaching others, and the cycle would continue.

So, as we consider this training, the goal is not just to impact your head, but it should impact your heart, which would then ultimately impact your life. You will be moved to train others in your church and community, who would then have a motivation to train others.

Course Overview

This course is structured differently than our other courses. As you can see from the Table of Contents on pages 1 and 2 of your handout, we will provide you with an overview to guide you into a simple process for studying the Bible.

Lesson One will focus on the importance of studying the Bible and in Lesson Two we will

introduce you to ten practical tools for personal Bible study. Beginning in Lesson Three, we will walk you through a hands-on process that can be followed to study any book of the Bible.

If you turn to page 26 in your handout, you will find a study guide for this course. As we walk through each step in the process to study the Bible, you will have an opportunity to apply your learning immediately as you study through the book of 1 John. There are seven learning activities for you to complete. If you turn to page 42, you will see that I have also provided my personal notes for each learning activity. These may be helpful if you get stuck and just need a little nudge to continue in your own study through 1 John.

There will be multiple opportunities throughout this course to pause the audio recording and take time to complete the learning activities. Once you have completed each activity, you may restart the audio for a summary of the activity and an introduction to the next learning activity.

With that as a short introduction to the course, turn with me to the top of page 3 as we begin with Lesson 1: Why Study the Bible?

Why Study the Bible?

I will begin with a quote from Howard Hendricks, long-time professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and author of what may be the best book about studying the Bible, *Living By The Book*.

“The great tragedy among Christians today is that too many of us are under the Word of God, but not in it for ourselves.”

What about you? Do you regularly read and study the Bible on your own? Or are you like many professing Christians who rarely if ever open the Bible and feed themselves on the Word of God?

(Data from 2021 for Bible reading frequency in the United States from Statista 2022.)

29% responded that they **“Never”** read the Bible.

29% responded that they read the Bible only **“4 times a year or less”**.

8%, read the Bible **“Once a month”**.

14% read the Bible at least **“4 times a week”**.

11% read the Bible **“Every day”**.

This means that **58% of people who profess to be Christians self-reported that they never or rarely read the Bible** while only **25% state that they read the Bible 4-7 times per week**.

There is an old Chinese proverb that says, *“Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”*

Certainly, having someone fish for you is convenient, but in the long run, you become dependent on someone else. However, if you are taught to fish, you can fish for

yourself at any time you desire or need to fish.

When it comes to the Bible, is it better to study the Bible for others and feed them what we think they need to know or is it better to teach others how to study the Bible for themselves?

We believe it is much better to teach someone how to study the Bible for themselves rather than to cause them to become totally dependent on a specific pastor or teacher.

Would you rather hear from God or just hear from your pastor?

We believe people are hungry to hear from God. Too many pastors love to hear themselves talk while their people are starving and really need and desire to hear from God.

What kind of sheep are you leading? Are they unhealthy, skinny sheep or are they healthy, well-fed sheep? Well-fed sheep reflect a preacher who is consistently teaching the Word of God, modeling for the congregation how to study the Bible and understand spiritual truth.

Thankfully, God has spoken and has not remained silent. God wants to communicate with us! This is a staggering thought. The God of the universe, the creator of our souls, desires to communicate with each one of us! If you have a Bible, you have access to what God wants to say to you.

As you hold your Bible, you are literally holding the words, the insights and the knowledge God wishes to communicate to you.

Reasons to Study the Bible

God tells us in His Word that the Bible offers great blessings to those who hunger and thirst for His truth. Psalm 19:7-10 provides a summary of blessings that flow from the Word of God.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

The Word of God refreshes the soul, provides divine wisdom, offers deep joy, illuminates our

eyes to grasp Biblical truth. The Word of God is pure, enduring, firm, righteous, and precious. The study of the Word of God keeps us on the right path and it promises rewards in this life and the life to come. There are so many benefits and blessings that flow from the reading, study, and application of God's Word.

Which of these joys have you experienced personally?

- Have you heard the voice of your heavenly Father speaking to you in the Bible?
- Have you learned what God is really like from His own lips (and often God's true character turns out to be a surprise because we are so used to hearing about God from others who may not really know Him.)?
- Have you discovered the wonderful truth of salvation and how to be sure of heaven?
- Have you found out the things that are on God's heart – what really matters to Him about this world and His will for your life?
- Can you testify that God's Word is transforming you?

In addition, there are harmful consequences of misunderstanding the Bible. These two examples are quoted straight from Scripture.

- There are some things in the Bible (like Paul's letters) that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:16)
- I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away disciples after them. Therefore, be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears. (Acts 20:29-31)

Without an understanding of the Scriptures, we can be like infants that are tossed about on the waves of false teaching and easily influenced by whatever the current trends are or the deceitful schemes of false teachers. Studying the Bible for yourself, will help you identify false teachers and distinguish good from evil. You will become an approved workman who has been trained to correctly handle the Word of Truth!

Here is another insightful quote from Jerry Bridges, *"Reading the Bible gives us breadth, studying gives us depth."*

Reading and study have their place in Bible intake. It is a good discipline to read the Bible every day and meet with God. We also need to periodically remind ourselves to slow down and go deeper when reading the Bible. You don't need much formal training to become a student of

the Bible. As with any sport, there is no substitute for getting on the field and into the game. You can talk about it only for so long but the only way to really improve is to practice and play the game. Listening to gifted pastors and teachers is helpful for our spiritual growth. Using good reference tools is also important. But there is simply nothing better than studying the Bible for yourself.

Beginning at the bottom of page 4 in your handout, I have summarized three points that make the case for why we should study the bible.

Bible study is essential for spiritual growth.

1 Peter 2:2

“Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation.”

Three important principles come from this verse.

- We need to have the right attitude, like a baby, to have a craving, a hunger for the Word of God.
- We must have the right kind of appetite – for pure spiritual milk. This is an appetite is for the Bible.
- And we must have an aim or purpose for studying the Bible - so that we can grow spiritually. Spiritual maturity is the desired outcome of having this craving for this pure spiritual milk. Bible study is essential for growth.

Bible study is essential for spiritual maturity.

Hebrews 5:11-14

“We have much to say about this but it's hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers you need someone else to teach you the elementary truths of God's Word all over again. You need milk, not solid food. Anyone who lives on milk being still an infant is not acquainted with the teachings about righteousness but solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

The author of Hebrews is saying to a group of believers, by this point you should be teaching others. You should be leading a group. You should be helping others grow in their walk. Instead, you are still like infants. You are still baby Christians.

As you invest time into working out your salvation, you are training yourself for godliness. As you train, you will begin to mature. You will be able to discern good from evil right, from wrong. You will become a teacher who will not just be talking about theoretical ideas, but you will be able to teach based on how the Bible has impacted your life from personal experience.

Knowing the truth is important, but what moves us beyond ignorance is not just knowing things but rather putting them into practice. This aspect of study and training produces spiritual

maturity.

Bible study is essential for spiritual effectiveness.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

“All scripture is god breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that the servant of god may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

Teaching doctrine informs us of the truth. Rebuke means to confront sin when you wander from the path. To correct means providing guidance to get back on the right path. Training is practical application for godly living.

In summary, Bible study essential for **spiritual growth, spiritual maturity, and spiritual effectiveness**.

We don't want to just sit in the pews. We just don't want to have people feeding us what they have studied in the Bible. We need to engage with the Word of God ourselves so we can make disciples. So, we can be teachers of others and live the life that God has called us to live.

We see this in Ezra's Life

On page 5, we can learn from Ezra the priest. In Ezra 7:10, we can see these principles related to the study of the Bible.

“He devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.”

Ezra had the right attitude - he **devoted himself** to the **study of the law**, the study of the Word.

He did not just study, but he **observed the Law**. He obeyed it he put it into practice in his life.

Next, he **taught others**. This is the principle from 2 Timothy 2:2. Whatever we learn, we must practice in our lives and teach others.

How about the Bereans?

Listen to Acts 17:11 Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

The Bereans did not just take the apostle Paul at his word as he taught from the Old Testament Scriptures. They received his teaching with eagerness and then they devoted time to personally study the Scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching was aligned to God's Word. This should be our approach to every message we hear from the Bible as well.

The Bible Is Our Authority

In our first Foundation of the Christian Faith course, we discuss the doctrine of the Bible. This is called Bibliology. The Bible is the inspired, inerrant, infallible, living Word of God and is our authority in all matters faith and life.

We already read what the apostle Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

The apostle Peter adds to this when he writes this in 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

Because God's Word is both inspired or breathed out by God and superintended by God in the writing down of His words, we have this authoritative source of truth in all matters of faith and life. This is what we are privileged to study, obey and to teach.

In fact, Paul declares that we are mandated to preach and teach this word. Notice how Paul says this in 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

The word "preach" means to herald or proclaim in public.

Before there was ever a printed page, a newspaper, a radio, a television or email, the king of the land would send a herald to towns and villages to literally shout out the words the king wished to communicate. If the king wanted to visit a town, he would send a herald ahead of his visit to announce his arrival. The herald would come into town and shout, "The king is coming, the king is coming!"

In the same way, the preacher is to communicate the words of the King of kings. The preacher is to herald or proclaim, "The King has come and He is returning." We have this mandate to declare, to herald, to proclaim the Word of God.

Did you notice by what authority Paul gives us this mandate in 2 Timothy 4:1?

First, Paul says this in the presence of God. That alone is enough to get our attention but then he goes on to say in the presence of Jesus Christ as well! Paul is speaking to us today as if we were standing in the presence of God and Jesus Christ. That is powerful and reveals the importance of this mandate to preach and teach the Bible.

Paul does not just invoke the name of God and Jesus Christ but also reminds us that Jesus will judge both the living and the dead, that Jesus Christ is coming again, and that Jesus Christ will rule in His kingdom. That, my friend, is a powerful mandate!

A mandate witnessed by both God and Jesus Christ. A mandate given to us with this great accountability to Jesus Christ who will judge, who is coming again and who will rule with all authority. Until that great day, when Christ is reigning on earth, we are to study, obey and teach the authoritative Word of God. We are never to abandon the Word of God with its life- transforming authority.

When any pastor abandons the Bible and begins to share only their thoughts, they are abandoning their authority. God has given us His Word, and our only response is to study it, obey it, preach it, and teach others how to fish for themselves.

There are a Greek few terms related to Bible Study that will be helpful to define.

- **Hermeneutics** - the study of the methodology of interpreting the Bible.
- **Exegesis** – an explanation or critical interpretation of a text, based upon what is present within the text itself. (“to explain” “to utter” “draw out the actual meaning”)
- **Eisegesis** – an explanation or interpretation of a text, based upon what we bring to the text ourselves. (“to lead into” bringing more of our own ideas into the text than allowing the text to guide us to the meaning.

Our goal in hermeneutics is to determine as accurately as possible the historical meaning of a text, the meaning that the author meant to communicate to his original audience.

To understand the message that God intended to communicate through the human author, the use of exegesis is the preferred bible study approach. We want to draw the meaning of the any passage of the Bible, directly from the text itself.

Ultimately, we want to discern God’s message accurately, avoid or dispel misconceptions or erroneous perspectives and conclusions about the Bible, and be able to accurately apply the Bible’s message to our lives. We accomplish this through this simple, three step study process: Observation, Interpretation, and Application.

Basic Steps for Studying the Bible

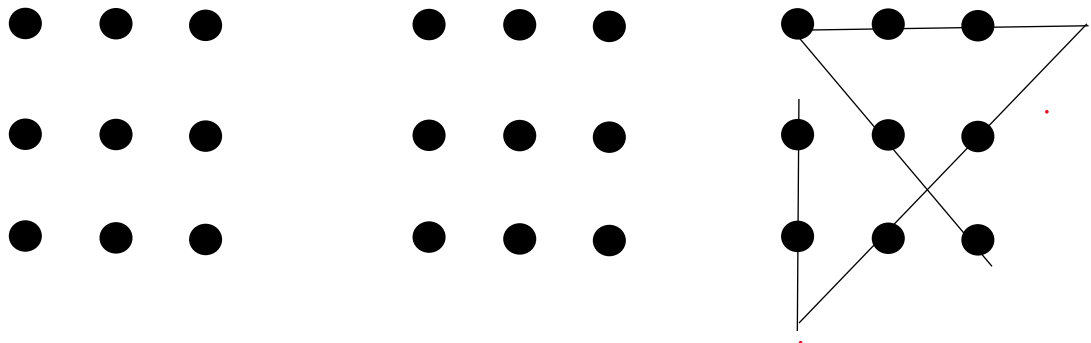
Turn to the top of page 8 as we lay the foundation for a few simple techniques for studying the Bible. This material is a summary of Howard Hendricks' wonderful book, *Living by The Book*. We will share a three-step process called Observation, Interpretation and Application.

Observation: Answers the questions, "What do I see?"

"Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from your Law" (Psalm 119:18).

What makes one person a better Bible student than another? He can see more, that's all. The same truth is available to each student in the text. Try this activity. To begin to illustrate the importance of observation and seeing things that may not be as clear at first glance, here is a fun activity.

In your handout on page 8, you will see three groups of 9 dots. There are three dots in each of three rows. Your assignment is to draw one continuous line through all nine dots. Here is the key: Without lifting your pen or pencil from the paper, draw four straight, connected lines that go through each dot only once. Your first few attempts will be based on what appears to be most obvious. You will probably attempt to draw four lines around the perimeter of the diagram. You may try several combination of lines but you will never connect all 9 dots with just four straight lines that only touch each dot once with taking a different approach. You will need to open your eyes to see things like you may have never seen before. Sometimes we call this "out of the box" thinking. The only way to solve this puzzle is to realize that you may draw your lines extending beyond the dots. One solution to this puzzle is provided in the transcript of this audio lesson.



In this Observation step you ask, “What do I see in the text?” “What are the facts?” You become a bible detective, looking for clues. Who is the author? When was it written? Where does the story take place? Who is the primary audience? Who are the characters? What are the places? What do you know about the culture? What are key terms to be defined? What is emphasized? What is repeated? What things are related? What things are alike? What things are different? What things are true in life? What is the structure/grammar of the sentences (subjects, verbs, objects, connecting words, comparisons, contracts, etc.)?

This observation step requires time but the benefit of the time invested will lead to a clearer understanding of the passage. Here is a short activity to practice “observation” with just one verse.

Activity: Let’s Start with a Verse

1. Read Acts 1:8 and make as many observations as you can from this one verse. The verse is written in your handout and there is room for you to make notes, circle, underline any key words or phrases that you observe that will give you background to better understand this verse.
2. Acts 1:8 says, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”*
3. As you get started, you may observe that the word “but” may be the best place to begin. This word indicates a change in direction. It forces you to go back and read what came before this verse, in context. As you look back at the prior verses you will find hints regarding the author and even a prior book that the author wrote. You will find clues regarding the purpose of the prior book and this current book that we call the Acts of the Apostles.
4. Ask questions regarding who are the people in this verse and what do we know about them? What is the main verb in this verse? What is the tense of the verb? What are they going to receive? Look for cause-effect relationships. Define other terms. Define places that are mentioned. How might this verse relate to the entire Book of Acts?
5. Pause the audio now and take 5-10 minutes to make as many observations as possible from just this one verse, Acts 1:8. Your observations will undoubtedly take you to other verses as you follow the clues and make more observations and ask more questions of the text. When you have finished, restart the audio for a summary of Acts 1:8.

Acts 1:1 -> Luke 1-4 Author: Former book Luke; to who: Theophylus
Context: What Jesus began to do, Acts continues His work
1:6 – questions about the kingdom, what kingdom?
1:7 Jesus answers in negative and 1:8 in the positive

Future tense: will receive a gift, they don't possess it yet;
Power = dynamite, repeated in Acts, end of Luke – wait
for this power

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power

Connecting phrase: “but” “You” repeated, who is “you”? What do we know about them? Just apostles or all believers?

Holy Spirit – Trinity, power from outside,
John 14-16 teaching on promised Holy Spirit.

when the Holy Spirit comes on

you;

Witness = Testify to what you have seen. Ambassador,
fisher of men, committed to His mission and message
(Matt 28); sent ones (John) Testify to truth – cost
them their lives

and you will be my witnesses

In Jerusalem,

What do we know about Jerusalem (temple, Jewish,
Crucifixion, ascension, return); Judea and Samaria?
Who were Samaritans? Half breeds, women at well, ...

and in all Judea

and Samaria,

Final words before Jesus' departure. What was the
atmosphere/feelings of audience?
What followed: The Ascension 1:9-11

and to the ends of the

earth.

Outline for book of Acts: Chapters 1-7 Jerusalem, 8-12
Judea and Samaria, 13-28 Ends of the Earth

In less than 10 minutes it is easy to come up with at least 30 different observations from just this one verse. Some have made more than 300 observations from this verse. We have not even studied a paragraph, a chapter, or an entire book. Your observation skills will improve the more you practice them and begin reading the Bible through a new set of “observing eyes”. The goal of observation is ultimately to better prepare you to understand the meaning of the passage you are studying. This brings us to the send step.

Interpretation: Answers the question, “What does it mean?”

Every book in the Bible has a message, and that message can be understood. God intended the Bible as His revelation to all people. “All Scripture is profitable”. That means it has purpose, it

has meaning. “Meaning” is not our subjective thoughts read into the text, but God’s objective truth read out of the text. The quality of your interpretation will always depend on the quality of your observation.

Interpretation is necessary because there are natural barriers to our understanding of the meaning of a biblical text. Some of these are related to language, culture, and literary styles. There are several tools in addition to the Bible that can help to remove these barriers with the help of the Holy Spirit. No matter how well you do with Interpretation, there will still be things you will not fully understand. Don’t get tied up in knots over the problems and unanswerable questions that may come up in your study of the Bible. The miracle is that you can understand all the essential things that God wants you to understand for your eternal salvation and for your daily living.

In this Interpretation step you ask questions of the text to look for meaning, find answers and then integrate your answers into a meaningful whole. Consider the following:

- Type of writing (i.e., prophesy, poetry, history, etc.)
- Content (much of this is uncovered during Observation)
- Context (what comes before and after the text, and how it fits into the book and the overall message of the Bible)
- Comparison (compare Scripture with Scripture using a tool like a Concordance)
- Culture (Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, a good study Bible can help with this)
- Consultation (consult other resources like commentaries, podcasts of sermons, etc.)

Work to summarize the main point for the passage into one sentence and then identify the sub-points in the passage that reinforce the main point. You can follow this process as you work your way through an entire chapter and book of the Bible.

Application: Answers the question, “How does it work?”

This third and final step, Application, might be the most neglected, yet the most needed step in this process. Too much Bible Study begins and ends in the wrong place. It begins with Interpretation, and it also ends there. But we have learned that you do not start with the question, “What does this mean?” but rather, “What do you see?” You also don’t end the process by asking, “What does this mean?” but rather, “How does this work?”

“Spiritual growth is a commitment to change. And yet, the human heart resists nothing as strongly as it resists change. We will do anything to avoid it.” - Howard Hendricks

As we consider the process of Application, it helps to know what the text means (interpretation) and to know ourselves and our needs. We must relate the truth of the Word of God to our own experience and areas of life. We need to pay close attention to the Scriptures,

even memorizing them so they will continue to work in our hearts and minds. And finally, we must put these truths into practice which should be our primary goal of Bible Study.

Here are 7 helpful questions to begin to ask yourself as you look to apply God's Word or put what you have studied into practice in your life (Matthew 18:19-20, James 1:22-25).

- Is there an EXAMPLE to follow?
- Is there a SIN to avoid/confess?
- Is there a PROMISE to claim?
- Is there a PRAYER to repeat?
- Is there a COMMAND to obey?
- Is there a CONDITION to meet?
- Is there a VERSE to memorize?

Bible Study Resources (top of page 11)

There are many other resources in addition to the Bible that can support your study of the Bible. First, it is helpful to consider the translation of the Bible you are working with. The preferred translations for sound Bible study are Formal Equivalent (NASB, ESV, NKJV) as well as the mix of Formal Equivalent and Dynamic Equivalent like the NIV.

- Bible Translations
 - Interlinear (the Greek and Hebrew text positioned in between the lines for comparison)
 - Formal equivalent (NASB, ESV, NKJ)
 - Mix of Formal Equivalent and Dynamic equivalent (NIV)
 - Dynamic equivalent (NLT)
 - Paraphrase (The Message)
- Concordances (Strong's Exhaustive Concordance can be downloaded as a free App.)
 - Helps in locating a passage if a key word or phrase can be remembered
 - Systematizes words and key phrases so you can do a word, theme, or topical search of all the biblical uses of the term
 - Allows you to do word studies to determine meaning of key words in a particular passage
- Bible Dictionaries: Explain the origin, meaning, and use of key words and terms in the text. Helps to overcome the language barriers to understanding the Bible.

- **Commentaries:** The studies of a biblical scholar related to the text. Helps to overcome language, cultural and literary barriers to understanding the Bible.
- **Bible Atlases:** collection of maps showing places mentioned in the text and perhaps some description of their history and significance. Helps to overcome geographical barriers to understanding the Bible.

In Lesson 2 we will discuss some of these additional Bible Study tools that are listed in your handout.

There is always a cost when we devote ourselves to study the Word of God. And as with anything worthwhile, with the cost often comes great blessing.

- **Effort:** The greater the investment of time and effort, the greater the reward.
- **Openness to God:** Proverbs 8:34-35.
“Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the Lord.”
- **Openness to Change:** The Bible was written not to be studied but to change our lives (Rom 8:29).
“For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”
- **Diligence:** What matters is not how far you get, but that you keep making progress.

This brings Lesson 1 to a close. I hope this has sparked an interest within you to continue this course as we equip ourselves to study the Bible. It is clear that Bible Study is essential for spiritual growth, maturity, and effectiveness. We will build upon the simple three step process of Observation, Interpretation, and Application as we move this course.

When we continue with Lesson 2, we will discuss ten simple tools that can be added to your tool kit that will transform your approach to studying the Bible on your own.