

STAGE ONE – BEGIN WITH PRAYER

Kay Arthur’s book entitled How to Study Your Bible correctly suggests that prayer is the first step for Bible study citing two verses that help prepare the Bible student’s heart and mind to engage God’s Word. The first verse is John 16:13, which is a part of John 16:13–15 (NASB 2020), which reads [emphasis added]:

¹³ But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, **He will guide you into all the truth;** for He will not speak on His own, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, for He will take from Mine and will disclose *it* to you. ¹⁵ All things that the Father has are Mine; this is why I said that He takes from Mine and will disclose *it* to you.

This passage is a part of Jesus’ last words to His disciples prior to His crucifixion. See John 13-17. A number of times (e.g., John 14:16-17, 25-26; 16:7-11) Jesus comforted His disciples with His promise of the coming Holy Spirit. For a believer it is a tremendous comfort to know that the Holy Spirit indwells them. See 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

The key expression in John 16:13 is, “He will guide you into all the truth.” The Greek verb *hodēgēō* (the lexical form), translated as “He will guide,” means:

15.182 ὀδηγέω: to guide or to direct, with the implication of making certain that people reach an appropriate destination—‘to lead, to guide.

Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 204). United Bible Societies.

The Greek noun *alēthēia* translated “truth” means:

72.2 ἀλήθεια, ας f: the content of that which is true and thus in accordance with what actually happened—‘truth.’

Louw et al., *supra* at Vol. 1, p. 672.

Please note that the definitive article *ho* (the lexical form) function as an attributive article, which is:

An article which relates to the relevant noun in the sense of adding definiteness to its meaning. In certain uses, the definite aspect is absent and the noun in question takes on the force of categorical generality. One example of the latter is found in some occurrences of τοὺς ἀνθρώπους for ‘humankind.’ (References: BDF §252-276; Wallace p. 206-290; Smyth §1154-1167.)

Lukaszewski, A. L. (2007). The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary. Lexham Press.

The expression “all the truth” encompasses the entirety of what is a certain body of truth or reality.

What a comfort to know that each time I begin a study session of God’s Word, God the Holy Spirit (Third Person of the Trinity) guides me to receive all the relevant biblical truth God wants me to receive from that session.

An exemplary prayer using John 16:13 reads:

Dear Heavenly Father, when I open Your written Word, I rely on, and look forward to, the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise that the Holy Spirit will guide me to receive all the relevant biblical truth that you want me to receive today. I early anticipate receipt of what You have for me. May this upcoming study session and what I take from it glorify Your Son, Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name, I pray.

The second verse is Psalm 119:18, which forms a part of the third strophe of Psalm 119 comprising Psalm 119:17–24 (NASB 2020), reads:

¹⁷ Deal *generously* with Your servant, That I may live and keep Your word. ¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your Law. ¹⁹ I am a stranger on the earth; Do not hide Your commandments from me. ²⁰ My soul is crushed with longing For Your ordinances at all times. ²¹ You rebuke the arrogant, the cursed, Who wander from Your commandments. ²² Take disgrace and contempt away from me, For I comply with Your testimonies. ²³ Even though rulers sit *and* speak against me, Your servant meditates on Your statutes. ²⁴ Your testimonies also are my delight; *They are* my advisers.

Key takeaways are:

- (1) May I keep God’s Word.
- (2) May God open my eyes to behold, and not hide from me, the many wonderful things in His Word.
- (3) May I long continually for God’s Word.
- (4) May I meditate on God’s Word.
- (5) May God’s Word give me guidance.

An exemplary prayer using this strophe reads as follows:

Dear Heavenly Father, I am consumed with longing for Your Word at all times. I ask You to open my spiritual eyes so I can feast upon Your extraordinarily wonderful truths that I have never truly comprehended before. I will listen to and meditate on these truths so they are my counselors that guide me as I strive to obey Your Word. O Father God, deal bountifully with me so I may live in accordance with Your Word. In Jesus Name I pray, Amen.

An instructive article (September 21, 2015) by Pastor David Mathis from the desiringgod.org website entitled “Four Prayers for Bible Reading” identifies four verses (one of which is Psalm 119:18) to use in praying before studying the Bible. A Bible student may want to try using one or more of these verses to structure a pre-study prayer.

Certain verses may be more applicable than others depending upon the purpose for Bible study. Therefore, the Bible student may discover that one verse is more applicable one day than another.

Pastor Mathis’ second verse is Luke 18:38 (NASB 2020), which together with v. 39 reads:

³⁸ And he called out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” ³⁹ Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

For context, the cry came from a blind beggar who wanted Jesus to heal him from his blindness. See Luke 18:35-42. The beggar continued to cry out in spite of opposition (see v. 39). Each one of us needs God to show mercy to us to remove spiritual blindness and allow us to see the truths in His Word.

A sample prayer using Luke 18:38-39 reads:

O, Father God, before I open up Your Word today, I cry out that You give me 20-20 spiritual vision to clearly see Jesus like did the blind beggar after Jesus let him recover his sight. I know You can take away spiritual blindness, and I have the faith to trust that You will do so for me this day. I ask You to give me the perseverance to cry out for spiritual sight even amid opposition such as distractions, strife, and turmoil. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.

Pastor Mathis’ third verse is James 1:22, that forms a part of James 1:22–25 (NASB 2020) that reads:

²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not just hearers who deceive themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for *once* he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. ²⁵ But one who has looked intently at the perfect law, the *law* of freedom, and has continued *in it*, not having become a forgetful hearer but an active doer, this person will be blessed in what he does.

A suggested prayer using this verse reads:

Dear Heavenly Father, I am about to engage in the study of the Bible. Please give me guidance from Your Word. May I retain and not forget the principles in Your Word. Please give me courage, and determination to apply the timeless principles in Your Word to my life today. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.

Pastor Mathis' fourth verse is Luke 24:45 (NASB 2020):

⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,

For context, Jesus opened the minds of His disciples so they understood how the Scriptures pointed to Jesus Christ the Messiah. See Luke 24:36-49. The Greek verb *dianoigō* (the lexical form) is translated as "He opened," and it means:

33.142 διανοίγωb: to explain something which has been previously hidden or obscure—'to explain, to open up, to make evident.' δὴνοιγεν ἡμῖν τὰς γραφάς 'he explained the Scriptures to us' Lk 24:32.

Louw et al., *supra* at Vol. 1, p. 404). United Bible Societies.

An exemplary prayer built around this verse reads:

Dear Heavenly Father, I stand in awe of You and the infinite love You display towards me in giving Your Son as a sacrifice for the atonement of my sins. Please help me to comprehend better the infinite sacrifice Jesus made on the cross and see it in the text. I rejoice in the fact of Jesus' physical bodily resurrection and the absolute certainty it gives me about the authority of Scripture and the certainty of my salvation. In Jesus' Name, I pray. Amen.

Other attributes of God's Word, which may be more applicable some days than others, are below with the relevant Scripture.

- God's Word is spiritual food. 1 Peter 2:2 (NASB 2020) - ² and like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,
- God's Word is light. Psalm 119:105 (NASB 2020) - ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.
- God's Word is a defensive weapon. Ephesians 6:17 (NASB 2020) - ¹⁷ And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- God's Word is a piercing instrument. Hebrews 4:12 (NASB 2020) - ¹² For the word of God is living and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, even penetrating as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

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