



The Discipline of Study

The Dutch scholar Erasmus quipped *"When I get a little money I buy books; and if any is left I buy food and clothes."* But perhaps you may feel like the author of Ecclesiastes: *"Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body."* How should the Christian approach the topic of study?

Why should we Study?

In Romans 12 Paul urges us *"Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* How are we to achieve this? The answer is found in the discipline of study. Christian philosopher JP Moreland states that *"Study is a discipline that strengthens the mind and enriches the soul."* Richard Foster, author of *Celebration of Discipline*, notes that *"The purpose of the spiritual disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life giving habits"*.

What should we Study?

For the Christian the primary focus of our study is Scripture. Psalm 1:1 reminds us *"Blessed is the man who meditates on the law of the LORD, day and night."* We can also use good Christian literature and benefit from the labours of others. In addition to written books, we can study "non-verbal" books. Psalm 19 directs us to the wonders of creations as they display God's glory. And in Proverbs 30 we are urged to consider *"ants, conies, locusts, and lizards"* in the pursuit of wisdom. James Montgomery Boice interprets Philippians 4:8: *"Whatever is true ... noble ... right ... pure ... admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things"* as guiding us to reflect upon *"the best in music art, literature and architecture"*.

How should we Study?

Richard Foster suggests that study involves four steps; repetition, concentration, comprehension, and reflection. Foster notes that *"Meditation is devotional; study is analytical."* Although, if study is to be viewed as a spiritual rather than merely academic discipline, the two are clearly closely linked. Eugene Peterson also views study as a four stage comprising reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation.

The Dangers of Study

Study is a high risk enterprise! The Pharisees were well versed in the study of Scripture. However they possessed information but without submission to God's will. In John 5:39-40 Jesus rebukes them: *"You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life ... yet you refuse to come to me to have life."* Becoming more knowledgeable about Christian truth and doctrine without being transformed to be more Christlike will only result in pride.

Conclusion

We have looked at study: its goal, focus, methods – and its risks. But let me conclude with discipline. As Chris Evans, Radio 2, comments *"It's the motivation that gets you started, but the habit that keeps you going!"* Study must become part of our daily routine if it is to be effective in renewing our minds and transforming our lives.

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