

When Study Isn't Study

Scripture: John 17:17

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Most people who claim to know and love the Lord would agree that His Word is central to spiritual growth.

But there are a wide variety of ideas about what that looks like in practice. For many leaders in the spiritual formation movement, Bible study doesn't really involve *study* at all. Instead, it's an attempt to *experience* the text.

Many spiritual formation gurus advocate various meditative Bible-reading methods, most of them adapted from a Catholic Church practice called *lectio divina*. Regardless of the name they apply to it, the pattern is usually the same—slow, methodical, repetitive reading, with an eye toward words and phrases that pop out to the individual reader. It's through those individual words and phrases, we're told, that the Lord speaks directly to us.

Bible study, then, is not a question of digging deep into God's Word but letting your imagination and intuition guide your own personal understanding of the text. The reader is encouraged to project himself into Scripture—to imagine the sights, sounds, and smells of the world of the Bible, supposedly gaining a deeper understanding of God's truth through these flights of fancy.

It's hard to imagine a "study" method that would show more casual contempt for the true meaning and original intent of God's Word. The Bible isn't a collection of fables or bedtime stories to fire our imaginations—it is direct revelation from God, and its meaning is fixed and eternal.

A key aspect of Bible study is pushing aside your own thoughts, prejudices, and ideas and getting to the author's original intent for the original audience. Instead of pursuing that primary meaning, spiritual formation techniques make the whimsical, disconnected thoughts and feelings of the reader the final arbiter and interpreter of Scripture.

God's Word is simply too important in the lives of believers to be left up to their own fickle intuitions and flawed understanding. His truth is not subjective—it's the objective, eternal, changeless foundation of our salvation and sanctification.

When he was recently in studio, we asked John MacArthur about the means of sanctification, and how the Lord works through His truth in our lives. Here's what he had to say.

Because of the vital role of God's Word in our spiritual growth, this week we're going to look at some practical ways to study it, understand its original meaning, and get the most out of it.

For now, we want to hear from you. What kinds of Bible-study methods have been recommended to

you in the past? What stimulated your spiritual growth, and what stalled it?

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