

# DISCIPLESHIP. SUPPLEMENT 11

## [DISCIPLESHIP]

### ADVANTAGES OF USING PRACTICAL METHODS IN DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING

This discipleship-training course teaches several practical methods. What are their use and their significance?

#### 1. The advantages of worship.

(1) Getting to know God.

In order to worship God, we must first get to know who God is. By teaching or by meditating together on a particular attribute or characteristic of God every time you meet for worship, the people get to know God better and better. People who come from different religious backgrounds with completely different concepts about whom they think 'god' is. Their ideas differ very much from what God revealed about himself and about Jesus Christ in the Bible. God's attributes or characteristics are for example: God is unfathomable, powerful, holy, righteous, love and merciful (he forgives all the sins of those who believe in the sacrifice of atonement of Jesus Christ)!

(2) Learning to worship.

Worship is more than singing songs of praise. Worship is an attitude of awe, adoration, submission and dedication to God, expressed in various kinds of prayer and in the way Christians live.

The variety in contents. By worshipping God especially with a view to the above-mentioned specific attributes or characteristics of God, every worship meeting becomes different, attractive and very educative.

The variety in methods. Worship expressed in prayer may be in words, in music, in songs or in silence. Every worship service is different. Worship may be expressed in the confession of sin, in breaking with sin, in returning to God, in changing thoughts and habits, in a new submission and dedication to God to live differently and to serve others.

#### 2. The advantages of a quiet time by means of the chosen Bible verse or favourite truth method.

A personal time with God (also called quiet time, devotional time) is a Christian discipline that Christians should practice very regularly, if possible, daily.

"The Chosen Bible verse method" or "Favourite Truth method" of quiet time trains Christians in several important Christian disciplines at the same time: praying before you read the Bible, daily reading of the Bible, choosing what is important in the Bible, meditation on what is written in the Bible, responding to God in prayer, intercession and sharing with others what you have learned.

Step 1. Pray.

You learn to prepare your heart to meet God. You pray to deliberately and consciously enter into God's presence. You could pray a short prayer like "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" (Psalm 119:18).

Step 2. Read a passage from the Bible.

You learn to read the Bible alone. You do not meet God by just seeking a quiet spot or by just meditating on your own inner thoughts or on something human like a poem. You meet God when you ask God to speak his words clearly to you. That is why you must read a passage from the Bible and expect that God will speak to you personally through the words in the Bible.

Step 3. Choose a Bible verse or favourite truth.

You learn to limit yourself by making choices. *Bible study* and *Bible meditation* have different goals. The goal of Bible study is to understand a passage in the Bible as God intended and to apply it. But the goal of Bible meditation is to develop a personal intimate relationship with God for that specific day without trying to understand every truth in the passage.

Therefore it is best to concentrate on *one truth* in the Bible passage and not on all the truths in that passage. In this way you exercise your will and decisiveness with respect to spiritual matters. It helps you to concentrate on what is really important and not get sidetracked by only the things that you like or by the things that present themselves to you as urgent. It also helps you to have an adequate personal time with God within 15 minutes, while a thorough Bible study takes much more time.

Step 4. Meditate on your Chosen Bible verse or Favourite Truth.

You learn to meditate on the Bible truths. *Bible reading* and *Bible meditation* have different goals. The purpose of Bible reading is to gain information and get a good overview of the Bible. The purpose of Bible meditation is to gain deeper insight into the truths within the Bible and to discover what God intends to do with these truths in your life. Christian meditation consists of:

- thinking about the meaning of the words in your chosen Bible verse or Favourite Truth
- praying softly about what God intends to say to you and what God wants you to do
- relating that truth to your personal life

- formulating your conclusions and recording them in your notebook.

Step 5. Pray your Chosen Bible verse or Favourite Truth.

- Your prayer becomes a dialogue instead of a monologue with God. God speaks to you via his written Word and you respond to what God is saying to you in the Bible.
- You learn to pray very specific prayers – for specific people and specific things.
- You learn to pray not only for yourself, but also for other people: your family members, the people close by and the people far away.

### 3. The advantages of sharing your quiet times with others.

When two of you or a small group of people read the same Bible passages every day of every week and then share about them once every week, you stimulate one another to grow every day! Sharing from your quiet time every week during the discipleship group meeting helps everyone to have regular quiet times.

By making the sharing from one of your quiet times a part of your weekly discipleship group meeting, you are actually spurring one another on toward love in relationships and good works in activities (Hebrews 10:24-25).

By taking turns in your small group to share from one of your quiet times during the past week, you are learning to teach others (Colossians 3:16: cf. Matthew 28:19-20). Because the Holy Spirit dwells in each Christian, he teaches some members of the discipleship group to become teachers, discipleship group leaders or elders (1 Timothy 3:2c).

### 4. The advantages of systematic Bible teaching.

The purpose of *systematic* teaching of the studies is to discover, to understand and to discuss the most important characteristics of a Christian disciple. The contents are in short: the relationship with Christ, the Word, prayer, fellowship with Christians, the relationship with non-Christians and obedience to Christ. Each lesson has one study and the group leader involves the students as much as possible.

### 5. The advantages of the five steps Bible study method.

The purpose of the five steps method of Bible study is to involve every member of the discipleship group to actively participate in every one of the 5 parts of the Bible study! Otherwise, it is very easy for the group leader to change the Bible study into a Bible teaching and monologue. Or one or two talkative students dominate and give the others no chance to participate.

Step 1. Read.

You learn to read the Bible together. Every one in the group gets a turn to read one Bible verse until the whole passage has been read. From the start, everyone in the group is involved. The purpose of reading the Bible is to gain information and get a good overview of the Bible passage. However, because the purpose of Bible study is more than merely reading, four more steps follow:

Step 2. Discover.

You learn to concentrate on what you already understand in the Bible passage and not on what you do not yet understand. Before people get bogged down in trying to understand all the difficult truths and answer all the questions in the Bible passage, they are stimulated to first discover truths which they do understand and which touches their mind (thoughts) and heart (feelings). The Bible study time should be characterised by a positive sphere of joyous discovery of truths and enthusiastic application of these truths. It should not be characterised by a negative sphere of problems, unanswered questions and difficult discussions! That is why the discovery of truths you understand (step 2) is placed before seeking answers to questions you do not understand (step 3).

Step 3. Question.

You learn how to interpret the Bible correctly. The Bible is not a collection of mere human views, but is the mind of God (Isaiah 55:8-9). There are things in the Bible, which are hard to understand (2 Peter 3:16). Therefore the Holy Spirit must teach you what he intended to say in every passage of the Bible. Just as there are traffic rules to help people to drive without causing accidents, so there are rules for interpreting the Bible (called “hermeneutics”), which help you to understand the Bible without falling into error. See Manual 3, lesson 29, “Interpreting the Bible correctly”. The Bible itself is always the best commentary of the Bible. Always interpret a Bible passage in the light of the whole Bible message. And always interpret the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament. The group leader will help you to understand a particular Bible passage by referring to other Bible passages.

The group leader should not devise the questions! He should give each group member an opportunity to ask at least one question from the Bible passage, which he or she would like the group to discuss. In this way, all the real questions in your small group are tackled. And the questions are always relevant questions. Teach the group members to ask questions using question words like “what”, “who”, “why” and “how” (thus, open questions that stimulate discussion).

Step 4. Apply.

You learn to put the teachings of the Bible into practice (cf. Matthew 7:24-27). Before they make a personal application from any Bible passage it is better that you first brainstorm with one another and make a short list of possible applications from the truths in that Bible passage. Ask God what he wants you *to know, believe, be or do*.

Then give the group a chance to choose a personal application, which they may share, but are not obliged to share with the group.

Step 5. Pray.

You learn to respond to God when God speaks to you. After studying a Bible passage together, each of you in the small group take a turn to respond to what God has said to you in that Bible passage and pray that truth back to God. In this way Bible study and prayer together form a conversation with God. First God speaks to you through the Bible and then you respond in prayer.

6. The advantages of meditation and memorisation.

You learn to meditate and to memorise God's Word. You learn to meditate on the meaning of a Bible passage before you memorise that Bible passage. By memorising Bible verses you are hiding important words of God in the storeroom of your heart. The memorised Bible verses enable you not to sin against God (Psalm 119:9,11), because the Holy Spirit will remind you of God's Word whenever you are tempted.

Bible verses that you have meditated and memorised help you to pray according to God's will, to claim a promise of God in the Bible, to answer someone's question with God's answer, to witness and to teach God's Word to others. In this discipleship course you memorise some of the most important verses in the Bible.

7. The advantages of prayer.

You learn to respond to God when God speaks to you through Bible teaching and Bible study. Close the discipleship group meeting by praying short in response to what God has taught you. Prayer and God's Word belong together.

Also teach group members to pray every day for someone or something specific (intercession) and then to keep on looking forward how God will answer that prayer (Psalm 5:3).

8. The advantages of preparation at home between the disciple group meetings.

You learn to continue your training as disciples during the small group by doing your preparation at home. In this way you learn to do the spiritual disciplines when you are alone, at home or living among non-Christians.