



THINGS

EVERY  
CHRISTIAN  
NEEDS TO  
GROW

---

R. C. S P R O U L

---



*Reformation Trust*

P U B L I S H I N G

A DIVISION OF LIGONIER MINISTRIES · ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Five Things Every Christian Needs to Grow

© 2002 and 2008 by R.C. Sproul

Published by Reformation Trust Publishing

a division of Ligonier Ministries

400 Technology Park, Lake Mary, FL 32746

www.ligonier.org    www.reformationtrust.com

First edition published 2002. Second edition 2008

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher, Reformation Trust. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Cover design: José Reyes for Metaleap Design

Interior design and typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version, copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982, Thomas Nelson, Inc., Publishers.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:

Sproul, R.C. (Robert Charles), 1939-

Five things every Christian needs to grow / R.C. Sproul. -- 2nd ed.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-1-56769-103-0

1. Christian life--Reformed authors. I. Title.

BV4501.3.S665 2008

248.4--dc22

2008020821



To Archie Parrish,  
for his utter devotion to kingdom-focused prayer,  
  
and to Douglas M. Rhoda,  
for his zeal to see this book made available again,  
that Christians might be aided in their spiritual growth.



# Contents

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
1. BIBLE STUDY . . . . .	5
2. PRAYER . . . . .	33
3. WORSHIP . . . . .	59
4. SERVICE . . . . .	83
5. STEWARDSHIP . . . . .	107
6. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS . . . . .	127



## Introduction



It's a worldwide phenomenon. Every four years, the world pauses and holds its collective breath while the Olympic Games take place. Staggered so they occur two years apart, the summer and winter games feature the finest athletes in the world competing in well-known sports such as running, skiing, basketball, and gymnastics, as well as comparatively unknown events such as curling and the triple jump. The athletes come from virtually every nation on the face of the earth, a vast, magnificent display of humanity in all its diversity: different skin colors, different languages, different dress styles, and different lifestyles.

But despite their differences, these national representatives have much in common as they enter the stadium and gather under the Olympic banner with its five interlocking

rings representing unity among the nations of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Europe. They all stand together and take the Olympic oath, pledging to uphold the highest ideals of sportsmanship. They all strive to attain the Olympic ideal: *Citius, Altius, Fortius* (Swifter, Higher, Stronger). And they all put their years of training and preparation to the utmost test, going head to head against their fellow competitors.

Being a Christian is not an acquired skill or discipline like diving or ice skating. It is a living, vital relationship with the God of the universe, a relationship that begins when a person becomes a new creation in Him and receives Jesus as Lord by faith. But like Olympic athletes, Christians are called upon to train, to make sacrifices, and to embrace certain disciplines in order to give God “our utmost for His highest.” This book deals with five of those disciplines: Bible study, prayer, worship, service, and stewardship. Just as Olympic athletes work hard to achieve their best performances, our diligence in attending to these aspects of the Christian life will help determine our effectiveness in serving our Lord.

Olympians sweat and sacrifice for years and sometimes decades for the chance to compete and, hopefully, win a



## INTRODUCTION

medal and hear the applause of fans the world over. This stands as a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a select few gifted and dedicated men and women. God's people likely will not receive the world's adulation, but we will someday hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. (1 Cor. 9:24–25)

Enjoy your race.



## Chapter 1



# BIBLE STUDY

**T**he man writhed in excruciating agony. The pain he felt was not physical. He wished it were; he had dealt with that kind of pain before, and he knew he could find relief from it. But this pain required something much greater for its cure. This was a spiritual agony, a darkness of the soul in which he felt suspended by a fragile filament over the gaping jaws of hell. The pain was the shame, devastation, and ruin of personal humiliation brought on by the public exposure of a secret sin.

This man had been a hero, a national celebrity, a noted warrior, statesman, poet, and musician. During his lifetime, he had been the object of popular songs that celebrated his exploits. He had catapulted to national fame when he had championed his people by killing his army's most feared enemy, a monstrous titan, simply with a sling and one smooth stone. He had been a loyal subject of his king, even when that man had sought to kill him. Later, he had become king himself, and his reign had ushered in the golden age of Israel as he extended the boundaries of the nation to unprecedented lengths. Situated on the land bridge that connects Africa with Asia and Europe, through which ran international trade routes, Israel was positioned in a place of strategic geopolitical importance. Under this man's leadership, this tiny country, about the size of the state of Maryland, had become a major world power. But his greatness went beyond politics and culture. He had been a spiritual leader, a man after God's own heart. He was David, the second king of Israel.

When he fell into monstrous sin, it was a calamity not only for David and his family, but also for the entire nation. Despite his spiritual strength, he was so blinded to the evil in his own heart that it took a direct confrontation

by the prophet Nathan to awaken David to his guilt. We read the account in 2 Samuel 12:1–7:

Then the LORD sent Nathan to David. And he came to him, and said to him:

“There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing, except one little ewe lamb which he had bought and nourished; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate of his own food and drank from his own cup and lay in his bosom; and it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his own flock and from his own herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man’s lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him.”

So David’s anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, “As the LORD lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb, because he did this thing and because he had no pity.”

Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man!”

FIVE THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO GROW

David was grief-stricken at this unmasking, this indictment. Verse 13 says, “So David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the LORD.’” Through Nathan’s words, David was stricken by the convicting power of the Holy Spirit. His repentance was as deep as his fall had been steep. His remorse went beyond a superficial fear of punishment to authentic repentance, a spirit marked by a heart broken for offending God.

In this attitude of contrition, David penned the prayer known to us as Psalm 51. In this psalm, all the elements of true repentance are found:

Have mercy upon me, O God,  
According to Your lovingkindness;  
According to the multitude of Your tender mercies,  
Blot out my transgressions.  
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,  
And cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my transgressions,  
And my sin is always before me.  
Against You, You only, have I sinned,  
And done this evil in Your sight—

BIBLE STUDY

That You may be found just when You speak,  
And blameless when You judge. . . .  
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;  
Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.  
Make me hear joy and gladness,  
That the bones You have broken may rejoice.  
Hide Your face from my sins,  
And blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from Your presence,  
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,  
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit. . . .

Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God,  
The God of my salvation,  
And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your  
righteousness.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
And my mouth shall show forth Your praise.

For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would  
give it;  
You do not delight in burnt offering.  
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,  
A broken and a contrite heart—  
These, O God, You will not despise. . . .

It is interesting to compare these words to those of another of the psalms—Psalm 1. There is a long way between Psalms 1 and 51, not in terms of pages in a book or years of personal experience, but in terms of the distance between obedience and disobedience. Psalm 1 says:

Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,  
Nor stands in the path of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And in His law he meditates day and night.  
He shall be like a tree  
Planted by the rivers of water,  
That brings forth its fruit in its season,  
Whose leaf also shall not wither;



And whatever he does shall prosper.  
The ungodly are not so,  
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.  
Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the  
    judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.  
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the ungodly shall perish.

At one point in his life, David could have been described as the embodiment of the man in Psalm 1, a man like a tree planted by rivers of water. He had taken delight in God's law and meditated on God's Word day and night. In this way, spiritual strength had been forged in David, and all that he touched had been fruitful. But somewhere along the way his attention had been diverted from that Word to a woman, Bathsheba. As a result, he had become like the chaff the wind drives away.

In his mighty fall, David lost not only his integrity, but his joy as well. In Psalm 51, David begs God to cleanse him of his sin, crying: "Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice.

... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation.” In his grief, David longed to experience afresh the joy of his salvation.

Though sin often brings immediate pleasure, it gives no lasting joy. If we understand the difference, we can avoid the pitfalls that entice the believer.

The time of greatest joy in my life was my conversion to Christ, the defining moment of my whole life. Compared to that, nothing else in the world is of any value.

I hear that testimony often. My friend John Guest, a British preacher and evangelist, tells of the night he was converted in Liverpool, England. He says that he didn't merely run home, he actually skipped, leaping over fire hydrants along the way. My wife, Vesta, kept waking up during the night following her conversion, pinching herself and asking, “Do I still have it?” Satisfied that she did still have new life in Christ, she would joyously fall back to sleep.

As a new Christian I was infatuated with Scripture. I wanted to spend almost every waking moment reading it. As a result, I made the dean's list in my first semester of college. It was not the list of academic achievement, however; it was the list of students placed on academic probation. I made A's in gym and in Bible, and D's in all

the rest of my classes. The A in Bible kept me from flunking out of school.

During those initial months of my Christian life, I was given to enormous mood swings, from tremendous spiritual highs to frightful lows. I visited a minister, seeking counsel. He explained that such a spiritual roller coaster ride was not uncommon for new Christians, and that as I matured in my faith my ups and downs would even out. He also counseled me to look to the Bible and not my feelings as the basis of the Christian life. I've never received wiser counsel.

## THE WORD IN CONVERSION

God is pleased to use Scripture to pierce the heart and awaken us to faith. Faith does indeed come by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). Hebrews 4:12–13 says:

For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and

intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.

History is replete with stories of great people who were converted through the power of the Word. Augustine, living a life of sheer immorality, one day heard children playing a game in which they shouted the refrain, “*Tolle lege, tolle lege,*” Latin for “Take up and read.” As he heard this, his eyes fell upon the open text of a Bible, where he read, “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts” (Rom. 13:13–14). When Augustine read the words, “not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust,” he was pierced by the Word of God and made alive by the Spirit of God.

Centuries later, Martin Luther was awakened in similar fashion. Luther had struggled deeply with the justice of God, admitting that at times he hated the very concept. Then, while reading Augustine’s commentary on Romans 1:17, Luther suddenly saw the truth of the gospel, that the righteousness of Christ is given by faith alone. This awak-

ening in Luther launched the Protestant Reformation.

Romans also was instrumental in the conversion of John Wesley. He was at a worship service on Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, when he heard a sermon preached from Romans and felt his heart “strangely warmed.” Wesley considered that the moment of his conversion.

My own conversion also was precipitated by the piercing power of Scripture. I was talking with an upper-classman my first week of college. He was the first person I had ever met who spoke of a personal relationship with Jesus. We had a general conversation, with no formal presentation of the gospel, but he spoke of the transcendent wisdom of the Bible. He cited a somewhat obscure passage from Ecclesiastes: “And if a tree falls to the south or the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it shall lie” (11:3b). The words of that text hit me right between the eyes. Suddenly I envisioned myself as the tree, immobile, lying there and simply rotting away. Like the rotting tree I saw my life full of corruption, slowly decaying. With that in my mind, I went to my room and sank to my knees. I knelt beside my bed and begged God to forgive me of my sins. In that moment, I met Christ, who gave me a new

life and lifted my rotten soul from the floor of the forest. I think it is probable that in the entire history of the Christian church, I am the only person to have been converted by that verse in Ecclesiastes.

## THE WORD IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Just as the Word of God is used in conversion, so it is a critical instrument in our spiritual growth. By immersing ourselves in the Word of God, we begin to gain the mind of Christ and learn what discipleship is.

In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul charged his dear friend and disciple to engage in the diligent study of Scripture. It's very important for us to understand the context in which the apostle wrote this admonition. Paul was under a death sentence from the Roman government and was awaiting his imminent execution. Given this situation, his advice to Timothy can be assumed to be that which Paul considered to be of greatest importance. By extension, this advice has enormous relevance for us.

Paul wrote, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and

imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:12–13). Because Paul was suffering for the gospel, it was only natural for him to speak of persecution. He told Timothy that persecution is the lot of every Christian and the Christian community. Believers must expect it. And what is more, he said, it was not going to get better. Paul was saying to Timothy: “Things are going to get worse and worse, and people are going to come along who are imposters, who will seek to defraud you, to lead you into falsehood, people who will deceive the people of God. But they themselves are deceived.”

Deception through distortion of the truth of God is a major problem that confronts every generation and every Christian community. For this reason, the apostle, following after Jesus, was profoundly concerned that Christian people be solidly rooted and grounded in the truth, so that they might not be deceived and led astray by false teaching. He wanted Timothy to be fully equipped in the things of God and in the teachings of Scripture so he would be able to resist such deceptions.

With that background established, Paul was ready to deliver his exhortation. He said to Timothy, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and

been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:14–15).

Paul didn’t specify exactly whom he had in mind when he mentioned those who taught Timothy. Was he referring to Timothy’s family, especially his grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice, who nurtured Timothy in the faith (2 Tim. 1:5)? Was he referring to himself as Timothy’s mentor? Or was Paul directing Timothy’s attention to the ultimate source of the things he had learned, namely God? We cannot be sure. But what is clear is what Timothy had learned—the Scriptures. He had been taught the Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, from an early age, and it is clear that Paul wanted Timothy to continue to be a diligent student of the Word of God. It was because of his own study of the Scriptures that Paul was able to say, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7). In other words, Scripture strengthened Paul to live out the Christian life despite opposition. So it is for us. By continuing to study the Bible, we grow in faith and are able to stand firm in the truth.

The value of Scripture in the life of the believer lies in



its source and its function. In his exhortation to Timothy, Paul commended Scripture to Timothy by saying, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

When I was a little boy, there was a fellow in our community who was a couple of years older than me, and he was something of a bully. He made fun of me and called me names, which hurt my feelings. Sometimes I came home crying to my mother and told her what the other boy had said to upset me. My mother had a favorite response to this. As she wiped away my tears, she said, “When people talk like that about you, son, consider the source.”

That little bit of sage advice from my mother was a principle that I learned to a much more intense degree in the academic world. One of the rules of scholarship is to track down in your research the sources for the information you have to make sure that those sources are reliable. Scholars have to be careful not to take anything at face value, because credibility is directly tied to source. They must analyze, examine, and use the critical apparatus at their disposal to track down the real sources.

Paul assured Timothy here that the source of Scripture is God. That Scripture is “given by inspiration” refers not to the way God oversaw the writing of the Bible but to the source of the content of the Bible. The word that is translated “given by inspiration” is the Greek term *theopneust*—literally, “God-breathed.” When Paul wrote that Scripture is *God-breathed*, the idea was not one of *inspiration* but of *expiration*; that is, the Bible was *breathed out* by God. The whole point here is that the Bible comes from God. It is His Word and carries with it His authority. Paul wanted Timothy to understand the *source* of the Bible, not the *way* it was inspired.

After stating that the Bible is God-breathed, Paul spelled out its purpose and value. Scripture, he said, is *profitable* for several things, including *doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness*.

The value of the Bible lies, first of all, in the fact that it teaches sound doctrine. Though we live in a time when sound teaching is denigrated, the Bible places a high value on it. Much of the New Testament is concerned with doctrine. The teaching ministry is given to the church for building up its people. Paul said, “And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and

some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11–12).

The Bible is also profitable for reproof and correction, which we as Christians continually need. It is fashionable in some academic circles to exercise scholarly criticism of the Bible. In so doing, scholars place themselves above the Bible and seek to correct it. If indeed the Bible is the Word of God, nothing could be more arrogant. It is *God* who corrects *us*; we don’t correct Him. We do not stand over God but under Him.

This yields a practical help for Bible study: read the Bible with a red pen in hand. I suggest that you put a question mark in the margin beside every passage that you find unclear or hard to understand. Likewise, put an X beside every passage that offends you or makes you uncomfortable. Afterward, you can focus on the areas you struggle with, especially the texts marked with an X. This can be a guide to holiness, as the Xs show us quickly where our thinking is out of line with the mind of Christ. If I don’t like something I read in Scripture, perhaps I simply don’t understand it. If so, studying it again may help. If, in fact, I do understand the passage and still don’t like it, this is not an

indication there is something wrong with the Bible. It's an indication that something is wrong with *me*, something that needs to change. Often, before we can get something right, we need to first discover what we're doing wrong.

When we experience the “changing of the mind” that is *repentance*, we are not suddenly cleansed of all wrong thinking. The renewing of our minds is a lifelong process. We can accelerate this process by focusing on those passages of Scripture that we don't like. This is part of the “instruction in righteousness” of which Paul speaks.

Finally, Paul explained the overriding purpose for Scripture study. It comes in the final clause, where the apostle wrote, “. . . that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” It was as if Paul was warning Timothy that if he neglected the study of God's Word, his life would be incomplete. He would be missing out on this vast resource, this treasury of truth that is the Word of God. And the same is true for us.

## GETTING STARTED

The New Testament calls us to a life of discipleship. The word *disciple* means “learner.” In any discipline, it

is important to begin with the fundamentals and master them. Arnold Palmer once remarked that only about one in fifty amateur golfers holds the club with a proper grip. Legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, when agitated over sloppy play by his players, always called them back to the fundamentals. He would stand before them with a football in his grasp, hold it up for the whole team to see, and say, “This is a football. . . . Am I going too fast?”

Sometimes we chafe at learning the basics. I take violin lessons. My teacher is a highly skilled and accomplished Russian violinist. She worked with me for weeks on how to hold the bow before she would let me actually put the bow on the strings. During that time, I learned more Russian than violin. The word “*nyet*” became a regular part of my vocabulary. I wanted to run before I learned how to walk.

To be sure, the Scriptures call us to maturity. We are not to be satisfied with milk but are to desire the meat of the Word. Hebrews 5:12–14a says:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to

need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age.

I think one of the reasons many Christians never get to the meat of the Word but remain at the milk level is because they never really learned how to drink the milk. There is a reason why scales are important to the piano player and the grip to the golfer. We must master these basics if we are to reach higher levels of proficiency.

Virtually every Christian at some point has resolved to read the entire Bible. If we believe the Bible is the Word of God, it's natural not to want to miss a word of it. If God delivered a letter to your mailbox, I am sure you would read it. But the Bible is a pretty big letter, and its sheer bulk is somewhat daunting, even to the person with the best of intentions. Therefore, few Christians actually keep a resolution to read through the Bible.

At seminars, I often ask for a show of hands indicating how many people have read the entire Bible. Rarely do even 50 percent of the people answer "yes." I ask, "How many of you have read the book of Genesis?" Almost

everyone raises his hand. Then I say, “Keep your hand up if you’ve also read Exodus.” Only a few hands are lowered. “Leviticus?” That’s when hands start dropping quickly. With Numbers it’s even worse.

Reading Genesis is almost like reading a novel. It is mostly narrative history and biography. It tells of important events in the lives of important people such as Noah, Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Exodus is likewise gripping, as it tells the poignant story of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt and of its liberation under the leadership of Moses. The contest with Pharaoh is exciting. But when we get to Leviticus, everything changes. It’s difficult reading about the ceremonies, the sacrifices, and the cleansing rituals because they are foreign to us today. We lack a road map to help us through these difficult portions of the Bible.

When I enrolled in college, I declared myself a history major. That lasted one semester. My first course was History of Civilization, which covered the scope of history from the ancient Sumerians up to the Eisenhower administration. I was quickly lost and confused by the sheer amount of data I tried to assimilate. It was a clear case of information overload. I had no framework in

which to process the dates, people, events, and other facts that assaulted my memory bank. I was relieved to get a D for the course and hurried to change my major.

What happened to me in this history class is what happens to many Christians who try to read the Bible from cover to cover. I think there is a better way to go about it. For Christians to truly understand the Bible, they need first to gain an understanding of its basic structure and framework.

Here's my recommendation: begin with an overview of the Bible. Get the basic framework first. If possible, enroll in a class that provides such an overview. At Ligonier Ministries, we have produced an audio and video series titled *Dust to Glory*. It gives the basic structure of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. It does not go into details, but it covers the high points of redemptive history. In addition to this series, I collaborated with Robert Wolgemuth to produce *What's in the Bible?* The goal of this book is to help the person who has never had a simple introduction to the Bible. In 1977, I published a book titled *Knowing Scripture*, which is designed to help people master the basic rules of biblical interpretation. I frankly think this book is one of the most important helps that I've ever been able



to provide for people in studying the Bible, because it provides basic, foundational principles of biblical interpretation to keep people from falling into errors that would lead to distortions of the teaching of Scripture.

Once you understand the basic framework, you are much better equipped to read the Bible. Here is a pattern I recommend for people who have never read the Bible, beginning with the Old Testament:

- Genesis (the history of Creation, the fall, and God's covenantal dealings with the patriarchs)
- Exodus (the history of Israel's liberation and formation as a nation)
- Joshua (the history of the military conquest of the Promised Land)
- Judges (Israel's transition from a tribal federation to a monarchy)
- 1 Samuel (Israel's emerging monarchy under Saul and David)
- 2 Samuel (David's reign)
- 1 Kings (Solomon and the divided kingdom)
- 2 Kings (the fall of Israel)
- Ezra (the Israelites' return from exile)

## FIVE THINGS EVERY CHRISTIAN NEEDS TO GROW

- ❑ Nehemiah (the restoration of Jerusalem)
- ❑ Amos and Hosea (examples of minor prophets)
- ❑ Jeremiah (an example of a major prophet)
- ❑ Ecclesiastes (Wisdom Literature)
- ❑ Psalms and Proverbs (Hebrew poetry)

The New Testament overview includes:

- ❑ The Gospel of Luke (the life of Jesus)
- ❑ Acts (the early church)
- ❑ Ephesians (an introduction to the teaching of Paul)
- ❑ 1 Corinthians (life in the church)
- ❑ 1 Peter (an introduction to Peter)
- ❑ 1 Timothy (an introduction to the Pastoral Epistles)
- ❑ Hebrews (Christology)
- ❑ Romans (Paul's theology)

By reading these books, a student can get a basic feel for and understanding of the scope of the Bible without getting bogged down in the more difficult sections. From there, he or she can fill in the gaps to complete the reading of the entire Bible.

As a practical matter, you may want to combine your

reading of the Old and New Testaments. It may help to read a certain number of chapters in the Old Testament and then read some in the New until the study is completed. Martin Luther recommended that his students read through the whole Bible every year to keep the winds of the whole blowing through their minds while concentrating on a particular portion of the Bible.

## IMPORTANT TOOLS

I think it is important that we have practical aids and helps for the task of studying the Bible. Here are some that any serious student of Scripture should consider.

I highly recommend using a study Bible. My preference is *The Reformation Study Bible*, for which I was the general editor. It's an annotated Bible that includes helpful notes in the margins, at the bottoms of the pages, and in the sidebars to explain the text of Scripture.

For those who want to dig deeper, there are many fine commentaries on the Bible. Theologians and pastors may have multi-volume commentary sets, but the average layman has no need for such detailed explications of Scripture. However, there are excellent single-volume

Bible commentaries that can help you work through difficult passages.

Every student of the Bible should have a complete concordance. A concordance lists every word that appears in a given translation of Scripture and shows where it appears. This can be very helpful. Maybe you will come upon a word such as *propitiation* and will want to figure out what it means in the text. You can turn to your concordance and look up every reference to it in the Bible. By reading those passages, you soon have a good idea of what the concept means. Of course, some words, such as *love*, may have several hundred references, and it might take you a long time to check each one out. But in the main, the concordance helps you keep the whole context of Scripture in front of you.

Another helpful resource is dramatic audio recordings of the Bible. It's a marvelous thing to hear the Word recited in an exciting way. You can spend time in the Bible by listening to somebody read it to you aloud in a way that brings the proper emphasis to the text.

As helpful as these study aids can be, it is important to remember the purpose behind our study. We must read the Bible existentially; that is, we must become involved in

## BIBLE STUDY

what we're reading. We must not just sit back as spectators, learning facts while remaining untouched and unmoved by the text of Scripture. We must ask ourselves what the Word is saying to us as we read. Only by considering this question will we come to the completeness Paul longed to see in Timothy.