**<https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/why-is-reading-bible-important/>**

**Answers in Genesis**

**Why Is Reading the Bible So Important?**

Many Christians begin each new year with a plan to read through the entire Bible over the course of that year. Some reach that goal, but most don’t. Then there are others who don’t even bother to read God’s Word at all. Is this issue really a big deal? Why is it so important to read Scripture on a regular basis?

**Knowing God**

First and foremost, the Bible is essential for knowing God and His will for our lives. The book of Romans tells us there are certain things we can know about God from general revelation. Without Scripture people can know about God’s power and divine nature by examining creation ([*Romans 1:20*](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%201.20)). They also know God’s law because it is written on their hearts ([*Romans 2:14–15*](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/Rom%202.14%E2%80%9315)).

However, there is a vast difference between *knowing about* God and personally *knowing* God. Everyone knows about God, which is why you are without excuse if you reject Him, but only a fraction personally knows Him. The Bible is the foundational truth that teaches the history of the universe, the origin of sin, the reason for death, morality, and so on. Apart from God’s Word, mankind would never learn the all-important message of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Knowing God’s Will**

The message of eternal salvation is a vital and dominant theme in Scripture, but the Bible reveals much more—including how God would have us live. Through the recorded examples of biblical figures we can learn what pleases God and what does not. His Word also gives direct instruction to believers on how we should act in every circumstance.

God’s inspired and inerrant Word was given for many reasons: to teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and instruct us in righteousness; it was also given so that we may be complete and equipped for every good work ([*2 Timothy 3:16–17*](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim%203.16%E2%80%9317)). By reading the Bible on a consistent basis, you can find direction for your life and learn how to best serve the Lord who gave His life for you.

**Knowing God’s Word**

Reading through the entire Bible provides an opportunity to better understand Scripture’s “big picture.” At the same time, we must be careful not to read the Bible just for the sake of doing it.

How can we present ourselves approved before God? We need to diligently study His Word so that we acquire an accurate understanding of it and then faithfully act upon the truth ([*2 Timothy 2:15*](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/2%20Tim%202.15)).

Studying the Bible requires careful and prayerful attention to the text and the correct application of [biblical principles of interpretation](https://answersingenesis.org/hermeneutics/how-we-interpret-the-bible-principles-for-understanding/). By studying God’s Word, you can not only more fully enjoy the wisdom God gives, but also bless your family and friends by sharing the fruit of your labor.

Making God’s Word your authority in every area is vital for defending against the many spiritual attacks facing Christians. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear” ([*1 Peter 3:15*](https://biblia.com/bible/nkjv/1%20Pet%203.15)).

We encourage you to read the whole Bible if you never have before. If you have already read through the Bible, then we would urge you to consider studying Scripture in more detail by concentrating on one passage per day. Continue thinking about that passage throughout the day and try to think of ways to apply what you have learned.

Don’t forget to spend time in prayer. Thank God for giving you eternal life and His Word. Ask Him to teach and guide you so that you will become even more faithful in following Him.

Commit to read and study God’s Word regularly in order to better know God, His Son, and His will.

**Focus on the Family**

Most articles about studying the Bible jump right into the topic at hand. This article will take a different approach by first asking the question, Why study the Bible? This is both practical and foundational. It is practical because we will learn real reasons why studying the Bible is important, but it is also foundational because it will prepare us for future discussions on the importance of Bible study.

While not an exhaustive list, below are eight reasons for studying the Bible:

## Cultural Literacy

One reason to study the Bible is for cultural literacy purposes. E.D. Hirsch writes, "To be culturally literate is to possess the basic information needed to thrive in the modern world."[1](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/the-study-of-god/why-study-the-bible/why-study-the-bible#fn1) Simply put, the Bible contains a wealth of cultural literacy. References to the Bible are found not only found in religion, but also art, music, philosophy, literature, law and more. Knowing what the Bible says is an important part of everyone's k-base.

Many popular phrases and figures of speech also find their origin in the Bible including being a Good Samaritan, the folly of letting the blind lead the blind, going the extra mile, ethical maxims such as "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," manna from heaven, etc. Hirsch considers the Bible so important to cultural literacy that it appears first in his *Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*.

## What Does It Say?

Another reason to study the Bible is to learn what it has to say firsthand. Whether one is a supporter or critic of the Bible, or perhaps just neutral or uninterested in the topic, history has demonstrated that the Bible cannot be ignored. Considering that the Bible is important to three major world religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – it is worthy of study.

In addition, the recent rise of hostile criticism towards the Bible itself and religion in general also makes it worthy of study. Sometimes the critics do not always quote the Bible correctly or in context. Knowing what it says firsthand and having some knowledge of the context is helpful in understanding not only current events, but key ideas the Bible addresses such as the nature and existence of God, the human condition, the biblical pattern of redemption and salvation and ethics.

## Personal Edification

For thousands of years the Bible has been read not only as history and God's Word, but also for personal edification. This, of course, is a more meaningful reason for studying the Bible for those who believe in God, but the Bible is also surprisingly edifying for those who do not believe. It is full of individuals facing moral choices, life challenges, and, frankly, situations that are applicable to us even today. As Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, NIV).

The Bible is available for us to learn from not only on an intellectual level, but on a personal and emotional level.

## To Help Others

But the Bible is not just for us to keep to ourselves as individuals. It is also useful in helping others. We gain centuries of wisdom and are thus able to help others by studying the Bible. Proverbs, for instance, contain general principles and ideas to assist anyone in living their lives in a way that is helpful and pleasing to God.

Studying the Bible in order to help others is not just for ministers, priests or pastors, but is something everyone can do. By knowing what the Bible says on different subjects, we can help others through difficult circumstances, encourage them and so forth.

## Jesus

For Christians the Bible culminates in the New Testament account of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Some 2,000 years after the time of Christ, His life and ministry remain relevant even in our contemporary world. Regardless of how one views Christ, like the Bible, He cannot be ignored. Far from being a distant prophet or irrelevant figure in history, Jesus Christ is at the Christianity's foundation. Particularly studying the four Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John will help anyone gain a better understanding of Jesus and His mission.

## God's Word to Us

For people the world over, the Bible is God's Word to us. People inspired by God recorded the words that make up the Bible, thus communicating what theologians call special revelation. In other words, God has chosen to reveal Himself not only through creation and conscience, but also specially through Jesus and through His Word. Studying the Bible, then, is a matter of course for those who love God and desire to follow Him.

## To Know God Better

Since the Bible is God's Word, studying it is a way to know God better. Through His words we come to know not only the nature and attributes of God, but we also come to understand His plan for each of us. In a larger sense, we also come to know God's plan in history, His sovereignty, His providence, His love and more. There is only so much we can learn about God apart from the Bible. But with it we can know God better.

## Avoiding Error

Studying the Bible also helps us avoid theological error. The Bible tells us, "Watch your life and doctrine closely" (1 Timothy 4:16 NIV), adding that we "must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1 NIV). If the Bible is our authority for faith and life, then the inspired words it contains will help us to avoid error. In a pluralistic world with many religious and non-religious ideas competing for attention, studying the Bible provides us with a firm foundation in God's truth rather than the errors of the world. Knowing the Bible also helps us respond to error and answer questions that skeptics and others may have about it.

## What's Next?

As we have seen, studying the Bible is important for a number of reasons. Other articles in this series will explore how to study the Bible, devotional Bible study, family Bible study and in-depth Bible study. The Bible is not just for theologians and scholars. Rather, it is God's Word in plain language intended for everyone. Together, we will explore the importance of Bible study and its relevance to everyday life. Far from being a stuffy or boring book, the Bible is the inspired and authoritative Word of God, helpful in building us up so that we may serve, love and glorify God and His Son, Jesus Christ, as we are intended to do.

The question, "How do I study the Bible?" is not just for new Christians. Anyone interested in studying the Bible will benefit from thinking about how to study it. In 2 Timothy 2:15, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth" (NIV). The Greek phrase translated "correctly handle" (*orthotomeo*) also means to "guide on a straight path." As we study the Bible, it's important we do our best to stay on the straight path when it comes to interpreting and understanding it.

But how can we go about that? This article will introduce several approaches and methods helpful in general Bible study. Other articles in this series will specifically look at certain types of Bible study such as personal or devotional study, family Bible study and in-depth Bible study.

## Interpreting the Bible

A key foundation of Bible study is interpretation. Technically known as *hermeneutics*, biblical interpretation offers some basic principles to help understand the Bible. The most important principle is *context*. This means that when studying the Bible one must keep in mind not only the immediate context of the portion under study, but also other forms of context such as the cultural context, the literary context and more. Usually, however, it's enough to have a basic understanding of the immediate context of what is being studied. Reading what comes before the passage being studied, what comes after and what the Bible says as a whole about the topic being studied, are all key concepts to keep in mind. More often than not, errors or difficulties of interpretation when studying the Bible come about as a result of not having a proper understanding of context.

Another important aspect of Bible interpretation is not to base an elaborate theological teaching on the basis of an apparently obscure or isolated passage. If a passage or teaching is important, there are often multiple instances throughout the Bible where the topic is discussed more clearly. In such cases, looking at many parallel passages to understand a topic better is more helpful than fixating on a more obscure or difficult passage, when the answer to the issue at hand can usually be resolved by turning to clearer passages.

Also keep in mind the cultural context and genre of the passage being studied. Keep in mind that we are looking at biblical writings that are separated from our time by centuries – more than 1,950 years in the case of the New Testament and even longer in the case of the Old Testament. The Bible was also originally written in cultural contexts that are different from what we are used to. This, of course, does not mean that the Bible is not relevant to us, but when it comes to studying it and seeking to understand it, remember issues related to context.

Genre is also important. This has to do with what kind of passage we are studying in the Bible. For example, the Bible contains poetry, wise sayings, history, letters, prophetic writings, apocalyptic literature and more. Sometimes when studying the Bible, knowing what genre we are studying will help us. For instance, Proverbs contains many wise sayings intended as helpful, general advice, but this advice is not always absolutely binding in the same way that a promise of God would be.

The last bit of guidance regarding interpretation and Bible study has to do with interpreting the Bible literally or figuratively. This sometimes depends on context too. The Bible is full of rich language. Jesus, for instance, often used word pictures to help communicate his message such as when he would say things like, "I am the gate" (John 10:7-9 NIV). Jesus is obviously not a literal gate with a handle and hinges. This is a figurative passage meant to illustrate a point. Conversely, interpreting literal language figuratively can also be a problem because if we are not careful we could end up spiritualizing passages that are meant to be taken quite literally.

## Bible Study Tips

What, then, are some other Bible study tips? Reading the Bible slowly and carefully is preferable to reading it quickly and carelessly. In our fast-paced culture, we often want to try to get to a point of understanding as fast as possible. But the Bible is best read slowly, not quickly. Once a passage for study has been selected, read through it slowly.

Another tip involves asking some basic questions about the passage being studied. The typical journalistic questions may be helpful: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Try to determine the main subject of the passage being studied: who wrote it; who originally received it and in what context; is there a key verse that could sum up that passage being studied; what insights may hold a reference to God, Christ, human nature or behavior in general; or is there some aspect of the passage that is relevant on a practical level in your own life?

Keeping a journal often helps Bible study. This may be for devotional notes, theological questions and insights, questions you may have and more. It need not be an elaborate journal but a simple notebook where you can jot down insights you come across during your Bible study times.

Studying the Bible alone is helpful for personal, devotional times, but make sure your Bible study can involve others too. Find out if your church offers small group Bible studies and look for one that interests you. Many times other people will have the same sorts of questions about the Bible that you will have. As a result, studying and discussing the Bible with other believers will help everyone grow in their faith.

Try not to jump around too much in your study times. Instead of reading brief, isolated verses from different books of the Bible, try to concentrate on longer passages and books. You may wish to select a broad theme or topic to study, too, such as God's plan of redemption. In general, however, studying the Bible book by book is better than jumping around a lot from section to section. If your time is limited occasionally, but you would still like to study the Bible more carefully, try reading entire psalms or passages from Proverbs.

## What's the Point?

Studying the Bible can be a lifelong adventure. It contains both simple and practical insights, but also profound and moving insights that will help Christians of all kinds grow in their faith. Bible study should never become just an academic task, though that has its place. Always keep in mind that the overarching point of studying the Bible is to know God better so that He may be glorified. Along the way, we'll be edified, challenged and changed for the better. Learning to correctly handle "the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 NIV) through Bible study can be enjoyable and rewarding.

"Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true." –Acts 17:11 (NIV)

Were the Bereans of Acts 17 one of the earliest examples of an in-depth Christian Bible study group? Probably not in the sense of what we consider in-depth Bible study today, but they did indeed dig into God's Word deeply, examining it and making sure that what they read corresponded to the message Paul shared with them. Today, of course, we have a lot more in the way of resources to help us study the Bible in great depth. Not only do we have access to sophisticated Bible software, we also have the Internet and its many resources, not to mention almost 2,000 years of Christian history and wisdom we can incorporate into our studies.

While personal, devotionally-oriented Bible study is very important, as is family Bible study, in-depth Bible study by definition digs deeper into God's Word in order to gain a better understanding of the truths contained in it. This article will offer some tips for in-depth Bible study and also look at some of the tools available to the Bible student eager to gain a deeper understanding of the Bible.

## How and Why?

It will be helpful here to reiterate what we shared in an earlier article in this series about *why* we should study the Bible. Some of the reasons include cultural literacy, to learn what it says firsthand, personal edification, to help others, to gain a better understanding of Jesus and His mission, because the Bible is God's Word to us, to know God better and to help us avoid theological error. All of these are excellent reasons to pursue in-depth Bible study that will help us grow spiritually.

Another key point to keep in mind has to do with interpretation or, in more formal terms, biblical hermeneutics. This is the foundation to any Bible study, but is particularly relevant when it comes to in-depth Bible study. Second Timothy 2:15 instructs us to correctly handle the Word of truth. Doing so requires us to interpret it as best we can, not reading into the text what is not there (*eisogesis*), but instead drawing out from it what it really means (*exegesis*). We also need to keep context in mind at all times, not just the immediate and broader context of the passage or book we may be studying, but the context in light of what the Bible teaches throughout its pages on a particular topic, as well as the cultural context, the intended meaning of the author and other matter such as the genre or type of biblical literature we are reading.

Since in-depth Bible study generally involves research into the authorship and dating of biblical manuscripts, as well as interaction with criticism of the biblical record, it's helpful to have or seek to pursue greater knowledge of the Bible so that we can study it better.[1](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/faith/the-study-of-god/why-study-the-bible/how-to-study-the-bible-in-depth#fn1)

## Translations and Study Bibles

Unless your in-depth Bible study equips you to read the original biblical languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), you most likely will be studying a translation. There are a variety of English translations available, some better than others and some taking a different approach than others. Focus on the Family maintains a list of [recommended translations](http://family.custhelp.com/app/answers/detail/a_id/26499/).

Broadly speaking, there are two usual approaches to Bible translation. The New International Version, for instance, takes a dynamic equivalency approach, while the New American Standard Bible follows more of a formal equivalency approach. This means that the NIV is often more readable and flowing in English, while the NASB is more of a literal, word-for-word approach (though given the limitations of English even translations that take the formal equivalency approach cannot literally offer a word-for-word translation because the resulting translation wouldn't make a whole lot of sense in English). Keep in mind that using multiple Bible translations will sometimes help you understand passages better, but other resources such as Bible commentaries, addressed below, will help you even more.

If you have a good study Bible, often these resources are indispensable when it comes to addressing most common questions readers will have. While a study Bible is not essential to in-depth Bible study, it will help immensely by providing what is essentially a mini-commentary on various passages you encounter. Two helpful study Bibles include the *NIV Study Bible* and, more recently, the *ESV Study Bible* (the English Standard Version is more along the lines of a formal equivalency translation such as the NASB). These types of study Bibles are in a sense annotated Bibles, full of notes by various scholars.

## Commentaries

Commentaries are also quite useful to in-depth Bible study. While commentaries used to be largely available to academic biblical scholars, they are now fairly common in Bible study software. Also, if you happen to live near a Christian seminary, you might look into accessing their library for more in-depth research, as they tend to have numerous commentaries available. A commentary is fairly simple to use. If you have a question about a particular Bible passage, you consult the relevant Bible commentary and look up the passage and what the commentator has said about it. Sometimes you will find a great answer to a puzzling question you've had, while other times you will find a blank space in the commentary. If you don't find what you are looking for, you can consult other commentaries or resources.

One helpful Bible commentary is known as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Zondervan). A couple of helpful mini-commentaries addressing Bible difficulties and seeming contradictions include *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer and *When Critics Ask* by Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe.

## Word Studies

If you are involved in a word study, a Bible dictionary and concordance are quite helpful. A printed concordance will help you easily look up key words and passages where they appear. A Bible dictionary will help you understand specific terms and how they are used in certain passages.