

Understanding the Bible

Maturity Curriculum

Tom Wilson

A Bible Study Guide

5/31/26

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This e-book was typeset in L^AT_EX using the *memoir* document class. It was formatted to get as much text onto each page as possible. This is because a good PDF reader should allow annotations (highlighting and comments) to be added. So, there is almost no room for the reader's notes on a printed copy.

The back cover caricature of the author was drawn by the well-known artist Jan van Haasteren as a favor to Els Rooswinkel, who maintained a web site dedicated to puzzles with artwork drawn by Jan. I originally created a version of this web site and handed it over to Els, who developed the site far beyond its initial content. In appreciation of my effort, Els asked Jan to draw me.

The latest edition of this e-book is available via <https://thechurchoforlando.org>.



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Christian Maturity

This document provides some guidance on how to mature as a Christian. Where each believer is in his growth differs, so this guidance should be adjusted accordingly. A person can be saved at any age. So, a young man could be a more mature Christian than an older man. Figure 1.1 shows a simple picture of man going through the stages of life. Where are you physically and spiritually?



Figure 1.1: The progressive stages of physical maturity.

Many Christians do not really try to mature; it just ends up happening over a period of very many years. But this shouldn't be so. Children typically go to school and go through an organized plan of (non-Christian) education. Christians go to church and hear random messages that do not have such an agenda. Maturing isn't intentional.

Instructions for Maturing

Let's see what the bible says about this. Christians are supposed to read God's word ("give attendance to reading"):

1 Timothy 4:13

KJB

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

Of course, this should happen throughout one's Christian life.

Christians are supposed to study God's word (such that God approves):

2 Timothy 2:15

KJB

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

This won't happen right away, but, after being saved for a few years, a Christian should know how to study. Studying God's word is a lot of work:

Ecclesiastes 12:12	KJB
12 And further, by these, my son, be admonished: of making many books <i>there is</i> no end; and much study <i>is</i> a weariness of the flesh.	

Many will quit or do it insufficiently and/or ineffectively.

Mature Christians are supposed to know how to use their bibles to check what the teacher teaches:

Acts 17:10-11	KJB
10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming <i>thither</i> went into the synagogue of the Jews.	
11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.	

You have to be very mature to be assessing whether the teacher was correct or not. The good news is that if you have the proper bible then you at least have the book to take on the task. Unfortunately, most Christians judge a teaching by what they have already been taught, not realizing how much error they received when they were younger.

Stages of Maturity

The bible tells you about 4 stages of maturity: (1) a babe, (2) carnal, (3) spiritual, and (4) perfect. Three of those stages are mentioned in the first verse of this passage:

1 Corinthians 3:1-2	KJB
1 And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, <i>even</i> as unto babes in Christ.	
2 I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able <i>to bear it</i> , neither yet now are ye able.	

A **babe** is essentially a new believer. He requires milk (in the bible, “meat” simply means *food*). He doesn’t know much, but is often full of desire to learn. However, that desire doesn’t last. Babes also look for the miraculous to occur in life. But such things just aren’t occurring today!

Here is another important passage:

Hebrews 5:12-14	KJB
12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which <i>be</i> the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.	
13 For every one that useth milk <i>is</i> unskillful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe.	
14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, <i>even</i> those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.	

We should conclude that there is “meat” as well as “strong meat”. The latter is for those who are of full age (i.e., perfect). That implies that the former is for those who are not (i.e., meat is for spiritual).

A **carnal** Christian is like a babe in that he doesn’t know much. He shouldn’t be a babe, but he is malnourished in the word. Such Christians have been saved long enough that they should be “teachers”, but are “unskillful” in the word. They often *do* know a lot, but such knowledge is often tradition and not truth. Another reason that a carnal Christian does not mature is that he does not “rightly divide the word of truth” (see 2 Timothy 2:15 above).

A **spiritual** Christian understands that Paul is his apostle:

1 Corinthians 14:37	KJB
37 If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.	

That verse says that if you want to be “spiritual” (or mature), then you have to acknowledge that the things Paul wrote are the commandments of the Lord (i.e., Jesus). Carnal Christians try to follow Jesus’s earthly ministry to Israel. They do not understand that he has told them to follow him through his servant Paul:

1 Corinthians 11:1	KJB
1 Be ye followers of me, even as I also <i>am</i> of Christ.	

A mature Christian is skillful in the word of God. He knows that he is to “rightly divide” Jesus’ instruction to Israel from his instruction to us today.

A **perfect** Christian has grown to the point that he can handle all of the scripture:

2 Timothy 3:16-17	KJB
16 All scripture <i>is</i> given by inspiration of God, and <i>is</i> profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:	
17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.	

“Perfect” means *complete* (in the bible, it does mean not *sinless*). A mature Christian knows he cannot be perfected by works of his flesh:

Galatians 3:3	KJB
3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?	

Figure 1.2 shows a diagram that attempts to show the relationships between these stages. I acknowledge that the diagram is not very good, but it communicates the point. To be honest, the “Perfect” and “Spiritual” parts should be much, much smaller!

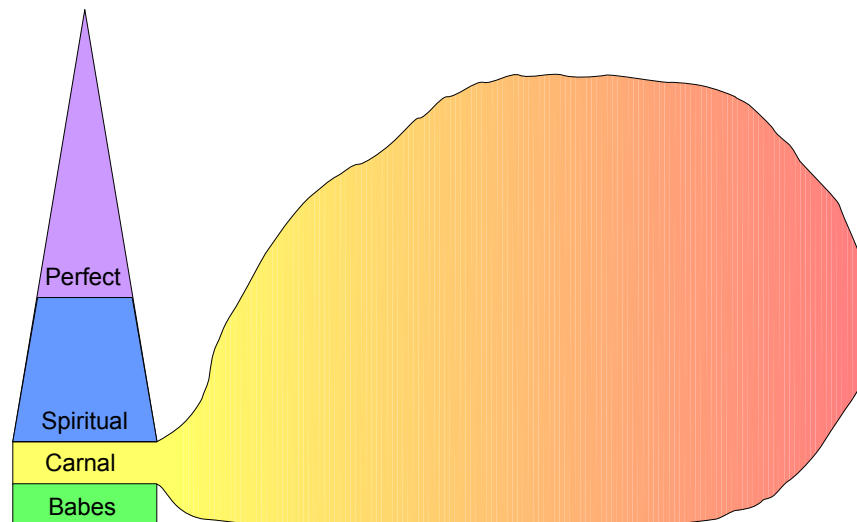


Figure 1.2: The unfortunate stages of Christian maturity!

Preferably, one would transition from “babe” to “spiritual” without being “carnal”. But, because of the world that we live in, most Christians will go through the carnal stage. The Corinthians did and they had Paul as their initial teacher, and they had spiritual gifts to assist them because they lacked a completed bible. But, let’s take a closer look at the stage of carnality.

The Woeful Stage of Carnality

While the carnal stage is undesirable, it is unrealistic to think that a believer won’t go through it. Adult believers bring in too much baggage from when they were unsaved. Television is a good example of the source of some of this baggage. Nonetheless, much of the carnality comes from within churches. If you claim to be part of a denomination, then you are doomed to its traditions that cause carnality.

Let’s see some verses about the carnal mind:

Romans 8:6-7	KJB
6 For to be carnally minded <i>is</i> death; but to be spiritually minded <i>is</i> life and peace.	

7 Because the carnal mind *is* enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.

The death here isn't physical—it is functional death.

1 Corinthians 3:3-4

KJB

3 For ye are yet carnal: for whereas *there is* among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

4 For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I *am* of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

While the passage is very specific about what is said, the equivalent thing today is to boast or argue about what denomination you are part of.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

KJB

3 For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh:

4 (For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;)

5 Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ;

6 And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

Every denomination claims that it is right and that it came from the biblical church of Paul's day. But, all denominations are founded on traditions. Unless you really understand what the bible teaches, you cannot see them for what they are. Here are some verses about traditions:

Colossians 2:8

KJB

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Colossians 2:20-23

KJB

20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Here are two more helpful passages:

2 Timothy 3:1-7

KJB

1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

2 For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,

3 Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,

4 Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

5 Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

6 For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

7 Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Verse 5 says "Having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof". Many Christians have a form of godliness: they are very religious. But, they aren't very spiritual. They follow the traditions that the bible does not instruct us about.

2 Timothy 4:1-4

KJB

1 I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

- 2 Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.
- 3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
- 4 And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

Verse 3 mentions “having itching ears”. It also says such Christians seek out teachers who scratch their ears for them. They want confirmation of what they think that they already know. It is easy to find someone on the Internet who teaches what you want to hear.

Carnal Christians often know a lot:

Romans 2:20	KJB
20 An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.	

But some of this knowledge is tradition. A seminary indoctrinates its students (who will be the pastors of the future) with the denomination’s traditions.

Carnal Christians have a long list of problems. Many do not understand that God has preserved his word and that we have it in English. They do not understand why God would limit himself to one English translation. Nor do they understand how easy it is to determine which one it is. They also look for miraculous things to happen today. They think they have spiritual gifts in spite of Paul telling us that such things came to end when the bible was completed. They think that God has a secret will that they need to find. God’s will is revealed to all of us in his book, which is completed. They also think that God speaks to them outside of his word.

Sometimes it feels better to cling to what you believe, even though you know that much of what you believe isn’t really working they way that you wish it did.

Final Comments

Did you notice that almost all of the quoted verses came from Paul? Only *Ecclesiastes*, *Acts*, and *Hebrews* were not written by Paul. *Acts* was written by Paul’s companion, Luke, and the quoted verse was referencing Paul’s ministry. Paul’s letters contain our valuable instructions for maturing!

If you press on in your maturing, you will find yourself surrounded by babes and carnal Christians. Then you can practice not wounding your weaker brothers and sisters (I’ll just reference the passages rather than quote them: Romans 14:1-10 and 1 Corinthians 8:7-13).

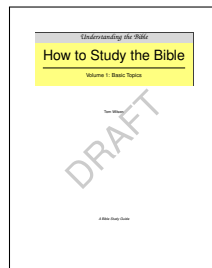
Beginner Curriculum

As a beginner, reading the bible regularly should be your main focus. A new believer is not likely to study, but he still needs some guidance. When you attend a church, you will often hear messages from various places in scripture, but they might not be appropriate for you where you are in your development. You can certainly start at the beginning of the bible, but you need to understand that most of what you are reading is not written to you as instruction as to how to live. Most of the bible was written to Israel (Israel in the past, not Israel today).

The best place to start reading is Paul's letters *Romans* through *Philemon*. These books tell us what to believe today and how we are to live. Some Christians will have trouble understanding Paul's references to Jesus' ministry, so reading the book of *Luke* is a good idea. This is the best account of Jesus' ministry for Christians to read because we are typically Gentiles (not Jews). It should then be followed by the book of *Acts*. This will help you understand what happened after Jesus' ministry and why Paul was commissioned to you with different instructions than those Jesus gave to the 12 apostles to Israel.

If you do not have a *King James Bible*, you will notice differences between what your bible says and the verses in the video studies. I used a different bible when I was a young believer, but I eventually learned why the KJB was God's word and the bible that I had was not.

Currently, there is one study guide to help you in your development. There are no videos yet, but they will be recorded once the study guide is completed.¹



- **How to Study the Bible – Volume 1: Basic Topics [2]:** This is the first installment in a series for maturing Christians. It will help you mature more quickly by setting your proper direction and demonstrating some simple techniques to use while studying. Only a partial draft study guide is available.

There are numerous *ad hoc* video studies of many important books of the bible (yes, they really are all important). An *ad hoc* study is one where I have not prepared notes in advance. The studies were recorded live for a believer who has glaucoma and could not read the bible for himself. He did not understand rightly dividing the bible very well, so much attention was given to that. The verses of the chapter are put on screen and some references are also displayed for you so that you do not have to look them up. These studies are not deep, but should give you enough understanding of what God was doing at the time. The *ad hoc* video studies are organized as playlists on

¹There are a few video studies in the Beginner section on <https://thechurchoforlando.org> which will eventually be replaced by the new material.

the YouTube channel “thechurchoforlando”. There are no study guides for these videos.

Here are the *ad hoc* commentaries available:

1. **Genesis**
2. **Exodus**
3. **Luke**
4. Acts: There is no *ad hoc* commentary, but there is an exposition study in the intermediate curriculum
5. **Romans**
6. **1 Corinthians**
7. **2 Corinthians**
8. **Galatians**
9. **Ephesians**
10. **Philippians**
11. **Colossians**
12. **1 Thessalonians**
13. **2 Thessalonians**
14. **1 Timothy**
15. **2 Timothy**
16. **Titus**
17. **Philemon**

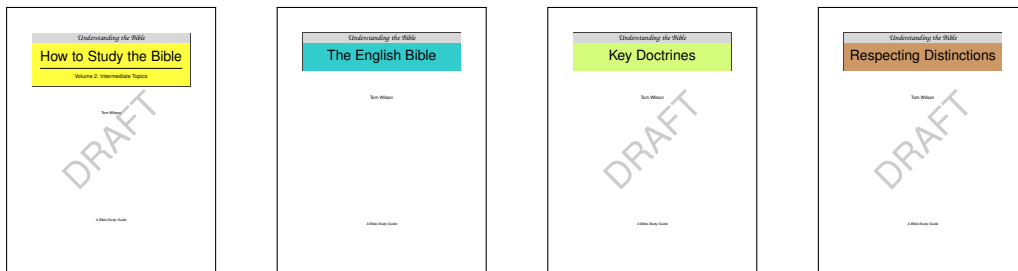
Much will be learned through repetition. But at the same time, you will want to read all of the bible. For how many years do you think you will want to think of yourself as a beginner. . . ?

Intermediate Curriculum

The intermediate curriculum matures the Christian in right division. While this is presented in the beginner curriculum at a high level, this curriculum studies the same parts of the bible. Several other important topics (such as the bible) are presented. The curriculum is divided into three parts.

3.1 Foundations for Maturity

This part of the curriculum makes sure that you are on the right path in your walk with God.



Studies available:

1. **How to Study the Bible – Volume 2: Intermediate Topics** [3]: This is the second installment in this series. It will help you mature more quickly by demonstrating how bible study is to be done without relying on someone explaining everything to you. Only a partial draft study guide is available.
2. **The English Bible** [12] If you do not understand the bible version issue, you need to address this need soon. Your growth will be seriously impacted by having the wrong bible. Both a video series and a study guide are available.
3. **Key Doctrines**: This is a planned study series that will focus on key doctrines of the bible: faith, prayer, salvation (justification, sanctification, and glorification), predestinated, called, elect, adoption, and more.
4. **Respecting Distinctions** [7]: The new testament part of our bible contains two conflicting programs: prophecy and mystery. This study shows you how to respect the distinctions in the aspects that are common to both programs: dispensations, gospels, apostles, baptisms, and churches. Several other distinctions are also discussed.

3.2 Exposition of Key Books

Paul's letters contain our doctrine for today. It is necessary that they are thoroughly studied for you to mature. Paul's teachings are supplemented by the two books written by his companion Luke, who sets the stage for Paul's

writings though *Luke* and *Acts*.

Studies available:

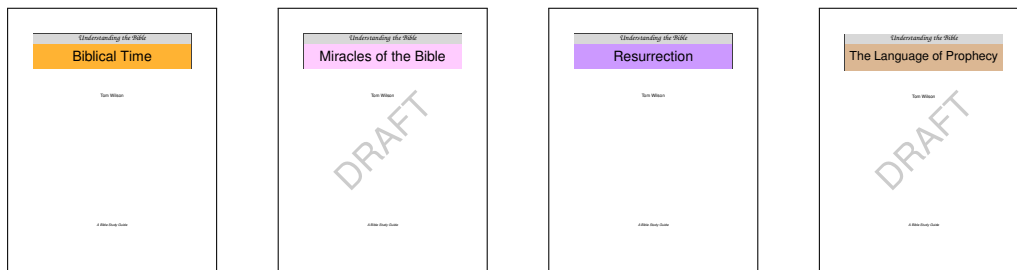
1. **Luke** [5]: Luke presents Jesus' earthly ministry to Gentiles. It doesn't tell us what to believe, but it helps understand what Jesus was doing with Israel. A video series is available: The first chapter is an expositional study; the remaining chapters are *ad hoc* commentaries. A study guide is planned.
2. **Acts**: Luke tells us what God continued to do with Israel after Jesus' ministry ended. It tells us how Paul ended up being our apostle and how Israel continued to reject what God was doing in the new program that God revealed to Paul through Jesus Christ. The video series is available but not a study guide.

Studies planned:

1. Romans
2. 1 Corinthians
3. 2 Corinthians
4. Galatians
5. Ephesians
6. Philippians
7. Colossians
8. 1 Thessalonians
9. 2 Thessalonians
10. 1 Timothy
11. 2 Timothy
12. Titus
13. Philemon

3.3 Furthering Your Walk

The studies in the next stage of your walk begin to take you into other parts of the bible and into topics that span both prophecy and mystery. It is time to dig much deeper into what might seem to be straightforward topics.

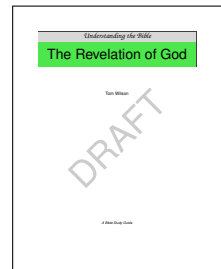
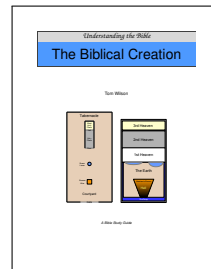
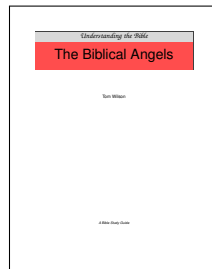
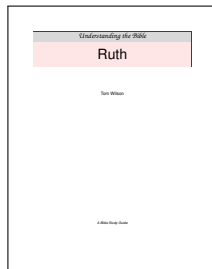
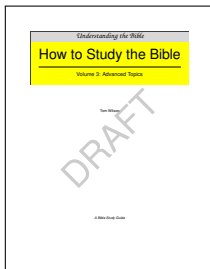


Studies available:

1. **Biblical Time** [1]: This series studies time in the bible. Most aspects of time involve God's dealings with Israel. Thus, it borders on being advanced. Then, there are topics which are truly advanced since they involve models and types. Both a video series and a study guide are available.
2. **Resurrection** [8]: This series looks at the topic of resurrection. This is something that we should all be looking forward to. Much like the *Respecting Distinctions* series, this series looks at resurrection in both prophecy and mystery. There is a lot in common, but there are notable distinctions. Both a video series and a study guide are available.
3. **The Language of Prophecy** [13]: This series helps you understand why reading most of the bible is not straightforward (because most of it is considered to be "prophecy"). It deals with parables, proverbs, dreams, visions, and symbolic language. Only a partial draft study guide is available.
4. **Miracles of the Bible** [6]: This series helps you understand what miracles are for and what they teach. These things are not happening today. Only a partial draft study guide is available.

Advanced Curriculum

The common aspect to the topics in the advanced category is that the relevant verses tend to be scattered throughout the bible. Some might think that these topics are not too advanced. However, the main problem with many of these topics is that traditions are taught along with the truth (and in some cases: instead of the truth). The carnal Christian will not receive these teachings. Most that are mature will not either. Why? They don't align with what they have already been taught.



Studies available:

1. **How to Study the Bible – Volume 3: Advanced Topics** [4]: This is the final installment of this series that presents advanced study techniques. Only an incomplete draft study guide is available.
2. **Ruth** [9]: This is an expositional study of the book of *Ruth*. This provides a good example of how old testament prophecy teaches doctrine for Israel, and how prophecy looks for Jesus' second coming. Both a video series and a study guide are available.
3. **The Biblical Angels** [10]: The topic of angels usually appeals to many believers regardless of their maturity. The audience is full of those with itching ears, and there many teachers who will cater to them with the popular sensational traditions. You won't find any of those in this study. You will see that the scriptures teach that angels are immortal men, created to do the will of God in heaven. But most of them have not been doing that. But God is dealing with them at the same time he is dealing with fallen man. Both a video series and a study guide are available.
4. **The Biblical Creation** [11]: There isn't anything in the scripture that is harder to study than the creation. Even without the false science of the astronomy to hinder you, you will find that studying the creation is overwhelming. But this study collects it all for you. Even if you disagree with the conclusions, you should be able to consider all the scriptures as you form your own opinion. The bible is right, but what it is saying? Both a video series and a study guide are available.
5. **The Revelation of God** [14]: Can we understand the infinite God? God says that we can through his word! Unfortunately, this is the greatest area of tradition. If you can make it through this study, you will either have

your eyes opened or you will have defended your belief as you considered hundreds of verses. Don't you want to know who God says that he is? A video series and a draft study guide are available.



Reference Materials

Completed and draft e-books are available via <https://thechurchoforlando.org>.

- [1] *Biblical Time*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 9/7/25
- [2] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 1: Basic Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 5/30/26
- [3] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 2: Intermediate Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 2/25/26
- [4] *How to Study the Bible – Volume 3: Advanced Topics*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 2/3/26
- [5] *Luke*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, planned
- [6] *Miracles of the Bible*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 1/24/26
- [7] *Respecting Distinctions*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 5/30/26
- [8] *Resurrection*, Tom Wilson, e-book; Second Edition, Revision A, 1/19/26
- [9] *Ruth*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, Revision B, 3/29/26
- [10] *The Biblical Angels*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, Revision A, 9/11/24
- [11] *The Biblical Creation*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 1/1/24
- [12] *The English Bible*, Tom Wilson, e-book; First Edition, 6/3/25
- [13] *The Language of Prophecy*, Tom Wilson, e-book; partial Draft Edition, 1/8/26
- [14] *The Revelation of God*, Tom Wilson, e-book; Draft Edition, 1/19/25 (first edition coming soon)



Tom Wilson is developing a curriculum to assist Christians in their growth. This booklet shows you the stages that a Christian should go through during development. It also provides a listing of studies available for beginner, intermediate, and advanced development.

This curriculum is a living document that is being updated as materials are developed. Look for many of the books in the curriculum in the "Understanding the Bible" series.