

How to Study the Bible Part 1

It's one thing to read the Bible; it's another to study it. Here's how to get the most out of your Bible study so you can find freedom, healing, and hope in Jesus. Now that you've made the decision, let's dive in! The Bible is a unique book. It is exciting, boring, weird, and inspiring. It can cut to the heart while also filling you with a new peace. It covers the big picture and also zeroes in on the smallest details that still make a difference. The Bible can affect your life in ways you never thought possible. "For the word of God is alive and active.

Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12, NIV). The Word of God is Food for the Soul. It might feel intimidating to begin your study, just like it can feel before having to dig into a new textbook at school or start a new project at work. What's different about the Bible is that you can take comfort in the fact that it was written for your benefit. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:6-7, emphasis added). "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105, NIV). God wants every single person to get to know Him, experience His love, and understand His will as it's revealed in the pages of His Word. You can do it. And there are several tools, resources, and even people available to assist you in your journey. Need some help getting started on your discovery of Bible topics? Check out our free online Bible studies.

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Did you know that there's a difference between reading and studying the Bible? King David stressed the importance of taking in the words of Scripture with care. Check out this little bit of the second-longest Psalm in the Bible: "How can a young person stay pure? By obeying Your Word. I have tried hard to find. You don't let me wander from Your commands. I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You. I praise you, O Lord; teach me your decrees. I have recited aloud all the regulations you have given us. I have rejoiced in your laws as much as in riches.

I will study your commandments and reflect on your ways. I will delight in your decrees and not forget your word." (Psalm 119:9-16). Notice how David includes active ways to regard Scripture. It's not only for casual reading, it's to memorize, to meditate upon, to

obey. And even to bring us delight, as it provides guidance and meaning. The Bible is meant for action. “All Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful to teach us what is true, and make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.” (2 Timothy 3:16). So, where’s the best place to start?

What’s the best reading method to use? How much time should you allow? Before you get caught up in the details, you might be surprised to find that studying the Bible is not as difficult as you may think. To help get you on your way, here are six ways to prepare for an effective Bible study:

1. Start with Prayer! Prayer is the first step to connecting with God. It seems logical to begin with prayer before you get into Scripture. Prayer is the best way to prepare your mindset. Pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth, and give you understanding and wisdom (John 14:26), and how to apply what the bible means to your own life.

Because the Bible is a spiritual book, we won’t grasp its concepts if we’re not guided by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). Your prayer doesn’t have to be eloquent, complicated, perfect, or even long. Simply, ask God to be with you and to give you focus, wisdom, and understanding. The best part is, he’s already promised you that He will do it! “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that gives to all men liberally, and withholds not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavers is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.” (James 1:5-6, ASV).

Yes, James adds the caution to ask in faith, not wavering with doubt. If this is the first time you pray this prayer, be encouraged that your intentional asking is an act of faith. Simply opening up your heart in prayer is an invitation for God to send you His Holy Spirit, which He promises will guide you “when He, the Holy Spirit, is come, will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:13). And we all have our bad days; we all get angry, frustrated, sad, or anxious. Share your feelings with Jesus and ask Him to help you focus on your study. Or if it’s an issue you can address by studying Scripture, ask God to guide you, and give you peace.

Another aspect of preparation is making sure that you’re coming to the Bible with a teachable and willing heart (John 7:17). Hebrews 4:12 describes the Word of God as something “living and powerful” that pierces the motives of our hearts (NKJV). So be prepared to not only be informed but also transformed by what you study. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Romans 12:2).

“But when the Father sends the Advocate as my representative—the Holy Spirit—he will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you” (John 14:26).

2. Set a regular time for Bible study and guard that time. Set aside some quiet time for daily Bible study. While there’s no prescribed time for how long you should study, try starting with 15 minutes. As you begin learning, you will want to increase your study time. The Bible promises: “Come near to God, and He will come near to you” (James 4:8, NIV).

But we all know how hard it can be to set aside time in our daily lives. Even with the best of intentions, if there isn’t a daily commitment of set-aside time to study the bible, it’s a lot more challenging to keep up a consistent program. Find a time that works for you, schedule it on your calendar, and stick to it. Many have found success with studying the Bible first thing in the morning, before anything else has a chance to be a distraction. But everyone’s different! Pray about it, then be intentional about your time. This kind of study time is often called “devotions” because you’re devoting time to God.

You might think that you don’t have the time to set aside, try getting up a little earlier in the morning, what will help, is going to bed a little earlier than usual. Here are some tips for staying committed to your schedule: Start small. Just 15 minutes gives you time to pray for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, read a chapter, and then prayerfully reflect on what you just read. Over time, you may want to increase how long you spend in devotions as you get deeper into the Word. Eliminate distractions. It’s so easy to have emails or texts pinging us before we even get out of bed.

There’s also the pressure to get started on the to-do list right away. Due to the hyper-connected nature of our society, it takes effort and commitment just to set boundaries and have quiet time. But it’s well worth it. Tell others. Let your family, etc., know you need this time to yourself. (That can also help keep you accountable!)

3. Find a version of the Bible you can understand. There’s no point in studying the Bible if you can’t understand its basic language. That’s why you must find a version you are comfortable with. Some recommend actual study Bibles, but keep in mind the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to give you insight and wisdom while using any version of the Bible. Whichever version you use, it’s essential to educate yourself on the different versions available. Test out passages in various versions to see which ones you can best relate to and make more sense.

Based on extensive research, these four versions are recommended for accuracy and readability for the English language: New King James Version, English Standard Version, Christian Standard Bible, and New American Standard Bible. Decide what Bible version

you'd like to read. You can stick with whatever version your personal Bible is, or find other versions online at places like <https://Biblegateway.com>.

4. Find quality Bible study tools. God's Holy Spirit will give you wisdom and knowledge about what you're studying, but He doesn't do the work for you. God knows "doing the work" of Bible study is part of how you internalize what you learn. There are additional tools to consider, but at a minimum, it's recommended to have a bible concordance available as you start your Bible study journey: A reliable Bible Concordance: A Concordance is like an in-depth index to the Bible. It keeps track of where specific names, phrases, and terms were used, and lists the verse references for each.

Concordances come in handy for topical studies, as they help you find each place in the Bible where the topic is addressed. Try using this concordance: Strong's-Exhaustive-Concordance

5. It's OK to say "I don't know." The Bible is a heavy-duty book about an all-powerful God with infinite perspective. There will likely be passages that are hard to understand, at least at first. Rest assured, God understands, and He's on this journey with you. If you come across a section of the Bible that leaves you baffled, take notes. Write down your questions, your concerns, even your fears regarding those verses. Then move on, it's OK! While much of the Bible complements itself in piecing together its overarching truths, you don't need to understand every verse right away, as you're reading through.

The Bible isn't a novel that requires you to understand everything in chapter one to make sense of chapter 2. It's even recommended to set one story or section aside for further study, then continue to study the rest. Make sure to come back to it later. Also, God will answer your prayers for clarity and understanding of your Bible study, even if it takes some time or growth first. Patience pays off in studying the Bible. Clarity may come in a day, in a year, or through an experience. God's timing is perfect, and He knows the best way you will learn each principle of the Bible.

God will reveal to you what you can accept and understand. Consider the prophet and statesman Daniel, while studying a specific prophecy (see Daniel 10:1-21), became anxious, troubled, and confused—but he didn't give up. Instead, he was consistent and persistent in praying, and God gave him the understanding he was searching for.

6. Find a study partner: To get the most out of your Bible study, don't go at it alone! Find a trusted friend, pastor, or other person who is as serious and focused about studying the Bible as you are. Interestingly enough, Jesus, when sending out His disciples to spread the Gospel, sent them out two by two (Mark 6:7 & Luke 10:1).

We were created as relational beings, engineered to “motivate one another” and to “not neglect meeting together” but to “encourage one another” (Hebrews 10:24, 25, NLT). Wise King Solomon wrote about the importance of making sure that you connect with at least one other person: “Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed.

If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, NLT). Check in with Leaves of Autumn Ministries; they’re all about teaching people to study the Bible with scripture-based topical Bible studies. <http://freechristianbooks.us/bible-studies> Now that you have prepared, all you need to do is start...

Just like any significant undertaking, sometimes the planning and the anticipation are more intense than the project itself! Armed with these steps of preparation, however, all you need to do now is begin your study. By starting with prayer, seeking out tools and resources as needed, you’ll make progress in your knowledge of God’s Word and in getting to know your personal Savior, Jesus Christ.