

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE



The Bible contains the very words and wisdom of God. What an incredible thought!

His magnificent glory. His trustworthy character. His mighty deeds. All these aspects of God are described in His book.

Here you'll find the story of God's redemption of humankind. And you'll discover practical wisdom for daily living and hope for the life to come.

But how do you uncover Scripture's precious principles? Perhaps you've never studied the Bible before. Where do you begin?

When you open your Bible to the table of contents, the first thing you notice is that the Bible is a compilation of many books. There are sixty-six individual books divided into two main sections: Old Testament and New Testament.

We can group the books of the Bible into categories by topic. Take a look at how the books are organized.

OLD TESTAMENT

Legal (Genesis through Deuteronomy): These first five books describe the creation and fall of humanity, God's plan to redeem the world through Abraham's descendants, and the expression of His holy character, which is most clearly seen in the Mosaic Law.

Historical (Joshua through Esther): The next twelve books trace the development, disobedience, downfall, and deliverance of God's people, the nation of Israel.

Poetical (Job through Song of Solomon): Beginning with the laments of Job, we move to the psalmists' praise to the Solomon's words of wisdom.

Prophetical (Isaiah through Malachi): The prophets called God's people to righteous living and foretold His judgment on those who turned their backs on Him.

NEW TESTAMENT

Biographical (Matthew through John): The four gospels, each written to a different audience, play out the life, death, and resurrection of our Savior.

Historical (Acts): The book of Acts is a narrative of how the good news about Jesus spread to the world through the growing church.

Doctrinal (Romans through Jude): These Epistles, or letters, are essays, in a sense, that apply the gospel to everyday life.

Prophetical (Revelation): Through the holy vision of John, the book of Revelation transports us to the end times, when Christ will return to earth in glory, judgment, and power.

The Bible's soil is rich with spiritual truths, but it is not like any other book you've dug into. Without a plan, you may feel like you're turning shovelfuls of empty dirt. You have to know *where* to dig, as well as *what* you're looking for.

A good place to begin reading is the New Testament, perhaps the book of John. Then move through the history of the beginning of the church in the book of Acts. Spend some time in the doctrinal book of Romans to give a good foundation to your faith.

Here's a tip: study Revelation after you have a grasp of the rest of Scripture. You might view Revelation as the last act of a stage play. To appreciate it, you need an understanding of all that came before.

And don't forget the Old Testament! Here are the roots of the New Testament and the thematic foundations to the life of Christ.

Follow the story of God's relationship with the Jewish nation from its beginnings in Genesis, to its pinnacle in 1 and 2 Samuel, and its downfall in 1 and 2 Kings.

For balance sake, intersperse one of the poetical books, such as the Psalms, and include a prophetic book from time to time to feel heartbeat of God toward His chosen people and the world.

Once you've decided where to dig, you need to know *how* to dig. Read through your passage prayerfully several times and **ask yourself three questions about each verse:**

WHAT DOES IT SAY? This is **observation**. Be sure you understand the context of the words. Try to uncover the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the passage. Who are the author and audience? What are the subject and historical background? When was the book written? Where was the author at the time he wrote? Why did he write? And how did he express himself—in the form of a story, a parable, a narrative?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? This is **interpretation**. Go deeper into the author's thoughts and teaching. What did he intend to say to his original audience? How would they have understood his teaching in their world?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO ME? This is **application**. By now, you should begin to see a principle emerging from your study. A *principle* is a statement of truth that can apply to all believers at all times.

For example, David's victory over Goliath in 1 Samuel 17:41-49 teaches this principle: *When we face an overwhelming problem, we can trust God to work through us.* The main point leads to specific life applications. What are some specific giant-sized problems in your life? And how can you depend on God's power as you face them?

To sharpen the application, try using a simple Bible study method created by pastor and teacher Ray E. Baughman. He suggests putting on your spiritual **SPECS** when you study Scripture.

The letters of the acrostic, **SPECS**, represent questions to guide your thoughts while reading Scripture. As you meditate on a passage, ask yourself, are there any:

- Sins to forsake?
- Promises to claim?
- Examples to follow?
- Commands to obey?
- Stumbling blocks or errors to avoid?

These questions can open your eyes to the rich treasures of application in the verses.

Try to make Bible study a daily activity, like eating. We don't load up our bodies with a huge meal then go for a week or two without food. It's not healthy. What is true for us physically is true spiritually. Regularity and consistency are crucial for good spiritual health. Here are some ideas that may help.

1. Pick a time when you are least likely to be interrupted. Begin a habit to keep the appointment.

2. Study at the same place. This will help your mind shift into a Bible study mode more quickly.

3. Keep everything you need right at hand. Bible, books, devotionals, pen, and pad should be within reach.

4. Ask God to give you understanding. The Holy Spirit is the ultimate teacher, and He will lead you to understand what you desire to know of God's Word (see Mathew 7:7; John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-16)!

Further Suggestions. Archeologists keep detailed notebooks on their findings. In a similar way, you may wish to keep a notebook of your spiritual discoveries. As your notebook grows, so will your understanding and insight. You'll be amazed at your collection of biblical treasures . . . spiritual gems from the heart of God.

HELPFUL BIBLE STUDY TOOLS

1. Study Bible

Features Bible text with charts and notes

2. Concordance

Lists words with verse references for word studies

3. Bible Dictionary

Defines biblical concepts

4. Commentary

Provides a Bible scholar's interpretation of each verse

For further insight on bibles and bible helps and what my personal preferences are, see the resource titled, ***"BIBLE TRANSLATIONS: Which Is Best For Me?"***