

How to Understand The Bible

Why We Study the Bible

1. When you read the Bible, you might feel a little bit like learning a new language.
2. We talk a lot about the importance of personally engaging with the Scriptures.
3. By that, we mean reading the Bible for ourselves and not relying on other people to tell us what it says.
4. One reason we emphasize the importance of personal Bible study is because over one million Christians have been surveyed about what has caused their faith to grow, and the #1 answer (by a mile) is: "When I began to personally engage with the Scriptures."
5. The greater reason why we emphasize personal Bible study is this: the Bible itself tells us that it is what will help us to know God and grow in Him.
6. For instance:

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, so I would not sin against You." – Psalm 119:11

"Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." – Psalm 119:105

"For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires." – Hebrews 4:12

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. 17 God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work." – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

How To Start

1. We all know that reading and studying the Bible is important to a Christian and anyone else who wants to find out what the Christian faith is all about.
2. But the Bible can be a challenge to understand.
3. The good news is that there are a lot of resources out there that can help you with the challenges of understanding and applying the Bible.
4. Here are a few basic thoughts on how you can begin to read, understand, and apply the Bible:

Before you read – pray.

1. Ask God to help you to understand what you are reading and show you how you can apply it to your life.
2. When we ask God for insight and illumination, we are asking the author of the story to help us understand.
3. What is the goal or purpose of Bible study?
4. While there are a number of different ways to say it they all boil down to this:

- a. We study the Bible to discover the intended meaning of a passage of Scripture and apply it to our lives today.
 - b. It's simple, but also not.
 - c. The "simple" is that we have a clear purpose.
- 5. The "not" is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to getting there.
- 6. That's why different Bible study *methods* exist.

General Guidelines for Studying the Bible

- 1. Personal position or prestige can not control the understanding of Scripture
- 2. There is no place for an authoritative interpreter who by force of personality or position declares what is the accurate meaning of the words.
- 3. Judgments are not made on the basis of who holds a particular view
- 4. Caution is needed when evaluating the degree, the person has knowledge
- 5. Freedom does NOT mean liberty to think as personal whim or fancy may dictate
- 6. Many have intentionally or unintentionally twisted the scriptures into distortions
- 7. It IS the freedom to apply the principles and use a proper method to understandIf a person humbly allows God through the Holy Spirit to instruct him
- 8. We are in a search for the truth in understanding scripture

Causes of difficulties and the sources of discrepancies

- 1. Names - misunderstanding who was spoken of - can be resolved by study
- 2. Carelessness - A careless reading is often at fault. You must note changes of conditions
- 3. Design - Grasp the design of the writer it can clear up many.
- 4. Time - Various ways of counting time have cause difficulty
- 5. Grammar
- 6. Compression - lack of detail may be caused discrepancy.
- 7. Style - the propose of the writer, and the current writing custom
- 8. The imagination of critics - Those who want to establish errors will not be satisfied by reasonable probabilities.
- 9. Law of Harmony - Work with the rest of scripture

Tools to Help with Biblical Understanding

Concordances

Bible Dictionary

Maps of Bible Times

Timelines

Cultural

- 1. History itself has a context
 - a. the people's knowledge, loves, fears, culture, trends of thought, and traditions.
 - b. What did it mean for them yesterday, verses what for us today?
- 2. It is helpful if we know things like:

- a. The writer
- b. His social environment
- c. The geography
- d. His nation and group and that of his audience
- e. National characteristics - ethnic attitudes
- f. Domestic life – like the customs for sitting, eating
- g. Food
- h. Their dwelling and furniture of their dwellings
- i. Military: strategy, titles,
- j. Architecture - types of buildings, their engineering

What Is a Bible Study Method?

1. A Bible study method is a framework that helps us understand and apply Scripture to our lives. Every method shares certain characteristics. They all incorporate observation, interpretation, application, and personal reflection.
2. They all also place a different emphasis on one or another.
3. Here are 6 methods for us to review as possible methods to study the Bible:
 - a. The Inductive Method
 - b. The SOAP Method
 - c. The TEXT Method
 - d. The Verse-Mapping Method
 - e. The Topical Study Method
 - f. The Character Study Method

The Inductive Method

1. The Inductive Bible Study Method is a process by which you make observations of a passage and draw conclusions from those observations.
2. The questions at the heart of this approach typically follow the five W's (and one H) approach:
 - a. **Who** (who is speaking; who is the intended audience; who is present in the moment, etc.)
 - b. **What** (what is this passage about; what problem is this addressing; what is happening; what is being said; what commands need to be obeyed, etc.)
 - c. **When** (when is this event taking place?)
 - d. **Where** (where is this event taking place, where does it fit in the larger context of the book and Scripture?)
 - e. **Why** (why is this message needed, why is it relevant today?)
 - f. **How** (how does this change what I know about God and humanity; how do I apply this to my life so that I can live more faithfully as a follower of Jesus?)

The SOAP Method

The SOAP Method is built on four practices:

- a. **Scripture**, reading a passage and writing out 1–2 specific verses by hand.
- b. **Observation**, asking questions of the text (who, what, where, when, how).
- c. **Application**, considering how you should respond to what you’ve read.
- d. **Prayer**, thanking God for what he’s shown you, and for his empowerment as you seek to live faithfully in light of what you have discovered in your time in the Word.

And best of all, SOAP can be used in in a verse-by-verse progression or in a topical study.

The TEXT Method

The TEXT Method uses a four steps process:

- a. Talk to God in prayer before you read.
- b. Encounter God and humanity in Scripture as you reflect on two simple questions: what does this passage say about God, and what does it say to us?
- c. eXamine your heart, considering what needs to be confessed, added, taken away, or maintained as a follower of Jesus.
- d. Talk to God and others, thanking God for what he has shown you in Scripture, and sharing what he’s shown you with someone else.

The Verse-Mapping Method

The verse-mapping method of Bible study allows you to study the historical context, transliteration, translation, connotation, and theological framework of a verse in the Bible. After choosing a verse (or verses) to study, do the following:

- a. Write out your chosen verse(s).
- b. Write them in at least two other translations (remember, you can read a verse in multiple translations).
- c. Circle keywords to look up in the original languages and write down the definitions, synonyms, and root words.
- d. Explore the meaning and message of the verse or verses as you consider the people, places, and context involved, and make connections to other relevant passages and concepts in Scripture.
- e. Write a 1–2 sentence summary of what you learned and consider how you can apply it.

The Topical Bible Study Method

As the name suggests, this method helps you to explore in-depth a specific topic or concept within Scripture. To put this method into practice, follow the following steps:

- a. Choose a topic you want to explore, perhaps a theological concept or aspect of how we're meant to live as God's people.
- b. Look up references to this topic (an exhaustive concordance is a helpful tool for this).
- c. Choose the verses you wish to study.
- d. Ask questions about the topic.
- e. Read the verses and see how they address your questions.
- f. Summarize your conclusions.
- g. Write out your application.

The Character Study method

Similar to a topical study, this method focuses on a specific biblical character to learn about how God worked in and through that individual and apply what we discover to our lives. Character studies involve the following steps:

- a. Choose the biblical character you want to study.
- b. Find the relevant passages about him or her.
- c. Read your passages, and consult additional Bible study tools like Bible dictionaries, to learn everything you can about this character (the trustworthy questions who, what, when, where, and how will serve you well here).
- d. Find the application points for your life.

Many Bible Study Methods to Reach One Truth

These different Bible study methods all share the same goal: they are designed to help you better understand and live out the truth of God's Word. Try them all and see how they help you to know, love, and obey God daily.

Other Helpful Practices to Help Understand the Bible

1 – Understand The Context

This is one of, if not the most important thing when it comes to how to understand the Bible. Context. Is. Everything. What do I mean by context? I simply mean:

- a. Where a verse falls within a chapter.
- b. Where a chapter falls within a book.
- c. Where a book falls within a chronology.
- d. Where a chronology falls within the story of the entire Bible.
- e. Where a section falls within a logical argument.
- f. Where one word falls in relation to other words.
- g. Reading a verse out of context almost always leads to terrible Bible interpretations
- h. The first and main principle in how to understand the Bible is to keep everything in context.

2 – Read The Entire Bible Sequentially At Least Once

- a. Obviously, reading the entire Bible multiple times is ideal, but reading it through sequentially at least once is essential.
- b. This gives you a feel for the overarching principles of Scripture.

3 – Read Groups of Scripture Together

- a. The Bible is grouped in relevant sections.
- b. The Old Testament is grouped into the law, the prophets, and the writings.
- c. The New Testament is the gospels, Acts, Paul's epistles, the general epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation.
- d. Reading in groups allows you to gain a fuller understanding of God's ways and wisdom.

4 – Understand Biblical Genres

- a. This ties into understanding the context.
- b. Every book of the Bible falls into a particular genre.
- c. The Song of Solomon is poetry and should be interpreted as poetry, not as commands like the law.
- d. The epistles are letters and follow the conventions of letters.
- e. Revelation is apocalyptic, meaning it contains many symbolic elements.
- f. If you don't understand genres you struggle with interpretations.

5 – Know The Original Audience

- a. Knowing the original audience of each book is enormously helpful.
- b. It causes so many puzzle pieces to fall into place.
- c. Take Galatians, for example.
 - i. It was primarily to Gentiles who had been converted under Paul's ministry.
 - ii. These Gentiles were being harassed by Jews who said they needed to follow Jewish customs in order to be true Christians.

6 – Know Your Theology

- a. The better you know your theology, the better your overall understanding of Scripture will be.
- b. Understanding core theological doctrines can help you make sense of verses that seem out of place.

7 – Read Multiple Translations

- a. I always recommend starting with a translation that is more literal (word for word) in its translation style so that you can get as close to the original meaning as possible.
- b. However, reading multiple translations of the same passage can unlock different shades of meaning that you may have previously missed.

8 – Read A Single Book Multiple Times

- a. Sometimes it can be immensely helpful to immerse yourself in a single book for an extended period of time.
- b. Diving way deep into a single book allows you to pick up nuances you would never get on a single pass.
- c. It forces you to grapple with the logical arguments of the author and pushes you to a more thorough understanding.

9 – Interrogate Your Bible

- a. You should always be asking questions of the text.
 - i. Why did God want this particular verse included?
 - ii. Why did God want me, a 21st century Christian, to know the genealogy of Jesus?
- b. Don't just skip over verses you don't understand.
- c. Stop. Question.
- d. Push deeper.
- e. Go back and read earlier verses and following verses.
- f. Examine the bigger context.
- g. If you want to know how to read the Bible, it's hard to beat simply asking tons of questions.

10 – Don't Put Yourself at the Center

- a. Remember, the Scriptures testify to Jesus, not you!
- b. Yes, there are thousands of things that are incredibly relevant to you, but Jesus is at the start, middle, and end of the Bible.
- c. Keep Jesus at the center.

#11 – Don't Believe Anyone

- a. This simply mean that when it comes to understanding the Bible, don't rely on what someone else tells you.
- b. Find out for yourself.
- c. If your pastor says something, test it against what the Bible says.

How To Understand The Bible – In All Things, Pray, Pray, Pray