

# How to study the Bible

**FEARLESS**

SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

# Part 1

## What is the Bible and Why Is It Important to Us?

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“Bible” literally means “the book.” And, without a doubt, it is a book unlike any others. For centuries, it lives on the top of the best-seller list and nearly every household in America contains at least one.

The Bible has had powerful influence over individuals and whole societies down through the ages and it is as relevant today as it was when it was written. The questions it deals with like *Who are we? Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where are we going? How should we live?* are questions every single person seeks to understand.

But most astounding of all is the claim it makes about itself...

**All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. - 2 Timothy 3:16-17**

While all other books and writings originate in the mind of humans, the Bible claims that it originates in the mind of God. In other words, this is a book where God communicates to the human race what he wants us to know about Himself, his creation and ourselves.

We could go on about the importance and relevancy of the Bible, but the point is made: This is a book to read, study and apply.

However, reading the Bible can be overwhelming. It is not an uncommon story to hear of someone who sits down with a Bible to read it from cover to cover and soon gets confused, frustrated and disheartened. Even many of us who grew up in church, never really learned how the Bible worked. For those of us outside the church and are introduced to the Bible as a student or adult, it may make no sense at all.

Maybe you've had your own frustrations or anxiety about reading God's Word. The purpose of the "How to study the Bible" videos and study guide is to help you jump into the adventure of studying the Bible. Once you have a few tools, you can study this book with success and fulfillment. You can have the experience that believers for generations have had when they say, "God spoke to me!"

Let's start by giving you a little more information about the Bible. [Here's a great video from "The Bible Project" that sums up how our "Bible" came to be.](#)

As the video notes, the Bible is really like a library of true, ancient accounts of God and His interactions with human beings from the beginning of time. The Bible contains 66 books and is separated in the Old Testament (the Hebrew Bible) and the New Testament (the writings of Jesus followers). There are many different genres (styles of writing). The Bible has "many stories about the lives of good and bad people, about battles and journeys, about the life of Jesus, and about early church activity. It comes to us in narratives and dialogues, in proverbs and parables, in songs and allegories, in history and prophecy."<sup>1</sup>

Although the Bible was written over thousands of years and compiles ancient texts – it provides relevant and significant truth to us today. Each book of the Bible conveys a truth about God and human beings. As we learn more about God and how He worked through the course of human history we can see how He continues to work in our world and lives. The International Bible Society reminds us that "the Bible can provide:

- A guide for living life to the full. It gives us a road map for the perilous journey of life. Or to put it another way, on our voyage through life's ocean, the Bible is an anchor.
- A storehouse of wonderful stories for children and grownups. Remember Noah and the ark? Joseph's coat of many colors? Daniel in the lion's den? Jonah and the fish? The parables of Jesus? These stories emphasize the triumphs and failures of ordinary people.
- A refuge in trouble. People in pain, in suffering, in prison, and in mourning tell how turning to the Bible brought strength in their desperate hour.
- A treasury of insight as to who we are. We are not meaningless robots, but we are magnificent creatures of a God who loves us and gives us a purpose and a destiny.

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1 <https://www.biblica.com/resources/bible-faqs/what-is-the-bible/>

- A sourcebook for everyday living. We find standards for our conduct, guidelines for knowing right from wrong, and principles to help us in a confused society where so often “anything goes.”<sup>2</sup>

There really is no book that can compare with the Bible. It is truly remarkable. Our prayer is that, as you study, you’ll not only see the Bible as a wonderful gift from God, but a source of encouragement, life and light!

# Part 2

## Why We Study the Bible and the Tools We Have

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Now that we understand how the Bible “works” we want to talk a little about why studying the Bible matters. Causally reading the Bible is terrific and God often blesses you any time you are in his Word. As a fearless family, we have many ways to connect with the Bible (study as a life group, a term group, an “In Training” relationship). We also follow a daily Bible reading plan called the “Fearless Word of the Day.” Often times, this follows our weekly teaching series and helps us connect to the messages and sermons at our churches.

But it would be a mistake to think this would replace a personal habit of studying. We want to have the same focus that King David had he studied the Scriptures:

*Praise be to you, Lord; teach me your decrees. With my lips I recount all the laws that come from your mouth. I rejoice in following your statutes as one rejoices in great riches. I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word. Psalm 119:12-16*

When we dig in deeper to studying the Bible, we actually equip the Holy Spirit, who lives inside of us, to do more significant transformational work. In Ephesians 6 we learn that the Bible is the “sword” of the Holy Spirit and in Hebrews we read this astounding statement:

*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*

It’s been said the goal of Scripture study is not just to get into the Word, but to get the Word into us.

As previously mentioned the Bible is rich, complex and written over thousands of years to ancient worlds. Reading the Bible and applying it to our lives takes a fair amount of time, study, effort and discipline. It is hard work, but thankfully we have help. Along with the crucial role the Holy Spirit plays in helping us understand and apply Scripture, over the

years the church has developed many Bible Study helps that are accessible and practical. Men and women have spent their entire lives studying the Bible and writing books (called commentaries) that provide helpful information for greater understanding. We can find numerous commentaries in libraries and online, but a good study bible provides many thoughts from these commentaries regarding specific passages as you read them.

Here's a list of a few helpful Study Bibles:

- [NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible](#)
- [NIV Zondervan Study Bible](#)
- [ESV Study Bible](#)
- [HCSB Study Bible](#)
- [Life Application Study Bible](#)

Here's how a study bible works:

Teacher to **\*\*\*Demonstrate\*\*\*** by selecting a specific passage and share the commentary along with how it helps to understand and apply the passage to everyday life.

With a good study Bible, some good commentaries (Bible Gateway has a lot of free options), and the Holy Spirit as your guide and helper, you have a lot of tools to utilize as you read, learn and study the Bible. In the following sections we will walk through a three step process ("What it says", "What it means", "What I will do") that utilizes those tools as you study.

## **As you begin keep the following in mind:**

- We are reading for transformation (not just a transference of information)
- Be intentional in you study. If possible, schedule a consistent time to read and give yourself enough time to "dig in" with minimal distractions (e.g., early in the morning, at a lunch break, after work, before bed)
- Find a quiet and place or, at the least, take a moment to quiet out the "noise" of the day/world around you
- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you and bring light to God's truth as you read

# Part 3

## What It Says

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The first step in studying the Bible reading **what it says**. Remember, the Bible contains the truth of who God is and who you are. It has a lot to say. There is a lot to learn in reading/ listening to what the Bible says.

### **Start with prayer knowing that the Holy Spirit will reveal God's Truth to you as you read.**

Focus on a smaller passage to study (in a narrative – a section, and in a letter – a few verses). Read the passage, make a point to read the sections above and below for an understanding of the message of passage (or context of the section). When you read, consider using different translations. The Bible, being an ancient text comprised of numerous ancient languages, can be interpreted into English and other modern languages in different ways. Reading different translations can help to give a different perspective on a particular text. A few great resources for reading differing translations are:

- [Parallel Bibles](#)
- [Bible Gateway](#)
  - This online resource allows for numerous translations in different languages and print versions

Another great way to “read” what the Bible says is by listening to the Bible read aloud (audio bible versions are available through Amazon and other media platforms). Read/listen to the passage a few times and then put the passage in your own words; you can say it out loud, quietly to yourself, or write it down in a journal/on a piece of paper (sometimes, I like to write the passage in my own words on a notecard so I can carry it around with me throughout the day).

Example and Walk Through of a Passage:

-Read a text (With a Parallel – In Multiple Translations - [Bible Gateway](#))

-Paraphrase and rewrite

As you do this – you will be able to answer the question, “What does this passage say?” and you will be on your way to the next step in our Bible study process – **What it means.**



# Part 4

## What It Means

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Once we have a handle on what a particular passage **says** we need to discover **what it means**. Learning what the text means is a two-part process. The first part is to understand what it meant the original audience when the passage was written (this is called exegesis). The second part is understanding what it means in the here and now (this is called hermeneutics).

Think of it this way:

If we read the sentence, "I'm mad about my flat!" – what does that mean? Well, it depends. If I am living in 21<sup>st</sup> century America, own a car and am sending a text to a friend, it probably means that I am angry about the tire that my tire ran over a nail on the road. However, if I am living in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Europe and I've been on the hunt for an apartment, it probably means that I am really excited about my new living quarters. Discovering where I am from (America or Europe) and the nature of my circumstances (driving on the road or searching for a place to live) is **exegesis**. Interpreting how I feel about it (angry or excited) and how you might reply to my note would be applying a **hermeneutic**. Now, imagine doing that with a note written in different language, to a people living thousands of years ago in a culture and geography very different to ours – that is the task ahead of you as you study.

This work "involves the careful, systematic study of the Scripture to discover the original, intended meaning. This is primarily a historical task. It is the attempt to hear the Word as the original recipients were to have heard it, to find out what was the original intent of the words of the Bible. This is the task that often calls for the help of the "expert," a person trained to know well the language and circumstances of a text in its original setting."<sup>3</sup> Exegesis helps us understand what the message meant when it was "sent" or recorded. When we know that we can ask what it might now mean today and that's where hermeneutics comes into play. This is where commentaries and Study Bibles help a lot. They help you take an informed look at questions like:

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3 Fee, Gordon D.. How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth (pp. 27-28). Zondervan Academic. Kindle Edition.

- Who is the author?
- When was this written?
- Who is the audience?
- What is the situation in history?
- What does the original language communicate here (what do the specific words mean in context)?
- Does it reference other verses or passages of Scripture?
- Is there any relevant historical or cultural information that can help me understand this passage?
- What truth does this present and how can it apply to my life?

# Part 5

## What I Will Do

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In the world of technology and information many can become “experts” of what the Bible says and means (and that’s a good thing). However, the goal of our study isn’t to simply learn – it’s to live in the fullness and goodness of God’s desire and design for our lives. This means moving from learning to **what I will do**. Asking, answering and following through on the question, “What will I do?” is the step that take us into a transformational journey toward becoming more like Jesus (more like God wants us to be).

Applying the Bible to our lives isn’t necessarily difficult in process. Take the thought or concept that you discovered in step 1 and step 2 and write it down somewhere. Then, think about how that concept applies directly to your life (“How would this apply to my marriage, my friendship, my work?” or “Does this point out a sin issue or struggle in my life that I need to stop or get help on?”). Then write out a challenge or action step to yourself (to accomplish in a specific time frame). **Remember: The more specific the better – you should be able to answer the question, “Did I do this?” after a few days.** If you are in a study group, “In Training” relationship or some sort of accountability/support group, consider sharing your action step.

Specific Examples:

- I will pray this verse ( 4 times today)
- I will call and apologize to someone (in the next 8hrs)
- I will watch my temper (for the next 24hrs)
- I will share my Jesus story or share about Jesus with someone else (today)

Finally, and most importantly, take action and do what you said you would do. The next time you sit down to study or connect with a friend, honestly report on your progress. What did you do? How did it go? If you didn’t do it – what prevented you? What can you learn from that? How can others help you? How can you rely on Jesus for His continued love and grace for the next time?

**Finish with prayer.** Just a reminder, this is the most important and most humbling part of the Bible Study process. As you work through this please know that you are not alone. What makes the message of the Bible truly “good news” is that you have a partner in the Holy Spirit who will work through your willingness to yield to God’s instruction and make you more like Jesus. You have the power of the Holy Spirit, the person of Jesus and the love of God on your side. God wants you succeed at applying His word to your life. He knows it’s hard and he knows your struggles.

Know that we are praying for you as you study and we will do whatever we can to help. Remember this process “**What it says//What it means//What I will do**” and you will be well on your way.