

How to Study the Bible

The best place to start with studying the Bible is asking why. Why study? It is not to gain more information, win God's approval or get smarter!

We study the Bible because it orders our thoughts around how to relate to God and others. There is no better reason to study the Bible

Study is ultimately asking questions, over and over. Read and ask questions, consider the message, think of the implications and read some more. To get more narrow, we read the Bible to understand what is being communicated and then to interpret what it means.

For it to be effective we take what we have understood and interpreted and compare it to our own experience. The final piece is to discuss what we have discovered with others who are studying the Bible.

It sounds complicated, and it does take focus but you are more than capable. Here are four steps to guide you. Studying the Bible requires

- 1) **Repetition** – no one has mastered all of the Bible. It is God's word, the only one who can truly master it is God Himself. This means it is going to take consistent interaction. How often have you read or heard a passage preached, come back to it at a later time and found new meaning? It happens all the time.

Beyond the inexhaustible depths of what God has to say, it is a way of reprogramming your mind. Consistently going back to read and study the Bible will over time change the way you think. You are literally transforming your mind when you study the Bible.

Keep at it! Even on the days when you don't feel you are getting anything out of it, keep going.

- 2) **Concentration** – Chew on what you are reading. Slow down, it is not about how many pages you read but about how much you grow. There is nothing wrong with using a Bible reading plan, but make sure the plan is serving you and you are not serving the plan.

On a very practical note, don't try to multi-task when you study. Find a quiet and calm (boring even!) place where you can focus for a block of time. A quiet place helps generate a quiet mind.

- 3) **Comprehension** – this goes back to understanding what the author is communicating. What are they saying? What did they original audience understand? Once you know these you can begin to interpret, if this is what they said, what does it mean?

This may mean re-reading something. Have you had the experience where you read something several times and then the light came on? Same idea. Read it until you would feel comfortable explaining to another person who has not read it. Make sure you know what it says and what it means.

- 4) **Reflection** – why is this significant? This is where it becomes personal. Can I see this from God’s perspective? You need to arrive at a place where repetition, concentration and comprehension bring you to a place to apply what you have studied. How does this impact me. What might need to change? Is God confirming something in my life? How does this impact my relationship with God or with others?

Here is an example. Luke 15:1-7 is the parable of the Lost Sheep. Take a minute to read it over a few times in a quiet place where you won’t be disturbed. Then jot down answers to the following questions.

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. ² But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

³ Then Jesus told them this parable: ⁴ “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵ And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders ⁶ and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ ⁷ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. Luke 15:1-7

What are the basics of the story, how would you re-tell the story to another person? Put it in your own words and note anything that stands out to you below.

Why did Jesus tell this story? What point was he communicating? (don't overthink this)

What does this parable mean?

Reflecting on these things, what does this tell me about God, myself and/or others?

Combining all these things God is telling me _____

Congratulations! You are on your way to studying the Bible to transform and renew your mind.