

# WORD.

How to get more out of your Bible Study

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We're a species that loves information. We want to be in the know and we want to be known. Have you ever been watching a TV program or a movie and 'googled' what you were watching to investigate the facts behind the real story? I certainly have.

There is an innate sense of curiosity in human beings. From the time we're born we're trying to figure out how something works or why it exists. We want information. Is it possible, that this innate sense of curiosity is there because we were created in the image of God? Is it possible that stamped into our souls is a desire to know what is beyond ourselves – principally to know God?

If this is true (and I believe it is) how do we know God? How do we know what God is like? We discover much about God in creation, or what is theologically referred to as "general revelation". But how do we learn of God's character, plans, and attributes? This is where the Bible comes in. The Bible is "special revelation". By special revelation we mean: specific human descriptions of who God is and what he is up to.

**"Brad, when I read the Bible I just don't get all of that out of it."**

I've heard that statement dozens of times over the years after a sermon or a small group series. What the person saying it really means is, "I've read *that* before, multiple times even, but I didn't see or understand all that you just taught. How did you get that, when I didn't?"

It's not Rocket Science. It's also not some nonsensical "anointed Man of God" mumbo jumbo. I think everyone can get more out of their Bible study. When you do, it will give you a clearer and more majestic view of who God is. The better we learn to see, listen to and obey the triune God - Father, Son and Spirit - the better we will worship, love and live.

# Before we Start...

## What is the Bible?

The Bible is not *primarily* 'God's instruction book for life'.

The Bible is not *primarily* "God's Love Letter" to mankind.

The Bible is not a book of rules for Christians.

The Bible is not two stories (Old Testament and New Testament)

The Bible is not a collection of moral stories.

The Bible is God's story of Redemption. There are lots of stories in the Bible, but all the stories are telling one Big Story. The Story of how God loves mankind and comes to rescue them. At the center of the story is Jesus. The Bible is primarily about God—and this is good news! To learn about ourselves and life is important, but what is more important is to discover God. In God we find our meaning, truth and life. This changes how we read the Bible. This changes how we interpret the Bible. We don't go to the Bible primarily for self-help, but for God, who is our greatest help.

## Getting Started

*This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. - Joshua 1:8*

Before you get started consider the following:

- When will you read? Do you have a consistent time?
- Where will you read? Do you have a consistent place?
- What will you read? Do you have a plan?
- What do you need? Do you have a Bible, journal, pen and highlighter?

One of the most important things you can do before you study the Bible is pray. Pray that God would:

- Open your mind to understand the riches of His Word.
- Open your eyes to see the beautiful wonders of Christ and the glories of the gospel.
- Unite your heart to fear His name, knowing that your desires are ever divided.
- Satisfy you with His steadfast and unfailing love.

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## Choosing what to read

There isn't anything random about the Bible, so we shouldn't use our magic 8-balls to determine what to read. We want to read intentionally and thoughtfully.

- Some people choose to read the entire Bible in a year, which involves 3-4 chapters a day (there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible).
- Others choose to read the Bible in three years, about one chapter a day.
- You might study through one book of the Bible at a time, alternating between the OT and NT.
- One chapter from the book of Proverbs and one Psalm could be added to each daily portion for the practical and worshipful aspects of daily living.
- Proverbs has 31 chapters, and many people read one chapter in the book of Proverbs daily.
- In determining the length of the passage you want to read and study, remember that you want to read that which can be read thoroughly.

## Reading the Bible Effectively

It is possible to read without having read anything! There have been times when you have read an entire page in a book, then realized you had no idea what you had just read.

- 1) Read out loud
- 2) Read carefully
- 3) Read alertly, not mechanically
- 4) Read slowly, weighing each word
- 5) Read repeatedly. Read a passage over and over again

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# Step One: Observation | What do you see?

## What does the Bible say?

- 1) Observe the basic facts in the text you are studying. This is the matter of the contents-what is said.
- 2) Ask questions to discover additional facts by more intense observation.

Ask some standard questions:

Who is...

- ...the author?
- ...the audience?
- ...being discussed?
- ...accomplishing the action?

Where is...

- ...the author?
- ...the audience?
- ...the action taking place?

What is the...

- ...meaning of this word?
- ...significance of this phrase?
- ...implication of this statement?
- ...overarching theme?

Why did the author...

- ...choose this word?
- ...include this phrase?
- ...use this command?
- ...connect these ideas?
- ...not say \_\_\_\_?

- 3) Mark up the passage. Don't be afraid to write in your Bible. Circle, underline and highlight. Write in the margins. Get creative.
- 4) List 2-3 overarching themes you see in the passage.
- 5) List at least two observations per verse. The more the merrier.

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# Step Two: Interpretation | What does it mean?

## Guidelines for interpreting the Bible:

- 1) Always try first to interpret the Bible literally.
- 2) Those who constantly try to find hidden meanings in the Bible instead of taking it literally have done a great deal of harm. The “Golden Rule of Interpretation”: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Take every word at its primary literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context stated clearly indicate otherwise.”
- 3) Unique interpretations are usually wrong. Uniqueness can often be attributed to pride (an attempt to “out clever” the rest of the world).
- 4) Don’t assume too readily that you know what the text means.
- 5) All possible interpretations of a verse are not equally good.
- 6) A dangerous approach to Bible study today: “*What does this mean to me?*” A passage cannot mean to me something substantially different from what it meant to its original human author and readers. Do not ask, what can this be made to teach? But rather, what was this intended to teach?

## Tips for interpreting the Bible:

- 1) Consider the context
- 2) Compare multiple translations (ESV, NASB, NIV, HCSB).
- 3) Look up key words.
- 4) Check out cross-references to see how this passage relates to others.
- 5) When stumped, list out all the various options and pros and cons of each. After due consideration, use supplemental resources such as the ESV Study Bible or commentaries for helpful insights and background information.
- 6) Don’t stop until you have considered how this passage fits into the overarching redemptive plan of God – the gospel. How does this passage relate to the person and work of Christ?
- 7) Discuss insights and questions with your spouse and Life Group community.

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# Step Three: Application | What do I do with it?

Bible study is incomplete until you have thought through how to apply the particular passage to your life. Some passages will be more readily applicable than others, but all Scripture is useful and helpful (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

- 1) List out a number of potential applications To get started, here are a few questions to consider:
  - Is there an example for you to follow?
  - Is there a sin to repent of and/or avoid? Is there a promise to trust?
  - Is there a prayer to repeat?
  - Is there a command to obey?
  - Is there a condition to meet?
  - Is there a verse to memorize?
  - Is there an erroneous view exposed?
  - What else is the Lord pressing upon you?
- 2) Choose one or two particular applications and prayerfully consider how you might pursue greater faithfulness in them. Be specific about what you will do (or not do) and whom you will ask (in addition to the Lord) to help you.

## Further Resources:

- 1) Consider a Bible reading plan. Many plans are available on your computer, Smart Phone or Tablet. Visit [www.youversion.com](http://www.youversion.com) for more information on these.
- 2) Read Living by the Book by Howard Hendricks, or go through this study as a LifeGroup. <http://www.livingbythebook.net/>
- 3) Book: Women of The Word by Jen Wilkin
- 4) Recommended Study Bibles:
  - ESV Study Bible
  - MacArthur Study Bible
  - Jesus Storybook Bible

*Credits: Research used for this curriculum includes: Principles of Bible Study Course, by Dr. David Kemp. Bible Study tools posts from the Village Church and The Gospel Coalition.*

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