Bible Study 101

Bible reading isn't simply about gaining knowledge—it's an invitation to journey and grow in life giving relationship with God, through the redemptive work of Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

What Is the Bible?

The Bible is a collection of **66 books**, divided into two sections:

- **Old Testament (39 books):** The story of God's relationship with Israel, God's promises, and the anticipation of the coming Messiah.
- **New Testament (27 books):** The story of Jesus—His life, death, and resurrection—and the beginning of the early church.

The Bible was written by people inspired by God, in a foreign context and in a variety of literary styles.

Remember:

- The Bible was written *for us*, but not originally *to us*.
- Understanding the context (culture, language, historical time period, etc.) helps us understand what the author intended.
- The Bible contains different styles of writing, including history, narrative, poetry, wisdom, law, and letters.
- The entire story of the Bible points to **Jesus!**

How Should We Approach the Bible?

Approach the Bible with **humility, curiosity, and a willingness to be transformed.**

It's tempting to approach the Bible as:

- A rulebook that simply tells us what to do.
- A theological dictionary that gives us all the right answers.

But the Bible is so much more!

Think of the Bible like a pair of glasses. The goal isn't simply to know about the glasses; it's to help us see more clearly.

In the same way, the Bible helps us see:

- God more clearly.
- Ourselves more clearly.
- Our neighbors and the world around us more clearly.

The ultimate goal of Bible study is not just knowledge or better behavior. It's deeper love for God and transformation through relationship with Jesus.

Five Practical Tips for Reading the Bible

1. Pray Throughout the Process
- Invite God into your reading before, during, and after.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.
- Remember that Bible study is about relationship, not just information.

2. Journey Together
- Don't study in isolation.
- Share insights, ask questions, and learn from others.
- Talk with trusted friends, mentors, and leaders when you encounter difficult passages.

3. Keep it Up and Switch it Up
- Start somewhere, even if it's just one verse a day.
- Try listening to Scripture.
- Read short passages, larger sections, or entire books.
- If one approach isn't working, try another!
- **Good places to start:** The story of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark (short and approachable) or John (more theological).

4. Work at Understanding the Context

Remember that the Bible was written in a different time, place, culture, and language.
Ask:
- Who originally wrote this?
- Who was the original audience?
- What was happening in their world?
- What would the original audience have understood?
- How does this passage fit into the bigger story of the Bible?
- Rather than immediately asking, "What does this mean to me?" first ask, "What did this mean to the people who originally heard it?"

5. Use Helpful Resources

You don't have to figure everything out on your own!
Consider using:
- **Readable/Multiple Bible Translations:** NLT (approachable), ESV (more scholarly), or MSG (helpful paraphrase).
- **Bible Project:** Videos, podcasts, and free online classes.
- **Study Bibles:** Helpful notes and background information.
- **Bible apps and devotionals:** Structure and consistency for daily reading.
- **Concordances and word studies:** Explore original Hebrew and Greek words and recurring themes. **STEP Bible:** Online tool for studying Scripture.
- **Commentaries:** Such as N.T. Wright's _____ *For Everyone* series.

A Simple Bible Study Framework: Read, Reflect, Respond

READ
- What does the passage actually say?
- Read carefully and notice repeated words, details, and themes.

REFLECT
- What did this mean to the original audience?
- What does this communicate about God?
- How does it connect to the bigger story of Scripture?
- What might the Holy Spirit be inviting me to notice?

RESPOND
- Respond through prayer, praise, or thanksgiving.
- Confess something or make a change.
- Seek or offer forgiveness.
- Have a needed conversation.
- Take a practical step of faith.
- **Allow the Holy Spirit to guide your response.**

Three Ways to Reflect on Scripture

1. The Hebrew Encyclopedia Approach
Imagine what an ancient Jewish listener might have thought when hearing a passage. Ask:
- What Old Testament stories or themes might this remind them of?
- What connections might they recognize?
- How does this passage fit into God's larger story?

Practice: Read Mark 1:9–15.

Look for Old Testament connections to:
- The Exodus and crossing the Jordan.
- God's presence and the Holy Spirit.
- Israel's wilderness experience.

2. Lectio Divina (Divine Reading): Read, Reflect, Respond, Rest
A slower, prayerful way to experience Scripture.

- **Read:** Slowly read the passage, perhaps more than once.
- **Reflect:** Notice a word or phrase that stands out.
- **Respond:** Turn that word or phrase into a personal prayer.
- **Rest:** Spend time quietly with God, remaining aware of His presence.

Practice: Read Mark 5:25–34

Ask: What word or phrase stood out to you? How did this prompt you to respond in prayer?

3. Keep Your Eyes on Jesus
As you read a Bible story, use your Holy Spirit-inspired imagination to picture Jesus in the scene.

Pay attention to:
- What Jesus says and does.
- How He treats people.
- His character, and priorities.
- How people respond to Him.

Practice: Read Mark 5:35–43.

Ask: What did you notice about Jesus as you kept your eyes on Him?

Your Next Step

Reading the Bible is a journey, not a race. You don't have to be an expert to experience the gift of God's Word.

Pray Throughout the Process. Journey Together. Keep it Up and Switch it Up. Work at Understanding the Context. Use Helpful Resources.

As we read, let's commit to knowing God more deeply, loving God more fully, and partner with God in bringing life to the world.

Personal Reflection
- What stood out to you about how we should approach Scripture?

- What is one next step you feel encouraged to take?

Remember: Keep your eyes on Jesus as you Read, Reflect, and Respond!

Scan for Resources
www.es.church/biblestudyresources