

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

The Bible often intimidates people. We are fearful that a “super Christian” will show up our ignorance. We can be overwhelmed by its unique presentation – it’s leather bound and the pages are thin, not like other books we read. We can falsely assume that preachers are paid to understand everything that’s in the Bible, so we don’t have to understand it ourselves. As a result, we miss out on God’s promises, God’s encouragement, and God’s challenges to us.

This is a simple seven-step method that will encourage you as you study the Bible. At Alice Drive, we believe that part of everyone’s next step toward Jesus is learning and applying what the Bible says.

STEP 1: MAKE A DECISION

Understanding the Bible begins with making a decision to understand it. This decision should be backed up by a commitment to a specific place and time to study the Bible.

Many people find it helpful to study the Bible soon after they first wake up, generally after their first cup of coffee. Others prefer to study the Bible at mid-day as part of their lunch hour. Some people find it more convenient to study the Bible in the evening, right before they go to bed. There is no right time to study the Bible, only a time that is right for you. Make a commitment to set aside fifteen minutes a day to study the Bible.

It’s helpful if you make a personal commitment to do that study in the same place: A comfortable chair, at the kitchen table, a place where you will be uninterrupted and able to think.

STEP 2: GET A BIBLE THAT HELPS YOU

People often wonder what is the best Bible to read. Eugene Nida, former chief translator with the American Bible Society, once remarked, “The best Bible translation is the one that you will read.” Many of us were raised hearing the King James Version read aloud in church. If The King James Version helps you grow spiritually and that’s the version you will read, by all means, it is the best version for you. Others find it more helpful to read a more modern translation. All translations have strengths and weaknesses. Alice Drive typically refers to the New International Version. This version is written in Basic English and is specifically designed for clarity and ease of reading. It is important, however, that the best translation is the one that you will read.

A study Bible is a tremendous help. A good study Bible offers an introduction to each book of the Bible and includes notes at the bottom of the page that will explain terms, places, names and historical events referred to in scripture. There are a number of excellent study Bibles on the market. A very helpful one is [The NIV Study Bible](#). This Study Bible is available in most bookstores and large retail outlets.

STEP 3: PRAYER

You should read your Bible at a specific place and time, and begin with a simple prayer asking God to speak to you while you study His Word. This prepares your heart. It also reminds you that the words you will be reading are not like other words. They are words that are inspired by God. The same Holy Spirit that inspired the writers of scripture many years ago, now also resides in your heart. A good prayer to pray as you begin studying the scripture goes something like this: “Father, please let Your Spirit help me understand the words that you gave so long ago and apply them to my life.”

STEP 4: SELECT A READING PATTERN

There are many different ways to read the Bible. There is no method that is superior to any other. What is important is to find a method that works for you at a specific time in your life. There are four common patterns, and **the first method is to read a specific book of the Bible.** If this is your first time studying the Bible, you may want to pick a book that is shorter: The Gospel of Mark, Ephesians, Philippians or James. It will be helpful if you can devote a day or two to read the book through completely. This will help you understand the general flow of the book and its main themes. Then, go back to the beginning and read the book paragraph by paragraph. Many translations will offer sub-headings that group paragraphs together. You may want to read each of these paragraphs. Use the study questions that are provided below. Once you have completed a book, go on to another book. Over time, tackle some of the longer books that are pivotal to understanding God and our relationship to Him: Genesis, Psalms, Matthew, John and Romans.

A second common pattern for reading the scripture is reading the Bible through in a year. The church will provide, at the beginning of each year, a Bible reading guide. This guide offers four passages to read each day. Two are located in the Old Testament and two are located in the New Testament. The plan provides for reading twenty-five days out of each month, thus allowing five days to skip, if necessary. Reading the Bible through in the year is especially advantageous if you have been a Christ follower for more than five years. It will help you be introduced to the breadth of scripture. You will also want to use the sermon questions that are provided below.

The third method to read the scripture is to select either a devotional guide or a book in the Bible and simply read one passage at a time. There are many devotion guides such as *Our Daily Bread*, *Open Windows* and *The Upper Room*. Each of these devotional guides offers a scripture to read. There are also numerous calendars that have passages that would offer a passage a day to read through in a year. This method is especially helpful for those who have only fragments of time – such as young mothers, military personnel on assignment, and those who are in high stress positions.

The fourth option is to study the Bible in depth. This means that you select a pattern of passages, either in a book or a devotional guide, but you don't leave the passage until you feel like you've completely understood and incorporated it into your life. For example, a person might spend an entire week focusing on the story of the lost son in Luke Chapter 15. One day they might focus on the younger son. The next day on the father. The next day on the older son. Then they may list our life lessons that they derive from all three of the main characters in the story. This method is often aided by a good Bible Dictionary or a good Bible Commentary.

STEP 5: ASK QUESTIONS WHILE YOU ARE READING ABOUT THE MEANING OF THE PASSAGES

These questions will help bring clarity to almost any passage in the Bible:

1. **Who is speaking?** Is the person who is speaking or narrating a trustworthy person? Not all voices in the Bible belong to God. Sometimes, the voice belongs to someone who is not to be trusted. The great example of this is in the Book of Job, and the speech is given by Job's three friends. By reading the Book all the way through we learn that the three friends are not to be trusted. They did not speak about God correctly. It is important to know who is speaking.
2. **Who is hearing?** Who is the audience? What's their situation? When Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount, even though He was surrounded by a large crowd, we are specifically told in Matthew 5:2 that He called His

disciples to Him. The Sermon on the Mount is not for unbelievers but for followers of Jesus Christ. The Book of Galatians is written to people who having been freed in Christ wanted to once again submit to the rules of religion. Introductory materials on each book of the Bible and footnotes in a study Bible greatly help clarify who is the audience.

3. **What's the big idea in the passage?** What is God really trying to convey through this story, through this teaching? See if you can write down the big idea in the passage in a single sentence or a single phrase.
4. **When does this episode take place?** What's the historical context? Sometimes it is self-evident. The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles all narrate a history.
5. **Where does this take place?** Geography does make a difference. Most Bibles come equipped with maps. Take a moment and locate on the map in the back of the Bible where a specific event is taking place.
6. **Why is this passage important?** What is it teaching us? Why did God include this passage in scripture?

STEP 6: ASK QUESTIONS THAT HELP YOU APPLY THE TEACHINGS OF THE PASSAGE

After we understand what the passage is saying, then we need to apply it to our lives. It is not enough to intellectually understand scripture; we must also understand what scripture has to say to us.

These eight questions help:

1. **What does God command us to do in this passage?** Are we commanded to love? Are we commanded to be courageous? Are we commanded to give, to serve?
2. **What promises do we claim in this passage?** Has God promised to be with us? Has God promised to save us if we call on His name? Does God promise to hear our prayers?
3. **What are the cause and effect dynamics?** These passages are generally marked by the phrases "if" and "then." If we love Jesus, then we will keep His commandments. Cause and effect passages always invite us to examine our lives in light of the "if."
4. **What are recurring words and ideas?** In the third chapter of John, over and over Jesus refers to being born again. This recurring theme tells us that we must be fundamentally changed and that change can only happen through Jesus Christ.
5. **Why did God want to communicate this to me?** Trust that God may supernaturally have arranged for you to read a specific passage on a specific day. What's going on in your life that this passage specifically helps you understand?
6. **What does this passage teach you about you?** Does the passage teach you that you are a sinner who has failed and you need help? Does the passage teach you that you have a greed issue that you have to face? Does the passage teach you that you are a divisive person in the church and need to stop?
7. **What does this teach you about God?** Does it teach you about God's power? Does it teach you about God's grace? Does it teach you about God's patience? Does it teach you about God's wisdom?

8. **What is the next step you need to take after reading the passage?** Is it a step that requires action? Is it a step that requires waiting? Is it a step that requires you to overcome a fear? Scripture needs to be applied to our real lives because it written for real-life situations.

STEP 7: RELAX

When you read a passage and it's clear, trust that it is God speaking to you that very day. The truth is, some days you will read passages and you won't get very much out of them. Trust that God can use your reading of scripture even on the days when nothing stirs in your heart. It may be something you need to remember for the future; it may be something you need to claim to help you deal with the past, but it won't make a connection in your mind until later. If you are having trouble understanding a passage of scripture, ask people for help. Ask someone you know who does study the Bible. Ask a pastor. But, also accept that because the Bible is God's Word, there are some passages that are hard to understand and some passages we may never understand until we finally reach heaven.

Bottom Line:

The bottom line is, read the Bible. It will make an incredible difference in your life. When you study God's Word, you grow your character.