

How to Study the Bible

1. Why should we study the Bible?
 - Spiritual growth – 2 Peter 3:17-18 Unless we constantly learn for ourselves we may fall victim to the false teachings of others
 - Daily guidance – Psalm 119:105 This is the only way we can understand how God wants us to walk through our sanctified lives and thus fulfill his desire for our lives
 - Practical instruction – 2 Timothy 3:16-17 The Bible is our guide that lays out God’s will for our lives and helps us make the right decisions
2. When we study the Bible, we start with the presuppositions of our faith. No one can read the Bible without some presuppositions – an unbelieving heart will try to deny or change what is said to make it more palatable. A believing heart, following the Spirit, simply accepts what is said and thus will read Scripture believing it is:
 - Centered on Christ
 - God’s Word, verbally inspired and inerrant
3. Come to your time with the Word with an attitude of praise, thanksgiving, adoration, reverence, humility, and repentance (Ps 51:10-12). Ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand what you are reading (John 14:26) and use this time to strengthen your faith (Ps 199:99).
4. Unless the Bible indicates otherwise, take what you read literally. This is a basic rule that governs all communication. Otherwise, what people say or write to one another would be hopeless confusion. The words of the Bible are to be understood according to their common usage. God gave us the Bible so that we could learn about him. It would make no sense for him to write to us in a code that we couldn’t understand.

However, the Bible does use figures of speech to make the abstract more concrete. We obviously would not take these sections literally, but rather understand them as we would if we encountered them in any other writings.

- Similes (using “like” to compare something difficult to something common) as in Matt. 13:33 – “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast.”
- Metaphors (describes an unknown in terms of the known) as in “I am the vine..” in John 15:5
- Personification (giving human characteristics to an object to make a point in a vivid way) as in “Where, O Death, is your victory?” in 1 Cor 15:55
- Parables (earthly stories with a spiritual meaning)

God NEVER uses figurative speech to establish a doctrine, only to illustrate it. Therefore we can always find doctrinal statements in clear wording that we can understand.

5. Let Scripture interpret itself. What we read in one verse may not be clear to us, but as we read the surrounding paragraphs and chapters it may become clearer. At times we need to look at a passage in light of something said in another part of the Bible to understand what is being said. Scripture will never contradict itself and needs to be taken as a whole.
6. Choose a good Bible for your studies; one that faithfully renders the original Hebrew and Greek into fluent English. New American Standard (NASB) or New International Version (NIV) - especially the Concordia Study Bible - are recommended.

Use the same Bible for all of your serious study, so that you can highlight and make notes in it. This allows you to build on what you learned last time you read these verses. After you read it several times you will begin to picture the page your favorite passages are on – upper right corner of the page highlighted in yellow. How wonderful to know your Bible this well!

7. Other tools might also be helpful. A parallel Bible shows several different translations side by side and this may give new insight into what a passage is saying. Take care with commentaries as many are filled with false doctrine and may cause more confusion than using nothing at all. Several which are recommended (and are in our library): *The People's Bible*, Paul Kretzmann's *Popular Commentary* and Werner Franzmann's *Bible History Commentary*.
8. Meditate on the words and phrases as you read them. Ask yourself
 - why this might have been included in the text,
 - how you might have responded if you had been in the same situation,
 - what these passages teach you about yourself and about God,
 - if this points out a specific promise that you can cling to, a truth to believe, a sin to confess, or an attitude to change,
 - how you might apply these words to your life, use them as an example to follow, or an error to avoid,
 - how you might use this for comfort or encouragement or as a reason for praise and thanksgiving
9. Don't rush through your study. Notice the details. Savor the Word. Cherish and ponder it. Taste and see that his Word is sweeter than honey (Ps 119:103). Meditate on the words throughout the day. Write down what you learn and return to your notes. Make the words you read *yours*. Consider memorizing especially meaningful verses so they are always available for ready reference.

10. Your pastor is there for you as you study. Ask him about which Bible or commentary to use, what passages mean, about confusing passages or anything else that comes up. Let him share your journey through the Bible.
11. It doesn't matter how you read the Bible, just read it! Read it from front to back like a book; read the old and new testaments intermingled; read it as the events occurred in time or in the order the books were written. Each will give you a new perspective. Reading guides are available on the bottom of each page of Meditations, on www.WELS.net, on www.BackToTheBible.org/Bible-reading-guides.html from Northwestern Publishing House as well as any number of other sources.
12. We're never finished studying and reading the Bible. Do it over and over. Some older Christians have read it so many times they can recite whole chapters from memory. What a blessing to have God's promises so readily available whenever we might need them! *"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."* – Romans 15:4

Helpful references:

- Burgland, Lane A., *Reading the Bible with Understanding*, Concordia Publishing House, 1998
- Kuske, David, *Biblical Interpretation: The Only Right Way*, Northwestern Publishing House, 1995