

How to Study the Bible

Class Description

This class will encourage and help you to study the Bible correctly. In this class you will learn—

- ✓ Reasons, challenges, and requirements for Bible study
- ✓ The nature and purpose of the Bible
- ✓ Description of the English Bible
- ✓ General and special rules for studying the Bible
- ✓ How to correctly understand narrative, Psalms, proverbs, prophecy, parables, and the epistles
- ✓ The practical and devotional use of the Bible

Goals for this Class

- God will be glorified and pleased by our consideration and study of His Word
- A key text for this class is 2 Timothy 2:15—
2 Tim 3:15 “Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth.”
- You will grow to be a stronger Christian
- You will be equipped to accurately handle God’s Word, “the word of truth”
- You will be able to use God’s Word to minister to others
- You will learn how to effectively use your English Bible, as well as some basic tools that help your study of Scripture

Requirements

- In preparation for each class, please **read the notes covered during the previous class**
- Additionally, before each class **complete the worksheet** handed out for that class.
- By preparing for each class in this manner you will have a better grasp and handle on the material. Remember, *what you get out of this depends on what you put into it!*

Notes and Class Instruction

- I have notes and blanks throughout – if at anytime you miss something, ask at anytime, call me, or check the church website (the full notes will be available in Adobe PDF format)
- Unless otherwise indicated I will use the *New American Standard Bible* (1995 edition) which is what I teach and preach from in the services of Orwell Bible Church. You are welcome to use the translation you currently use, but extra copies will be available if you so desire.
- If at *any* time you have a question or comment, please ask! The objective is to learn, not plow our way through the notes in a set amount of time.

INTRODUCTION TO “HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE”

1. What is Meant by “Studying” the Bible?

- A. *Studying* involves attentively using your **mind** to **learn** something. You give **diligent attention** to a subject to gain essential knowledge for concrete application.
- B. When you *study* you are examining, researching, exploring, investigating, and probing.
- C. Is there a difference between *reading* and *studying* the Bible?
 - 1) Some may think of *reading* the Bible along the lines of opening it up and “just reading it.”
 - 2) Some may think of *studying* the Bible along the lines of really getting serious about it and spending lots of time “getting into the Word.”
 - 3) There are times when both ideas are true, but when you “just read” the Bible, do you do so for the same reasons that you would read a novel like “Moby Dick,” for entertainment? Or do you read your Bible because “that’s just what Christians do,” so that when you’ve read it you can think to yourself, “okay, I *read* my Bible, so I’m good for today—a chapter a day keeps the devil away, after all!” I hope not on both of these counts!
 - 4) Point: **Whenever you read your Bible you must *always* attentively and accurately use your mind so you will learn from it.**
- D. So, you shouldn’t read your Bible without doing so carefully and attentively. *Care* is necessary because of the character and purpose of the Bible. *Attention* is needed because of your need to learn from the Bible.

With this in mind, let’s consider another question...

2. Why Should You Study the Bible?

The Bible is God’s Word in written form. Because it was written by humans and for humans, there is a sense in which it *is* literature. But it isn’t *just* literature, as if it were *Moby Dick* or *War and Peace*. Through the Bible a perfect, holy God “speaks” to you, and you’d better listen! Here are some reasons why you should study the Bible—

- A. It is the tool God uses in salvation, 2 Tim 3:14-15
- B. It is the tool God uses in sanctification, 2 Tim 3:16-17

- C. It is the means by which God’s **wisdom** is gained (Prov 4:1-9). While the Bible doesn’t address *everything*, because it tells of God’s eternal character and will it *is* all we need to live a life of godliness (2 Pet 1:3-4). “Wisdom” is skillful living based on God’s truth; the only way you will know God’s will in different circumstances is by skillful application of God’s Word to your life.
- D. It is essential for spiritual growth (1 Peter 2:2), the “text book” for Christian living (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- E. It is necessary for living a life that pleases Christ (Colossians 1:9-10)
- F. It is what the Spirit uses to make you holy (John 17:17)
- G. It is the tool for protection against temptation and sin (Psa 119:9, 11)
- H. It is the means of learning Christian truth so you are protected against the many false teachers that would deceive you and lead you away from Christ (Ephesians 4:14)
- I. It is the tool you use to serve the Lord (Eph 4:12; 2 Tim 3:16-17)
- J. If you don’t study the Bible, you won’t **grow** in your faith and you will be susceptible to false teaching, Eph 4:14; Heb 5:11-14
- K. Learning from the Bible is essential so you can help your church in its unity, maturity, protection, and growth, Eph 4:12-16
- L. You should delight in (Ps 19:8), love (Ps 119:47), value (Ps 119:72), stand in awe of (Ps 119:161), crave (1 Pet 2:2), and praise God for His Word (Ps 56:4)
- M. Attention to the Word of God has always been blessed by God in personal change, salvation of sinners, and strengthening of local churches

God’s Sufficient Word, James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000)

When God from heaven gave his Word,
His Word was all sufficient;
It needs no words I may have heard
To add to or be in it.

Sufficient for God’s work in me:
My soul’s regeneration,
A life in which good works will be
The fruit of my salvation.

Sufficient too in daily strife,
Providing clear directions
For how to live a godly life,

Creating right affections

Sufficient! If I stoop to sin,
God’s Word will soon correct me,
And if I wander from God’s way,
His Word will redirect me.

So I will take God’s Book and read,
To learn what God desires;
The Bible gives the strength I need
To do what God requires.

God's Amazing Word, James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000)

When evil thrives in earth's last days
And people boast of brutal ways,
When even churches in that hour
Retain the form but lose God's power,
Hold fast to everything you've learned,
The Word which sinful men have spurned.

God's Word is good for godly gain,
To teach, rebuke, correct and train;
Equipped by him we can pursue
The work God has for us to do.
God's Word is all the Christian needs
To grow in grace and do good deeds.

The Bible has commanding worth
To do God's saving work on earth;
It draws our souls from death to life
And rescues us from needless strife:
Amazing gift, on earth so odd,
The life imparting Word of God.

God's Word was written to be read,
To be our life and daily bread,
To guide our thoughts throughout the night
And lead us forth by morning's light.
So let us read, mark, learn, digest
God's Word which gives us heaven's best.

The Bible teaches us God's will
In circumstances good and ill;
God's Word uncovers sin's disguise;
Obeying it will make one wise.
It trains the saint to hear Christ's voice,
To trust in him, repent, rejoice.

Having established that you need to study the Bible, you need to understand that there are...

3. Challenges to Studying the Bible

There are a number of challenges we have in accurately and attentively studying the Bible—

- A. **History** – the Bible was written during circumstances very different from ours

EXAMPLE: Some knowledge of Assyria is essential to understanding Jonah and Nineveh

- B. **Culture** – the Bible was written during times with very different practices of their time

EXAMPLE: "Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss," (1 Thess 5:26)

- C. **Geography** – the Bible was written in specific locations that are assumed and not explained

EXAMPLE: the crossing of the Red Sea and the route of the Exodus

- D. **Language** – the Bible was written in three ancient languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. It is impossible to have 100% complete "transfer" of meaning from one language to the other. This creates a communication challenge, especially with idioms...

EXAMPLE: “No Ammonite or Moabite shall enter the assembly of the LORD; none of their descendants, *even to the tenth generation*, shall ever enter the assembly of the LORD” (Deut 23:3)

4. What Needs to be in Place in Your Life to Effectively Study the Bible?

A. A **Disciplined** Mind

You don't need to be a genius or have a high IQ to correctly understand the Bible! What you do need is a disciplined mind in these three areas:

- 1) A *love* of learning and an unquenchable thirst for the teachings of Scripture

A “hit and miss” approach to studying the Bible will always miss! You hit what you aim for—if you truly desire something, you will put the effort into it because you want to (1Pet 2:2)

- 2) *Connect* (correlate) what you learn from the Bible with what you know from the Bible. What appear to be contradictions are resolved by correctly handling Scripture.
- 3) *Discipline* yourself not to go beyond what is written. Be content to believe what God says, to change your thinking so it matches God’s thinking. This requires discipline and humility.

B. A Correct Method Of Interpretation (more on this later)

C. A Holy **Affection** Toward God

- 1) A *reverence* for truth taught in the Word of God (Ps 119:38, 120, 161)
- 2) A *dependence* on God expressed through earnest prayer for help (Ps 119:18)
 - a. Recognize that as a sinner saved by grace you still struggle with the effects of sin in your mind, will, and emotions
 - b. Understand that you are not God but His creation, and thus must be completely dependent on Him
- 3) An unprejudiced *heart* toward the Bible (Ps 119:34-35)

You can't come to the Bible with your own agenda, but must be ready to make whatever changes need to be made in your thinking and life.

- 4) A *humble* spirit when it comes to receiving and spreading truth newly learned
 - a. It can be easy, amazingly, when you have learned something new, to have a proud, know-it-all attitude

- b. It can also be easy, upon learning something new, to have an air of superiority toward those who have not had the opportunity or ability to learn such or to teach it as if it is something everybody should already know
- 5) A *ready* spirit to examine and accept whatever you learn is true (Ps 119:29)

This means that when you learn something new, you are quick to accept it as true, even when it means that you had previously been wrong about the matter

- 6) A patient, *teachable* spirit, knowing that God has not taught us in His Word all the truth that exists, nor even all the truth about a certain thing, but accepting by faith what you have learned and patiently waiting for God to help you with the things you don't fully understand yet.

D. The **Ministry** Of The Holy Spirit

If you are a Christian, the Holy Spirit has changed your unbelief in God's Word with definite belief that it is God's Word (1 Cor 2:14-15). *There are two important and essential aspects of the Spirit's work in the mind and heart of the believer:*

- 1) The Holy Spirit enables you to grasp the significance of the Bible for your own life (Eph 1:18)

This is not new revelation; this also doesn't mean that the Spirit tells you what a passage means.

- 2) The Holy Spirit does this for you as you study the Bible.

This means you have to do your part! This also means that you must have a right heart attitude toward God and His Word.

E. Patient And Tireless Study

You will never get to the point in your study of the Bible where you can say there's nothing left to learn! This is a lifelong pursuit, and it must be a tireless, relentless one!

F. **Fellowship** With Like-Minded Believers

- 1) Those who don't love God and His Word will pull you away from both (Ps 119:115, 150, 155)

- 2) Disobedient believers will pull you along with them (Ps 119:118)

- 3) Association with those going in the same direction gives encouragement (2 Tim 2:22). Note—all believers are at different places in their Christian lives. The important point is *direction* and *desire!*