

## HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE ON YOUR OWN.

Growing Christians learn to study the Bible so they can grow spiritually on their own. Here are some principles about studying the Bible to help you give God's word a central place in your life.

### **Choose a Time and Place**

Since we are easily distracted, pick a time when you're at your best. If you're a morning person, then study the Bible in the morning. Find a place away from phones, computers, and TVs so you are less likely to be interrupted.

### **Begin with Prayer**

Acknowledge God's presence with you. Thank him for his gifts, confess your sins, and ask for his guidance and understanding as you study his love letter to you.

### **Start with Excitement**

We often take God's Word for granted and forget what an incredible gift we have. God wasn't forced to reach out to us, he did. He's made it possible for us to know him, understand his directions, and be encouraged – all through his Word, the Bible. Remind yourself how amazing it is that God wants you to know him.

### **Read the Passage**

After choosing a passage, read it several times. You might want to read it slowly, pausing after each sentence. If possible, read it out loud. (Remember that before the Bible was written on paper, it was spoken verbally from generation to generation.)

### **Keep a Journal**

Respond to God's Word by writing down how you're challenged, truths to remember, thanksgiving and praise, sins to confess, commands to obey, or any other thoughts you have.

### **Dig Deep**

When you read the Bible, look deeper than the plain meaning of the words. Here are a few ideas about what to look for:

- *Truth about God's character.* What do the verses reveal about God's character?
- *Truth about your life and our world.* You don't have to figure out life on your own. Life can be difficult, but when you know how the world works, you can make good decisions guided by wisdom from God.
- *Truth about the world's past.* The Bible reveals God's intervention in our mistakes and triumphs throughout history. The choices we read about – good and bad – serve as examples to challenge us to greater faith and obedience. (See Hebrews 11:1-12:1)

- *Truth about our action.* God will never leave you stranded. Although he allows us all to go through hard times, he is always with us. Our actions have consequences and rewards. Just like he does in Bible stories, God can use all of the consequences and rewards caused by our actions to help others.

As you read, ask these four questions to help you learn from the Bible:

- What do these verses teach me about who God is, how he acts, and how people respond?
- What does this passage teach about the nature of the world?
- What wisdom can I learn from what I read?
- How should I change my life because of what I learned from these verses?

### **Ask Questions**

You may be tempted to skip over parts you don't understand, but don't give up too easily. Understanding the Bible can be hard work. If you come across a word you don't know, look it up in a regular dictionary or a Bible dictionary. If you come across a verse that seems to contradict another verse, see whether your Bible has any notes to explain it. Write down your questions and ask someone who has more knowledge about the Bible than you. Buy or borrow a study Bible or check the Internet. Try [www.gotquestions.org](http://www.gotquestions.org) for answers to your questions.

### **Apply the Truth to Your Life**

The Bible should make a difference in your life. It contains the help you need to live the life God intended. Knowledge of the Bible without personal obedience is worthless and causes hypocrisy and pride. Take time to consider the condition of your thinking, attitudes, and actions, and wonder about how God is working in you. Think about your life situation and how you can serve others better.

### **More Helpful Ideas**

- Decide that the time you have set aside for Bible reading and study is nonnegotiable. Don't let other activities squeeze Bible study time out of your schedule.
- Avoid the extremes of being ritualistic (reading a chapter just to mark it off your list) and being lazy (giving up).
- Begin with realistic goals and boundaries for your study time. If five to seven minutes a day proves a challenge at the beginning, make it a goal to start smaller and increase your time slowly. Don't set yourself up to fail.
- Be open to the leading and teaching of God's Spirit.
- Love God like he's the best friend you'll ever have – which is the truth!

## **JOURNALING: SNAPSHOTS OF YOUR HEART**

In the simplest terms, journaling is reflection with pen in hand. A growing life needs time to reflect. When you take time to write your thoughts in a journal, you'll experience many benefits. A journal is more than a diary – it's a series of snapshots of your heart. The goal of journaling is to slow down your life to capture some of the great, crazy, wonderful, chaotic, painful, encouraging, angering, confusing, joyful, and loving thoughts, feelings, and ideas in your life. Keeping a journal can become a powerful habit when you reflect on your life and how God is working in it.

### **Personal Insights**

When confusion abounds in your life, disorderly thoughts and feelings often loom just out of range, slightly out of focus. Putting these thoughts and feelings on paper is like corralling and domesticating wild beasts. Once on paper, you can look at them, consider them, contemplate the reasons they were causing you pain, and learn from them.

Have you ever had trouble answering the question, "How do you feel?" Journaling compels you to become more specific with your generalized thoughts and feelings. This is not to suggest that a page full of words perfectly represents what's happening on the inside. That would be foolish. But journaling can move you closer to understanding more about yourself.

### **Reflection and Examination**

With journaling, you can write about your feelings, your situations, how you responded to events. You can reflect and answer questions like these:

- Was that the right response?
- What were my other options?
- Did I lose control and act impulsively?
- If this happened again, should I do the same thing? Would I do the same thing?
- How can I be different as a result of this situation?

### **Spiritual Insights**

One of the main goals of journaling is to gain new spiritual insights about God, yourself, and the world. When you take time to journal, you have the opportunity to pause and consider how God is working in your life and in the lives of those around you. Journaling helps you see the work he's accomplishing and remember it for the future.

### **What to Write About**

There isn't one right way to journal, no set number of times per week, no rules for the length of each journal entry. Figure out what works best for you. Get started with these options:

### ***Write a letter or prayer to God***

Many Christians struggle with maintaining a consistent prayer life. Writing out your prayers can help strengthen it. Begin with this question: “What do I want to tell God right now?”

### ***Write a letter or conversation to another person***

Sometimes conversations with others can be difficult because we’re not sure what we ought to say. Have you ever walked away from an interaction and 20 minutes later thought, *I should have said...?* Journaling conversations before they happen can help you think through the issues and approach your interactions with others in intentional ways. As a result, you can feel confident as you begin your conversations because you’ve taken time to consider the issues beforehand.

### ***Process conflict and pain***

You may find it helpful to write about your conflicts with others, especially those that take you by surprise. By journaling soon after conflict occurs, you can reflect and learn from it. You’ll be better prepared for the next time you face a similar situation. Conflicts are generally difficult to navigate. Thinking through and writing about specific conflicts typically yields helpful personal insights.

When you’re experiencing pain is also a good time to settle your thoughts and consider the nature of your feelings. The great thing about exploring your feelings is that you’re only accountable to God. You don’t have to worry about hurting anyone’s feelings by what you write in your journal (if you keep it private).

### ***Examine your motives***

The Bible is clear regarding two heart truths. First, how you behave reflects who you are on the inside (Luke 6:45). Second, you can take the right action for the wrong reason (James 4:3).

The condition of your heart is vitally important. Molding your motives to God’s desires is central to following Christ. The Pharisees did many of the right things, but for the wrong reasons. Reflect on the *real* reasons why you do what you do.

### ***Reflect on God’s work in your life***

If you journal in the evening, you can answer this question: “What did God teach me today?”

If you journal in the morning, you can answer this question: “God what were you trying to teach me yesterday that I missed?” When you reflect on yesterday’s events, you may find a common theme that God may have been weaving into your life during the day – one you missed because you were busy. When you see God’s hand in your life, even a day later, you know God loves you and is guiding you.

### ***Record insights from Scripture***

Journal about whatever you learn from the Bible. Rewrite a verse in your own words or figure out how a passage is structured. Try to uncover the key truths from the verses and see how the verses apply to your life. (Again, there is no right way to journal. The only wrong way is to not try it at all.)

## **GETTING STARTED**

No matter how wonderful your small group experience, your youth group experience, you need to learn to grow spiritually on your own, too. God has given you an incredible tool to help – his love letter, the Bible. The Bible reveals God’s love for you and gives you directions for living life to the fullest.

To help you with these, we’ve included a fairly easy way to read through one of the Gospels. Instead of feeling like you need to sit down and read the entire book at once, we’ve broken down the reading into bite-size chunks. Check off the passages as you read them. Don’t feel guilty if you miss a daily reading. Simply do your best to develop the habit of being in God’s Word daily.

### **A 30-Day Journey through the Gospel of Mark**

Imagine sitting at the feet of Jesus himself: the Teacher who knows how to live life well, the Savior who died for you, the Lord who commands the universe. Like his first disciples, you can follow him around, watch what he does, listen to what he says, and pattern your life after his.

Day 1	Mark 1:1-20	Day 16	Mark 8:22-9:1
Day 2	Mark 1:21-45	Day 17	Mark 9:2-32
Day 3	Mark 2:1-12	Day 18	Mark 9:33-50
Day 4	Mark 2:13-28	Day 19	Mark 10:1-31
Day 5	Mark 3:1-19	Day 20	Mark 10:32-52
Day 6	Mark 3:20-35	Day 21	Mark 11:1-19
Day 7	Mark 4:1-20	Day 22	Mark 11:20-33
Day 8	Mark 4:21-41	Day 23	Mark 12:1-17
Day 9	Mark 5:1-20	Day 24	Mark 12:18-44
Day 10	Mark 5:21-43	Day 25	Mark 13:1-37
Day 11	Mark 6:1-29	Day 26	Mark 14:1-31
Day 12	Mark 6:30-56	Day 27	Mark 14:32-72
Day 13	Mark 7:1-23	Day 28	Mark 15:1-20
Day 14	Mark 7:24-37	Day 29	Mark 15:21-47
Day 15	Mark 8:1-21	Day 30	Mark 16:1-20

## Memory Verses

The word *memory* may cause some of you to groan. In school, you have to memorize dates, places, times, and outcomes. Now you have to memorize the Bible?

No, not the entire Bible! Start small with some key verses. Trust us, this is important. Here's why: Scripture memorization is a good habit for a growing Christian to develop because when God's Word is planted in your mind and heart, it has a way of influencing how you live. King David understood this: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Psalm 119:11).

Write the verses on index cards and keep them available so you can learn and review them when you have a free moment (standing in line, before class starts, when you've finished a test and others are still working, waiting for your dad to get out of the bathroom – you get the picture). You'll be surprised at how many verses you can memorize as you work toward this goal and add verses to your list.

“FOR WHOEVER WANTS TO SAVE HIS LIFE WILL LOSE IT,  
BUT WHOEVER LOSES HIS LIFE FOR ME AND FOR THE GOSPEL  
WILL SAVE IT. WHAT GOOD IS IT FOR A MAN TO GAIN THE WHOLE  
WORLD, YET FORFEIT HIS SOUL?” – MARK 8:35-36

“SITTING DOWN, JESUS CALLED THE TWELVE AND SAID,  
‘IF ANYONE WANTS TO BE FIRST, HE MUST BE THE VERY LAST,  
AND THE SERVANT OF ALL.’” – MARK 9:35

“JESUS LOOKED AT THEM AND SAID, ‘WITH MAN THIS IS  
IMPOSSIBLE, BUT NOT WITH GOD; ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE  
WITH GOD.’” – MARK 10:27

“FOR EVEN THE SON OF MAN DID NOT COME TO BE SERVED, BUT TO  
SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY.”  
- MARK 10:45

“AND WHEN YOU STAND PRAYING, IF YOU HOLD ANYTHING AGAINST  
ANYONE, FORGIVE HIM, SO THAT YOUR FATHER IN HEAVE MAY FORGIVE  
YOU YOUR SINS.” – MARK 11:25

“‘LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND  
WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND AND  
WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.’” THE SECOND IS THIS: ‘LOVE  
YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ THERE IS NO COMMANDMENT  
GREATER THAN THESE.” – MARK 12:30-31

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