

How to Study the Bible

Passages: As listed in the lesson.

Memory Verse

“And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment.”
(Philippians 1:9)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand the benefits of studying the Bible.2. Understand the attitude required to study the Bible, as well as the various methods used.	God is the way, the truth, and the life.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Learn how to study the Bible using the inductive method.2. Apply and act on God’s word in our lives.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Studying the Bible
- B. How to Study the Bible: The Inductive Method
- C. What to Study: Types of Bible Studies

Life Application

- 1. Passage Study Example
- 2. Character Study Example

Memory Verse

Conclusion: Studying the Bible is necessary for us to better understand God’s character and how to please Him. We must practice studying the Bible in our own time until it becomes part of our daily lives, able to transform us from within.

A. Studying the Bible

The Bible is a marvelous book; while its language is so simple that even a child could read it, its message is also so profound that a scholar may spend his entire life trying to unravel its meaning. When the gospel reached the city of Berea, the Jews “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). It is with the same diligence that we ought to receive and learn the word of God, because the blessings of God’s word begin only when we study the Bible.

Reading and studying the Bible are two very different things. In study, one searches the Bible in depth. Studying requires notes, analysis, comparisons, and research in order to understand it better. But why do we need to study the Bible so deeply? Isn’t it enough to simply read it? As God’s children, our primary goals should be drawing closer to God, and growing in our faith. To better understand God’s character and learn how to please Him, studying the Bible is a necessity.

Solomon wrote that if we apply our hearts to understanding God’s words, “Then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Prov 2:5–6). God freely gives wisdom and knowledge to anyone who is willing to search for them (Jas 1:5). We need only take the first step and learn to study His word.

1. How to Approach Bible Study

a. Study with prayer and faith

Like any difficult subject, we require a teacher when studying the Bible (Acts 8:30–31). “Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11). The guidance of the Holy Spirit is key to understanding and being inspired by God’s word. We will never be able to understand the Bible on our own, so we must learn to rely on the Spirit for help by praying every day and asking for wisdom (Lk 24:45; Jn 16:13). As long as we ask for this wisdom in faith, then God will grant it to us (Heb 4:2; 11:6).

b. Let the word speak to you

A Bible study is not an exercise in intellect. Its final goal is to apply God’s word to our lives by adjusting our thoughts, behavior, and lifestyle to conform to His will. As such, it is important that we adopt an attitude of one willing to be taught and corrected, for God reveals His will to the humble (Mt 5:3). Your study will be more fruitful when you are willing to examine your faults and shortcomings in the mirror that is God’s word (Josh 1:8). We need to approach our Bible study with a pure heart and a receptive mind (Mt 5:8; Jas 1:21).

c. Read carefully and take notes

Misinterpretation is often the result of careless reading, making observation the most basic step in Bible study. We can only interpret what the passage means when we know what it says. Write down your thoughts and observations in a notebook as you read to help focus your mind on the text and leave a deeper impression. Mark key words and phrases, and take note of relationships between different sections. By taking the time to read the passage closely and notating its structure, phrasing, or anything striking, we will discover things we would never have noticed in a casual reading.

d. Never alter the word of God

It is human nature to twist things to suit our own needs. But the word of God must never be changed. Never add anything to God's word or take anything away from it. Do not let personal interpretation, pride, or any other self-serving motivations compel you to distort or alter God's message of truth and salvation (Deut 12:32).

2. How to Benefit from Bible Study

a. Keep the word

Studying the Bible is an act of futility if we do not strive to also meditate upon it and keep it in our heart (2 Tim 3:14–17). If we do so, we will be able to call upon it with greater ease when faced with temptations or trials. When it becomes a part of our hearts, it will truly become spiritual armor, able to help us defend against sin and death (Ps 119:11).

b. Apply the word

In addition to keeping the word, it is equally important to apply God's word to your heart, "that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10). As James writes, faith without deeds is useless. If we are truly faithful, we will act out His word in everything we say and do.

c. Spread the word

Jesus Christ urged His disciples to spread the gospel, and we must also determine to do the same. We have been freely blessed with the goodness of God's word, so it is only right that we freely pass it on to others with diligence and courage (Mt 10:8, 27; Tit 1:3).

B. How to Study the Bible: The Inductive Method

In our walk with God, we must not depend on our RE teachers or ministers, but learn to delve into the Scriptures on our own. One of the best ways to study the Bible is through an "inductive" Bible study. This is a type of study that has three basic steps: observation, interpretation, and application.

- 1. Observation ("What does the passage say?"):** Very often we may read a passage, but have no idea what we just read. This step means discovering what the passage is saying. Some questions you may ask yourself are, "What did God say?" and "How did He say it?" These types of questions help you unravel the passage and equip you for a more accurate interpretation.
- 2. Interpretation ("What does the passage mean?"):** We should let the Bible interpret itself whenever possible, without coloring its meaning with our own perceptions. Context is important for understanding the Bible's intent. Look at the immediate context by reading the surrounding verses, and at the broader context by reading the surrounding chapters. Most importantly, ask the Holy Spirit to enlighten you and show you what God wants to convey.
- 3. Application ("How does the passage apply to me?"):** Think about what God is teaching you personally through your study. What are His commands? Which of your shortcomings is He pointing out? How is He trying to encourage you? How does this particular truth affect my relationship with God and with others? How can I grow in my walk with God?

It is important to remember that the Bible can only truly come to life when we examine our relationship with God and act out His word. "Application" is not simply answering the question; it is a determination to actively put into practice what you have learned in your Bible study. When we apply His truth to our lives, God will bless our efforts because we become more like Christ.

C. What to Study: Types of Bible Studies

1. Survey the Old and New Testaments

This method involves reading the entire Bible chapter by chapter, from Genesis to Revelation, in order to develop a general overview of its content. You may choose to read the Old and New Testaments concurrently (i.e.: one chapter each from the Old and New Testaments every day).

2. Book Study

To study any book in the Bible, it is important to read it thoroughly several times until you know the contents in detail and can outline its structure. It is also important to study the book's background and purpose, and examine the main focus of its teachings.

3. Chapter Study

Analyze the main theme of the chapter and grasp the main concepts within the context of the preceding and following chapters. Look for important words to search for the meaning of each verse. Additionally, you can use tools such as references and concordances to find related verses and words in other parts of the Bible.

4. Passage or Subject Study

Some people prefer to study the Bible by their topic of interest, which can range from a specific passage to a story in the Bible. It can also be a more general topic, such as the study of Christ and His works (also called Christology), the end times (eschatology), or salvation (soteriology). There are many other subjects, but regardless of your choice, topical studies often involve a large amount of research and cross-referencing, both within the Bible and with other books or encyclopedias that are related to your topic of interest. Topical studies can be difficult, so it is important to humbly pray for wisdom, and also to consult spiritually mature members if you have any questions or problems in your studies.

5. Character Study

Studying a character in the Bible involves examining their upbringing, actions, and mentality. It is also important to note their reactions to events both good and bad. Just as we learn from those around us today, gaining insight into the personal characteristics of different biblical figures can teach us how to approach our own lives. We can learn from their flaws and mistakes as much as from their virtues and success.

6. Historical Study

Many enjoy learning about the Bible itself – its chronology, history, events, customs, and geography. This is a study of the Bible's historical and cultural context – how the people lived at the time, and the customs and technology at the time of its writing. To learn such things, it is often necessary to consult knowledgeable members or references outside of the Bible. This type of study is helpful for understanding how God has shaped the events of the past and, ultimately, His plans for His chosen people.

Tools for Studying the Bible

Some studies can rely solely on Bible text. But others require external sources and knowledge from those more learned than us. Unlike scholars of the past, we have many legitimate tools available to us that can help us with our study of the Bible. Concordances, dictionaries, linear translations, atlases, and

encyclopedias are all useful references that can help bring the Bible into a different light and offer new understanding. Two examples of acceptable references are:

- Thomas Nelson Publishers. *Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps & Charts: Old and New Testaments*. Revised and updated edition, Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996.
- Arnold, Clinton E. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002.

Whatever references we choose to use, it is important that we continue to rely on the Holy Spirit. It is easy to fall into deception and away from the truth if we rely too much on the interpretations of the world around us. Use biblical tools with care, and always look first to the Holy Spirit for divine guidance and wisdom.

Check for Understanding

1. **What is the difference between reading and studying the Bible?** In study, one searches the Bible in depth, takes notes, analyzes, compares, and researches in order to understand it better.
2. **Why is it so important that we study the Bible?** As God's children, our primary goals should be drawing closer to God and growing in our faith. Studying the Bible is necessary for us to better understand God's character and how to please Him.
3. **What are the four approaches to Bible study?** Study with prayer and faith; let the word speak to you; read carefully and take notes; and never alter the word of God.
4. **Name three types of Bible studies.** Survey of the Old/New Testaments; book study; chapter study; passage or subject study; character study; or historical study.
5. **What dangers might we face if we rely too much on interpretations of the world around us?** We may easily fall into deception and away from the truth. We must use biblical tools with care, and always look first to the Holy Spirit for divine guidance and wisdom.

Life Application

(Teachers: Below are two examples, one of a passage study, and one of a character study. If your time is limited, choose one that you feel is more appropriate for your particular students, or consider preparing your own example. If you have a large class, you may want to split them into groups and have them attempt a brief study and present their findings to the rest of the class.)

Effective studies are all about asking the right questions, so encourage them to come up with meaningful and thoughtful questions, even if they can't answer them. If you feel they might have trouble with this exercise, consider preparing a handout ahead of time with some guidance and a few sample questions. If you have resources available to you such as biblical encyclopedias or atlases, or access to the internet for reliable sites such as <https://www.blueletterbible.org/>, consider showing them to your students.)

1. Passage Study

Let's try doing a passage study of Philippians 1:1–8.

Observation

The first step to observation is understanding the context. That means knowing the basic background of the book that contains the passage you are studying. Philippians, for example, has the following background:

<i>Audience</i>	Believers in Philippi
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<i>Date written</i>	Likely A.D. 61–62
<i>Theme</i>	Joy in Christ
<i>Purpose</i>	Paul wrote this letter as thanks for the love of the Philippian believers, who had sent a gift to him with Epaphroditus (Phil 4:18).
<i>Central Verse</i>	“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phil 4:4)

- *Additional Notes: Philippi was the first church God established in Europe (A.D. 49–52). It was established through Paul, who was also the first worker sent to spread the gospel there.*

Once we know its background and contextual purpose, we can now examine the passage in detail. To help with this, read it several times, then try picking out keywords and writing a brief outline. What keywords would you pick out for this passage? How would you outline it?

- *Keywords: Bondservants, saints, grace, peace, good work, gospel, affection of Jesus Christ*
- *Outline:*
 - (1) *Greetings (vv. 1–2)*
 - (2) *Thanksgiving for the church’s good works (vv. 3–6)*
 - (3) *Paul’s affection for the church (vv. 6–8)*

Interpretation

Once you clearly understand the passage, it is time to ask questions about it. Try to answer these questions to the best of your ability, taking the time to consider the passage and its background. Try looking up references to the same keywords within the passage, and use a dictionary if you are uncertain about specific words. What questions can you come up for this passage? For example:

- *What does it mean to be a bondservant of Christ?*
A bondservant must obey and follow their master without question. Their lives are dedicated to their master’s will, not their own.
- *What was Paul’s purpose in greeting the members with “grace and peace”?*
Grace is the free gift of redemption through Christ (Rom 3:25). Peace is the inner tranquility and assurance as a result of God’s grace (Jn 16:33).
- *What are Paul’s feelings for this church?*
From the gift the church sent and Paul’s own words, they clearly had a close bond, perhaps because Paul was the one who first brought the gospel to Europe, and consequently helped to establish the church.

Application

The most important part of studying the Bible is understanding what aspect of our lives we must change in order to apply the teachings that we have learned. To be obedient to God and become more like Him is our ultimate goal as Christians. To seek out the application of the passage, ask questions about how the passage pertains to your own life. For example:

- *What in my life prevents me from being a bondservant of Christ? How can I fix this?*
- *Do I feel peace as a result of God’s grace? Do I pray that others receive grace and peace?*
- *How can I better my relationship with my family and show better care for my fellow members?*

2. Character Study

We’ll now practice a character study, using Noah as our example.

Observation

Once you have selected your character, choose and list the passages and references you will need for your study. A concordance or biblical encyclopedia will help make this process faster. Once you have done so, read through your list, jotting down notes as you go. Try to write down facts about their life, such as where they lived, their family, and major events. It would be good to note any unusual influences or factors that shaped their life, too. With Noah as an example, our points may look something like the following:

- *Noah lived in a generation which was “wicked” and “every intent of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil” (Gen 6:5)*
- *Noah was a farmer (Gen 9:20). He was already 500 years old when he fathered three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.*
- *Noah pleased God and found favor in His eyes (Gen 6:8–9; 2 Pet 2:5)*
- *God instructed Noah to take seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, and two of every kind of unclean animal. (Bible scholars calculated that 45,000 animals may have fit on the ark.)*
- *Noah was the “heir of the righteousness which is according to faith” (Heb 11:6–7)*
- *After the flood, Noah built an altar and offered sacrifices to God (Gen 8:20).*
- *God promised to Noah that He would never destroy the earth again with a flood. He made the rainbow as a sign of this everlasting covenant.*
- *Noah’s drunkenness was recorded in Gen 9:20–27. He lay in his tent naked (9:21).*
- *He lived 350 years after the flood (Gen 9:29).*
- *Noah was listed along with Daniel and Job’s names twice in the Bible (Ezek 14:14, 20).*

Interpretation

Using our notes, we can now try and understand a bit about the character. Why did they make such decisions? What were the reasons behind their actions? What about their environment shaped them to be the way they were? What can we infer about their faith from their lives? Keep these questions in mind. With all that we have gathered about Noah, what can you conclude about his character?

- *Being surrounded by a generation of sinners, Noah’s faith must have been very strong.*
- *His decision to build the ark without question demonstrates a complete obedience to God.*
- *The fact that he immediately built an altar to God shows that worship was part of Noah’s life.*
- *Being listed along with Daniel and Job shows that he was, like them, a model of faithfulness and righteousness.*
- *From his drunkenness, recorded in Gen 9:20–27, we can see that Noah may have been considered righteous, but he was not sinless.*
- *In his entire 950-year life, he held on to his beliefs and walked with God his whole life.*

Application

As God’s children, it is not only our duty to learn His word, but also to strive to become more like Him by acting out His word. What lessons from the character’s life can we apply to our own lives? How did they follow God? What caused them to stray? Their decisions, both right and wrong, can hold nuggets of wisdom that will help us reflect on our own choices. By examining their mistakes, we can learn what mistakes to avoid, and by studying their righteous acts, we can learn ways to follow their example. After studying Noah’s life, what are some self-reflective questions to consider?

- *Have I ever been influenced to sin by those around me? How can I avoid this in the future? What did Noah do that helped him avoid becoming a part of the perverse generation around him?*
- *Faith and obedience were what allowed Noah to be a righteous man. What is the state of my faith? Have I been obedient to God?*

- *It was natural for Noah to offer sacrifices to God. What kind of sacrifices have I made for Him? Is worship a natural part of my lifestyle? If not, how can I integrate worship into my daily life?*

We can also learn lessons about God Himself, not just about how we should act in our own lives. God's presence in the lives of biblical characters can help us understand His character, and in turn, help us understand what we can expect from Him in our own lives. For example:

- *God protects the righteous. As long as I obey Him, He will watch over me like He did Noah.*
- *God has great power over nature; He made all the animals enter the ark, and created the first rainbow as a sign of His promise. Knowing this, it is well within His power to help me with any problems that I might have. I need only rely on Him.*

Memory Verse

*"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment."
(Philippians 1:9)*

Meaning

1. The more we understand God, the more we will be able to express His love in our actions. When we understand Him and draw closer to Him, our inner heart will naturally change and our love will become more like God's.
2. Love must be in truth (1 Jn 3:18; 2 Jn 1:1). In other words, our actions of love need to conform to the principles of God's word. Attempts to help brethren or truth-seekers with a misguided or blinded love may harm them rather than build them up. Therefore, we need to grow in our spiritual knowledge and discernment as much as we need to grow in love.

Conclusion

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up." (Deut 6:6–7)

As God's children, our primary goals should be drawing closer to God and growing in our faith. Studying the Bible is necessary for us to better understand God's character and how to please Him. But we cannot rely on our teachers and ministers within the church; we must learn to do it on our own and practice studying the Bible in our own time until it becomes part of our daily lives, able to transform us from within.

Lesson 12 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What is the importance of knowledge and discernment in relation to our love for others?
Love must be in truth. Our actions of love need to conform to the principles of God's word. If we try to help others with a misguided or blinded love, we may harm more than help, so we must grow in our spiritual knowledge and discernment as much as we need to grow in love.
2. What is the importance of studying the Bible?
It is necessary for us to better understand God's character and how to please Him.
3. What does it mean to "let the word speak to you" when studying the Bible?
It means adopting an attitude of one willing to be taught and corrected, for God reveals His will to the humble. Your study will be more fruitful when you are willing to examine your faults and shortcomings in the mirror that is God's word.
4. What questions summarize the meaning of each step in the inductive method of Bible study?
Observation: "What does the passage say?"
Interpretation: "What does the passage mean?"
Application: "How does the passage apply to me?"
5. The "application" step is not simply answering a question. What more should it be?
It should be a determination to actively put into practice what you have learned in your Bible study. When we apply His truth to our lives, God will bless our efforts because we become more like Christ.
6. Do you keep God's word in your heart? How do you plan to improve your knowledge of the Bible?
Personal answers.