

Chapter 7

How Do I Study the Bible?

From the very beginning, God has worked through His Word to create, communicate, repair, and heal. He continues to work through his Word today to bring people to himself. The Bible is a perfect collection of God's Word that reveals His creation, man's sinful rebellion, and God's work of redemption. Studying the Bible is valuable because it shows you God's heart and God's plan for the world. Studying the Bible is how you draw closer to the Lord and learn who you are in light of what he has done for you. Studying the Bible speaks to your needs and the needs of those around you, informing your brokenness and informing your actions and reactions to the events in your life. Studying the Bible changes you and guides you through life, making you look more like Jesus, more like his disciple.

God uses his Word to bring people to himself.

As you embark on your journey to study God's word, this guide through the book of Mark will lead you through four essential steps you can use to better understand any passage of Scripture. The guide offers sample questions that will assist you as you study Scripture and apply God's Word to your life. The questions listed should serve simply as a guide for you as you study this and other texts in the Bible.



Explore

Who wrote it?

To whom was it written?

When was it written?

Why was it written?

Now, let's jump in!

Explore

This is the initial thirty thousand foot view of the text. You will begin by asking a series of basic questions that are essential to helping you better understand the Bible, and they are not as difficult to answer as you might assume. If you have access to a good study Bible, all of these questions can be answered by looking to the beginning of each book in the Bible. Study notes will answer these questions as well as others you may not have even thought to ask like, "In what language was this book originally written?" or "What was the chief export of the city in which this church was written?"



Examine

What did the author intend for the original audience?

Why was this important for the original audience?

What is the timeless truth?

The second step in your Bible study journey is a little more challenging. You will discover that you have to pay closer attention to the text to complete this step. As you examine the text, you will answer questions primarily concerned with the author's intent and the original audience. The primary question is not (nor should it ever be), "What does this passage mean to *me*?" At the risk of seeming a bit harsh, the meaning of the passage is wrapped up in God's intent and the author's words, not in your experience of the words. At this point in your study, it can be tempting to move straight from "Who wrote it?" to "What does it mean to me?" but you will miss much of the meaning wrapped up in the Bible if you do not study thoroughly.

Your primary tools in this stage will be the passage of Scripture you are studying and the verses it shares in context. You should also make use of study notes in a study Bible (they are usually under the biblical text in a different text box).

Engage

In the next step, you began to dig into the scripture, and you jump into the text with both feet.

To really grasp the meaning of a passage of scripture, you need to read it in context and try to understand how it fits within the whole Bible; such whether the events in the text took place before Jesus's birth, during his earthly ministry, or after his resurrection. For example, when you read the Gospel According to Mark, he writes many stories about Christ and offers specific details about Jewish customs that are helpful to readers who do not have a Jewish background.

Mark introduces his book in chapter 1, verse 1 as "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." "Gospel" means good news and Mark's book is filled with the good news that God loved us enough to send his Son, Jesus, to save us by dying on a cross. Mark includes many teachings of Jesus as well as many examples of his miracles. Mark frequently uses the word "immediately" to show the urgency of the message, and by emphasizing the amazing miracles that Jesus did, he shows over and over that Jesus is who he says he is — the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

When you engage with the text, one of your primary tools will be the cross-references available to you in most Bibles. The cross references are found either at the bottom of the page or in a column alongside the biblical text. Cross-references will point you to related passages and help you to uncover the implications of the text.

Engaging with the text requires you to see how Scripture supports Scripture and all parts of the Bible work together to tell the whole story. Engaging with Scripture encourages and affirms you, and it also calls you to repent and change.

Execute

In the Execute stage, you identify the areas of your life you need to change or perhaps you discover implications from God's word that you should share with others. In this stage, you move from studying God's word to applying God's word.

Some of the most effective tools at this stage are a journal and an accountability partner. By writing down the next steps and sharing them with someone else, you create a system of accountability to put what you have learned into practice.



Engage

What are the implications of this passage?

How does this fit within the broader picture of Scripture?

How does this speak to me?

How does this speak against me?



Execute

So, what do I do now?

How does this text prompt me to pray?

What should I stop doing?

What should I start doing?

Who should I share this with?

Open my eyes, that I may
behold wondrous things
out of your law.

Psalms 119:18

Getting Started

Here are some practical suggestions for beginning to study God's Word:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes and heart to receive all that God has for you in His Word.
- Set a time and place for regular Bible study.
- Find a guide or make a plan for studying your Bible.
- Share what you are learning with someone else.
- Study the sermon text from your pastor's sermon or your LifeGroup lesson each week.
- Quality and quantity matter. Take time to read a lot of scripture, but also make time to dig deep into smaller sections of scripture.
- Memorize verses.
- Read books about the Bible.
- Keep a notebook or computer file to record what you learn as you study.
- Never be ashamed to ask questions about what you are learning. No one has all of the answers.

We've included sample planning sheets at the end of the book to help you as you study Scripture. Feel free to make copies for your personal Bible study time, or use them as guides.