



Bible Reading

Trusting the Spirit-inspired Words of God as our wisdom and strength for life.

What is the Bible?

The Bible is the words of God. While many refer to the Bible as one book, it is actually a collection of 66 books, split into the Old and New Testaments that tell one unified story. From beginning to end, the story is all about God. These 66 books come together to tell one unified story that goes like this:

- God created the world and everything in it was very good.
- Humans rebelled against God, 'sin' entered the world, and everything was now broken.
- After thousands of years of foreshadowing and preparation, God sends His Son Jesus into the world to redeem the world back to its original design - shalom, or peace, between God and humanity.
- Jesus lives a perfect life, dies on the cross, and rises again three days later defeating satan, sin, and death.
- Jesus establishes His Church to carry on His mission of reconciliation throughout the entire world.
- One day Jesus is going to return and establish His forever reign.

Christians believe the Bible was written by both men and the Holy Spirit and kept by God through generations and languages, over time and space, as a gift to God's Church.

This is a story first and foremost about God, but it is also a story that shapes our story. As we see who God is we learn who we are and how the good news of Jesus changes everything.

Helpful Tools and Tips

BRIDGING THE CULTURAL GAP:

The Bible is written for us, but it is not written to us. Through the Holy Spirit, the Bible was written by and to ancient people in the Near East. This means much of it can seem confusing or seemingly out of touch by today's standards. Sometimes we can leave our time reading the Bible with more questions than answers. These ancient people had a different culture, concepts about the world, languages, and figures of speech than we do as modern Americans.

The key for us is to learn to put on contextual glasses to help bridge the gap between our culture and the culture of the Bible. All Christians are called to do the hard work of humble, Spirit-filled interpretation by engaging with Scripture in a meaningful, helpful, and responsible way. Here are some ways to help bridge the divide between the context of the Bible and our context today:

- **Author's Intent** - The goal behind our study of the Bible is not to make a verse or chapter say what we want, but to understand what the original author, through the Holy Spirit, was trying to say. These authors had intended messages for their specific audiences and, through the Spirit, for all people. We have to ask what their meaning was, not what our meaning wants to be now.
- **Genre** - Because the Bible is a collection of books, not simply one book, there are a number of different genres contained throughout. Genesis is a historical narrative, recounting events that took place in the lives of real people in a real place. The book of Psalms is a book of poetry, with songs and poems that portray the emotions, thoughts, and desires of the authors. To make it even more confusing, some books of the Bible have multiple genres within them. For instance, in the book of Exodus, there is both historical narrative and poetry. Different genres require us to read texts differently. Examples of genres found in the Bible include (but aren't limited to):
 - Poetry
 - History
 - Law
 - Prophecy
 - Biography
 - Wisdom Literature
- **Repetition** - One of the key markers of emphasis in the languages of the Bible - Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic - is repetition. These ancient languages didn't have punctuation marks like we have in the English language. Today, if you want to make sure something is communicated, you can put a period, a

question mark, or an exclamation point. In the time of the writing of the Bible, repetition was a key way of emphasizing a point in your writing.

HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS:

We must be a people of balance when it comes to our engagement with Scripture. Based on our personalities and wirings, some of us may enjoy the deep theological study of Scripture. We might enjoy pulling out a concordance and doing word studies of certain Greek words or phrases. We might enjoy researching the background and historical context of places in the Bible like Ephesus, Corinth, Jerusalem, or Rome. We come to Scripture to enlighten our minds and fill our heads.

Others of us might tend towards a more devotional reading of Scripture. We might find ourselves more often reading the Psalms, or some of the more easily understandable Epistles. We read to “get something out of it” that encourages us or gives us hope in our circumstances. We read to engage our hearts and stir our affections.

Still others might come to Scripture for the practical tools and tips. We want to know steps for a better marriage, a more successful career, how to be a nicer person, how to walk with God day by day. We read the Bible for practical tips for life and godliness, or to engage our hands.

We need a balance of all three in our Christian devotion. We must read Scripture with a view towards information and knowledge, but also to stir our affections for God and to show us how to live out our faith on a daily basis.

READING THE OLD TESTAMENT:

In Luke 24, after His resurrection, Jesus appears to two of His disciples traveling on a road and begins a conversation with them. During this conversation, we read in Luke 24:27 - “And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.” The whole of the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, are about Jesus.

That means as we read the Old Testament, we are not primarily reading a system of rules and government, stories about great heroes, or poetry and wisdom. We are reading foreshadowings that point to the coming Messiah who would save God’s people from their sins. As we read the Old Testament, we should ask the question - “How does this passage point us forward to the coming Christ?”

PRACTICES

Practice #1 - STUDYING A SCRIPTURE PASSAGE:

A helpful framework for studying a passage of Scripture is walking through the letters O-I-A. These stand for Observe, Interpret, Apply. Choose a passage to study, then walk through the steps, asking helpful questions.

1. Observe

Observe what the passage is saying and describing. At this point you are trying to get a basic understanding of the text. Ask questions such as:

- WHO is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters?
- WHAT is the subject or event covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, event, or teaching?
- WHEN do/will the events occur or did/will something happen to someone?
- WHERE did or will this happen? Where was it said?
- WHY is something being said or mentioned? Why would/will this happen? Why at that time and/or to this person/people?
- HOW will it happen? How is it to be done? How is it illustrated?

2. Interpret

Often this step flows out of observation, but the goal is to discern the meaning of the passage. Remember to look for the author's intent. Look for what the author is trying to say, teach, or communicate through this section of text. A particularly fruitful way to pull these things out of the passage is to ask questions such as:

- What sinful, broken, or fallen condition is being addressed or corrected by the passage?
- What is the deeper sin beneath the behavior?
- What prompted the author to write this passage?

3. Apply

In this step, we cross the bridge into our lives and our context seeking to know how the text matters to us today. Here's some questions you can ask, especially in prayer:

- God, what are you trying to say to me through this passage?
- In what ways am I seeking to earn your favor rather than live by grace?
- What do my actions suggest that I'm wrongly believing about your character, our relationship, and what you've said in your Word?
- In what ways do we need to be more intimate in our relationship?
- In what way is Jesus the answer to my sin and pain?

Practice #2 - SCRIPTURE MEMORIZATION:

Psalms 119:11 says, "I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you." In Matthew 4, Jesus is led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where He is tempted by the devil. In each temptation Jesus responds with Scripture. God's Word is a powerful tool in our lives to help us fight sin, live with wisdom, and abide with Jesus throughout our days. Taking the time to memorize passages of Scripture will help us in our daily walks with God.

Here's some short texts we suggest you start with memorizing:

- Psalm 1
- Psalm 23
- Proverbs 4:5-6
- Philippians 4:6-7
- Ephesians 2:1-10

It is also helpful to have a partner for accountability and help. It may be helpful to include your Community Group, your family, or a friend and memorize passages together.

Practice #3 - PRAYING THE SCRIPTURES:

The beauty and gift of the Scriptures is that God has revealed Himself and spoken to us. The goal of our study and reading of the Bible is not to simply cross something off our to-do list. Like all spiritual practices, the goal is communion with God through the Holy Spirit.

A great way to do this with Scripture is to pray the Bible. Here's what that means:

- Choose a shorter passage of Scripture (Psalms can be very helpful here).
- Begin reading, pausing after each phrase or verse to pray and talk to God about whatever comes to mind out of that verse.
- Work through the chapter (or however much you have time for) stopping to pray and engage with God along the way.

Here's an example of what that might look like from Psalm 23:1-4:

Read - The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Pray: God thank you for being my shepherd. Thank you for comforting me and leading me. Thank you for giving me everything that I need and satisfying the desires of my soul.

Read - He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul.

Pray: God, thank you for caring for me and leading me to peace and quiet. Thank you for leading my soul to still waters. My life feels like chaos and my soul feels fatigued. Thank you for giving me true rest.

Read - He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Pray: Lord, keep me from sin. Lead me on paths of righteousness. Help me to live a holy life so that you get the glory.

Read - Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

Pray: God, thank you that you never leave me. Thank you that I don't have to be afraid because no weapon formed against me shall prosper. Thank you that even though they could kill my body, I have a future with you sealed by your Holy Spirit. Calm my fears and help me to trust you more.

Practice #4 - READ OUT LOUD:

There is something about speaking things out loud that give words extra weight in our lives. In uncertain times, God's people have always come together to remember who they are through the public reading of Scripture. This helps create and shape a gathered people around their identity in Him.

As we read the Bible out loud, whether in community or on our own, we remember where we've come from and how to keep living as the people of God. Our vision - how we see God, ourselves, and the world - is formed as we listen to these stories in community with one another.

- Pick a passage of Scripture and read it out loud either alone or with community. Read it slow, spending time thinking about the truths of God as you read them.

RESOURCES

The following are recommended resources if you would like to journey further into reading the Bible:

- ["How to Read the Bible"](#) series by The Bible Project
- [*Praying the Bible*](#) by Donald Whitney
- [*Knowing Scripture*](#) by R.C. Sproul
- [*Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*](#) by E. Randolph Richards & Brandon J. O'Brien
- [*Women of the Word*](#) by Jen Wilkin