

# Bible Study



## Read, Study, Discuss, Teach

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“... biblical interpretation is too important to leave to the experts, though experts have much of value to say, because understanding the Bible concerns our eternity. Our ability to understand the truth of the Bible depends on our willingness to hear all of the Bible’s message, especially the passages that trouble and challenge us, because that is where conversion is often most necessary. Conversion turns us from being hearers of the Bible to doers, and from experts in interpretation to experts in hearing the voice of God in our daily lives.”

Martens, John W. “The Challenge of the Word”. *America*. September 21, 2015 Issue.

<http://americamagazine.org/content/the-word/challenge-word>. Accessed September 12, 2015.



# Why Study the Bible?

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# Why Study the Bible?

## Prayer for Bible Study

Lord, please open up our hearts and minds to read, study, and discuss Your Holy word intelligently and with understanding. Grant us the understanding that You want us to have. Help us to learn what You want us to learn and to remember what we learn in every life situation we encounter. Help us in those situations to apply what we have learned so that You and Your Holy Name are glorified - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

## Why Study the Bible?

We study the Bible for the reasons given below.

Jesus tells us to teach the whole world to observe all that He commanded us. We must first study the Bible to learn what He has commanded us and then pass it on to others. And Jesus came and said to them, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matthew 28:18-20/ESV)

Jesus tells us that His Word will endure forever. That makes it imperative for us to know His Word if we are to live with Him forever. It is noteworthy that three of the Gospel writers mention this. *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”* (Matthew 24:35, Mark 13:31, and Luke 21:33/ESV)

Jesus tells us that we study the Bible to learn how all Scripture witnesses to Him. We must first study the Bible to learn who He is, to believe in (i.e., be committed to) Him, and to know and abide in Him. *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”* (John 5:39-40/ESV)

Jesus tells us that His Law will endure until the completion of His mission in the end times. We must study to learn what He means by that to know what we are to obey. *“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”* (Matthew 5:18/ESV)

Jesus commands us to teach the Law. We must study to learn His commands to know what we are to obey. *“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”* (Matthew 5:19/ESV)

St. Paul told us that knowing the Bible enables us to effectively pass on to others in various forms (i.e., teaching and correcting) what Jesus has commanded us. <sup>1</sup> *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in*

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<sup>1</sup> St. Peter told us that Paul’s letters constitute Scripture. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. (2 Peter 3:15-16/ESV)

*righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16/ESV)*

Martin Luther told us of the value of the Bible both to learn the Law and the Gospel.<sup>2</sup> He wrote that the Old Testament is a book of laws instructing people on how to obey God and giving examples those who did and those who did not. The Old Testament also gives promises and words of grace by which the fathers and prophets were kept in the faith of salvation by Jesus. Although the New Testament is the Gospel, a book of grace, that teaches us where to get the power to obey God, it also teaches commandments keep us from falling under the control of the world and Satan.<sup>3</sup>

We noted above that Jesus tells us that we study the Bible to learn how all Scripture witnesses to Him, and that His Word will endure forever making it imperative for us to know His Word if we are to live with Him forever. How about this for an extension of those thoughts?

Luke 16:19-31 records Jesus’ parable about two men, the “rich man” and Lazarus. “Both men die and are carried to their eternal destinies. The first man goes to heaven, which is called ‘Abraham’s bosom’ in this passage. Why is it called that? The name ‘Abraham’s bosom’ implies intimacy and rest. When the apostle John rested his head on Jesus’ bosom, he relaxed and was at rest (John 13:23). So heaven is a place of rest, a fact that the Bible certainly backs up. But heaven is by no means boring as many people seem to think. It is a place of eternal enjoyment. We will have new glorified bodies and there will be no night-time. It is going to last forever because that’s how long it takes to reveal all of who God is. Ephesians 2:7 says: *‘In the ages to come He [will] show the surpassing riches of His grace.’*”<sup>4</sup>

## How to Study the Bible?

The Bible clearly indicates that there is a teaching ministry and an obligation for us individually and communally to learn the Word of God. Luke wrote about the diligence with which the Jews in Berea studied the Scriptures to understand the Gospel that Paul and Silas were preaching to them. They clearly knew that they could verify the Gospel message of Jesus by reading the Old Testament. It is incumbent upon us to likewise verify the Gospel messages we are exposed to daily. We can do that by reading the Bible and comparing Scripture with Scripture. Acts 17:11: Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. (Acts 17:11) (ESV)

Many Old Testament and New Testament passages tell us both that we are to study individually and in small groups including the family, and that we are to study in large groups. Jesus’ entire ministry was one of teaching, preaching, healing, and praying. The book Acts of the Apostles records sermons of Peter and Paul, their teaching activities, and the preaching and teaching activities of other disciples. The Epistles discuss teaching. However, Scripture is largely silent about the specifics of how it should be carried out. There are both commands and hints in Scripture that tell us all to listen to Scripture, and tell our ministers and lay people to teach, read,

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 35*, “Prefaces to the Old Testament”

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, American Edition, Volume 35*, “Prefaces to the Old Testament”

<sup>4</sup> Ray Pritchard, “What Happens When We Die?”, <http://www.crosswalkmail.com/ViewMessage.do?m=chcttgclqg&r=tzwvzvcbbhw&s=eydzsprhgzdqhktlwvjvprpqyllqdbvssk&a=view> and <http://m.crosswalk.com/archive/what-happens-when-we-die-1327683.html>, Accessed July 26, 2015.

listen, and learn. There are references to teaching and learning Scripture in antiquity before Jesus, during His ministry, and during the growth of the early Church. There are many hints as to learning individually, in small groups, and in large groups. Those hints may be seen in the many verses cited below.

### Studying and Teaching in the Old Testament

We learn about teaching and learning in many Old Testament books: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Hosea, and Malachi. In Deuteronomy we learn that the laws concerning Israel's kings included their personal responsibility learning and applying the Word of God in their personal lives (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). The Lord taught us through Moses to read, study and instruct our children and each other in His Law (His Word), to discuss it, and to meditate on it individually (Deuteronomy 6:6-9; Deuteronomy 11:18-21.) God instructed Joshua to study, remember, and apply all of what He had taught Moses and him to their daily lives (Joshua 1:8). The psalmist wrote that God, who was his refuge, taught him individually (Psalm 32:8) and that he must meditate on God's Law to learn more than his teachers can impart to him (Psalm 119:11). The Psalmist told us that he remembers all that God had taught him in order to avoid sin (Psalm 119:99). King Solomon wrote that his proverbs are to instruct the reader that not to learn and obey the law is sinful, and that misleading others by our words or example will condemn us (Proverbs 28:9-10). He wrote that as a preacher, he had written proverbs to teach us God's truth that we might teach others (Ecclesiastes 12:9-13). He told us specifically that we are to teach our children (Proverbs 1:1-5; Proverbs 2:1-5; Proverbs 3:1-2; Proverbs 22:6). Even the company or conversation of friends presents an opportunity to teach and learn (Proverbs 27:17). All of us are accountable to God for our works (Ecclesiastes 12:9-13). Learning God's wisdom alone will enable us to give accountability with joy (Proverbs 2:1-5). God, through the prophets, accused Israel of rejecting and ignoring His Word (Hosea 4:6) and reminded the nation's teachers that they are to instruct the people and the people are to ask for that teaching (Malachi 2:6-7).

### Studying and Teaching in the New Testament

We have many New Testament instances of the teaching mission of the disciples. One example is found in Acts 8:26-40: The Ethiopian Eunuch asked the Apostle Philip to explain a passage from Isaiah, Philip taught him its meaning, and the eunuch believed and asked to be baptized. Another example is Acts 14:27-28 which closes with a statement about the Apostles' (Paul and Barnabas) approach to establishing new churches: "And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles. And they remained no little time with the disciples. Luke mentions many times that the Apostles stayed with people and did not just preach and move on. They stayed apparently to ensure that a church took root at each location. In each of the following verses we read that the Apostles remained for a time with those who came to believe. Although not stated in all verses, the context indicates that they were probably teaching and preaching as exemplified by the following cited verses.

At Joppa Paul stayed for many days with a barber (Acts 9:43).

The centurion's family asked Peter to stay with them for some days (Acts 10:48).

Barnabas and Paul met with the church and taught a great many people for a whole year (Acts 11:26).

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Barnabas, Paul, Judas, and Silas stayed with the brothers at Antioch for some time (Acts 15:35). Paul and Barnabas remained in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.

At Corinth Paul stayed a year and six months, teaching the word of God (Acts 18:11).

Paul spent many days at Corinth. At Ephesus, when the Jews asked him to stay for a longer period, he declined saying "I will return to you if God wills". (Acts 18:18-22)

Paul taught the elders at Ephesus in public and from house to house, both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Acts 20:20-21).

Paul lived in Rome two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him. (Acts 28:30-31).

Paul wrote in his Epistles of the teaching ministry.

Paul wrote that the Church has many ministries, many members with different gifts. Among those gifts are teaching and preaching. (Romans 12:6-8).

He stated that his calling was to preach and not to baptize (1 Corinthians 1:17).

St. Paul told the church at Ephesus that Jesus gave the apostles prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip Christians for the work of ministry, to build up the Church (Ephesians 4:11-13).

He told the Thessalonians to encourage and build up the faith of each other. (Thessalonians 5:11).

Paul warned his disciple Timothy to be aware of false teachers that would corrupt the Gospel; teachers who made confident assertions about the Gospel without knowing their material (1 Timothy 1:7-8).

He exhorted his disciple Timothy to teach and preach the Word of God properly (2 Timothy 2:15).

Paul instructed Titus to show dignity and integrity in his teaching (Titus 2:7-8).

The writer of Hebrews told his audience that they ought to be teachers, and that they need someone to refresh them in the Gospel. He continued to evaluate his audience in terms of their maturity and ability to absorb the Gospel teachings, encouraging them to meet together to encourage one another in the Word (c.f., Hebrews 5:12-14; 10:24-25).

James wrote specifically about who should teach and who should not teach.

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body* (James 3:1-2ESV).

James wrote about the use and abuse of the important role of teaching in the church to the good and bad use of the tongue, the instrument that we use to teach (James 3:9-12). One way of expressing what James was telling us is that we must first know what we are talking about before we can teach. We must first study and learn the Scriptures and their meaning before we are qualified to teach. A related thought - related to giving correct information and the results of giving wrong information - may be found in the 5th and 28th chapters of the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus.

*Be quick in your listening, and in your patience make a reply.* (Ecclesiasticus 5:11 )

*Whoever pays heed to it [a meddling tongue] will not find rest, nor will he settle down in peace.* (Ecclesiasticus 28:16) <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rev. Edward A. Engelbrecht, Editor, The Apocrypha, The Lutheran Edition with Notes (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2012) pp. 73-75. Ecclesiasticus is also called Sirach and BenSira.

Martin Luther described the Apocrypha as useful texts to read, but not divinely inspired. The Apocrypha allow Christians to look back at our heritage and see the Bible as our ancestors would have. Also, the texts of the Apocrypha are essential reading for filling in the 400-year gap between the Old and New Testaments.

As teachers of the Bible, we must also strive to set a Christian example by our thoughts, words, and actions every bit as much as Paul described for our pastors.

Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach. (1 Timothy 3:2/ESV)

### A Special Benefit of Studying and Teaching

To know someone is to be familiar with or have experience and understanding of a person. To be familiar with someone is to have continuing personal or intimate knowledge of a person. To know someone, that person must be often seen and well known to you. You must be closely acquainted with that person. So it is with our knowing, “seeing”, and being with Jesus.

Jesus is with us when we read, study, and discuss His Word. We would be impressed if Jesus appeared in visible form while we were talking. However, something remarkable happens when we study the Bible, talking about Jesus - who He is, what He did and said, what He’s like. Although He does not appear visibly, He is present in each of our discussions. As we talk about God’s Word, Jesus Himself joins our group. *“For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.”* (Matthew 18:20/ESV). Jesus Himself is present and speaks to our hearts through His Word. That is exciting! We are privileged not only to become aware of Jesus but also to actually be in personal contact with Him. This does not happen when we are talking about anyone else. For example, if we were talking about Martin Luther, our words would not bring Luther to the scene. If we discussed him very well, he might seem to be present. We might describe him vividly and make him seem real. But in fact, Luther would not be present. However, when we speak about Jesus, among ourselves or anywhere else, He is right there in person - with all of His love and power. Through the Holy Spirit He moves us and helps us in the ways that we need most. He forgives us and changes us. We are built up in our faith and are given the desire and ability to become more Christ like. We are sustained in our eternal life. He speaks and acts through us, through His Word that we share. We can be confident about our Bible discussions, knowing that he is there with us. As a hymn goes: “Here, He is here, he has blessed us with His presence in this place; we will not be the same”.<sup>6</sup>

We get to know Jesus and His Father when we read, study, and discuss His Word. To believe someone is to accept the word of that person. So, we must have experience and understanding of Jesus, be closely acquainted with Him, and believe in Him. We must read and study His Word to know what He teaches us. His own words suggest this: *“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”* (John 14:21/ESV) We “see” Jesus by getting to know Him through His Word. Jesus said to him, *“Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”* (John 14:9/ESV)

Commitment is also needed. Jesus wants us to know Him and believe in Him. There is a difference between a decision to do something and a commitment to the person. As Christians, we must not only follow Jesus but also commit our lives to Him (Luke 14:28-33; Acts 5:42). He does not command intellectual assent to Himself but rather commands the commitment of our

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<sup>6</sup> Portions of this paraphrase an article in Lighthouse, John 1-11 Leaders Guide, “Life-Giving Communication”. The hymn line is from Sandi Patty, Lyrics, “Doxology”.

lives to Him - our thoughts, words, and actions - in faith and love. The ultimate commitment is recorded in Luke 23:46 (reminiscent of Psalm 31:5): Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, *Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" And having said this he breathed his last.* (Luke 23:46/ESV)

When we get to know Jesus and obey Him, we get to be His friends. Jesus called His disciples "friends" at the Last Supper (John 15:12-15): *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."* (John 15:14) Jesus' words were reminiscent of Moses' writings in the Torah about the righteousness imputed to Abram (Genesis 15:6) and about God's speaking personally to Moses: Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. ... And the Lord said to Moses, *"This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."* (Exodus 33:11, 7) Paul and James reflected on the thought of God's friendship in their epistles (Romans 4:3; Galatians 3:5-6; and James 2:23: ... and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness" - and he was called a friend of God (James 2:23). The Bible tells us the traits of good friends (Proverbs 20:6; John 15:13). John 15:13 is particularly noteworthy for our mutual friendship with Jesus as it implies what He also expects from us: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

We read elsewhere in the Bible about what friendship is (Ruth 1:16-17 - Ruth and Naomi; 1 Samuel 18:1-3 - David and Jonathan; Job 2:11 - Job's Friends; 2 Kings 2:2 - Elijah and Elisha; Proverbs 22:24-25; Proverbs 27:5-6; ) and about our friendship with God (Proverbs 3:32; James 4:4; Romans 5:10).

### Closing Prayer

Lord God, we give you thanks for calling us to faith through the promise of your Son, Jesus Christ. Guide us by your Holy Spirit to seek your will and not our own. Help us to use the opportunities you give us everyday to be witnesses to your glory and power. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

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*“Lord, to whom shall we go?  
You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68)*