

WILLERUP CHURCH

Ways to Study God's Word



Ways to Study God's Word

Most Christians sincerely want to study the Bible on their own, but most don't know how or where to begin. The Bible teaches us we cannot be disciples of Jesus Christ if we do not have a regular intake of the Word of God.

But where do we begin?

There is more than one way to study the Bible. Let's discover a method that is right for you.

METHODS

1. Devotional Method
2. Chapter Summary
3. Character Quality
4. Thematic
5. Biographical
6. Topical

OTHER METHODS:

Word Study

Book Background

Book Survey

Chapter Analysis

Book Synthesis

Verse-by-Verse

No matter what method you choose, make sure you stick with it and devote sufficient time to it. On a typical evening, the average Christian may sit and watch television for three to four hours but only read their Bible for three minutes before bedtime.

What could happen if you committed yourself to increasing your time reading or studying God's Word?

Reading the Bible is the best way to learn more about God. Studying the Bible changes lives--your life and the lives around you. Many Christians find the practice of reading completely through the Bible in a year a valuable practice. Nothing will give you the deep insights, personal revelation, spiritual refreshment and ultimate direction for your life like reading the Bible.

There are 12 different methods to study the Bible included in this document.

1. Make a commitment to read or study God's Word.
2. Select one method.
3. Select a Bible to use for reading or study. Buy a notebook, special pen, highlighter or other study helps.
4. Get started.
5. Stick with it.

The Devotional Method

This method can set the foundation for all the others. If application is our ultimate goal with the Bible, this method can be the most important for our spiritual growth. It involves taking a passage of scripture and prayerfully meditating on it until the Holy Spirit provides a concrete way to apply it to our life, situation or relationships. This method is so vital to studying the Bible that is generally part of every other method.

The Chapter Summary Method

This is probably the easiest way to study the Bible. Using this method allows the student to get a general overview of a chapter. We can select any chapter of the Bible that are of interest to us. There are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. If you studied one chapter each day, you could read through the Scriptures in just over three years. If you summarized two chapters a day, you could finish in about 20 months. This pace is certainly not recommended, because you could quickly get bored with the study method. Instead, select random chapters of Scripture that you want to study and use the summary method on those passages; or use a different method for variety.

Example:

- Read one chapter in a Bible without notes. If you try using this method by reading a Bible in which you have made notes, you will have the tendency to concentrate on the same ideas. Let God speak to you in a fresh way and give you new insights.

- Read the entire chapter without stopping. During your first few readings, don't stop in the middle of a chapter, but read it from start to finish. Your goal is to feel the flow of the chapter, so don't be concerned with the details at the outset. Try to capture the central message and the writer's overall theme.
- Read the same chapter in several different contemporary (NIV, NLT, CEB) or classic (KJV, NASB, RSV) translations. This will give you additional insights as you see how each translator or translation team interpreted the original writing. Make notes on the interesting differences you find.
- Read the same chapter aloud quietly to yourself. If you have a problem with concentration, this will help tremendously because you will be hearing yourself read. Many people have found that reading aloud helps them better focus their attention on the text. As you are rereading the chapter, begin looking for the following 10 specific things and write your answers on your Chapter Summary Form or on a

blank piece of paper. You may fill in the 10 Cs in any order, saving Step Ten for the last step.

Ten parts of chapter summary include:

1. Capture a Caption

Give the chapter a short, descriptive title. The shorter the title, the more likely you will remember it. In fact, if you use this method on every chapter in a selected book of the Bible, you can remember the contents of the whole book by memorizing your chapter titles. Use one word if possible (1 Corinthians 13 might be titled “Love”) and five words at most (Hebrews 11 could be “Heroes of the Faith”). Try to find the key word of the chapter and fit it into your title. If your title is catchy or produces a mental picture, you will remember it longer. One creative person gave “Well-Well” as a title for John 4. The two key events of that chapter are the woman at the well and the nobleman’s son whom Jesus made well.

2. Comments and Contents

Describe, summarize, paraphrase, outline, or make a list of the major points in a chapter. The method you choose will depend on the literary style of the chapter and on your own preference. Some people like to summarize and others enjoy outlining. Choose the method with which you feel most comfortable and is easy for you to do. Don’t try to interpret the chapter; just make observations on its contents. Record what you feel the writer said.

3. Step Three Chief People

List the most important people in the chapter. Ask questions such as, Who are the main people in this chapter? Why are they included? What is significant about them? If the chapter contains pronouns (he, she, they, etc.) you may have to refer to the previous chapter to identify the people. Write down your reasons for choosing certain people as the chief ones of the chapter. When you come to long genealogies (lists of people), don't try to list each one, but summarize the list.

4. Select a Verse

Choose a verse that summarizes the whole chapter or one that speaks to you personally. In some chapters you may find a key verse that summarizes the writer's argument; in other chapters there may not be a key verse. On occasion you may want to pick a verse from which you will be writing your application, a verse that you believe God would have you apply to your life.

5. Crucial Word(s)

Write down the key word or words of the chapter. Many times the key word will be the one that is used most frequently ("love" in 1 Corinthians 13 and "faith" in Hebrews 11). Sometimes the crucial word may be the most important word but not the most used one. In Romans 6, for example, the word "count" (KJV, "reckon") is the important word even though it is used only once (Rom. 6:11). Also, a chapter may have more than one crucial word.

6. Challenges

List any difficulties you may have with the passage. Are there any statements you do not understand? Is there any problem or question you would like to study further? Often while doing a chapter summary you will get ideas for other types of studies you may want to do in the future. For instance, a certain word in the chapter may catch your attention.

7. Cross-References

Using the cross-references in your study Bible, look up other verses that help clarify what the chapter is talking about and list them on your form. You may find other suggested verses in the margins or footnotes at the bottom of the passage. Ask the question, What else in the Bible helps me understand this chapter? Cross-references are important because they are helpful tools in interpreting the meaning of a chapter; they enable you to see what the Bible as a whole has to say on any given teaching.

8. What does this chapter say about Jesus?

The entire Bible is a revelation of the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus used the Old Testament to teach his disciples about himself. On the day of resurrection on the Emmaus road, Jesus taught two of his disciples: "Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). As you study each chapter, be alert for statements that tell you something about Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit or God the Father. Ask yourself, What can I learn about Jesus from this

chapter? What attributes of God in Christ are illustrated here? (Some examples: his love, justice, mercy, holiness, power, and faithfulness.) This step may be the most difficult to complete in some portions of the Bible, particularly in Old Testament narratives and in passages where symbolism is used.

9. What is the Main Point or Lesson(s)

Write down the major points, principles, insights, and lessons you learn from this chapter. Ask yourself, Why does God want this passage in the Bible? What does he want to teach me from this chapter? What is the central thought the writer is trying to develop? A possible answer might be "We should be loving in all interpersonal relationships" (1 Corinthians 13).

10. Conclusion

This is the application portion of your study. Develop a mindset to help you implement the Bible in your life. Focus on a lesson you have learned from the chapter or portion. It will benefit you to conclude your chapter summary by asking yourself two questions: (1) How do these truths apply to me personally? and (2) What specifically am I going to do about them?

The Character Quality Method

Goal of this method is help identify both negative and positive character qualities. Once we are able to understand them, we can learn to set aside negative qualities and build positive ones. We do this by discovering what the Bible says about a particular characteristic of a person, with heavy emphasis on personal application. Remember--we are to become more like Jesus Christ as we develop and mature.

Here are a few tips for applying this type of study: Take ONE quality at a time. Don't rush it! This takes time, sometimes months or even longer! Stay with that one quality until you get a victory in that specific area. Be alert to a negative quality that is actually a misused positive quality.

Nine parts of Character Quality

1. Name the quality: write it down. Look up the definition in an English dictionary and jot it down. List synonyms and related words.
2. Name the opposite quality: write the antonym(s) and definition(s), plus similar words. There may be several opposites!
3. Do a simple word study.
 - a. Look up the Bible definition in a Bible dictionary or look up the word in the original language. www.blueletterbible.org
 - b. Find scriptural contexts in a hard copy or online Concordance.
 - c. Check Bible dictionaries or Bible encyclo-

dias to see how the word was used in Biblical or historical times. Did the word mean something different than it does today? For example, the word “meek” is defined as “humbly patient, docile,” but in the original language it meant “under submission.”

4. Find cross-references: Find some cross references in the verses you are looking at that have your character trait. Some of them will probably be the same as the verses you have already found. If you run across a verse that expands your understanding of the character trait, note it here.
5. Do a brief biographical study of at least one Biblical character who exhibits the character quality you chose. Describe how that person shows the character quality, and provide references. These questions will be helpful:

What shows this quality in this person's life?

How did this quality affect this person's life?

Did this quality help or hinder the person's growth to maturity? How?

What are the results of this quality in this person's life?

6. Memorize at least one verse from the study that has stood out to you.
7. Here is where the application really starts. Choose a situation or a relationship in your life in which you can work on this character quality, either en-

hancing a good one or minimizing a bad one. Think broadly here. If you have chosen kindness, for example, practice kindness with family, friends or strangers.

8. Get even more practical. Think of one thing you can do this week to use what you have learned. With the above example of kindness, think of one practical way you can show kindness to your spouse, child, friend or colleague this week.
9. Conclusion--make note of your progress. This is an important assessment step of this method. For better application of making a lifelong change, assess your progress week to week and see how you have done. (Extra credit) Ask others about your progress.

The Thematic Method

Thematic studies focus on a specific theme (salvation) or topic (sin) found in scripture, providing a unique often big picture, narrative-driven perspective on the biblical book. This allows our theology to be shaped by the grand vision of scripture as opposed to having a single verse attempt to explain a theme or inform our theology. Our understanding of the Bible, as a whole, is enhanced when we're able to properly grasp the overarching themes and topics woven within Scripture.

1. Choose the theme. A theme is a topic or a subject. It could be a specific issue or idea that the Bible teaches about or something in daily life that needs to be considered or just something that is interesting to you. The best themes are fairly specific, as generalities tend to be too generic and less likely to result in a cohesive, effective study. For example, the topic "Women of the Bible" is too broad, while "Esther" would be narrower and "Esther's feast" would be more specific. A good theme for beginning might be "discovering God's will."
2. Stay focused. It is important to stay focused on the chosen theme. When discovering associated ideas, have a page to write them down for future study themes. Refuse to run down the Rabbit Trail--even if it is interesting!
3. List the verses. Using a comprehensive hard copy concordance or an online concordance such as Strong's Concordance. Note all the verses that relate to the topic that was chosen. Remember to check for synonyms and other possible vocabulary that relates to the study. It may also be advantageous to get a

Bible that is already marked for thematic study, such as The Thematic Reference Bible, (NIV) Alister McGrath general editor.

4. Determine questions to answer through the study. Take a few moments to determine what questions would best serve you while you study this theme. Somewhere around five questions is a good plan (not more than five), with specific things based on “who, what, when, how, where, and why.” Think like a journalist. For example, if studying Esther’s feast, you might have a set of questions like these:

1. Who is mentioned here?
2. Where does this take place?
3. What is the goal of each individual?
4. Why is this situation handled this way?
5. What can I learn from this?

For the study of knowing God’s will, some possible questions include:

1. What particular things are God’s will?
2. Why should we do God’s will?
3. How do we do God’s will?
4. What happens if I don’t follow God’s will?
5. Who else is affected when I follow God’s will?

If you come up with more than five questions, consider doing more studies of the same verses with different questions at a later date. Keep the questions available while studying. Write them on note-cards and consider them with each verse.

Answer as many of the questions as possible with each verse as you write the answers in the notebook. It is likely that not every verse will have an answer to every question. Numbering the answers can aid in later steps of study. If you read the verses without finding answers to your questions, reevaluate the questions and adjust them to something that can be answered with the topic's Scriptures.

5. Summarize and organize the information. Compile the answers that were written down and summarize them by writing what you learned in your own words. An outline made from the main points and grouping similar verses and answers together will put the information in an easily reviewable layout, which can also be used in a group study.
6. Apply the information. Be specific about how the lessons learned in this study can be applied to situations in personal life. Write down practical ways that life changes can be established. Remember to consider if the application is possible, practical and able to be evaluated. It is important to go back and consider how application has been successful,
7. Discover the advantages in using this study system. This is an easy way to learn from the Bible. With a specific topic and a few questions, this type of study can be done over time in just a few minutes a day.

The Biographical Method

Select a Bible character and research all the verses about that person in order to study his life and characteristics. Make notes on his attitudes, strengths, and weaknesses. Then apply what you have learned to your own life.

With the Biographical Method of Bible Study you select a biblical person and research the Scriptures to study his or her life and character. You try to become thoroughly acquainted with that person's inner life and explore what made it a spiritual success or failure. You may even discover the significant defining moments of their life. Ask God to help you think and feel like him or her so that your study becomes a life-changing experience.

Some Helpful Tips for a Good Biographical Study

To do a meaningful biographical study, keep the following pointers in mind:

1. Start with a person on whom you can do a simple study. Begin with one about whom there is a small number of references. Some biblical people can be studied in a few hours; others take weeks to study, and some major persons can take a lifetime. Do not start doing this study on a person such as Jesus, Moses, or Abraham. Begin with some minor but important people such as Andrew, Barnabas or Mary of Bethany.
2. The secret of a good biographical study is to use your imagination and live with that person during the study. Walk in his or her sandals. Try to get inside their mind and see how they think, feel, and respond

to circumstances. Attempt to see things from their point of view, hear with their ears, mingle with their friends and fight with their enemies. Imagine that you are that person while you are studying them. This is only possible if you spend a lot of time with that person, reading and rereading all the Bible references about them.

3. Be careful not to confuse different people who have the same name when you look up the references about them. You will have to be sure that the verse is speaking about the person you have chosen to study. You would not want to confuse John the Baptist with John the Apostle or John Mark. For example, the Bible shows us that the following names were popular and refer to different people:

Zechariah—30 different men • Nathan—
20 men • Jonathan—15 men • Judas—8 men •

Mary—7 women • James—5 men • John—5 men

Familiarize yourself with the context of the verses and they will usually reveal to you which person is in view.

4. Be careful to find the various names that may apply to just one person. Since the Bible came out of a Hebrew-Aramaic-Greek context, some people's names changed in the different languages, in both the Old Testament and the New. For example, the apostle Peter is known as Peter, Simon, Simeon, and Cephas. Daniel's three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, are better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Sometimes a name change came because of a character change, which was the case of Jacob becoming Israel. So, become aware of the differences and find all the names used for the same person in your Bible study.

5. Stay away from books written about biblical people until after you have exhausted every Bible reference about that person and have drawn every possible insight out of those texts. Don't let a Bible commentary rob you of the task of doing your own work of personal discovery or prejudice your views of a person. Do your own work first, then check other sources.

Let's get started: Biographical Study List

1. Name
2. Scripture References
3. First Impressions and Observations
4. Outline of His or Her Life
5. General Insights (Answers to Questions)
6. Character Qualities Identified
7. Bible Truths Illustrated in His or Her Life
8. Summary of Lessons Learned from His or Her Life
9. Personal Application
10. Transferable Concepts (Ways I can share this with others)
11. Someone with Whom I Intend to Share This Study

General Questions for a Biographical Study

Do your own work. Don't short change yourself. Here is a list of 70 questions you can use in Step Five of the Biographical Method of bible study. You shouldn't try to use every question in a single study. Depending on the depth of your study and the time you have, select the questions you would most like to have answered. The questions are divided into seven major categories for easier use. As you think of other questions, add them to this list.

Reputation

1. Who wrote what we know about this person?
2. What did people say about him or her?
3. What did their friends say?
4. What did their enemies say about them?
5. What did family (wife, children, brothers, sisters, parents) say?
6. What did God say about him and why do you think God allowed this person to be mentioned in the Bible?

Tests of Character

7. What were his or her aims and motives?
8. What was he or she like in his home?
9. How did this person respond to failure? Did they get discouraged easily?
10. How did they respond to adversity? Did he or she handle criticism well?

11. How did he or she respond to success? Did they get proud when praised?
 12. How did he or she respond to the trivial and mundane things in life? Was he or she faithful in the little things?
 13. How quickly did they praise God for the good or bad things that happened to them?
 14. How quickly did they obey God when told to do something?
 15. How quickly did they submit to God-ordained authority?
 16. What was he or she like when he was alone with God?
- Background

17. What can you discover about their family and ancestry?
18. What does the name mean? Why that name? Was it ever changed?
19. What was his or her home-life like? How was he or she raised? Where was he or she raised?
20. What were the characteristics of the parents? How did they influence him?
21. Was there anything special about their birth?
22. Where did they live? What was everyday life like?
23. Was there exposure to other cultures? Did they affect him or her in any way?
24. What was the condition of their country politically and spiritually during his lifetime?
25. What kind of training did they have? Did they have any formal training or schooling?
26. What was his or her occupation?
27. How long did he or she live? Where did they die? How

did they die?

Significant Events

28. Was there any great crisis in their life? How did they handle it?
29. What are the great accomplishments for which they are remembered?
30. Did he or she experience a divine “call”? How did he or she respond to it?
31. What crucial decisions did he or she have to make? How did they affect him? Others?
32. Did any particular problem keep recurring in their life?
33. Where did they succeed? Where did they fail? Why?
34. How did the environment and circumstances affect them?
35. What part did he or she play in the history of God’s plan?
36. Did he or she believe in the sovereignty of God or God’s invitation to participate?

Relationships

37. How did he or she get along with other people? Was he or she a loner? Was he or she a team player?
38. How did he or she treat other people? Did he or she use or serve them?
39. What was their spouse like? How did he or she influence them?
40. What were their children like? How did they influence them?
41. Who were the close companions? What were they like? Were they influential?

42. Who were the enemies? What were they like? How did they influence him?
43. What influence did he or she have on others? On their nation? On other nations?
44. Did he or she take care of their family? How did their children turn out?
45. Did his or her friends and family help or hinder in serving the Lord?
46. Did he or she train anyone to take their place? Was there a trained leader or disciple that was behind?

Personality

47. What type of person was he or she? What made him or her the way?
48. Were they quick tempered, depressed, cheerful or dull?
49. What were the outstanding strengths in their character? What traits did they have?
50. Did their life show any development of character as time passed? Was there growth and progression?
51. What were their particular faults and weaknesses?
52. What were their particular sins? What steps led to those sins?
53. In what area was the greatest battle: lust of the flesh, lust of the eyes, or pride of life?
54. What were the results of the sins and weaknesses?
55. Did they ever get the victory over their particular sins and weaknesses?
56. What qualities made him or her a success or failure?
57. Was he or she in any way a type of Christ?

Spiritual Life

58. What personal encounters did he or she have with God that are recorded in Scripture?
59. What was their purpose in life? Did they try to bring glory to God?
60. What message did they preach and live? Was their life a message for or against Jesus/God?
61. Did they live a separated life, distinct from worldly ways?
62. What did they believe? What great lessons did God teach?
63. Why do you think God dealt with them the way He did?
64. What was their attitude toward the Word of God? Did they know the Scriptures existed?
65. What kind of prayer life did they have? Did they have close fellowship with God?
66. Was he or she bold in sharing their testimony? Was he or she a courageous witness in times of persecution?
67. How big was their faith in God? How did they show it? Did God give them any specific promises?
68. Was he or she a good steward of what God had given them—time, wealth, talents?
69. Was he or she filled with the Spirit? What were their spiritual gifts? Did they use them? How?
70. Was he or she eager to do God's will, willingly and without question?

The Topical Method

In many ways this is a lot like the thematic study, only more extensive with a lot more verses. When you study the bible topically, there is a broad subject in scripture like prayer or sacrifice. Unlike thematic study, you ask every question you can imagine. Topical study broadens an idea and widens the scope of study.

1. Do a word search for the key word of your topic with all English tenses. For example, the topic of prayer would include pray, praying, prayed. This method expands your range of study. Identify other synonyms for prayer such as supplication, intercession, petition, request – even cry.
2. Copy the passages that pertain to your search. Not ever verse with the word “pray” is about our prayers to God, so breathe a sigh of relief that you don't have to copy ALL those verses.
3. Read each verse and surrounding verses for context. Context is especially important in a topical study. Would you pick a random line in a friend's letter or email and start reading what they had to say to you there? No, Why not? The same applies to God's letter to us. How will we know what He is saying if we don't begin when He first introduces the topic?
4. Investigate the verses/passages. Notice similarities between the verses. Ask questions. Make notes. Write down a sentence or two of summary below each passage or verse.

5. Take to heart everything you learn. Another benefit of topical studies is they usually take longer than word studies. Something about the longer period focused on God's word encourages us to pay attention to what God says about prayer, praying and answers.
6. Pay close attention to the first time your topic is introduced. Notice the situation, where and when God first introduces a word in the Bible. Make careful notes of the verse and circumstance where the topic is first used.
7. Be aware that there may be passages that expand your topic in creative ways without ever using your key word. For example, many psalms are actually prayers even though the word prayer may never be used in them. Also two vivid examples of prayer in the life of Elijah is given in 1 Kings 18, yet the word is never once used in the chapter. Depending on the nature of your search, you may want to go to these specific passages and study them also.

The beauty of topical studies is you discover a grander vision of what God thinks, feels and says about the topic. We consider the whole of Scripture instead of a portion which sometimes leads us to read or study out of context.

OTHER METHODS:

The Word Study Method

The Book Background Method

The Book Survey Method

The Chapter Analysis Method

The Book Synthesis Method

The Verse by Verse Method

What Bible is right for me?

There are 150 versions of the Bible available for purchase. Selecting the right one takes time and exploring different types of Bibles can be overwhelming. Here are a few recommendations:

Types of Bibles for STUDY:

1. New King James Version (NKJV)
2. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
3. New American Standard Version (NASB)
4. New International Version (NIV)
5. English Standard Version (ESV)
6. Amplified Version (AMP)

Types of Bibles for READING:

1. New Living Translation (NLT)
2. Common English Bible (CEB)
3. Common English Version (CEV)
4. The Message (MSG)
5. Good News Bible (GNB)
6. Today's English Version (TEV)

SPECIALIZED Bibles

1. Celebrate Recovery Bible (NIV)
2. Interlinear Bible: Hebrew, Greek, English
3. The Jewish New Testament Commentary
4. The Passion Translation
5. The Student Bible (NIV)
6. Chronological Bible (NIV)

Online resources:

Bible.com

Biblegateway.com

Biblehub.com

Biblica.com

Biblestudytools.com

Youversion.com

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