



UNDERSTANDING  
& STUDYING

*The Bible*

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# The Bible

is a powerful library of books that will radically change your life as you read and study it.

The purpose of *this* booklet is to teach you how incredibly complex, useful, and special the Bible is, as well as to equip you with skills to read it with confidence so it can become a vital part of your spiritual walk with God.



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# Introduction

Well hello! My name is Jordan Dunlap and I'm a pastor at New Life Ministries in Endicott, NY. I am super passionate about teaching anyone, well, pretty much anything! But getting to share insight about God and His Word - the Bible - is my favorite.

I developed this booklet for two purposes, which is why it's split into two main parts.

Part one is "Getting to Know the Bible". This part will help you realize just how fascinating and beautiful the Bible is so that you actually *want* to read it! Not out of obligation - but out of interest, wonder, and thankfulness for what God has provided in its pages.

Part two is "Studying the Bible". This part will teach you different methods of Bible study so that when you open it up (or scroll through it on your device) you can be confident that you will learn from it and hear God speak life and wisdom to you through it.

Are you ready to dive in? Let's go!





# Part One

## *Understanding the Bible*

To start off Part One, I'm going to ask and answer some of the most common questions people may want to know about the Bible. Then I'll offer you some fun facts and other information that will hopefully inspire you to want to learn more for yourself.





## What is the Bible?

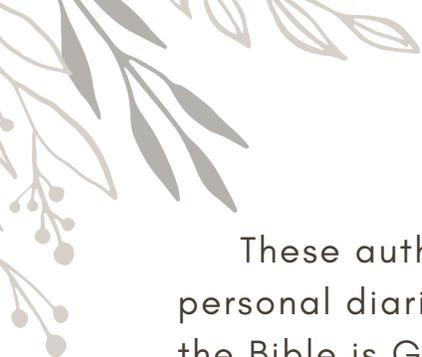
The word "Bible" comes from the Greek "ta biblia" meaning "the books." In essence, the Bible is a book made up of smaller books.

There are 66 different books in the Bible; 39 in the Old Testament, and 27 in the New Testament. These include many different *types* of books - which we will get more into later - but an easy way to consider it is a library that helps us understand and follow God.

## Who wrote the Bible?

The Bible was *physically* written by people just like you and me. Over 40 people from very diverse occupational backgrounds contributed books to the Bible. They lived in Asia, Europe, or Africa and spoke either Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic. The Old Testament, which is the first part of the Bible, was primarily written in Hebrew. The New Testament, which is the second part of the Bible, was written in Greek - the language of scholars at the time. Aramaic was the common "international language" and was most likely the language that Jesus spoke.

Parts of the Bible were written by kings and royalty - people you may *expect* to be in such an important book. But the other parts were written by farmers, fishermen, homeless prophets, a tentmaker, a doctor, a professional scribe (someone who listens to and writes down what other people are saying), vocational musicians, and pastors. Quite a variety, right?



These authors probably kept track of events and memories in personal diaries just like we might do today. But the true author of the Bible is God Himself, who inspired and led those people to write what they wrote in the specific way that they wrote it - for His greater purpose. The Bible is called "God's Word" because it was created and designed by Him, but written by human authors. It is the Words of God *through* the words of human beings.

2 Timothy 3:16 starts out saying,

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God..."*

This is the only use in the Bible of the Greek word *theopneustos*, which means "God-breathed, inspired by God, or due to the inspiration of God," but other Bible verses support the idea that God makes things happen through His breath as well.

God breathed life into Adam, the first man on earth. He also breathed on people to give them the power of the Holy Spirit. God's breath inspires things to change.

Imagine experiencing different important or historical events, and then sensing that God wanted you to write them down and keep track of them. Or maybe you're great at writing poetry or you love writing songs of praise to God, so you put them into a collection that God later orchestrated to be in the Bible. We may never know exactly how God inspired the authors to write their books, but we can be confident that it was God *through* them, not from their own desire, or for their own glory.



2 Peter 1:21 says,

“For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

It's easy to put the people who wrote the Bible on a pedestal, thinking they must have been the “greatest of great” in their time or had reached a certain level of “special”. But the Bible is filled with people like us - imperfect, trying to find their way through life to understand its meaning and purpose. I'm sure most of them had no idea that what they wrote would eventually be part of the most important book in history!



The Divine authorship of the Bible through the physical writers occurred over a span of about 1,500 years. That's a *long* time to create a book - although it *is* the most important book of all time, so it makes sense! That entire time wasn't spent writing, but it is the span in which the writing occurred. Most biblical scholars agree that it took about 1,000 years to write the Old Testament, and between 50-100 years to write the New Testament. Those missing years make up the 400 year “silent period” between the Old and New Testament. Speaking of numbers...



## When was the Bible written?

The oldest book of the Bible, which is either Genesis or Job, is thought to have been completed around 1400 BC. BC means “before Christ”, which would make that about 3,400 years ago. The newest book, Revelation, was written around AD 90. AD means “Anno Domini” (anno dah-min-ee), which is Latin for “year of our Lord”. So 90 years after the birth of Jesus Christ places Revelation’s completion date around 1,900 years ago.

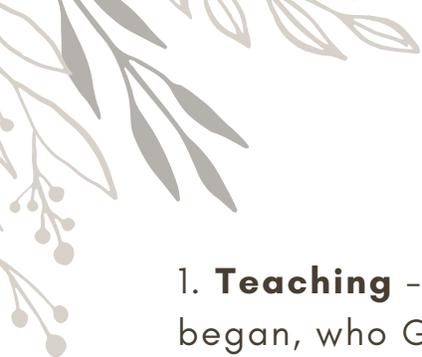
## What is the Bible for?

Let’s look back at 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in full. It says,

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”

When in doubt, this verse is a great go-to when we want to be reminded of why the Bible is so important! First we see that the Bible is profitable. Profitable means beneficial; useful; helpful. Do you want help in this life? I know I do.

Then we see what it’s profitable for: teaching, reproof, correction, and training. Let’s take a look at each one of those four things individually.



1. **Teaching** - The Bible is filled with vital information. How the world began, who God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are, what sin is, what love is, and what happens after we die - just to start! Later we'll look at the different types of books which will shed more light on all we can be taught through the Bible.

2. **Reproof** - This is not a word we use very often, but it's "Criticism for a fault; Expressing disapproval of something". Not a very happy term, but it means that the Bible will help us learn what we're doing wrong. No one likes to be criticized, but God lovingly desires for us to live the best lives we can, and it's important we know when we're wrong. Reproof is expressing disapproval - so if we know firsthand the things God disapproves of, it will teach us *not* to do them.

3. **Correction** - This goes right along with reproof. We don't only need to know what we're doing wrong, we need to know how to fix it. The Bible is all about redemption and healing, forgiveness and grace. A loving parent will correct their children, just as God wants to correct us so we can maintain a healthy relationship with Him.

4. **Training** - Last but not least, the Bible is for training, which is the act of teaching (which we already covered before) a person a particular skill or type of behavior. When we're taught something, we are given information that we hopefully remember - we become aware of it. But being trained in something means we're actually going out and doing the thing we learned.

For example, the Bible has taught me that I should love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength. I can know that's true, and believe it to be helpful - but that doesn't mean I'll actually *do* it. Training means practicing what I've learned and applying it to my life regularly so I get better and better at it.



Now that we've seen the four ways the Bible is profitable, let's look at the why: "That every man may be complete, equipped for every good work."

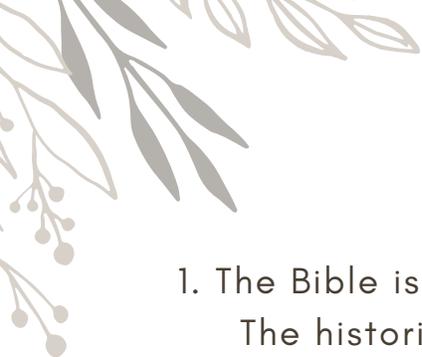
Being complete sounds pretty awesome to me! So much of our life is spent trying to figure out who we are and how we can feel whole, and God is letting us know that we can find that completeness in His Word. Every truth we need to know is found in the Bible, so it can fill us up whenever we read it.

It also says that it will equip us for "every good work". I don't know about you, but I'd much rather *do* good things on this earth while I'm here instead of *guessing* what I should be doing. On my own, I'm limited to my human abilities, but with God's help, I can do anything and everything He wants for me. It's empowering to know that God wants us to be successful in everything we do!

This next question is one a *lot* of people have probably wondered, and for good reason.

## How do we know the Bible is true?

This topic has a lot to it, but I'll hit on the most important parts. If the Bible can be shown to be a reliable, infallible document - accurately recorded and passed on through history from God to us - then we can build a strong case that the Bible is indeed true. Let's look at some key ways the Bible is accurate.



1. The Bible is proven to be **historically accurate**.

The historical accuracy of the documents that make up the Bible are far superior to the written records of Egypt, Assyria, and other early nations. Museums and libraries have physical copies of Biblical manuscripts that show the Bible has been transmitted accurately. Despite common claims that the Bible has been changed through the centuries, the physical evidence proves this wrong. There are minor differences in manuscripts, called variants, but none of them change key Christian beliefs.

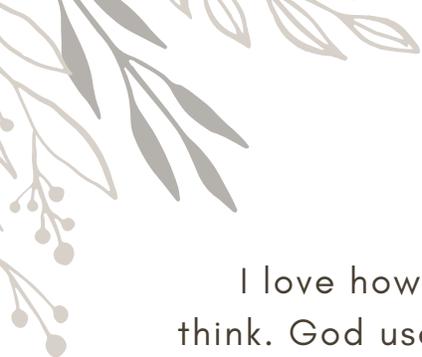
2. The Bible is proven to be **archaeologically accurate**.

There have been almost innumerable archeological confirmations in the last century. Dr. Nelson Glueck, one of the greatest modern authorities on Israeli archeology, said, "No archeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or in exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical descriptions has often led to amazing discoveries." Pretty cool, huh?

3. The Bible is proven to be **scientifically accurate**.

Many of the principles of modern science were recorded as facts of nature in the Bible long before scientists confirmed them experimentally. Just a few of these include:

- The roundness of the earth (Isaiah 40:22)
- The Law of Conservation of Mass and Energy (2 Peter 3:7)
- The Hydrologic Cycle (Ecclesiastes 1:7)
- The vast number of stars (Jeremiah 33:22)
- The Law of Increasing Entropy (Psalm 102:25-27)
- Gravitational fields (Job 26:7)



I love how God and science are not at war like many people think. God uses science to help us understand the world He created! Everything in nature points back to Him.

4. The Bible is proven to be **structurally accurate**.

Although it's a collection of 66 books written by 40 different men over a period of 2,000 years, it is clearly one book with perfect unity and consistency throughout.

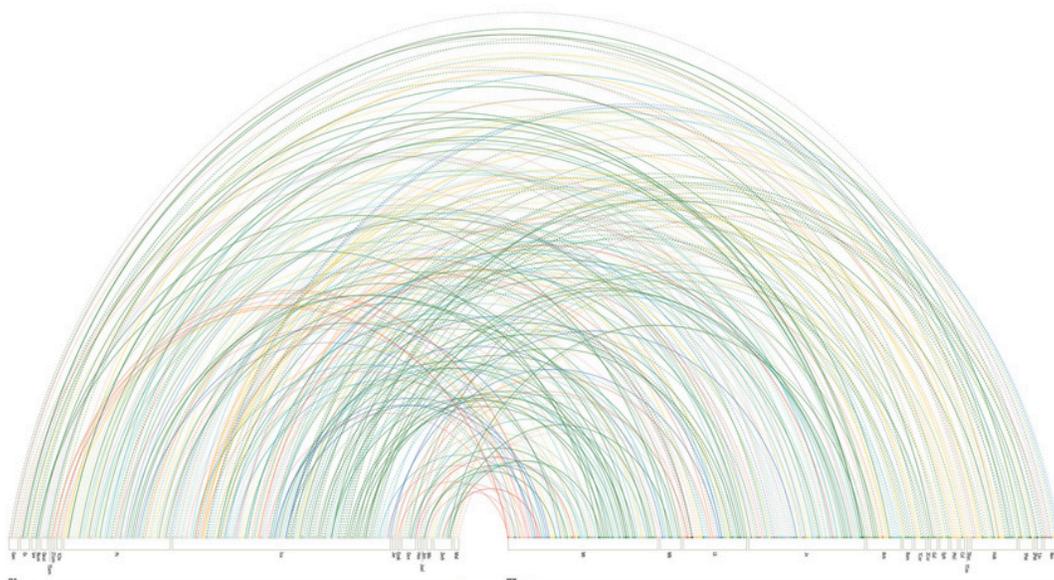
The writers had no idea that their message would eventually be put with other texts to create the Bible, yet each book fits into place and serves its own unique purpose as a part of the whole. There are structural and mathematical patterns throughout, with intricate details and symmetry that could never have happened by chance.

The one consistent theme from Genesis to Revelation is God's great work in the creation and redemption of all things, through His only Son Jesus Christ. There are thousands of cross-references in the Bible, proving this beautiful revelation; it was certainly created and organized by God!

5. The Bible is proven to be **prophetically accurate**.

A prophecy is a prediction that is given to a person or group that tells them something will happen. There are 6,000 prophecies in the Bible, 3,000 of which have already come true, and 3,000 more which we're waiting on to come true regarding the future of our world. If the Bible were not inspired by God, how could its human writers have known about thousands of events in the future?

This powerful graphic reveals Jesus as the Messiah! It shows every Old Testament prophecy about Him, and then where each one was fulfilled in the New Testament. This does not include all of the other accurate prophecies we see in the Bible.



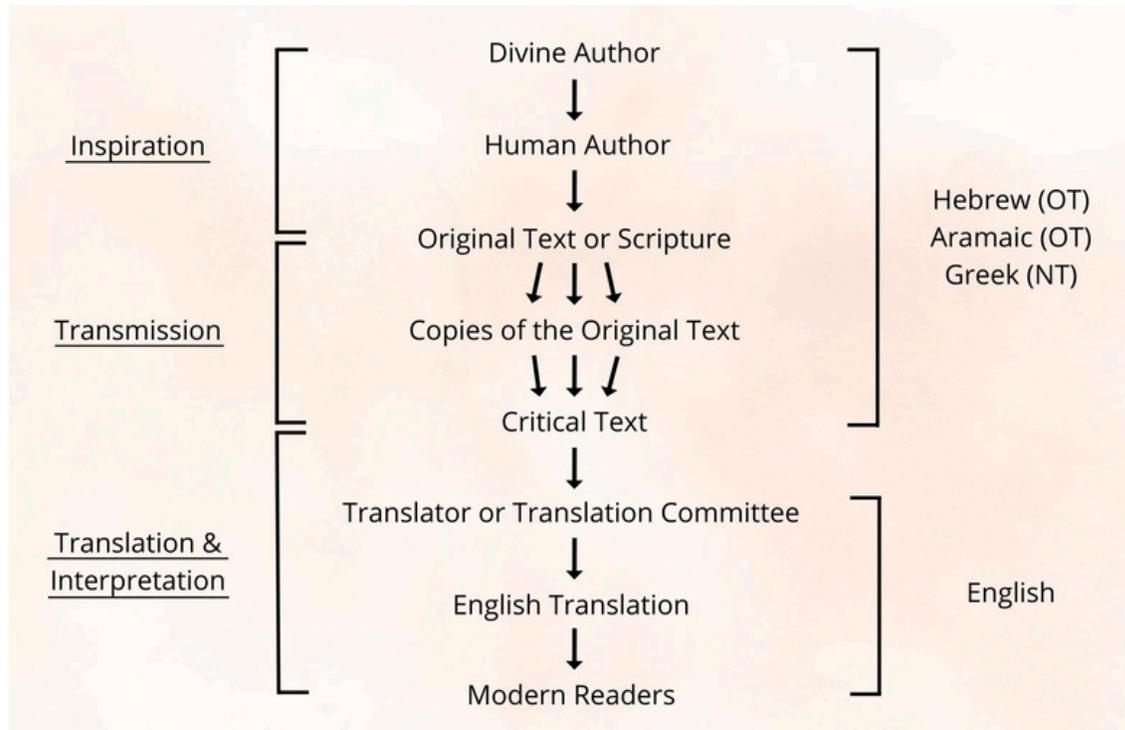
6. The Bible is proven to be **effectually accurate**.

This book stands alone because of its incredible effect on both individuals as well as the history of nations and our world. No other book has ever held such universal appeal or produced such lasting effects because it speaks to both hearts and minds, but has no conditions. The rich, poor, scholars, simpletons, kings, and commoners, can all find meaning and help from God's Word.

Authors Henry Morris and Martin Clark say this; "One final evidence that the Bible is true is found in the testimony of those who have believed it. Multitudes of people, past and present, have found from personal experience that its promises are true, its counsel is sound, its commands and restrictions are wise, and its wonderful message of salvation meets every need for both time and eternity."

# How did the Bible come to be?

If we were to create a working order of things, it would look something like this:



God's plan was for His Word to be accessible to everyone. As time went on, the Bible went from a collection of giant scrolls to a physical book that could be carried and read at any time, to, now - an app on our phone!

Over hundreds of years, many different councils came together to agree on which books should be included in the Bible. The chosen books were then translated, formatted, and compiled in more organized ways. Where we see "Critical Text" on the chart, that means *Textual Analysis* was used to make sure any copies of the text were legitimate and as close to the original as possible.



Between 1380-1382 John Wycliffe and his associates translated the entire Bible from Latin into English for the first time. That was the foundation for the English Bible you and I use today! After he died, the Church exhumed and burned his corpse as punishment for his translation work. They didn't like that he was making the book more accessible to other people.

The cost of a Bible back in the 1300s would have easily cost the amount of a priest's entire yearly income.

In 1526, William Tyndale was the first man to print the New Testament in English. He was later hung and burned at the stake for his efforts because the Church thought he was altering the Bible to go against their version. The first printed English translation of the entire Bible was produced by Miles Coverdale in 1535, using Tyndale's work together with his own translations.

Then in 1557 the Geneva Bible - Produced in Geneva, Switzerland - was the first Bible to be printed on a printing press. This version of the Bible is significant because, for the first time, the Bible could be mass-produced and made available directly to the general public.

Finally, in 1611, the King James Version was produced, which was the most popular English translation of the Bible from the mid-17th century to the early 20th century - and is still popular today. As you can see, a lot of time, energy, and hard work went into getting the Bible we have today. Makes you appreciate it a little more, right?



## Interesting Bible Facts

- The first Bibles did not have verses. The Geneva Bible is the first Bible to use numbered verses. It's also the Bible Shakespeare used and the one that the Pilgrims brought to America on the Mayflower in 1620.
- The Bible is the most stolen book in the world, as well as the world's best selling book! It is estimated that between 5 and 7 billion copies of the Bible have been printed.
- China leads the world in Bible production. The Amity Printing Company in Nanjing, China, continues to produce Bibles year after year, employing over 600 people.
- On average, the Bible is over 600,000 words long. Different translations are even longer, like the King James Bible (KJV) with 783,137 words. There will always be a variation in word count because some translations use more words to get the message across.
- The Bible in its entirety has been translated into 775 languages and smaller portions have been translated into over 4,000 languages.
- The last word in the Bible is "Amen". AMEN means "firm", "fixed", or "sure", and the related Hebrew verb also means "to be reliable" and "to be trusted". What a perfect way to end the Bible! The Greek Old Testament usually translates amen as "so be it". So when we pray and end it with "AMEN", it's as if we are saying "SO BE IT".

# How is the Bible Organized?

The Bible is made up of 66 books - 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament. To help us visualize this, here is a list of it's books.

## OLD TESTAMENT

(PENTATEUCH)	<b>HISTORY</b>	(MAJOR)	<b>PROPHETS</b>
	GENESIS		ISAIAH
	EXODUS		JEREMIAH
	LEVITICUS		LAMENTATIONS
	NUMBERS		EZEKIEL
	DEUTERONOMY		DANIEL
	JOSHUA		HOSEA
	JUDGES		JOEL
	RUTH		AMOS
	1 SAMUEL		OBADIAH
	2 SAMUEL		JONAH
	1 KINGS	MICAH	
	2 KINGS	NAHUM	
	1 CHRONICLES	HABAKKUK	
	2 CHRONICLES	ZEPHANIAH	
	EZRA	HAGGAI	
	NEHEMIAH	ZECHARIAH	
	ESTHER	MALACHI	
			(MINOR)
	<b>POETRY</b>		
	JOB		
	PSALMS		
PROVERBS			
ECCLESIASTES			
SONG OF SOLOMON			

## NEW TESTAMENT

(PAUL)	<b>GOSPELS</b>	<b>EPISTLES (LETTERS)</b>
	MATTHEW	ROMANS
	MARK	1 CORINTHIANS
	LUKE	2 CORINTHIANS
	JOHN	GALATIANS
		EPHESIANS
	<b>ACTS</b>	PHILIPPIANS
	ACTS OF THE APOSTLES	COLOSSIANS
		1 THESSALONIANS
		2 THESSALONIANS
(GENERAL)		1 TIMOTHY
		2 TIMOTHY
		TITUS
		PHILEMON
		HEBREWS
		JAMES
		1 PETER
		2 PETER
		1 JOHN
		2 JOHN
	3 JOHN	
	JUDE	
	<b>PROPHECY</b>	
	REVELATION	

Each book is broken up into chapters, and each chapter is broken up into verses. Each chapter and verse have a number, so if we want to reference a certain verse, we would say the book, the chapter, a :, then the verse number.



For example, the first verse of the Bible is Genesis 1:1. So chapter 1, verse 1. The last verse in the Bible is Revelation 22:21. This shows Revelation has 22 chapters, and the last chapter has 21 verses.

The Bible includes 1,189 chapters, with 929 in the Old Testament and 260 in the New Testament.

If you were to open your Bible with your fingers in the middle, you'd probably land in the Psalms. The book of Psalms has the most chapters of any book in the Bible - 150! But it also includes the shortest chapter (117) and the longest chapter (119) in the Bible.

Not just that, but the two verses in the very center of the Bible are Psalm 103:1-2 NIV. They say this: "Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise His holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all His benefits". The exact center of the Bible is all about praising God with everything that we are - and not forgetting how beneficial He is to us.

Now let's get to the books.

The Bible has **17 historical books** - Genesis through Esther. These books show the historical events of the Old Testament. The first 5 are called the "Pentateuch" - or the "five books of Moses". You'll also notice that some historical books - Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles - are split into parts. This is because in those days they used scrolls for writing and storing text, and those books were so long they couldn't print all of it on one scroll. Even if they wanted to try, the scroll would be way too heavy to manage.



Next are the **5 poetical books** - or books of poetry. These are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. These books serve as a link between the historical past and the prophetic books of the future. They include songs and poems written by many authors including King David and King Solomon. Believe it or not, there are 185 songs in the Bible - including chants, hymns, and dirges (a dirge is a mournful song or lament). The majority of these are in the Psalms, which is partly why it's the longest book. The word "psalm" comes from the Greek psalmos, meaning "song sung on a harp." Around 75 of the Psalms were authored by King David, who actually did play the harp.

Then we have **17 prophetic books** - A prophet is someone who was considered an inspired teacher or proclaimer of the will of God. So although **all** Scripture is inspired by God, these people were specifically known for proclaiming God's will to those around them. The **Major** prophets are Isaiah through Daniel, and the **Minor** prophets are Hosea through Malachi. The difference between major and minor prophets is simply the difference in **length** of their books. Major = longer, minor = shorter.

The Bible has **4 Gospels** - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The term "Gos" comes from the Old English word for God, meaning "good" - and is partnered with "Spel" which means "news." So in Christianity, the words "Good News" refer to Jesus' birth, life, sacrificial death on the cross, and resurrection as part of saving His beloved people. The Gospels are the four books that tell the good news of Jesus! They were written about 40 years after Jesus' death, and tell the same story from four different perspectives - which means they each reveal different ideas, concerns, and details.



In most Bibles now, any time we see Jesus speak, His words are **written in red** - to show emphasis and power, but also to remind us of the blood He shed on the cross for us.

Next we find **Acts** which has its own kind of category. It is short for "Acts of the Apostles". The apostles were the 12 core disciples (or followers) of Jesus, and this book shows the important history of the early Christian church. It shares what happened after Jesus went up to heaven after He was raised from the dead - and teaches us a lot about how the Christian Church grew and spread.

Then we have **21 Epistles (Letters)** - This sounds very similar to "Apostles", but it actually just means that it was written in the form of a letter. The first 13, Romans through Philemon, were written by Paul, and the last 8, Hebrews through Jude, were written by other various authors. You'll see that just like in the Old Testament, some of these letters were split into parts - Corinthians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Peter, and John. This isn't for the same reason as the Old Testament, though. These books were broken up because the letters came from the same author but were being sent to different places; or to the same place for different reasons.

Last but not least, we have **Revelation**. This book finishes the Bible with another book of prophecy, telling the story of what the future looks like through a vision given to the Apostle John, one of Jesus' closest disciples. This book uses a lot of unique imagery to teach us what will happen when the world comes to an end.



## Which Bible Translation is the best?

Over the last 400 years, many different English translations of the Bible have been created. Which tends to make people wonder if there's one version that is better than all the rest. Older generations may instantly say that the King James Version trumps all the others because it is the original. But the language used in that version is often difficult for people in our age to understand and connect with. This is due to the outdated style of speech and constant use of "thee", "thy", "thou", etc.

That's why I'll answer that question like this: **The best translation of the Bible is the one you will read, understand, and grow from.**

If that's the King James Version, then great! But if you find that it's easier to connect with the English Standard Version, the New International Version, or the New Living Translation, that's perfectly okay too. I would recommend using the Bible app to compare the most common ones I just mentioned, to see which one you find the most natural to read.

On the next page you'll see an example of how Ephesians 2:8-9 changes slightly between different translations. The meaning doesn't change, but the way it's explained does. Take a minute to read through these and notice the changes.



**King James Version (KJV):** 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

**English Standard Version (ESV):** 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

**New International Version (NIV):** 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

**New Living Translation (NLT):** 8 God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. 9 Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

As you learn more about reading and studying the Bible, you may discover which translation you like the best. You may even use different translations for different purposes. For daily reading, you may prefer the NIV because it holds true to a lot of the structure of the KJV, but it's more modern and easy to follow. NLT tends to put things in easily understandable terms, like you're having a normal conversation with someone. For deep study you may use the ESV because it is the closest to the original text without the older language of the KJV.

The best thing you can do is try one out and see how God speaks to you through it. The most important part about reading God's Word is that you understand it so you can apply it to your life!



## Does everything in the Bible still apply to us today?

As you read the Bible more, you'll realize how different the culture of that time was. Thousands of years have passed since the Bible was written, but that doesn't mean it's irrelevant. The people of that time may have had very different occupations, living conditions, laws, and languages from us, but what God teaches us in His Word has a lot more to do with the condition of our heart than the conditions of our surroundings.

The people in the Bible struggled with the exact same things we do, just in different ways. They were faced with putting other things before God (idols), with lying, cheating, swearing, lusting, caring too much about money, sex, or status, and in general, trying to figure out their purpose. We may not live in tents, or cities with fortified walls around them, we may not be farmers or fishermen, or have to make animal sacrifices for our sin, but we DO have to wrestle with the same internal decisions they did.

We have to decide each day to live a life for God, or live a life for ourselves. If we can look past the differences in culture to see what God is really trying to say to us about life and His purpose for us, we will connect with the Bible in a powerful way. The Old Testament reveals what life was like before Jesus, and the New Testament reveals how Jesus changed everything on the cross, making a new mission for us - to learn about His love and share that love with the rest of the world!



## Is the Bible really “alive”?

The Bible is a physical book, and yet it is also truly alive. Philippians 2:16 says the Bible is the “word of life”. Hebrews 4:12 says it is “alive and active”.

1 Peter 1:23, NLT says, “For you have been born again, but not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal, living word of God.”

How can the Bible, an object, be alive? God speaks of himself as a “living God” in 2 Corinthians 6:16. Jesus Christ is called the “Prince of Life” in Acts 3:15. The Holy Spirit is called the “Spirit of life”. So God lives, Christ lives, and the Holy Spirit lives. Now Peter is saying that the word of God lives.

When we continue in verses 24 and 25 of 1 Peter, it says “As the Scriptures say, “People are like grass; their beauty is like a flower in the field. The grass withers and the flower fades. But the word of the Lord remains forever.” See the contrast there? Everything on this earth is dead or dying. It will not last forever. But everything in this book, will. It cannot be corrupted or changed, and its truth cannot decay.

Here are 5 ways we can know that the Bible is alive.

1. **It’s lasting freshness.** Every person who picks up the Bible, no matter how many times they’ve read it, can learn something new. No other book on earth is like that.



2. **It will never be obsolete.** Not one thing in the Bible is scientifically or historically inaccurate. It will never become outdated or old. It's timeless!

3. **It is indestructible.** Yes, someone can burn or physically destroy a Bible, but its contents and power cannot be stopped. Many people have tried to destroy the Bible, disprove it, or hide it, and nothing has worked so far.

4. **It can discern hearts.** It has insight into who we are, able to reveal our deepest, innermost thoughts and desires. It can detect motives and discern needs.

5. **It produces growth.** The true test of a living thing is if it can produce new living things. The Bible plants seeds in us, then waters them until they bloom. It does not bring death, but life.

So in summary, the Bible not only has life, it also gives life - and then helps sustain it. When we aren't reading the Word of God we will feel spiritually undernourished and weak. But when we consume it regularly we will be our strongest, most fruitful selves because we will be connected to the very source of life itself - God.

The exciting thing is, that because we are always evolving and changing in our walk with God, every time we open up the Bible it can be like we're reading it for the first time. God will use certain verses in certain seasons to open us up to His truth at the perfect time. That means the Bible will always contain the same words and message, but to each of us, it will be a unique, personal experience - and never boring!



## Part Two

# *Studying the Bible*

Knowing *about* the Bible isn't where we should stop. We can be "Bible experts" when it comes to facts and figures - but reading, studying, and meditating on what the Bible contains will give us the fullest and most purposeful life possible.





# Where to Start

In part one we learned a lot about the Bible. So now that we have those facts in our brains, let's tackle a topic I think many people wonder - how do we actually read it? Should we just open it up to a random spot and start going? Do we start at the beginning? The Psalms or Proverbs? The New Testament?

One truth I'll share is that no matter what you read in the Bible, if you genuinely want to learn from it, you will. If you're a Christian, then the Holy Spirit in you will make the Bible come alive - and every time you open it, truth and life can be found. Remember that God loves to teach us, encourage us, and correct us through its pages - we just have to do our part of opening it up and making an effort.

A second truth is, having a plan and confidence in how you read it will also be greatly beneficial!

In my own life, there have been times where I was so desperate to hear from God that I actually felt Him telling me a chapter or verse to look up. I'd sense that I should read a certain passage in say, Isaiah or the Psalms, and when I did, I realized what God was trying to communicate me.

There have also been times where I've opened my Bible up and it fell on *just* the page I needed to read. Both of those examples are nice, but quite rare. I'd say that 99% of the time, I needed to intentionally make an effort to read something that I knew would be a good direction to start in.

Let's discuss some key prep work to reading the Bible, give you some study starting points to choose from, and then you can decide which one you'd like to take! After that, I'll help you learn the basics of **Bible explication** - which is a fancy way of saying that we'll look at some verses and analyze them to reveal their meaning. That will help you get the most out of what you're reading as you go through the Bible.

## Choosing a Bible

First, you have to choose a Bible. Before we get into different Bible study methods, we each have to decide which Bible we would like to read!

If you're really into the digital world and love reading on your phone or tablet, the **YouVersion Bible app** is an incredible tool for that. It has every translation of the Bible, as well as thousands of reading plans and devotionals and even search tools to help you find what you're looking for.

Making a free account allows you to highlight verses, take notes, go through reading plans with friends, and a whole lot more! If you always have your phone on you, it's nice to have the app as a reference when you want to look something up, or if you're on the go and want to get some Bible reading in.

Download the App here:  
[youversion.com/bible-app](https://youversion.com/bible-app)

Or scan the QR code with your camera:





Although the Bible app is a great option, there is also something very special about having a real, physical Bible. It helps you to connect with God's Word tangibly. You can write notes in the margins with your own hand, and highlight, circle, or underline things in a personal way that is more fluid than a digital version. It's often easier to flip through a real Bible than to navigate through the screens of a digital one.

Remember in Part 1 how we talked about different **translations**? This is the time you'll have to decide which translation you'd like to start with. The app allows you to change the translation at any time, but choosing a physical Bible means choosing the style you'd like to commit to. I would highly recommend the NIV or NLT to start. The NIV is slightly more traditional, and the NLT is slightly more modern, but they are both reliable options for Bible Study.

There is also one more thing to think about when it comes to choosing a physical Bible. There are a lot of great options out there to help people who want to do more than just read the book. There are **Standard Bibles** that list the books of the Bible in the front so you know where to find each one, and in the back it may have some charts, maps, and references to help you understand certain places or concepts. This is your average, basic Bible.

Then there are **Study Bibles**. This is what we give out to new believers at New Life, because it offers so much more to help you learn. A study Bible has footnotes about each verse or passage that offer context to what is being said so the reader has a better understanding of the culture, the meaning of certain words, or any important details that expand on the intention of the writer.



There are introductions to each book, character profiles for key figures, maps, and more. These are very helpful with study because they allow you to read a passage as it is, and then read the notes below to give you a deeper understanding. This may be a good choice for you if you want to have one Bible to do all your reading in because it will be helpful for years to come.

There are also **One Year Bibles**. These are designed to help you read the entire Bible in a year, either taking you through the books chronologically - how they happened in time - or with a mix of the Old Testament, New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs in each day. I would recommend this style for people that are already familiar with the Bible and can handle reading a mixture of different books each day, or someone who specifically wants to reach the goal of reading through the Bible in exactly one year. I'd say it's more for daily reading than for deep study.

For those of you who do not have a Bible yet, I would recommend trying **both** a digital Bible and a physical Bible to see which you like better! It is a personal preference, but one that is fun to explore. You may find you like to use the different Bibles for different purposes.

Other helpful **Bible Study Tools** that are affordable and may help you on your journey are Bible Book Tabs (you can stick them to the side of the pages to show where each book of the Bible is for quick reference), Bible highlighters (designed not to bleed through the pages), a fast-drying pen or pencil for circling or underlining parts of the passages that stand out to you, and a journal for having more space to take notes, pray, or write down insight that God wants you to know in the season you're in.



# The Importance of Context

Now that you have a Bible and are ready to start reading and studying, the most important thing to remember is reading in **context**. We want to shy away from reading just *one* Bible verse, which gives us a very shallow look at the meaning and will likely result in poor understanding. Instead, we should read a paragraph, a chapter, or a whole book at one time in order to get the full picture of what is happening.

After reading a passage, we can ask questions like:

- “What is the passage as a whole saying?”
- “What do the surrounding verses reveal about the one I am focusing on?”
- “What was the original intent of the author?”
- “How did this apply by then, and how does it apply now?”
- “Is there something God wants *me* to learn through this?”

Another important part of context is understanding what **genre** of biblical text you are reading. Is it history, poetry, a narrative, or a list of laws? Is it a prophecy or vision for a certain person or people group? This will also influence the way you read and interpret the Scriptures.

As you read, many questions may arise that you need answers for. This is where a Study Bible, or using online Bible tools can be helpful to learn more about the cultural context. I often look up the meaning of words I’m not familiar with and write the definition nearby in the margins. Through a quick online search you can find commentaries from Bible scholars with added wisdom and insight.



# Deciding What to Read First

Now let's talk about different reading plans. It can be overwhelming to choose a place to start when you have 66 different book options! I'd always recommend spending a few minutes in prayer and asking God directly, "where do I start?" - but you can also look through the following options and see if one stands out to you the most based on your current faith journey.

## **I'm Brand New to the Bible and Faith in Jesus**

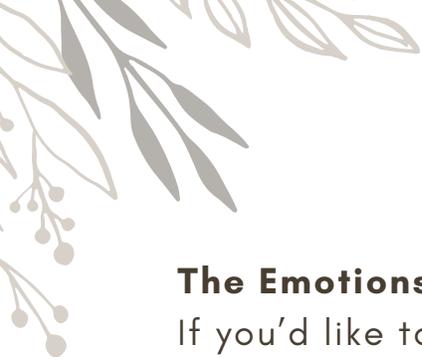
Start with the book of John (the fourth book in the New Testament). This will take you through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus so you can learn about His character, love, and lifestyle and mission with His disciples - His closest inner followers.

## **Learning about the Christian Life**

Once you've read through John or another one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke), continue on to the book of Acts to learn about the early Christian church and how they lived out their faith. After finishing Acts, Romans and Ephesians will give you ample insight, challenges, and clear direction for living a life surrendered to Jesus - and counter-intuitive to the culture we live in!

## **The Beginning of the World**

If you want to focus on how the world began, the fall of mankind, and the earliest leaders of the faith, Genesis and Exodus are packed with thrilling historical accounts of early life on earth. These include the stories of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Joseph, and more.



## **The Emotions of the Christian Journey**

If you'd like to read and experience how people in history handled both the mountaintop highs of walking with God - along with the darkest valleys - the book of Psalms has 150 chapters filled with beautiful praise all the way down to deep sorrow and suffering. God created us with emotions, and expressing them fully to Him is a way to connect and bring our experiences into His presence. You can use portions of the Psalms as prayers for yourself, or be inspired to write your own Psalms as you journal to God about your life.

## **Wisdom for Everyday Life**

Proverbs is known as the book of wisdom, and for good reason. In its 31 chapters are vast amounts of knowledge to help us make wise decisions in every part of our life. With topics like discretion, counsel, instruction, judgment, reproof, integrity, and purity, you are bound to learn many things that will challenge you to become a wiser person as you develop your Christian character.

## **All Four Gospels**

If you're interested in reading every part of Jesus' life and the words He spoke while on earth through the lens of four different authors, you may want to read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in order.

Matthew was written to the Jewish people, so you will see many Old Testament quotes and references pertaining to their customs. Mark is the shortest Gospel and was written to the Romans. It is more of a summary and feels action-packed. Luke was written to the Gentiles (those who were not Jewish) and has the most detail as he was a physician and highly educated. John was written to Christians and those seeking to understand Christ. He was the closest companion of Jesus and provides unique insight.

### **The Bible in a Year**

I'd recommend this for people who have already spent time in God's Word and are more familiar with its structure, style of writing, and overall themes. Perhaps read through the New Testament as a whole first, and then as you add in the Old Testament books you will begin to see how everything correlates together with less confusion. You can read the Bible chronologically (in order with time), or some plans have you jump around to different books and chapters so that there is a variety in your daily reading.

### **One Book of Interest**

If none of these other plans seem to fit your style, you may be in a place where you want to do a deep-dive into a specific book of the Bible you're interested in or know the least about. For this I would recommend using your Study Bible, a commentary, or other online sources to get the fullest picture of what's happening in the book. Take plenty of time to read, pray, and absorb each chapter and take notes on everything you learn. Focusing on one book can be a great way to learn new Bible study tools and feel connected to God's heart.

## Bible Hub

One of my favorite Bible study resources is **Biblehub.com** (QR code). It is packed with Bible study tools of every kind to help you understand what you're reading. You can search any verse and find the original translations in Hebrew or Greek, read commentaries, and so much more!





# Bible Study Methods

You have your Bible, you've chosen a reading plan, and now you're ready to go! What are some ways to get the most out of reading God's Word?

1. Start with Prayer - invite the Holy Spirit into your reading time and ask God to reveal what He wants to.
2. No need to rush - take your time and be thankful for the opportunity to get insight from the mind and heart of your Heavenly Father. The Bible is a beautiful gift to receive.
3. Have an open heart - if your attitude is not in check, you may not hear from God clearly through the Bible. Confess anything you feel is getting in the way, and do your best to be fully present.
4. Ask the right questions - remember to look at the passages you're reading with context in mind and to ask what the original meaning was - not just what it may mean for you (or us) today.
5. Just do it - practice is how we get better at anything, so sometimes we just have to start the process and trust that God will do wonderful things through His Words to us.

## **Three Ways to Study a Bible Passage**

1. Word Study: Choose one verse and look up the original meaning of the key words (OT Hebrew, NT Greek) on [biblehub.com](http://biblehub.com) - search a verse, click on Greek (NT) - view each word, and click "Strong's" for more information.

Write out the verse adding in additional definitions or words with the new context you learned from the study. Summarize the verse in a fresh way using the words you liked most for each definition. Reread it out loud and ask God what He wants to speak to you.



Let's practice with a short but powerful verse:

**Be still and know that I am God. Psalm 46:10**

Word Study - Hebrew

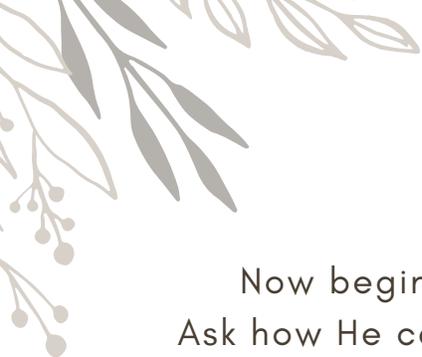
- Be still = raphah: to relax, let go, cease, be weak, be idle
- Know = yada: acknowledge, advise, answer, appoint, be assured of, be aware
- I am = anoki: myself
- God = elohim: exceeding, supreme, very great, mighty

2. Three Questions: Choose one verse (or small passage) and write it out. Read it out loud and ask (then journal your answers):

- a. How would I summarize this in one sentence?
- b. What did this verse mean in its original context (what was its purpose back then)
- c. How can I apply this verse to my life today?

3. Lectio Divina ("Divine Reading"): You'll want to find a quiet, calm space to sit in with your Bible (this is very important) and take some deep breaths, working to bring your focus inward to your time with God and His Word. Once you are comfortable and ready, slowly read the verse(s) word by word, really focusing on each one as you go. As you read, pay attention to what word or phrases catch your attention.

Meditate on the word or phrase that most captures you. Repeat it over many times again, both to yourself and out loud. What thoughts come to mind? Words, phrases, ideas, pictures? What in life are you reminded of? What does it make you hope for? (Note: If other thoughts creep in to distract you, be patient - this takes practice over time. Just move back into focus as you can.)



Now begin to pray to God. Tell Him what captured your attention. Ask how He can use that word or phrase to bless or transform you. Tell Him your feelings (good and bad) and ask Him to align your heart with His. Remember that God's presence is with you; try to feel Him near to you. Invite Him in. Read the text again if needed. Read it quietly to yourself, then out loud. Give power to its words by speaking it confidently. End with gratitude and thanks for God's Word and His willingness to meet you right where you are.

## Studying in a Group

Reading the Bible on your own is an important spiritual discipline, and one we should practice daily. There is also a benefit to reading and studying God's Word with other believers - whether that be on a Sunday morning at church, at a weekly small group, with your spouse or partner, or with a friend. Sometimes we'll gain important insight or a unique perspective by reflecting and sharing our experiences with different types of people. We may even see a Bible passage or theme in a new way! It also makes space for encouragement and prayer as you navigate Scripture in a safe space and discuss what God is doing as you read together.

If you've never studied the Bible in a group setting before, consider trying it out! Small groups are a great place to get started as they offer guidance and wisdom from leaders who will have experience in answering questions and guiding discussion. It's okay if you're brand new - your brothers and sisters in Christ will enjoy getting to help you understand more about God through His Word, and may even learn something new from your point of view!

## Final Thoughts

Now that you've been given plenty of ideas and steps to try out, the only thing left is to start practicing what you've learned! Every new spiritual practice can be intimidating - but God will be with you and His Holy Spirit in you will be your helper. Remember to invite Him into your Bible time, and be patient as you go. Before you know it, the structure, storyline, and overall themes of the Bible will become more apparent. You'll begin to see patterns, learn about the different people who wrote the Bible and were part of its history, and most importantly, you'll get to know God at a deeper level.

God's Word is a precious gift to us, so don't take it for granted! Enjoy the access to truth and life you have in its pages, and let it transform you from the inside out. Someday you may even find yourself sharing what you've learned with others with ease, using the power of God in you to share His love with them.

If you have questions for our pastors or want to get connected in community at New Life, we're here for you! Reach out to us at **[newlifefm.com/connect](http://newlifefm.com/connect)** and let us know you'd like to meet, join a small, group, or take another next step of faith.



Your word is a lamp for my feet,  
a light on my path.

Psalm 119:105



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