



# How To Study God's Word

By

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# Your Bible

Hold your Bible in your hands for a moment. Look at the front, side and back. What do you learn from the words printed there? Open your Bible and look at the first several pages. What do you learn from what's printed there? You are holding the Holy Bible – the very Words of God.

Unless you read from the Hebrew or Koine Greek, you are reading a translation of the Bible. Who did the translation? Is it an old translation or new one? Does your Bible contain any extra-biblical resources like a concordance, dictionary, word study, maps, footnotes, section notes, study aids, subject index, etc? Do you own more than one Bible? If so, look at each one similarly to see what you have in your Bible study arsenal. Keep in mind that the only words in your Bible that are God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16) and infallible are those specific inspired words found between Genesis 1:1 and Revelation 22:21. All of the rest

is what human beings wrote about what God inspired. Human thought is fine, but God's Thoughts are divine.

God's Word is a huge book. God inspired at least 40 people to write His Word over a period of about 1,500 years. It contains more than 783,000 Words, more than 31,000 Verses, 1,189 Chapters, and 66 Books divided into two Testaments. The Old Testament is made up of more than 8,670 Hebrew words. The New Testament is made up of more than 5,620 Greek words. How can we study the Bible thoroughly and correctly?

The first thing about studying the Bible is **desire**. You have to want to study it. That's why I started this blog series with the what and why of studying the Bible. You have to believe that studying God's Word is important, vital to your life. Why do people do anything? Because they want to – they have to. To me, studying the Bible falls into both categories. I want to study the Bible because I want to

hear straight from God without anyone getting in the way of the message. I also have to study the Bible. It is my spiritual food and water. I hunger and thirst for it. God's Word feeds my soul and my mind and heart. I must have it every day.

I have made an assumption that if you're reading this it's because you want to. If I saw a blog with a title of "How To Study Egg Shells," I doubt I'd read it. Not because there's anything wrong with egg shells. I'm just not interested. I don't have a desire to learn about egg shells. It's not something I need in my life on a regular basis. But if you love egg shells with all your heart and hunger and thirst for knowledge about egg shells, you would most likely read a blog about studying egg shells. In fact, you would probably own a small library about egg shells and spend much of your free time building an egg shell collection.

The one thing about egg shells that does interest me is that God created them. I would study about egg shells from that perspective. I'm fascinated by anything God has touched. And why is that? Because of the years I've studied the Bible. I've compared what I've learned in Bible study to everything else. Studying God's Word will give you a unique perspective on life and everything in it. That's because you know who created life and everything in it.

No matter what you've heard on television or read in books, God has inspired only one Book. He started with Moses and continued to inspire Hebrew people. God called out Abraham and protected the lineage of His Holy Promise to Abraham through Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons. God gave His people a name – Israel. God's Word is for Israel and to Israel. It was through the Apostle Paul that God spoke to Gentiles. God also spoke to Greeks through Luke, who learned at the feet of Paul. That's it. That's all God has said. God has not spoken

differently to people of other nations and religions. If people want to hear from the One True God, they will have to read and study the Holy Bible.

Most Christians who are involved in Bible study do so in groups. They open their Bibles at church or Sunday school or a small group Bible study or a Bible conference. They may even use notes from their group to do some extra Bible study at home. That's fine, but it's not the kind of Bible study I'm writing about.

The Bible study I'm going to share with you is personal and powerful. It's you and God – in His Word – together. Nobody else is around. Just you and God. That is the most exciting type of Bible study anyone can have. You read God's Word and He speaks to you through it. Personally! God speaks to you personally through private Bible study! It is an awesome thing to come into the Presence of

Almighty God and that is what you do when you study God's Word alone.

**God becomes your Teacher!** Think about that. The God of Heaven visits you every time you open His Word and ask Him to Teach you. That is something I cannot adequately explain. The Holy Spirit in us Speaks to us through His Word. You will actually "feel" Him inside of you as He Teaches you. Remember that the Holy Spirit in you inspired people to write His Word. He is the One Person Who can explain it to you. God the Father will overshadow you as you study His Word. You will feel the Presence of God **around you** even as you feel His Presence **in you**. What is it they Teach? Jesus. Jesus. Jesus. The entire Bible, all of the Word of God, is about Jesus. From start to finish, the Bible is about Jesus. So, guess Who is also with you as you study the Bible privately? That's right – Jesus! Jesus Christ, your Lord and Savior, the One Who shed His Blood for you on the Cross, sits with you as you read



about Him. Amazing! Personal Bible study is you and God together – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Wow!

Don't misunderstand me. I believe in group Bible studies. But imagine how powerful it would be if every person in a group Bible study had experienced a one-on-One personal Bible study. The Bible is worthy studying and God wants to Teach you personally!

## The I M Bible Study Method

The first course I took in Bible college was a two-semester class called Bible Hermeneutics. That's the study of the methods and principles of interpreting God's Word. I call it the **I M Bible Study Method** – short for **Inductive Methodical** Bible Study.

God's Spirit **inspired** the writing of Scripture, so I want to know what He meant when He inspired it. I'm less interested in knowing what people think God meant. I want the Holy Spirit to tell me what He meant. He lives in me and shows me what He means as I listen to Him.

Reasoning is often viewed in classical literature and science as logical thinking. Deductive reasoning is viewed at arriving at a specific conclusion based on generalizations. This is where people start with what they believe the Bible means, then look for Scriptures that

support their theories. Deductive Bible study is by its nature subjective and prejudicial. People who study the Bible deductively will find themselves dictating to God instead of hearing from Him.

On the other side, inductive reasoning moves from specific facts or events and makes generalizations based on facts. Inductive study is objective and impartial. This type of study examines the particulars of Scripture, then determines conclusions on the facts as discovered in the Word. The methodical Bible student hears from God first, then determines what to do about what they hear.

How does God want us to reason and conclude concerning His Word? Does He want us to make generalizations, then arrive at specific conclusions about His Truth? or study specific facts and events, then move to generalizations? **The I M Bible Study Method begins with specifics, then moves to general conclusions.**

My goal in Bible study is to hear directly from God. How does God speak? Through His Word. And what is His Word? Is it specific or general? Is it creative or chaotic? Is it direct or indirect? Is it orderly or messy? Does it have direction or lack direction? Is it about something or nothing? I think the answer is clear. **God's Word is specific, creative, direct, orderly, with direction, and about something very important.** Therefore, my study of the Bible will be inductive, rather than deductive.

Have you noticed in reading the Bible that God knew the end from the beginning? Jesus told His disciples that the day was coming when He would sit on the Great Throne of Heaven and judge all the nations of the world. He also said – *“Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.’”* (Matthew 25:34). How did Jesus know that was going to happen? Paul said that Christians were chosen

by God before the foundation of the world “that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love.” (Ephesians 1:4). How did God choose us that far in advance? God is organized, deliberate and methodical. Everything God does has a method to it – including the inspiration of His Word. Nothing He does is haphazard. Neither should be our study of His Word. **The key to Bible study is to find God's Method in writing it and follow it.**

Here are the five basic keys I've used for decades to learn what God means in His Word. It's not the quickest way to study, but it is the best. You may look at this and think that Bible study is overwhelming, that it's just too much to do. It's not if you are passionate to know what God said and what He meant and you give yourself time to learn. Don't be in a rush. Take it a step at a time. Remember that God's Spirit Who lives in you inspired the writing of the Bible and will guide you to understand it.

Key #1 – Observe

Key #2 – Interpret

Key #3 – Evaluate

Key #4 – Apply

Key #5 – Correlate

**First Key – Observe everything before interpreting anything.** So many people want to know what a verse means before they've studied it. Don't make that mistake. If you hear yourself trying to interpret God's Word before you've gone through the basic process of observing God's Word and hearing from God, stop yourself right away. Put a halt to any actions that bypass inductive and methodical observation.

Observation is defined as “the act or faculty of taking notice, the act or result of considering or marking attentively.” Write down all your observations about every verse in the Bible and the questions you need answered about those verses. Observation questions often become interpretation questions that often mean the difference between hearing from God and missing His point.

Many Christians are afraid to ask questions about God's Word because they're afraid they may get an answer that goes against what they've long believed or that they may be disappointed in what they learn. How sad. If what I believe is wrong, I want God to show me what's right. I will never, ever be disappointed by what God says is true. How could I be disappointed in God?

**Define every word in God's Word** – knowing what the word meant to the people who heard it is extremely important in understanding the Bible. You may need some good Hebrew and Greek references, but by all means get whatever you need to make sure you know what words mean in their original language. God did not inspire His Word in English or Spanish or French or German or Italian or scores of other languages spoken around the world. God chose to inspire His Word through the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek. You don't have to read, write or speak Hebrew and Greek to define words, but you do need a good resource that you can trust. Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies and Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words are good references for English speaking people. If you want to go further in studying the original languages of the Bible, talk with someone who does it and ask them to teach you.



Remember that this is God's Word. Everything God does is with precision. He created the world and everything in it in six days. He looked at everything He created and said it was good. He looked at His final creation, human beings, and said it was very good. The complexity and precision of His creation is staggering. We were fearfully and wonderfully made. Do you think God was any less precise when He inspired the individual words that became His Word? The Holy Spirit crafted His Word with the same care as He gave to the Creative process. That means every word we read in the Bible has a purpose. What is its purpose? Look at every word with an eye to God's purpose in using it.

Which words in the Bible are literal and which are figurative? God is quite clear about this. He did not leave it up to sinful man to determine what He meant. The Holy Spirit uses language in way that will guide us to know when He means a word or phrase to be taken literally and when He means for it to be taken figuratively.

**Find out who God used to write each portion of Scripture** – God is the Author of the Bible, but He used real people to write out His Words. Who were they? Where did they come from? What was their background? How did they come to be in the Lord's service? Why did God use them to write His Word? Do any other writers of Scripture mention them?

**Find out who they wrote to** – each writer of the Bible wrote to a specific audience. Who were they? Why would God inspire His Word to be written to them? What was it about those people and their culture and customs that would make God's message to them unique? What can we learn from their history as a people to help us understand the power of God's Word to them?

**Study the Bible in context** – that means verse-by-verse. Start at the beginning and study every verse through the ending. If you wrote me a letter and I opened it and read a few sentences in the middle of the letter, then closed it. Would you say that I had read your letter? Of course not. If I read a few sentences and then started telling others about what you wrote, would you say that I was qualified to talk about what your letter? Of course not. I know what you wrote until I read it all. I'm not qualified to tell other people about what you wrote until I read every word. The same is true about God's Word. You have to read

everything, in context, to even begin to comprehend what God has said. And you certainly shouldn't go around telling people what God says until you know what God says.

Studying the Bible in context means that we begin with individual words and move to the structure of those words. Literary structure involves all the relations and interrelations binding terms in a literary unit. Structure is the framework of writing. Do you think a professor of language and writing at a university knows more about good writing than God? I don't think so. The Bible puts all other writing to shame. Here's a quick way of understanding structure in the Bible.

1. word – individual term – is it a noun? pronoun? verb? adverb? adjective? article? preposition? conjunction? – what is the case of the word? what is the voice, person, gender and number of the word? how about its mood and tense?
2. phrase – two or more terms
3. clause – group of terms, usually with subject and verb
4. sentence – contains one or more clauses
5. paragraph – group of sentences making up a unit of thought
6. segment – group of paragraphs making up a unit of thought
7. subsection – group of segments making up a unit of thought
8. section – a group of subsections making up a unit of thought
9. division – a group of sections making up a unit of thought

10. book – a group of divisions making up a unit of thought

This is true for every Book in the Bible. God was precise in His plan and purpose for His Word. Everything was presented in an orderly fashion. Nothing was rushed. Nothing was misplaced. The same is true about Bible study. Study it in an orderly fashion. Don't be rushed. You don't have to understand everything at once. Rushing to get an interpretation of Scripture can be a dangerous thing to do. Don't misplace anything in your study. God was complete in inspiring the writing of His Word. You and I need to be complete in our study of it.

Take notes as you read the Bible. Write down your observations. Ask questions about your observations. Those questions will help you do a better job of understanding what was written. It's like being a good detective. You can write down your questions for

interpretation as you study, but don't go to interpretation until you've seen everything in the passage you're studying. Your first job as a student of the Bible is to see everything in front of you. Observe it carefully and completely. Don't leave any stone unturned. The notes you make as you read are the building blocks you'll use later to interpret God's Word and see how it applies to your life and the lives of people in your life.

There are many other important points about observation, but this will get you started in your quest. I suggest you read a Book of the Bible three times, taking notes along the way, before moving to the second step in I M Bible Study.

**Second Key – Interpret.** This is where we learn what God meant when the Scripture passage before us was written. Careful observation leads naturally to questions for interpretation. Once you finish observing a passage of Scripture, you then start answering those questions. Interpretation takes time, and should take time. What we're doing is defining the meaning of Scripture. I heard it said once that there are many observations, but only one interpretation in Bible study. God had something in mind when He inspired His Word. What was it? What was on His Mind? What was He saying to the people who received His Word.

Interpretation begins with interpretive questions. You may find that every observation leads to a question for interpretation. Answer those questions and you are well on your way to understanding God's purpose. You will find that asking questions for interpretation often leads to more observations. We sometimes miss seeing something in



our study and asking questions that are hard to answer send us back to the Word to see what we missed. Nothing wrong with that. Every good detective knows they may have to revisit the scene of a crime several times before they've seen everything. Doing that helps them solve the case. Asking and answering questions for interpretation helps us understand God's purpose.

The answers you get from the questions you ask are vital to your interpretation. Be careful to remain objective during interpretation. Bible study is exciting because you are hearing directly from God, but don't let that excitement cause you to jump to conclusions. Enjoy the joy that is in every step of Bible study. Your answers should make sense, both spiritual sense and common sense. If you are complete in your observations, questions for interpretation and answers to those questions, you will learn God's meaning. Remember, He is your Teacher.

**Third Key – Evaluate.** This is where you consider the worth of what you've studied. Evaluating the worth of God's Word is the bridge between interpretation and application. What value does what you learned about a passage of Scripture have to you? to other people today? The process of observation and interpretation shows you the value of what God said and did to the people of the Bible, but what about today? Millions of people believe the Bible is not for today. They'll tell you that to your face. Are they right? Is God's Word old fashioned? Was it only for the people it was written to thousands of years ago? Evaluate the worth of each passage of Scripture you study and be prepared to demonstrate that value to others. If your evaluation of God's Word is that it doesn't have much value to your life, you will be hard pressed to ever convince someone else of its value. If you listen to God, He will show you the value of His Word.

**Fourth Key – Apply.** You've now arrived at the place where God's Word can impact people at the deepest spiritual level. Knowing what you know, seeing what you've seen, hearing what you've heard from God, how does each passage of Scripture apply to your life? Jesus told the people of Israel 2,000 years ago that He is the Way, the Truth and the Life and that no one can come to God the Father except through Him (John 14:6). Is that still true today? or was it only true 2,000 years ago? If it is true today, which it is, then the implications are staggering – to us and the world. If Jesus is the only spiritual path to God, then every other thought about the path to God that conflicts with what Jesus said is wrong. That means billions of people are on the wrong path and will not know God in their lifetime. That's heavy! And that's just one verse out of more than 31,000 verses in the Bible.

Be as careful during application as you were during observation, interpretation and evaluation. You're dealing with eternal truth that will affect you and people in your life for eternity.

**Fifth Key – Correlate.** Correlation is where we see the big picture in God's purpose for inspiring the writing of His Word. It's where we make connections between Scriptures. We correlate Scripture when we do topical Bible studies. We look at individual words and ideas across the Word of God to learn what He has said and done through the ages. We correlate facts across the Bible. We see truths in God's Word and follow those truths into many Books of the Bible. That is a wonderful way to study God's Word "if" we've already studied the Bible inductively and methodically – word by word, verse by verse. If we haven't done that, then we will easily fall into a trap of mis-interpreting Scripture and mis-applying it to our

life and the life of other people who look to us for spiritual truth.

Bible study is worth your time and effort. The combination of praying for God to reveal His Truth to you and methodically studying God's Word to hear directly from Him is the best way to arrive at God's Truth. Ask and you shall receive!

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