




How To Study The Bible

And they read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading. (NASB) Nehemiah 8:8

One day John realized that what he knew about the Bible had come from his pastor. He was having a discussion with some close, dear friends. As they talked about God and about the Bible, he realized he could not go to the Bible and find what he believed. He realized that he could not find the answers for himself. He did not know where the Bible talked about Jesus Christ, salvation, heaven, hell, church conduct, or just about anything else. He discovered that he needed to know the Bible for himself. What if his pastors were wrong? So he decided to study the Bible for himself.

PATH TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH. Later God showed him 1 John 2:12-14 and he found that spiritual growth was not determined by how long a person was a Christian or how old a person was but by the depth of one's relationship with God. He discovered that 1 John 2:12-14 says that spiritual growth is like growing from a little child, to a young man, and then to a father in the faith. A new Christian has just started his/her journey to a deeper relationship with God and his/her sins are forgiven.

		
Little Children	Young Man	Father
"Sins forgiven" 1 John 2:12	"Strong, Word of God abides, overcomes the evil one" 1 John 2:14	"Known Him Who is from the beginning" 1 John 2:13

A Christian becomes a "young man" when he/she is spiritually strong in the faith, has a good grasp of the Bible, and is increasingly having victory over sin. He/she is not sinless, but is sinning less and less. But one can be a spiritual father in the faith only when one really knows God the Father as a friend knows a friend. Moses was a spiritual father. This was obvious by the passion of his heart. He longed to know God. He longed to see God. He wanted a deep relationship with God. As you read the passage below, remember that Moses had already performed many awesome and incredible miracles. God had brought plagues on the Egyptians through Moses. Moses had brought Israel across the Red Sea and provided them water from rocks. He was a leader of at least two million people. Yet Moses wanted something more. Listen to Moses' heart as he asks God for a favor,

Now therefore, I pray Thee, if I have found favor in Thy sight, let me know Thy ways, that I may know Thee . . . (NASB) Exodus 33:13

Moses wanted to know more than just some facts about God. He wanted to know God - really know God! The goal is not simply to know the Bible. A Christian needs to know the Bible in order to really know God - to become a spiritual father. But the goal is not to know the Bible but to know Jesus. What does 1 John 2:12-14 say is required in order to be a spiritual father?

Did God answer Moses' prayer? What does Psalm 103:7 say that God did for Moses?

Why did God show the Israelites only His acts (Ps. 103:7)? What are His acts? The acts of God are the facts about God and what He has done. They are the stories about Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Joshua, Gideon, Samson, King David, Daniel, and Elijah, for example. But God did not help the Israelites to know Him in a personal way - His ways. Why? Jeremiah 29:13-14 gives us the answer. What is the answer according to Jeremiah?

What is God's great desire for you (Jeremiah 9:23-24)?

Purpose For Studying God's Word	Result
<i>Intellectual Exercise</i>	<i>Personal Pride</i> (1 Tim. 1:3-7)
<i>Emotional Experience</i>	<i>Shallow Faith</i> (2 Tim. 4:3-4)
<i>Knowing God Personally</i>	<i>Spiritual Maturity</i> (1 John 2:12-14)

STEPS IN GROWTH. The goal of this study is help you know how to learn more about God's ways from the Bible so that you can grow more and more into a spiritual father. There are other reasons for studying the Bible. What are these other reasons?

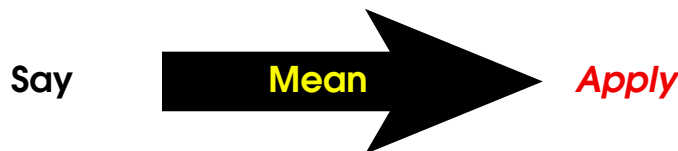
Passage	Reason To Study
Ephesians 4:11-13	_____
2 Timothy 3:15-16	_____
Revelation 1:3	_____
Hosea 4:6	_____

PREPARE TO STUDY. When we come to the Bible to learn about ourselves and about God, we need the Holy Spirit to teach us. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says that we cannot REALLY understand the Bible without the Holy Spirit’s teaching us. So we need to start by asking the Holy Spirit to teach us as we read or study the Bible. We must come with the right purpose and proper attitude. Our goal for study is to really know our Creator and to love Him. The response of our hearts should be to please Him and enjoy Him. Next, find a place where you can study. Try to give yourself at least one hour so that you get buried in the Bible and give it time to become alive within you. When you come to study the Bible, STUDY THE BIBLE. Remember you have come to learn about God first and then about yourself.

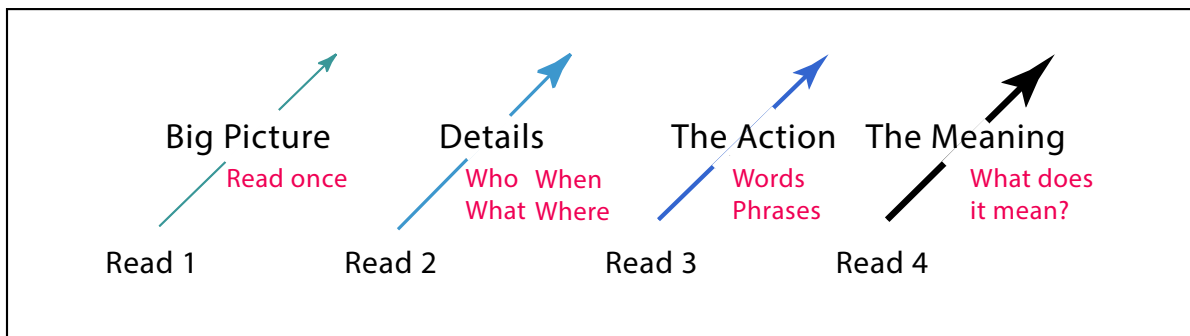
HOW THE SAINTS STUDIED THE BIBLE. The Old and New Testament saints show us how to study the Bible. There are two examples we want to examine. The first one is found in Nehemiah 8:2, 3, 5, 7-9. What do the following passages tell us about how to study the Bible?

	What Should We Do?
Nehemiah 8:8	_____
2nd answer	_____
3rd answer	_____
Nehemiah 8:9	_____

The second passage is found in 1 Timothy 4:13. Here the apostle Paul tells Timothy to give attention to “reading, exhortation and doctrine (NKJV).” So they read the Bible, gave the sense or meaning of the passage, and then they applied it or encouraged the people to respond positively to the Word of God. Let’s talk about the three steps involved in studying the Bible: The acronym SMA stands for “What does it *say*?” “What does it *mean*?” and “How does it *apply*?”



WHAT DOES IT SAY? When we study the Bible, we must first see what it says. This requires us to start by reading the part of the Bible we want to learn. It is best to read it all at once the first time in order to get the big picture or to understand what the passage is all about. In fact, we should read it several times until we can close our eyes and remember what happens step by step. We want to see the big picture - to see everything that is happening. It would be good to read the chapter that comes before the passage we are studying as well as the chapter afterward. If possible read the entire book.



SECOND READING. Next, we want to read the passage and start asking the questions like who, what, when where, how and why? Who is the passage about? Who is talking and what are they doing? To whom is the passage written? What happens and to whom does it happen? What unusual things occurred? At what are you surprised? What is the purpose of the passage, the chapter, and the book? When and where does it happen? How do things happen? Why do the people, angels or God do what they do? These questions help you start to understand the passage.

THIRD READING. The third time we read the passage, we should look for key words such as nouns and verbs. Nouns usually refer to people, cities, countries, towns, and buildings that are important to understand. When we understand ancient people, places, and times, we can better understand what is happening in the passage. The verbs give us the action and help us discover what is occurring.

But what do these words mean? One approach to discovering the meaning of these words is to use a concordance along with Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testament (W. E. Vine, et al, Nelson Publishing Co.). Other approaches require some knowledge of Greek or Hebrew. You will want an exhaustive concordance such as Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance or Young’s Concordance. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance is highly recommended and is the most common. If you do not have one and you decide to buy one, make sure that it matches the version of Bible you have: NASB, NKJV or NIV. This is important, since different Bible versions sometimes use different words in a passage.

Let us discover how to use Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance and Vine’s Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments. We will start by selecting the verse Hebrews 2:17. Then we will find the meaning of one of the words. The passage reads as follows:

Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. (NASB) Heb. 2:17

The book of Hebrews is all about Jesus our God, and the chapter in which this verse occurs is about Jesus’ humbling Himself when He became a human. This verse is awesome because it tells us that as a result of all of this, Jesus is our merciful and faithful high priest. He is the one who faithfully forgives our sins and cares for us. There are several key important words that we should explore in order to better understand the meaning of this verse. But we will select only one for the purpose of illustration. We will investigate the word “merciful”. What does it mean that Jesus is merciful?

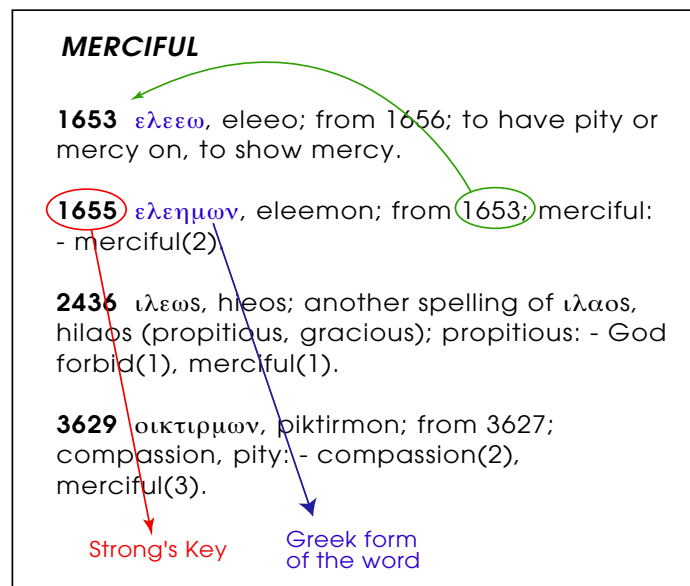
MERCIFUL		
the house of Israel are <i>m</i> kings,	1Ki 20:31	2617a
O Lord, art a God <i>m</i> and gracious.	Ps 86:15	7349
The Lord is gracious and <i>m</i>	Ps 145:8	7349
The <i>m</i> man does himself good, But	Pr 11:17	2617a
"Blessed are the <i>m</i> , for they	Mt 5:7	1655
"Be <i>m</i> , just as your Father is	Lk 6:36	3629
just as your Father is <i>m</i>	Lk 6:36	3629
"God, be <i>m</i> to me, the sinner!"	Lk 18:13	2433
become a <i>m</i> and faithful high priest	Heb 2:17	1655
I WILL BE <i>M</i> TO THEIR INIQUITIES,	Heb 8:12	2436
is full of compassion and is <i>m</i>	Jas 5:11	3629

We could start with the concordance in the back of our Bible to find other verses where "merciful" is used. By comparing different verses, we can discover how the word is used and we may be finding some shades of meaning. If you have a Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, you can do more. It would help to find every place in the Bible where the word "merciful" is found (see chart above). Strong's provides a brief excerpt from each of the verses on the left side of the page. We have highlighted Matthew 5:7 and Hebrews 2:17 in the example below, since the same Greek word for merciful is used in both passages. The right column is a list of numbers which are keys to the actual Hebrew and Greek word that is used in each verse. For example, in Hebrews 2:17 the English word for merciful is a Greek word designated by Strong's number of 1655. The same Greek word also occurs in Matt. 5:7. In both places the Greek word is translated as "merciful." Notice that the Greek word translated as "merciful" in all of the other verses is not 1655. They are different words which are translated as merciful and have a slightly different meaning. As an exercise, find Strong's number for merciful in each of the following passages.

Passage Where Merciful Occurs	Number for the Greek Word
Luke 18:13	_____
James 5:11	_____

Now what is the meaning of the word in Hebrews 2:17? We will start by comparing "merciful" in Heb 2:17, Luke 18:13 and James 5:11. What did you find? Sometimes it is hard to understand the difference. So Strong's has provided short explanations of the meaning of each word in the back of the book (see an example in the chart below).

In the chart below, you will find every word for "merciful" listed in Strong's and its meaning. You will discover that 1655 comes from that word designated by 1653. Therefore, it has a similar meaning. What do you think the meaning of merciful is in Hebrews 2:17?



These word meanings are short. Vine's Expository Dictionary of the Old and New Testaments will provide a better explanation. Therefore, we will go to Vine's now and look-up the word "merciful," find the Strong's key number 1655 and see what the word means. After finding "merciful" in Vine's, we will discover that 1655 has the idea of someone who is actively passionate for others. That is a great meaning. Merciful means more than kindness, grace, duty, or treating someone nicely. It reveals the passion of the heart for another.

Now that we understand this word we can ask, "What does it mean that Jesus is our merciful . . . high priest?" The verse tells us that Jesus was actively passionate for us because we need help. Therefore He came and helped us. It reveals Jesus' loving heart. He helps us because we cannot help ourselves.

FOURTH READING. During our fourth reading, we want to ask if the meaning of the passage is confusing and hard to understand. If so, we call that part of the passage a "problem passage." When this occurs, we need to ask God for help, talk with others, and read some commentaries to get the views of others. It is a time to seriously seek the Lord. We need to ask God to show us what it means. Memorize the passage and meditate on it for days. Dwell on it until the Lord shows you the meaning.

If you can, buy a few books that discuss Jewish culture and the meaning of words. There is a short list of recommended books at the end of this study that will help your study. The studies of others can help.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN? As we study the Bible, here are seven key principles of study you should follow:

1. Honestly seek to find the meaning of the passage and do NOT put meaning into the passage.
2. Scripture is the place one can find truth - truth does not come from our experience or opinion.
3. Use other scriptural passages to help you understand the passage.
4. Hard to understand passages MUST give way to clear ones.
5. Scripture does not contradict scripture - God wrote all of it!
6. Seek to understand how the Bible fits together.
7. If you think you have found a new truth, check your understanding with a trusted pastor or commentary.

HOW DOES IT APPLY? Start by praying and asking God to show you how the passage applies to your life and what it reveals about God. Think about it and pray for several days. God will show you. He is faithful. Application is the wonderful part of Bible study. It is here we discover how we should be like God. We find victory over sin and our problems. We discover the purpose of trials. We find sins in our life that God wants us to remove, and God gives us direction for life. If there is a command to action, the application is easy - we ought to obey. If there is a warning to avoid something or an encouragement about an attitude, then we should comply, realizing the benefit. Remember - pray and pray - asking God to show you what His Word reveals about Himself and how you should respond.

But best of all, we discover new glimpses of Him. In Hebrews 2:17 we discover that we are sinners and need His forgiveness. We discover that He was made like us and calls us brethren. That implies, that He is not distant but close to us. The word "merciful" implies that He loves us and has great compassion for us. Wow! Does it get any better than this? What else can you find?

THINGS TO PONDER

1. What is the focus of the Old and New Testaments according to 1 Peter 1:10-12 and Luke 24:27, 44?

2. Why should we study the Bible according to Exodus 33:13 and 1 John 2:12-14?

3. Can a person really know God without knowing the Bible?

4. Does every book of Bible reveal something about God? Why?

5. According to 1 Corinthians 8:1, what can happen if we study the Bible for the wrong reason?

6. According to Hosea 4:6 and Hebrews 5:11-14, what happens to us if we do not study?

7. Revelation 1:3 and Nehemiah 8:8-9 gives us three things we should do with God's Word; what are they?

8. What is the best way to remember God's Word and apply it to your life (see Deuteronomy 11:18)?

9. Some people study the Bible to find proof of something they want to be true. So they search and search the Bible and twist the meaning of a Bible verse to make it say what they want. What kind of person does this according to 2 Peter 3:16?

10. What promises are made to those who meditate on God's Word (Psalms. 1:2-3)?

11. If you want to know God more, how do you plan to accomplish your desire?

Basic Bible Study Tools

Concordances are useful for finding verses related to a word and helping us find the meaning of a word. Many Bibles have short concordances. A concordance is a list of words followed by a list of verses in which the word occurs. A concordance can help you find a verse(s) if you can remember a word or words of the verse. This requires that you know at least one of the words in the verse. An exhaustive concordance will include your verse under the selected word. Some concordances will help you find the meaning of words. Four very good concordances are suggested:

New American Standard Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible
New International Version Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible
New King James Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of The Bible
Young's Analytical Concordance To The Bible

CROSS REFERENCE. Topical studies are great. But finding passages and verses on a special subject or topic can be difficult at times. The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge provides references to other passages from within the passage you are studying. It is a unique book. The MacArthur Topical Bible is the best for solid scriptural references on a subject. There are a group of books that have been published which help you find scriptural passages on a wide range of topics. Here are some recommendations:

Nave's Topical Bible
The MacArthur Topical Bible
The New Treasury of Scripture Knowledge

WORD DICTIONARIES. Word dictionaries are used to determine the original meaning of individual Hebrew and Greek words. Sometimes background information is provided about the word. Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old And New Testament Words is easier to use since it lists the English words alphabetically and then gives most Hebrew or Greek words which have been translated as that word. For example, under the English word "love" three Greek words are listed. One refers to God's love, another is used for brotherly love, and the last is friendship love. The last book is best if you are seeking a better understanding of the word and are unfamiliar with Greek. These books provide a fuller meaning to the word you are studying. Two word dictionaries are suggested for the non-Hebrew or non-Greek student:

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged In One Volume, Bromiley, Geoffrey W.
Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old And New Testament Words (Revell)

BIBLE DICTIONARIES. Some of these books are really encyclopedias. They help the student investigate the meaning of names, interpret words, provide information on geographical locations, determine the significance of ancient customs and cities and so forth. The New Bible Dictionary is best since it was put together by twenty-nine scholars, covers a wide range of subjects and has excellent doctrinal and archaeological articles. Two works are suggested:

- The New Bible Dictionary (Tyndale, rev. 1982)
- Zondervan's Pictorial Encyclopedia Of The Bible (Zondervan, 1976)

JEWISH BACKGROUND. These books typically have lengthy discussions on historical, geographical and cultural background information. The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah is highly recommended since it contains a wealth of information about Jesus and the people of His time. It is written by a converted Jewish rabbi. Several suggested books are as follows:

- Wycliff Historical Geography Of Bible Lands (Moody, 1967)
- Sketches Of Jewish Life In The Days Of Christ (Eerdmans, 1961)
- The Life And Times Of Jesus The Messiah (Eerdmans, 1954)

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGIES. These books will help ground you in the scriptures, give you a grid to understanding specific passages in scripture and clarify problem passages. Evangelical Theology is highly recommended because of its brief survey of the major spiritual doctrines. It also provides a short historical survey of each doctrine. Grudem's Systematic theology is very comprehensive, easy to read, and the best systematic theology in the list. Four systematic theologies are suggested:

- Baker's Dictionary of Theology (Baker, 1960)
- Chafer's Systematic Theology (Dallas Press)
- Evangelical Theology (Lightner, 1986)
- Systemic Theology by Wayne Grudem (IVP)

How To Study The Bible

Answer true (T) or false (F) to each of the following statements:

1. You will need to study the Word of God to be spiritually mature. _____
2. The Bible describes spiritual growth as being changed from a little child to a young man and finally into a father. _____
3. The Bible says a spiritual young man is one who abides in the Word. _____
4. Bible study does not really help me know God. _____
5. We need the Holy Spirit to help us understand the Bible. _____
6. When we study the Bible, we need to ask three questions “What does it say?” “What does it mean?” and “How does it apply to me?” _____
7. Memorization of the Bible is not important. _____
8. An exhaustive concordance is useless when it comes to Bible study. _____
9. Sometimes we must draw conclusions not found in the passage we are studying in order to make it meaningful. _____
10. The King James Version Bible uses the language in which Jesus spoke. _____