

# 4 Preparation for Bible Study

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Now that we have stated reasons for studying the Bible and briefly described the Bible, we need to discuss how to study the Bible. In this lesson we want to talk about things that will prepare you to study. Then, in the next four lessons we will present some methods of organizing your study.

You might think that to study the Bible is an impossible task. There is so much material to cover and some of it is difficult to understand. But as with any other large task, if you know how to divide it into smaller parts, you will accomplish a great deal.

It took over 20 people to prepare this book, *How to Study the Bible*, in a process of 35 steps. Many of the steps took weeks to complete and some of them had to be repeated. This book is just one in a series that has been and is being written to help you know about God and His will for your life. Years ago this whole task seemed impossible, but it is being accomplished because of a plan of action.

## ***The Plan***

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- A. Basic Tools for Study
- B. Basic Rules of Interpretation
- C. Prayer for Guidance

## ***The Goals***

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1. Describe the basic tools for Bible study.
2. State basic rules for how to interpret the writer's intended meaning.
3. Recognize the relationship between prayer and your study of God's Word.

## **A. BASIC TOOLS FOR STUDY**

**Goal 1.** Describe the basic tools for Bible study.

The best way to grow spiritually is to study the Bible. You cannot rely on the studies or teachings of other people. The study of God's Word is an individual task. It is perhaps the most personal task you will ever become involved in. This task will affect your whole being—who you are and what you do.

Naturally, you influence other people around you. Therefore, what you learn in your private Bible study, you must share with others. As you learn and grow in the knowledge of God, you should teach Sunday school, share in group Bible studies, and tell your friends and neighbors about Christ.

### **Have Your Own Bible**

The tools you need for Bible study are very few. Of course, you need a Bible. (It is helpful to have more than one version of the Bible so you can compare the wording of difficult passages of Scripture.) The Bible expresses all of God's revelation to man. It tells you all you need to know about your new life in Christ and your eternal life in heaven. Thus, the Bible is its own

best interpreter. The more you read it, the more you understand its meaning.

Your eyes and mind are the second tool for study. When you use your eyes, you can experience many things a blind person cannot. Yet, so many people who can see are careless and do not really “see” or experience all that they could through using their eyesight and their ability to think.

## Read and Think

Physical sight is closely connected to spiritual sight, which is knowledge or insight into the hidden truths of God. In fact, the Scriptures use the word *seeing* to mean “knowing spiritual truth.” According to 2 Corinthians 4:4 those who do not believe the gospel about Christ are blinded by Satan so they cannot see the light that comes from God’s Word. (See also Matthew 13:14–16.) Isaiah 44:18 says that those who reject God “know nothing, they understand nothing; their eyes are plastered over so they cannot see, and their minds closed so they cannot understand.” On the other hand, the pure in heart, those who love God, will see God. (See Matthew 5:8.) Yet, so many Christians are guilty of not studying God’s Word, as they should. They do not see or experience as much of the truth as they could.

You can begin to have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16), if you allow the Holy Spirit to make the Word clear to you. The goal of your study is to have spiritual sight. You want to know God’s truth and apply it in your daily decisions and actions (1 Corinthians 2:13–16). Through careful study you will receive knowledge of the Bible’s teachings about your new life, and you will be better prepared to reject false teachings. The apostle Paul warned the young churches and his friend Timothy to be aware of false teachers, who would try to lead Christians away from the truth by making them obey rules that are not biblical. (See Ephesians 4:14.)

## Write

Your third tool is a pen to write notes as you read the Bible. Writing helps you to remember things. As you write repeated words or ideas that are mentioned, you will see more of what the writer wrote. Write references that are made to other passages so that you can read and compare them. And write questions or thoughts that come to your mind as you read. Later when you read over your notes, you will understand the Bible better and you can answer some of your questions.

These three tools, the Bible, your physical and mental eyes, and a pen, are really all you need to study the Bible. There are other tools that are helpful to Bible study. You may be able to use a Bible concordance, which lists in alphabetical order all the words of the Bible and their Scripture references. If, for example, you wanted to read several Scriptures about faith, you could easily find them by referring to the word “faith” in the concordance. Many Bibles have a small concordance in the back.

The Bible dictionary is a tool that provides definitions of difficult words and information about biblical times, places, culture, and people. Another kind of tool is the Bible commentary. These are books written by various Bible scholars who share their own understanding of the Scriptures based on their long and intense study.

If none of these extra tools are available to you, do not worry. The Holy Spirit will reveal the meaning of the Word to you even though you have no study helps. Ask for divine guidance as you put into practice the study methods you learn in this course.

## *Application*

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- 1** You can depend on just the Bible for learning about God’s revelation to man because
  - a)** other great religious books duplicate its material.
  - b)** no other books discuss God’s revelation to man.
  - c)** the Bible expresses all of God’s revelation to man.

- 2** The most important tools for Bible study are
- a)** commentaries by well-known writers.
  - b)** a Bible, your eyes, and a pen.
  - c)** books on new revelations.
- 3** The relationship of spiritual sight to eyesight is suggested by the term
- a)** *seeing the truth.*
  - b)** *circumstances of truth.*
  - c)** *light for seeing.*
- 4** The main purpose of writing notes as you study is to
- a)** keep a record of what you have studied.
  - b)** keep from having to remember what you read.
  - c)** see in a different way what you are studying.
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## B. BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

**Goal 2.** State basic rules for how to interpret the writer's intended meaning.

You may wonder how to begin your study of the Bible. What book should you start with? How many verses should you study each day? You should begin with a short book (such as Colossians which we will study in Lesson 5) and study about 20–25 verses a day. You may be able to read more than this, but your study will take more time. You should cover a short passage each day to gain the most out of your study.

Just as you may have questions about how to study, you may have questions about the meaning of certain passages of Scripture. How can you interpret or explain the meaning of them? One rule of interpretation is: Ask questions about each passage of Scripture. Who is the author? What is his main purpose? To whom is he writing? Who or what is the passage about? How was something done? When did it happen? Where did it happen? What does this passage mean? What was the purpose in saying this? What truth does it suggest?

We will use Romans 8:26–27 as a sample passage to interpret.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will.

We cannot answer the first three questions. But we can see what these verses are about. They are about prayer; the Holy Spirit's prayers on our behalf. The Spirit prays in groans that come from deep inside us, where the Spirit dwells. (See John 14:15–17.) The Spirit prays when we do not know how we ought to. The Spirit prays on behalf of God's people wherever they are. This passage means that we have a great Helper, who not only pleads with God for us but also pleads for that which is according to God's will. We cannot see yet how these verses serve the author's main purpose, but they do serve to encourage us in our faith. They also suggest that as we seek to do God's will, the Holy Spirit will renew our mind! Then we will pray in accordance with God's will.

To answer the other questions, we must read the verses that surround this passage. Surrounding material is called *context*. By reading verses 1–25, we see that the author is discussing our new life in the Spirit (vv. 5, 9) as children of God (vv. 14, 17) who have hope in a future glory (v. 18). This context helps us to better understand why we have the power of the Holy Spirit in our prayers. It is because of who we are in Christ.

By reading chapter 1 of Romans we learn that Paul, an apostle (v. 1), wrote this letter to the church in Rome (v. 7). After giving his greetings, he states his main purpose in verses 16 and 17: the gospel of Jesus Christ teaches that salvation is by faith, not by anything else. Now we can see how the emphasis in verses 26 and 27 on our victory through the Holy

Spirit supports Paul main purpose. He teaches that faith brings salvation and future glory in heaven.

The second rule of interpretation is: Explain the meaning of a Scripture as it relates to its context. False teachings can arise from taking a verse or part of a verse out of its context. Sometimes people claim God's promises while ignoring the conditions that go with them (See the condition in Matthew 6:33.) Others may use a verse to support their own belief without paying attention to the intended meaning of the verse that is based on its context.

When a passage presents limited teaching or a seeming conflict, we need to study other passages that give related teaching. This third rule of interpretation provides a balanced teaching of the truth. Look in the margins of your Bible for references to related Scriptures. These three rules become easier to use the more you read the Bible.

## ***Application***

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- 5** Select the best completion for the following sentences:
- a)** If you ask questions as you read a passage of Scripture, it helps you interpret the passage. See how much you already know.
  - b)** If you cannot answer many questions about a Scripture, you should go on to find something else. Read the context to find more answers.
  - c)** References listed in the margins of your Bible are helpful for anyone who studies. This is important for teachers only.
  - d)** Using the rules of interpretation helps you find support for your ideas. Avoid false ideas.

- 6** Read Romans 14:4 and interpret it as you read and answer the following questions.
- a)** What is this verse about?
  - b)** Read the context in verses 1–6. What seemed to be causing problems in the church at Rome?
  - c)** Read Colossians 2:16, which is given as a reference for Romans 14:1–6, and 1 Timothy 4:3, a verse we referred to in the lesson. What do these verses suggest?
  - d)** Read James 4:11–12, which gives related teaching. What particular new meaning does it suggest?
  - e)** Read Matthew 7:1–5 and Luke 6:37–38, 41–42, which give Jesus’ own instructions on this matter. What additional emphasis is made about our conduct towards others in Luke 6:37–38?
  - f)** Now read all of Romans 14 for thorough teaching of what verse 4 means. What should you do about Christian brothers who believe differently than you do?
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## C. PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE

**Goal 3.** Recognize the relationship between prayer and your study of God’s Word.

We have the Holy Spirit to direct us in God’s will. The Holy Spirit dwells in us, continually, and is our guide. This is described in 1 John 2:27: “As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.” People who do not have God’s Spirit in them cannot correctly interpret the spiritual truths of the Bible. Neither can we unless we ask the Holy Spirit to help us. He does not force the truth on us. We must pray for understanding as King David did, repeatedly. “Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me” (Psalm 119:18–19).



Effective Bible study depends on prayer. Prayer indicates our humility, sincerity, and dependence in our relationship to God. Prayer shows us our need for help and guidance. Prayer helps us pay attention to our study and respond to Bible lessons. Prayer opens our minds so that we are ready to receive truth: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1 Peter 1:13).

Once again we refer to 2 Timothy 3:16–17: “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you learn as much as you can about interpreting God’s Word as you continue studying this book.

## ***Application***

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- 7** (Circle the letter in front of each correct completion.) Prayer is necessary for effective Bible study because
- a)** the Holy Spirit is our teacher.
  - b)** we acknowledge our need for guidance through prayer.
  - c)** it makes us receptive to the truth.
  - d)** it reduces the burden on us to study hard.
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Now that you have completed the first four lessons, you are ready to do the first unit evaluation. Review Lessons 1–4, then follow the instructions in your Unit Evaluation directions.

## Check Your Answers

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- 1 c)** the Bible expresses all of God's revelation to man.
- 5 a)** interpret the passage.  
**b)** read the context to find more answers.  
**c)** helpful for anyone who studies.  
**d)** avoid false ideas.
- 2 b)** a Bible, your eyes, and a pen.
- 6 a)** We are not to judge our brothers in Christ. Their master is Christ. He will judge them.  
**b)** There is arguing about what people can and cannot eat and whether or not one day should be set above the other. If you read verse 17, you see that these are not to be our concerns.  
**c)** We need to look to God for guidance rather than to men. Thus we will be judged by God, not by men.  
**d)** The act of judging another person shows our disobedience. We must not play God or we will be judged even more severely.  
**e)** Not only should we not judge others, but we should forgive them and love them by giving to them.  
**f)** Do not judge or condemn them; instead protect them by not doing anything that would weaken their faith.
- 3 a)** seeing the truth.
- 7 a)** the Holy Spirit is our teacher.  
**b)** we acknowledge our need for guidance through prayer.  
**c)** it makes us receptive to the truth.
- 4 c)** see in a different way what you are studying.



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## **Lessons**

- 5 Individual Book Study**
- 6 Topical Study**
- 7 Character Study**
- 8 Devotional Study**