

BIBLE BASICS

LEARNING TO READ AND
UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE



BRENDA KUNNEMAN

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Unless otherwise identified, Scripture quotations and adaptations are taken from the King James Version.

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"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."

2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT)



INTRODUCTION

Countless people avoid reading the Bible because they believe it is too hard to understand. For some, this is simply to cover the fact that they don't actually want to read the Bible. But the majority could possibly be those who have opened the Bible a time or two and found it overwhelming, so they put it down. There are also those who have never picked up a Bible and have no clue what any of it is about or even where to start. They may have been encouraged by a friend or family member to read the Bible, but they need some guidance and that is how this little booklet can help!

Many think the Bible is some scholarly book that only the most educated minds can understand. However, that is the farthest from the truth! When God inspired men, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to pen the words in the Bible, He ensured that it would be understandable

by the simple minded but would also draw the most brilliant thinkers.

God's ability to communicate to every human soul from His written Word is far greater than our inability to hear and understand. What we have to do is be willing! If you are new to understanding the Bible, then a good question to ask yourself is, are you willing? Are you willing to put in time and are you willing to learn? If you can say yes, then you will embark on a glorious journey to allowing the living Word of God to heal your soul, bring peace to your heart, and guide your life into purpose and stability.

Whether you consider yourself a Bible beginner, or somewhat advanced, I encourage you to begin with this simple assignment on your journey to better understanding the Bible. Read Psalm 119. It's actually the longest chapter in the Bible, but don't be intimidated! You certainly don't have to read it all in one

day. Why is this chapter important? Because it's all about what God's Word, or the Bible, will do in your life if you will read and study it. It details everything that God's instructions and teachings (all part of the Bible) will do for you. Read this remarkable chapter if you dare! It's 176 verses that show why you need to read the Bible every day and why our lives end up lost without it.

Before we delve into the details of Bible basics, remember this Scripture in 2 Timothy 3:16 (NLT - *New Living Translation*): *"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right."*

God's Word will be the guide to success in your life. If it's not included, we become void of direction and left to our best guess on what choices to make. Make the choice today to let God's Word,

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the Bible, become the guide you need and determine to learn the Bible basics for yourself. Without question, your life will be forever changed for the good!



- ONE -

KEEP IT SIMPLE

The first step to learning how to study the Bible is to keep it simple. I once heard a pastor say, "Develop a good working knowledge of God's Word." This pastor went on to talk about how we need to just become familiar with the Bible itself. I think the best way to accomplish this is to not make understanding the Bible harder than it needs to be. Just begin by opening the book on a regular basis. Don't expect to understand everything immediately -- just open it and read something. Here are some easy steps to keeping Bible Basics simple.

• GET AN OVERVIEW •

Begin by *not* trying to understand everything because you won't possibly be able to do that. Starting with the belief that you can't or won't understand it will also set you up to quit. Even those who are well-seasoned in the Scriptures know that they will never understand it all and it's an ever-learning process. If you are a beginner, be at peace and understand that at this point you are just becoming familiar with the Bible.

The Bible consists of 66 books; each filled with chapters. There are 39 books in the Old Testament and 27 books in the New Testament, each divided by chapters for ease of understanding. The Old Testament is the history of the world before Christ and begins at Creation. It's focused on the coming of Jesus Christ to bring salvation to humanity, and His lineage descended from the nation of Israel. It also provides direction on how to love God and pursue Him in your life. The Old Testament is also filled with

many exciting stories that you can't put down! These stories help us identify with the characters involved and how God intervened in their situations as He will for you.

The New Testament depicts the life of Christ and reveals His plan of salvation for the world, as well as expansive teaching on how to live as a Christian. Both the Old and New Testaments complement each other, and both are historical, prophetic, and instructional.

The key here is getting an overview of what the books of the Bible are, which can be easily seen in its Table of Contents. Many Bibles give an overview summary on what each book is about, or you can look for this information online. Mainly, just spend time becoming familiar with these books. Do some casual reading and page turning. Don't worry if at first you don't understand what everything means, you will still gain knowledge by simply becoming familiar.

• READ A LITTLE EACH DAY •

I am a fan of reading small amounts rather than trying to reach some quota or fulfill a Bible reading plan that lays out long texts. Now, if you are up for a specific goal-oriented reading plan, by all means do so! Many people have read the Bible in a year using one of these amazing plans. But as a beginner, or perhaps someone who doesn't normally read long texts, just start with a few verses each day. Reading a little is far better than none at all!

I am also one who prefers a regular, short reading approach as opposed to meeting some time-driven goal that presses reading a certain amount each day. Consider committing yourself to a minimum of five or, better yet, 10 minutes each day. Most people, regardless of schedule, can commit to this short plan. Knowing that you are only going to read for 10 minutes encourages you to pause and absorb what you are reading, rather than rushing

through it in order to quickly skim down a longer passage attempting to ensure you've "read" the passage laid out for the day. Plus, if you miss a day (which happens from time to time), you will never feel you fell behind in your goals.

Reading for 10 minutes per day, at a minimum, without worrying about how much to read, allows you to read at your own pace and focus on what you are reading. Of course, I have also found that if I commit to just 10 minutes, it often grows, and I end up reading more!

The point is, keep it simple by picking it up daily and dedicating at least 10 minutes to read.

**• FOCUS ON EASY-TO-
UNDERSTAND PASSAGES •**

Those who say the Bible is hard to understand have obviously not read the parts of Scripture that are unexplainably simple.

There are countless passages that provide basic guidelines and stories. Many scholars have offered beginners some of the following tips for starting out in the more easy-to-understand parts of Scripture.

*Read the Four Gospels
of the New Testament*

Each of the four Gospels, which are Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, are four different accounts of the life of Jesus on earth. None are exactly the same because they are told by different authors who each present a slightly different account, but in essence are all the same stories. Each one is simply that, a story, making these books some of the easier to understand portions of the Bible.

Read the Book of Acts

The Book of Acts is the early accounts of the first Christians after Jesus ascended back into heaven. It is also a story and will help you understand how Christianity began

and got its name. It is the perfect complement to the four Gospels.

*Read the Shortest Books of
the New Testament or Epistles*

The shortest Books of the New Testament, or the Epistles, are writings and letters mostly written by the Apostle Paul, to various churches and individuals. These books to individuals and churches gave them guidelines and commandments on how to live and build character as a Christian, and they are also God's guide for us. All the Epistles are in the New Testament after the Book of Acts, beginning with the longest and moving toward the shorter ones.

Read Psalms and Proverbs

Psalms and Proverbs are poetic songs and wisdom writings comprised mostly by King David in Psalms and then Proverbs by King Solomon. These two books are filled with uplifting words of encouragement and

strength for hard times. They provide wisdom on how to align with God and keep your life on course during the various circumstances we all face.

Beginning with the books that are considered easier to understand will also help you begin to understand some of the more seemingly complex parts of Scripture. Again, don't assume any part is too complex! The Holy Spirit has an amazing way of helping us understand His Word. Though I didn't mention certain books and passages in the list above, that doesn't mean avoid them. If you want to read Leviticus or Deuteronomy, then do it! The point made here is just to begin with areas that many see as simpler to understand and then grow from there.



- TWO -

UNDERSTAND TRANSLATIONS

There are many printed translations and paraphrased versions of the Bible. The goal of those who have translated the Scriptures into modern language has typically been to take the original ancient texts and translate them into the various languages of the world as close to the original as possible. There are countless versions that attempt to further the ease of understanding for readers by structuring the words according to modern language. This at times can deviate more from the original texts, but the key is knowing that translators typically desire to capture the overall meaning. At this point, don't

become too worried about which translation to have. If you are committed, you will most likely develop a favorite down the road.

For now, consider having a main Bible that is commonly used in most churches.

Bibles commonly used are:

- *King James Version or New King James Version (KJV or NKJV)*
- *The New Living Translation (NLT)*
- *The New International Version (NIV)*
- *Modern English Version (MEV)*
- *The Amplified Bible or Amplified Classic (AMP or AMPC)*

There are several other versions commonly used, but this list comprises what seems to be used in most churches. From there you can download a Bible app which will have many more versions, and it will allow you to jump between several versions to compare them for clarity.

Try not to be overly concerned about the variations between the different versions but instead try to appreciate the different things each version highlights over others. It's not that each version contradicts the others, it's simply that different translators word things differently. Some will word things in a beautiful way that may speak to your heart and add to your increasing revelation.

You may have heard critics and opponents of the Bible say that the Bible contradicts itself. They often use this to discredit the Bible's validity, but if you read and study the Bible for yourself, you will eventually find that the Bible does not contradict itself but rather complements itself. You will eventually see that passages that, at a glance, seem to contradict are instead a piece to the puzzle of one beautiful picture.

God has an amazing way to make the Bible both easy to understand and difficult all at the same time. You may wonder why this is. I believe it's because He truly wants His Word to us to be a journey of personal growth in which

we have to give thought, study, prayer, and learning. We have to find God's secrets hidden in Scripture because that is part of our growth and development to a fulfilling relationship with the Lord.



- THREE -

STUDY AND CONTEXT

Properly understanding the Bible begins with keeping the passages that we read in context. What that means is, even if you read a few verses, also try to understand what the surrounding verses and even the entire chapter are saying. In some books, such as Psalms and Proverbs, this might be a little less important as these poetic books largely contain single thoughts and sayings that can stand alone. But in many other books, such as those mentioned in the previous chapter, it's important to try and gain an understanding of the entire chapter as well as the chapters surrounding the verse you are reading.

Again, many verses stand well on their own and this is how many people present the Bible when they quote Scripture, or when they create Bible memes, art, and so on. This is certainly fine to do, but in many cases, we need to understand the entire thought being communicated, or why a certain directive was given in a specific verse. Sometimes there is an entire subject to be understood and knowing the context will also help you be more accurate in your interpretation of God's Word.

Keeping Scripture in context also includes taking some time for in-depth study. Researching is the next step to becoming more advanced in the Bible. With the Internet at our fingertips, researching Scripture is easier than ever. There are historical study guides you can use that help you understand the events surrounding a biblical passage. Knowing the culture of the time, timelines, and even how people dressed or conducted business can help enhance and add value to what you read.

There are also Bible dictionaries to help you better understand the meaning of words, as they would be in the original text. From there you can find other commentaries, study guides, and teaching materials to enhance learning. You might consider downloading a concordance app in which you can take a word in the Bible and look up its meaning in either the Hebrew (Old Testament) or Greek (New Testament).

Of course, do not think for a moment that these resources are required in order to understand God's Word. God masterfully designed His Word to be understood in just the reading of it, but He also wants us to search deeper as we grow and that is where these additional materials can help. The key is to grow in your journey of reading and applying the Bible to your life.

In-depth study isn't beneficial if our primary focus isn't applying what we are reading on a daily basis. James 1:22 (NLT) says, *"But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it*

says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves." You want to read the Bible in such a way that you live out and apply what it teaches you.

In your study, consider making notes about verses and passages that stand out to you. Consider a Bible journal where you can write about what you are learning and how it applies to your own situations and challenges in life.

Also, don't be afraid to write in your Bible! Sometimes the best way to make notes is to write them in your Bible where space allows. Get a nice highlighter and highlight meaningful passages. Remember, your Bible isn't an untouchable museum piece, but rather a book to utilize for your spiritual growth.

So, as you learn to become skillful with Scripture, keep context in mind and develop some study. It will surely be a key step in your walk with the Lord.



- FOUR -

MEMORIZE, MEDITATE, AND PRAY

A final key component in learning Bible basics is to memorize verses or passages. This can be a few verses here or there or, if you are up for it, longer chapters. One good way is to have a printed or handwritten verse that you can keep in your purse or pocket and then pull it out throughout your day and meditate on that verse until you commit it to memory. Consider choosing verses that are meaningful to whatever you might be dealing with in life. Of course, just a general practice of doing this will enable you to know God's Word well so that when you face a hard time you will quickly recall

the Scriptures, and you will stand firmly on those verses in your heart.

Remember earlier I suggested reading Psalm 119? Psalm 119:11 emphasizes the power of meditating and memorizing God's Word. It says, *"Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee."*

This verse underscores Bible memorization and meditation. You can meditate on God's Word by repeating a key verse over and over in your mind until it stays with you. Then when you are facing hard times, tempted to do wrong, or needing wisdom, those verses will come back to protect you and guide you through.

Here is another verse that emphasizes the importance of meditation and memorization of Scripture: *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou*

shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success" (Joshua 1:8).

Here we see that speaking or repeating Scripture aloud with our mouth, thinking on it, and the meditation of it will help you observe what it says when you face the things that life brings. It goes on to say that it will help guide you into God's path of success and blessing.

Lastly, you can also pray God's Word.

For example, consider Psalm 23, a passage often read at funerals, but it's really not a funeral passage at all! It's filled with promises that God wants for us here on earth! You can pray this Psalm over yourself. See Psalm 23:1 where it says, "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.*" This means God is your guide and because of that you will not lack anything. You could pray it like this: "*Lord, You are my shepherd and so I thank You that I will not lack anything.*"

Another good Scripture to pray is Psalm 91:10, which says, *"There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling."* You could pray this promise by saying, "Lord, I thank You that according to this verse, no evil can come upon me, and I am protected from all plagues and evil."

Wherever you find a promise, directive, or commandment in the Bible, consider praying it out in faith and commitment to the Lord, even adding in your own name where you can. Adding in your name personalizes it and builds your faith to apply it and to believe what it says!

By memorizing and meditating on Bible verses in your thoughts, and also praying out Scripture to the Lord, you will make the Bible come alive within you and it will help you apply it to all the seasons of life. Lastly, in your journey of getting acquainted with God's Word, I encourage you to seek help from Bible-believing friends. Find a

good church where the Bible is preached and there are solid Christians around you that you can reach out to when you need help. Being around the family of God is a key element to keeping you on track with the Lord.

Prayerfully this little booklet has helped you begin your journey in reading and studying the Bible. My hope is that not only will you be better equipped in your spiritual journey but that you can pass your knowledge and personal experience with Jesus onto others!

Notes:

PRAYER TO RECEIVE JESUS AS SAVIOR

*Dear Heavenly Father,
I thank You that Jesus Christ
died for me on the cross.
He gave His life for my sins
so that I could be saved.
I believe in You, Jesus, and ask You
to come into my heart and
forgive me of all my sins.
I give my life to You today and invite
You to be my Lord and Savior.
Today I make a firm decision to
follow You and do the things
You have taught in Your Word.
I ask for Your help and
for a new start today.
I thank You that I am now a child of
God and will forever live with
You in heaven someday.
Thank You for saving me, Lord.
In Jesus' Name, Amen.*



For more resources from
Lord of Hosts Church and
Pastors Hank and Brenda,
we invite you to:



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