

Why Study the Bible?

- An important part of making disciples is teaching people to obey everything Jesus commanded (Matt. 28:20).
- As disciple makers, we need to know Jesus' teaching and commands.
- God the Father through the Holy Spirit has recorded His words and the testimony of Jesus' followers in a book—the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 // All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God[a] may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- Reading our Bible should come naturally for Christians, Peter likened it to a baby's natural craving for milk:

1 Peter 2:2-3 // Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

- As a newborn depends on milk to survive and to grow, we should equally depend on the words of Scripture for our spiritual survival and growth.
- We should pray that God would give us a hungry and love for His word.

The strongest thing we can say about the Bible is that it is the “Word of God.” That concept should blow our minds. When we talk about the Bible, we're actually talking about something that the all-powerful, all-knowing, transcendent God decided to write to us! What could be more important? Think of how you would respond to hearing a voice from heaven speaking directly to you. We should approach the Bible with the same reverence.

If we really believe that the Bible is the Word of God, then it should be much more than a book that we are familiar with. It ought to shape every aspect of our existence. It should guide the decisions we make in life. If God is the designer and creator of this world, if He made us and placed us on this earth, and if He has taken the time to tell us who He is, who we are, and how this world operates, then what could be more important to us than the Bible?

- After we decide that the Bible is important, we still need to learn to approach it in the right way and with the right motives.
- Many Christians misuse the Bible because they never ask themselves why they are studying it in the first place.
- The purpose of this session is to help you think through the nature of the Bible, why it is important to study, and how it should transform our lives.

Studying the Right Book for the Wrong Reasons

Q: Why do you study the Bible? (Be honest and search your heart)

- What is motivating you? Are you driven by guilt? Do you have a desire to know God more fully? Are you looking for arguments against other perspectives? Are you looking for material for a Bible study or sermon?

1. Take a few minutes to examine your motivations.

The fact of the matter is that most Christians study the Bible for the wrong reasons. Here we will explore three motivations for studying the Bible that we need to move beyond.

1) Some people are motivated by guilt.

When we are motivated by guilt we add reading the Bible to our to-do list like church attendance, tithing, and not swearing. Very often guilt is connected with legalism. We create our own standard (“I must read x chapters per day”) and then hold ourselves to it, never stopping to consider that God has not placed this standard on us, we have placed it on ourselves. It doesn’t take long before we begin holding other people to that standard as well. And thus a culture of guilt is formed, a culture where “good Christians” read their Bibles because they’re afraid not to, and “bad Christians” feel guilty about not meeting their Bible-reading quota.

2) Some people are motivated by status.

There is a certain status or level of respect reserved for those who know their Bibles well. And rightly so. We should all aspire to know God’s Word inside and out. It should be on the tip of our tongues and deeply ingrained on our hearts and minds. God is pleased when we treasure His Word, but do you really think He is pleased with your desire to appear intelligent? Does your desire to be the “go-to guy” who is never stumped really bring Him glory? What about your desire to be recognized as the best or the most spiritual person in the room?

It’s not about studying the Bible too much (as if that were possible); it’s about your motivation. Too often Christians are motivated by status when we should be motivated by a desire to know God, to be changed by His Word, and to love and serve the people around us

3) Some people are motivated by vocation.

Sometimes our motivations get skewed when we have to study the Bible in order to lead a Bible study, preach a sermon, or just have some sort of scriptural gem to share with someone. This tends to be a much more subtle misuse of the Bible. It’s not wrong to use the Bible in preparation for teaching other people. In fact, it’s necessary. The problem arises when we begin to approach the Bible only as a source for teaching material. If you are in a role where you preach or teach to others, do you find yourself simply scanning the Bible for nuggets to share? Or do you soak in the Scriptures because of what they have to say to you, listening to what God wants to teach you, allowing the Bible to transform you in unexpected ways?

2. Take a minute to think about your past experience with studying the Bible. Which of the wrong motivations listed above are you guilty of? Can you think of any others?

Why Did God Give Us the Bible?

1) To Teach Us about Himself.

- God wants to describe Himself to us. From beginning to end, God is the subject of the Scriptures. Everything in this book is God centered.

Genesis begins with a God who existed alone and then spoke all things into existence. Revelation ends with this same God reigning eternally over all that He created. Every book in between reveals His character and attributes by narrating His sovereign actions throughout history. People naturally want to believe in a human-centered world, so God gave us the Bible, which shows that everything revolves around God. He is the First and the Last, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. He is described as “holy,” which speaks to the massive disparity between God and people. It is important to God that we understand this.

It is through the Bible that we learn about God’s power, justice, mercy, wrath, love, kindness, anger, faithfulness, jealousy, holiness, compassion, etc. Because God is already described in the Bible, we are left with no room to formulate our own opinions. We should all study in order to understand God better. We search diligently to know the truth about God and to rid ourselves of any misconceptions we hold about Him.

2) To Teach Us about Ourselves and the World We Live In.

- The Bible is a grand narrative that explains where we came from, why the world is the way it is, and where everything is headed. It explains who we are as human beings and how we should think about our existence.

Many Christians think that the Bible is helpful for answering religious questions and teaching us how to live godly lives, but it doesn’t have answers for the tough questions that we face in philosophy, science, or sociology. This is not true! The Bible gives us answers to all of life’s most important questions. The Bible gives us much more than “religious truths”; it accurately explains the world we live in. The God who wrote the Bible is the God who designed this world. Since this is His world, it only makes sense to view the world from His perspective and live according to His principles. All of this means that as we study the Bible, we should be seeking to understand our God, our world, and ourselves.

3) To Enable Us to Live Godly Lives.

- Through God’s word and the Holy Spirit we gain everything we need for living godly lives.

2 Peter 1:3 // His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence,

- We study the Bible because we want to know God and be like Him.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 // All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- Though He used human authors to write each book of the Bible, God Himself is the ultimate source of these words.

- God gave us His word so that we would be complete, mature people who are equipped and ready to do anything God asks us to do.

- As we study the Bible, we see transformation.

Hebrews 4:12 // “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

Though we primarily think of the Bible as something we read in order to gain knowledge, we actually have it backward. The Bible reads us—it penetrates to our core and exposes who we really are. If you ever find yourself reading your Bible and not changing, then you can be sure that you’re approaching the Bible in the wrong way. It’s not about finding support for our lifestyle or way of thinking; it’s about approaching the mind of God and letting Him change and redefine who we are.

4) To Facilitate a Relationship with God.

- Every relationship requires communication—the loving expression of each person’s thoughts, emotions, concerns, and dreams that strengthens the relationship and deepens intimacy

- The Bible is God means of sharing His thoughts and desires with us.

- We are relational beings because He is a relational God.

- From the beginning God has maintained a relationship with mankind, and communication has always been central to that relationship.

- When we open the Bible, we are engaging with God’s communication to us.

- Everything in the Bible is ultimately written for our benefit.

- If the Bible is words delivered from the mouth of God Himself—then reading the Bible is listening to the voice of God.

- If we approach the Bible with humility, eagerly listening for God to speak to us we will strengthening our relationship with Him.

- True Bible study must always have intimacy with God as a primary goal.

5) To Exalt Jesus.

- All of the events in biblical history point to His Son .

- The law was given to show us our sinfulness and our need for Jesus.

- Old Testament priests and sacrifices point to our need for the greater high priest and ultimate sacrifice.

- The Gospels record the loving words and actions of the Son of God.

- The epistles explain how it is only through His work on the cross that we can be saved from sin and filled with the Spirit.

- Revelation shows how He will one day return to judge and restore the earth, and reign with His followers forever.

- All of this is written to exalt Jesus to the glory of God the Father. These words should move us to exalt Jesus in our everyday lives.

6) To Prepare Us for Our God-Given Mission.

- After God finished creating the world and everything in it, He created the first man and placed him in the garden “to work it and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).
- God also gave humanity dominion over the creation. (Gen. 1:28)
- From the very beginning, God has had a mission for humanity.
- From the moment God chose Abraham, God made it clear that Abraham would be blessed so that he could be a blessing to all of the nations of the earth.
- Through the covenant God made with Abraham, Israel’s mission was to show the world who the one true God is.
- In the New Testament, the mission of God’s people is to be God’s servants, His ambassadors.

2 Corinthians 5:20 // Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

- We are not on this earth merely to enjoy our own personal relationships with God.

Though much of Christian thought tells us that we are the center of it all—that it’s all about you and God and nothing else really matters—the reality is that God is the center, and He has saved us so that we can work with Him in His mission to redeem humanity and restore creation to what He originally intended it to be.

- As we read the Bible, we need to view it as our marching orders.
- Rather than coming to the Bible with our own agenda and trying to find verses that support our own views.

3. Take a minute to think through why God gave us the Bible. How should these things affect the way you think about studying the Bible?

Approaching the Mind of God

- When we read the Bible, we are approaching the mind of God.
- When we read the Bible, we ought to prepare yourself for an encounter with the Creator of the universe.

Q: How do we prepare for this type of encounter?

- Approach God’s word with humility, this means that you’re assuming the role of a student.
- Don’t study just to find chapters and verses that agree with your views but instead agree with the view you are studying.
- We don’t have all the answers—that’s why we’re reading the Bible.
- Lay aside your agenda and allow God’s Spirit to teach you.
- Don’t try to explain away what the Bible is saying.
- When we find that your beliefs or lifestyle disagree with the Bible, we can be certain that we are the ones who need to be changed and transformed.
- God gave us the Bible to tell us what He did and what He wants us to be and do.
- Until we begin reading the Bible in order to draw close to God and do what He says, we are completely missing the point.

4. How do you tend to respond to the Bible's teaching? Would you say that you approach it humbly with a desire to change? How do you need to adjust your approach to studying the Bible?

Right Motivation Makes All the Difference

- Christ is not glorified when we study the Bible with the wrong motives.

Q: Are we studying the Bible in order to gain more knowledge, to look more intelligent, to prove a point to someone else, or to convince other people that they should think and act just as we do? This is the wrong motivation.

Q: What is the fruit of this type of study?

1 Cor. 8:1 // "we know that "all of us possess knowledge." This "knowledge" puffs up, but love builds up."

5. Rather than thinking about all of the arrogant people you know, take a minute to consider whether or not your efforts in studying the Bible have simply puffed you up. How has studying the Bible changed you? Are you more arrogant, argumentative, or judgmental? Write down a few thoughts below:

- When we allow God's word to transform us we will live like God want us to.
- Reading God's Word should lead us to become more like God.
- We should set aside every ungodly desire and inclination and simply long to be fed and nourished by the Word of God.

1 Peter 2:2-3 // Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Imagine how different you would be if you aligned your thinking and lifestyle with the Bible. Rather than becoming arrogant, you would love God more; you would be in tune with your God-given mission; you would see people not as means to your own ends but as valuable creations of God, and you would find ways to love and serve the people around you.

6. What would your life look like if you desired the Word as Peter described?

Before You Move On

To sum it all up, the right way to approach the Bible is to first let go of everything that we want and expect, and to let God tell us exactly what to think and what to do. Pray for the right motivations and ask God to give us a pure longing for His Word. Unless our heart is right, we will misuse the Bible, no matter how skilled we are at studying it carefully.

7. Close this session by praying. Ask God to purify your heart with regard to Scripture. Ask Him to produce in you a longing for the pure milk of the Word.