

# **BIBLE** **BASICS** FOR **EVERYONE**

Terry Glaspey



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# Contents



Before We Get Started... ..	5
Seven Ways the Bible Helps Us Know and Love God... ..	7
<b>Part One: Reading the Bible for Yourself</b>	
Five Reasons You Should Read the Bible . . . .	10
Five Ways to Approach Reading the Bible . . . .	12
Eight Study Tools Every Bible Reader Should Own . . . . .	14
Twelve Ways to Get More Out of Reading the Bible . . . . .	17
A Ninety-Day Bible Highlights Reading Plan . . . . .	21
<b>Part Two: A Quick Tour of the Bible</b>	
A Five-Minute Overview of the Entire Bible. . . . .	26
A Guided Tour of the Bible, Book by Book. . . . .	31
<b>Part Three: The Greatest Book in the World</b>	
Great Moments in the History of the Bible . . . . .	102
Ten of the Most Popular Bible Translations. . . . .	104
Twelve Memorable Things People Said About the Bible . . . . .	107

Five Things the Bible Says About the Bible . . . . .	109
Fourteen Familiar Phrases That Originated in the Bible . . . . .	110
Fifteen Famous Painters Who Created Art Based on the Bible . . . . .	111
Twelve More Memorable Things People Have Said About the Bible . . . . .	114
Ten Great Pieces of Classical Music Based on Biblical Texts . . . . .	117
The Old Testament According to Film . . . . .	118
The New Testament According to Film . . . . .	120
Ten More Memorable Things People Have Said About the Bible . . . . .	122

#### **Part Four: Help for Every Day from God's Word**

Ten Verses for When You Feel Afraid . . . . .	126
Eleven Verses for When You Need Comfort . . . . .	128
Ten Verses for When You Feel Depressed . . . . .	130
Ten Verses for When You Feel Guilty . . . . .	132
Five Verses for When You Feel Lonely . . . . .	134
Seven Verses for When You Feel Stressed and Worried . . . . .	135
Eight Verses for When You Are Tempted . . . . .	137
Letting God's Word Change Your Life . . . . .	139

## BEFORE WE GET STARTED...

The Bible. It's the book that everyone quotes from, most people say they respect as the Word of God, and few people actually read. It's the source of much of our law, our art, and, of course, our faith. It isn't always an easy book to read and understand, but it *is* a book worth reading.

Sure, it's long. And much of it seems foreign to us. Some of it is kind of confusing. Some of it is hard to understand. Some of it frankly seems a little weird to the modern reader. The events recorded in it took place a long time ago, and it was originally written in languages that few speak or write today. But it is a book worth reading.

Countless people through many generations have found it to be a life-giving book, filled with hope, help, and strength for dark times. I know that I have! In its pages we glimpse the majestic glory and tender heart of its main character—God. And in its pages we are offered the promise of salvation through Jesus Christ, His Son. So, yes, it is a book worth reading.

But maybe you need a little help getting started. Well, the book you hold in your hand is intended as a guide to help you get more out of the Bible by 1) understanding how it all fits together, 2) discovering how you can get more out of reading and studying it, and 3) exploring how it can change your perspective on life's struggles. All these features are put together in sections that can be read in one minute or less. Think of it as a compact tourist guidebook for seeking out the treasures of the most amazing volume ever penned, or as *CliffsNotes* for the Scriptures.

I've tried to keep it simple, straightforward, and practical. My prayer is that you'll find within these pages the background you need to have to read the Bible with greater understanding. I also pray that it will deepen your appreciation for the miracle that is God's Word. Hopefully it will be fun too. So join me for this journey through the world's greatest book, one definitely worth reading.

Terry Glaspey



## SEVEN WAYS THE BIBLE HELPS US KNOW AND LOVE GOD

1. *The Scriptures give us spiritual insight.*  
(Psalm 119:30; James 1:2)
2. *The Scriptures give us guidance.*  
(Psalm 119:105)
3. *The Scriptures produce faith in us.*  
(Romans 10:17)
4. *The Scriptures help us face temptation.*  
(Psalm 119:11)
5. *The Scriptures teach us wisdom and equip us for life.* (2 Timothy 3:14-17)
6. *The Scriptures are a mirror to our soul.*  
(Hebrews 4:12)
7. *The Scriptures nourish us.* (1 Peter 2:1-2)





# Part One



## Reading the Bible for Yourself

## FIVE REASONS YOU SHOULD READ THE BIBLE

1. *It contains a unique message from God—no other book can claim to be the “Word of God.”* It is an inspired (2 Timothy 3:16-17) account of God dealing with His people and the written record of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who was Himself the eternal Word of God (John 1:1). If it's God's book, isn't it worth your time to explore?
2. *It is filled with practical wisdom about how human beings should live their lives.* In its pages you'll find advice on how to build a stronger relationship with God and with others, as well as the ethical rules necessary for living a more healthy and successful life. It shows us the best way to live.
3. *It teaches us the truth about God, about ourselves, and about the world we live in.* The Bible is a wonderful mirror in which to see our own limitations as human beings and

learn to depend on God. It is a book that transforms lives!

4. *It is the single greatest fountainhead of Western thought and culture.* You can't really understand the history of philosophy, law and politics, the meaning of much of our great art and literature, or even the significance of countless common English expressions without some knowledge of the Bible.
5. *It makes for a fascinating read!* Really! Whoever told you that the Bible was boring and irrelevant evidently hadn't read very much of it...or maybe they just read those tedious bits in Leviticus and the genealogies. The Bible is full of amazing stories, challenging teachings, and intriguing ideas. Give it a chance, and you'll see what I mean!



## FIVE WAYS TO APPROACH READING THE BIBLE

1. **Reading at Random.** This is how many people read the Bible. They simply pick up their Bible, let it fall open to a random page, and then start reading. The problem with this is you'll often miss the all-important context of the passage and overlook many of the wonderful nuggets that you'd find with a more systematic approach.
2. **Reading Chapter-by-Chapter.** Many people (myself included) have discovered the joy of making a commitment to reading a chapter of the Bible every day. It adds inspiration to your life and helps you explore the entire Bible.
3. **Reading Book-by-Book.** We need to remember that the Bible was not originally written with chapters and verses. These were only added later to help us find specific sections and passages. Instead, each book

was its own scroll. There is a lot to be said for setting aside a significant block of time and reading a whole book of the Bible at one sitting. It's the way we'd read any other book, so why not read the Bible this way?

4. **Reading by Themes.** Another interesting way to explore the Bible is to trace various themes throughout the whole Bible, discovering everything it has to say about any given topic. You can use your concordance or a topical Bible to help in your exploration.
5. **Reading with Prayer.** There is an ancient Christian practice called *Lectio Divina*, which teaches the art of meditating on a verse or short passage and praying it into your life. Phrase-by-phrase you can praise God for the truth you see written on the page, examine your own life in view of what you are reading, and ask God to make it real to you.



## EIGHT STUDY TOOLS EVERY BIBLE READER SHOULD OWN

1. **A Study Bible.** It can be of great assistance to have some explanatory notes, book introductions, maps, and charts right there between the covers of your Bible. There are a number of good ones available, but my personal favorite is *The NIV Study Bible*, or if you want something simpler, *The Student Bible*.
2. **A Notebook.** It's always a good idea to have a notebook handy to write down the insights you discover, passages you find helpful, or questions you'd like to explore later.
3. **A Concordance.** A concordance lists all the places any word is used in the Bible. It is helpful for examining what Scripture teaches about a particular topic and for finding a passage you remember when you can't recall where it is found. You probably have one in

the back of your Bible, but may want to get a more extensive one like *Strong's Concordance*.

4. **A Bible Dictionary.** The Bible dictionary provides brief definitions of words you might run across in your Bible reading, as well as brief biographies of key people in the Bible stories.
5. **A Topical Bible.** This handy tool groups together all the Scripture verses on any topic you might want to study. Be aware that these groupings are based upon the interpretations of the person who put the book together so take time to explore the context before you change any of your views based on what you read.
6. **Manners and Customs of the Bible.** There are several good resource books that help you understand the often-puzzling customs of Bible times. Check them out.
7. **A Bible Commentary.** A commentary helps the reader interpret Bible passages. Of course

scholars are merely putting forward their own views, so it is a good idea to compare how several commentators might provide different interpretations of the same passage. Commentaries can cover the whole Bible in one volume or be so detailed that one volume focuses solely on a single book of the Bible.

8. **A Bible Atlas.** This type of atlas is very helpful to see exactly where an event took place and the relationship between two localities. The atlas found in a good study Bible may be adequate for most readers.





## TWELVE WAYS TO GET MORE OUT OF READING THE BIBLE

1. *Pay attention to the context.* Every verse is surrounded by other verses, so it is essential that you read in the context of the entire passage, the chapter, and the book. It isn't wise to just rip a verse out of context and try to apply it to your life.
2. *Focus on the main points and don't get tripped up on secondary issues.* Some people have arrived at very strange conclusions about what the Bible teaches because they have focused on some obscure and unclear passage and dreamed up their own interpretation.
3. *The most obvious interpretation is probably the correct one.* Don't make a Scripture passage more complicated than it actually is or look for encoded messages or hidden mystical teachings. Most of the Bible is relatively straightforward, but...
4. *Don't take metaphors literally.* When Jesus

said, “I am the Door,” you shouldn’t be looking for a doorknob. Allow the artistic beauty of metaphors and parables to help you understand God’s kingdom. However, beware of using such artistic language to construct doctrines.

5. *Interrogate each passage and make sure you are noticing everything it has to say.* Ask yourself the following questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? How? Slow down and ask the questions, and you’ll be surprised at how much more you learn.
6. *Look for relationships between ideas.* If/then phrases and words like “therefore” will help you track with the arguments being made in the passage. Sometimes they indicate important conditions imposed on specific promises. Pay attention!
7. *Determine who is speaking.* You can’t treat every statement as a statement from God. Some of the passages in the Bible are the

words of the devil or untrustworthy men and women. Also, don't assume that because the psalmist expresses a strong emotion about something (like hatred for his enemies) that such a statement represents how God feels. Carefully differentiate between what God actually says and what His imperfect followers say.

8. *Pay attention to the literary genre.* Poetry, history, narrative, parables, and apocalyptic passages all have their own rules of interpretation. It's worth learning a little about these.
9. *Let Scripture interpret Scripture.* The best way to check for the accuracy of your interpretation is to compare it with other passages on the same topic.
10. *What you focus on determines what you miss, so read the Scriptures again and again, each time trying to focus on something different.* I have a friend who had read the books of

the minor prophets numerous times over the years, but one day realized that he had failed to see what they taught about social justice because he was too busy looking for prophecies about the end times.

11. *Don't be afraid to consult commentaries and reference tools.* There are many great scholars who can provide information that you'll probably never discover on your own—the original meanings of words, historical background, cultural idiosyncrasies, and how the passages fit into the overall theological development of the Bible. Don't be too proud to ask for help from the experts.
12. *Push forward to practical application.* Don't settle for simply reading the Bible as a theological text. Read it, but also ask yourself how the passage applies to your life and what you need to do about it. How should it change the way you think and change the way you live?