

STUDY THE BIBLE - SIX EASY STEPS

UNDERSTAND SCRIPTURE AND DEEPEN YOUR
FAITH

SECOND EDITION

DENNIS C STEVENSON JR

Dennis C. Stevenson, Jr.
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IS THIS BOOK FOR YOU?

Would you like to feel confident about what the Bible says? How would you like the comfort of knowing God's answers to challenges in your life? What would it feel like to join a Bible conversation at church and know you had something to add?

If you knew how to study the Bible, you could have all these things and more!

Think about being asked about the Bible and immediately knowing the answer. Consider the satisfaction of knowing what God has to say about a situation you are facing in your life. Imagine yourself saying something insightful about a Bible verse in your small group.

Many Christians believe a long list of barriers keeps them from studying the Bible and experiencing all these things. The actual issue isn't what they think it is. **Most people don't know how to study their Bible because no one has shown them how!**

No one becomes a Christian and immediately knows how to

study the Bible. Everyone needs to be shown how to do it. And the miracle of God's word is that anyone CAN do it!

- You don't have to go to Bible College or Seminary to learn how to study the Bible.
- You don't have to know Greek or Hebrew learn how to study the Bible.
- You don't need to learn a long, complex process to know how to study the Bible.
- You don't have to be a genius to learn how to study the Bible.

My name is Dennis Stevenson. I've been studying the Bible for over twenty-five years, but I didn't go to Bible School or seminary, nor did I have to learn Greek or Hebrew. I've converted this experience into a simple method that involves just six easy steps and no confusing terms.

I learned how to study the Bible because people showed me how it's done. Over the years, many godly men and women have invested in me. They worked with me to teach me the basic steps. Then they gave me books and resources that helped me refine my skills. I listened, I learned, and most importantly, I practiced.

If I can do it, so can you!

In this book, I will show you the six easy steps that will turn you into an effective Bible student. We will go through them slowly and clearly. When I'm done, you'll probably think all I did was share some common sense. Divine common sense!

Before you are done with the last chapter, you will have a complete overview of how to study your Bible. And I'll show you how to do your first study of a short book of the Bible. I'll take you through every step with advice and guidance. I'll even

share my study notes with you so we can compare what we learned. But you will study the Bible for yourself.

When you are done, not only will you will have gained knowledge and confidence. You'll also have a set of study notes that will let you go back and review what you discovered. And you'll have the experience of doing it again and again.

This book is definitely for you! All you need to do is start reading and commit until the end. I've done the hard work; you just need to follow along. If you do this, the benefits I've described will be yours.

INTRODUCTION

This book began in the living room of a friend's house. Ten people had gathered for a small group Bible study and we were struggling. The study wasn't making sense, and the group didn't know what to do. Some people had given up, while others were full of questions. It wasn't going well.

The small group wasn't new and the people in it varied in terms of their experience as Christians. Some had been believers for a long time, while others were relatively new in their faith. That didn't seem to matter. Most of the people were confused and were not getting a lot out of the study.

We finally stopped the study. It made little sense to invest any more time in that study if we didn't understand what we were reading. Everyone in the group knew my experience of studying and teaching the Bible would make a big difference. So they looked for me for help to get us all back on track.

I thought back to the people who had taught me to study the Bible. I remembered all the principles and lessons that I had

learned through my own studies. But the group didn't want a theoretical understanding. They wanted something practical and useful. So I distilled the essential elements of Bible study into six lessons. Starting with very basic foundations, I highlighted the steps and skills which would lead to an effective Bible study. The group followed along and paid attention to the process.

Knowing that our previous study would have been a big ask, we next focused on a short Bible book study. It was a New Testament epistle that only had three chapters. It took another four weeks to complete this practice study.

The results were shocking! As we resumed the original Bible study, those people who had given up started connecting with what was happening and made contributions to our discussion. The people who had questions felt like they had a structure to help them understand. Everyone felt much more prepared and engaged.

The book we were studying was the book of Isaiah. In ten weeks, we completely changed our outcome. We tackled the second half of the book and enjoyed a productive study.

This book will take you on that same journey of learning and discovery.

It doesn't matter if you are a new Christian or someone who has been a believer for 40 years. Odds are, no one taught you how to study the Bible. Many beloved saints have lived most of their lives without this basic skill.

Many people think you need to know Greek or Hebrew in order to study the Bible. You don't. You just need to follow a few steps and spend a little time. It might surprise you what you can learn from God's word with the background that you already have!

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This book produces amazing results, just like we saw in our small group. You can be the recipient of these benefits if you learn the simple principles I'll share.

I titled the first part of the book "Getting Started", and that's exactly what you'll be doing. I'll take you through the information you need to know in order to study the Bible. You'll probably be surprised by how much it sounds like common sense.

To help you maximize how much you learn from this book, I've created a Study Plan that walks you through all the key points and study tools. It's a PDF that prints on a single sheet of paper and puts every key principle at your fingertips. You can use it to track your progress as you learn - then keep as a handy memory jogger when you start your own Bible study.

The Study Plan is available for free on my website at:

<https://dennis-stevenson.com/study-plan>

Or you can scan this QR code with the camera of your smart-phone and it will load the website for you.



It will take you to a web page where you put in your email address, and I'll send the PDF to you in an email right away!

I recommend you get the Study Plan, print it out and keep it

nearby as you read this book to keep track of where you are in the learning process.



There are seven chapters in the Getting Ready section, and they will cover all the tools you need to know.

Chapter 1: What is the Bible? sets the groundwork for the study by considering what the Bible is. If you ask people what they think about the Bible, you'll find many opinions. It's important that we correctly understand the truth about the Bible so that we handle it correctly.

Chapter 2: Choosing the Right Kind of Study looks at a wide range of different ways that you could study the Bible. It might surprise you how much diversity falls under the heading "studying the Bible". You may not even realize that you're using these different studies today!

Chapter 3: Understanding the Big Picture and **Chapter 4: Tools for Understanding** look at the different tools that you will use in your Bible study. As I already said, you don't need to know Greek or Hebrew. These tools are simple and straightforward. It might surprise you how many you already know.

Chapter 5: Applying what you learn will show you how to take your understanding of what the Bible says and accurately apply it to your life. Studying the Bible is about life transformation, not just additional facts to master. Once you've learned this, you will see what God is asking you to do—or commanding you to do.

Chapter 6: The Six Easy Step Method will spell out the exact process to follow in order to conduct your own Bible study. It will introduce you to a broad list of resources that you can use

to enhance and support your study. Not only that, you'll understand when you should turn to study Bibles or commentaries and when you should use your own tools to uncover God's message to you.

Chapter 7: Bible Study References for You shows you how to get the resources that will allow you to effectively study God's Word. Some of the resources are free, others are very low cost. I don't believe you need to spend a fortune to be set for studying the Bible. So my recommendations are very practical.

Throughout these chapters, I'll explain what you need to know, but I'm also going to ask you to think about several thought-provoking questions. I'll point you to the companion workbook, where you'll have space to write your answers. The more you engage, the more you'll understand and the better you'll become at studying on your own.

In the second part of the book, "Using the Study Process", we'll put all the pieces together and walk through the process so it's perfectly clear. I'll show you the formula I use to study the Bible. You won't need any knowledge beyond what you read in the first seven chapters. It really is that simple.

Chapter 8: How to Start Your Study explains the Study Overview process. Before diving into the chapter study, it's a good idea to take some time and get your bearings. The Overview process will help you understand the book and prepare you to better understand the chapters you will study next.

Chapter 9: How to Do A Chapter Study will drill into the exact steps that you will need to follow to understand and apply what God's Word says. For starters, we'll focus on chapter studies. But once you master the process, you can apply these steps to a study of any size - from a single verse to several paragraphs.

Chapter 10: How To Finish Your Study shows you how to wrap up your study and summarize all the lessons you've learned. It's good to study the text of your Bible. But sometimes the best insights come when you put all the pieces together.

Chapter 11: What Next? explains how to get a guided study of Titus. This is a short book in the New Testament which is ideal as your first study. What's even better is that I have already completed the work and as we go along, I'll share all my notes with you. I'll also walk you through the study process step by step to ensure that you get all the steps in the right order. And if you have a question, I'm just an email away and will be happy to help you with your challenge.



During the Bible study portion of the process, I encourage you to download the study plan from my website. Everything you'll learn in this book is a template you can use on your own. With a little practice, you'll become proficient at following the six-step process to reading and understanding what the Bible has to say, and then applying it to your own life.

You can read this book and do the study by yourself. That would be very rewarding. However, if you want a deeper impact, consider doing it with a friend. Just like my small group went through this journey together over 10 weeks, you could meet weekly with a friend to discuss each chapter. If you did one chapter per week, you'd complete the process in less than three months.

Who do you know that would benefit from knowing this? They don't have to be an expert. You can learn together. Write out a name and call them. They will probably be glad you thought of them!

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Maybe a name will come to you later. That's fine. It's never too late to invite someone to study the Bible with you! Just stay open to the possibility of teaming up.

If you don't have a friend to do this with, don't worry, it's not a requirement. What really matters is what you learn and how you will grow spiritually because of reading.



Notes on the Second Edition

I published this book in May of 2018, with the plan to help people become students of the Bible. Ordinary people who just wanted to know what God had to say. And since then, I've been overjoyed with the response. Thousands of people have benefitted from the Six Easy Steps study process.

But as I looked at the book, I realized I could do better. Hence this second edition. I've made some changes that will help potential students go even deeper than before.

First, I removed the four chapters that contained the study of Titus. These have been moved into a companion tool on my website. At the end of the book I'll explain how you can get access to the email study that will guide you through your first study.

Second, I added three new chapters that focused on HOW the Six Easy Steps process works. This instruction will make the entire process much clearer and set you up to use it as guidance when you do your own study beyond the ones that I offer on my website.

Finally, these changes set me up to think about adding audio as another format for this book. With the Bible study included,

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that was never a good idea. But with this edition, I'm thinking about ways to reach even more people with the simple process that will make the Bible talk to them.

With all that said, let's start studying!

—Dennis

PART I

GETTING STARTED

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?

Congratulations on deciding to learn how to study the Bible! In the pages that follow, I'll provide you with the information you need to know in order to study for yourself. In this chapter, I want to focus on understanding what the Bible is.

You've obviously started studying the Bible for a specific reason. It might be to better understand your pastor or to learn what the Bible has to say, or perhaps because you want to join a Bible study group and don't want to look like a beginner.

Believe it or not, the Bible itself gives us reasons to study it. When we properly understand what the Bible is and what it has to say to us, we find even more reasons to open it up and study it.

That's what I want to do in this first chapter. I want to show you what the Bible is and what it truly has to say. When you see what the Bible says about itself, you will have even more motivation to study it. I also think it will raise your expectation of what you will gain when you study the Bible.

God's Message to Us

The Bible is God's message to us. In its pages, God introduces Himself to the reader and displays His holiness and sovereignty. We see ourselves as infected with sin and hopelessly cut off from God. This paints a terrible picture of humanity, cut off from God and responsible for the consequences of our sin. Fortunately, the Bible doesn't stop there. The continuing narrative arc of the Bible is how God reaches out to us and makes a way for us back to Him through Jesus' sinless life and payment of our sin-debt. This is God's message, and He wants us to know what He has to say.

The Bible, however, is not a general message communicating broad concepts in non-specific language. Quite the opposite is true. The Bible is very specific in what it says, and this matters a lot!

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, the writers of the Bible refer to it as "the word of God". The very words that God wanted to communicate to us.

Look up the verses below and, in a few words, write what they say about the word of God.

- Psalm 119:11
- Psalm 119:105
- Proverbs 30:5
- John 6:67-69
- Hebrews 4:12

The theme of Psalm 119 is God's Word. To the psalmist, this was the five books of Moses where God declared his covenant with Israel and passed down His law. In verse 11, the writer says that

he has memorized God's words so that he would not violate them and stand guilty before God.

Continuing on in the same chapter, the psalmist says that God's Word illuminates his path. It makes his path clear so that he knows what to do. This is like verse 11 because the context is about living a life pleasing to God by obeying His law.

Proverbs 30 says that God's word is pure and untainted, and therefore, true. Because of this, it protects those who rely on it because what it says is dependable and reliable.

When Jesus asked the disciples if they wanted to leave Him and follow someone else, Peter objected. He recognized that the very words Jesus spoke differed from the words that he heard from everyone else. Jesus' words were the only means he had of accessing eternal life.

In Hebrews, we see the word of God is unique and has unparalleled power in our lives. God's words can get into the secret parts of our lives and see the truth that might not be visible from the outside. Because of this, when God judges us, He judges the complete person, not just the outside actions.

In these passages, we see God is serious about His word. It has power and the ability to change our lives: saving us, keeping us obedient, giving us life, showing us what to do and judging us.

In everyday conversation, we use words to communicate with each other. God chose the same communication style and expressed Himself in words. Today we call these words the Bible. Today you can buy them at any Christian bookstore, or read them on the internet.

We should take God's word seriously. The Bible declares that God's word is capable of far more than we can accomplish ourselves. It does the work that only God can do.

The Criticality of Communication

Since the Bible is communication from God, I want to make a point about communication. It's something that will come up again later in this study. But it's really important and I want to get it out early so we don't have any confusion.

The purpose of communication is to pass a specific message from a speaker or writer to a listener or reader. The speaker determines what the message is, and the purpose of communication is to see the message accurately delivered to the person who is listening. Any break-down in this process has a very specific definition: miscommunication.

Perhaps you've played the game "grapevine" before. It goes by a lot of different names, but the concept is very similar. One person in a group whispers a message into the ear of the next person. Each person repeats what they heard to the next in line until everyone in the group has taken part. Finally, the last person and the first person share their version of the message. Often, the two messages are unrecognizable. Everyone gets a great laugh, trying to sort how the message got so messed up.

With the Bible, God is the speaker, and we are the listeners. God has a specific message that He intends to communicate. Our role is to receive that message exactly how He intended it. We don't get to put words in His mouth. We don't get to add our own little flair or opinions to His message.

In the game of "grapevine", that kind of miscommunication is funny. But when we are dealing with God's word, we don't want any miscommunication. Just like Peter said, if we miss out on what God has to say, we are missing out on the words of life. When miscommunication happens, bad things follow.

The Bible is communication from God, and we want to know exactly what He has to say. If we make it say what we want to hear, it ceases to be God's communication, and it loses all of its power and value.

Our modern Bible is a collection of many writings. At least 39 different people who wrote portions over a 1,500 year period. Despite the number of human writers, we believe God is the actual author.

The Bible gives us a logical argument for a single author. From beginning to end, the Bible has a consistent message. It describes God in unwavering terms. It presents our human condition with different words, but a common assessment of what we need.

Throughout the Bible, we see the progressive unveiling of a unified story. God, the Creator, made humanity. Adam, the first man, sinned and rebelled against God with no ability to reconcile. What followed was the dramatic revelation of God's plan to redeem the people who rejected Him. It did not happen in one grand movement, but in a series of steps that proceeded to the revelation of Jesus and His sinless sacrifice.

Inspiration of the Holy Spirit

The consistency and coherent plot line of the Bible point to a single author who is assembling the storyline carefully with a plan for what needs to be said. There is no reasonable way that so many people could have made all the parts of our Bible hang together so well.

It's not just logic that points us to an understanding of God as the author. Several of the individual men who wrote portions of the Bible said that God was the author who brought it all together.

Read the following verses and jot down a couple of things you observe about who they say wrote the Bible.

- 2 Peter 1:21
- 2 Timothy 3:16

When Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples, wrote a letter to fellow believers, he said that his readers had even more evidence than prior generations, and they ought to pay attention to it. They had the Word of God. It was not a matter of anyone's opinion, but established and known truth.

Peter is very clear that the Holy Spirit "carried along" the human writers to express what God wanted to have written. This language says that while the human writers used their own style of writing, what they communicated was exactly what God wanted us to know.

Paul, the great missionary apostle, gets even more personal with what he says. In writing to his protégé Timothy, he says that the Scriptures were "breathed out" by God. That's what the word "inspired" means.

According to what Paul wrote to Timothy, God's breath carried the very words of the Scriptures to the human authors. These were not the ideas of the men who actually penned the manuscripts.

However, those men wrote them down, and God has preserved them for us to read today. Undoubtedly, oral tradition played a role in how scripture moved from generation to generation. But eventually, someone put pen to paper and wrote it down. Scribes copied these manuscripts repeatedly until the text came to us today. God superintended this transmission to ensure that the message He communicated did not get corrupted like in the game of "grapevine."

The Inerrancy of the Bible

Inerrant is an old-fashioned word these days. It has a very simple meaning, though. It means “without error”. When we say that the Bible is inerrant, we are describing a quality that it possesses apart from every other book written.

Since God is the author, what He says expresses His character. If God had the character of a human, we would expect the Bible to be slightly incomplete, riddled with errors and off point occasionally. People don't know everything and make mistakes. If God had the character of a trickster, we'd expect the Bible to have misleading sections and other parts that were wrong just to mess with us.

God's character is holy, true, and omniscient. He knows everything, so we don't need to worry that there are things He doesn't understand. He is holy, so He is without sin or lying. Finally, He is true, so what He says is also true.

As we consider the Bible, we do well to remember that God is omnipotent. He can do anything. This means that even though the writers were human, and lived in an age when they understood less of the world than we do today, what they wrote remains true for us. God's power handles that. He ensured that the individual writers did not stray into errors as they expressed the message He wanted them to convey.

God is also eternal and unchanging. This differs from you and me. We are both finite and changing. Our opinions and beliefs grow and change as we age and encounter unique experiences. Not so with God. His perspective on events 2,000 years ago is exactly the same as His perspective today. So even though God inspired the Bible long ago, its truth is still true today.

The word “inerrant” wraps up these ideas. Because of who God is, His word was true when it was first written and is still true for us today. Even though imperfect humans with ancient worldviews wrote it down, God ensured that what they wrote was true and applies to us today.

Just because we say that the Bible is inerrant doesn’t make all the hard or confusing sections suddenly easy. Some parts still challenge brilliant and skilled Bible students. But through it all, we have confidence and faith in the Author of the Bible. There is neither reason nor cause to doubt what He says, even as we work, or even struggle, to understand it.

In the Bible, we see God’s message to us perfectly preserved, just as He intended it. It is a message for all ages and times, just as He is the God of all ages and times. His message is exactly what He wants it to be. Our job is to engage, study and understand.

The Bible IS the Word of God

All the Bible is the word of God and is inerrant. We say “The Bible IS the word of God.” It does not contain the word of God. Containing the word of God implies that some of what it contains is not the word of God. If that were the case, we would have to question everything in the Bible and ask, “Is this part of God’s message?” The result would be nothing but uncertainty and doubt.

The same God who inspired the writers to communicate His message also prevented those writers from adding in their own thoughts and opinions. It would be silly of us to assume that God could give the writers His message and ensure that they communicated what He intended, but then couldn’t stop them from writing more than what He wanted. Since God wanted to

communicate with us, we believe the Bible is exactly and only what He wanted to say.

We don't get to pick the parts we want to believe or study. All the Bible is the word of God and is suitable for us to engage. That doesn't mean that it's all equally relevant to every situation we face, but it can all be used to reveal God, point out our sin problem and show us God's plan of redemption.

The three truths we've already looked at lead to this last point. Because the Bible is God's message to us and because it says exactly what God wants it to say and because it is without error, the Bible communicates with authority.

In the Bible, we see God as He reveals Himself. He is telling us exactly what we need to know to see Him correctly. The Bible is the full revelation of God. For understanding God, His character, His attributes or His standard, there is no other source. No one knows God better than He knows Himself. He is the best qualified to reveal Himself.

So as you think about God, it's tempting to fill in the blanks with what you've read in other books, or what you've heard from friends, or even what you want to be true. That would ignore the authority of the Bible. The best approach to getting to know God is to study what He has already told you about Himself.

In the Bible, we also see ourselves exactly as God sees us. When we evaluate ourselves or each other, it's very difficult to pick a measuring stick to compare ourselves against. We are entirely subjective. But God has communicated His standards to us. He points out our sin and our separation from Him.

This isn't exactly joyful news that we like to dwell on. But as we've already established, it's true. It is something that we all

need to deal with if we want to have any kind of relationship with God.

In the Bible, we see God in action to redeem us and bring us back to a relationship with Him. This is the great news that follows the bad news. We don't have to fix ourselves. God's plan provides a way for us to come to Him, just as we are.

The Bible shows us what it looks like when we have faith. It begins with faith that God has actually provided a way. But it goes far beyond that into a faith that trusts in God's provision of a savior. This kind of faith in something we can't see or touch is unnatural. We benefit tremendously by seeing it modeled and having it explained in the Bible.

If you ever think that you've got a great idea for making God happy or for pleasing God, check the Bible. Your idea has no authority on its own. It only has merit or value to the degree that it aligns with what God has already done—and told us about.

Finally, the Bible explains to us how we should live lives that please God. There are lots of ideas floating around today telling us how to live “the good life”. All other ways of living that don't follow the pattern outlined in the Bible will fail us and will not result in a “Well done, good and faithful servant” when we see Jesus face to face.

The Bible has the Final Authority

Because the Bible is the word of God, it is the ultimate authority for how we know who God is, how we understand our relationship with God, and what we need to do about that. As you face decisions, the Bible is a great place to turn to for advice and wisdom on how to proceed. Studying the Bible is how you will know what it says.

Remember, at the beginning of this chapter, I said that the Bible gives us its own reason to study? This is it. Take whatever reason motivated you to buy this book and add to it that only the Bible is God's message to us about who He is, who we are, His plan of salvation, and how we should live to please Him. Together, these are all significant reasons for studying the Bible.

Summary

Now that you've read this chapter and gotten to learn a little about the Bible, how does this impact how you live? It's one thing to gain some knowledge, but quite another thing to let that knowledge change you.

Take a moment and reflect on the questions below. Given what you've learned about the uniqueness and authority of the Bible, how would you answer today? Do you think that's a proper answer, or would you like to see change and growth in your life so that you could answer differently?

- How often do you read the Bible?
- Do you understand what it says; are you striving to go deeper?
- In what areas of your life do you need to obey what you read in the Bible?