



PORTLAND
BIBLE COLLEGE

How to Study the Bible

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These five sessions by Prof. Lanny Hubbard will teach you how to study the Bible effectively in order to build a biblical foundation for the rest of your life!

Step 1: Perspective for Biblical Study

You must begin with the understanding and belief that the Bible is inspired, inerrant, authoritative, relevant, reliable, and valuable. God speaks through humanity to teach us about his nature, the role he plays in history, to develop faith in him, and to obey and respond to his words.

The goal of biblical study is the obedience of faith. We study to learn more about God so that we can apply truth to our lives and reach others. This is orthodoxy (what we believe from the Bible) and orthopraxy (our actions in response to those beliefs) working together.

Take note of your initial reaction to God's word. Does it seem strange? Are you resistant? Enter into study with an open heart to learning new things about God.

Frequent exposure to the Bible is crucial to the spiritual vitality of a believer and Christians must become self-learners devoted to biblical study. This will deepen your understanding of the Bible and God.

Step 2: Object of Biblical Study

The Bible is a collection of 66 books divided into the Old Testament (39 books) and the New Testament (27 books). There are six genres between the two Testaments: narrative, poetry, gospel, parable, epistle, and prophecy. It is not written in chronological order, but rather by general topic.

The Old Testament was written over the course of 1000 years by various authors from different backgrounds (from shepherds to kings). The topics are: law, poetry, history, and prophecy.

The New Testament was written over the course of 50 years, also by various authors (from fishermen to doctors) and the three topics are the gospels/Acts, epistles, and prophecy.

Step 3: Tools of Biblical Study

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew and Aramaic, while the New Testament was written in Greek and Latin. We don't have the original copies from either Testament so it is important to understand that the translation you study from matters.

God gave ideas to his people, they wrote them down, they were painstakingly hand-copied throughout history, and the Bible wasn't translated into English until 900 AD. Today we constantly get updated translations/versions of the Bible because of new archaeological discoveries that allow us to better translate and refine the text.

There are three types of translation: formal correspondence (word for word), dynamic (thought for thought), paraphrase (translated from English to English rather than from Greek/Latin)

Good study resources for credible historical information: notes and bibliographies at the back of study books, biblehub.com, blueletterbible.org, and e-sword.net.

Step 4: Goal of Biblical Study

It is imperative that we understand the meaning of the text and the only way to know the meaning is to determine authorial intent.

That is, to see the message that the author was trying to communicate to the original readers and how the original readers would have understood that message.

Some hindrances to modern readers are worldview, social values, culture, experience, and education. (Recommended Book: Strange Scriptures that Perplex the Western Mind by Barbara Bowen.)

Our application is only strong when it is founded on good historical context. Therefore it is crucial to know the author's background to better understand their perspective. A tax collector (Matthew) will write differently than a tent-maker (Paul).

Always go through the interrogative questions with each passage of study: who, what, why, how, when, where, and who was the text originally written for.

Four steps in the biblical interpretive journey from Grasping God's Word by Duvall and Hays:

1. Understand the text as written to the original audience.
2. Know the differences between the original audience and modern world.
3. Find principles that carry over from the ancient one to our modern one.
4. Determine how the principles in the Bible are to be applied in the modern world.

Step 5: Process of Biblical Study

Character/place studies:

1. Start with general background information from dictionaries and encyclopedias.
2. Look up every reference in the Bible where the character/place is referred and make three categories: **references** (book, chapter, verse), **details** (the main points from the passages), **insights** (e.g. in the story of Joseph in Genesis it doesn't explicitly say there is parental favoritism or sibling rivalry, but we can see that in the story).
3. Organize your findings into a chronological outline including details and insights first, then you can adjust it into themes depending on your study.

Passage/book studies:

1. Read the passage or book in a few different translations and read the passage leading up to it, often they will go together.
2. Write down the people, places, symbols, and key words from the book or passage, then ask what is the point of this book? Additionally, watch for repeated phrases and the order of the material. When you have unanswered questions, check commentaries on the passage at biblehub.com, blueletterbible.org, and e-sword.net.
3. Lastly, try to summarize the whole book or passage into one or two sentences.



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