

How to study the Bible

Including a short study on the book of Philemon

PHW
PRACTICING HIS WAY

Resources:

How to study the Bible series by Craig Groeschel

day one

The living Word

Scripture:

Hebrews 4:12; 2 Timothy 3:16–17; John 1:1

Focus:

The Bible isn't just a book - it's God's voice speaking straight to your heart. It's alive and active (Hebrews 4:12), and every time you open it, God is inviting you into deeper relationship with Him. He wants to teach you, guide you, encourage you, and gently correct you - not to condemn you, but to help you grow and walk in freedom (2 Timothy 3:16). Through His Word, He reminds you of who He is and who you are in Him. This isn't just about learning - it's about connecting. When we read the Bible, we're spending time with the God who loves us and is lovingly shaping us to be more like Him.

Teaching:

- Hebrews tells us that God's Word is "alive and active". It cuts through the noise of our lives, piercing our hearts, revealing what's really going on inside, and helping us see what's true. It doesn't just speak to our actions, but to our thoughts, motives, and desires.
- 2 Timothy emphasises that Scripture is useful for every dimension of life: teaching, correcting, training, and equipping.
- John 1:1 reminds us that Jesus Himself is the Word made flesh. Studying Scripture is encountering Jesus.

day one

The living Word

Reflection:

When was the last time a Bible verse felt like God was speaking right to you?

What might be getting in the way of you hearing God clearly through His Word right now - distractions, doubt, or something else?

Application:

Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17 slowly and let the words sink in. Notice how each phrase highlights the power of God’s Word to shape and strengthen you. Whether you need encouragement, direction, or correction, God’s Word is there to meet you. Let this verse remind you that Scripture is not just informative - it’s transformative. You are being equipped, day by day, for everything God has called you to.

Journaling Prompt:

What does it mean to you that God’s Word is meant to shape, teach, and prepare you for life? How might this change the way you approach the Bible from now on?

day two

Choosing a translation

Scripture:

Nehemiah 8:8; 1 Corinthians 14:9

Focus:

Understanding begins with comprehension. If we don't understand the words, we can't obey them.

Teaching:

- Nehemiah's leaders explained the law clearly so people could understand.
- Bible translations fall into three general categories:
 - Word-for-word (formal equivalence): e.g. ESV (English Standard Version), NASB (New American Standard Bible), and NKJV (New King James Version)
 - Thought-for-thought (dynamic equivalence): e.g. NIV (New International Version) and NLT (New Living Translation)
 - Paraphrase: e.g. The Message (MSG)
- Look for a Bible translation that helps you clearly understand the message while staying true to the meaning of the original languages.

Reflection:

Which Bible translation do you use most often, and is it helping you understand and engage with God's Word?

day two

Choosing a translation

Reflection:

What do you like about the Bible you're using?

Application:

Read Philemon 1:6 in three translations. Which version helps you understand the verse best?

Journaling Prompt:

What is one small way you can start living out 2 Timothy 3:16–17 each day? (For example setting aside time to read the Bible, writing down what you learn, or letting Scripture guide your choices this week.)

day three

Time, Place, Plan

Scripture:

Psalms 1:1–3; Mark 1:35

Focus:

Spiritual transformation happens not in occasional moments but in consistent rhythms. Bible study requires intentional space.

Teaching:

- Psalm 1 describes the one who delights in the law of the Lord day and night as a rooted tree.
- Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray and reflect.
- Different seasons of life (motherhood, illness, busy careers, grief, transition) may affect what time in the Word looks like. Embrace your season.
- Life-giving rhythms require choosing a regular time, a quiet place, and a specific plan.

Types of Bible Reading Plans:

- **Book Study:** Read 1 Bible book at a time (e.g. John, James, Psalms)
- **Character Study:** Focus on people like Ruth, David, or Peter
- **Topical Study:** Look up themes like forgiveness, anxiety, or grace
- **Devotional Plans:** Use tools like the YouVersion app for guided plans
- **Whole Bible Reading:** Try a 1-year Bible plan (like the Gumbels' Bible in One Year)

day three

Time, Place, Plan

Reflection:

What time of day are you most focused, present, and open to connecting with God?

What distractions do you need to eliminate from your Bible time?

Application:

Identify a specific time and place to meet with God daily.

Journaling Prompt:

What kind of space do you need to create in your life and home to meet with God?

day four

Context is key

Scripture:

2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11

Focus:

As 2 Timothy 2:15 reminds us, we're called to "correctly handle the word of truth." When we study Scripture in its full context (understanding who wrote it, why, and what was happening) we step into the bigger picture of God's redemptive story. This not only protects us from misunderstanding, but deepens our wisdom and connection to His truth.

Teaching:

- Context asks: Who wrote this? To whom? Why?
- The Bible was written by approximately 40 different people under the divine inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
- These writings span three continents: Asia, Africa, and Europe, and were recorded in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- Written over 1,500 years, yet the Bible maintains a unified message of redemption, centered on God's relationship with humanity and His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ.

day four

Context is key

Reflection:

What might you miss or misunderstand if you read a verse without learning who wrote it, why, and in what historical or cultural setting?

How does knowing the history behind Philemon affect your reading?

Application:

Research and summarise Philemon: Who wrote it? Why? What's the situation?

Journaling Prompt:

How might your understanding of other familiar passages change if you consistently studied them in context first?

day five

Reading slowly and asking questions

Scripture:

James 1:22–25; Psalm 119:18

Focus:

Don't rush through your Bible reading. Slow down and engage with the text. Transformation requires meditation (biblical meditation means to dwell deeply on God's Word - repeating it, reflecting on it, and letting it sink into your mind and heart. It's mentioned often in the Psalms, like Psalm 1:2 and Psalm 119:15, where we are urged to “meditate day and night” and “meditate on Your precepts”).

Teaching:

- Asking good questions leads us from simply reading Scripture to truly applying it.
- James compares God's Word to a mirror - it reflects our true spiritual condition. The more we look into it, the more we discover about who we are and who God is shaping us to become.
- Ask the following two foundational questions:
 - What does this say about God?
 - What is God saying to me?
- You can also use the S.P.E.C.K. method:
 - S** - **Sin** to avoid
 - P** - **Promise** to claim
 - E** - **Example** to follow
 - C** - **Command** to obey
 - K** - **Knowledge** about God

day five

Reading slowly and asking questions

Reflection:

What kinds of questions help you move from simply reading the Bible to actually applying it in your life?

What happens when you take time to pause and reflect?

Application:

Choose a passage and read it slowly twice. Write down anything that stands out the second time.

Journaling Prompt:

How might your experience with Scripture change if you began to treat it as a meaningful dialogue with God rather than something to check off a list?

day six

Prayerfully applying the Word

Scripture:

James 1:22

Focus:

Putting Scripture into Action.

Teaching:

God wants transformation, not just information. Invite the Holy Spirit to guide your reading, then act on what you've learned. Real change comes through obedience.

Reflection:

What's one small way you can live out what you read today?

How has God been prompting you lately?

day six

Prayerfully applying the Word

Application:

Start and end your time in prayer. Ask God to help you live differently because of His Word.

Journaling Prompt:

What did God show you, and what are you going to do about it?

day seven

Book Study: Philemon in Context

Scripture:

Philemon 1:10–11

Focus:

Study the Bible in context.

Teaching:

Philemon is a short, personal letter from Paul to a man named Philemon about a runaway slave named Onesimus.

- Author: Paul, writing from prison
- Recipient: Philemon, a wealthy Christian who hosted a house church
- Purpose: Encourage forgiveness and restoration of Onesimus, a new believer

Understanding these details changes how we read each verse - now we see the themes of grace, forgiveness, equality, and reconciliation.

Reflection:

How does knowing the background of Philemon change how you read it?

What does this short letter reveal about Christian relationships?

day seven

Book Study : Philemon in Context

Application:

Read Philemon in full. What is one lesson God is highlighting for you?

Journaling Prompt:

Summarise the story of Philemon in your own words. How does it mirror the Gospel?

day eight

Character study: Paul, Onesimus, Philemon

Scripture:

Philemon 1:17

Focus:

Studying Bible characters helps us see our own spiritual journey.

Teaching:

In Philemon, we meet:

- Paul – advocating on behalf of someone else
- Onesimus – a runaway in need of grace
- Philemon – challenged to forgive and restore

You may identify with any of these roles. Scripture invites us to see how God meets us in each one.

Reflection:

Which character do you relate to most right now? Why?

What do you learn about God from their stories?

day eight

Character study: Paul, Onesimus, Philemon

Application:

Reflect on a relationship in your life where you're called to be a Paul, an Onesimus, or a Philemon.

Journaling Prompt:

Write a letter as if you were one of these three characters. What are you feeling? What is God teaching you?

day nine

Formerly... but now

Scripture:

Philemon 1:11; 2 Corinthians 5:17

Focus:

Following Jesus means our past no longer defines us. Our identity is reshaped by what He has done for us - His forgiveness, His sacrifice, and His love give us a new way forward.

Teaching:

- Onesimus means “useful.” Paul says, “formerly useless ... but now useful.”
- God gives us a new identity through Christ. Who we were no longer holds power over who we are becoming.
- This transformation is not theoretical - it’s personal and ongoing.

Reflection:

What were you “formerly”?

What has Christ changed?

day nine

Formerly... but now

Application:

Write your own testimony: Formerly I was ____.

But now, because of Jesus, I am ____.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Journaling Prompt:

If someone asked you how Jesus changed you, what story would you tell?

day ten

From study to lifelong transformation

Scripture:

Romans 12:1–2; Matthew 7:24–27

Focus:

The aim of Bible study isn't just to learn more - it's to become more like Jesus. Real growth happens when we live out what we've read, letting God's truth shape how we think, speak, and act.

Teaching:

- Romans 12 calls us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.
- Jesus said wise people are those who do what He says.
- Studying the Bible is about ongoing formation - choosing every day to become more like Jesus through obedience and reflection.

Reflection:

What habit from this study will you carry forward?

How is your heart different than it was ten days ago?

day ten

From study to lifelong transformation

Application:

Take time to reread the entire letter of Philemon. Reflect on how your understanding of Scripture and your connection with God has grown over the past ten days.

What themes or truths have stood out most clearly?

How have they impacted your perspective or habits?

Journaling Prompt:

Looking back on this journey, what are one or two specific truths you want to carry with you and how can you begin living them out in the days ahead?
