

BIG WESLEY LIBRARY ♦ BIBLE STUDY



HOW TO *Study* THE BIBLE

*A beginner's guide: three simple methods, the tools you need, and how to
keep going when it gets hard*

WESLEY A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

1500 LOMBARD STREET · PHILADELPHIA · SINCE 1820

HOW TO *Study* THE BIBLE

A beginner's guide: three simple methods, the tools you need, and how to keep going when it gets hard



BLACK AMERICANS READ THE BIBLE MORE THAN ALMOST ANY OTHER group in the country. Studies by the American Bible Society have found that more than one in four Black adults are deeply engaged with Scripture. If you want to join them — or go deeper — this booklet is for you.

Many people want to read the Bible but do not know where to start. They open to the first page, get lost somewhere in Leviticus, and give up. That is not a failure of faith. It is a lack of a plan. Studying the Bible is a skill, like cooking or driving. Anyone can learn it, one step at a time.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.

PSALM 119:105 · KJV

FOUR THINGS TO KNOW

BEFORE YOU BEGIN



THE BIBLE IS A LIBRARY

It has 66 books — 39 in the Old Testament, 27 in the New — written over 1,500 years by about 40 writers, all inspired by God. Different books are different kinds of writing: history, poetry, letters, prophecy.

2

KNOW HOW TO FIND A VERSE

John 3:16 means the book of John, chapter 3, verse 16. Use the table of contents at the front of your Bible. There is no shame in using it — pastors do too.

3

PICK A TRANSLATION YOU UNDERSTAND

We quote the King James Version, the Bible of our grandparents. For study, many people also use a modern translation alongside it. Reading two side by side often makes the meaning clear.

4

PRAY FIRST

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the Bible helps us understand it. Start every study with: *Lord, open my eyes to see what You want to show me.*



Study is better together. Join a Bible study class.

HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE
THE SIMPLEST WAY TO START
METHOD ONE: SOAP

SOAP is the method most often recommended for beginners. All you need is a Bible, a notebook and fifteen minutes. Each letter is one step.

LETTER	STEP	WHAT YOU DO
S	Scripture	Read a short passage. Copy one verse that stands out to you into your notebook, by hand.
O	Observation	What does it say? Who is speaking? To whom? What words repeat? Write down what you notice.
A	Application	What does this mean for my life today? Write one specific thing you will do.
P	Prayer	Write a short prayer, using the verse, asking God to help you live it.

A SOAP EXAMPLE · PHILIPPIANS 4:13

S: *I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.* **O:** Paul wrote this from prison. In the verses before, he says he has learned to be content whether he is hungry or full. So *all things* means *getting through all situations*, not *winning at everything*. **A:** My hours were cut at work. I will trust Christ to give me strength to be content this month, and stop complaining at home. **P:** *Lord, give me Your strength to be content this month. Help me trust You for what we need.*

METHOD TWO: *Observe, Interpret, Apply*



This method, sometimes called *inductive study*, adds a careful step in the middle, to make sure we understand what the passage meant to its first readers before we decide what it means for us. It keeps us from making the Bible say what we want it to say.

1

OBSERVE: WHAT DOES IT SAY?

Read the passage several times. Ask *who, what, when, where, why and how*. Circle repeated words. Notice commands, promises and warnings.

2

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What did it mean to the people who first heard it? Read the verses before and after. Compare with other Scriptures. Use a study Bible or a Bible dictionary.

3

APPLY: WHAT WILL I DO?

How does this truth change how I think, speak or act this week? Be specific. *Be more loving* is vague. *Call my sister and apologize* is an application.

METHOD THREE: *Slow, prayerful reading*



This ancient way of reading, practiced by Christians for over 1,500 years, is less about studying and more about listening. Choose a short passage — a psalm, or a few verses from a Gospel — and read it four times, slowly.

READING	ASK YOURSELF
1. Read	Which word or phrase catches my attention?
2. Reflect	Why does this stand out to me? What is God saying to me through it?

READING

ASK YOURSELF

3. **Respond** Talk to God about it in prayer.

4. **Rest** Sit quietly in God's presence. You don't need to say anything.

KEEP THIS LIST IN YOUR BIBLE

QUESTIONS TO *ask any passage*



- ☐ What does this teach me about **God**?
- ☐ What does this teach me about **people** — and about me?
- ☐ Is there a **promise** to claim?
- ☐ Is there a **command** to obey?
- ☐ Is there a **sin** to avoid or confess?
- ☐ Is there an **example** to follow?
- ☐ How does this point to **Jesus**?

YOU DON'T NEED ALL OF THEM

HELPFUL *tools*



- ◆ A **study Bible** has notes at the bottom of each page explaining hard passages.
- ◆ A **concordance** lists every place a word appears in the Bible. Many Bibles have a short one in the back.
- ◆ A **Bible dictionary** explains people, places and customs.
- ◆ A **notebook** for your SOAP notes. Date every entry; years from now it will be a record of your walk with God.
- ◆ A **free Bible app** on your phone can show the King James Version side by side with a modern translation.

WHEN IT GETS *hard*

Q I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT I'M READING.

A That is normal. Write your question down and bring it to Bible study or ask the pastor. Then keep reading — often the next passage explains the last one. Start with easier books like Mark, John, Psalms and Proverbs.

Q I KEEP MISSING DAYS.

A Don't start over from the beginning or feel guilty. Just pick up where you left off. Five minutes a day is better than an hour once a month. Tie your reading to something you already do every day, like your morning coffee.

Q IT FEELS DRY.

A Every believer has dry seasons. Try reading out loud, reading a different book, reading with a friend, or listening to an audio Bible on your commute. And keep praying, *Lord, give me a hunger for Your Word.*

STUDY WITH US

Big Wesley holds Bible study during the week, in person and online. Bring your questions — there are no silly ones. Call the church office at (215) 735-8961 for this season's times.

SIT WITH IT

Which method will I try first?

What time of day will I set aside for study?

Which book of the Bible will I start with?



“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

2 TIMOTHY 2:15

WESLEY A.M.E. ZION CHURCH

“Big Wesley” · The Freedom Church · Founded June 6, 1820

SUNDAY SCHOOL	9:30 AM
---------------	---------

SUNDAY WORSHIP	11:00 AM
----------------	----------

1500 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA 19146
(215) 735-8961 · wesleyamezion1500@gmail.com

*This booklet is free. Print it, copy it, and pass it on.
Scripture is from the King James Version, which is in the public domain.
More booklets in the library at our website.*