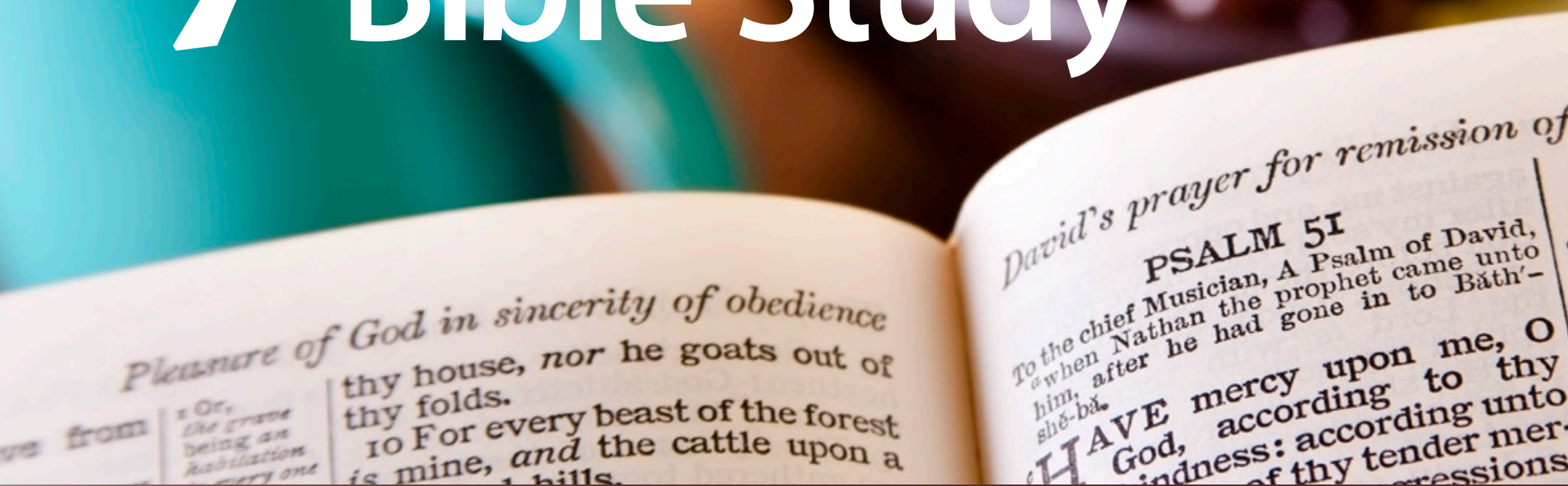


7 Keys to Better Bible Study



Many want to learn more of the truths of the Bible, but find it challenging or confusing. Here are seven keys that will make your Bible study more fulfilling.

We believe the Bible is a gift from God—His instruction book for His human creation. He inspired it to show us how to live now to prepare for His gift of eternal life. It is a practical book—and a priceless one.

But that doesn't mean that studying it is easy. Many people find the Bible's 66 books and 1,189 chapters daunting. Where should you start? How can you find the most helpful information? And how can you understand and apply what you learn?

The following seven keys to better Bible study are based on helpful principles from the Bible itself and input from Bible students with years of practical experience. Applying these seven keys will make your Bible study more helpful, inspiring and life-changing.

1. Pray for God's guidance to understand His will.

The Bible can be challenging to study, but God wants us to understand. He did not have it written in a way that requires a high level of intelligence or education to appreciate.

Long ago God said, "For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. ... But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it" (Deuteronomy 30:11, 14).

In other words, God gave us His instructions intending that we should understand and live by them. But in order to do so we must be willing to study

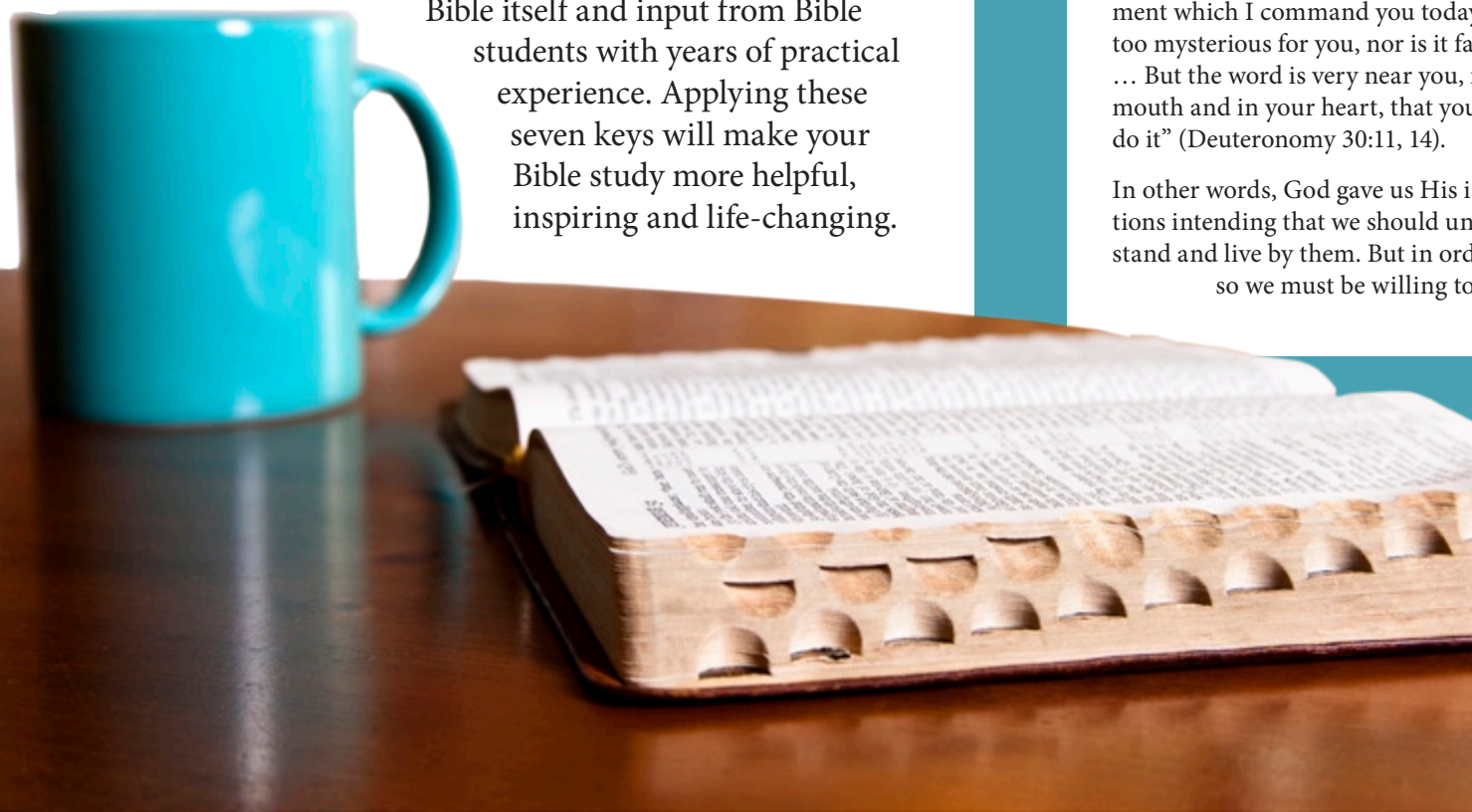
and learn—and to ask for His help.

God inspired the Bible to be filled with layers of meaning—it is a book we can continue to learn from for a lifetime! God says that some things are hidden and require the help of His Holy Spirit to understand (1 Corinthians 2:13-14). He encourages us to ask and to seek the help He is happy to give (Matthew 7:7-11).

As you study the Bible, pray to God for a humble, teachable attitude. Commit to regular, daily study and ask God to grant you understanding and perception and the help you need to stick to your plan.

KEY OBSERVATION:

The Bible is a challenging book, and we need help from its Author in order to understand and benefit from it.



2. Read the Bible for an overview that will help you put things in context.

A vital key to Bible study is considering the context, and it can be helpful to read a whole paragraph, chapter and even an entire book to understand the context of a verse.

Many new readers find it helpful to start with less-demanding books like Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Matthew, Acts and James. It is also good to set a long-term goal of reading the entire Bible to eventually gain an overall context of the Bible. You can read straight through or follow a [Bible reading program](#). As you read,

note the clear themes and emphases of the Bible.

It's also helpful to take notes on what you read so you can better remember sections of Scripture and lessons that you may want to study later in more detail. And be sure to write down questions. As you continue reading, you may be able to answer many of those questions for yourself. And you can seek help and counsel to better understand the rest (see point 7 in this article).

As you read through the Bible, you may find the articles in the [Holy Bible](#) section of the Life, Hope & Truth website provide helpful background information.

KEY OBSERVATION:
Context is vitally important in Bible study. Make a long-term goal to read the whole Bible. You can't fully understand the Bible without reading it all, Old Testament and New.

3. Study specific subjects throughout the Bible.

Generally speaking, the Bible is not arranged by topic. For example, if you want to know everything the Bible says about patience or finances, you will not find it in one place. It is woven throughout the Bible.

Looking at just one or two scriptures out of context can give a skewed picture of the biblical teaching. It is helpful to study as many related passages as possible, in context, to gain a more complete understanding.

Concordances (which help you find specific words and phrases) and topical Bibles can help you find passages in all parts of the Bible that discuss a specific subject, such as marriage, parenting, prayer, honesty or worship. (More information about concordances, including online concordances, can be found in the article "[Bible Study Tools: Where to Start](#).")

Information about how to choose topics to study can be found in the article "[Bible Study Topics](#)."

KEY OBSERVATION:
When you need to find God's thinking on a specific subject, it helps to use Bible study tools to find related passages.

4. Use clear scriptures to help you understand less clear scriptures.

One of the major claims skeptics make is that the Bible is inconsistent and contradictory. But Jesus Christ said, “The Scripture cannot be broken” (John 10:35). We believe that the entire Bible is consistent in presenting truth inspired by God. Any apparent contradictions can eventually be reconciled by other scriptures. In other words, the Bible interprets itself.

It’s true that some passages are more difficult to understand, often because of translation issues. An important principle is to base understanding on scriptures that are clear and easily understood, using them to interpret the verses that aren’t as clear.

For example, even the disciples didn’t understand some of Christ’s parables, but thankfully Jesus’ explanation of them is often also recorded. And the Bible gives us four books describing Jesus’ life and teachings: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Carefully comparing the accounts can help Jesus’ teachings to become clearer.

KEY OBSERVATION:
The Bible interprets itself, and careful study can clear up apparent contradictions.

Sometimes apparent contradictions can be resolved by considering the Bible as a problem of addition, not subtraction. For example, what did the sign above Christ’s cross say? The four Gospel accounts all contain the words “King of the Jews” but are different in other ways. Did some of the Gospel writers get it wrong? Or were they all copying different parts of the same sign?

Part of the explanation may come from John 19:20, which says the sign was written in three languages. Perhaps Pilate had the accusation written a bit differently in each of the three languages.

Dr. Gleason L. Archer, in his book *New International Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, wrote: “It is quite conceivable that Pilate first wrote in Latin in brief form. Then, as he wrote beneath in Greek, he may have felt like adding the name of Jesus and the city that He belonged to, since the Greek form would be legible to all bystanders of whatever race. The Aramaic version may have copied the Greek with the omission of ‘Nazarene.’ This could account for the variations reported in the four versions” (p. 346).

Study Bibles, conservative commentaries, Bible handbooks and specialized books like Dr. Archer’s can help Bible students examine the apparent contradictions that skeptics often bring up. For more on this, see [“Contradictions in the Bible?”](#)

5. Compare various trustworthy translations.

Since the Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek and translation is not an exact science, comparing different Bible translations and other Bible study aids can help modern readers better understand the original meaning.

Which English translations are best for different uses? We use the New King James Version as our standard Bible, but other translations can provide insights when used carefully. See our helpful article [“What Is the Most Accurate Bible Translation?”](#)

It’s also important to understand the difference between a translation and a paraphrase. Some Bibles (such as the Living Bible) aren’t translations from the original languages, but attempt to reword an English translation to clarify the language. While paraphrases can be helpful when reading some sections of Scripture, they are not reliable sources for more detailed, doctrinal study.

KEY OBSERVATION:
Comparing and being aware of the strengths and weaknesses of various English translations can help us as we try to understand the meaning of a passage.

6. Do what the Bible teaches you.

The Bible is not designed to just be academic knowledge. God revealed this information for our benefit—to change our lives for the better, now and forever! But we must act on what we learn. When we think about (**meditate** on, Psalm 119:97-100) what we are studying, we can better understand how to apply it in our daily lives.

We need God’s Word—the Bible—implanted in our hearts to motivate us to be doers—to see ourselves as God does and to change.

As James wrote: “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man observing his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of man he was. But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:22-25).

KEY OBSERVATION:
God wants us to obey Him—for our own benefit!

7. Seek help.

The book of Acts records the good example of an educated man serving in the government of Ethiopia who said, “How can I [understand], unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:31). This Ethiopian eunuch found it helpful to have someone to ask his questions to.

Of course, God doesn’t expect us to just accept someone’s explanation. The book of Acts also records the admirable example of the Bereans, who were “fair-minded” and “received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things [taught by Paul and Silas] were so” (Acts 17:11).

If you have questions about the things you are studying in the Bible, we are happy to assist in any way we can. You can type the subject into the **search box** on the Life, Hope & Truth website or explore all of the articles on our “**All Topics**” page.

If you don’t find a related article, you are welcome to **ask a question** for our Personal Correspondence team to answer by email. Or if you prefer to contact a minister in your area directly, see our “**Congregations**” page for a list of trained, Bible-believing, caring ministers around the world. We are here to help.

But you shouldn’t just believe a man or group of people. Compare the answers you are given to Scripture—believe the Bible—to prove it for yourself.

KEY OBSERVATION:
Asking questions and comparing the answers with the Bible can be a helpful tool in understanding the Bible.

Key Actions:

1. Pray daily for God's guidance in your Bible study.
2. Read through the Bible to understand the context.
3. Use concordances and other tools to study specific subjects that are important to you.
4. Focus on clear scriptures to help you understand less clear passages.
5. Compare translations and use other Bible study helps.
6. Apply what you learn.
7. Ask questions and compare the answers with the Bible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For more information about Bible study, see these helpful articles:

How to Study the Bible

What is the best way to study the Bible? Here are some tips on how to study the Bible and gain deeper insights and understanding.

What Is the Most Accurate Bible Translation?

Which Bible translations are most accurate and readable? Which translation(s) should you use in your Bible study?

Why Study the Bible?

Is the Bible relevant to our lives today? Can it give us priceless, practical help and real hope? We believe it can!

Holy Bible section of the Life, Hope & Truth website

What kind of book is the Holy Bible? Who wrote this best seller? And what does the Holy Bible mean for us today? In this section see overview articles about many of the divisions and books of the Bible.

Bible Study Tools: Where to Start

There are more Bible study tools available to us today than ever before. But did you know that the Bible itself can be the most important study tool?

Bible Study Topics

The Bible addresses so many topics that can answer our questions and help us now and in the future. What are some of the most important Bible study topics?

Contradictions in the Bible?

Is the Bible inerrant? There have been errors in copying and translation, but were there contradictions in the original manuscripts? Does it matter?

About **LifeHope&Truth**

LifeHopeandTruth.com exists to fill a critical void in this world: the lack of understanding about the purpose of life, the lack of realistic hope for a better future and the lack of truth!

Neither religion nor science has satisfactorily addressed these issues, so people today are of divided opinions, confused or, worst of all, don't care anymore. The ancient words of the prophet Isaiah ring so true today: "Truth is fallen in the street."

Why? Is it because God was right when He warned that humans are inclined to reject Him and usually choose not to know Him?

We are here for people who are searching for answers, who are ready to prove all things or who are hungry for more than what they've been taught most of their lives about God, the Bible, the meaning of life and how to live. We want to help you truly understand the good news of the gospel and fulfill Jesus Christ's admonition to "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness."

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