



BIBLE STUDY

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE?

To start using this guide, don't be overwhelmed by thinking you need to attempt every section. First off, simply skim through the sections in an attempt to see how you want to study the Bible. You may just want to memorize a passage, or you might want to dig a little deeper into a section of the Bible. This guide is simply an attempt to offer as many ways for you to study the Bible as possible. Along with providing as many tools as possible to help you in this process. The idea is to start slow and small, then build up over time in your daily Bible practice.

OVERVIEW

The Bible stands apart, more comparable to a library than a single book. Sometimes, it demands a slow, deliberate reading, reflecting on each word. Other times, a broader perspective is required, consuming large portions to grasp its overarching narrative. Moments arise when a single phrase warrants prolonged contemplation, allowing its essence to permeate our hearts. And then there are instances when we must sit attentively, equipped with reading glasses, and meticulously study its contents.

In essence, the Bible invites us to engage both our hearts and minds in its reading. While the practice of *Lectio Divina* nurtures a heart-centered approach, this week's focus is on stimulating our intellects to delve into its depths through study.

The Bible is divine revelation. God's own word to us. It reveals who God is, who we are, and why we are here. Through Bible study we gain insights into God, human nature, and creation. Studying Scripture can equip, guide, and reveal how to live in life-giving ways that deepen our friendship with God and others. Both Old and New Testaments encourage regular study, meditation, contemplation, and memorization of God's word. The benefits of Bible study are directly relation to how open, attentive and obedient we are to what we read.

Jesus exemplified the love of God's Word in every area of his life. He used Scripture to answer those who tested him, resist temptation, find guidance, encourage his heart, comfort others, explain his actions, and ultimately face his own death.

Truly embodying Christ's teachings demands a commitment to immerse ourselves deeply in God's Word, exploring its depths with thorough study. By doing so, we



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cultivate a genuine delight in His Word, derived from meditative reflection and diligent study, as expressed in **Psalm 1:2**.

COMMUNITY PRACTICE

If you have never heard of the BibleProject, they have created multiple explainer videos over the Bible itself, individual books, and different stories. If you are new to the Bible or would like a refresh, go to the BibleProject and their "[How to Read the Bible](#)" section. Start by spending a few minutes watching the first video "[What is the Bible](#)". Afterward you can begin to watch the rest of the How to Read the Bible series.

COMMUNITY QUESTIONS

1. What stood out to you about this video?
2. What has been your experience of studying the Scriptures in the past? What value do you see in studying the Bible?
3. How do you tend to relate to authority? Is there any area of life that you struggle to trust the Bible as authoritative?

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE

The Practice for this week is simple: spend some time studying and memorizing certain scriptures in the Bible. Below are a few different approaches for Bible study. Some are exercises for a specific passage, while others could be applied to any passage in the Bible. Note: These exercises and tools are not meant to help you "solve" a passage, but to help form you into a better student of the Bible. Try several different methods and see what fits well with you. What method helps you stay more consistent in God's word?

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. **Psalm 119:11 (ESV)**



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Memorizing scripture is a great way to hide God's Word in your heart. Memorizing portions of the bible lets you think about the Bible verse any time of the day or night. You can start out with verses that are especially meaningful to you.

You can combine Scripture memorization with many of the different Bible Study. Methods like writing out verses in your own writing and meditating on the Word. These methods flow together well.

You can also memorize several verses or even chapters of the bible. This would be a more challenging goal, but also very rewarding.

There's great value in having the Bible always on your mind and ready to think about for yourself or to share with others (John 14:26).

TOOLS:

- **Scripture Lullabies** – You can search on Spotify or iTunes. Scripture put to music to help relax and memorize scripture.
- **Dwell Differently** – Website that offers stickers, temporary tattoos, apps, and a podcast to help you memorize scripture.
(<https://dwelldifferently.com/>)
- **Bible Memory App** – a downloadable app which helps with Bible memorization. The basic level is free, but have a Pro version for \$9.99.
- **Topical Memory System** – Memory cards from the Navigators, you can search on Amazon or go directly to the Navigators at
(<https://www.navigators.org/resource/topical-memory-system/>)
- **Verses** – (App) Memorize quickly and easily with simple memory games, then stay motivated by tracking your progress over time using Verse memory health tracking.
- **Verses: Melody of God's Word** – (app) A meditative and immersive way to experience the Bible. Playlists and original songs by familiar voices were made to help you memorize, meditate on, and motivate and ongoing practice of reading God's word.



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STUDY SCRIPTURE CROSS-REFERENCES

Studying cross-references is looking up other places in the Bible that mention the same or similar ideas. This doesn't require as much time commitment as other methods, but you can apply it to any verse or passage of Scripture you're interested in.

For example, there are four accounts of the Gospel, or Good News of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The writers of the Gospels cover a lot of the same events. **Each reference might reveal a different detail or says it in a slightly different way that helps you understand the passage you're studying.**

These cross-references will point you to the word, phrase, or idea in different parts of the Bible. You'll find that the Bible often interprets itself. For example, if you're reading a verse in Ephesians, you will find a lot of parallel passages in the book of Colossians. If you're in the book of Revelation, you'll find a lot of references to the book of Genesis.

These cross-references are often in the center column. Some Bibles have titles for sections added in and could list parallel passages. Reference Bibles, some reading Bibles and almost all Study Bibles will have cross-references next to the text of the Scripture.

If a Bible verse doesn't make sense, looking at the immediate context around the verse or looking up cross-references can often bring a lot of clarity. If you don't understand the verse right away, put it "on the shelf" and use one of the other ways to study the Bible. Memorize the Scripture so you can think about it. You can try meditating on God's Word and let the insight arise slowly.

Write your questions in a journal, not just the insights and applications. Ask God to open His Word to you. You'll find that many of these questions get answered eventually.

COMMENTARIES & REFERENCE MATERIALS

One of the great benefits of living in our time is that we have more resources for Biblical studies than any other time in civilization. Scholars have written commentaries on books of the Bible and created easily accessible materials to increase our understanding of the Bible. One way to step into deeper into study



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of the Bible is to use commentaries or reference materials to assist our study of any given book, passage, or theme. Considering giving one of these study tools a try:

- [The IVP Bible Background Commentary](#): This Old Testament Commentary is a great all-in-one resource for understanding the world in which the Old Testament was written and how it impacts the meaning of Old Testament passages.
- [Logos](#): Logos is a subscription site where you can begin to curate and build different commentaries and tools as you learn to study the Bible. Logos contains over 100,000 theological resources to aid in your understanding of the Bible.
- [SonicLight](#): SonicLight is a resource from Plano Bible Chapel in Texas. Dr Constable has written study notes on each book of the Bible and has offered them free of charge.
- [N.T. Wright's For Everyone Series](#): Choose a book of the New Testament and pick up one of NT Wright's short *For Everyone* commentaries on that book. These commentaries are short, accessible, and could be read in small sections each day.
- [BibleProject](#): BibleProject creates incredible podcasts and animated films to explain Biblical themes, books, words, and more. If you're looking for a place to start, read through the books of Luke and Acts alongside the [Luke-Acts Miniseries](#).

WRITE OUT VERSES FROM THE BIBLE

Writing out a verse or several verses makes you slow down and think about the Scripture. It can give you a different perspective on the verse than just reading it alone.

Write it in your own handwriting. It can be on a lined sheet of paper. You can also get creative and write it in a different pattern. You can get colorful if you want to. You can doodle a little bit and draw small pictures if it helps you process the verse.

As you write the verse, ask yourself:

1. What words are my eyes drawn to?
2. What is the main subject?



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3. What is the main verb?

Read the passage out loud several times. **Try reading it slowly. Try reading it quickly to get a sense of the structure.** Read it again as many times as you'd like.

I didn't include journaling as a separate way to study the Bible because that can apply to any of these different ways to study the Bible. But, a journal would be a great place to keep these.

Take the journal or paper you wrote the Scripture on and look at it throughout the day. You can take a photo with your phone and set a reminder during your lunch break to look at it. Think about the verse and how you can apply it to your life.

To take it a step further, **you can paraphrase or summarize the verse or passage in your own words.** This makes you process and ask what the verse means even further.

You can also come up with a title for the verse or passage and write it at the top. It can be a phrase that summarizes what the verse is about, what you learned, or how you can apply it to your life.

MEDITATE ON THE WORD

To Meditate on God's Word is to ponder and dwell on the Scripture.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

The Bible speaks more about meditating on the Word than studying it (Gen. 24:63; Josh. 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 119:23, 97). To study is to observe and gather facts, analyze them, and come to conclusions.

To meditate is to purposely stay narrowly focused on a short phrase or verse and ponder it deeply. Meditating on the Word is more like cooking a stew for many hours than a quick sauté in a pan.



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Meditating on the Word is not to get more information from the Bible, but to let even one word or phrase from the bible take hold of your heart and mind.

There are many ways to meditate on the Word.

Ways to Meditate on the Word of God

1. Read the Word

Slowly read the Bible verse several times. Discover key phrases or words.

2. Write the Word

Write the entire verse at least once.

3. Memorize the Word

Having the verse in your mind and heart frees you up to not have to look for your place on the page.

4. Speak the Word

Gently speak it out loud several times. It can help you focus and process the verse.

5. Sing the Word

Sing the Bible? Yes! (Col. 3:16) Singing can unlock the heart and emotions. This has been an important part of many traditions in monasteries throughout history. It adds another dimension to meditating on God's Word.

6. Pray the Bible

Turn the Bible into a dialogue with God. Thank God for the truth that the verse is pointing to. Commit to obey and ask God to empower your heart to follow-through.

7. Picture the Bible

For example, when Jesus says that the Kingdom of God is like a Sower going out to the field to sow seed, picture the scene in your mind. What is God thinking, feeling, and saying?

All of these are ways to meditate on God's Word and be still in God's presence. Be sure to write down any insights and thoughts you had and ask God to give you more.



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THE SWORD METHOD OF BIBLE STUDY

The Sword Method of Bible Study is a simple, but powerful way to study the Bible. You simply ask 3 questions that cover the 3 most important points. It can be applied to a single verse or multiple verses (for example, the story of Jesus and Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10).

1. **What does this passage teach me about God, Jesus or the Holy Spirit?**
2. **What do I learn about mankind in general** – How and why do people act, think, and feel the way they do? What do I learn about myself personally and why I act, think, and feel the way I do? Do I identify with anyone in the story and why?
3. **Is there anything that God wants me to do according to this passage?** Is there a Sin to avoid? Is there a Promise to claim? Is there an Example to follow? Is there a Command to obey? (You can use the acronym: S.P.E.C. to remember the 4 questions related to what God wants you to do).

CHARACTER STUDY

In a Character Study or Biographical Study, you look at one character in the Bible and draw out lessons from their life.

There are many to choose from – major characters like Abraham, Joseph, Deborah, Moses, Ruth, David, Solomon, Esther, Paul, and Peter. There are hundreds of other characters in the Bible that you can learn from.

In a character study, you are looking at how God relates to people and how people respond to God. You can observe and learn from the dealings of God in a person's life.

You can learn from both the positive and negative experiences in a person's life. Are there any interesting life lessons? Were there any challenges that the person faced? What were his or her biggest faults? Did they overcome them? How?

For example, the life of King David, the second King of Israel, is a fascinating study. He starts out as a shepherd boy who is faithful in the mundane things of this life, like taking care of a few sheep. God sees him as a man after His heart and chooses him to be king over all of Israel. Yet, it takes many decades before the full



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promise is fulfilled. Along the way, David has many triumphs and some really big stumbling's.

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 1 Cor. 10:11 (ESV)

The Bible is a combination of biographies, poems, songs, visions and dreams, letters, and history. The Bible is not written like a theological textbook. **It's about how God relates to people in everyday life.**

When you do a character study, you can delve into the life of one person in the Bible and learn valuable lessons to apply to your own life. **You can find yourself in the story.**

How to do a Character or Biographical Bible Study

1. Pick a character in the Bible.

2. Find out all the passages of the Bible where the person is mentioned.

Be careful of different people with the same name. A quick internet search or a Bible dictionary will be helpful. Study Bibles may have a concordance or index that can be helpful.

A **Study Bible** is a great resource for in-depth Bible Study.

3. Make a timeline of their life if it's helpful.

What are the major events in that person's life? What kind of trials or temptations did they face?

E.g. For King David, it might be nice to map out the different seasons of his life and the different cities where those seasons took place: Bethlehem, Gibeah, Adullam, Hebron, and Jerusalem. These can be found in the books of Samuel and Chronicles.

4. What character traits do you notice?

What strengths or weaknesses of the person are highlighted in the Bible? Do they struggle with the same issue throughout their life? Do you notice any patterns? How did they overcome those trials or temptations?

5. What lessons can you glean from their life?



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Can you find yourself in this story? How can you identify with the character? What can you apply to your own life? What does God want you to do? Commit to obey. Ask God to empower your heart to obey.

STUDY A BOOK OF THE BIBLE

Have you tried other ways to study the Bible and want to go deeper? Do you like to be challenged? Studying a book of the Bible, or doing a book-by-book study, is a great way to go.

Studying a book of the Bible is one of the more challenging ways to study the Bible because it involves a little bit of every method of Bible Study. It can involve studying themes, topics, characters, individual words, and cross-references.

A book study takes time and commitment, but it can also be the most rewarding! It's my favorite way to study the Bible because it takes me deeper and helps me wrestle with the text over an extended period of time.

You might see many Bible verses in a whole new light when you read them in their context. **You might even find that some of your favorite verses mean something different** than what you might have heard in the past.

If you take a verse out of its context, it can seem to mean something different than what the author intended. **The advantage of a book study is that it helps you keep Bible verses in their context.** You want to know what God is saying and not change its meaning.

What I love about doing a book study of the Bible is that I usually end up where I didn't expect. I start out with a general idea of what I think the book means. Then I end up in a surprisingly different place at the end. Also, whatever book I studied last becomes my new favorite!

Studying the Bible one book at a time requires some time commitment. It can take anywhere from a few weeks to many months to study one book of the Bible, depending on the length and complexity of the book.



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The lessons you learn in Bible Study, and in life too, often come at unexpected times and in unexpected ways. Stay consistent and stay on track and you'll discover many jewels in God's Word along the way.

If it's your first time doing a book study, it's recommended to pick a book from the New Testament that's not too long, like the book of *Philippians*.

READ THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading through the Bible is a great way to study it. **Every page of the Bible reveals God's character, emotions, thoughts, and actions.**

"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:16-17 (ESV)

When you read the entire Bible or large portions of it, you can get a big-picture overview of the Bible. Anytime you read the Bible, you'll know what part of the big picture it is in.

How to Read through the Bible

Option 1: Read through the entire Bible from cover to cover.

Option 2: Read specific books first to get an effective overview of the Bible

Books of the Bible to Read for an Effective Overview

These 15 books of the Bible will help you cover all the major themes and the main storyline of the Bible.

1. Genesis
2. Exodus
3. Joshua
4. 1 Samuel
5. 2 Samuel
6. 1 Kings
7. 2 Kings



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8. Ezra
9. Nehemiah
10. Habakkuk
11. Proverbs
12. Luke
13. Acts
14. Ephesians
15. Revelation

The books of the Bible are arranged by category, not chronologically. **That's one of the reasons that reading the Bible from cover-to-cover is challenging for many people.**

For example, there are 4 records of the Gospels, the life of Jesus, in the New Testament. You can read one of the Gospels the first time through and then read the others after you have an overview of the Bible.

You can reference the [One-Year-Bible \(link to Amazon opens in a new window\)](#) or at Bible.com. This version has daily portions conveniently divided. These are helpful in developing a daily Bible-reading habit.

There are also many different types of Bible reading plans that you can find online. Some Bible apps and programs also have reading plans with reminders. **A reading plan with check-marks can be motivating to keep reading.** This is especially true when life gets busy and you fall behind schedule.

Another way to cover the Bible is to listen to an audio Bible. Audio Bibles can give you a new perspective on the flow of a book. You can listen when you're not able to read.

Many Bible apps offer audio along with the text. Also, some apps offer a choice of dramatized or non-dramatized versions of the audio. The dramatized ones might include background music, sound effects, and different actors reading different portions of the Bible.

Some Bible websites like [ESV.org](#) also let you listen to the Bible online as well.

If you get stuck in your Bible reading plan, feel free to skip any books along the way and come back to them later. Remember, [the goal is to encounter God and](#)



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[His heart for you](#). If you keep the main thing as the main thing, you'll find great benefit and encouragement from God's Word.

TOPICAL/THEMATIC BIBLE STUDY

As you read the Bible, there might be some topics or themes that you're interested in going more in-depth into. **A Topical or Thematic Bible Study is a type of study that explores a theme or topic through the entire Bible.** To read the Bible as not only scripture, but as literature, we must pay attention to its themes. Biblical authors use repetition of words, images, and ideas to develop themes and illustrate their point.

How to do a Topical Bible Study

1. Choose a topic.
2. Look up every instance of that topic in the Bible.
3. Categorize and summarize your findings. Explore the differences, nuances, and connections in the verses.

There are many theological or doctrinal themes in the Bible. For example, how is Jesus both fully God and fully man. Theologians would call this the doctrine of the Incarnation. There are also topics like salvation, angels, or the nature of the church.

The topic can also be application-oriented. What are the fruit of the Spirit? How do you develop passion for God? How can I forgive people who have hurt me and let go of the past? What does the Bible say about baptism in water? What is the purpose of prayer and fasting?

There are countless numbers of topics and themes in the Bible that you can pursue. How is the color purple used in the Bible? What does the number "12" often signify?

Depending on the topic, it might be a study that takes an hour, or if it's a major theme like the End Times, it could take months.



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The idea of a Topical or Thematic Study is to study what the Bible says about a topic or theme throughout the entire Bible and not just from one verse.

To do this, you can use tools like a Bible Concordance. Many Bibles, especially Study Bibles have at least a short index in the back.

How do you look up every instance of a topic or word? A concordance is a great tool for this. **A Concordance is like an index at the back of a book.** For example, you can look up all the verses where the word "heaven" occurs in the Bible. Some Bibles have a concordance in the back, but they're usually very limited.

Some concordances are organized by topics, which would be perfect for a topical or thematic study. Here's one that's online: [Torrey's Topical Textbook Online Resource](#).

TIP: Navigate using the alphabet at the bottom, not with the search bar at the top. If you wanted to study the topic of "heaven," click on the letter "H" then scroll down and choose the word "heaven."

If the topical concordance doesn't have many results, or you want to study the verses on your own before you look it up in a topical concordance, you can use a standard concordance that looks up words, not topics.

The most widely used concordance is some variation of Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, but most Bible apps or websites can do this easily using the *search* feature. Here's an example at esv.org (you might have to create a free account to use the tool). [ESV.org search results on "heaven."](#)

For this exercise, spend a few days reading one of the following passages and take notes on any repeated words, phrases, images, or ideas you notice:

- John 1-6
- 1 John
- 1 Thessalonians
- Ephesians



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PRACTICAL STUDY

A Practical Study is like a topical study of the Bible, but with a broader focus on **applying it to your life**. These are topics that entire books can be written on. For example, practical studies can dive into topics like prayer, discipleship, raising children, relationships, how to live out your faith in the workplace, and how to share your faith with others.

All the tips and tools like concordance resources that we looked at in Topical Studies would also be useful for a devotional/practical study.

The uniqueness of a practical study is the application of the truth from the Bible to our modern life. **It's mind-boggling to see how much of the Bible written about 2000+ years ago could apply to our modern-day life.** Countless numbers of people have received God's wisdom and applied the truths of the Bible to their lives.

WORD STUDY

A Word Study looks at the individual words and translations of the Bible text.

For example, there are several different words in the original languages of the Bible that are usually just translated into one word, *love*, in the English translations. Another example is that there are more than 7 different Hebrew words for *praise* in the Old Testament. **There are lots of opportunities for fruitful study if you know where to look.**

To learn to do a Word Study properly takes a lot of time in learning at least the basics of the original languages that the Bible was written in. Fortunately, **many translations of the Bible and Word Study tools are available, so you can gain many of the insights of Word Studies from these resources.** Unless you're doing original research in theology or Biblical studies, these resources will serve you well.

3 Ways That You Can Benefit From Word Studies

1. Compare 2 or 3 different translations of the Bible. E.g. ESV, NKJV, and NLT



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2. Use a Word Study resource like [Vine's Concise Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words](#) to look up particular words. Some of this info is available on the websites like the ones the video below mentions.
3. Learn to use Bible software or online tools. Here's a video introduction to 3 helpful websites that you can use to do Word Studies.

TRANSLATION STUDY

As you may know, the Biblical writers did not write their narratives, poems, and letters in English. Instead, the Bible has been translated from other ancient languages. Because translation is an art and a science, each translation reflects different subtleties of the text. Reading multiple translations of a given passage can help us gain a broader understanding of that passage. For this study approach, pick a passage (1-5 chapters) and read it in three different translations. We recommend trying the NIV, ESV, and NLT translations. There are multiple websites out there that will let you view different translations for free (Ex. <https://www.biblegateway.com/>). While you read the passage, take notes and write down any differences that you notice.

SUMMARY EXERCISE

When reading the Bible, it's easy to get lost in the weeds. For this reason, it can be helpful to stop and summarize what we've read. Read through one of the following passages or a passage of your choosing. Along the way, stop at the end of each chapter (or if you really want to dive in, each paragraph) and write down your summary of what you read in one or two sentences.

- 1 Thessalonians
- James
- 1 John
- Matthew 5-7
- Ephesians



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CONTEXT EXERCISE

The key to understanding almost any passage of the Bible is to understand it in context. Below are a few commonly misunderstood Bible passages. Pick a passage and spend some time reading the verses immediately before *and* after this passage. Then, ask the following questions:

- 1) What might this passage seem to mean when only read on its own?
- 2) How do the verses before and after this passage influence its meaning?
 - Philippians 4:13
 - Matthew 18:20
 - Jeremiah 29:11
 - Romans 8:28

STUDY BIBLES

If you're looking for a simple first step to broaden your study of the Bible, buying a study Bible is a great start. Study Bibles include notes in their margins that provide insight to the historical context, background, and interpretations of a given passage. We recommend either the:

- [NIV Cultural Backgrounds Commentary](#)
- [ESV Study Bible](#)

STUDY QUESTIONS

The Bible is a library full of many genres, written by different authors over nearly 1000 years. Yet, there are some questions that when asked of almost any passage can help us arrive closer at its meaning. Pick a passage of your choice and ask the following questions (if you're stuck, see if BibleProject has a video on the passage):

- Who wrote this passage? How might their worldview influence the meaning of this passage?



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- To whom were they writing and what did they intend to communicate to that audience?
- Are there any words or ideas that I understand one way as a 21st century reader that may have been thought of differently by original readers?
- Does this passage make any allusion to some other passages in the Scriptures? (See the Biblical Allusions section.)
- How does the context of this passage (verses before and after) shape its meaning?
- What words or ideas are repeated?
- If I were to summarize this passage in a few sentences, how would I do that?

BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

The Biblical authors are constantly building on, interacting with, and alluding to other texts in the scriptures. Jesus himself regularly quoted the Torah, Psalms, and Prophets. These allusions to other passages in the Scriptures provide key insights into the message that the authors were trying to convey. For this exercise, take your time (even over a few days!) reading one of the following texts or a text of your choosing looking for allusions to other passages in the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. These allusions can come in the form of a quote, a similar phrase, or simply a familiar image. (Some Bibles will even provide a footnote to help you know which passage is being alluded to). Once you've found an allusion, go and read the passage it alludes to and ask how the original passage influences the meaning of the current passage you're reading.

- Matthew 1-7
- Hebrews 1-3

Content derived from

<https://practicethewayarchives.org/scripture-practice/part-four>

(Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*, IVP Books, Downers Grove, IL, 2015, p.185.)