



How to love the Bible

Say a prayer

Not sure about the Bible? Too big? Old language? Confusing? Where to start? This series of LifeSpots will help. But first, *say a prayer*. If there's one thing that comes out super-strong in the Bible, it's that there's a God who connects. He listens. He steps in to help. Not sure how to pray? Go ahead and blurt out whatever's on your mind. Maybe something like this: "God, I'm not sure about you or the Bible. But here I am, ready to try. I'm willing to read and see where it takes me. Show me where to start. Teach me whatever you want me to learn. Do what you want to do right now. Amen."

Begin somewhere

The Bible has about 1,200 pages—a huge feast. But don't worry, it's broken down into smaller meals and bites—books, chapters, verses. You don't have to think about reading the whole Bible, any more than you have to think about meals for a month from now. Just start with a taste, and see where it takes you. The Bible has two "Testaments"—the Old and the New. "Testament" means covenant, or promise. The Old Testament has writings from before Jesus lived on Earth. The New Testament tells about the time Jesus lived here, and beyond. Recommendation: Start with the New Testament book of Mark, chapter one.

Choose your media

Digital scriptures, or hard copy? Whatever works for you! With hard copy, you can use highlighter crayons to mark verses that impress you. With digital scripture apps, it's easy just to read, if that's your focus. But it's also easy to find similar verses, look up names and places in a Bible dictionary, make your own highlights and notes, save verses in folders you name, look at meanings of words in their original language, and compare different versions. Check out Tecarta Bible (Tecarta, Inc), and The Bible Study App (Olive Tree Bible Software). Whether you use digital or hard copy—or both, you'll find a blessing in the Bible.

Choose a version

Start right away, with whatever Bible version you have. But also look for an easy-to-read Bible. For example, check out the New Revised Standard Version, New Century Version, New International Reader's Version, Good News Translation, or The Message. Compare the same few verses in a handful of versions, and see which one God leads you to. The classic King James Version has its beauty. However, it represents English that's 400 years old. Newer versions deliver the same message with language that's fresh and more understandable. For a description of Bible translations, see the article "[Which Bible version?](#)"*

Make a plan

The Bible is not one book, but a collection of 66 books written over many centuries. If you are new to the Bible, it's best *not* to try to start at the beginning and go through to the end. Ask God where he wants you to start. Consider the first four books of the New Testament—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. We call these the “gospels”. Of these, Mark is the shortest and easiest to read. In the Old Testament, try the Psalms—a collection of 150 songs that describe the longing of humanity and the heart of God. It's a great plan to read something from the New Testament, then something from the Old, then back to the New again.

Skim and dive

There are two different approaches to the Bible. One is to “jet ski”—to skim through a section fairly quickly. You gain a good sense for the general picture, and you get satisfaction from covering a lot of territory. The second approach is to *dive*—like putting on a snorkel or scuba gear, to go deep. You don't cover a lot of territory, but you see things you would otherwise miss. Colours, treasures, astonishing beauty and design. In this approach, you might spend a week or more on just one short section. You linger, ask questions, explore, pray, make notes, and think. Both approaches have their value, but be sure not to miss the second one!

Look for the One

“You study the Scriptures carefully. You study them because you think they will give you eternal life. The Scriptures you study are a witness about me. But you refuse to come to me and receive life.” John 5:39–40 (NIRV). This is a significant caution from Jesus. The Bible won't save you—only the One it reveals can do that. There are doctors of divinity who don't know Jesus and don't believe in him. Wherever you read—Old Testament or New—look for Jesus! The entire scriptures reveal him, Luke 24:27. Look for him, and when you see him, invite him into your life all over again. Reaffirm your trust in him, and his joy will fill your days.

Consider the style

The Bible is not where God sits down and says, “OK, listen up. Here's a series of black-and-white lectures on the straight truth about me and you and everything in the universe.” The Bible is better than that! It's a gripping historical record of the way God has unveiled himself and acted with humanity. The story is *real*—sometimes shocking. As a literary masterpiece, the Bible is filled with variety—history, symbolism, poetry, song, prayer, prophecy, story, illustration, drama, metaphor, dreams, visions. You'll also find declaration of truth and direct warning about falsehood. Always be aware of style and context, and you will love the Bible.

Pray it in

Once you learn to love the Bible, it can be your companion for the rest of your life. If you find your Bible study getting dissatisfying or boring, change something! Try a different version. Go back to basics, such as the four gospels or the first letter of John. And most of all, pray it in. Instead of reading “God so loved the world” and moving on, stop right there, get on your knees, and pray “God, thank you for loving me. Thank you for giving your Son for me. I claim your promise that I will not perish, because right now I have everlasting life. By your Spirit, make it real for me in this moment, and through the rest of this day. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

* See john524goodnews.org, Articles page > Scripture—the Word.