

Many different kinds of study tools are available today to assist readers in engaging the worlds and words of the Bible. The follow is a partial list of Bible study tools that can be helpful in finding new and rich insights from the Bible.

Bible dictionary. A Bible dictionary or theological handbook will have an alphabetical listing of articles on biblical ideas, events, people, and other topics, along with their meaning and background.

Bible atlas. A Bible atlas is not just a collection of maps of the Bible lands. A good historical atlas provides information on changing boundaries, geographical features of the land, major movements or peoples, and a feeling for distance, elevation, and climate conditions.

Bible commentary. A commentary is a book written by someone who has taken a lot of time studying some part of the Bible very carefully. A commentary provides information on who, when, to whom, and what of the biblical texts, as well as suggesting possible meanings and even applications.

Bible concordance. A concordance is an alphabetical listing of all the major words in the Bible. It will tell you how often the word appears and the passages in which the word is found.

Parallel Bible. A parallel Bible is a Bible that prints several translations side-by-side in columns. The resource can be used to compare how different people have understood the same original text.

Literary guide. A literary guide is a resource that helps Bible readers identify the various types of literature in the Bible. Some of the literary forms in the Bible include laws and rules, history and narratives, poetry and songs, wisdom and proverbs, gospels, letters, prayers, and parables.

In addition, your Bible should be a reliable translation and not a paraphrase. Also, your Bible will be most useful if it is annotated, that is, if it has footnotes that give you information on related Bible verses, other possible translations, and details useful for understanding the verses you are studying

Faith Practices

STUDY

“Be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern the will of God, what is good, perfect and acceptable.”— Romans 12:2b
“I pray that God may grant that you be strengthened in your inner being with power through God’s Spirit as you are being rooted and grounded in love.”— Ephesians 3:17b-18

In the ancient church, most new Christians were adult converts to Christianity. They went through a process of initiation into the faith which involved study of Scripture, instruction in various forms of prayer, and explanation of the symbols and actions of the liturgy. The process culminated in the Easter Vigil, where the new Christians were baptized, anointed with holy oil, and given their first communion. As the practice of baptizing infants became more and more prevalent in the fifth and sixth centuries, this process of initiation disintegrated.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the invention of the printing press and the growing number of people who could read provided access to the printed word as a tool in religious education. Disheartened by the state of parish education in a visit to all the churches in Saxony in 1527, Luther prepared the Small and Large Catechisms for instruction in home, school and congregation. Christians were to be lifelong learners. Study informed discipleship. Luther envisioned his *Small Catechism* as the foundation of learning for life. It told Christians what they were to do (the Ten Commandments), what God had done for them (the Creed), and finally, what and how to pray (The Lord’s Prayer). The *Small Catechism* could be easily memorized and inscribed on the heart. Then and now, biblical preaching familiarizes audiences with the stories of Scripture.

Unlike Luther’s parishioners, we own Bibles and can read them on our own. Entering the world of Scripture initiates us into a story-shaped world and offers us a way to understand our own. Study of the Catechism and Scripture mark the life of Christian discipleship.



BRINGING IT HOME

When was the last time you needed to refer to something or someone other than yourself to accomplish something? Identify some of the things you may have used—a Google search, road sign, a recipe, an advertisement, a book, etc.. We take guidance from these “informers” all the time. They help us know who we are and where we are and guide us as

we seek to accomplish things in safe and healthy ways.

A commitment to follow Jesus involves the same kind of prompting. We need daily direction and encouragement to “stay on track.” If we want to grow in our understanding and devotion to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is vital that we read the Bible again & again for ongoing insight and inspiration for daily life.

Identify some ways you can stay “on track” with Jesus.

Look through the following ideas that will help you learn more about how God is active through the word in your life. Feel free to adapt them to your situation.

- Share Bible stories that relate to ongoing activities in your life.

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| Parades | Mark 11:1-11 (Palm Sunday) |
| Picnics | John 6:1-14 (Feeding the 5000) |
| Fishing | John 21:1-14 (The miracle of the fish) Jonah 1 (Jonah and the Great Fish) |
| Gardening | Matthew 4:30-32 (The Mustard Seed) Luke 8:4-8, 11-15 (The Sower) |
| Camping | Genesis 28:10-22 (Jacob’s Ladder) |
| Travel | Luke 2:41-52 (Jesus in the temple) Luke 2:1-7 (The trip to Bethlehem) |
| Sightseeing | Genesis 1:1-31 (Creation Story) |
| Boat rides | Mark 4:35-41 (Jesus Calms a Storm) John 6:16-21 (Jesus Walks on Water) |
| Zoo | Genesis 6:9-8:22 (Noah’s Ark) |

- Display symbols of faith in your home at a level everyone can see (e.g., pictures of Jesus, crosses, Bible quotes, etc.).
- Choose age-appropriate Bibles and devotion books to ground your family faith discussions in a Bible story or verse.

- Learn Bible verses that promote healthy behavior, such as “May the Words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord,” and post them on your refrigerator.
- Attend intergenerational and age-specific classes to grow in knowledge and faith with others.
- Immerse your family in Christian community and experience Bible truths and promises through song, study, creative arts, relaxation and recreation. Consider spending part of your family vacation at a Bible camp.
- Preview movies and TV programming through a faith lens. Question whether they will enrich your hearts or tempt you to stray
- Weave your reflection on God’s Word with a study of the issues that confront you in your local and global community.
- Have conversations about how current events affect the way you live out your call to discipleship in God’s world.
- Give children the opportunity to include Bible stories in their imaginary play. Set up play stations for them to act out specific stories—the Christmas story (Luke 2), Noah’s ark (Gen 7-8), Daniel in the lion’s den (Daniel 6), Jesus calm’s the storm (Mark 4:37-39) , Jesus feeding the 5000 (John 6).
- As you and your older children experience life’s “ups and downs,” invite them to consider some of the personal conversations David had with God about challenging times in his life. They are recorded in the book of Psalms.

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths.” — Proverbs 3 5-6.
