



faith life and learning

Engaging the Bible through Prayer, Study, and Application

By Dr. Brant M. Himes
Lecturer

The Bible is God's living Word, and its truth can transform our lives anew every day. The Bible is also the church's historical accounting and record of the faith; it is an ancient collection of 66 diverse books, written in various literary styles across hundreds of years, for different groups of people and situations. How, then, are we to read and study these incredibly unique and complex books in order to discover and apply God's truths to our lives today? Fortunately, there are many quality and helpful resources available that can help you discover God's story of redemption in the Bible and connect it to your own life journey. To start, we suggest three steps you can take in order to enhance your Bible reading and study: **Pray, Study, and Apply.**

PRAY

Prayer is simply talking and listening to God. There is not a right or wrong way to pray; the purpose is not to say the right thing in the right way so God hears you. Rather, we pray to open our hearts and minds to the work God is doing within us. Prayer tunes our heart to God, and this tuning can happen through various modes such as silence and meditation, song, journaling, reading written prayers, or by just directing our thoughts, worries, and joys to God.

The Bible is a wonderful place to practice and enhance our prayer life. The book of Psalms, for example, is known as the "prayerbook of the Bible" because it captures the full range of the human experience and directs it all towards God. There are psalms of promise, faithfulness,

love, joy, and awe, as well psalms of anxiety, worry, doubt, and lament. God hears all of these prayers. The church has been praying the psalms for centuries because, in addition to expressing a wide array of our emotions and experiences, they also teach us to pray by providing words for thoughts and feelings that can be difficult to express. When you don't know what or how to pray, pray the psalms. These articles can help you get started: [How to Pray the Psalms | desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org), [How to Pray the Psalms | praypsalms.org](http://praypsalms.org), and [Praying the Psalms](http://prayingthepsalms.com).

Of course, the entire Bible is full of prayers. For example, Jesus teaches his disciples to pray in Matthew 6 and Luke 11, Miriam leads a prayer of victory after crossing the Red Sea in Exodus 15, and the apostle Paul offers his own prayers in the letters he wrote to the early churches. One of my favorites is Ephesians 3:20-21 (NIV): "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen." The Bible is the best teacher for learning how to pray.

Lectio divina (divine reading) is another form where we spend time focusing on a passage of the Bible, reading it as a prayer, imagining the scene, and listening for God's unique word to our own lives. [Lectio Divina: A Beginner's Guide](http://lectio-divina.com) provides an overview and instructions for how you can incorporate this art of prayer into your own life. For a more in-depth explanation, including

how to use *lectio divina* in a group setting, see [Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina](#).

STUDY

The Bible is a wonderfully complex collection of writings, and this complexity is an invitation to discover more of who God is and what God's story means for our lives. First a word of caution: beware of the tendency to read and interpret the Bible so it says what you want it to say, instead of letting the Bible speak its truth to you. Because of the diversity of the Bible, it is possible to "proof text" your own views and opinions by selecting verses from the Bible that affirm your already held personal opinions. Basically, we can make the Bible say whatever we want it to say. But we need to learn to let the Bible shape and influence us. We do this by learning about how the Bible was written, what it meant to the people who first heard it, and how the themes of the Bible connect across all 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. As we understand more of what the Bible is saying in its own context, then we can begin to make broader applications for our own lives.

[The Bible Project](#) is an excellent resource for introducing and explaining the history, context, and meaning of the Bible. There are video series on [How to Read the Bible](#), videos on various biblical themes, word studies, and individual books - and more resources are being developed all of the time. They are even offering [free graduate level theology classes](#).

[Fuller Studio](#) also provides short video introductions to every book of the Bible from a variety of professors and biblical scholars.

A common method for Bible study is known as the inductive method. This has three simple steps: observation, interpretation, and application. The articles, [How to Read the Bible - A Beginners Guide](#) and [How to Study the Bible on Your Own](#), are helpful starting places. As you dive deeper,

start consulting outside resources like Bible dictionaries, commentaries, articles, and other resources. [Bible Gateway](#), [Bible Study Tools](#), [Blue Letter Bible](#), [E-Sword](#), [Olive Tree](#), and [Study Light](#) are all free resources that can help you learn more about how to understand the Bible. Of course, the [APU Library](#) has a plethora of resources and scholarship to aid in your journey of discovery.

APPLY

Reading and studying the Bible are lifelong pursuits. We never "arrive" at all of the answers. But with intention and dedication, each day we learn a little more, go a little deeper, discover more about God, and see more of what God's love and hope can mean for us along each step of our journey. Remember, God's truths are new each day; every day is a new invitation to follow Jesus with all of our lives. We pray, read, and study in order to hear God's calling on our lives - and then we can take bold steps into a future shaped by God's goodness and truth.

Application is both a personal journey and one that takes shape within a community. Our families, friends, churches, communities, and the "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) before us all play a part in teaching us about God and discerning next steps for our lives. Test your sense of what God is doing in your life through prayer and Bible study, and by consulting with trusted family, friends, advisors, and teachers. God is with you.

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace."
Numbers 6:24-26 (NIV)