Introduction

This *Bible Study Basics* course is designed to help us gain the most benefit from the time we spend reading our Bibles. Whether we read it devotionally to enrich our souls, or read it more academically to find God’s answers to life’s perplexing questions we must read the Bible as responsible students of God’s Word.

The Bible is like no other book and it deserves our best effort to accurately understand and live its message. Millions of people have developed a spiritual depth and maturity through their accurate understanding of God’s truth. But some have tragically confused and misled themselves and others because they misunderstood the Bible.

By developing and applying some proven tools in our course we will learn how to correctly interpret and apply God’s holy Word to our lives. In this lesson we will discover why it matters so much that we do that. It matters to God, to us, and to those we may minister to. In Lesson 2 we will introduce three essential practices of effective Bible study. Then in Lessons 3 through 6 we will explore and practice each of the three practices. The course’s goal is to launch you into a lifetime of discovering amazing truths from God’s Word.

This course is designed so that it never ends. It introduces a passion and a practice that only grows for the rest of our lives. People who have studied the Bible for decades are as excited about their new discoveries as they were when they first read it. A young student asked a well-known Bible teacher how he could know the Bible as well as she did. “Simple,” she answered, “just study the Bible every day for fifty years.”

There are different reasons and ways to read the Bible. Scholars study to plumb its depths and we teach Bible stories to our
preschool children. We can approach the Bible academically or devotionally but we are in danger of misreading it if we detach either approach from the other. Academic study alone can lead to indifferent scholasticism. Devotional reading without attention to what the Bible text actually means can lead to a distorted misunderstanding of God and His message.

The Great Commandment teaches us to love God with all our heart, mind, and will. As we seek to know God in His Word our minds focus on what He has said; our hearts listen to His Spirit’s voice; and our wills are determined to act on what we learn.

**Why Take the Bible Study Basics Course?**

The fact that you are taking this course says you are interested in studying the Bible. But take a moment and think about why. What do you hope to accomplish by taking this course?

- Learn to live by God’s teachings?
- Learn to know God better?
- Learn more about biblical history?
- Teach a Bible class?
- Contribute more to a Bible study group you participate in?
- Prepare for vocational ministry?
- More effectively share your faith with skeptics or unbelievers?
- Explore answers to your doubts about the Bible?
- Other reasons?

The Bible offers a number of reasons why people should understand its teachings, but let’s look at three Bible passages that introduce its benefits.

**The Bible Is Essential to Knowing and Loving God**

Deuteronomy 6:4–7 provides a foundational reason to know God’s Word:

*Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.*
Why We Study the Bible

Deuteronomy 6:4–7 is one of the Bible’s most foundational statements of faith and it presents three facts about what it means to be God’s people. First, we must know who our God is and we must know that He is unique. He alone is God. Second, we are commanded to love the Lord our God with all our soul, heart, and strength. And third we must keep God’s Word at the center of our intellectual, emotional, and volitional activity. We are commanded to diligently teach God’s Word to our children and model it day and night in all our actions. We must consciously remind ourselves to make it part of every aspect of our lives.

All three commands are essential. But the first two are dependent on the third. It is God’s Word that teaches us about God’s nature and gives us specific facts about why and how we should express our love to Him. Apart from a diligent commitment to study God’s revelation of Himself, we cannot possibly know and/or love God.

The Bible Is Essential to Serving God

Second Timothy 3:16–17 states that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (NIV).

Notice the amazing claims this passage makes about the Bible. First it teaches us that what we are reading is God’s own Word. He “inspired,” or carefully superintended, those who were writing it. He left no room for error or misunderstanding. His Word is true and absolutely trustworthy.

This passage also says that the Bible offers marvelous benefits to those who read it.

- It is profitable for teaching – or for defining a worldview, a way to look at life. The Bible tells us about God and about our relationship with Him. It tells us how God intends us to live.
- It is good for rebuking. It tells us when we stray from God’s teachings. When we read God’s Word we discover our errors and
The Bible is Essential for Growing Up in God

First Peter 2:2 teaches that Scripture is to God’s children what milk is to a baby. “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation…” (NIV). No matter where we are in our life’s trajectory we are always in a growth pattern. Pursuing God’s standard is always a quest and never a conquest. A baby cannot grow without proper nourishment, and a Christian will never grow without the nourishment found in God’s Word.

Hebrews 5:11–14 teaches us that growth is arrested when we neglect God’s teachings. The writer wanted his readers to know about the Old Testament priest named Melchizedek but couldn’t take them to this level of maturity. He wrote:

We have much to say about this [Melchizedek], but it is hard to make it clear to you because you no longer try to understand. In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God’s word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching
But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. (NIV)

The Bible Study Basics course is designed to help you know God better and to love Him with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. It will teach you how to interpret and apply God’s Word to your life and to digest the Bible’s “solid food.” The course’s goal is to help train you in righteousness so you are equipped for God’s good work. It is designed to help you drink the pure milk of God’s Word and chew on God’s solid meat so you are mature and are trained to distinguish good from evil.