

# Learn, Live and Love **the Bible**

*God's Word discusses several tools we can use to grow spiritually and build our relationship with our Creator. In this second article in a series on tools for spiritual growth, we examine the foundational tool of Bible reading and study.*

by Don Hooser

**T**he Bible is boring, I concluded. I was about 10 years old, had some reverence for the Bible and decided I should read it—from Genesis to the maps at the back. I didn't get very far.

I was proud of my progress until I almost crashed in chapter 5, a boring genealogical record. However, being a sequential person who hadn't learned when to skim or skip while reading, I struggled my way through, verse by verse. But then in chapter 10 I hit another genealogical record! At that point I gave up on the Old Testament.

At least I'll read the New Testament, I thought. Surely it would be more interesting. But the New Testament *begins* with a genealogical record! Though somewhat ashamed of my lack of spirituality and commitment, I gave up on reading the Bible. Based on my



**God indeed *did* give us His revelation of what we need to know but could not learn on our own. It is a handbook for life that we call the Bible.**

unfair sampling, I decided it was not very user-friendly.

Then when I was 12, one of my younger brothers died. I began to think much more seriously about the meaning of life and about life after death. Looking back on it, I see how God gradually used that painful memory to begin to turn my life around.

### The real turning point

But I didn't read the Bible until I was forced to. A required one-semester university course for engineering students was "Survey of the Bible." We were assigned to read a wide variety of selections throughout the Bible. That opened my eyes. I was fascinated and amazed at much of what I read!

I learned many impressive things about the Bible, including how it ranks right at the top among mankind's greatest works of literature. Even in secular writing, the Bible is quoted, knowingly and unknowingly, far more than any other book.

Also I came to appreciate the meaning of the *Judeo-Christian heritage*—the profound influence the Bible has had on Western civilization. Today one can buy whole books of quotes from many of America's founding fathers stating their strong beliefs in the Bible.

That class was the great turning point of my life. I soon began requesting publications (like those offered free in *The Good News*) that gave clear and wonderful explanations of virtually every subject and section of the Bible. A whole new world had opened up to me. I was discovering how valid and valuable the Scriptures are—how reliable and relevant they prove to everyday life. My perspective on everything changed—and changed for the better.

Above all, I was not only learning *about* God, I was coming to *know* God in a real and personal way. From then on when I read the Bible, it was *God talking to me!*

At the same time, I was studying a lot of

science and math. It became clear to me that every detail in the universe is the result of perfect planning, engineering and construction—it could not have happened by accident! I figured that if the Bible is from God, it too must be absolutely perfect—and I set out to prove whether this is so.

Indeed, God has revealed Himself in two ways—His *words* (the Bible) and His *works* (the creation we see around us) (compare Psalm 19:1-4; Romans 1:20).

### The Maker's instruction manual

Of all the earth's creatures, it's obvious that human beings are unique. We have magnificent minds with amazing intellectual capacities. Human minds also have spiritual potential and a hunger for spirituality. This is not surprising once we learn that "God created man in His own image"—in the image of God Himself—to have an intimate relationship with Him! (Genesis 1:27).

All physical life-forms are governed mainly by instinct, except for human beings. We need a roadmap—a guidebook for life—or else our intellectual and spiritual interests will go in all the wrong directions.

It makes no sense that God would create His masterpiece and then leave us in the dark as to why we are here. God indeed *did* give us His revelation of what we need to know but could not learn on our own. It is a handbook for life that we call the Bible.

The English word "Bible" is derived from the Greek word *biblion*—meaning "books." The Bible is a collection of 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New. These were composed by about 40 writers with different writing styles, living in 10 countries, over about 1,500 years!

However, miracle of miracles—in spite of the Bible's great *diversity*, there is astounding *unity*. It is consistent and coherent all the way through.

How could that be? It is because God inspired and directed every writer. Thus the real Author behind the scenes was always God (2 Timothy 3:16).



So the Bible is also *one* book. It is *the* Book—the Book of books. Many religions claim to have a sacred book. But the *Holy Bible* is exactly that—*God’s Book*. It is divine revelation to man and therefore the literal and actual “Word of God.” It is *complete*, and God warns in the Old and New Testaments not to add to it or take away from it (Deuteronomy 12:32; Revelation 22:18-19).

In fact, the Bible even gives us myriad first-person quotes from God that are introduced by such words as “Thus says the LORD . . .”

### One Bible in two parts

Ironically, many Christians ignore the Old Testament as being irrelevant, while most Jews reject the New Testament. Both views are wrong. *Together* the two testaments constitute the written Word of God. The New Testament cannot be properly understood without a foundational knowledge of the Old, and the Old Testament must be understood in the light of the New. They complement and complete each other.

Jesus Christ and the writers of the New Testament repeatedly quoted from the Hebrew Scriptures we call the Old Testament. For many years they were the only Scriptures the early Christian Church had. These Scriptures, as amplified by Jesus’ own statements, were the basis for Christian teachings and practices. Later, by the time the apostle Peter wrote his second epistle, some parts of what became the New Testament were also being accepted as “Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16).

Many people erroneously believe that during His ministry Jesus Christ criticized the Pharisees and other Jews for teaching and living by the Old Testament. Not so. Jesus scolded them for *not* living by the Scriptures! It was as if they had not even *read* the Scriptures, because Jesus repeatedly asked, “Have you not read . . . ?” Jesus also said, “All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition” (Mark 7:9; see verses 5-13).

Today, Judaism is much the same. Plus, most of Christianity favors human religious traditions over the Bible, and many of those traditions are in conflict with the Bible.

What comes from God is perfect. The original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts of the Bible were infallible (although no human translation of those texts is perfect). The Bible is true and it is truth—the ultimate truth (John 17:17).

The Bible should serve as the founda-

tion for all areas of knowledge. Harmony with the Bible is the ultimate filter or test of truth. If an idea or theory is in conflict with the Bible, it cannot be correct. The Bible is especially necessary for understanding the absolutes of life, such as what is good and what is evil.

### New Testament Church vs. today’s skepticism

Notice this emphatic statement by the apostle Paul: “But this I confess to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). True Christianity was called “the Way”—for it is *a way of life*, not just a belief.

And “the Law and the Prophets” here is a reference to what we call the Old Testament. So Paul said he believed *all things* in the Old Testament! Many “Christians” today don’t believe everything in the New Testament, much less the Old Testament!

In today’s world, the tragic trend is toward disbelief in and apathy toward the Bible. “Christianity” is increasingly disconnected from the Bible. Most professing Christians don’t even read the Bible, and even fewer obey its teachings. Many of the beliefs and practices that they *assume* come from the Bible in fact *do not*.

Many people avoid reading the Bible—and some even hate it—because they know or suspect that it will correct them for sins and other habits they are not willing to give up.

We are also increasingly bombarded with skepticism and attacks against Christianity and especially Bible-based beliefs. Some claim only the “uneducated” would hold such beliefs. As Jude 18 notes, there will be “mockers” as the end of this age of man draws near.

All of this can be quite confusing and intimidating.

This is where you need courage. Be much more concerned about what God thinks than what any man thinks. Don’t rely on someone else to tell you what the Bible says. Read it for yourself! Swim upstream. Be among the few who choose the “narrow gate” that leads to life, not the many who choose the easy “broad gate” that leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

Keep this in mind. Noah preached the truth all the time he was building the ark, but only eight people believed and were saved from the Flood (2 Peter 2:5). Jesus Christ preached to multitudes for more than

## How to Read, Study and Understand the Bible

Author Bruce Barton called the Bible *The Book Nobody Knows*. That is practically true, but *you can* know it.

How should you read and study the Bible? The overall answer is *any way that works for you!* Just do it! Starting something new seems strange and difficult. So new Bible students are the ones most likely to become discouraged and give up altogether.

What is important is to *get started* and then *stick with it*. Take the most interesting approach and begin to get familiar with the content. Whet your appetite and hopefully the Bible will be a big part of your diet for life.

Many books and articles offer helpful suggestions for Bible study approaches, and we recommend that you eventually read and consider them. But don’t feel obligated to take a certain approach or to follow a rigid structure or to stick with an approach when you would rather switch to a different one.

For example, one approach is to read the Bible all the way through in chronological order to get an overview. It is good to do that eventually, but it’s not necessary to start that way. You can go through the books in any order. Another popular approach is topical Bible study, studying all the scriptures on any one topic.

The publishers of *The Good News* offer an excellent booklet, *How to Understand the Bible*, to get you started. We also offer a free, eye-opening, 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* that gives a new student a very good foundation of understanding. All are yours free for the asking.

We’re also in the process of producing a commentary on the entire Bible—the *Good News Bible Reading Program*. You can access it at [www.ucg.org/brp](http://www.ucg.org/brp).

It’s also fine when part of your personal Bible study is reading trustworthy articles, booklets and books *about* the Bible that explain it accurately. Of course, any such sources should be compared against the Bible itself to make sure they properly represent the Bible’s teachings (see Acts 17:11). Indeed, over the long run be sure that much of your study is reading the Bible itself so that you become thoroughly familiar with the content and context of the Scriptures.

As you can afford it, you may want to purchase various *Bible helps*—reference books and computer programs that provide assistance in your studies.

If you have difficulty reading, you can take advantage of the fact that the Bible and many books are now available as audio recordings.

Also be sure to avoid the classic mistake many people make. Don’t start out with preconceived doctrinal ideas and try to find verses that appear to provide support and justification for those beliefs. Read the Bible with an open mind and see for yourself what it says. Have the attitude of Jesus Christ who said, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Above all, seek to know the mind of God and His plan for your life. *Apply* what you learn in your life. Be a doer of the Word and use the Bible as a spiritual mirror to see how you need to change (see James 1:22-25).

*Read* the Bible. *Study* the Bible. *Live* the Bible.

three years, but His Church began with only 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). Be among the few who listen well. Then go do the right thing!

## The Bible is “good news”!

The message of Jesus and the apostles was called “the gospel.” The word *gospel* comes from the Old English *godspel*, meaning “good news.” But good news of what? Most Christians could not tell you exactly.

It was “the gospel of the kingdom of God” (Mark 1:14). So Christ preached the good news about His future return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and how human beings can become a part of that eternal Kingdom and family of God! It truly is a message of *hope* for all mankind (Romans 15:4).

We may think of the gospel as being in the New Testament, yet this message is also found throughout the Old. Indeed, all of the Bible is interrelated, so in one sense the gospel is the entire Bible. Scripture has a great deal of bad news about “this present evil age” (Galatians 1:4), but the long-range news is wonderful—a soon-coming new world under the reign of Jesus Christ!

## Keys to understanding the Bible

How can you get the most out of reading and studying the Bible? Following are some important keys.

Take time—*make* time—out of your busy life to devote to daily Bible reading. Make it a high priority. Many great and successful men and women have been dedicated daily Bible readers. Even some U.S. presidents followed this practice while occupying that enormously important office. If *they* made time for daily Bible reading, if *they* could fit that in, why can't you?

Reflect and think deeply about what you read, and consider how you will apply the lessons in your life. You cannot make a better investment of your time.

For understanding, pray for God's help. “Ask, and it will be given to you” (Matthew 7:7). Prayer and Bible study go hand in hand (you may want to review the first article in this series, “The Privilege and Power of Prayer,” in the last issue of *The Good News*).

Be sure to take advantage of human and technical resources. When an Ethiopian official was reading the book of Isaiah, Philip asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The man responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (Acts 8:26-31). It helps tremendously to have Bible teachers show you where to look for answers to life's important questions. So we invite you

to ask for help from United Church of God as well. We offer many free resources that are crucial for gaining a foundation of biblical understanding (see “How to Read, Study and Understand the Bible,” page 2).

Note that the Bible can be understood on many levels. A person with no interest in God can read through the Bible and gain much understanding of history (His story!),

human relationships and many other subjects. Scripture is full of great wisdom.

But to understand the Bible on a deeply spiritual level requires the reader to meet some important conditions. One key is a *humble, teachable attitude*—being receptive and responsive to God's instructions!

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all

## Proofs of the Bible

**G**od doesn't want blind faith. He wants you to have faith based on solid evidence. “Test [prove] all things; hold fast what is good,” He tells us (1 Thessalonians 5:21). You can prove the divine origin, authenticity and accuracy of the Bible.

To help you prove whether the Bible is true and trustworthy, request our free booklet *Is the Bible True?* Many books available through Bible bookstores are also very helpful.

Some of the major proofs of the Bible's divine inspiration are:

**Fulfilled prophecies.** Many past events were prophesied in the Bible and came to pass exactly as foretold. It will be even more impressive to see future prophesied events happen exactly as promised. For more information, request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.

**Internal harmony.** The Bible never contradicts itself! This is truly miraculous considering that it was written over the course of some 1,500 years by about 40 different authors! Some details in the Bible may seem to contradict at first glance, and many skeptics point to apparent discrepancies to try to disprove divine inspiration. However, several good books have been written that explain such alleged discrepancies, showing that when properly understood they are not contradictory. If there are a few that we can't readily explain, they merely show our human lack of understanding, not errors in the Bible.

**Science.** There is no conflict between true science and the Bible. (Evolution is a theory for *explaining* science, not science itself.) When science and the Bible seem to conflict, one or the other is not being correctly understood. The Creator God who inspired the Bible understands science better than all scientists put together.

**Archaeology.** This is the study of the material remains of past people's lives and activities. Many biblical sites have been found, and the amount of evidence confirming the biblical record is enormous. No archaeological discovery to date contradicts the Bible (though some mistakenly *interpret* some findings as doing so).

**Promises and prayers.** God gives us many promises in His Word. Seeing promises fulfilled is evidence of God's faithfulness. And God promises to answer prayers of His people, especially prayers that are in harmony with His will and promises. Answered prayer can strengthen one's faith in God and His Word more than anything else.

**The Bible works!** God's ways *work*. The Bible teaches countless practical principles for daily life. Just as nature teaches us about invisible physical laws, the Bible teaches that there are also invisible but absolute *spiritual* laws governing every aspect of human life. The better we understand all those laws and get in harmony with them, the healthier, happier and more successful we will be. God's ways work and they work well.

## Great Themes of the Bible

**T**he Bible is unified by profound themes running through it. Although it contains a number of major themes, here are three of the most important:

**Jesus Christ.** Not only does the New Testament give us the life and teachings of the Son of God, much of the Old Testament includes prophecies of His first and second comings (Luke 24:44). The greatest event of the past was Christ's first coming to earth as God made flesh. The greatest event in the future will be His second coming as glorified God in power and majesty. Although few understand this, Jesus Christ was the Creator and God in the Old Testament, acting on behalf of the Father (see John 1:1-14; Hebrews 1:1-2; Colossians 1:13-16; 1 Corinthians 10:4). To fully understand, you will want to read the booklet *Jesus Christ: The Real Story*.

**Love.** “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The two “great commandments” are love for God and love for neighbor (Matthew 22:35-40). The Ten Commandments and God's other laws show us how to love God and how to love other people. The Bible is a love story—God's love for the whole world and how all people must learn to love God and others in turn (John 3:16; 1 John 3:16; 5:3).

**Salvation.** “Jesus” means “God Is Salvation,” and He came to “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21). The greatest set of miracles related in the Old Testament was the deliverance of Israel out of Egyptian slavery. That and all the other times that God rescued His people are symbolic of the miraculous spiritual liberation, conversion and transformation of those whom God calls out of their spiritual Egypt “into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21). This is only possible because of the supreme sacrifice Christ made for us so our sins can be forgiven and we can be saved by His grace (Ephesians 2:8).

those who do His commandments” (Psalm 111:10). To really comprehend God’s Word requires an attitude of deep reverence for Him and submission to His authority. God blesses readers with understanding when they are willing to *apply* and *obey* what they learn.

Consider the significance of what Jesus said in Luke 4:4: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.”

It should first be observed that the purpose of God’s Word is for us to *live by it*.

Second, this is what *strengthens and sustains us spiritually* as bread does physically.

Third, we should have an enquiring mind *hungering* for God’s Word.

Fourth, Jesus included *every* word of God, not just *some* of the words of God.

## Be much more concerned about what God thinks than what any man thinks. Don’t rely on someone else to tell you what the Bible says. Read it for yourself!

Fifth, how can we live by the words of God if we have not read them?

Sixth, “you are what you eat.” Ingesting the words of God can make us increasingly godly.

Even children can gain a remarkable understanding of the Bible, partly because they tend to have humble, teachable attitudes.

Also remember that God’s thoughts are infinitely higher than our human thoughts (Isaiah 55:9-11). God’s Spirit is essential to an ever-deepening understanding of spiritual truth and the power to live by that truth. Future articles in this series will cover the wonderful process for obtaining

the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the meantime, for more understanding of this vital subject, request our free booklet *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion*.

### The Bible? Priceless!

God’s revelation of how He will bring human beings into the Kingdom of God is a “treasure”—the “pearl of great price” (Matthew 13:44-46; see also Proverbs 3:13-18). It is worth every sacrifice. God wants us to dig and seek and search with our whole hearts to enter His Kingdom.

One definition of “disciple” is “student,” so God would have us all become students of Jesus Christ. Blow the dust off your Bible then. Open your Bible and open your heart to listen to what God has to tell you.

Bible reading is “profitable” for many

reasons (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Berean believers were called “noble” because they “searched the scriptures daily,” making sure that what was being preached to them conformed to its teachings (Acts 17:11, King James Version).

Bible study is a serious matter. The only reliable security we can have in this life is God. If we don’t hear today, we can be gone tomorrow. What really matters is life after death. For that, we must become disciples and “doers of the word” (James 1:21-25). And any sacrifices we make in this life are tiny compared to the glorious everlasting life God is offering us (Romans 8:18).

The longest chapter in the Bible is Psalm 119. How fitting that it is an extensive love song praising God for His Word and His laws! The writer said, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (verse 105). May His Word light your path!

Be enthusiastic and passionate for God’s Word. Immerse yourself in it! With increasing understanding comes increasing satisfaction and enjoyment. Try it—you’ll like it! And it will transform your life!

The following verse from Revelation 1:3 applies directly to the book of Revelation, but it is true of the entire Bible: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear [understand] the words of this prophecy, and keep [obey] those things which are written in it; for the time is near.” **GN**

## Who’s Behind The Good News?



**W**ho’s behind *The Good News* magazine? Many readers have wondered who we are and how we are able to provide *The Good News* free to all who request it. Simply put, *The Good News* is provided by *people*—people from all walks of life, from all over the world.

But those people have a common goal: **to proclaim the gospel of the coming Kingdom of God to all the world as a witness and to teach all nations to observe what Christ commanded** (Matthew 24:14; 28:19-20).

We are dedicated to proclaiming the same message Jesus Christ brought: the wonderful *good news* of the coming Kingdom of God (Matthew 4:23; Mark 1:14-15; Luke 4:43; 8:1). That message truly is good news—the answer to all the problems that have long plagued humankind. Through the pages of *The Good News*, various booklets (also free) and our radio and TV programs, we show the biblical answers to the dilemmas that have defied human solution and threaten our very survival.

We are committed to taking that message to the entire world, sharing the truth of God’s purpose and plan for us as taught by Jesus Christ.

The United Church of God has congregations and ministers around the world. In these congregations believers assemble to be instructed from the Scriptures and to fellowship. For locations and times of worship services in your area, contact us at [info@ucg.org](mailto:info@ucg.org). Visitors are always welcome.



For additional information, visit our Web site:

[www.ucg.org](http://www.ucg.org)

### Recommended Reading

The publishers of *The Good News* offer many free resources to help you get started in reading the Bible. Among them are *Is the Bible True?*, showing that the Bible is indeed the inspired Word of our Creator. *How to Understand the Bible* gives you practical guidance on how to get the most from your personal Bible study. And our free 12-lesson *Bible Study Course* will guide you through the most important teachings of the Bible. We also offer the online, in-depth *Good News Bible Reading Program* at [www.ucg.org/brp](http://www.ucg.org/brp). Use these resources for your own personal journey of discovery through God’s inspired Word!



Request or download them from our Web site at

[www.gnmagazine.org/booklets](http://www.gnmagazine.org/booklets)