

The Bible

Where does the Bible come from?

A message from Billy Graham

The Bible is somewhat like a library because it is actually a collection of books. Those books were written over many centuries, and they were only gradually brought together into their present form. The first “collection” was probably the first five books of the Bible (often called the “Torah,” which is the Hebrew word for God’s Law). As time went on, other books were added.

The whole Old Testament was finished about four centuries before the time of Jesus. Only a few decades after His ministry, the books of the New Testament were written and then accepted by Christians. The most important fact about the Bible, however, is that God watched over its writing, and He has preserved it down to the present time.

The Bible isn’t just another ancient book of human wisdom—it is God’s Word, given to us to tell us how we can know God. The Bible says, “For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (II Peter 1:21). God guided the authors as they wrote the different books. What place does the Bible have in your life? God wants to speak to you through its pages; are you listening? Most of all, He wants you to come to know Him by discovering Jesus Christ, who is at the Bible’s center.

Reading the Bible

The Bible is big—so big that even the greatest scholar will never exhaust its riches. But the Bible isn’t just for preachers and scholars! God wants to speak to you through His Word, and no matter who you are, the Bible can come alive to you. You may never understand everything in the Bible, but you can understand something. Samuel was still a boy, but God answered his simple prayer: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (I Samuel 3:9).

Today, many people keep the Bible a closed book. One reason is because we don’t realize how much we need it. If I suggested that you stop eating for a few months, you’d ignore me—and rightly so. We need food in order to survive, and without food we’ll grow weak and eventually die. Yet many Christians are spiritually starved and weak because they ignore the spiritual “food” God has provided in the Bible. The Bible is not an option; it is a necessity. You cannot grow spiritually strong without it. Job said, “I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread” (Job 23:12).

Is the Bible this important to you? So how can you discover the Bible’s message? How can the Bible become part of your life? Learn the Bible from others. God has given some people a special gift to understand the Bible and teach it to others. The Bible says that “God has placed in the church ... teachers” (I Corinthians 12:28). Listen carefully when your pastor preaches from the Bible. In addition, seek out a Bible class in your church or community where the Bible is faithfully taught. Also check your local Christian radio

station (if you live in a country that permits religious broadcasting); some of today's most gifted Bible teachers are on radio. Investigate spending part of your vacation at a conference center devoted to Bible teaching. Many people find daily devotional books based on the Bible helpful. Although they may examine only a verse or two each day, God can use them to encourage you.

One of the most significant spiritual movements in recent decades has been the explosion in small group Bible studies. All over the world, Christians are coming together to read the Bible and share their insights. The Bible says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another" ([Colossians 3:16](#)). Jesus promised, "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" ([Matthew 18:20](#), NKJV).

Learn the Bible on your own. If you have never read the Bible, or you started reading it once but got bogged down, let me encourage you to discover the Bible for yourself. How can you do this?

First, come to the Bible joyfully. Bible reading shouldn't be a burden but a joy! I vividly remember the day I received Ruth's letter saying she had decided to accept my proposal for marriage. I probably read and reread it dozens of times that day. God wants to talk with us through His Word; in fact, it is His "love letter" to us. Why shouldn't we come to it joyfully? Then come to the Bible prayerfully and expectantly. Ask God to speak to you through its pages and expect Him to do so. This doesn't mean that every time we open the Bible we'll find something new; God may be underlining truths we already know. But let the psalmist's prayer become yours: "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law" ([Psalm 119:18](#)). In addition, come to the Bible systematically. Some people open their Bibles almost at random or simply reread passages they already know. While God can certainly speak to us through any passage, we also need to remember that the Bible wasn't written [to be read] that way.

Get in the habit of reading the Bible the way it was written: one book at a time. I often suggest people begin by reading through one of the Gospels, such as John, perhaps only a few paragraphs at a time. Later you can read Acts, which tells of the early Christians, or some of the New Testament letters. Psalms in the Old Testament—the "hymnbook" of the Bible—has blessed generations of believers, while Proverbs gives practical guidance for daily living. Psalms teaches us how to relate to God, and Proverbs teaches us how to relate to others.

Also come to the Bible thoughtfully. In other words, be sure you understand what you are reading. Several years ago, a woman told me that her grandmother reads a chapter of the Bible every day. Then she added, "But whenever I ask her what she's just read, she can't tell me. Reading the Bible is just a habit that doesn't seem to make any impression on her."

Focus on what the passage is really saying. What is happening in it? What is its central point or primary teaching? What does it say about God, or about Jesus, or about someone's response to God?

Finally, come to the Bible obediently. James wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" ([James 1:22](#)). Is God pointing out a truth you should believe or something you should do? Is He revealing a sin for which you need to repent? Remember: God never leads us to do anything that is contrary to His Word. But the opposite is also true: God always leads us to do everything that is in agreement with His Word. God gave the Bible to us because He wants us to know Him and love Him and serve Him. Most of all, He gave it to us so we can become more like Christ. Make the Bible part of your life—beginning today.

Reading and Understanding the Bible

The Bible is God's Word to us. It's His message of love and forgiveness, and shows us how we can have eternal life. It can also answer questions you have as you strive to live a life that pleases Him. That's why Christians should try to read the Bible daily.

Here are some suggestions:

- *First*, read one chapter from the Gospel of John each day. This will help you understand the basics of the Gospel. (Books of the Bible are typically listed in the front of the Bible.)
- *Second*, read Acts, the exciting story of how Jesus Christ's first disciples told others about how He died and rose again.
- *Third*, read the letters that Christ's apostles wrote to His first followers—all who were new in their faith. These letters are the book of Romans through the book of III John.
- *Fourth*, go back and read one of the other three gospels: Matthew, Mark or Luke.

You might not understand everything you read in the Bible, but don't let that discourage you. The Bible tells us what God is like and offers us wisdom. As you read it, ask yourself:

- What does this passage mean?
- What is God saying to me in this passage?
- How can I apply this to my own life?

As you read your Bible regularly, you will begin to understand more of it. Here are 4 more ways to get more out of your reading:

1. Read the Psalms, the Old Testament book of worship, to enrich your devotion to God.
2. Read Proverbs to gain wisdom and strengthen your relationship with others.
3. Pray for understanding. The Holy Spirit can help you, and you will begin to see life from God's perspective.
4. Talk to others about what you're learning. Try to attend a small group Bible study.