

## “A Bible Bunch”

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John 1.1,14; Psalm 119.105-112; Hebrews 4.12  
2 Timothy 3.15-17; Isaiah 55.8-11; John 1.14

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You can read the Scriptures selections [here](#).

We just read a medley of bits from all over the Bible, in which its various writers talk about God’s Word.

A while back, I began using a few minutes during worship to teach something about the Bible. These “Bible Bits” are short snippets of information to help make our way about this book that is so vital to us, and also so perplexing and at times troubling.

I’ve talked about . . .

How the Bible is really a library, a collection of writings.

And how these sixty six “books” are grouped into two parts: the Older Testament and the Newer Testament.

And how folks later divided them into chapters, then verses, as a way of referring to particular sections and sentences.

Today, I’m not offering another “Bible Bit,” but a whole bunch. I want to introduce you to some resources. These can help us read, understand and live the Bible better.

II

This is a book I just discovered.

***Bible Babel: Making Sense of the Most Talked About Book of All Time***<sup>1</sup>  
**by Kristin Swenson**

I’m enjoying it so far. It’s lively, interesting, and easy to read.

Here’s a book I’ve used for along time.

***How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth***<sup>2</sup>  
**by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart**

It begins with how to pick a good Bible translation. That’s important for those of us who don’t ready ancient Hebrew or Greek! Then it offers guidance for reading the various kinds of writings that are in the Bible: stories, letters, biographies, laws, poems, sayings,

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<sup>1</sup> Harper Collins, 2011 (ISBN 978-0061728266)

<sup>2</sup> Fourth Edition, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014 (ISBN 978-0310517825)

philosophical reflections, prophetic oracles, and apocalyptic visions.

Those same authors have written a follow-up resource:

***How to Read the Bible Book by Book***<sup>3</sup>  
**by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart**

They start with an overview of the whole Bible story. Then for each of the 66 books, they give basic data, an overview, and advice for reading that book. Then they go through the parts of the book, summarizing each. I use this book all the time.

### III

What's exciting me these days is the many excellent resources you can get for free on the internet. Now, as with anything online, you have to be careful. It's got lots of garbage too, things that are unreliable. So here are some I'm finding very helpful.

First is **Bible Gateway**.<sup>4</sup> This site has the whole Bible, in more than 200 translations into 70 languages. That includes 50 English translations.

- Up at the top I can pick from a list which translation I want.
- I'm going to pick the English Standard Version.
- Then I put in which passage I want. I've selected the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of the prophet Daniel.
- And here it is, with a title they've added to help orient me: The Handwriting on the Wall.
- I can also narrow down to a particular verse or range of verses. I'm selecting verses 13-31.
- That's where Daniel interprets the handwriting.
- I can then pick another translation. I'm choosing the New Revised Standard Version.
- It gives the same passage but in a different translation.
- And you can copy and paste selections into documents you're working on.

That's the Bible Gateway. It also comes as an app you can put on your mobile device.

**Enter the Bible**<sup>5</sup> is produced by Lutheran Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. This gives lots of information about every part of the Bible, prepared by professors at the school.

- I was looking at the prophet Daniel, which is a challenging book to make sense of. So I select the "Old Testament" tab, which opens a list of all the books. I click on "Daniel."
- At the top it tells me what time period it is. Daniel tells about things that happened among Jews who were living in exiled in Persia (modern Iran).
- It gives me a summary of the book,
- why it matters, where it is in the Bible, who wrote it,
- and when, what it's about,

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<sup>3</sup> Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002 (ISBN 978-0310518082)

<sup>4</sup> [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)

<sup>5</sup> [www.enterthebible.org](http://www.enterthebible.org)

- and tips for reading it.
- Then I can pick the “Outline” tab and see a table of contents for the book with quick summaries.
- I can look at the “Background” about what was going on historically.
- Then some important issues to understand.
- I was looking at Daniel 5, so over here I can select that chapter,
- and read an analysis of that particular section.
- The site also has other resources:
- videos by professors (there wasn’t one about Daniel, unfortunately),
- maps
- (here’s one of the Middle East in Daniels’ time)
- and a glossary where I can look up many unfamiliar words and find out and see what they mean.

So that’s **Enter the Bible**.

This one is called **The Bible Project**.<sup>6</sup>

- It’s full of videos that explain things about the Bible.
- Like how to read the different kinds of literature.
- They have videos on individual books,
- and themes that run through the Bible, particular topics, and important words.
- The videos are on YouTube too.
- The videos are cartoons, but they are not childish. Don’t be surprised if I show some from time to time in worship.

That’s The Bible Project.

They’ve also made an excellent app called **Read Scripture**.<sup>7</sup>

- It works on Apple and Android devices.
- You can set it to lead you through the whole Bible in whatever time you choose, and keep track for you.
- Each day it give you the passage. You can also play a video that helps understand that passage, from The Bible Project’s collection.
- One thing I like about the Read Scripture app and The Bible Project is how they keep bringing us back to the big story the Bible is telling.

#### IV

Before she led us in that medley of Bible passages, Joan led us in prayer. Reading the Bible is much more than an intellectual exercise. It’s a spiritual practice. So we need to God’s help.

The prayer was an old and famous one, from the Church of England’s *Book of Common*

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<sup>6</sup> [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com)

<sup>7</sup> [www.readscripture.org](http://www.readscripture.org)

*Prayer.*<sup>8</sup> It uses five wonderful verbs, each leading us into a deeper engagement with God's Word.<sup>9</sup>

**Hear.** Most Christians in history have heard the Bible. They were non-literate, or printed copies were not widely available. The Bible was written to be read aloud, for the ear.

**Read.** The Protestant Reformation put the Bible into people's hands and before their eyes. This was a great spur to the growth of literacy, as it continues to be translated into the world's languages.

**Mark.** Pay attention to what you read. Literally mark up your Bible, with underlining, notes, questions..

**Learn.** This might be memorizing things from the Bible, such as Psalm 23. It's also about learning "by heart," letting the Bible teach and shape your spirit.

**Inwardly Digest.** Jesus reminded us that "we don't live by bread only, but every word from God." Just as food gives us life and sustains us, so does Scripture keep our souls alive. What we eat becomes what we are. Scripture shapes us into people of Christ.

V

This is all for God's purpose.

The Bible is inspired, "in-Spirited." The Holy Spirit "has formed and made these texts to [move ahead] God's ongoing mission."<sup>10</sup> God's mission is to make ordinary, very fallible and limited folks like us into people for Jesus. God's mission is shaping a People, for the salvation all peoples and all creation. God's mission is re-creating a whole world bathed in the joy and love of Jesus, worshipping and celebrating God.

The Spirit is using the Bible to get this done, to do this in you and me.

A recent United Church statement says this:

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<sup>8</sup> *BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.* We used a slightly modified version with more contemporary language.

<sup>9</sup> My reflections on this are greatly informed by a blog post by Malcolm Guite, "Hear, Read, Mark, Learn, and Inwardly Digest!" (December 8, 2012) [malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/12/08/hear-read-mark-learn-and-inwardly-digest](http://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/2012/12/08/hear-read-mark-learn-and-inwardly-digest)

<sup>10</sup> Annette Brownless, Preaching Jesus Christ Today: Six Questions for Moving from Scripture to Sermon (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2018), 91.

*Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word  
passed on from generation to generation  
to guide and inspire,  
that we might wrestle a holy revelation for our time and place  
from the human experiences and cultural assumptions of another era.  
God calls us to be doers of the word and not hearers only.<sup>11</sup>*

Let's read and hear well, so we can do faithfully, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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<sup>11</sup> A Song of Faith: A Statement of Faith of the United Church of Canada, (2006).