



The *Why, What, How, and Who* of Studying the Bible

by Kelly Needham

WHY: Does It Matter If I Read the Bible for Myself?

If we don't understand why it matters to read the Word, we will struggle to follow through.

There are many reasons why we read the Scriptures, but of primary importance is to know and love God. Our love for anyone begins with facts about that person—pieces of information that slowly build for us a picture of their personality and character. I said it this way in *Friendish*:

All relationships are built on information. When I first began dating my husband, our dates consisted mainly of information-sharing: what our favorite books were, where we went to school, what we were studying, a history of our lives up to that point, what we liked and didn't like. All of that information helped us build a framework for the other person's personality and character. Slowly over time, we began to deeply love the character we saw in one another. **Our love began with facts.**

The Bible gives us information about God. What he likes, what he doesn't like, a history of his activity in the world up until now, his favorite places and people, what he makes a habit of doing or not doing, his responses to other people's activity, what makes him angry and what makes him rejoice. If we read our Bibles to learn information about God, it will help us build a framework for the character of God. And slowly over time, you may find that you deeply love the character you see.

Remember, the Bible is not primarily a book about us and what we should do; it is a book about God and what he has done. Therefore, read it to learn more about God above all other objectives.¹

Other Motivations to Read God's Word

- It is how we come to a saving knowledge of the gospel and how we understand all the implications of our salvation ([Rom. 10:13–17](#); [1 Pet. 1:23](#); [John 1](#); [Heb. 1:1–2](#)).
- It is the only source of Truth and sufficient to give us all the wisdom we need to understand God, ourselves, and the world we live in ([Psalm 119:105, 160](#)).
- It is for our joy ([John 15:11](#)).
- It is our spiritual food, our sustenance for a life of following Jesus ([Matt. 4:4](#); [Deut. 8:3](#); [Rom. 15:4](#); [John 8:31–32](#); [Psalm 119:9–11](#); [Heb. 12:1–2](#)).
- It is alive and never returns void; it is accomplishing things in us whether we feel it or not ([Heb. 4:12](#), [Isa. 55:10–11](#), [Jer. 23:29](#), [1 Thess. 2:13](#)).

¹Kelly Needham, *Friendish: Reclaiming Real Friendship in a Culture of Confusion* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2019).

WHAT: What Is the Bible? And Do I Need Other Tools?

Here are some different ways we could answer the question, “What is the Bible?”:

- **A library** of sixty-six books of various genres of literature that reveal Jesus as the only mediator between God and man.
- **A supernatural book**, the writing, preservation, and compilation of which has been overseen by the living God!
- **A book written by God**, through the writing of men. It is God-breathed! ([2 Tim. 3:16](#); [1 Pet. 1:10–11](#); [2 Pet. 1:19–21](#)).
- **A book worth dying for**. People have died to see it translated into the language of the common tongue. People have died to get it into closed countries. It is a precious truth to remember this.

HOW: How Do I Read and Study the Bible?

Do I need other resources and tools? Or is the Bible enough?

Yes, the Bible is enough! Try reading a book of the Bible on your own, making notes in a journal of what you notice about God, about mankind, and about the world. Write out your questions and things that are confusing, and then talk to God about it. You can read the Bible for yourself.

But, it’s important not to read the Bible in isolation. We should be reading our Bibles in community. Ideally, that community would be the local church. When we have questions about how to interpret difficult passages, it’s our pastors and the leaders of our local church we should seek wisdom from. They know us and they have been trained to help us in these ways. We can also look to trustworthy commentaries and ministries.

Recommended Tools:

- [An English dictionary](#). Find help with tough words and concepts like propitiation, supplication, satraps, etc. Just looking up these words in an English dictionary answers most people’s questions.
- [A Bible dictionary](#).
- [A good study Bible](#) like the ESV Study Bible.
- [The New Inductive Study Bible](#) gives some basic structure and helps people dig in for themselves.
- [The Bible Project Book Overview videos](#).

WHO: Reading to Know God

Read the Bible relationally. Read it like the Author of the book is right next to you because He is! Talk to Him as you encounter uncomfortable Truths, things you don’t understand, beautiful promises, etc.

I often use a journal. My Bible reading is like tasting the Truth, but as I journal, I digest the Truth. I rewrite God’s Word. I pray it back to God. I outline it, meditate on it, and let the Spirit press it into the corners of my life that need to conform to it.

I wrote this in *Friendish*:

We cannot stop with simply reading the Bible and learning information about God. In John 5:39–40 Jesus rebukes the Bible scholars of his day, saying, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”

Knowing things about God is not enough. You can be an expert on him and still not know him personally. So how do we know him personally? As Jesus said in the verses above, we must go to him. We do this through praying. Praying is simply talking to God. We take what we learn in the Bible about God and then talk to him about it in prayer.

When we read about his compassion for sinners like us, we come in prayer, thanking him for showing us compassion. When we read that he hates the proud, we come to him in prayer and confess our pride, asking for his help to rid us of it. When we read that Jesus is the only righteous one, we come to him in prayer and ask for faith to trust his good deeds and not our own. When we read things we don't understand, we come to him in prayer and ask him questions and for help to understand.

If we have only Bible reading and no prayer, we are not becoming friends of God, but students only. Like following a stranger on social media, we may know a lot about them, but we do not really know them. Yes, we must study God's character, but if we refuse to take the next step of praying, we are no different than the unbelieving Pharisees. We must read the Bible relationally, always talking to the One who wrote it.²

About Kelly: Kelly Needham is a regular contributor to *Revive Our Hearts* and is the author of *Friendish*. She has been on staff at two different churches, serving in youth, college, and women's ministry.

²Needham, *Friendish*.



P.O. Box 2000, Niles, MI 49120 | ReviveOurHearts.com

