

I will never forget sitting in a seminary class, the Holy Spirit etching the words of my professor into my brain: He said, “For every hour you spend in a commentary, spend three hours in the text yourself.” I can’t tell you how much fruit this has born in my life. It’s led me to big aha’s and deep convictions. It has encouraged and humbled me. And it’s been a constant reminder to me that listening to other people’s words is never the same as hearing God’s voice for myself. We live in a world with incredible resources: books, podcasts, speakers, etc. Be sure to take advantage of them, but I encourage you to never allow those to become a replacement for God’s word in your own life. Starting in February we’ll be diving into 1 Peter. I invite you to take one hour a week to study and dig into it for yourself. Here are simple guidelines for a basic framework for good study. As you jump into 2025, I hope you find yourself captivated by God’s word!

1. **Pray.** You’ll find this throughout the process, but with all that’s constantly going through my brain and heart at any given moment, I need to stop and ask God to help center my inner being so I can give him my whole attention.
2. **Grab a good translation.** You may remember that the bible was not originally written in English. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew (with a few parts in Aramaic), while the New Testament was written in Koine Greek. So, if you have the time and energy, it’s a wonderful task to learn both Greek and Hebrew. But of course, most people don’t, so finding a good English translation is key to a good start. Here is a helpful, but somewhat lengthy [article](#) you can read through to learn more about modern translations, and which may be best for you. I like to use the English Standard Version (ESV) because it holds a bit more to the more formal aspects of the original languages while maintaining a stronger readability in English. But I also like to keep the NIV and NLT nearby to compare.
3. **Find a good spot.** In today’s world, finding a good space to study without distraction is difficult, but it’s important to give God our whole attention. Where did Jesus go when the demands of ministry put pressure on him? To a place of seclusion and quiet (Cave time!). This may mean getting up a little earlier (and going to bed a little earlier), or carving out a special time during the day, at night, or on the weekend. Maybe it’s your soft cozy chair (not too soft that you fall asleep in though!), or a desk by a window so you can see the sunrise. It could change each time or stay the same, but wherever and whenever you choose, choose it intentionally so you can give God your whole attention. Essentially what you’re doing is creating a good rhythm to meet with God on a regular basis.
4. **Read through the passage.** If you’re in a shorter book, it’s incredibly helpful to read through the entire book in one sitting beforehand. If you’re in a longer book that may not be possible, so read the chapter you’re in, and the surrounding chapters. Additionally, try reading the passage in its entirety, without stopping. Here’s a fun key: do it out loud! This will help your brain from going on autopilot and skipping over words. It is especially helpful when you’re in an epistle (letter) or even a gospel (but can be helpful for any book). Do it multiple times until you get a good sense for the words, the flow, and the feel of the text. You may even try summarizing the passage into a single sentence, phrase, or even one word.
5. **Pray.** I like to stop and pray after reading the passage because it keeps me from jumping right into study and creates space for me to really listen for a moment to the bigger picture. After all, you can never have too much prayer!
6. **Ask good questions.** This is where it starts to get a little more challenging, but we need to remember that while the Bible was written *for* us, it was not written *to* us. That’s why we need to ask good questions, so that we understand what the author was saying in their time, before we begin to apply it to our time. What’s below is certainly not exhaustive, but I hope helpful for you as you begin this challenge to pick up God’s word for yourself.
  - a. What is this text saying?
    - i. Historical/Cultural:
      1. Think *author* – Who wrote this and what is their story? If we can know, knowing can make a big difference. For example: How does Peter writing a letter differ from Paul writing the letter?

2. Think *audience* – Who were the people being written to and what’s their story? Were they Jews, or Gentiles, or both? Where did they live? How did they live? What was the culture like? What problems or struggles did they have? Was there opposition or suffering?
3. Think *date* – When was this written? For example, was 1 Peter written before, during, or after the persecution of Christians under Emperor Nero?

ii. Literary:

1. Think *genre*. The genre changes how we read and interpret the Bible. Check out this short [video](#) as a help.
2. Think *words*: Who or what is the subject? Are the verbs active or passive? Singular or plural? A fun tip is to snag a biblical lexicon or concordance (like [Strong’s](#)) to look up individual words.
3. Think *context*: Taking words out of context can keep us from understanding them correctly. Start small by looking at the sentence, then paragraph, & then chapter. This may force you to rebuild some grammar and syntax muscles, but its worth it. Then consider that this passage is also part of a larger book (say 1 Peter), testament (OT or NT), and amazingly, the entire Bible!

iii. Main Idea:

1. Once you’ve studied the passage, write out what you think the main idea is that the author is trying to get across.

b. What is this text saying to me personally?

- i. This is where we move from the *head* to the *heart*. If we miss this piece, studying becomes about a collection of knowledge that never changes me. As important and difficult as the study above is, this question is just as important and difficult. While it’s true that the Pharisees made some flaws in their interpretation of the Law, it’s probably more significant that they never allowed God’s word to penetrate their hearts. We need the word of God to pierce our hearts and discern our intentions (Heb. 4:12).

c. What is God asking me to do as a response?

- i. Lastly, we move to our *hands*. I’d encourage that you never walk away from a passage or time with God without some type of action. Think about it this way: the role of the disciple was to 1) Be with their Rabbi, 2) Become like their Rabbi, & 3) Eventually live and do as their Rabbi. How does God want to use this to call us into Jesus living?

7. **Dream.** Lastly, ask yourself, how might the world look differently if God worked this application powerfully in me and through me? This may sound strange to some, but what we’re really talking about is Vision. I would encourage you to remember that while God wants to grow you, he also wants to grow his kingdom. Think of this way, what you’re learning should create an overflow that comes out of you wherever you go! Who might God be asking you to share with today?

8. **Pray continuously.** Knowing all the above, it should lead us to a place of utter and constant dependence on God. Of course, everything above is fueled by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like we’re often reminded, as we continue to show up and study God’s word, let’s pray continuously that the Spirit do what only he can do.

Another great and simple resource would be to use your 1 Peter Companion guide (which you can get at church) to study the same passage as Sunday, and then to talk through that same passage around your table at home with your family, or with your life group. Less is more!

Pursuing God alongside you - Pastor Seth