

BIBLE NOTE

Bible Study Guide

Scripture · Observation · Context · Questions · Response · Prayer

A simple, printable way to study any passage of Scripture — with two worked examples, a four-week starter plan, thirty questions to ask any text, and blank study pages for your own notes.

Free printable from biblenote.ai — print and share freely.

Online version & more free tools: biblenote.ai/resources/bible-study-guide-pdf

Before you begin

Dear reader,

If you have ever opened the Bible, read a paragraph, and thought “*I have no idea what to do with that,*” this guide is for you. You do not need a seminary degree, a shelf of commentaries, or a perfect morning routine. You need a passage, a pen, and a few honest questions.

The six fields in this guide give your attention somewhere to go. They move you from reading words on a page to actually sitting with them: what the text says, where it lives in the bigger story, what it leaves you wondering, and what it might ask of you today. Some days your notes will feel profound. Most days they will feel ordinary. Both count.

A few gentle suggestions: pick one passage and stay with it rather than skimming five. Write by hand if you can — it slows you down in the best way. And bring your real questions; the Bible is not fragile, and neither is honest study.

Everything here is offered as a starting point, not a verdict. Christians across many traditions have read these same pages for centuries and sometimes reached different conclusions. Where you land is between you, your church, and the text. We just want to help you keep showing up to it.

Happy studying,
— The Bible Note team

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Tip: print pages 17–23 in a small stack and keep them with your Bible. One page per passage is enough.

The six fields at a glance

The method builds on the classic SOAP approach and adds two fields most beginners skip: Context and Questions. Work through them in order — each one prepares the next.

1 Scripture

Anchor the text. Write the reference, and copy out the verse that stands out. Handwriting is slow on purpose — it makes you read every word.

2 Observation

See what is actually there. Repeated words, commands, promises, contrasts, surprises — before you decide what it means, notice what it says.

3 Context

Locate the passage. Who is speaking? To whom? What comes before and after? Most misreadings start by skipping this step.

4 Questions

Admit what you do not know. Writing the question down turns confusion into a study plan you can bring to a commentary, a pastor, or a friend.

5 Response

Name one concrete step. Not five resolutions — one thing the passage asks of you today, small enough to actually do.

6 Prayer

Talk it back to God. Gratitude for what is true, help for what is hard, trust for what is unclear — the page becomes a conversation.

Steps 1–3, in depth

1 Scripture — anchor the text

Why it matters: study drifts when the text drifts. Writing the reference down fixes exactly what you are (and are not) studying, so your observations stay accountable to real words.

How to do it: copy the reference, then choose one verse — the one that struck, comforted, or bothered you — and write it out word for word. If a phrase keeps pulling at you, underline it.

Tip: copying by hand is half of memorizing. Do not skip it even if the verse is familiar.

2 Observation — see what is there

Why it matters: we read fastest over the passages we think we already know. Observation slows you down and lets the text surprise you again.

How to do it: look for repeated words, cause and effect (“therefore,” “so that”), commands, promises, contrasts (“but,” “yet”), and anything that does not fit your expectations. List them as plain facts, not interpretations.

Tip: if you only have ten minutes, spend six of them here. Good observation makes the rest of the page easy.

3 Context — locate the passage

Why it matters: a verse read alone can be made to say almost anything. A verse read in its paragraph, book, and moment in history usually says something specific.

How to do it: ask who wrote or spoke these words, to whom, and why. Read the paragraph before and after. If you have a Bible with section headings or a study Bible with introductions, use them.

Tip: one sentence of honest context beats a paragraph of confident guessing.

Steps 4–6, in depth

4 Questions — admit what you do not know

Why it matters: unanswered questions do not disappear; they quietly make us avoid the text. Written down, they become specific things you can actually look up or ask about.

How to do it: write every question the passage raises, from “what does this word mean?” to “how could a good God allow that?” Mark the one you most want answered, and chase it this week.

Tip: bring your best question to someone further along — a pastor, a study group, or a trusted commentary. Questions are easier together.

5 Response — name one concrete step

Why it matters: study that never touches Monday morning stays theoretical. A single concrete response is how the text moves from the page into a life.

How to do it: finish this sentence: “Because of this passage, today I will...” Keep it small and specific — an apology to make, an anxiety to hand over, a person to thank, a habit to pause.

Tip: some passages call for trust, not action. “Remember this when I am afraid tonight” is a legitimate response.

6 Prayer — talk it back to God

Why it matters: the goal of study is not information about God but conversation with him. Prayer is where the page turns personal.

How to do it: use your own words. Thank him for what the passage shows, ask for help with what it confronts, and sit with what you still do not understand.

Tip: if you are not sure what to pray, borrow the words of the passage itself — the Psalms have been borrowed exactly this way for three thousand years.

Worked example: Philippians 4:6–7

Philippians 4:6–7 (KJV)

“Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

1 Scripture

Philippians 4:6–7. The verse I keep returning to: “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”

2 Observation

“Be careful for nothing” is old English for “do not be anxious about anything” — a command, not a suggestion. The alternative to anxiety is not willpower but a sequence: prayer, supplication, *with thanksgiving*. “In every thing” admits no exceptions. And peace is described as something that “keeps” — literally “garrisons” — hearts *and* minds: feelings and thoughts both.

3 Context

Paul is in prison (Philippians 1:13–14) writing to a church he loves at Philippi, a Roman colony. Just verses earlier he has urged two quarreling members to agree (4:2–3), and told the church to rejoice (4:4). This command about anxiety lands between conflict and joy — from a man with prison-cell reasons to worry. That gives it weight rather than naivety.

Philippians 4:6–7, continued

4 Questions

Why does thanksgiving change the prayer itself — does gratitude reframe what I ask for? What does peace “guarding” a mind look like at 3 a.m.? And “passeth all understanding” — does Paul mean peace that defies explanation, or peace beyond what thinking can produce? Probably both.

5 Response

Today: when I notice anxiety rising, I will pause before asking for anything and name one thing I am thankful for first. One pause, one thanksgiving, then the request — in that order.

6 Prayer

Father, you know what I am carrying, and you have carried Paul through worse rooms than mine. I bring it to you with thanks — for what is already true — and I ask for your peace to stand guard over my heart and my mind today.

What to notice about this example

None of these entries is long. The Observation field does the heavy lifting; Context is two sentences anyone can find by reading the chapter around the verses; the Questions are honest rather than impressive. Short and true beats long and borrowed.

Worked example: Psalm 23

Poetry studies differently from letters: watch the images, the structure, and who is being addressed — the psalm does its work through metaphor, not argument.

Psalm 23 (KJV, abridged)

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want... Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies...”

1 Scripture

Psalm 23. The verse I keep returning to: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.”

2 Observation

Two metaphors, not one: the Lord is a shepherd (vv. 1–4), then a host preparing a table (vv. 5–6). The pronouns shift at the darkest moment — God is “he” in the green pastures, but “thou” in the valley. The valley is walked *through*, not camped in. Rod and staff are instruments of guidance and protection, and the comfort comes from his presence, not from the valley disappearing.

3 Context

A psalm of David — a man who knew shepherding firsthand and danger firsthand. Psalm 22 (“why hast thou forsaken me?”) sits immediately before it; the calm of Psalm 23 is hard-won, not naive. In Israel’s hills, the “valley of deep shadow” was a real place between pastures — the dangerous stretch you cross to reach still water.

Psalm 23, continued

4 Questions

Why does the psalm switch from talking *about* God to talking *to* God exactly at the valley — is closeness to him felt most in the dark? What are “goodness and mercy” (that loyal, covenant-keeping love) actually “following” me into? And a table prepared “in the presence of my enemies” — why does the feast happen before the enemies leave?

5 Response

This week, in the valley I am currently walking through, I will practice speaking to God instead of merely about him — one sentence at a time, the way the psalm does: “Thou art with me.”

6 Prayer

Lord, you are my shepherd even here. I do not ask for the valley to vanish; I ask to know you are in it with me. Let your goodness and mercy follow me all my days — and let me dwell in your house for ever.

What to notice about this example

With poetry, resist turning images into equations (“the staff means X”). Let the metaphors stay images: notice them, feel their weight, and watch how the poem moves. Structure — like the he/thou shift — is often where the treasure is buried.

A four-week starter plan

Five passages a week, one study page per passage. Each week samples a different kind of biblical writing, so by the end of the month nothing on the page will feel foreign.

Week 1 • Psalms — learning to read poetry

DAY	PASSAGE	WATCH FOR
Day 1	Psalm 1	The two paths; the tree image
Day 2	Psalm 8	How majesty and “what is man?” fit together
Day 3	Psalm 23	The he/thou shift at the valley
Day 4	Psalm 51	Confession without excuses
Day 5	Psalm 103	How the psalmist argues with his own soul

Week 2 • Mark — learning to read narrative

DAY	PASSAGE	WATCH FOR
Day 1	Mark 1:1–20	“Immediately” — Mark’s pace
Day 2	Mark 2:1–12	Forgiveness before healing
Day 3	Mark 4:35–41	Who is this? — the disciples’ question
Day 4	Mark 8:27–38	The turning point of the gospel
Day 5	Mark 15:33–39	The centurion’s confession

Weeks 3–4

Week 3 • Ephesians — learning to read letters

DAY	PASSAGE	WATCH FOR
Day 1	Ephesians 1:1–14	One long sentence of blessing (in Greek!)
Day 2	Ephesians 2:1–10	“But God” — the great reversal
Day 3	Ephesians 3:14–21	Paul’s prayer for people he has never met
Day 4	Ephesians 4:1–16	“Therefore” — doctrine turning into life
Day 5	Ephesians 6:10–18	The armor: mostly Old Testament echoes

Week 4 • Genesis — learning to read the foundations

DAY	PASSAGE	WATCH FOR
Day 1	Genesis 1:1–2:3	The rhythm of “and it was good”
Day 2	Genesis 3	The question God asks first: “Where art thou?”
Day 3	Genesis 12:1–9	A promise built on going
Day 4	Genesis 22:1–14	The hardest passage — write your real questions
Day 5	Genesis 45:1–15	“You meant evil... God meant it for good”

After week four, keep going with any book you like — or build a full plan with the free Bible reading plan generator (see page 24).

Thirty questions for any passage

When you do not know what to write, steal a question from this page. They work on psalms, stories, and letters alike.

A.Observation — what does the text say?

1. What words or phrases are repeated?
2. Who is speaking, and who is being spoken to?
3. Are there commands, promises, or warnings? List them.
4. What connects the sentences — “therefore,” “but,” “so that”?
5. What surprises me or does not fit my expectations?
6. What is the emotional tone — joy, grief, urgency, calm?
7. If it is a story: what changed between the first and last verse?
8. If it is a poem: what images carry the meaning?
9. If it is a letter: what problem is the writer answering?
10. Which single verse would I underline if I could only choose one?

B.Context — where does this passage live?

1. What comes in the paragraph before and after this one?
2. Where does this book sit in the bigger story of the Bible?
3. Who first heard these words, and what was their situation?
4. What do I know about the author’s circumstances when writing?
5. Does this passage quote or echo an earlier part of Scripture?
6. What would the first readers have found shocking here?
7. Is this describing something that happened, or prescribing how to live?
8. How does the genre (poetry, narrative, letter) change how I should read it?
9. What nearby passage answers the question this one raises?
10. Have I been reading my situation into the text instead of listening to it?

C.Application — what does it ask of me?

1. What does this passage show me about who God is?
2. What does it show me about people — including me?
3. Is there a promise here I need to trust this week?
4. Is there a command I have been quietly ignoring?
5. What would change today if I actually believed this?
6. Who in my life needs what this passage says?
7. What is the smallest concrete step this text suggests?
8. Is this calling me to act — or to wait and trust?
9. What would I pray after reading this honestly?
10. What question from this passage should I bring to someone wiser?

D.Where to read when...

References only — look them up in the Bible you already own, and let the search be part of the study.

...you need peace

Psalms 46:1 · Isaiah 26:3 · John 14:27 · Philippians 4:6–7

...you need courage

Joshua 1:9 · Psalm 27:1 · Daniel 3:16–18 · 2 Timothy 1:7

...you want to give thanks

Psalms 100 · Psalm 103:1–5 · Colossians 3:15–17 · 1 Thessalonians 5:18

...you need guidance

Psalms 32:8 · Proverbs 3:5–6 · James 1:5 · John 16:13

...you need comfort

Psalm 34:18 · Isaiah 41:10 · Matthew 11:28–30 · 2 Corinthians 1:3–4

...you need patience

Psalm 37:7 · Ecclesiastes 7:8 · Romans 5:3–5 · James 5:7–8

...you are working on forgiveness

Genesis 45:4–8 · Psalm 103:10–12 · Matthew 18:21–22 · Ephesians 4:31–32

...you need hope

Psalm 42:11 · Jeremiah 29:11 · Romans 15:13 · 1 Peter 1:3–5

Using this guide in a small group (60 minutes)

Print one study page per person. The six fields become a ready-made agenda — the structure keeps the hour moving without anyone needing to prepare a lecture.

5 min **Welcome.** Open in prayer; read last week's responses if anyone wants to share.

10 min **Read the passage** aloud twice, in two different voices if you have them. Everyone fills in field 1.

15 min **Observation round.** Each person names one thing they noticed — no interpreting yet, just noticing.

10 min **Context together.** Read the paragraphs before and after; let someone summarize who, whom, and why.

10 min **Questions on the table.** Collect honest questions; pick one to chase together next week.

10 min **Response and prayer.** Volunteers share their one concrete step; close by praying the passage itself.

Five common pitfalls

Everyone falls into these at some point — including people who have studied for decades. Noticing them early saves years of frustration.

1 • Reading verses out of context

A sentence lifted from its paragraph can be made to say almost anything. When a verse sounds too convenient — or too troubling — read the twenty verses around it before deciding what it means.

2 • Over-spiritualizing every detail

Not every coin, donkey, and doorway is a symbol. Start with what the text plainly describes; let the clear meaning lead before hunting for hidden ones.

3 • Measuring truth by how it makes you feel

Some true passages comfort, and some confront. If a text bothers you, that is a reason to stay with it longer — not to skip it, and not to force it to feel nice.

4 • Using the Bible as a quote book

Collecting favorite verses without studying their books leaves you with fragments. Favorite verses are wonderful doors — walk through them into the whole chapter.

5 • Rushing to application

“What does this mean for me?” is the right question asked too early. Observation and context come first; application drawn from a misread text goes confidently wrong.

The antidote to all five is the same: slow down, stay with the whole passage, and write your questions down. That is exactly what the six fields are for.

Study page

Date: _____

1 Scripture

2 Observation — what does the text say?

3 Context — who, to whom, and what surrounds it?

4 Questions — what do I not understand yet?

5 Response — what does this ask of me today?

6 Prayer

Study page

Date: _____

1 Scripture

2 Observation — what does the text say?

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Date: _____

1 Scripture

2 Observation — what does the text say?

3 Context — who, to whom, and what surrounds it?

4 Questions — what do I not understand yet?

5 Response — what does this ask of me today?

6 Prayer

Passage / date: _____

Keep going — it is all free

If this guide helped, these free tools from the same team might too. No sign-up, no email, no gate.

Bible Reading Plan Generator

Build a custom plan — the whole Bible, a testament, or a single book in 90, 180, or 365 days, verse-balanced and printable.

[**biblenote.ai/tools/bible-reading-plan-generator**](https://biblenote.ai/tools/bible-reading-plan-generator)

Bible Verse Finder

Find any verse by the words you remember, a topic, or a plain description — with instant references.

[**biblenote.ai/tools/bible-verse-finder**](https://biblenote.ai/tools/bible-verse-finder)

Bible Quizzes

Trivia for all levels, “Which Bible character are you?”, and a spiritual gifts test — free, in your browser.

[**biblenote.ai/quiz**](https://biblenote.ai/quiz)