

Sophia knows Jesus. She invited Him into her heart when she was in elementary school. Her family attends church regularly and she loves learning about the Lord and worshipping Him with other believers. She prays every day and now that she's in middle school, she's learning what it's like to share her life with Jesus in prayer. But Emma doesn't spend a lot of time in God's word. It's not that she doesn't like to, she's just unsure of where to start and how to apply it to her life.

Maybe you can relate? I certainly could as a middle schooler. It was so overwhelming to hold the Bible in my hand and know where to turn. This book of 66 other books that was two inches thick. This inspired Word of God. I loved it, but I hardly cracked it open.

When I got older, I learned that Bible Study books were my friends. They were centered around one book of Scripture or sometimes a topic like "The Armor of God" or "The Prayers of Ascent" and the wisdom that flowed from the authors added so much color and depth to my Bible reading. And what's incredible about this is that when I seek the Lord's face, He always meets me. Most times when I am going through a study, the very thing I'm reading is the very thing I needed to hear. I believe God plans it that way.

Now that I've made a habit of spending time with Jesus, I can tell when I've gone a while without it. It starts to feel like I'm a wilting plant that needs water. Or like I'm a car running on fumes, out of gas. I know I've gone too long when I get grumpy or am quick to irritation. Or when I start to stare at my circumstances and get depressed or impatient. That's because we need spiritual food. And the food we receive today isn't meant to carry us into next week. It's meant for today. You don't eat breakfast on Monday and then not expect to eat again until Saturday, do you? Well, the same goes for time with Jesus.

During this mini-series, we're going to take the sense of overwhelm and apprehension out of studying the Bible. There are so many ways to spend time with Jesus and dive into His word. And by the end, we'll have discussed 3 fun ways to do that! Today, we start by looking at Word Studies.

Have you ever wondered what the Bible says about a certain topic? Maybe you've wanted to know what the Bible says about prayer or love or anxiety. Well, luckily for us, there are hundreds of years of resources at our fingertips, a lot of which is on the internet. Everything from commentaries to help explain verses to dictionaries defining words in the original Greek and Hebrew.

Speaking of Greek and Hebrew, let's start there. Obviously, the Bible was written thousands of years ago. The Old Testament was written in ancient Hebrew and Aramaic. The New Testament was written in ancient Greek, called Koine Greek. And if you've studied



languages at all in school, you've likely come to realize that languages can differ a lot. For example: ancient Greek has 4 different words for our one word "love." Each Greek word describes a different kind of love. Like, the love we have for a friend vs. the love God has for us. That's where word studies come in handy. Looking up the original language can help bring deeper context to the meaning of scripture.

So... where do we start?

Study Bibles

Well, one of the best places to start is to use a Study Bible.

A Study Bible is helpful because it has notes at the bottom of each page, explaining what each verse means. This is called a "commentary." Study Bibles also usually have a "concordance" in the back. A concordance is like an index that lists every word in the Bible and the verses that use those words. This resource will particularly come in handy when you want to do a word study.

If you don't have a Study Bible, I recommend getting one. Reading from it and using the resources inside will help you learn so much. There are Bibles made just for students your age, with pre-teen specific resources inside. There are Bibles with a focus on Bible history and archeology. There are so many options.

Personally, I love the NIV study bible I've had since High School. It's well rounded, focusing on the meaning of scripture with maps and archeology facts thrown in here and there. It's since been updated with new study material, but you can find a similar one online. (See the post online for a link.)

Strong's Concordance

If you really want to geek out (which I totally recommend doing 12) and do an in-depth study of a word, you can access Strong's Concordance online. It's also available in printed format, but be aware: it's over 1,700 pages thick!

The beauty of this concordance is that it's so much more than the index in the back of your Bible. It literally lists out every Hebrew and Greek word, gives the definition of the word in context, and lists how many verses use that particular word and where to find it in the Bible.

Why would someone go this far, you ask? Well, like we discussed before, it helps reveal more depth. Bible translators work really hard to translate scripture in the most accurate way possible, but sometimes there's just not a good substitute for the original word. Looking back at our original example, "love," to read "God loves you" is fine. But to read "God has *agape* (a-gá-pē) for you" brings so much additional meaning. The word *agape* in Koine Greek is the word for the highest form of love someone can have for someone else. It is self-sacrificial love. Love that is pure and not self-seeking. It's so much more than the "love" we have for ice cream. To know that God has *agape* for us shows us that we truly *mean something* to Him. That He'd literally do anything for us. And He has!

How do you know what words to look up? Well, it's a good idea to use Strong's Concordance and Dictionary when you come across a word in a verse that you don't understand. Or when the author



repeats a word, that's another good time to look up the word.

If you'd like to explore Strong's Concordance, you can find it on several study websites such as BibleHub.com or BlueLetterBible.com.

The Bible App

Now, if you just want to find a "topic" search, there are many resources for this too. The most popular one, I'd say is the YouVersion Bible App. Not only does it put a million Bible translations right on your phone, but the content creators have also put together devotionals and reading plans by topic. So, if you want to look up verses on prayer or anxiety or confusion or joy, they've got you covered.

If you don't have the Bible app on your device already, you can add it by going to your app store and searching "YouVersion Bible app" and you should find it right away.

Follow the Trail

One important thing to remember is that the point of a Word Study is to understand context. This is not something you should use to find a verse that suits your needs, like you'd take a Tylenol for a headache. It's always important to read a group of verses rather than just one verse by itself, to make sure you understand the author's intended meaning.

You can also gain more context and understanding by going down the rabbit trails listed in the footnotes of your Bible. Have you ever wondered what those verses in the middle of the page with tiny letters beside them were? These verses are called "cross-references" and they are listed to help you find other verses related to the ones you're currently reading. Sometimes the verses use similar phrasing or words and sometimes they share a similar topic, theme, or reference to Biblical history. Following the rabbit trails is another good opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of scripture.

Be inspired, sweet friend! The word of God is living and active. No matter how long you study scripture you'll always find something you haven't seen before. That's because the Holy Spirit reveals to you what you need to know at the time. Let what once overwhelmed you inspire you. The fact that scripture is so deep and extensive is a good thing! It is just a snapshot of how deep and extensive God is. And that is something that should keep us coming back to scripture over and over again. We'll never be bored. We can never know it all. I want to belong to a God like that! Don't you?

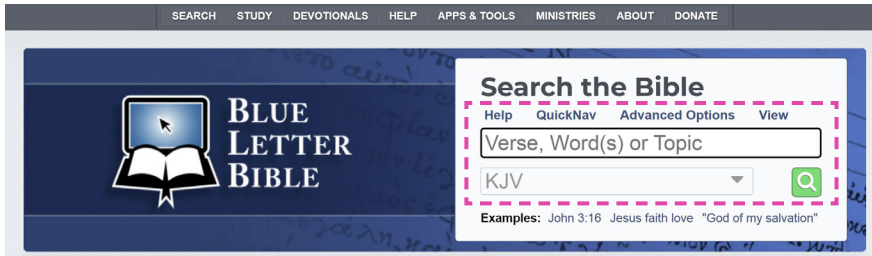


DIG A LITTLE DEEPER:

Let's dive in and put this study method to practice, shall we?

Key Word Search

- * First, grab a concordance. Let's use BlueLetterBible.Org so we can walk through the website together. You should see a **search box** at the top of their home page. Underneath the search box, you should see a dropdown menu with Bible translations listed. It probably has "KJV" listed and an arrow pointed down. **Click the arrow and find NIV (New International Version).**



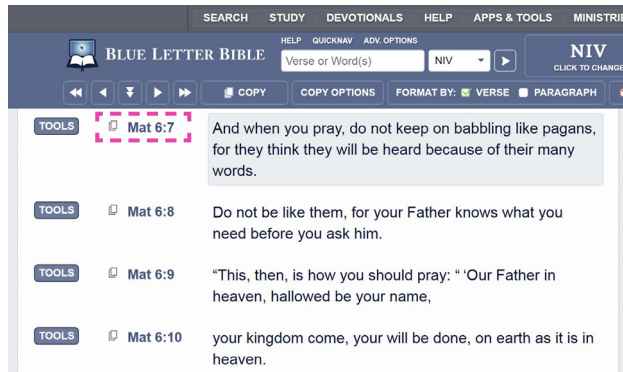
- * Let's narrow our search. **Click the "Adv. Options" button above the search box and under where it says "Search a pre-defined list," click the drop-down arrow and select "The New Testament."**



- * Now, **type the word "pray"** into the search box and **click the magnifying glass** to search.
- * A new page will load and will list every verse in the New Testament with the word "pray" in it!
- * For the sake of time, let's just look at the verses listed in Matthew 5 and 6. **Summarize what these verses say about prayer.** I suggest making bullet points so you can go back and easily reference it later.
- * Remember, we talked about understanding the original context of the verses we find. Go back and **read Matthew 5-6**, then answer these questions:
 - **Who said or wrote these words?**
 - **When?**
 - **To whom?**
 - **Why?**

Original Language Study

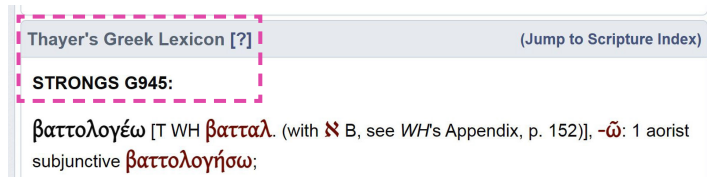
- * Now let's practice using **Strong's Concordance**. Go back to the **search bar** on **BlueLetterBible.Org** and **search this time for "Matthew 6:7."** Make sure that NIV is still listed as your preferred translation, or it will default to King James Version.
- * A new page will pop up. **Find Matthew 6:7** and **click the bolded reference**.



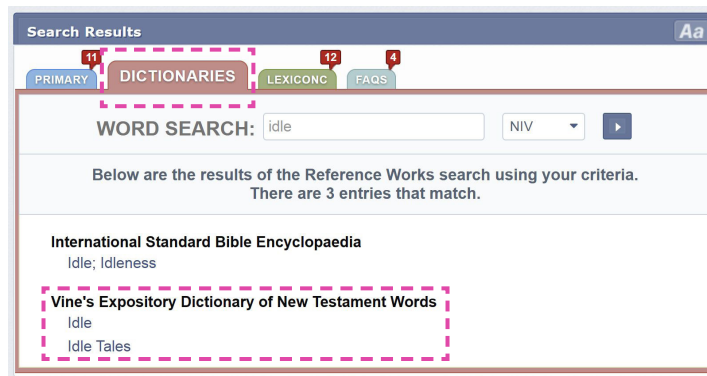
- * The page will expand showing the verse with the original Greek and the English translation of those words. In between is Strong's reference number, which if you have the book, helps you find that word in the Bible Dictionary at the back of the book, but online it's all together. We want to study the phrase "babble on" to see what Jesus meant by that comment.
- * When you scroll down, you'll see that the phrase "babble on" is literally translated "use meaningless repetition," so that already helps bring more understanding. **Click on G945**, which is Strong's reference number for the Greek word *battalogeō*.



- * A new page will pop up. **Scroll down** to where it says, "Thayer's Greek Lexicon" and **read bullet point B. How does it say this word battalogoē is used?**



- * "...to use many and idle words." This is where curiosity comes into play. And this gives you a sense of the bunny trails you can go down to learn something. **Go back to the search box** at the top of the page and **type in the word "idle."** This time when the search results come up, **find the red tab labeled "dictionaries"** and **under "Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words" click the word "idle."**



- * **How does Vine's Dictionary define the word "idle"? Knowing that definition, how can you rephrase "idle words"?**
- * **What would it look like to pray using worthless words? Have you ever found yourself praying words that you didn't understand? Or maybe you've found yourself praying words you didn't actually mean? Do you feel those prayers were effective? Did they help boost your faith? Why / why not?**
- * **How would it be better to follow Jesus' advice? Practically, what would it look like to follow how He said to pray?**

In Jesus' time, some "gentiles" prayed to pagan gods using repetitious words. This is not how God would like to communicate with us. As Christians, Jesus calls us to have a relationship with Him. Praying is our means of communication and we can come just as we are. There is no point in being inauthentic, praying words we don't mean. That's not how a relationship is built anyway. There is also no need to use big, fancy words and there is no formula of certain phrases to say. Bringing our heart-felt messages to God through prayer boosts our faith and nourishes our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

See how looking up just one word, "prayer," revealed so much content for you to study? And do you see how looking up just one key phrase, "babbling on," helped you apply that verse to your everyday life? Imagine how much we could learn if we added this technique to our study habits!