



Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds

Jen Wilkin

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Many Christian women find great encouragement and joy in and through women's Bible studies. However, popular Bible teacher Jen Wilkin is concerned that sometimes we let our emotions rule our study of Scripture and forget that the Bible is primarily about God, not us. Challenging hungry women to go deeper in their study of Scripture, this book will help you refocus your efforts on feeding your mind first and foremost. Whether you're young or old, married or single, this accessible volume will energize and equip you for Bible study aimed at transforming both the heart and mind.

Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds Details

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From Reader Review Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds for online ebook

Melanie says

This book was amazing. I loved the content and the way it was written. It had a lot of helpful tips about how to study the Bible and I can definitely see myself rereading it in the future. It was a very easy read, and yet it had a lot of depth. I highly recommend this book.

Robin Hatcher says

What a wonderful tool for learning how to best study the Word of God. This is one of the most helpful guides I've come across in my many years as a student of the Bible. Highly recommended.

Christine Hoover says

Women of the Word is an excellent resource for learning a process for Bible literacy. Would be helpful to walk through with someone in a discipleship relationship who would like to learn to study the Bible for themselves.

Kate says

I am tempted to reduce my rating for this book based on some of the critiques I've heard/read from friends and other reviewers. I certainly see some of the weak spots in this book, and agree about its flaws, but I feel like a lot depends on what you're hoping for this book to accomplish. For me, it did exactly what I needed it to:

1. It ignited a much greater interest in Bible literacy. This is something I've found it easy to overlook or take for granted. I have read the Bible and attended church for more than 20 years, so I can assume that Bible literacy will simply come to me through Sunday morning preaching (which is vital - don't get me wrong!) and daily quiet times. But this book highlights the importance of studying the Bible with intention and depth. I want to know the Bible for myself, and be able to share it with others. I think this book could ignite a similar passion among other women.
2. It helped me realise that I can understand the Bible for myself. This may sound like a strangely obvious statement, but I found Wilkins's encouragement to only bring in commentary and other resources after an initial in-depth study for yourself, really eye opening for me. I have felt that because I have no formal Bible training, I must rely primarily on the teaching of others in order to understand a text, so it was refreshing to be encouraged that God reveals Himself in His Word when any of us are faithful to study it. That isn't to say my interpretations are infallible - I think Wilkin was very clear that we will still find passages hard to understand and will need to ask for as much help as possible as we seek to faithfully understand Scripture - but it was an enlivening to be reminded that God speaks to us through His Word directly.
3. The length of this book was great. I could see this book not only being an accessible resource but actually

a catalyst for spurring on Bible study within churches. It sets out a great vision at the beginning and end, and between it gives simple practical tools. Though some have compared this book to more in-depth writings by Kay Arthur and John Piper, I'd say that my interest in reading those books has been stirred BY reading this one. Perhaps this is the "introductory" level book on Bible study that begins a longer journey.

Becky Pliego says

The principle that this book argues for is by all means important and I cannot agree more with the author: Become a woman of the Word. Jen Wilkin does a wonderful job in explaining why is it important -extremely important- to study the Word of God faithfully. I would give this book 5 stars from pages 1-108.

On the next pages (p.109-145), the author proposes a method to study the Scriptures (and because of these pages I dropped the rating down to 4 stars). Her method is good and in-depth, but I am more afraid about all the discouragement that it may bring to all the women out there (especially to those with little ones, or full-time jobs) trying to get into the Word. As my pastor says, "we need to always be able to discern the principle from the methods."

I would encourage you to read attentively chapters 1-7 as well as the conclusion. Take notes, learn, and find the principles in there, and by all means start reading the Word now.

Wendy says

An accessible hermeneutic for ladies and seriously...just anybody.

Laura says

Thanks, Jen Wilkin! Good encouragement for women who want to actually study for themselves, not just sit in front of a screen listening to someone else's ideas about the Bible and filling in the prepared blanks. I especially appreciated her encouragement for women to become teachers of other women. This book is sorely needed and I'm sorry I didn't buy it when I had the chance a few years ago. I'm encouraged afresh to realize I'm not alone in my frustrations!

Olivia (Liv's Library) says

I can't tell you how incredible, insightful and especially convicting this book has been!

I've always been one to love reading, no matter what it is, but need help when it comes to actually studying the Bible. This had so much insight, tips & examples on how to make the most of your study & where to start. This should be on the must-read list of every Christian women & men alike! I cannot talk enough about this book, so just read it.

P.S. There's also a FREE study/download that comes with it!

Elizabeth Johnson says

I have a feeling I'm not the only who feels inadequate when it comes to Bible study. It's the reason I enrolled in seminary last year. Thankfully, there are many tools available that can help us learn how to do that, even if you don't want to pursue formal education. One such tool is Jen Wilkin's book, *Women of the Word*, which explores the importance of Bible literacy and outlines the major components necessary for profitable study.

I'm usually skeptical about books targeted to women, since they often focus too heavily on emotional approaches and, quite frankly, lack depth. But I was pleasantly surprised at the substance and insight it offered, and appreciated the overarching focus on engaging the mind before the heart when approaching Scripture.

Women in the Word combines sound biblical reasoning with practical steps, helpful personal anecdotes, and even humor (ever heard of the Xanax approach to reading Scripture?) to explain the importance of biblical literacy and help anyone learn to study the Bible better - even someone like me, who's been in the Word for over thirty years.

The book begins with a simple question that we all would be wise to consider: when you approach Scripture are you looking for truth about yourself, or truth about God? Too often we approach it like Moses did the burning bush, wanting to know what it can do for us but neglecting to see what it teaches about God. For instance, I'm studying through Proverbs right now and it's easy to see what it says about how I should live — but the more important truth to understand is what it says about God, and then considering how I should live in light of that truth.

The next major section considers the issue of Bible literacy, and our usual approaches to reading God's Word — for instance: flipping the Bible open to a random passage each day (not reading it systematically), doing only topical studies (not reading it contextually), or relying too heavily on other people's words about the Bible (not reading it directly). It's easy to think we're getting sufficiently fed by reading selectively, but as Wilkin points out, "Not all contact with Scripture builds Bible literacy!"

With that much-needed foundation established for how we approach Scripture, the next five chapters outline some very practical steps for digging carefully through the depths of God's Word, what Wilkin calls the "5 P's of Bible Study" (bonus points for alliteration!):

- Purpose: seeing the "big picture" landscape of the Bible
- Perspective: doing biblical archaeology to understand the original setting
- Patience: allowing ourselves to feel "lost" or confused as we begin
- Process: reading multiple times before using any study tools
- Prayer: seeking spiritual guidance before, during, and after our time in God's Word

Lest it all seem too theoretical or abstract, Wilkin shares many examples of using these principles to study the book of James. I found those concrete applications very helpful. She also includes a short section for Bible teachers (or those who will be someday), which considers various aspects of preparation and delivery of a Bible study lesson or curriculum. As I prepare to serve as a missionary and pastor's wife, I anticipate many opportunities to teach other women, and her suggestions will certainly be beneficial.

Whether you're new to personal Bible study, or you've been doing it for thirty years, I'd highly recommend this book! It's a resource I will gladly recommend to every Christian woman (and some men might appreciate it too!), and plan to refer back to it in the future as I develop a more diligent habit of studying God's Word.

Disclaimer: I received this book for free from Crossway in exchange for providing an honest review. All opinions expressed herein are completely my own.

Jan says

2.5 stars out of 5 stars Better than just "okay" but I can't honestly give it a "good" rating because it's a little too "cutesy/fluffy" and I doubt I'll ever read/refer to it again whereas I refer fairly often to a few other books on how to study the Bible (esp. Kay Arthur's). She does have some good quotes but overall it doesn't live up to all the 5-star reviews I've seen. All those high reviews making this sound like the best book on how to study the Bible made me expect it to be much better.

Some Favorite Quotes:

- "But until I see my selfishness through the lens of the utter unselfishness of God, I have not properly understood its sinfulness. The Bible is a book about God."
- "If our reading of the Bible focuses our eyes on anyone other than God, we have gotten backwards the transformation process. Any study of the Bible that seeks to establish our identity without first proclaiming God's identity will render partial and limited help."
- "But I was missing the important truth that the heart cannot love what the mind does not know."
- "...sound Bible study transforms the heart by training the mind and it places God at the center of the story. But sound Bible study does more than that—it leaves the student with a better understanding of the Bible than she had when she started. Stated another way, sound Bible study increases Bible literacy."
- "Contrary to our gut reaction, feeling lost or confused is not a bad sign for a student. It is actually a sign that our understanding is being challenged and that learning is about to take place."
- "Repetitive reading offers two main benefits to the student: Scripture memory and overall familiarity with a text."

Things I did not care for/agree with:

- Wilkin writes: "If you have read other books about Bible study, you may have heard the first step in the learning process termed as "observation" rather than "comprehension." I believe comprehension better captures what we want to accomplish. Observation can be subjective—it can connote a casual perusal, in which I pull out details or thoughts that seem significant to me as I read. Comprehension, on the other hand, is more objective. It seeks purposefully to discover what the original author intended me to notice or ask."
- o I disagree. Replacing Observation with Comprehension is like skipping the Observation step of Bible study and splitting Interpretation into Interpretation Part 1 and Interpretation Part 2. I do not believe it's a better term and if you've done any Precepts Bible studies you KNOW Observation is NOT just a casual perusal of the text. And per thesaurus.com, Comprehension is a synonym for Interpretation not a stronger word for observation - if she wanted to tweak inductive Bible study so much, why not use a better term?
- No "hands-on" examples or instructions (and for me that brought the rating way down). Thankfully she did list Kay Arthur's How to Study Your Bible in her reference section, which has very good directions for how to study the Bible. If you can only afford one book on how to study the Bible, Kay Arthur's Precept'book is

a better one to start with (or even her book "Lord, Teach Me to Study the Bible in 28 Days"), then read Wilkin's book for a refresher/reminder on the reasons why inductive Bible study is important.

• Many of her suggestions for hosting/leading a Bible study seemed to be straight out of the way Bible Study Fellowship structures their Bible studies and made me wonder if she got her start leading Bible study groups in BSF, and if so why not acknowledge them.

•• Here's a list of more good books on how to study the Bible:

• Living By the Book by Howard Hendricks **(On Kindle you can buy it together with a workbook for less money than buying them separately.)

• Independent Bible Study by Irving Jensen

• Dig Deeper: Tools for Understanding God's Word by Nigel Beynon & Andrew Sach

• The New Joy of Discovery in Bible Study by Oletta Wald

• Understanding and Applying the Bible by Robertson McQuilkin

***** 9/5/14 Update ~ I'm glad to report that the author contacted me to let me know she did not borrow from BSF and hasn't participated in their classes, but came by her similar tips for hosting a Bible study honestly. She wrote that she does "not have any background with them, nor am I familiar with how they structure their studies beyond what friends have told me." It's good to know that she wasn't copying them, especially since in my experience, BSF &/or Bible studies that are structured along those lines have been the ones that run smoothly. (Even the best Precept studies I've participated in were the ones that were led by women who had done BSF first and structured their classes similarly to BSF's classes.)

Cassandra Eggert says

This book is really good. It convicted me and has spurred me into wanting to study the Bible more and know God better. I did find it overwhelming at some points just a bit, but I re-read a lot of chapters and that helped.

Keren Threlfall says

2014 is proving to be a good year for newly published Christian women's books, a genre whose weaknesses and shallowness I and many others have oft lamented.

Without even using the word *hermeneutics*, this book is a guide to exactly that. (But no worries, lovers of and trained students in hermeneutics, the author still pulls out and articulately teaches words and concepts such as *metanarrative*, *exegesis*, and *Bible literacy*.)

Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds is a clarion call to today's Christian women to lay aside poor Bible study habits and to dig deeply into patient, purposeful intake of the full scope of Scripture, examining God's Word word-by-word, and within context of The Big Story. Just like our culture is currently learning that this the case with food, the *more* processed your Bible study is, the *less* healthy it is for you.

Jen Wilkin encourages women to "put the ruffles in the back," (you'll have to read the book to learn the specific meaning of this one :)), to put away flaky bible study, and to realize that simply "doing devotions" or a "spending time in the Word" are often merely buzzwords that have not been further elaborated or adequately demonstrated.

Yet she writes without intimidation; her own words are neither lofty nor inaccessible. Instead, Jen writes as a skilled teacher, articulating with precision and simplicity, giving her readers a helpful framework for studying God's word. This guide gives the reader specific steps to follow while simultaneously allowing freedom for individual seasons of life, speeds of learning, and the relinquishing of poor study habits.

Framework for Studying the Bible

After addressing the need for Bible study, Jen dissects several common, yet ineffective, ways we tend approach Scripture within the American Christian subculture: the Xanax Approach, the Pinball Approach, the Magic Ball Approach, the Personal Shopper Approach, the Telephone Game Approach, and the Jack Sprat Approach. (Check out this article for a more in-depth examination of each of these approaches.)

In going through each of these mistaken ways to approach God's Word, Jen not only discusses how easy it is to treat Scripture carelessly, but how important it is that we take a careful, studious approach.

(While this is certainly not a diatribe-focused book, it is nonetheless important to address these errors. Because these approaches have subtly become the standard and accepted methods, extra time and explanation must be given to evaluating each of them. Many of us have habitualized these methods to the point of needing extra effort to eliminate them from our Bible study methods.)

Jen builds a framework for good Bible study using her alliterated five-point outline. She urges her readers to study with:

Purpose
Perspective
Patience
Process
Prayer

Although alliteration is occasionally symbolic of shallow Bible study, in this case it's a well-crafted pneumonic device.

Under these five foci, Jen addresses the importance of understanding *metanarrative* (the big-picture story of the Bible) and understanding *the Bible as literature* (focusing on an understanding of specific authors, the time of writing, the intended audience, the style of writing, and the purpose of writing).

As she explains within the section on *Study with Process*, Jen then gives the reader *specific* steps for approaching a passage and studying it in detail, listing the three main stages as:

Comprehension - "What Does It Say?"

A Printed Copy of the Text
Repetitive Reading
Annotation
An English Dictionary
Other Translations of the Bible

Outlining

Interpretation - "What Does It Mean?"

Cross-References

Paraphrasing

Application - "How Should It Change Me?"

What does this passage teach me about God?

How does this aspect of God's character change my view of self?

What should I do in response?

While she does give specific instructions, Jen nonetheless is teaching her readers to fish, rather than simply handing them pre-selected fishes. Or in the words of Jen's opening analogy, she gives her readers a spoon to move their "mountains of Biblical ignorance."

At the end of the book, Jen walks through *James* as an example of studying a smaller book of the Bible. (This is extremely beneficial, particularly for those who may not have had previous exposure to this type of Bible study.)

For the Hungry

Women of the Word is easy to read (can be read in just a few hours), but is also valuable as a Bible study companion — using it as a reference and tool as you learn to navigate exegesis of individual passages.

Christian women are hungry for God's Word. In the absence of being taught how to feed ourselves or where to find the healthy food, women are turning to the ineffective approaches listed above, to false teachers, or to anyone who will claim to feed them. Others have been told that "spiritual meat" isn't food for women, and some have become content with a diet of milk and watered-down Word. Yet we can't expect a quick-fix: studying God's Word takes discipline, persistence, and patience. And as we labor through the text, we soon realize we are being filled, we are growing, and our hunger is increasing.

Regardless of where you are in your spiritual journey or how much Bible study training you have under your belt (or your fluffy tights :)), I can guarantee that anyone who has a desire to study God's word will walk away from this book better equipped to do so.

Does Every Passage Have Personal Application?

One minimal concern with Jen's instructions for Bible study is found in the final step of *making application*.

(Specifically, my concern is grown out of the application she draws from Genesis 1-6. It would seem that her particular application from that specific text is a bit forced: "A person who *applies* the creation story can tell you that because God creates in an orderly fashion, we too should live well-ordered lives..." While we may indeed be called to live well-ordered lives, I do not believe this is something that can be drawn out as specific application from this text.)

Because her teaching is so specific and corrective elsewhere in the book, I think further clarification on this particular detail is warranted. Not every passage is going to contain specific personal application or even merit a specific, immediate response. Sometimes, the most specific application that can be wrestled out of certain texts will be to simply step back in awe of Who God is. Sometimes, and Jen does address this elsewhere (also listed in excerpts below), we are simply storing up a savings account of Biblical literacy for the Spirit to apply specifically at a later time.

Jen is careful to repeatedly point out that Scripture is not a book about finding ourselves, but about learning who God is. She is even careful to note that while, *yes*, we will learn more about ourselves the more we study God's Word, it is only under the umbrella of coming to know who *God* is. When I understand who He is, I can begin to understand who I am in light of that.

And so, teaching or believing that personal application can be made from every passage can potentially lead to forcing the Scripture into a mold it wasn't intended to be in, going back to the very error Wilkin is so concerned about in the first place. (The particular example that stands out as forced; I think Wilkin would agree with the previous sentence, but perhaps could do a better job in articulating this, especially in light of the ineffective approaches she lists.)

The Truth Will Set Us Free

This book is empowering for women who have been told that theology is the man's work, or who have been relegated to studying only the "pink passages." (Hannah Anderson's *Made for More*, review [here](#), also has a great, in-depth examination on this subject.)

The truth is that God desires all people — male or female — know Him for who He is.

A proper understanding of Scripture (and how to study Scripture) is absolutely essential for Christian women. *Why?* Because our Biblical theology affects our practical theology — how we *live out* what we believe before God and humankind.

Our understanding of who God is directly affects our understanding of the world around us, of ourselves, and how we view and treat the countless other people created in God's image. And until we can dig deeper to understand who God is, we often leave ourselves with a very shallow interpretation of each of those areas.

If we've been taught that it's okay to cherry pick the Scriptures, we end up twisting the Bible to say whatever we want it to say. If we haven't understood the metanarrative of the Bible, we are unable to discern what is truth when we hear Bible teachers teach opposite positions.

It would behoove those in a position of teaching God's word to others or leading a Bible study to read this book. In fact, Jen devoted her last chapter to addressing the particulars of teaching Bible study.

While this book is addressed particularly for women, this would also be a valuable resource in any man's toolkit for studying Scripture. Given the dearth of Bible study teaching for women, my hope is that many pastors and other men would seriously consider reading this book, both to sharpen their own understanding of being *people of The Word* and for increasing their knowledge of available resources.

For those who are in a season of life that allows for only minimal (or, even *no*) interaction with the Bible, the author empathizes and is careful not to make rules that Scripture itself does not make. Rather, she writes with encouragement to endure and wait during such seasons. (A portion of such encouragement is included below, as the final excerpt.)

After reading this book, my hunger for further and deeper Bible study grew. This is a book I have long hoped would be written, and am thankful for this important resource in *Women of the Word*.

Assorted Excerpts:

"It seemed obvious that if God had given us his revealed will in the Bible, I should be spending more time trying to know and understand it. But the task seemed overwhelming. Where was I supposed to start? And why weren't the things I was already doing making the problem discernibly better? How was I supposed to

move my mountain of biblical ignorance?

The answer, of course, was gloriously simple. The answer was 'one spoonful at a time.' Thankfully, someone gave me a spoon...

On the other side of the mountain of my biblical ignorance was a vision of God high and lifted up, a vision stretching Genesis to Revelation that I desperately needed to see. I have by no means removed that whole mountain from my line of sight, but I intend to go to my grave with dirt beneath my nails and a spoon clutched in my fist. I am determined that no mountain of biblical ignorance will keep me from seeing him as clearly as my seventy or eighty years on this earth will allow."

"Within our Christian subculture we have adopted a catch-all phrase for our regular habit of interacting with Scripture: 'spending time in the Word.' Church leaders urge us to do so. Authors and bloggers exhort us to value it. But what should take place during our 'time in the Word' can remain a vague notion, the specific habit it represents varying widely from person to person.

The potential danger of this vagueness is that we may assume that our version of 'spending time in the Word' is moving us toward Bible literacy simply because we have been obedient to practice it. Not all contact with Scripture builds Bible literacy. Learning what the Bible says and subsequently working to interpret and apply it requires quite a different practice than many of those we commonly associate with 'spending time in the Word.' We cannot afford to assume that our good intentions are enough."

"For years I viewed my interaction with the Bible as a debit account: I had a need, so I went to the Bible to withdraw an answer. But we do so much better to view our interaction with the Bible as a savings account: I stretch my understanding daily, deposit what I glean, and patiently wait for it to accumulate in value, knowing that one day I will need to draw on it. Bible study is an investment with a long-term payoff. Rather than reading a specific text to try to meet an immediate need, give the benefits of your study permission to be stored away for future use. What if the passage you are fighting to understand today suddenly makes sense to you when you most need it, ten years from now? It has been said that we overestimate what we can accomplish in one year and underestimate what we can accomplish in ten. Are you willing to invest ten years in waiting for understanding? Are you willing to wait a decade for an application point to emerge? Be encouraged that you are storing up treasure, even if you don't see or feel it in the short term."

"For me, these seasons [of not being able to devote long periods of time to Bible study] have sometimes lasted for years — sermons and podcasts were a lifeline. Having a structured group study to go to helped keep me in contact with the Bible, but some months even that was too much to take on. Some months, just keeping body and soul together for myself and my family seemed to occupy almost every waking moment. I don't consider those months to have been lost time or setback to my growth. They were times to employ patience, not with active learning of the Scriptures, but with waiting on the Lord. They deepened my desire

for study. Some of my most fruitful times of teaching and writing occurred immediately after just such a period of waiting."

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Disclaimer: I received an electronic advanced reader's copy of this book in exchange for my review. But all opinions are my own.

Original review posted here: <http://wp.me/p26dwz-256>

Rachel B says

Overall, this book was just okay. It has fairly sound teaching, and I can appreciate Wilkin's desire to motivate more women to really know their Bibles.

However, her tone throughout the first half of the book read to me like, "I used to be a terrible Christian who didn't know anything, either. But I have now arrived, and if you just do exactly what I do, you can become an awesome Christian, too!" (Her tone does improve in the second half a bit.)

The book was really dry. I finally started skimming in the last few chapters (which I hardly ever do), because I just wanted it to end already. Her version of studying the Bible is essentially the induction method. Rather than reading an entire book on it, one could save a lot of time and energy by doing a quick Google search to discover the key attributes of such a study. (This book is about 150 pages, but it could have been greatly condensed!)

The bulk of examples/anecdotes were about herself and her family. I would have personally preferred reading stories from multiple women in various life stages.

The more I read, the more I wondered if perhaps Wilkin is an ENFP/ESFP on the Myers Briggs scale. I'm an ISTJ, and so it would make sense that the concepts she spoke of being "breakthrough" type moments only made me go, "Well, duh." She writes as if what she struggled to grasp is the same thing that every woman struggles with. The truth is, we all come to our Bibles with vastly different personalities and experiences, and since she seemed to be writing to only one type of person (someone who shares her exact personality), I had a very hard time connecting with her and walking away with anything of value...

For someone who is very new to the Christian faith and needs very basic information on getting started with studying the Bible, or for the ENFP :) this could be a helpful read.

Jordan Shirkman says

"There are really only two possibilities in this life: be conformed to the image of God or be conformed to the pattern of this world."

Jen Wilkin writes good, short books. She encourages 5 P's of Bible study: purpose, perspective, patience, process, and prayer. She provides solid examples, warnings, and exhortations, especially for teachers at the end.

Even though I didn't know what rhumba tights were, this was still a helpful book. So, not just for women, even if they are the intended audience.

Paul J. says

This was a great book I really appreciated and will be going back to repeatedly. While I didn't find any "secret key to Bible study" or "the way to master God's Word in just 20 seconds a day", it is a very useful, succinct overview of good Bible study. There were a lot of good reminders. I think it is well-written and a surprisingly easy and enjoyable read.
