

Here's what you really need for effective Bible teaching!

# Bible Study & Teaching Tools Checklist

A Special Report from Glenn Brooke,  
Author of the Premiere guide to Bible teaching,  
[Teach the Bible to Change Lives](#)

## About the author

Glenn Brooke has been teaching the Bible for more than twenty years and is the author of [Teach the Bible to Change Lives](#). Glenn is the husband of one wife (and he married 'up', way up!) and the father of two children. He is learning how to exercise his gifts every day as he walks with Christ and ministers in His name. Glenn's family calls the Johnston Evangelical Free Church (Johnston, Iowa) home.

Glenn's statement of faith agrees with the twelve points of doctrine from the Evangelical Free Church of America (<http://www.efca.org>). Contact him at [info@teachtochangelives.com](mailto:info@teachtochangelives.com) if you have questions.

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I recently surveyed over 600 people interested in Bible study and teaching. One question came up over and over again, from new and experienced teachers:

## **“What Bible study tools should I use?”**

There is a lot of confusion out there. I've tried about every Bible reference and study book I can lay hands on, and am glad to report there are still only a handful of books have stood the test of time and are needed in your library.

Before I go into my tools checklist, you need to understand **two important points**:

**First, YOU are the tool God will use.** So the Bible is your one essential tool, and all other tools must be supplementary.

**Second, Bible study tools are a small (but important) part of the overall picture.** Bible teaching that changes lives comes from a Spirit-infused combination of excellent lesson content, receptive students, a prepared teacher, and a teaching approach that conveys Truth.

Let me illustrate this. Imagine that I played 18 holes with Tiger Woods, but under special conditions: I use his clubs, and Tiger uses a rake, shovel, and sledgehammer from my garage. There's no doubt in my mind that Tiger would have a better score than me, even though I had the \$600 custom-fit driver and he was putting with a garden rake!

Owning Christendom's best Bible study tools does not make you a great Bible teacher. I have hesitated to write up this report because **I cringe when I see people try to substitute a Bible study tool for the complete work of integrated Bible study, prayer, and good teaching practices.** There only short-lived joy in buying a study tool, especially if you don't intend to learn to use it well. Teaching ministry, though not easy, is a joy-filled road with much satisfaction working in the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

I've outlined a proven system for Bible teaching in my book, [Teach the Bible to Change Lives](#). Check it out if you want to know how to use the tools discussed in this report in the context of real teaching ministry.

**Your focus must be on Bible study tools that will help you in the overall ministry of Bible teaching.**

So what Bible study tools should you put in your working library?

Every tool I describe in this report meets these criteria:

- They are time-tested and have served generations of great Bible teachers
- They will sharpen your depth and breadth of Biblical understanding
- They will be helpful no matter what your teaching situation is now, or will be in the future.

Here are my recommendations in a simple list:

✔ **Essential:** A Bible that you can take good notes in

✔ **Should-have:** Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible

✔ **Should-have:** Nave's Topical Bible

✔ **Should-have:** Vines Expository Dictionary

✔ **Consider:** Exhaustive Concordance

✔ **Consider:** Commentary Set

✔ **Consider:** Bible handbooks, books about Jewish life

✔ **Consider:** Bible map atlas

Let's look at each of these recommendations in detail!

## Your One Essential Tool is a Bible – but not just any Bible.

(Note: this section is adapted from my ebook,  
[Teach the Bible to Change Lives](#))

A simple Bible with a small concordance and cross-references is adequate for 90% of your teaching needs. Let me say that again, because I know it sounds like some form of heresy in this day of proliferating versions, devotional, and reference Bibles.

**A simple Bible with a small concordance and cross-references  
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But I do have a **specific recommendation for Bible teachers: a wide-margin Bible** with lots of space for taking notes and marking up the text.

The Bible I use every day is a [wide-margin NIV Bible](#) from Zondervan. It has plenty of margin space for notes, single column format, and a large enough font that I can easily read it in public and keep my place. It includes a decent sized concordance, and a basic set of maps. (I do wish it had is more cross-references.) I invested in a leather-bound version after wearing out the bindings of several hardbound Bibles – it's softening up nicely with regular use. (If you want to check on other Bible translations in a wide-margin format, click [here](#).)

Why a wide-margin Bible, specifically? The wide margins make it easy to take notes directly in the Bible and I use it as my primary tool when teaching. I have plenty of writing space in the back notes pages to include

- sermon notes
- summaries from studies I've done
- a photocopy of my Bible reading plan
- prayer requests for people close to me and for whom I have a special prayer burden
- great quotes that I can use sometime in the future
- outlines of short devotionals I can use in many situations

The habit of capturing notes and materials directly into my Bible creates an increasingly valuable resource to use when teaching or leading groups. So mark up your Bible with pen and pencil. Put dates next to verses and passages that are strongly speaking to you. Underline key passages. Circle words and phrases.

Make it your ambition to wear out Bibles from use! Leave them as a legacy to give to your children. They will treasure your worn, note-studded Bible as a great reminder of your faithfulness that lights their way. If there were a fire in my home and I could grab just one material thing, it would probably be my Bible.

## Whoa, Glenn, why aren't you recommending a big fat study Bible?

What about using a Study Bible? There are lots of these – it seems every possible market for children, youth, men, women, different theological backgrounds, and recovering addicts, to name a few, has a study or devotional Bible available. Perhaps you are surprised that I don't use the [NIV Study Bible](#) as my regular Bible. And when my prayers are answered and God raises up a mighty generation of Great Bible Teachers, will I recommend Bible publishers create a new study Bible just for teachers? Nope.

Here's why:

**Study Bibles get in the way of thoughtful reading and reflection.** I've observed that people spend as much time looking at footnotes as the actual text of God's word! Therefore I recommend that people *not* use a study Bible with all the footnotes and helps as their regular reading Bible when preparing to teach. Instead, **use study Bibles as reference tools only to look up information.**

What Bible translation should you use? I recommend you use the translation that you are comfortable with and that your students are using. It's uncomfortable for students to listen to a teacher who is reading a very different translation than the one they are used to hearing. Many American churches use the New International Version (NIV) translation in English. (A recent survey showed that over 30% of pastors and ministers in the United States were using the NIV translation in their teaching and preaching. Zondervan estimates that over 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of English-speaking Evangelicals are using the NIV.)

We praise God that His Word is powerful (Jeremiah 23:29) and can work through any translation. Therefore, I believe that it's simply not worth getting into debates about whether the New American Standard Bible, Revised Standard Bible, New Revised Standard Bible, King James Bible, New King James Bible, English Standard Version, New Living Bible, etc. are best. What a contrast to the Koran, which I'm told by my Muslim friends cannot be truly understood unless you read it in Arabic! There is no comparison to the Lord's Word, which He promised will not return to Him empty, but accomplish His purposes (Isaiah 55:10-13).

**There is only one essential: a wide-margin Bible that you can use to read, study, and take notes in.**

## **There are only three time-tested tools that make my “Should Have” list:**

- 1. A Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible**
- 2. Nave’s Topical Bible**
- 3. Vines Expository Dictionary of NT and OT words**

All three are wonderful investments in your teaching ministry. I’ve listed these in order of their value. If you can only get one, get a Thompson’s. The Thompson’s Chain Reference Bible is such a fabulous tool that I recommend it to every Bible teacher. If you can get two tools, add the Nave’s Topical Bible.

These are all classics. They’ve been tested by generations of Bible teachers, preachers, missionaries, and serious Bible students all over the world. If you have these tools and learn how to use them, you may not need to invest in any other study tools. They’re simply that good.

### **1. The Thompson’s Chain-Reference Bible**

This is hands-down the best study Bible for every teacher, because it fosters discovery through the Word itself. I almost rated this as an essential tool. If you have only your regular Bible and a Thompson’s, and some God-directed skill in using them, you can teach powerfully and effectively in every situation. You can learn more about the Thompson’s Chain-Reference Bible in another free special report, at <http://www.teachtochangelives.com/thompsons.htm>

### **2. Nave’s Topical Bible**

Nave’s Topical Bible combines the most useful features of a Bible handbook, a Bible dictionary, and a Concordance. It has introductory information about each book of the Bible. There is an alphabetic organization of information about Bible people, places, events, and objects. Thousands of Bible verses are indexed by topic.

In short, it’s a gem that every Bible teacher should use regularly. You can use it for cross-reference study, character studies, or theme studies. I recently used my Nave’s to prepare for a character study on David and a class about the Christian view on bioethics.

Purchase a copy of Nave’s Topical Bible in the translation you use most often. I’ve used the Nave’s in the King James Version (mine is out of print, but something similar to [this](#) ) for many years and recently purchased [the Nave’s NIV Topical Bible](#) from Zondervan. I’m delighted with this NIV version because I teach from the NIV (that’s what most of my students use).

Another note: there are “compact” versions of Nave’s that don’t contain as many topics or Bible references. I advise you to get the full or “exhaustive” versions – serious Bible teachers like you need a complete reference guide. And they’re not much more expensive. My Zondervan NIV Nave’s references over 33,000 verses, compared to the 8,000-12,000 that most Compact versions reference.

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A side note on the origin of the Nave's Topical Bible. Orville James Nave (1841-1917) was an army chaplain who created the first version of his topical reference tool while stationed at Fort McPherson in Georgia. It took him 14 years to complete with the assistance of his wife Anna. His goal was "to classify everything found in the Scriptures." I'm astounded to think of the detailed study required to assemble this tool. It was first published in 1896. Praise God for his servant Orville, because today we have a fabulous tool for studying God's Word in breadth and depth!

### 3. Vines Expository Dictionary of NT and OT Words

Since you probably aren't fluent in the original Bible languages (Hebrew and Greek), and didn't live in Bible time cultures, you may not get the richness of word meanings in translated English. Short of going to seminary and studying Hebrew and Greek, what can you do? Use a dictionary!

**Vines Expository Dictionary** is a terrific, easy to use resource to help you understand the richer meanings of words in the original language. This information about the original word meanings and usage can really help you explain the Bible more clearly to your students. You can pick up a little of this information in Nave's and Thompson's, but Vines is THE authoritative source.

You can learn more about the Vines in another free special report, at <http://www.teachtochangelives.com/vines.htm>

## Other Bible study tools you should consider

The tools I have listed above will be helpful to any Bible teacher in every teaching situation. Period. There are lots of other good tools that may be helpful for you in your teaching situations. Here's my take on the best tools you should consider:

### An Exhaustive Concordance

Sometimes you just need to look up words that don't appear in the basic concordances that are in your regular Bible or even Thompson's Chain-Reference. That's when an exhaustive concordance (which covers EVERY word) becomes useful. Here's the one I use: [The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance](#).

If you need a concordance in a different translation than NIV, click [here](#).

### Commentaries

We are so blessed to have a rich history of Bible scholarship recorded for us in commentaries!

**Key point: Use commentaries at a later stage in your study.**

Remember that commentaries are written by imperfect men; they are not equal to the authoritative Word. I don't want to see Bible teachers running to a commentary immediately. Meditate on the Word. Ask the Lord to unfold His Word and bring light (Psalm 119:130). He is faithful and loves to answer that prayer!

I recommend a good conservative commentary series, like the [Expositor's Bible Commentary](#) or the [NIV Application Commentary series](#). (You can get the complete Expositor's series on [CD-ROM](#) much cheaper than buying the books.) It's also helpful to review commentaries that are older, like Matthew Henry's or Calvin's Commentaries. Ask your pastor for advice. Your denominational background may influence which commentaries you want to use regularly.

(If you are focused on preparing studies from one book, there are many single book commentaries available. I tend to recommend commentary series because most Bible teachers have long-term ministries and it's cheaper to buy the set than to acquire many individual book commentaries.)

If you'd like to look for commentaries, click [here](#) for a great jumping off point.

## **Tools to understand Jewish culture and Bible history**

I believe Biblical truth transcends culture, but Bible teachers need to understand the cultures of biblical times in order to get the most out of the Scriptures.

The Zondervan company updated and revised the classic **Eardman's Handbook to the Bible** and has released it as [The Zondervan Handbook to the Bible](#). It's an excellent resource that you will find useful for many years of Bible teaching. They've done a great job making the layout more readable.

Also, I highly recommend the writings of scholar [Alfred Edersheim](#). The biblical authors lived in a very different culture than ours. He wrote a number of books on the Temple, and Jewish culture in biblical times. His book, **Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah** is a classic. Edersheim really makes the culture come alive. There is a wealth of material here to communicate to your students as background information for the biblical texts you're studying. Reading his books can feel like you've stepped out of a time-travel machine into the past.

### **Maps and Atlases**

It's very helpful to have detailed maps of the lands and places described in the Bible. The Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible has some very good maps, but sometimes you may want more details. Scan the multiple products [here](#) and see what might be helpful. I've enjoyed using the maps books from Rose Publishing. You might need the electronic maps that some companies sell now.

Now at this point you may be asking

**“What about all those computer programs for Bible study?  
They’ve got everything, right?”**

What about computer Bible study programs? There are probably a dozen software packages, full-featured, with extra translations and maps and photos and videos and, well, just everything you could ever want! The ads are so appealing that you may find yourself thinking “Why, if I had this software installed, I’d become a Bible scholar overnight!”

**I have the same concerns about computer Bible programs as I do with study Bibles.** The resources are great, but all too often people actually spend less time with the actual Word of God. The integrated tools that link the Scripture text, other translations, commentaries, maps, and related passages can be very helpful, but my observation is that relatively few Bible students are disciplined enough to use them effectively. It’s difficult enough to meditate on the Word and listen to God’s voice in a quiet room with my Bible open on my lap. I find it’s extremely difficult to do this while using a computer program.

Also, computer tools aren’t helpful if you don’t have a computer handy and electricity. I remember a short-term mission trip to Venezuela where I was glad for paper-based tools that let me prepare lessons! I only had to worry about the humidity curling up my papers and bleeding my ink.

**→ My recommendation: use computer Bible tools for reference purposes and to help prepare handouts.**

I personally don’t use a computer Bible program; I find it’s better for me to study using books. I tend to get distracted at the computer. There are a lot of electronic tools available. (In fact one bonus report I give to people who buy [Teach the Bible to Change Lives](#) is a list of the best free Bible study tools online.) For example, I use the free service at BibleGateway ([www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)) to get electronic copy of verses to use in handouts.

Since I don’t regularly use computer Bible software, I won’t make a product recommendation. Here are some links to get you started if you want to look into buying computer Bible programs:

[Reviews of different software available](#)  
[Good source for tools](#)

## Let's Wrap This Up

Remember what I said in the beginning: **Your focus must be on Bible study tools that will help you in the overall ministry of Bible teaching.**

There are many Bible study tools available now. I believe strongly that you need classic, time-tested tools that will be helpful in every teaching situation. Only use tools that sharpen YOU to be the tool God will use to change lives to glorify Jesus Christ. I don't think you need a ton of books or software, or need to keep running after the latest and newest commentaries and programs.

**So I recommend you invest in these tools:**

- **A Bible you can annotate with your own notes, in the translation that is most effective for your students**
- **Three reference tools: A Thompson's Chain-Reference Bible, Nave's Topical Bible, and Vines Expository Dictionary of NT and OT Words.**

I've also described some classic, time-tested tools that you should consider, but aren't essential.

God may lead you to other resources that are good tools for you to use. That's fine. You have freedom in Christ, dear teacher!

Teach to change lives,

Glenn Brooke  
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