

Bible Study Tools: “Where’s that &%&*!#@ Hammer?”

By Steve Ray

This was his third time up the ladder and Jim was fuming. His tool belt was full of stuff but the items he really needed were never there. His wife had already run to the hardware store for him six times and he still was coming up short.

Earlier, when he tried to use a nearby rock to slam the nail into a two-by-four, he put a dent in the siding and sprained his wrist. He tried using the kitchen knife for a screwdriver, and bent it out of shape (and his wife too!) and cut his finger. He grabbed the swivel chair for a step stool and ended up spinning around three times before crashing into the display case. Finally, he decided to quit. He tossed his tool apron aside, pushed the ladder into the bushes, and yelled at the dog. The kids knew enough to stay clear, but the dog never learned its lesson.

This was not Jim’s first attempt at fixing up the house. Over the years their home had fallen into serious disrepair—*all for the lack of a few tools and a little knowledge!*

Later that evening everyone was quiet at the dinner table as dad grumbled about his failures. The kids nodded to each other and with half-hearted resolve decided to go ahead and ask dad to help with the Bible questions for their CCD project. Dad had a Bible on his dresser and they knew he read it once in a while. So, Johnny asked.

Dad seemed to get his second wind and ran up the stairs to grab his Bible. “Yes, son,” he said, “the answer to your questions is, let’s see, right here I think. I read that just last month. Wait, I’ll find it.” The kids sat in rapt attention as their father flipped back and forth through the Bible for several minutes before tossing it on the table saying, “Rats, I can’t find it!”

The kids cautiously asked their second question, “Dad, what is the Pentateuch?” Dad had a look of puzzled consternation! “Frankly son, I don’t remember reading about that in the Bible and I don’t know.” Poor dad began muttering about how he couldn’t seem to get anything right and what was this world coming to anyway.

As the years went by the kids looked elsewhere for the answers to their questions about God and the Bible. The end result is not a happy story. Dad and mom go to Mass alone now and the kids have grown to show little interest in the Church—or in carpentry either, for that matter. Sad, and *all for the lack of a few tools and a little knowledge.*

When I was seventeen years old, I fell in love with Jesus. My mentors said “Read the Bible, young man, read the Bible.” I *had* a Bible but it was such a big book. Even though I was raised in a Christian home that cherished the Bible, it was still an overwhelming tome.

My friend told me I needed a “tool belt” and a selection of “quality tools”—Bible study tools. I headed right down to the bookstore. Today you can also turn to quality Catholic

magazines and bookstores which are full of helpful resources (even computer software) to help you study the Bible.

Had our friend Jim received similar advice, he could have answered his kids' questions, earned their respect, and helped them to grow in the faith. The Bible was written over two thousand years ago. The language and culture were different than today. St. Peter informs us that in Scripture some things are "hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16). We are fortunate to have an abundance of quality tools that help us study and discover the truth of the Bible.

Tools for the Tool Belt:

(See my Recommended [Books](#), [Periodicals](#), and [Software](#) Lists on my website at www.CatholicConvert.com)

First, a few good Bible translations are essential to enable you to get the full "flavor" and meaning of a passage. I recommend the *Revised Standard Bible: Catholic Edition* published by Ignatius Press. The *New American Bible*, *The Jerusalem Bible* and the *New American Standard Bible* will provide well rounded additions. The *Precise Parallel New Testament* is a gold mine with six translations side by side, including the original Greek text. Look for a Bibles with good Catholic footnotes and cross-references directing you to other passages containing related words or ideas. There are excellent Protestant translations as well, but one must be cautious of the frequent inherent bias, especially in the footnotes and comments.

Second, it is essential to study the Bible within the Tradition of the Church. The tools are easily available. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is a marvelous resource tool with a scriptural and topic index in the back. Fr. John Hardon's *The Catholic Catechism* is also very helpful. *The Christian Faith* by Neuner and Dupuis is a thorough study of Catholic doctrine with an extensive scriptural index. *The Faith of the Early Fathers* by Jurgens gives a quick scripture reference to the Fathers' use of Scripture.

Thirdly, every "tool box" should contain essential reference tools such as a good Bible dictionary which defines all the terms, places, names, etc. used in the Bible. Try the *Dictionary of the Bible* by John McKenzie or *The New World Dictionary/Concordance to the New American Bible*. The *Harper's Bible Dictionary* and the *New Bible Dictionary* are both excellent sources for biblical information. A good Bible atlas and a few solid Catholic commentaries are also very helpful. An exhaustive concordance is indispensable, listing every word in the Bible alphabetically to help you find verses quickly and easily. There are also many dictionaries (lexicons) of the original languages that explain the meanings of Hebrew and Greek words. Check my *Recommended List* above for the latest.

Fourth, everyone with a computer should consider some of the wonderful offerings now available. The [Logos Library System](#) offers a Scholar's pack with the *Latin Vulgate*, *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, and a host of other sources, including the

Church Fathers. *Welcome to the Catholic Church* by Harmony Media is a wealth of Catholic reference material. And of course, the electronic *Catechism of the Catholic Church* on CD Rom is a must for all computer aficionados.

Quotations

“In order to discover the sacred authors' intention, the reader must take into account the conditions of their time and culture, the literary genres in use at that time, and the modes of feeling, speaking and narrating then current” (CCC 110)

“When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).

The sacred Council also earnestly and especially urges all the Christian faithful...to learn by frequent reading of the divine Scriptures.... They should gladly put themselves in touch with the sacred text itself...through instructions suitable for the purpose and other aids which, in our time, with approval and active support of the shepherds of the Church, are commendably spread everywhere” (Vatican II, *Dei Verbum*, 25).