

Towards a Simple
Personal References
Database

M. David Johnson

Towards a Simple Personal References Database

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“Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed...” (II Timothy 2:15).

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Doctrinal Position

I hold to traditional Reformed Theology as often expressed by the acronym TULIP:

T = Total Depravity
U = Unconditional Election
L = Limited Atonement
I = Irresistible Grace
P = Perseverance of the Saints

I also hold to the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible, and affirm its authority, sufficiency, and inerrancy in the original autographs.

Sola Scriptura – Sola Fide – Sola Gratia – Solus Christus – Soli Deo Gloria

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Towards a Simple Personal References Database

While sitting at your computer writing a sermon, article, or school paper, have you ever wanted to quote or refer to something you knew you'd seen before, but you can't remember where or when? Did you start hunting through your stacks of books, magazines, and clippings? Did you ever find it, or did you give up and settle for something else, ... or did you just leave it out?

Computer scientists invented databases to help you keep track of such information and to help you quickly and easily locate and retrieve it. However, database technology is complex. It can take a lot of time and effort to learn how to program and use a database.

In fact, most people never try – they just use spreadsheets instead. That can work, but you lose features and flexibility by restricting yourself to spreadsheet technology.

What I hope to do here is to help you set up a simple personal references database with a minimum of hassle.

In addition, I'm going to give you a bit of a head start by letting you download a copy of my own personal references database. This will make it easier for you to follow along with my discussion here, and will include some references which you may find useful for yourself.

Many of the entries won't be of personal interest to you (and won't be much help unless you happen to have copies of some of the same books and magazines as I do) but some entries may fit your personal needs. And, the copy will provide the database framework readymade for you to expand upon with your own personal entries.

To download your copy, just go back to the theologyfrombelow.org/Books page and pick one (or more) of the database files listed under this *Towards a Simple Personal References Database* book title.

I originally built my database using Microsoft Access 2010. If you have a copy of that program (or a later version), you'll want to download one of the two Access Database files. The zip file will download a bit faster, but you'll need to unzip it after the download.

I don't recommend trying to use a spreadsheet instead of a database, but I've provided Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet files as well for your convenience (Excel 2010 or later).

For those of you who have some other database or spreadsheet program (or none at all), I've also provided comma-delimited Text Database files which can be imported to other databases or spreadsheets, and which can also be viewed in text processors such as NotePad.

To begin: A database is primarily a collection of tables and queries. The tables contain the information, and the queries ask questions about the information and present the answers. For

example, a database might contain a table which is just a big list of book titles. You can add titles to the table in any order. One query in the database might ask, “What is the list of all the titles in alphabetical order?” Another query might ask, “What is the list of all titles which begin with the letter ‘U’?” Still another query might ask, “What is the list of titles which are three words long?”

My simple personal references database contains one table and two queries. The table contains various items describing the references. One query simply presents the table in category order, and the other query presents the current list of categories. (More on this later).

A database table, like all tables, has rows and columns. Each horizontal row represents one book, magazine article, clipping, sermon, or whatever. Each vertical column represents one “field”, i.e. the same piece of information for each row. For example:

Category	Title	Author Name	Date	Shelf
Prophecy	Things to Come	Pentecost, J. Dwight	1958	23
Creation	Biblical Creationism	Morris, Henry M.	2000	18
Commentary	Living on the Ragged Edge	Swindoll, Charles R.	1985	27
TextCrit	Encountering the Manuscripts	Comfort, Philip	2005	13
Sermon	Waiting for the Lord	Smith, Colin	2013	21

This is only an example. The actual information in my personal references database is somewhat more involved. In addition, each column has pre-determined limits on what type of data it is allowed to contain (text, numbers, etc.) and a predetermined size (e.g. 3 text characters, 15 text characters, long integer, etc.).

My table is named SermonNotes (the name is used in the queries), and it has 12 columns and (currently as of 2013/11/26) 4,826 rows. The actual fields in my personal references database table are as follows:

1. ID

AutoNumber – Microsoft Access adds this long integer automatically – It’s a record identifier and it must be unique, i.e. each row must have a unique ID – no two rows are allowed to have the same ID. If you’re not working with Access (or some other database which has an AutoNumber feature), you can insert this manually – just be sure there are no duplicates. (Technically, a long integer is any whole number from -2,147,483,648 to +2,147,483,647. However, we will not be using negative numbers in any field in this database. Thus, our limits will be from 0 to +2,147,483,647).

2. StartVerse

Text – 13 characters maximum. My database is primarily designed to locate information by Scripture references. In such cases, this field will contain the Reference Code for the first verse in the Scripture Reference (as described in my Bible Reference Codes System book). For example, if the entry is for an article discussing Romans 1:1-7, the StartVerse entry would be B45-Rom001001.

In many cases, entries have no specific Scripture References, but are organized by category instead, such as “Creation”, “Prophecy”, “TextCrit” (abbreviation for Textual Criticism), etc. In those cases, the StartVerse field is used to enter that category. (Using the same field for two different things is NOT a generally accepted database practice, and can cause problems in large database systems. BUT, this is a small database, and your convenience is more important to me than formal database rules).

An entry is required for this field in every row.

3. EndVerse

Text – 13 characters maximum. This field will contain the Reference Code for the last verse in the Scripture Reference (as described in my Bible Reference Codes System book). For example, if the entry is for an article discussing Romans 1:1-7, the EndVerse entry would be B45-Rom001007.

For entries organized by category instead of Scripture References, this field should duplicate the StartVerse entry. For example, if StartVerse = “Prophecy”, then EndVerse = “Prophecy”.

An entry is required for this field in every row.

4. SermonTitle

Text – 255 characters maximum. My database is primarily designed to locate specific sermons in my personal notebooks and in various collections (e.g. W. Herschel Ford’s *Simple Sermons* series, etc.). Thus, the field is entitled “SermonTitle”. But you can enter book titles, magazine article titles, whatever, as needed. To facilitate sorting, entries should not begin with “A”, “The”, etc. For example, enter “The Golden Word” as “Golden Word, The”. An entry is required for this field in every row.

5. NotebookNumber

Number – Long Integer (1 to +2,147,483,647). I keep my sermon notes in spiral bound notebooks (specifically 5.5-inch by 8.5-inch, 110 page, *The Bible Study Organizer & Notebook*, ISBN 978-1-55748-460-4 from Barbour Publishing at <http://www.barbourbooks.com>). You can also use this field for Volume Number for multivolume collections (Roman numerals will have to be converted to Arabic numerals, e.g. XVII = 17). Otherwise, this field can be left blank.

6. PageNumber

Text – 255 characters maximum. Text is used instead of a number to accommodate non-standard page numbers such as 123b, G-117, etc., including Roman Numerals. An entry is required for this field in every row.

7. Preacher

Text – 255 characters maximum. The name of the Preacher if a sermon, or the author’s (or editor’s) name if a book, magazine article, etc. To facilitate sorting, the name should be entered in LastName, FirstName (and/or initials) format. Multiple authors may be listed as appropriate. An entry is required for this field in every row.

8. Location

Text – 255 characters maximum. This is the church or other facility at which the sermon was preached. For journal and magazine articles, it's the name (or abbreviation) of the journal or magazine in which the article appears, followed by the date of publication. For example, for an article appearing in the January-March 2014 issue of *Bibliotheca Sacra*, the entry would be "BSAC 2014-01". For multiple months (e.g. January-March) the first listed month is used. For multiple volume sets of books, the set title is used (e.g. "Simple Sermons" for W. Herschel Ford's *Simple Sermons* series). An entry is required for this field in every row.

To facilitate sorting, the standard date format yyyy-mm is to be maintained. For dates which include seasons instead of months:

Winter	mm = 13
Spring	mm = 14
Summer	mm = 15
Autumn	mm = 16

Also for sorting purposes, it's important to maintain uniformity of the abbreviations used for journal and magazine names. It doesn't really matter which abbreviations you choose, so long as they don't change from entry to entry. For example, it wouldn't do to use the full name *Bibliotheca Sacra* in one entry, *BibSac* in another, and *BSAC* in a third.

In large production databases, there are complex rules and functions to enforce such uniformity. In this simple database, you are responsible for keeping such things straight. For Access Databases and Excel Spreadsheets, you can facilitate this by sorting the table into A-Z order on this Location field and looking for anomalies. For example, if you go down the column and see a whole line of *BSAC* entries followed by a lone *BSAX* entry, you can correct the "BSAX" typographical error manually. Other database and spreadsheet products may have similar functionality. This would be difficult to impossible in the flat text file.

For your convenience, here is a list of the abbreviations I use:

BSAC	Bibliotheca Sacra
GTJ	Grace Theological Journal
JBL	Journal of Biblical Literature
JETS	Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society
PTR	Princeton Theological Review
TJ	Trinity Journal

9. SermonDate

A Microsoft Date/Time field. For manual entry purposes, please note that Microsoft Access renders these entries in mm/dd/yyyy format. For mm's and dd's less than 10, the leading zeroes are suppressed, i.e. "2/7/2005" rather than "02/07/2005". This is the date on which the sermon was preached. If the entry is for something other than a sermon, speech, or other dated event, this field should be left blank.

10. Note

A Microsoft Memo field. This is effectively a text field allowing a maximum of about 65,000 characters. You can add any note or notes you want in this field. This field may also be left blank.

11. Case

Number – Long Integer. For books, journals, magazines, and other physical or hard copy items, this is the number of the bookcase on which you have stored them. I've simply numbered my individual bookcases 1 through 40. However you identify your bookcases, you would also have to number them in order to use this field. This field may also be left blank.

12. Shelf

Number – Long Integer. This is the shelf number within the given bookcase. I simply number each bookcase's shelves from 0 (the top of the bookcase) through 5 (the bottom shelf). This field may also be left blank.

The two queries are presented in the Access Database files only. Queries are written in Structured Query Language (SQL) and only work in databases. They don't work in spreadsheets or with flat text files.

The first query is named "Check" and it presents the table reorganized into StartVerse/EndVerse/SermonTitle order. That is, first it is placed in StartVerse order, then for any rows which have the same StartVerse entry, those rows are placed in EndVerse order, etc.

This is useful for finding specific items. You can simply run down the rows until you find what you're looking for.

For those of you who may be importing the text file into another database product (e.g. MySQL, Oracle, SQL Server, etc.), the specific SQL is:

```
SELECT *
FROM SermonNotes
ORDER BY StartVerse, EndVerse, SermonTitle;
```

This is Microsoft Access syntax. You may have to adjust it slightly in other database products.

The second query is named "StartVerseList" and it presents all the entries in the StartVerse field in alphabetical order without duplicates. This is useful for checking for anomalies, e.g. if both "Abortion" and "Anortion" appear in the list, you'll need to make a correction in the table (go down the Check query listing until you find "Anortion" and correct it there – Don't try to correct it in the StartVerseList query). The specific SQL is:

```
SELECT DISTINCT StartVerse
FROM SermonNotes
ORDER BY StartVerse;
```

The StartVerseList query results are also useful for printing out as a reference for while you are entering new data into the table. I usually delete the Scripture Reference Codes and just print out the non-Scripture Reference entries. This is best because you can use my Bible Reference Codes System book when entering Scripture Reference Codes, and because leaving such references in will generate many, MANY pages of printout.

For your convenience, the non-Scripture Reference list for the current (2013/11/26) 4896-entry database table is:

Abortion
Abraham
Aesthetics
Angelology
Anthropology
Apologetics
Aramaic
Archaeology
Ascension
Assurance
Atonement
AttributesGod
Baptism
Bibliography
Bibliology
Biography
BirthControl
CalvinVsArmin
Canon
Choked
ChPlanting
ChristianEd
ChristianLife
Christology
ChurchAdmin
ChurchHistory
ChurchLife
ChurchState
Computer
Counseling
Covenants
Creation
Cross

Cults
Demonology
Discipleship
Doctrine
Ecclesiology
Environment
Epistemology
Eschatology
Ethics
Evangelism
Exegesis
Faith
Family
Fasting
FigOfSpeech
GenderRoles
Gospel
Grace
Greek
Hamartiology
Healing
Hebrew
Hermeneutics
History
Homiletics
Homosexuals
Humility
Hypocrisy
Idolatry
Illus
Islam
Israel
Justification
Law
Leadership
Linguistics
LiteraryCrit
Logic
LordsSupper
Love
LXX
Medicine
Mercy
MI
Ministry
Miracles

Misc
Missions
Music
OtherDocs
Parables
PaulineThot
Pentecostal
PetrineThot
Philosophy
Pneumatology
Prayer
Predest
Prophecy
Psychiatry
Psychology
Quote
Reason
Resurrection
RuleOfFaith
Sanctificat
Satanology
Science
SecularHumism
Sex
SocialJustice
SolaScriptura
Soteriology
SovereignFree
SP
Suffering
Syncretism
SynopticProb
Syriac
Teaching
TextualCrit
Thanatology
Theodicy
Theology
TheologyProp
Theonomy
Trichotomy
Trinity
Truth
Typology
Ugaritic
WillOfGod

Wisdom
Witness
Works
Worldviews
Worship

END

A personal reference is someone who you have not worked with but can describe your values, integrity, character and goals. You can select personal references from many parts of your life, including volunteering, school, personal associations and longtime friendships. Your resume can help personal references see your professional skills and experience. It can also allow professional references to see how your career has progressed since you last worked together and refresh them on your skills and projects.