



## *Living in Faith*

Discipleship Series

Developing  
a habit of  
listening  
to God



# How to Read Your Bible



# **How to Read Your Bible**

*Developing a Habit of Listening to God*

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### ***Living in Faith*** Discipleship Series

*Adapted from Bible Handbook* (The Bible Teaching Series)

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# Table of Contents

Getting Started .....	2
Chapter 1: Know the Source .....	3
Chapter 2: Find your Way Around .....	13
Chapter 3: Start a Reading Plan .....	23
Chapter 4: Develop a Devotional Life .....	35
Five-Point Guideline for Studying the Bible.....	46

## Appendix – for Digging Deeper

A. Summary of the Stories of the Bible .....	47
B. A Jesus-centered Bible Reading Plan .....	53
C. Basic Rules of Interpretation .....	58

# Getting Started

Maybe the thought of reading the Bible scares you a little. Maybe you would like some help getting to know how the Bible works or knowing a little bit more about the way the Bible was put together. Then you will feel more ready to read it. That is what this book is for – to help you understand the Bible and its main message. Of course, the Bible does not need this extra little book. If you read the Bible, God will use the words in the Bible to speak to you and teach you. We will be glad if this book helps you to read through the Bible. But we will be even happier to know that you are reading the Bible itself, because the Bible is full of God’s powerful truth!

## READ THE TEXT

Each lesson is broken up into smaller sections with a review question after each section. Feel free to stop at any of the passages to make sure you understand them or to dig more deeply into what they are saying. Circle, underline, or highlight key words.

## GRAPPLE WITH THE QUESTIONS

In this book there are also questions to start, review and end the lesson. If you are studying this on your own, think through the questions for yourself. If you are studying in a group, use the questions for deeper discussion. Designate someone as a facilitator. Allow each individual a level of comfort to ask questions and freedom to discover and grow.

## NOTICE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Each page also includes additional references on the sidebar for those who want to dig deeper (You will need a Bible or a Bible app to read those sections). They are available to use in group or in personal study.



= Location of Bible Story



= Search options – related passages

## MAP OUT YOUR NEXT STEPS



After connecting the timeless truths to your life, make sure you map out Next Steps before ending the lesson.



# Chapter One

## KNOW THE SOURCE



There are countless books written over the years. Some books are written to entertain people. Other books are written to help people learn things or to teach skills for living. Libraries are filled with thousands of books.

1. What are some of your favorite books. Why?

Many books are considered sacred or holy books. The Bible, however, is special. No other book is like it. It is estimated that over the years five billion copies have been printed in over 2,800 languages. What makes it so popular and enduring? In these chapters, you will find out what and gain help in reading it.

## THE BIBLE – UNIQUE AMONG WRITINGS

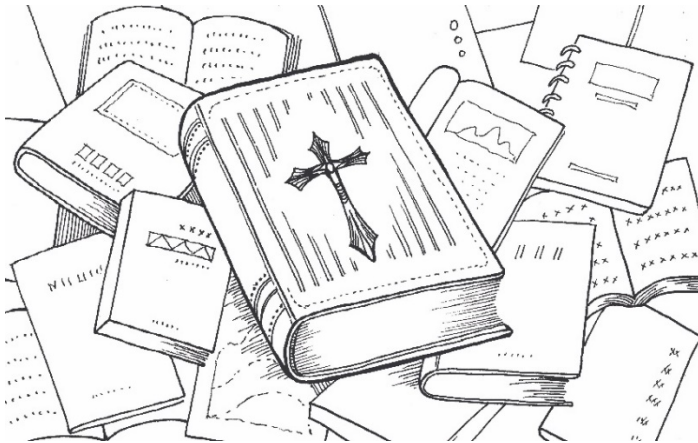
The Bible has survived the test of time and cultures over thousands of years. People risked their lives to translate it. Others risked their lives to read it and share it. Yet despite all the hostility it met over the years, it continues to be in demand throughout the world.

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**The Bible is filled with love stories and tragedies, heroes and villains, history and poetry.**

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The Bible is filled with love stories and tragedies, heroes and villains, history and poetry. It talks of human sufferings and victories. It identifies with the daily challenges of this world and unfolds the hidden mysteries of the spiritual world.



Many religions set out to discover the Supreme Being that influences the universe. Others try to explain the spiritual realm to gain its advantages or avoid its darkness. But we cannot see God and or discover the spiritual realm by looking in us or around us. We cannot by ourselves understand God and what he thinks of us. Only God can tell us about himself and



**Heroes of Faith**

Hebrews 11



what we cannot see. He reveals all of that in the Bible.

---

**Only God can tell us  
about himself and what  
we cannot see**

---

The Bible helps us understand the origin and cause of the evil and suffering in our world and shows how

God carried out his plan to solve it. It addresses life's biggest questions, which include, "Where did this world come from," "Why am I here?" "What will happen after I die."

The Bible remains timeless because it deals with the unchanging challenges of humanity and reveals the only solution that applies to any culture, any person, any situation. That message has been changing the lives of countless people for thousands of years across all cultures.

2. List three ways that the Bible is unique.

## **MANY WRITERS – ONE AUTHOR**

The human writers of the Bible were farmers, kings, fisherman, tax-collectors, priests, physicians, musicians, and people from other walks of life. More than 30 men wrote 66 different books. The writing took more than 1,500 years to finish. Yet, the whole Bible stayed true and reliable.



**God reveals the  
truth about  
himself**

Isaiah 43:10-13

45:18-22

John 1:1-3; 14-18




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**All the Bible's books  
have one Author –  
God Himself**

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books have one Author – God Himself.

*“All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16).  
“For prophecy never had its origin in the human  
will, but prophets, though human, spoke from  
God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”  
(2 Peter 1:21)*

The Bible is inspired. “Inspired” means that every word in the Bible was breathed by God. God put his words into the minds of the men as they wrote. Because the Bible is inspired we can know that the Bible really is God’s Word. God made sure the writers wrote things exactly as they happened.

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**“Inspired” means  
that every work in  
the Bible was  
breathed by God**

---



**The Bible is of  
spiritual origin**

1 Corinthians 2:4-13

2 Peter 1:19-21

Galatians 1:11-12

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Notice that we said, “The Bible *is* God’s Word.” Saying it that way is important. Sometimes people say, “The Bible *contains* God’s Word.” That statement can mislead people to think that only certain portions of the Bible are God’s word. The

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**The Bible remains  
the final authority on  
faith and life**

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Bible does not simply *contain* God’s Word; it *is* God’s Word. Every word in the Bible comes from God. Because it is God’s

word, the Bible remains the final authority on faith and life. It is the measure or standard against which we view everything to be true or false, right or wrong.

3. Review the important truths you learned from this section.

## MANY STORIES – ONE MAIN STORY

The Bible is full of many stories but all the Bible’s stories really make up one big story.



**Jesus speaks of  
Old Testament  
Events as real  
history**

Matthew 19:4-6

Luke 17:26-27

Matthew 12:40

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**All the Bible's  
stories really make  
up one big story**

---

glory. He created people to enjoy life with him, but they betrayed that honor by turning away from him.

God promised a Savior to Adam and Eve, the first people, after they had sinned against God. But soon sin filled the world with wickedness. God sent a flood over the whole world and started over with Noah's family. But again after that, people did not stay connected to God. Then God chose to make Abraham the father of the nation from which the Savior would come. God gave judges and priests and kings and prophets to the people, but none of the leaders could solve the real problem. Just like the ones they served, they were all sinful human beings. During that time over 300 prophecies told about the coming savior. Then at God's right timing, the Savior was born as a baby in Bethlehem that fulfilled all those prophecies. His name is Jesus.

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**Over 300 prophecies  
in the Old Testament  
were fulfilled in the  
person of Jesus**

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that saved the whole world. After three days, he came alive again and showed the world he had satisfied God's justice and brought peace with God that brings life to those who believe.

The main storyline starts with God creating a wonderful and perfect world. His creation displayed his love and

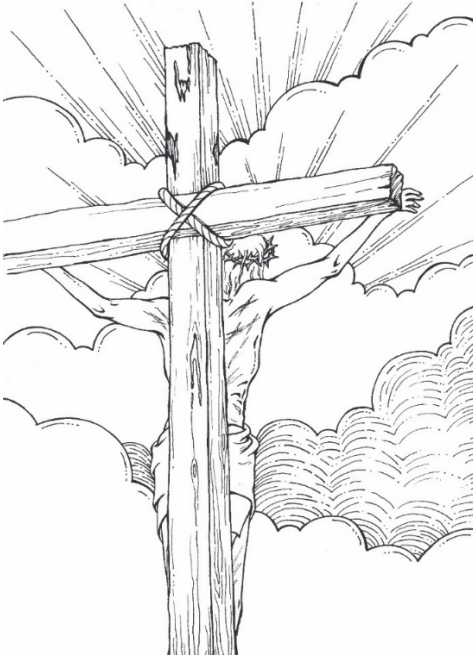
*The appendix  
includes a longer  
narrative summary  
of the Bible.*



**The whole Bible  
was pointing  
ahead to Jesus**

Luke 24:25-27  
1 Corinthians 15:1-4

Jesus taught people about God and healed with miracles. But the religious leaders nailed him to a cross like a criminal. His death became the event



***“All the prophets testify about him (Jesus) that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.” (Acts 10:43).***

All of the Bible’s stories are really pointing us to Jesus and what he does for us. He forgives our sins and makes us God’s children. This is God’s great gift to us.

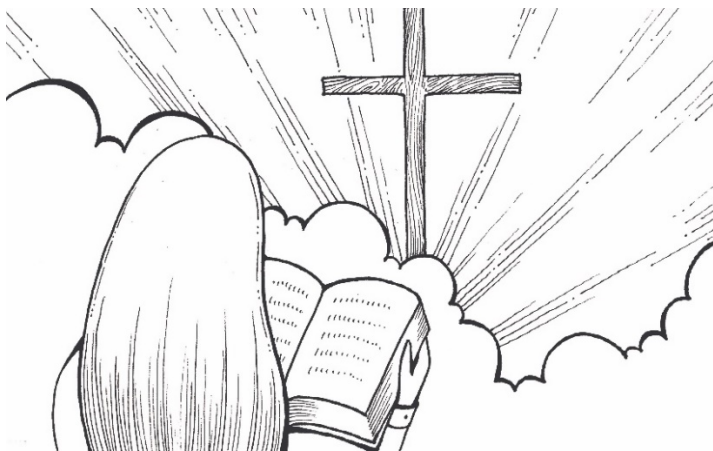
4. Summarize in your own words the main story of the Bible.

## MANY BENEFITS – ONE MAIN PURPOSE

People gain many benefits from reading the Bible, but it is important to recognize its chief purpose. It is not just to improve our lives. It is a matter of life and death. Jesus said without obeying it, you won't be able to withstand the storms of life nor face the judgment at the end of the world.

Among all the stories and teachings, the Bible has one main purpose – to lead us to faith in Jesus so that we might live in the blessings of God now and after we die.

*“These are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” (John 20:31)*



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**The Bible has one main purpose – to lead us to faith in Jesus so that we might live in the blessings of God**

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The Bible not only prepares you for life after death but equips you for this life. Understanding and trusting that message brings joy, peace, and hope. It brings



**God's Word is  
Your Solid  
Foundation**

Psalm 119:89-93

Acts 20:32



**King David  
Cherishes God's  
Word**

Psalm 19:7-11

Psalm 119:98-105

confidence, comfort, guidance, and strength in life.

*"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."* (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

5. In your own words, explain the main purpose of the Bible.



## CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. Evaluate different sacred books people trust in and what makes the Bible different from them.
2. When you realize the Bible is the very word of God, how does it change the way you approach life and life's values?
3. Some people say that the Bible is only another book about morals, how to improve yourself, or how to live do good. What would you respond according to what you learned in this lesson?
4. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
5. Please pray to God based on this.



## YOUR NEXT STEPS

### **Memorize it!**

Identify a Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you and memorize it.

### **Read it!**

Page through the Bible to get familiar with it. Take note of names of books (memorize the order if you want to find them easier in the future)

### **Apply it!**

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

### **Share it!**

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson to help you).

*Go on to Lesson Two to learn a simple map to find your way around in the Bible*



## Chapter Two

# FIND YOUR WAY AROUND



Have you ever gone into a large city or forest and felt lost? Did it frighten or frustrate you? Did it keep you from enjoying your journey? Did it keep you from getting to your destination?

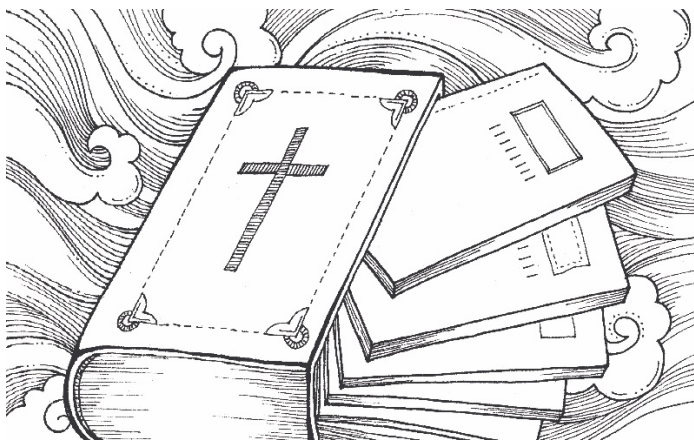
1. Describe a time you were lost. How did you find your way?

Maybe you feel a bit lost trying to read through the Bible. Reading through it is a bit like a journey. It is helpful to have a map to guide you through. In this chapter, we provide you with a simple framework to understand what God is saying and more easily get to the destination.

## ONE BOOK CONTAINING MANY BOOKS

The Bible is not like other books. You might call it “The Book of Books,” because it is so much more important than any other book.

There is another reason to think of the Bible as “The Book of Books.” The Bible is actually like a little library containing many different books. God used more than 30 different persons to write the various Bible books.



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**There are 66 books  
inside the Bible –  
written over more  
than 15 centuries!**

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Altogether, there are 66 books inside the Bible. They were written over a very long period of time, from before 1400 BC to about AD 100. That’s more

than 15 centuries!

The Bible is not just a lot of information. The Bible has a story to tell. So people put the books that tell the Bible’s story in chronological order—according to

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**The birth of Jesus  
into this world  
brings us to the  
heart of the Bible**

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when they were written.  
The birth of Jesus into  
this world brings us to  
the heart of the Bible.  
This great event divides  
the books of the Bible into



**How God spoke  
then and now**  
Hebrews 1:1-3

two main parts. The two parts are called the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Old Testament's 39 books were written before Jesus was born. The 27 books in the New Testament were written after Jesus was born. The two sections of Scripture fit together seamlessly.

God had the Bible written in ordinary, everyday languages so that people could understand God's Word. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew.

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**The Old Testament  
was written in  
Hebrew**

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That was the language of the people who were picked by God to carry his promise until Jesus came.

Then, when Jesus told his apostles to go out to all the world with his good news, they wrote their books in Greek. At that time Greek was the common language of most of the people whom

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**The New Testament  
was written in  
Greek**

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the apostles would meet. In fact, the Greek they used to write the New Testament was the kind spoken by ordinary people every day. It was not the fancier style written by scholars. God wanted his message to be read and understood.

Since most readers today do not know Hebrew or Greek, many faithful translations have been made so it can be read in each person's own language.

*The appendix  
includes a longer  
narrative summary  
of the Bible.*

To understand how the books are arranged, it might help to picture the Bible as a couple of bookcases in a library.

**The Old Testament (39 books)**

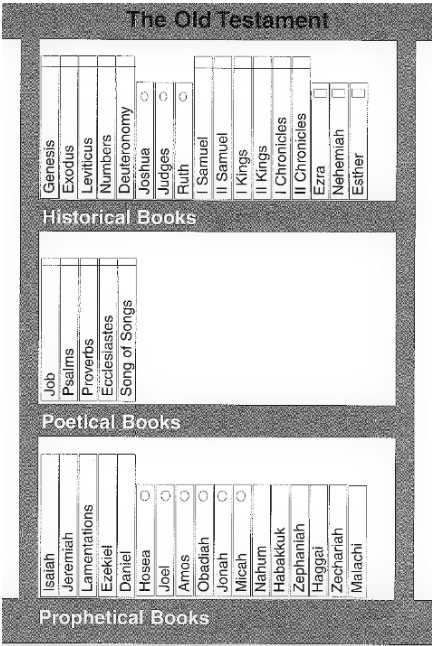
In the first bookcase, the first shelf holds the first seventeen books of the Old Testament (Genesis through Esther). These are all history books telling us about main events from the past.

On the second shelf are five books (Job through Song of Songs). These are poetry books that provide personal and artistic expression to the writer’s wisdom, praise, or struggles.

On the third shelf are the remaining seventeen books of the Old Testament (Isaiah through Malachi). These are books of prophecy. They were written by men called prophets. Since the Old Testament prophets lived in the time before the birth of Jesus, some of what they wrote was about the future when Jesus would come.

**The Old Testament books cover about 4,000 years of history**

The Old Testament books cover about 4,000 years of history. The main human writers of the Old Testament were Moses and the Prophets. Moses wrote the first five books (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). These books are often referred to as the Torah. Other writers of the Old Testament included King David who wrote the Psalms (songs), King Solomon who wrote wisdom literature (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) and prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.



**The Bible reveals mysteries unknown to man**

Romans 16:25-27

1 Corinthians 4:4-14

Ephesians 3:2-9

## The New Testament (27 books)

The New Testament focuses on the most important years of history that happened within 100 years. The New Testament bookcase also has three shelves.

The first four history books (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) are known as the Gospels. "Gospel" is a

word that means "good news." Small

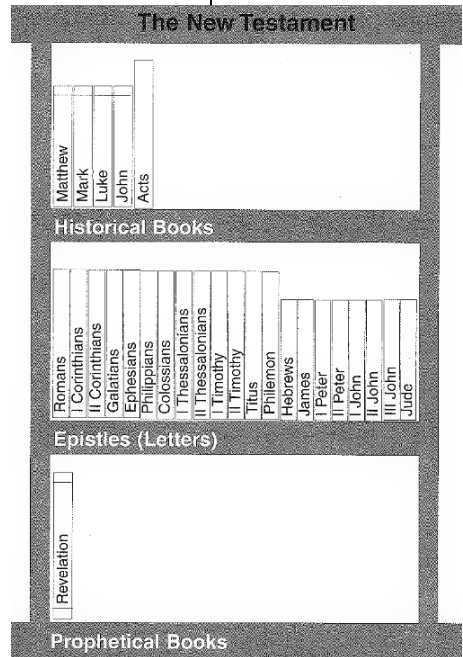
**Gospel means "good news"**

gems of gospel can be found throughout the Bible. But these four books are like rich diamond mines. They are called Gospels because they tell all about the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. That good news is the heart of the Bible.

The fifth history book in the New Testament is called The Acts of the Apostles. Sometimes people shorten the title to one word, "Acts." This book tells us about the ministry of the apostles and the first years of the Christian church. The apostles were men chosen and sent out by Jesus to spread his message.

The next books in the New Testament are letters sent to individuals or different churches. The letters explain the teaching and life of Jesus. They were written to guide the faith and the lives of Christians. There are 21 such letters in the New Testament (Romans through Jude).

The last book of the Bible (Revelation) is a prophecy book. Revelation is like a room filled with very wonderful paintings. There are pictures of things the



**Scripture cannot be broken**

John 10:34-37

Bible has told us already, visions that predict God's final victory over the devil and all evil, and even a glimpse of what heaven will be like for us when we go to be with God.

The New Testament was written mainly by those who had followed Jesus during his life on earth (like

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**The New Testament was written mainly by those who had followed Jesus during his life on earth**

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Matthew, Peter, and John). Other writers like Luke got information from eyewitnesses. Paul wrote many of the

letters as encouragements to the churches he started on his missionary journeys. The last book, called Revelation, was written by the apostle John as a vision from Jesus to give us a window into the spiritual realm and God's victorious plans against Satan.

Long after the books of the Bible were written, they were divided into chapters and verses to make it easier to find specific passages. The first number after the book name indicates the chapter. It is followed by a semi-colon and the number of the verse. For example: John 3:16 refers to the third chapter of the book of John and the 16<sup>th</sup> verse in that chapter.

2. To help you find your way around the Bible, memorize the names of books in each of the three categories of the Old and New Testaments.

## TWO MAIN TEACHINGS, ONE KEY MESSAGE

The Bible's key message has two parts to it – Law and Gospel. They are the two main teachings of the Bible.

In the law, God clarifies how to honor him in our relationships. But like a

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**Like a mirror, the law shows us how unworthy we are because of our sinful lives**

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mirror, the law shows us how unworthy we are because our sinful lives insult God's honor. *"All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"*

(Romans 3:23). Because we fail, we deserve to be condemned and forever separated from him. *"The wages of sin is death"* (Romans 6:23a).



The second main teaching in the Bible is the gospel. Gospel means "good news" and points us to Jesus

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**The Gospel means "good news" and points us to Jesus who saves us.**

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who saves us. Jesus, the Son of God, cared enough for us to leave his glory and stand in as our substitute. He obeyed God's law perfectly to succeed where we've



failed. By dying on the cross, he suffered the punishment and judgment demanded of our sins so we might be forgiven. What he did brought glory to God by removing our shame and restoring our relationship with God. *"We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"* (Romans 5:1). By bringing us to believe in Jesus, God accepts us as his honored and loved children who will one day be with him in heaven (1 John 3:1-3). That is the good news.

So, this is the key point. All other religions put an emphasis on your righteous actions or religious rituals to bring blessings or avoid the evil. But in Jesus, God gives us a gift - his righteousness to cover our unrighteousness, his shame on the cross to restore us to honor in God's sight. And he came alive again so we can enjoy life with God forever. That is the good news of the Gospel and the key message of the Bible.

3. In your own words, distinguish between the messages of both the law and the gospel.

## START READING

A well-known Christian (Augustine) once said, "The

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**The Bible is shallow enough for a child not to drown, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim.**

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Bible is shallow enough for child not to drown, yet deep enough for an elephant to swim." Even a child can understand many stories and truths from Scripture. Reading



### Distinguishing between Law and Gospel

Exodus 34:5-6

Romans 3:20-24

Galatians 3:10-14

Isaiah 53:4-6

2 Corinthians 5:21



### Knowing Scripture from Infancy

2 Timothy 3:14-15



it will eventually lead you to understanding more complicated things.

So where will you go as you start reading the Bible? When you are starting as a Bible reader, it will be best to read easier books and chapters at first and save harder things for later.

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**A good place to start  
is the book of Luke**

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A good place to start might be the book of Luke. There you will read the story of Jesus

from his birth to his death and resurrection.

The next chapters will give you suggested approaches to reading. But there is no secret formula or method that is required. Simply start reading. It will be a journey you will not regret.



**Luke collected  
eyewitness  
accounts**

Luke 1:1-4



## **CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE**

1. Summarize the differences between the Old and New Testaments. How does that affect your reading plan?
2. What message do we need in our daily life – the law or the gospel? Why?
3. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
4. Please pray to God based on this.



## YOUR NEXT STEPS

### **Memorize it!**

Identify a Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you and memorize it.

### **Read it!**

Begin to read the book of Luke

### **Apply it!**

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

### **Share it!**

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson to help you).

*Go on to Lesson Three to begin a plan to read the Bible in a pattern that works best for you.*

## Chapter Three

# START A READING PLAN



When you are by yourself, away from your family, you can feel cut off and alone. It helps when someone visits you, or when someone sends a letter to you. Visits and letters show that someone cares about you and is thinking about you.

1. Name two people who care about you and describe ways they show it.

When we open the Bible, it is like getting a letter from God himself. Reading the Bible is like being visited by God. In the Bible, God lets us know that he cares about us and has not forgotten us.

## LEARN TO ENJOY READING

It may be helpful to briefly distinguish between Bible reading and a devotion. In general, regular Bible reading does not emphasize in-depth study or reflection of the text. Instead, it focuses on understanding the story, flow, and general messages of the books. The purpose of a Bible reading plan is to help the reader to read the whole Bible systematically within a certain period of time.



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**Regular Bible reading  
is similar to the reading  
at a pace as you would  
read a book**

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Regular Bible reading is similar to the reading at a pace as you would read a book. Reading as a devotion, however, emphasizes an in-depth concentration on

the meaning of a shorter text or even a single verse and considers how to apply the truth to our life. The purpose of a devotion is not to read the entire Bible in a short period of time but to carefully reflect on our daily life to live according to the teachings of God's Word.



**King David's joy in  
reading the Bible**

Psalm 19:7-14

Psalm 119:11-16



**Nourishing the  
Soul**

Psalm 1

Isaiah 55

Bible reading is not as difficult as a devotion. Below is a brief introduction to help you start your Bible reading plan.

## CHOOSE A SUITABLE TRANSLATION

First, we should remember that the Bible revealed by God was not originally written in Chinese. When God revealed his messages to the prophets of the Old Testament era, they wrote it in Hebrew and Aramaic, the language they spoke. When the apostles and preachers of the New Testament era wrote God's messages, they wrote it in Greek, the popular

language of the world at that time.

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**When God revealed his messages to the prophets, they wrote in the language they spoke**

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Many people do not understand Hebrew and Greek. In order that many more

people can read the stories and teachings of the Bible, Christians wanting to be faithful to the Bible have translated the original text of the Bible into different languages. In order to communicate the message of God, some translators even had to create a written language for ethnic minorities who didn't have a writing system. For that reason, most of the Bibles people use today are translations.

Secondly, there are also many Chinese translations of the Bible such as the Chinese Union Version, Revised Chinese Union Version, Chinese New Version, and Today's Chinese Version. There are so many translations mainly because translators are trying to find a good balance between literal accuracy and smoothness of language. In addition, the changing developments in languages over many years

becomes another reason for the emergence of many new translations.

Here are some suggestions for choosing a suitable Bible translation:

- Choose the most recent faithful translation such as the Revised Chinese Union Version. In general, the language in such a translation is more similar to your everyday language.
- Consider choosing a translation that your church uses. As Christians often participate in church gatherings, it will be advantageous to have the same translation the church uses.

Once you have selected a translation, always use this translation for your Bible reading plan. It will make it easier for you to memorize the Bible and share it with others.

Finally, with the development of mobile phone

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**Many prefer to  
download Bible  
software on their  
mobile phones**

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technology, people's lifestyles have undergone tremendous changes. Instead of using the traditional print Bible, many

Christians today prefer to download Bible software on their mobile phones. You might want to check out different Bible reading apps such as WeDevote.

2. Discuss which Bible translation you will use and why.

## DEVELOP A SUITABLE READING PLAN

When it comes to choosing a Bible reading plan, you can search for different Bible reading programs on the internet. Some like Robert Murray M'Chayne's Bible Reading Plan or Robert Roberts' Bible Reading Plan guide you in reading the Bible in a fixed period of time. You can also find plans for reading the Bible that follow specific themes or topics. Any of these reading plans are of great help to Christians because readers don't need to spend time deciding what to read. All the reading schedules are already set out to make it convenient for the readers.

**A Bible Starter  
Reading Plan**

[See Appendix B](#)

However, we also recognize there are differences among those who read. Although existing reading plans help many people, others get interrupted in their routine for various reasons and put off their

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**There is no perfect  
reading plan which is  
suitable for everyone**

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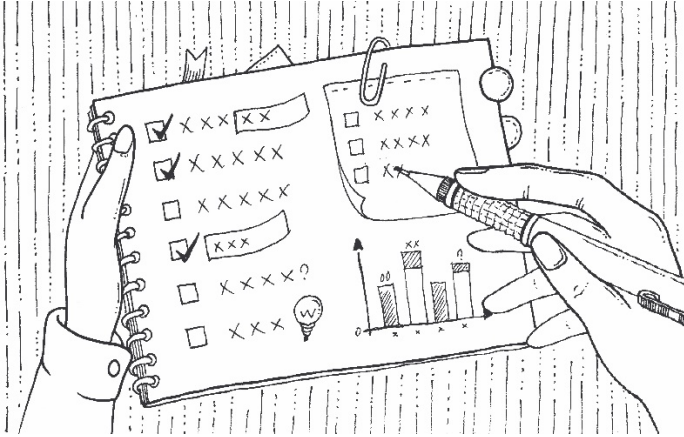
Bible reading. They may get discouraged or feel it is a burden to read the Bible and give up reading Bible

completely. There is no perfect reading plan which is suitable for everyone. Here are some ideas that might help guide you to develop a suitable reading plan:

### **The Status of the Reader**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the main purpose of Bible reading is to understand the story, flow, and general messages of the books. If you are reading the Bible for the first time, then we recommend that you read through the Bible books in order starting with the New Testament. Another option is the recommended Bible reading plan in Appendix B of this book.

If you have already read some of the Bible, we recommend that you choose any existing reading plan. You could also use a reading plan that follows a theme that is relevant to your current needs. Of course, if you wish to continue reading the Bible from beginning to end, this is also a good approach.



## The Right Time for Reading

You may hear other Christians tell you that you should spend a few hours reading the Bible in the morning. Some believe that people are more productive in the early morning and would want to rest at night.

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**You could choose to read in the morning or at night or on your way to work**

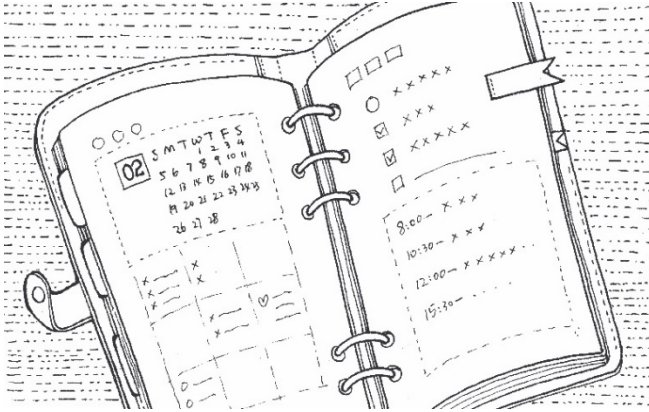
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But we must remember that God does not stipulate when to read the Bible. If you wish, you could choose to

read the Bible in the morning or at night. You could also choose to read on your way to work in the morning, during lunch break, or any other time.



Also, the length of time spent on reading varies from person to person. If you are willing to spend more time or wish to finish reading the whole Bible as soon as possible, you could end up spending a few hours daily. If you are busy, you could utilize whatever time is available to read.



## Frequency of Reading

Some Christians see no need to discuss the frequency of reading the Bible because they think that Christians must read the Bible on a daily basis. There is no specific regulation from God that we have to read the Bible daily. The Word of God is, of course, beneficial to us. Daily reading can benefit a person tremendously.

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**Reading the Bible is not  
a hundred-meter dash  
but more like a marathon.  
Persistence is essential.**

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However, that does not mean that skipping Bible reading for a day is a sin or offence against God.

Christians who have already begun Bible reading and have established a good reading habit may be

reading the Bible daily or even several times a day. But someone who has just begun to read the Bible and has not established a reading habit may need time to cultivate a consistent routine. They can try to read the Bible 1-2 times a week. After that becomes a habit, they can gradually increase the frequency until they develop a good habit of reading the Bible daily. After all, reading the Bible is not a hundred-meter dash but more like a marathon. Persistence is essential.

Now you can start to develop a suitable reading plan.

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**The most important thing is to open the Bible and read**

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Please note, however, that the most important thing is to open the Bible and read. God will help you

experience the blessing of Bible reading.

### COMMON PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

You may encounter some challenges in your Bible reading and need help. Here are two common problems and solutions to help you continue your journey.

1. *The readers read the Bible irregularly and are filled with guilt feelings or stress. Thinking that he or she is unable to have a good Bible reading habit, the person may eventually give up entirely.*

We previously discussed the time and frequency of reading. You may have already discovered that some Christians will regard the reading as a command of God. That type of thinking is completely law-driven. Thinking that God will punish us if we don't read the Bible is a mindset that brings guilt and pressure to readers.

**God's Word is like spiritual armor**

Ephesians 6:10-21

Of course, if someone continually forsakes the Word of God, he can eventually lose his salvation. This is because God builds faith in our hearts through the gospel. Losing salvation can become a consequence of rejecting the Word of God, but the fear of it should not be the main motivation for reading the Bible. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthian church expresses a proper motivation:

*“For Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).*

So the motivation for the Christian to hear from God’s Word and live for the Lord comes solely from Christ’s sacrificial love. This love is itself unconditional and is not based on how much or little a person reads the Bible.

So please relax. The fact that Jesus died on the cross for you draws you to understand what this is all about. God’s love does not change

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**God’s love does not  
depend on how  
much or little you  
have read the Bible**

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according to your reading or not reading. It does not depend on how much or how little you have read the Bible. Let

God’s love be the only motive for your reading. This will continue to inspire you to cultivate the habit of reading his Word. If you have stopped reading the Bible, please put aside all kinds of negative thoughts and emotional burdens about it. Pick up your Bible all over again and start



**Opening the eyes  
of our heart to  
know Jesus  
better**

Ephesians  
1:13-22; 3:14-21  
Colossians 1:9-14

reading. There God will make clear to you that He cares and loves you.

**2. *In the process of reading the Bible, some readers do not understand the text or may have many questions they cannot answer.***

First of all, even if you do not understand the Bible, it does not mean that the Bible is a mysterious book that requires special explanation. There is a large time gap between our time and the time of writing. There is a lot of historical background information of the nations, their people, and their customs that you may not be familiar with. As a result, we can often get

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**As readers become  
more familiar with the  
Bible they will  
understand it better**

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confused, which is quite normal. However, as readers become more familiar with the Bible they will

understand it better, and most of these problems will be resolved.

Secondly, when you want to know what the Bible is saying, congratulations! You have entered the realm of devotional reading. We will elaborate on this in the next chapter. In addition, choosing a reliable set of Bible commentaries can also

provide much help as you study what it means. You can ask your pastors or other Christians for suggestions for this.



**Prepare to share  
with others**

Psalm 78:1-7

Matthew 28:18-20

Finally, God does not want Christians to live alone in the world. Instead, he wants Christians to have fellowship with other Christians. If you can find a partner or join a group to study the Bible together, it will be of great benefit to you. In this setting group members can share their insights from the Scriptures, mutually encourage and build up one another.



### **Gather with Others**

Hebrews 10:22-24  
Ephesians 4:11-16



## **CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE**

1. Develop a suitable reading plan and use it accordingly to read the Bible.
2. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.
3. Please pray to God based on this.



## YOUR NEXT STEPS

### **Memorize it!**

Memorize a passage that is meaningful to you.

### **Apply it!**

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

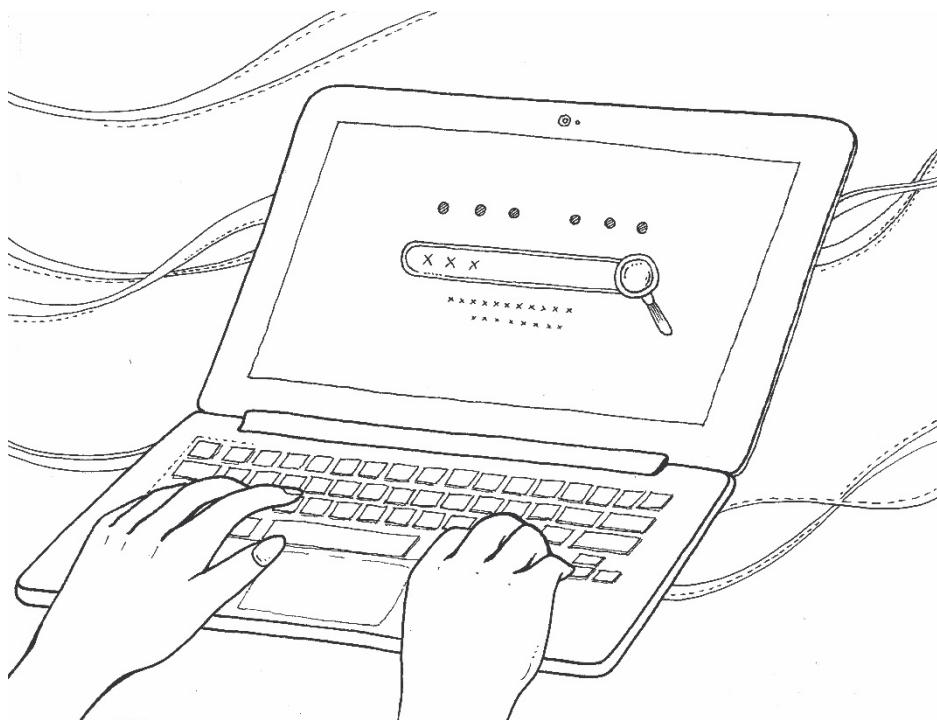
### **Share it!**

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson to help you).

*Go on to Lesson Four to learn a method to set up a devotional lifestyle.*






## Chapter Four

# DEVELOP A DEVOTIONAL LIFE



In the last chapter we talked about the difference between regular Bible reading and devotional reading. When believers begin to cultivate their reading habit and let God work gradually in their hearts through the power of his Word, they will naturally want to know more about the Bible and to follow it in their lives.

So this chapter will talk about devotions to help believers build their personal devotional life. You can follow the steps below to learn how to get started on a devotion.

-  1. **LISTEN** to it – What first impression does it give?
-  2. **THINK** about it – What unchangeable truth is God teaching?
-  3. **CONNECT** it – Where does it relate with our world today?
-  4. **LIVE** it – How will you now commit it to your daily life?
-  5. **PRAY** it – Thank God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you

This approach can be used in your private or group devotions. You can go through it quickly or spend plenty of time in it. You may want



to follow these points by using each finger of your hand beginning with the **Listen** = the thumb (impression), **Think** = the pointer finger (pointing out new things), **Connect** = middle finger (tying it to life today), **Live** = ring finger (commitment), and **Pray** = pinky finger (completing the grasp).

Here are more explanations of the 5 steps above:

## #1 **LISTEN to it**

*"Faith comes from hearing the message"* (Romans 10:17)

Have you noticed how many times people seem to be listening to you but are actually pre-occupied with something else? That often causes them to jump to conclusions and miss what you were trying to say.

Fundamentals of good communication include

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**Devotion time is  
your time for  
listening to the Lord**

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careful listening. The same is true of the Bible. Devotional time is your time for listening to the Lord. Approach it with

the awe and respect of sitting in God's presence and



**Samuel**

*Speak Lord, for your  
Servant is Listening*

1 Samuel 3:1-10



hearing the very words of God. Here are some suggestions to help you listen to God.

a. **Begin with prayer**

Start this conversation with God by asking him to open your head and heart to what he is saying.

b. **Then read over the section of Scripture**

Just listen! God is talking with you. Don't hurry on this part. Read it slowly and let it sink in. Maybe read it a couple of times and quietly reflect on it.

c. **Write down your initial observations**

What stuck out for you as you read? What words, phrases, ideas especially drew your attention? What people or event attracted your interest?

1. Read a passage from the Bible by using the above approach. Share what you first hear when you "listen." (suggestion: John 4:1-26)

## #2 **THINK about it**

*"Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long" (Psalm 119:97). "Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 1:19).*

There is a specific message God is sharing in every part of Scripture. As you read, "meditate" on the wisdom and wonders God reveals. That means to think more deeply about what God is really saying.



### **Mary and Martha**

*The One Thing  
Needed*

Luke 10:38-42



### **Meditate on the message**

Joshua 1:7-9

Psalm 1

Psalm 119:97

Luke 2:19

Perhaps you could imagine yourself as one of the people who first heard this. Realize how our sinful

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**Our sinful nature doesn't always want to hear or accept what God is saying**

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nature resists accepting what God is saying. Preconceived ideas and cultural viewpoints can interfere with understanding what God

is telling us. Reflect on the timeless truths God is trying to teach through these words.

You might want to ask yourself these questions.

- a. **What does it reveal about God's character?**
- b. **What does it reveal about our world?**

Finally summarize what you learned:

- c. **What are the timeless truths** that shine through?
- d. **What is the main point** (write it down, summarize)?

Don't get hung up on names or concepts you don't understand at this point. Think it through first. Let

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**Be willing to accept the mysteries that are there**

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the message sink in. Some of the information will make more sense the more you continue to read the Bible. List questions

you still have. You may want to consult a commentary or ask a trusted Christian who is more familiar with the Bible. Be willing to humbly accept the mysteries that are there. That is part of the miracle and wonder of faith.



**The devil's age-old temptation "Did God really say?"**  
Genesis 3:1-6



**Bereans search the Scriptures**  
Acts 17:10-12

2. Discuss what might be obstacles for you in learning what the text is saying and how you might solve the problem.

### #3 CONNECT it to life today

*“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in Scriptures we might have hope.” (Romans 15:4)*

Reading the Bible is not just an intellectual exercise. Once you have understood what God was saying to the original readers, it is important to take the truth of the text and connect it to our lives. How are our relationships today similar to those in the Bible? What struggles in our world are similar to those in the text? What sins are we confronted with? What hope do we need?

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**It is essential to look at what it means for your life**

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But this is not just about others. It is essential to look at what it means for your life. What in the story or passage is

similar to your relationships? What issues or situations can you identify with?

Here are some questions you might ask to see if they help clarify what God is telling you personally:

- a. **What convicts you** – making you guilty or ashamed of your thoughts, words or actions?
- b. **What comforts you** – leading you to see Jesus and God’s love working in your life?



**The Bible reveals mysteries unknown to man**

Romans 16:25-27

1 Corinthians 4:4-14

Ephesians 3:2-9

- c. **What challenges you** – confronting you to live more faithfully for Christ?
  - d. **What changes you** – giving you a new attitude and direction for life?
  - e. **What charges you up** – energizing you to make a difference in someone else's life?
3. Summarize what you learned in this section.

## #4 LIVE it in your life

*“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.” (James 1:22)*

Now that you've listened, thought about, and connected what you read, determine what you will do about it in your daily life and relationships. How will the timeless truths make your life different? Here are some follow up questions you can ask:

- a. Who does God want me **to be**?
- b. How does God want me **to think**?
- c. What does God want me **to do**?
- d. Where does God want me **to go**?
- e. Who is God leading me **to share** this with?

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**Write down what you intend to do with the truth in your life**

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Write down what you intend to do with the lesson's truth in your life. Develop a specific plan of actions or attitudes God is

leading you to commit to in your life.



**Josiah and the people commit to live what they read**

2 Chronicles 34:29-33



**Important: Both Hearing and Obeying**

Matthew 7:21-29

Matthew 13:9-17

Mark 7:5-9

Realize, however, a genuine and lasting motive for change comes only from the love of God that led Jesus to die on the cross for our sin. It is Jesus' love for all sinners that motivates us to change and willingly obey his Word.

4. Talk over different ways you can follow through with what you learned.

## #5 PRAYER AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

*"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth." (John 16:13)*

Jesus promises that the same Holy Spirit of God that

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**Jesus promises that the same Holy Spirit that guided the writers will also guide the readers.**

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guided the writers will also guide the readers of the Bible. Sometimes he convicts us with the law to expose the infection of sin in our lives. Like a doctor with a scalpel, he

works to remove the spiritual cancer. It may be painful at the time, but he soothes the pain and provides healing with the medicine of the gospel. The gospel motivates us to live a healthy relationship with God that finds joy and strength in him.

The book of Hebrews says that the Bible (the Word of God) is "living" because it has always affected our lives. The prophet Isaiah describes the Word of God like rain falling from the sky which accomplishes its purpose making plants grow and produce fruit. So, God's Word will also accomplish its purpose to produce faith and its fruits.



**The Spirit teaches us the spiritual truths**

1 Corinthians 2  
John 14:15-17

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## Not everything and every action of God is revealed in the Bible

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Not everything and every action of God is revealed in the Bible, and the human mind cannot comprehend



## The Transforming Effect of God's Word

Matthew 13:1-23

Romans 12:1-2

1 Peter 1:22-25

everything. God said,

*"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways." (Isaiah 55:8).*

Sometimes we only need to honor God and declare together with Apostle Paul,

*"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).*



## CONNECTING TO YOUR DAILY LIFE

1. Review this lesson's 5-step framework for reading Scripture and summarize them in a way that is most helpful for you.
2. Practice it. Apply this method in this lesson to Mark 4:1-25 (You can find the text at the end of this lesson).
3. Write a prayer to begin your study and a prayer to end your study.

4. Pick out the one point that was most meaningful for you in this lesson.

5. Please pray to God based on this.



## **YOUR NEXT STEPS**

### **Memorize it!**

Identify a Bible passage in this lesson that is most meaningful for you and memorize it.

### **Apply it!**

Discuss how you can put this lesson into your life this week.

### **Share it!**

Who especially needs to hear this? Determine how you will share this chapter with others. (You can use this lesson to help you).

## Mark 4:1-25

### The Parable of the Sower

<sup>4</sup> Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. <sup>2</sup> He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: <sup>3</sup> "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed. <sup>4</sup> As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. <sup>6</sup> But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. <sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants, so that they did not bear grain. <sup>8</sup> Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up, grew and produced a crop, some multiplying thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times."

<sup>9</sup> Then Jesus said, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

<sup>10</sup> When he was alone, the Twelve and the others around him asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> He told them, "The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables <sup>12</sup> so that,

"they may be ever seeing but never perceiving,  
and ever hearing but never understanding;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!"<sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Don't you understand this parable? How then will you understand any parable? <sup>14</sup> The farmer sows the word. <sup>15</sup> Some people are like seed along the path, where the word is sown. As soon as they hear it, Satan comes and takes away the word that was sown in them. <sup>16</sup> Others, like seed sown on rocky places, hear the word and at once receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. <sup>18</sup> Still others, like seed sown among thorns, hear the word; <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> Others, like seed sown on good



soil, hear the word, accept it, and produce a crop—some thirty, some sixty, some a hundred times what was sown.”

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Do you bring in a lamp to put it under a bowl or a bed? Instead, don’t you put it on its stand? <sup>22</sup> For whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”

<sup>24</sup> “Consider carefully what you hear,” he continued. “With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more. <sup>25</sup> Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

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Try practicing the following when you read the section above



1. **LISTEN** to it – What first impression does it give?



2. **THINK** about it – What timeless truth is God communicating?



3. **CONNECT** it – Where does it relate with our world today?



4. **LIVE** it – How will you now commit it to your daily life?



5. **PRAY** it – Thank God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you

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## 5-Point GUIDELINE for your study



1. **LISTEN** to it – What first impression does it give? (*Observation*)



2. **THINK** about it – What timeless truth is God communicating?  
(*Exploration*)



3. **CONNECT** it – Where does it relate to our world today?  
(*Application*)



4. **LIVE** it – How will you now commit it to your daily life?  
(*Appropriation*)



5. **PRAY** it – Thank God and ask the Holy Spirit to help you understand and live it

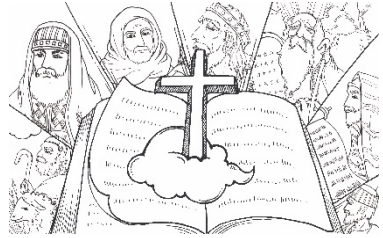
## Appendix A

# SUMMARY OF THE STORY IN THE BIBLE

## OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

### Creation – 2000 B.C.

God creates the universe, including the first couple, in 6 days. Everything is perfect. However, Adam and Eve – tempted by the devil – sin. Immediately afterwards, God promises to send a savior.



As the human race multiplies, people become more wicked. God sends a worldwide flood to destroy them. Only 8 members of Noah's family survive. Of Noah's 3 sons, God selects Shem as an ancestor of the promised Savior.

### 2000 – 1700 B.C. (Age of the Patriarchs)

God calls Abraham, a descendant of Shem, and directs him to go to Canaan, the land which God has chosen for his people. God also tells Abraham that he is an ancestor of the promised Savior. By God's power, elderly Abraham and Sarah produce a son, Isaac. At this time, God institutes circumcision as a sign of his covenant with his people. God tests Abraham's faith by asking him to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham is willing, but God intervenes by providing a lamb for the sacrifice.

Isaac produces a son, Jacob. Jacob has 12 sons and Joseph is one of them. Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt by his brothers. However, by God's guidance, he became prime minister of Egypt. When there was a famine in Canaan, he invited his family to come to Egypt to escape the disaster. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob are the ancestors of the promised savior. In the sons of Jacob, Judah and his descendant are designated as the ancestors of the promised Savior.

## **1700 – 1500 B.C. (Israel's Deliverance from Egypt)**

Jacob's descendants (Israelites) remain in Egypt and increase in number. As the years pass, the Egyptians force the "Israelites" to become slaves. God calls a man named Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. To force the Egyptians to free his people, God afflicts them with 10 plagues. Before the last plague, God instructs each family of Israel to kill a lamb, eat its meat for supper, and paint its blood on the doorpost. All families who follow God's instructions escape the last plagues. Afterwards, this "Passover" – which is observed annually – pre-figures the Savior, Jesus Christ, the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." After the Israelites leave Egypt, they begin their journey to Canaan, the "promised land." Along the way, the people often rebel against God. Nevertheless, God guides them with a pillar of cloud by day and with a pillar of fire by night. He also feeds them with "manna" (bread send from the sky) and quails.

## **1500 – 1100 B.C. (Israel's Journey to & Conquest of Canaan)**

Because of his people's disobedience, God forces them to journey in the wilderness for 40 years. One time, God sends poisonous snakes among his people. At the same time, God tells Moses to make a brass snake and raise it on a pole. Anyone who trusts God and looks at the brass snake on the pole is saved. Again, this incident pre-figures Christ, who died on a cross for all people and whoever trust him will be saved. Joshua succeeds Moses as leader of Israel and leads the people into the twelve tribes, named after the sons of Jacob and Joseph. After the death of Joshua, God appoints "judges" to lead his people. The last of these judges is a prophet called Samuel.

## **1100 – 980 B.C. (The Unified Kingdom)**

When Samuel is old, Israel insists on having a king. Saul is chosen as the first king of Israel. In the beginning, Saul is a good king. However, he later disobeys God and, finally, commits suicide. God directs Samuel to anoint David to succeed Saul. David, originally a shepherd, also is the poet who wrote many of the psalms. Under king David, Israel becomes a

great nation. David, however, is not perfect. At one stage in his life, he commits both adultery and murder. When David dies, his son Solomon succeeds him. Solomon, who is famous for the wisdom which God gave him, writes many proverbs. During his reign, he builds a grand and beautiful temple for God. Solomon's shortcoming, however, is his many heathen wives. At the time of this death, the nation of Israel begins to decline.

### **980 – 720 B.C. (The Divided Kingdom)**

After Solomon's death, the nation of Israel is divided into 2 kingdoms. The northern kingdom, consisting of 10 tribes, is called Israel. The capital is in Samaria. The smaller southern kingdom, consisting of only 2 tribes, is called Judah. Its capital is Jerusalem.

The kingdom of Israel is ruled by evil kings. God sends 2 prophets, Elijah and Elisha, to warn the people. However, the people do not listen and fall away from God. Finally, Assyria conquers Israel and destroys it completely about 720 B.C.

In the meantime, the kings of Judah are both good and evil. The people vacillate between the worship of God and the worship of idols. God also sends prophets to warn the people. Some of these prophets, such as Isaiah, remind the people of the Savior whom God has promised to send.

### **720 – 400 B.C. (The Captivity and Return)**

Because the people of Judah repeatedly rebel against God, God allows Babylon to capture them. However, because God has promised the Savior is to come from Judah, he preserves this small kingdom. After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, the people return to Canaan. There they rebuild the city of Jerusalem and its temple.

### **400 B.C. up to the Birth of Jesus Christ**

The Bible does not record any history from the time that the people of Judah return to Canaan until the time of Jesus' birth. God, however, does

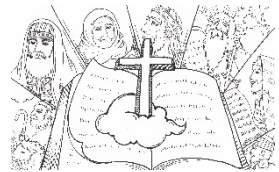
preserve the small kingdom of Judah until Christ, the Savior whom he has promised, is born.

## **Summary of the Old Testament**

The Old Testament is a record of God's dealings with his people. It reveals how frequently people sin against God. It reveals God's hatred of evil AND God's deep love for the sinner. Above all, it reveals how God preserved his people so that he could provide the Savior which he had promised to the world.

## **NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY**

### **LIFE OF CHRIST**



#### **Birth and Childhood**

When God decides to fulfill his promise of a savior, he informs a virgin named Mary, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most high will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the "Son of God." Later, God also informs Mary's fiancé, Joseph, that "what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

After Joseph and Mary are married, they travel to Bethlehem. Meanwhile, the time came for Mary's baby to be born. The promised child is born in a stable of Bethlehem. At the time of his birth, a host of angels announces the event: "Today... a Savior has been born to you." Eight days later, the child is circumcised and called "Jesus."

When Jesus is 2 years old, "magi" from the East come to worship him. At the same time, a king named Herod seeks to kill him. As a result, Joseph, Mary, and Jesus flee to Egypt. After Herod's death, the family returns to live in Nazareth, a city in the province of Galilee. When Jesus is 12 years

old, he travels to the temple in Jerusalem. There his words and deeds amaze everyone with his wisdom.

### **Public ministry**

When Jesus is 30 years old, he begins his public ministry. John the baptizer announces that Jesus is the “lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” and baptizes him. Jesus then spends 40 days in the wilderness overcoming the devil’s temptations. He chooses 12 ordinary men as his disciples. For 3 years, he travels throughout the land of Israel. All the while, he preaches, urging people to trust in him. At the same time, he performs many miracles, e.g., raising the dead. He performs these miracles not only to help people, but also to demonstrate that he is God’s son and God’s promised Savior. Some of the Jews accept him, but most reject him.

### **Suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension**

When he is 33 years old, Jesus foretells that he will suffer and die, then rise from the dead. Shortly thereafter, he enters Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. A few days later, he meets with his disciples and institutes a special meal for them, now called “The Lord’s Supper” or “holy communion.” That night, he is betrayed by Judas, one of his disciples, and arrested. The next day (Friday), he is sentenced to death, first by the Jews and then by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. He is crucified with 2 criminals. Later in the day, he died and is buried.

On the third day after his death, Jesus returns to life. During the next 40 days, he meets with his disciples. To prove that he has risen from the dead, he also appears to more than 500 other people. Then, exactly 40 days after his resurrection, Jesus returns to the Father by ascending to heaven.

### **Summary of Jesus’ Life**

During his 33 years on earth, Jesus was God’s representative. He revealed the Father to us. At the same time, Jesus also was man’s representative.

He did what God required us to do: obey the law perfectly. He also suffered what God required us to suffer: the punishment for sin. He indeed is God's Son and our Savior.

## **A.D. 33 – 100: THE FOUNDING OF THE CHURCH**

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven, he sends the Holy Spirit into the world. On that day (Pentecost), Jesus' disciples begin to preach, starting in Jerusalem. Many people in Israel and the surrounding regions believe. When the local governments persecute these "Christians," they flee to other countries, preaching the gospel wherever they go. At the same time, God enlists a man named Paul to preach the gospel to the Gentiles. As a result, the church grows rapidly. By the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century, Christianity has spread through southern Europe and northern Africa, as well as to India in the east and to Spain in the west.

During this time, the New Testament Bible was written down. Certain men were verbally inspired by the Holy Spirit to record God's own words. The four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) are histories of Jesus' life. There are also several letters, most written by Paul, that were sent to different churches and individual or groups of Christians.

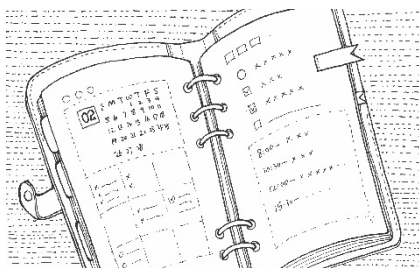
Jesus' disciple John wrote the last book of the Bible – Revelation. In it John share a vision of Jesus' work in the last times before He returns.



## Appendix B

### A JESUS-CENTERED BIBLE READING PLAN

This Bible reading plan starts with the story of Jesus and the early Christian Church. Then it moves into the beginning of the Bible for some context and then and forth from New and Old Testaments so that the main story of Jesus in the Gospels is central and the correlation might continue to emerge through the other books.



This plan skips over many parts of the Bible that are more difficult to read the first time through. Do not worry if it takes you a long time to read all this. If you do not understand something, that is all right. Keep reading. Again and again you will see people who are weak, who do wrong things, who get in trouble. And you will see how God keeps showing love to his people and how he rescues them. As you are reading, remember that all the stories are part of one big story — that people are sinners and need God to be our Savior. Keeping that key message in your mind will help you understand the different stories you are reading.

So, here is a plan for reading through the Bible for the first time.

Start with these books to give you a clear understanding of Jesus, who is the center of the Bible's message. You also may want to use a Psalm each day for your time of prayer and a chapter of Proverbs as words of wisdom within your day.

## SEGMENT ONE – THE BASICS

### NEW TESTAMENT

**Luke** – *an account of the birth, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus.*

**Acts** – *the activities of the early Christian church as the message of Jesus began to touch many lives*

**Ephesians** – *a letter to churches to help them understand how to live in their new life in Christ.*

### OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (The beginnings)

**Genesis** chapters 1–4: *How God created the world - people fell into sin*

**Genesis** chapters 6–9: *How God saved Noah and family from the flood*

**Genesis** chapters 12–33: *The lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob*

**Genesis** chapters 37–50: *Stories about the lives of Jacob's sons (the beginnings of the nation of Israel)*

**Exodus** chapters 1–20: *How God rescued the people of Israel from slavery and gave them his law*

## SEGMENT TWO – THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH

### NEW TESTAMENT

**Matthew** chapters 1–28: *The life of Jesus, focusing on how he is the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament*

**Romans** chapters 1–15: *A summary of Christian teachings and how salvation is by faith in Jesus*

**James** chapters 1–5: *How we need to put our faith into action*

### OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (continued)

**Numbers** chapters 10–14: *How the people of Israel failed to put all their trust in God*

**Numbers** chapters 20–25: *Stories from the years that the people of Israel wandered in the desert*

**Deuteronomy** chapters 31–34: *How Moses ended his days as leader of Israel*

**Joshua** chapters 1–11: *How God gave Israel victory over other kings in order to give them a land of their own*

Along the way in some of the chapters listed above, you will come across some lists of names. Do not worry if you do not recognize the names or cannot pronounce them. God included things like these lists of names to show that these Bible stories are about real people who lived in real places on the earth.

## SEGMENT THREE – THE SOURCE OF LOVE & STRENGTH

### NEW TESTAMENT

**John** chapters 1–20: *The life of Jesus, his words and teachings*

**1 John** chapters 1–5: *To live in love, as God has loved us*

**1 Peter** chapters 1–5: *To stand strong when you are suffering*

**2 Peter** chapters 1–3: *To watch out for those who teach wrong ideas about God*

### OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (continued)

**Judges** chapters 1– 2: *How Israel had trouble during the time of the judges*

**Ruth** chapters 1–4: *The story of a woman who became part of the family from which the Savior would come*

**1 Samuel** chapters 1–31: *Stories about weak and bad priests (Eli and his sons) and about Israel's first king (Saul)*

**2 Samuel** chapters 1–20: *How David ruled as king – and how there were many sinful troubles in his house*

**1 Kings** 1–11: *How Solomon ruled as king, also the building of the temple for God*

## SEGMENT FOUR – THE DANGERS OF FALLING AWAY

### NEW TESTAMENT

**Mark** – *The story of Jesus again with attention to the miracles*

**Galatians**– *A letter to the churches to emphasize the importance of the gospel of Jesus and faith*

**Hebrews** – *An explanation of Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament messages*

## **OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY (continued)**

**2 Kings** chapter 17: *How the northern part of Israel was taken over by another country*

**2 Kings** chapters 24–25: *How the southern part of Israel (called Judah) was taken over by the empire of Babylon*

**Ezra** chapter 1 and chapters 4–7: *How when Persia took over Babylon, some of Israel's people were allowed to return to their own land and rebuild their temple*

**Esther** chapters 1–10: *The story of a Jewish woman and the Jewish people who remained in Persia (Note: People from Judah became known as “Jews”)*

Reading about what happened in the time of Ezra and Esther takes you to the end of the main story about God's people in the Old Testament.

## **SEGMENT FIVE – ENCOURAGEMENTS FOR OUR FUTURE**

**Isaiah** chapters 6-7, 9, 12, 35, 41-45, 49-56, 60-61: *Warnings for the people of God and prophecies of the coming Messiah*

**Jonah:** *The man who tried to run away from God's assignment*

**Philippians** chapters 1–4: *How to stay strong when life is hard*

**2 Corinthians:** *Staying strong during opposition*

**1 Thessalonians** chapters 1–5: *How to be ready for Jesus' return*

**Revelation** 1, 5, 7, 21, 22: *the glory of heaven*

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You will want to read the poetry books sometime, especially some of the worship poems in the book of Psalms. You will also find Proverbs quite enlightening. But for your first time through the Bible, we will stay mostly with books that tell stories. Important parts of the books of prophecies were pointing ahead to when the Savior would come. You might want to come back to reading some of the prophets after

you gone through the list of books above the help your grasp what Jesus did when he came.

If you've come to the end of this list, read it through again or find another Bible reading plan that will help keep you in the Word and keep the Word in you.

## Appendix C

### BASIC RULES OF INTERPRETATION

Too often, careless reading causes people to misunderstand the Bible. We want to minimize our own personal interpretation (what we would like to think it means) and determine what God actually means. Here are some basic principles to follow:

#### THE BIBLE IS REAL LANGUAGE

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**It is important to  
get a good Bible  
translation**

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Since it was originally written in Hebrew and Greek, it is important to get a good Bible translation. Look for one that is faithful to the original languages but very readable for you in your language. As you read, here are some

basic “guidelines” to follow to help you stay on track.

- A. Follow the Basic Rules of Language**
- B. Take into Consideration the Context**
- C. Let Scripture Interpret Scripture**

#### A. FOLLOW THE BASIC RULES OF LANGUAGE

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**Take its simple literal  
meaning unless  
clearly shown  
otherwise**

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The Bible follows normal rules of grammar and usage of speech. A first key rule of interpretation is to understand the Bible passage in its simple literal (basic) meaning unless the language or context clearly shows otherwise.

#### FIGURES OF SPEECH

Don’t take literal statements figuratively, and don’t interpret figurative statements literally. Normal Figures of Speech are often used in Scripture. Some of those include;

- a. **Simile** – a comparison that uses “like” or “as” (Matthew 13:24)

- b. **Metaphor** – a comparison that is implied (doesn't use "like" or "as") (Psalm 119:105)
- c. **Hyperbole** – exaggerating a point for emotional emphasis (Matthew 19:24)
- d. **Symbols** – objects represent a spiritual truth (Jesus the sacrificial lamb, the cross (Philippians 3:18)
- e. **Personification** – comparing things with persons by describing them as if they were persons who could talk and walk and clap and sing (Isaiah 55:12)
- f. **Anthropomorphism** – describing God using human features or emotions to help us relate to him (Isaiah 59:16)

With figures of speech and parables you will want to find the point of comparison in order to stick with the purpose of the message.

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**Find the point of  
comparison**

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## TYPES OF WRITINGS

The Bible is filled with different types of literary forms. It is helpful to understand the difference to understand them better

- a. **Narrative literature** – These are historic accounts of things that actually happened and fit into the history of other nations (like Genesis, Exodus, Luke).  
*Approach:* take it literally for what it says happened.
- b. **Wisdom literature** – These sections are statements of truths to apply for daily living (like Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).  
*Approach:* Appreciate the lessons it teaches about life.
- c. **Poems/songs literature** – These are often personal expressions of praise or life struggles (like Psalms).  
*Approach:* Use to identify with your own struggles as your own expressions of praise or prayers.
- d. **Parables** – These are stories from everyday life that illustrate a spiritual truth (see Matthew 13).  
*Approach:* find the one main point of comparison. Other details might just be there to support the main point.
- e. **Prophecy literature** – These are prophets speaking for God, sometimes telling what is coming in the future, or calling

people to repentance and giving them hope (Isaiah 9 & 53, Jeremiah 23:1-8).

*Approach:* Look for prophecies that have been fulfilled and determine which are yet to come

- f. **Revelation literature** – also called apocalyptic messages. They paint word pictures of spiritual activities behind the scene by using fantastic imagery (like parts of Daniel, Ezekiel, most of Revelation).

*Approach:* Realize that the images and numbers are most often symbolic of something Scripture already described clearly elsewhere.

## B. TAKE THE CONTEXT INTO CONSIDERATION

Perhaps in your conversations with someone, you thought you were clear.

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**Dig into the text and the context to recognize what the writer intended to say.**

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But when they shared it with others, they took your words out of context to say something totally different from what you intended. The same happens at times with those who read the Bible. You may need to dig into the text and the context to recognize

what the writer intended to say.

### THE CONTEXT OF THE SPECIFIC MESSAGE (Immediate Context)

It is important to follow the line of thought of the passage or section of the Bible. It may be helpful to read the passages or chapters before and after to capture the event and teaching or to understand the issues the writer was addressing. You may want to put yourself in the shoes

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**Some passages are descriptive. Other passages are prescriptive**

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(sandals?) of those who first heard this message. Understand also that some passages are “descriptive” and are merely telling you what happened. Other passages are “prescriptive” and are telling you it applies to how we are to live today. Context will help

determine that.



## THE CONTEXT OF THE WHOLE BIBLE (Wider Context)

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**The whole Bible is  
the context for each  
part of its message**

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Since there is a unity in its whole message, the entire Bible is the larger context for any particular part of it. It is important to see how the passage or story fits into the overall story and main teachings of the Bible. The Bible is

leading people to acknowledge why we need a Savior and to recognize how Jesus has saved us. Jesus said, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me" (Jn 5:39).

### C. LET SCRIPTURE INTERPRET SCRIPTURE

Sometimes it seems as though one section or story contradicts another. Scripture alone is the interpreter of what it says and the sole authority for what we believe. Here is the principle: "Let Scripture interpret Scripture." Let God tell you what he meant.

Many times what is difficult is explained more clearly in a another part of

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**Let clearer passages  
interpret more  
difficult ones**

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scripture. Give it time to become clear as you learn from other areas of the Bible. Don't expect to resolve every mystery. Instead, let the clearer passages of Scripture interpret more difficult one. The Bible won't contradict itself.

Still don't understand? You have some additional options

- a. **Wait until it becomes clear to you.** Like a child going to school, our understanding continues to grow and build on what we already learned. Be patient.
- b. **Ask someone you trust.** Is there a more informed student of Scripture or group you can ask for help?
- c. **Find a good commentary.** You may also want to turn to some trustworthy authors. Consider a good commentary. Ask which may be best for you.

Above all, pray that the Holy Spirit would lead you to appreciate what he is accomplishing through his Word in your life.





# How to Read Your Bible



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