



GrowN
Week 4: THE Path of GrowN – The Bible
2 Peter 3:17-18
October 4th, 2023

9/13 th - The WHY(God's Roles)	(Sp. Disciplines -j 8 weeks)	11/8 th -
9/20 th - The Payback(P.B.A. Prodigal. God's Grace means..)	10/4 th -	11/15 th -
9/27 th - The Power in Community	10/11 th -	11/22 nd -
THE Path of GrowN	10/18 th -	11/29 th - ADVENT
	10/25 th -	12/6 th - WNC Tmas Party?
	11/1 st -	12/ 13 th - Family Worship

[Week ? = Understanding the Kingdom of God????]

Series Resources: How People Grow by Cloud/Townsend and Cloud, H., & Townsend, J. (2009). [How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals About Personal Growth](#). Zondervan. Celebration of Discipline by Richard Foster

Week 2: Bailey, K. E. (2005). [The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants](#) (Second Edition, pp. 42-44). IVP Books.

Handouts:
 Week 1 – God’s Roles Chart. Week 2 – Community.

GrowN Concept #1: Quadrant Growth

Luke 2:52 HCSB *And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.*

Jesus grew: Intellectually ● Physically ● Spiritually ● Socially

GrowN Concept #2: The Inheritance of Reconciliation

The Long-term Goal of GrowN: **2 Corinthians 5:18-21. NLT**

*¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to Himself through Christ. And **God has given us this task of reconciling people to Him.** ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

YES: Reconciling = Living your Life OUTLOUD with others so they may see Jesus in action.

NO: Reconciling ≠ You are going to Hell if you don't accept Jesus. Stop SINNING! Never saying anything. God gives you the abundant life – including lots of \$\$\$ - here on earth.

THE Payback: I have earned this, God ↔ God cannot love me because...I have sinned so...

GrowN Concept #3: God is FOR me – There is no “God cannot love me because...”

Romans 8:31-32

*What then are we to say about these things?^(C) **If God is for us, who is against us?^(D)***

³² He did not even spare His own Son^(E) but offered Him up for us all;^(F)

how will He not also with Him grant us everything? HCSB

GrowN Concept #4: God will PROVIDE for me - I do not have to EARN His love.

Matthew 6:33 (25 – don't worry about your life)

*But **seek first the kingdom of God^(A)** and His righteousness,^(B) and all these things will be **provided** for you.^(C)*

GrowN Concept #5: THE Power in Community

I. The Power of Relationships in Community II. The Power of Acceptance in Community III. The Power of Forgiveness in Community

[Disciplines: C&T – The Bible. Role of Suffering&Grief. Righteousness. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin&Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. FOSTER – Meditation. Prayer. Fasting. Study. Simplicity. Solitude. Submission. Service. Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

How People Grow – Not a therapy book but a book on the sanctification process. Does not discount therapy (it is being written by two of them!) but ADDS the sanctification process to the therapeutical model.

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ANNC FAMILY CURRICULUM DONATIONS

2 Peter 3:18

*¹⁷ Therefore, dear friends, since you know this in advance, be on your guard,^(A) so that you are not led away by the error of lawless people and fall from your own stability.¹⁸ **But grow in the grace and knowledge^(A) of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity.^{(a)(B)} Amen.^(b) HCSB***

With our FIVE GrowN concepts as a foundation:

- #1. Quadrant Growth.
- #2. Becoming a Reconciler.
- #3. Knowing God is for me.
- #4. Knowing God will provide for me.
- #5. Understanding the POWER in Community.

NOW WHAT do we actually DO?

[**Disciplines: C&T – The Bible.** Role of Suffering&Grief. Righteousness. Discipline. Spiritual Poverty. Obedience. Sin&Temptation. Truth. Activity. Time. **FOSTER** – Meditation. Prayer. Fasting. **Study.** Simplicity. Solitude. Submission. Service. Confession. Worship. Guidance. Celebration.]

ASK:

How do I interact with PEOPLE?

Interact: VERB

ACT in such a way as to have an effect on another; act reciprocally.

Interrelate; interchange; interconnect: link; relate to; depend on; associate with; correspond to; react to; work alongside of

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I ^(a)beseech^(a) you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies ^(a)a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, *which is* your ^(b)reasonable service. ² And ^(c)do not be conformed to this world, **but ^(d)be transformed by the renewing of your mind,** that you may ^(e)prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

CEB. So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. ² Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature. **NLT.** And so, dear brothers and sisters,^(a) I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.^(b) ² Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

May I suggest there will be:

- Interaction
- Transformational proof

As we proceed into GrowN.

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Meet The Bible (HCSB)

1. The Bible is perfect.

Psalm 18:30

*God—His way is perfect;^(A) the word of the Lord is pure.^(B)
He is a shield to all who take refuge in Him.^(C)*

Psalm 19:7

*⁷ The instruction of the Lord is perfect, renewing one's life;^(A)
the testimony of the Lord is trustworthy, making the inexperienced wise.^(B)*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

2. The Bible is true and can be trusted.

Psalm 33:4 *For the word of the Lord is right, and all His work is trustworthy.^(A)*

Psalm 119:138 *The decrees You issue are righteous and altogether trustworthy.*

Isaiah 55:11

*so My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do.*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

3. The Bible will last forever

Psalm 119:89 *Lord, Your word is forever;^(A) it is firmly fixed in heaven.*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

4. The Bible gives us wisdom

Psalm 119:99 *I have more insight than all my teachers because Your decrees are my meditation.*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

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5. The Bible reveals the truth

Acts 18:28 *For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.*

I.E.: John 5:19 (Jesus as a dependent...not independent, as in a reigning king.)

¹⁹ Then Jesus replied, "I assure you: The Son is not able to do anything on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father^[a] does, the Son also does these things in the same way.

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

6. The Bible is Holy

Romans 1:1-2

Paul, a slave of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle^[a] and singled out^[b] for God's good news^[c]— ² which He promised long ago^[d] through His prophets^[e] in the Holy Scriptures—

If this be true, how does this affect my life? [Holy =

7. God's Holy Spirit helps us understand the Bible

1 Corinthians 2:12–16

¹² Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God. ¹³ We also speak these things, not in words^[a] taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual things to spiritual people.^[b] ¹⁴ But the unbeliever^[c] does not welcome what comes from God's Spirit, because it is foolishness to him; he is not able to understand it since it is evaluated^[d] spiritually. ¹⁵ The spiritual person, however, can evaluate^[e] everything, yet he himself cannot be evaluated^[f] by anyone.

¹⁶ *For who has known the Lord's mind, that he may instruct Him?^[g] But we have the mind of Christ.^[h]*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

8. The Bible is authoritative

Galatians 3:10

¹⁰ *For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse,^[a] because it is written:^[b] Everyone who does not continue doing everything written in the book of the law is cursed.^[c] ¹¹ Now it is clear that no one is justified before God by the law, because the righteous will live^[d] by faith.^[e]*

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10b

[Deuteronomy 27:26 HCSB](#)

'Anyone who does not put the words of this law into practice is cursed.' And all the people will...

[Romans 4:15 HCSB](#)

For the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.

11

[Habakkuk 2:4 HCSB](#)

Look, his ego is inflated; he is without integrity. But the righteous one will live by his faith.

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

9. The Bible is a Christian's spiritual weapon.

Ephesians 6:17

Take the helmet^(A) of salvation, and the sword^(B) of the Spirit,^(C) which is God's word.

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

10. The Bible is inspired by God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

*¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God^(A) and is profitable for **teaching**, for **rebuking**, for **correcting**, for **training in righteousness**, ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.^(B)*

a.) Teaching =

John 16:12-15 ¹² "I still have many things to tell you, but you can't bear them now.^(A) ¹³ When the Spirit of truth^(B) comes, He will guide you into all the truth.^(C) For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ Everything the Father^(D) has is Mine.^(E) This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you.^(F)

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

b.) Rebuking =

2 Cor. 6:11-13

We have spoken openly^(A) to you, Corinthians; our heart has been opened wide. ¹² You are not limited by us, but you are limited by your own affections. ¹³ I speak as to my children. As a proper response, you should also be open to us.

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Luke 18:10-14 ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple complex to pray,^(a) one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee took his stand^{(a)(b)} and was praying like this: 'God, I thank You that I'm not like other people^(a) —greedy,^(c) unrighteous,^(d) adulterers,^(e) or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast^(f) twice a week; I give a tenth^{(g)(h)} of everything I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector, standing far off,⁽ⁱ⁾ would not even raise his eyes to heaven^(j) but kept striking his chest^{(k)(l)} and saying, 'God, turn Your wrath from me^{(m)(n)}—a sinner!'^(o) ¹⁴ I tell you, this one went down to his house justified^(p) rather than the other; because everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted."^(q)

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

c.) Correcting =

1 Corinthians 5:1-13

It is widely reported that there is sexual immorality^(a) among you, and the kind of sexual immorality that is not even tolerated^(b) among the Gentiles^(c)—a man is living with his father's wife.^(d) ² And you are inflated with pride, instead of filled with grief^(e) so that he who has committed this act might be removed from your congregation. ³ For though I am absent in body but present in spirit,^(f) I have already decided about the one who has done this thing as though I were present. ⁴ When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus with my spirit and with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ turn that one over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,^(g) so that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord.^(h)

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Don't you know that a little yeast⁽ⁱ⁾ permeates the whole batch of dough?^(j) ⁷ Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch. You are indeed unleavened, for Christ our Passover^(k) has been sacrificed.^(l) ⁸ Therefore, let us observe the feast, not with old yeast or with the yeast of malice and evil^(m) but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Church Discipline

⁹ I wrote to you in a letter not to associate⁽ⁿ⁾ with sexually immoral people.^(o) ¹⁰ I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy^(p) and swindlers^(q) or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world.^(r) ¹¹ But now I am writing^(s) you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer^{(t)(u)} who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard^(v) or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. ¹² For what business is it of mine to judge^(w) outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? ¹³ But God judges outsiders. Put away the evil person from among yourselves.^{(x)(y)}

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

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d.) Training in Righteousness =

Psalm 34:14 *Turn away from evil and do what is good;^(a)
seek peace and pursue it*

Proverbs 2:2 *listening closely^(a) to wisdom
and directing your heart to understanding;*

- If I am listening closely...what am I NOT doing?

Hebrews 6:1-2

Therefore, leaving the elementary message about the Messiah, let us go on to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God,^(a)² teaching about ritual washings,^(a) laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment.

Psalm 119:52 *Lord, I remember Your judgments from long ago and find comfort.*

1 Samuel 13:14 *but now your reign will not endure.^(a) The Lord has found a man loyal to Him,^(a)^(b) and the Lord has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not done what the Lord commanded."*

Romans 15:4

For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction,^(a) so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.

Matthew 4:1-11 – The Temptation of Christ

Then^(a) Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil.^(b) ² After He had fasted 40 days and 40 nights,^(c) He was hungry. ³ Then the tempter approached Him and said, "If You are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."^(d)

*⁴ But He answered, "It is written:
Man must not live on bread alone
but on every word that comes
from the mouth of God."^(e)^(f)*

⁵ Then the Devil took Him to the holy city,^(g) had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple,^(h) ⁶ and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written:

*He will give His angels⁽ⁱ⁾ orders concerning you,
and they will support you with their hands
so that you will not strike
your foot against a stone."^(j)^(k)*

⁷ Jesus told him, "It is also written: Do not test the Lord your God."^(l)^(m)

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⁸ Again, the Devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ And he said to Him, "I will give You all these things if You will fall down and worship me."^(a)

¹⁰ Then Jesus told him, "Go away,^(b) Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God, and serve only^(c) Him."^(d)

¹¹ Then the Devil left Him, and immediately angels came and began to serve Him.^(e)

Ephesians 6:11-17

¹¹ Put on^(a) the full armor^(b) of God so that you can stand against the tactics^(c) of the Devil. ¹² For our battle is not against flesh^(d) and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities,^(e) against the world powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil^(f) in the heavens.^(g) ¹³ This is why you must take up the full armor^(h) of God, so that you may be able to resist⁽ⁱ⁾ in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand. ¹⁴ Stand,^(j) therefore,

with truth^(k) like a belt around your waist, righteousness^(l) like armor on your chest,^(m)

¹⁵ and your feet sandaled with readiness for the gospel of peace.⁽ⁿ⁾

¹⁶ In every situation take the shield^(o) of faith,^(p) and with it you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.^(q)

¹⁷ Take the helmet^(r) of salvation, and the sword^(s) of the Spirit,^(t) which is God's word.

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

11. The Bible judges our life.

Hebrews 4:12

¹² For the word of God is living and effective^(a) and sharper than any double-edged sword,^(b) penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart.

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

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12. The Bible helps us grow spiritually.

1 Peter 2:1-5

So rid yourselves of^(a) all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.^(b) ² Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk,^(c) so that you may grow by it for your salvation,^(d) ³ since you have tasted^(e) that the Lord is good.^(f) ⁴ Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God— ⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God^(g) through Jesus Christ.

Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). [*Holy Bible: New Living Translation*](#). Tyndale House Publishers.

Acts 17:11 *The people here were more open-minded than those in Thessalonica, since they welcomed the message with eagerness and examined the Scriptures^(a) daily to see if these things were so.*

If this be true, how does this affect my life?

When we expose ourselves to the pages of the Bible, WHAT happens? [Supernatural] Reading the Bible is one of the main ways God speaks to our lives and hearts.

13. The Bible points to God as the Source(anchor) of ALL Growth

Acts 17:28

²⁸ For in Him we live and move and exist[HAVE OUR BEING], as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.

*²⁸ for ^(A)in Him we live and move and have our being, ^(B)as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'**NKJV***

Daniel 5:23

*²³ Instead, you have exalted yourself against the Lord of heaven. The vessels from His house were brought to you, and as you and your nobles, wives, and concubines drank wine from them,^(a) you praised the gods made of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, which do not see or hear or understand.^(b) **But you have not glorified the God who holds your life-breath in His hand and who controls the whole course of your life.** (1 Corinthians 4:7)*

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ASK:

How do I interact with PEOPLE?

Interact: VERB

1. **ACT in such a way as to have an effect on another;** act reciprocally.

Interrelate; interchange; interconnect: link; relate to; depend on; associate with; correspond to;
react to; work alongside of

How do I interact with SCRIPTURE?

Interact: VERB

2. **ACT in such a way as to have an effect on another;** act reciprocally.

Interrelate; interchange; interconnect: link; relate to; depend on; associate with; correspond to;
react to; work alongside of

What is my current relationship with the Bible?

- How often do I read it?
- How often do I listen to it?
- How often do study it?
- How often to do I Meditate on it?
- How often do I memorize it?

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Titus 1:1-2

Paul,^(A) a slave of God^(B) and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to build up^(C) the faith of God's elect^(D) and their knowledge of the truth^(E) that leads^(F) to godliness,^(G) ² in the hope of eternal life^(H) that God, who cannot lie,^(I) promised before time began.^(J)

READ Psalm 119 in one seating.

Do Biblical principles work even when we do not know we are using them?

Confession. Forgiveness. WHAT ELSE?

Sanctification (being progressively set apart for God's use): **Romans 6:19**

I am using a human analogy^(A) because of the weakness of your flesh.^(B) For just as you offered the parts^(C) of yourselves as slaves to moral impurity, and to greater and greater lawlessness, so now offer them as slaves to righteousness, which results in sanctification.

Transformation (being changed from the inside out): **Romans 12:1-2**

Therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, I urge you^(A) to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,^(B) holy and pleasing to God; this is your spiritual worship.^(C) ² Do not be conformed^(D) to this age,^(E) but be transformed by the renewing of your mind,^(F) so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will^(G) of God.

GrowN (maturing spiritually): **1 Peter 2:1-5**

So rid yourselves of^(A) all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander.^(B) ² Like newborn infants, desire the pure spiritual milk,^(C) so that you may grow by it for your salvation,^(D) ³ since you have tasted^(E) that the Lord is good.^(F) ⁴ Coming to Him, a living stone—rejected by men but chosen and valuable to God—⁵ you yourselves, as living stones, are being built into a spiritual house for a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God^(G) through Jesus Christ.

Becoming who we have been created to be: **2 Cor. 3:18**

We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at^(A) the glory of the Lord^(B) and are being transformed^(C) into the same image^(D) from glory to glory,^(E) this is from the Lord who is the Spirit.^(F)

1. Grow Equation:

Relationship with God & Others – **Eccl. 4:9-12**

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Truth – **Ephesians 4:15**

Time – **Mark 4:26-29**

2. The Tasks

Hebrews 12:11 (being trained by scripture)

Submission and Obedience to God: **Romans 12:1**

Need and Dependency: **Prov. 3:5-6**

Responsibility and Ownership – **Luke 9:23**

Forgiveness – **Matt 6:12-15**

Bible study

Prayer

3. The Resources

God.

Creation (Food. Work. Nature.

People – 1 Peter 4:10

The BIBLE points to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ: **John 5:39**

Biblical Psychology? Is it real?

Challenge: Memorize a verse during the rest of GrowN series. Write in your Prayer Ring.

ASK: How do you share Scripture?

Acts 17:

²⁸ for [Ⓜ]in Him we live and move and have our being, [Ⓜ]as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' ²⁹ Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, [Ⓜ]we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. ³⁰ Truly, [Ⓜ]these times of ignorance God overlooked, but [Ⓜ]now commands all men everywhere to repent, ³¹ because He has appointed a day on which [Ⓜ]He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by [Ⓜ]raising Him from the dead."

NOTES:

The Most Influential Book in History

Because followers of Jesus know the power of the Bible, they have taken God's Word to every civilization to preach the message "Jesus Saves." Immediately after getting people to know Jesus, missionaries have attempted

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to translate the Bible into the language of the people so the people could hear sermons and lessons in their own language and dialect. Then missionaries taught the people to read so they could read the message of the Bible for themselves.

This is a deep passion of the Christian church today as missionaries continue to translate the Bible into every foreign language in the civilized world. There remain approximately a thousand languages to go, and today there are about 200 million (uncivilized) people who do not have the Bible in their own language.

When the Bible has been translated into the language of uncivilized tribes, individuals become converted to Christianity and slowly the tribe becomes civilized. Missionaries from organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators have gone into heathen tribes, learned their language and reduced it into letters, words and sentences. Then they have translated the Bible into the language of the people and taught them to read the Bible. When member after member of a heathen tribe has heard the Bible and made it a part of their life, they want a better life. This is technically called *redemption and lift*: When God redeems people, He lifts them to a higher level of civilization. Eventually the Bible civilizes a tribe so that they live on a higher level than before. Wherever the Bible goes, culture and civilization shortly follow.

Some of the greatest leaders in the world have appreciated the influence of the Bible. John Adams wrote an entry in his diary on February 22, 1756:

Suppose a nation in some distant region should take the Bible for their only law book, and every member should regulate his conduct by the precepts there contained! Every member would be obliged in conscience to temperance, frugality and industry: to justice, kindness and charity towards his fellow men: and to piety, love and reverence toward Almighty God.... What a Eutopia, what a Paradise would this region be.

The Bible has been one of the greatest motivators to the good of those who believe its contents. Christian leaders have lived by the Bible, taught the Bible and given their lives to master the Bible. No other religion has produced as many books to explain itself, or more beautiful paintings and works of art to express the message of the Bible, or more music to reflect the emotions and message of God's Word. All that influence comes from the message of the Bible.

The Greatness of the Bible

The Bible is a great book because it tells the truth about the sinfulness of man. It teaches that no matter how good anyone is outwardly, he is a sinner and falls short of God's standards. At the end of his life, the apostle Paul could testify to his own sinfulness: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1 Tim. 1:15).

The Bible never flinches to tell the bad news about good men. It tells of how Abraham, the man of faith, couldn't trust God, so he lied. It tells how David, a man after God's own heart, committed adultery with Bathsheba. It tells how Peter, the bold fisherman, denied Jesus three times and cursed. The list could go on because the Bible tells the truth about the faults of God's leaders. Yet, the average reader doesn't read about the sin of Noah—getting drunk—and then go out to do the same. Nor do they read about Solomon's many wives and follow his example. No, the Bible is a truthful book that looks beyond the sins of its people to the truth it upholds (see Gen. 9:20–23; 20; 2 Sam. 11; 1 Kings 11; Mark 14:16–72).

Perhaps the greatest influence of the Bible is its convicting, convincing, converting power to all who honestly accept its message and believe in Jesus Christ. I was a normal high school student who cussed as much as the average guy. I told lies to keep out of trouble. In my heart I fully admitted that I lied, because normal people can't lie to themselves. I had immoral thoughts and a vicious temper. Yet the Bible *convicted* me of my sin, and *convinced* me to seek Jesus Christ as Savior, and *converted* me when I asked Jesus to come into my heart.

What were the results of my conversion? God transformed my mouth; I no longer spoke curses. I began memorizing Scripture that changed my desires about sin, and I had an overwhelming desire to serve God.

Finally, the Bible is a story of present hope for those who are discouraged, despondent or have no purpose in life. The Bible tells that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. The Bible is the story of the future when Christ will return to rapture His people to be with Him. When we die, our bodies will be resurrected, and we will live with God for all eternity (see chapter 11 for the details).

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Just as you can't have Christianity without a person—without Jesus Christ—so you can't have Christianity without a book—the Bible. What is right with the church? The Bible is right.¹

Why is understanding the Bible important?

Understanding the Bible is important because the Bible is God's Word. When we open the Bible, we read God's message to us. What could be more important than understanding what the Creator of the universe has to say? We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason a man seeks to understand a love letter from his sweetheart. God loves us and desires to restore our relationship with Him (Matthew 23:37). God communicates His love to us in the Bible (John 3:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:10).

We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason a soldier seeks to understand a dispatch from his commander. Obeying God's commands brings honor to Him and guides us in the way of life (Psalm 119). Those commands are found in the Bible (John 14:15).

We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason a mechanic seeks to understand a repair manual. Things go wrong in this world, and the Bible not only diagnoses the problem (sin) but also points out the solution (faith in Christ). "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason a driver seeks to understand traffic signals. The Bible gives us guidance through life, showing us the road of safety and wisdom (Psalm 119:11, 105).

We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason someone in the path of a storm seeks to understand the weather report. The Bible predicts what the end times will be like, sounding a clear warning of impending judgment (Matthew 24–25) and how to avoid it (Romans 8:1).

We seek understanding of the Bible for the same reason an avid reader seeks to understand his favorite author's books. The Bible reveals to us the person and glory of God, as expressed in His Son, Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18). The more we read and understand the Bible, the more intimately we know the Author.

As Philip was traveling to Gaza, the Holy Spirit led him to a man who was reading a portion of Isaiah. Philip approached the man, saw what he was reading, and asked this very important question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" (Acts 8:30). Philip knew that *understanding* was the starting point for faith. Without understanding the Bible, we cannot apply it, obey it, or believe it.²

What is the difference between exegesis and eisegesis?

Exegesis and eisegesis are two conflicting approaches in Bible study. Exegesis is the exposition or explanation of a text based on a careful, objective analysis. The word exegesis literally means "to lead out of." That means that the interpreter is led to his conclusions by following the text.

The opposite approach to Scripture is eisegesis, which is the interpretation of a passage based on a subjective, non-analytical reading. The word eisegesis literally means "to lead into," which means the interpreter injects his own ideas into the text, making it mean whatever he wants.

Obviously, only exegesis does justice to the text. Eisegesis is a mishandling of the text and often leads to a misinterpretation. Exegesis is concerned with discovering the true meaning of the text, respecting its grammar, syntax, and setting. Eisegesis is concerned only with making a point, even at the expense of the meaning of words. Second Timothy 2:15 commands us to use exegetical methods: "Present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." An honest student of the Bible will be an exegete, allowing the text to speak for itself. Eisegesis easily lends itself to error, as the would-be interpreter attempts to align the text with his own preconceived notions. Exegesis allows us to agree with the Bible; eisegesis seeks to force the Bible to agree with us.

The process of exegesis involves 1) observation: what does the passage say? 2) interpretation: what does the passage mean? 3) correlation: how does the passage relate to the rest of the Bible? and 4) application: how should this passage affect my life?

Eisegesis, on the other hand, involves 1) imagination: what idea do I want to present? 2) exploration: what Scripture passage seems to fit with my idea? and 3) application: what does my idea mean? Notice that, in

¹ Towns, E. L. (2009). [*What's Right with the Church: A Manifesto of Hope*](#) (pp. 36–39). Regal; Gospel Light.

² Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*](#). Logos Bible Software.

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eisegesis, there is no examination of the words of the text or their relationship to each other, no cross-referencing with related passages, and no real desire to understand the actual meaning. Scripture serves only as a prop to the interpreter's idea.

To illustrate, let's use both approaches in the treatment of one passage:

2 Chronicles 27:1–2
"Jotham was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years.... He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, just as his father Uzziah had done, but unlike him he did not enter the temple of the LORD."

EISEGESIS

First, the interpreter decides on a topic. Today, it's "The Importance of Church Attendance." The interpreter reads 2 Chronicles 27:1–2 and sees that King Jotham was a good king, just like his father Uzziah had been, except for one thing: he didn't go to the temple! This passage seems to fit his idea, so he uses it. The resulting sermon deals with the need for passing on godly values from one generation to the next. Just because King Uzziah went to the temple every week didn't mean that his son would continue the practice. In the same way, many young people today tragically turn from their parents' training, and church attendance drops off. The sermon ends with a question: "How many blessings did Jotham fail to receive, simply because he neglected church?"

Certainly, there is nothing wrong with preaching about church attendance or the transmission of values. And a cursory reading of 2 Chronicles 27:1–2 seems to support that passage as an apt illustration. However, the above interpretation is totally wrong. For Jotham not to go to the temple was not wrong; in fact, it was very good, as the proper approach to the passage will show.

EXEGESIS

First, the interpreter reads the passage and, to fully understand the context, he reads the histories of both Uzziah and Jotham (2 Chronicles 26–27; 2 Kings 15:1–6, 32–38). In his observation, he discovers that King Uzziah was a good king who nevertheless disobeyed the Lord when he went to the temple and offered incense on the altar—something only a priest had the right to do (2 Chronicles 26:16–20). Uzziah's pride and his contamination of the temple resulted in his having "leprosy until the day he died" (2 Chronicles 26:21).

Needing to know why Uzziah spent the rest of his life in isolation, the interpreter studies Leviticus 13:46 and does some research on leprosy. Then he compares the use of illness as a punishment in other passages, such as 2 Kings 5:27; 2 Chronicles 16:12; and 21:12–15.

By this time, the exegete understands something important: when the passage says Jotham "did not enter the temple of the LORD," it means he did not repeat his father's mistake. Uzziah had proudly usurped the priest's office; Jotham was more obedient.

The resulting sermon might deal with the Lord's discipline of His children, with the blessing of total obedience, or with our need to learn from the mistakes of the past rather than repeat them.

Of course, exegesis takes more time than eisegesis. But if we are to be those unashamed workmen "who correctly handle the word of truth," then we must take the time to truly understand the text. Exegesis is the only way.³

THE BIBLE FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

Doubtless the kind of question most frequently asked by Christians concerns biblical teaching about some current issue or problem. That kind of question reflects two extremely critical facts. (1) Nearly all Christians regard the Bible as the only sufficient and authoritative guide for Christian living. (2) Most Christians have some difficulty understanding exactly *how* the Bible can, or should, serve as guide.

The Bible as a Book for Living

The purpose of the Bible as guide for Christian living can be seen in the nature of the Bible itself. Its distinctiveness lies first in the remarkable way it came into being. It grew piecemeal (Heb 1:1) as God revealed Himself in specific times and cultural situations. He spoke to farmers and business people, poor and wealthy people, philosophers, fishermen, and kings. He addressed people in times of prosperity and adversity, war and peace, obedience and

³ Got Questions Ministries. (2002–2013). [*Got Questions? Bible Questions Answered*](#). Logos Bible Software.

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rejection. He came to Eastern cultures and Western. He involved Himself in every category of human need, longing, and failure.

The Bible thus possesses authority as the expression of God's will for human life. It is like the authority of loving parents actively involved in the lives of their children, not of a dictator issuing orders without regard for their effect. The message of the Bible is in touch with the most meaningful aspects of life—marriage and family; joy and love; sorrow and death; right living, thinking, and feeling.

Not only in terms of origin and scope but also in terms of form, the Bible shows itself to be a book for living. The Bible betrays almost no interest in itself merely as literature, although it is literature of the first order. Modern efforts to read, interpret, and appreciate the Bible only as great literature distort the true purpose of Scripture, which is to engender faith and obedience.

What is more, the message of the Bible is intended for all persons, not just the learned. The church of the Middle Ages tended to obscure this common appeal of the Bible by restricting its use to clergy. The Reformers of the sixteenth century helped to restore Scripture to common life by emphasizing (1) the authority of Scripture and (2) its intelligibility to all believers. As a result, and thanks to technological advances, the Bible is more accessible now to more people than at any time in history.

Indeed, it is a tragic irony of the modern era that biblical literacy has not kept pace with biblical accessibility. Christians may choose from some three dozen English translations; many Christians own more than one. Yet the evidence suggests that actual use of the Bible is declining and that many Christians are woefully unacquainted with it. While Medieval Christians were separated from the Bible by ecclesiastical authority, many modern Christians are separated by apathy.

Herein lies the first and most vital principle about the Bible for Christian living. In order to guide faith and life, the Bible must be read and used. The most potent enemy of Christian life has always been neglect of Scripture.

Granted that the Bible is a book for living, a more serious problem arises. *How* does the Bible function as a guide for life?

Such a question really has two answers. One concerns the *reader*—attitude, personality, background, and the like. The other concerns the *Bible* itself—its applicability, scope, authority, and so forth. The Bible therefore functions as guide only when it is both approached and understood responsibly.

A Responsible Approach to the Bible

Jesus once warned certain Jewish leaders that their use of the Scriptures was invalid since these bore testimony of the Christ they were unwilling to acknowledge (John 5:39–40). Such distortions of the Bible through improper motives have continued for centuries.

Personal Faith and Devotion. As Nicodemus learned (John 3:1–12), the Bible is first a book of faith rather than of learning. For Nicodemus and his colleagues among the Pharisees, Scripture was essentially philosophy. But Jesus made clear to him that their message was meant for belief, obedience, and transformation, not for academic discussion.

Particularly since the Middle Ages, the *speculative* and *theological* use of the Bible has tended to overshadow the *pastoral* and *devotional*. This has led to increasing emphasis on study as an end in itself and sometimes to a strict division between study and devotion. No such divisions or emphases appear in the Bible itself. Everywhere the biblical testimony is that persons must approach God's Word in order to hear and obey God (see Ps 119).

In this seminary class the professor suggests several biblical reference books to his students to aid them in their Bible study.

Those who approach the Bible in a spirit of personal devotion are distinguished in several ways. First, they respect the authority of Scripture. They receive it as morally binding. They acknowledge the implications of biblical teaching for thought and behavior. They grasp the seriousness of the Bible. They do not trivialize it, nor do they relegate it to the world of scholars.

Second, they approach the Bible to respond, to learn, and to act on the Word, not simply to hear it (Jas 1:22–25). They involve themselves actively in the Scripture so that it becomes personally significant.

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Third, they regard the Bible as a personal message from God for the purpose of leading one into a deeply devoted relationship with Him. The Bible is less like a “how-to” manual than a letter. It testifies of Christ and leads persons to Him (John 5:39–40).

Personal Honesty and Self-examination. No one ever approaches a situation with total openness. The mind is never completely blank. A person brings to every single experience a long history; a set of attitudes; and a variety of fears, hopes, habits, and perspectives.

A reverent approach to Scripture demands an honest recognition of these psychological forces. Indeed, this is part of the Bible’s own purpose: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12). It has been rightly said that when one opens the Bible honestly and asks what it is, the question is reversed: The Bible asks who the reader is!

As a guide for living, the Bible cannot be used to rationalize disobedience. Nor can only part of Scripture be permitted to speak. Nor must it be chosen to speak only in selected instances. An honest approach to the Bible implies a recognition of biases and a willingness to receive scriptural judgment from the whole of Scripture for the whole of life.

When personal bias leads to dishonest, inaccurate, or selective use of the Bible, the consequences are predictably disastrous. Any number of cultic groups, for example, have appealed to Scripture to justify the gratification of desires for sex, money, or power. Even among orthodox Christians, Scripture has been used not to guide living but to exercise control (legalism) or excuse disobedience. Several influential Christian movements utilize the biblical materials in these distorted ways. The modern stress on psychological wholeness and self-realization, for example, has encouraged many believers to interpret the Bible as a self-help manual. The effect is often to de-emphasize self-sacrifice or even fundamental doctrine. In so-called “situation ethics,” to take another example, generic biblical principles such as “love” are said to replace the restrictive “rules” for proper behavior. Since love may require different responses from one situation to another, right behavior is relative.

Such approaches to Scripture are not necessarily dishonest. However, they do characteristically neglect, distort, or supplement portions of the Bible for the sake of a predetermined agenda. As guide for living, the Bible must be allowed to speak for itself.

Cultural Awareness. A person also comes to Scripture surrounded by an environment, a culture that has helped shape his or her life and that continues to do so. This culture-boundedness can affect the use of the Bible profoundly.

It can encourage neglect or skepticism of the Bible. Especially in modern society, the gap between “then” and “now” can seem intimidating. The Bible may appear irrelevant, out-of-fashion, or impossible to apply to contemporary needs. Scientifically minded people may be skeptical of the Bible’s nontechnical point of view or simply ignore the Bible in favor of “hard” data from research.

It can generate confusion or distortion. Biblical injunctions about extramarital sexual behavior, for instance, might seem hopelessly antiquated to a person in a culture that not only excuses but encourages pleasure. In Europe and America materialism is so pervasive that many Christians are inclined to equate economic well-being with Christianity. Even sincere believers may struggle to accept biblical mandates in areas where cultural norms differ radically.

It can lead to selective emphasis on certain doctrines or themes in Scripture to the neglect of others. Biblical concepts like suffering and servanthood, for example, nowadays attract very little attention. Liberation theology, one of the most potent movements in world Christianity, is another excellent example. Most liberation theologians advocate freedom from injustice along the lines of Marxist economic and political philosophy. They frequently draw on “liberation” themes in the Bible (such as the exodus) to support programs of dramatic social change.

In one of the most influential books ever written on the subject, theologian Richard Niebuhr argued that Christians have historically responded to culture in one of five ways (*Christ and Culture* [New York: Harper, 1951]). Some Christians have completely *renounced* their cultures (some monks, for example). Others have *identified with* their cultures (“all Americans are Christians”). Still others have claimed *dual citizenship*, in the kingdom of God and the kingdom of this world. A fourth way Niebuhr called “Christ above culture,” where the church exercises *authority over* culture and where those who serve the church live at a higher level than those who work in the secular arena. Finally, some Christians have advocated the *transformation of* culture.

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These categories show the complexity of living “in the world but not of the world” (John 17:14–16). Yet the Bible is meant to guide Christians into godly and responsible behavior within their culture. They must neither renounce nor accommodate. They must not allow culture to judge Scripture. Instead they must permit Scripture to confront and evaluate culture. Christians must realize that culture affects their perspective and then come to Scripture for direction in living within that culture.

A Responsible Understanding of the Bible

The second prerequisite for proper use of the Bible has to do with the nature and function of the Bible itself. What should Christians expect from the Bible? What kinds of help can it give and how much? The Bible’s testimony concerning itself suggests a threefold answer to these questions.

The Book of the Church. Second Peter 1:20 warns that Scripture is not a private affair. While personal Bible reading and devotion are certainly enjoined in Scripture, full understanding is often linked with corporate reading and explanation (Luke 10:26; Acts 8:28–32; Eph 3:4; Col 4:16). Moreover, the Holy Spirit is promised to the church to illumine Scripture (John 14:26; 16:13; 1 Thess 1:5).

Bible study has entered the computer age with the availability of a wide variety of computer software programs involving both Scripture text and reference material.

There are several important practical implications of this fact. First, Christians should not neglect the acquired wisdom of the church. For two millennia devoted Christians have grappled with the application of Scripture to the issues of living. Their conclusions provide a wealth of information for contemporary believers.

Second, Christian living is meant to be a shared experience. Scriptural discipleship assumes a church context of mutual encouragement, enlightenment, accountability, and discipline.

Third, God’s revelation is given for the life and mission of the church, the body of Christ (Eph 3:1–6). The counsel of God is not in the first place for personal benefit. It is for the good of all persons in and through the church.

Even a young child who does not understand all of the words of the Bible can be touched by God as he turns through its pages.

A Book of Growth. Jesus described His own words as “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63) because they are food that nourishes the spirit (John 6:54–58). Likewise in His encounter with Satan, Jesus rejected bread in favor of “every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). The writer of Hebrews likened mature doctrine to solid food (Heb 5:11–14).

The food metaphor suggests a process of incorporation resulting in growth and energy. The Bible functions for Christian living as food does for biological living.

This kind of metaphor helps to correct certain misconceptions about the power of the Bible for living. First, it is not symbolic power. A copy of the Bible lying on a desk may communicate something positive to visitors. Taking an oath on a Bible might lend solemnity to the ritual. But the symbolic use of the Bible cannot empower Christian living. Second, it is not magical power. Some Christian groups have attached great significance to the physical presence, reading, or recitation of the Bible. Third, it is not intellectual power. Bible study has no inherent value. It can produce interesting discussion or even insight with no life change whatsoever.

A Book of Wisdom. For many Christians the thorniest problem of all is the application of Scripture to specific situations. There are several explanations for this problem. (1) The Bible obviously fails to address every contemporary issue, such as smoking or genetic engineering. (2) Some commandments, like Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws, seem not to be applicable to modern society or to New Testament doctrine. (3) Some biblical injunctions seem to reflect cultural practice, not universal principles. A warm handshake might be the modern equivalent of greeting “with a holy kiss” (1 Cor 16:20), for example.

In Psalm 119 the psalmist called himself a “stranger on earth” who needs God’s commands (v. 19). The law is the standard for guiding his life (v. 8). It is a light for his path (v. 105), it preserves his life (vv. 25, 37, 40), and gives him understanding beyond his years (v. 101). Throughout this psalm and elsewhere the Bible is a book of wisdom

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that gives (1) understanding, that is, a proper *worldview* (cosmology) and (2) direction, that is, a proper *standard* (ethics).

Positively, immersion in the Bible enables Christians to think in a Christian manner (2 Pet 3:1). The doctrine of creation, for example, demands a high view of life. Negatively, it enables Christians to evaluate claims and values in light of revelation (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 5:21–22). The fall, for example, means that no person can be truly good and whole apart from redemption (Rom 3:21–23).

The Bible also gives direction. It urges believers to ground themselves in the truths that Scripture plainly teaches. The Psalms stress this repeatedly. Godly people are to “walk” in the law, “delight” in it, “mediate” upon it, “cling” to it, “live” it, and “keep” it. Proverbs has similar urgings to seek wisdom and keep the commandments (Prov 2:1–22 and many others). The New Testament constantly encourages attitudes and behavior that should characterize the Christian life (Phil 4:8). There are likewise warnings of attitudes and behaviors to be renounced (Gal 5:18–21).

Scripture also teaches discernment. Believers are to avoid conformity with the values of the age (Rom 12:1–2). They are to examine claims and values in light of revelation (Acts 17:11; 1 Thess 5:21–22). Discernment requires full understanding of an issue. Christians should therefore become fully informed in order to interpret cultural practices or values in biblical terms.

Above all, to be a guide for Christian living, the Bible must be a living book. Christians who come to it for answers to isolated questions will find it occasionally helpful. Those who immerse themselves in it will find it “a tree of life” (Prov 3:18).

THE BIBLE FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

Through the words they speak, the ministry they fulfill, and the symbols they create, Christians declare God to be worthy of honor, praise, and devotion. To declare God’s worthiness through word, deed, and symbol is the essence of worship.

Scripture plays an indispensable role in both private and public worship. Our response to God through worship presupposes God’s revelation of Himself through Scripture. When the Bible is used in worship, the Christian is made aware of God’s interaction with His people through the ages. The New Testament especially puts us into contact with the testimony of the original eyewitnesses to God’s historic revelation through Jesus Christ. Moreover, Scripture provides us with a sure word from God that stands apart from the vicissitudes of either excessive rationalism or emotionalism.

Worship and Scripture in the Old Testament

Christians are indebted to Jewish worship for many of its forms and patterns, especially in the importance attached to Scripture. Jewish worship centered primarily in two institutions: the temple and the synagogue. Each of these institutions had its own focus in worship, and each would significantly contribute elements to Christian worship. Both would continue to be important in Judaism until the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 by the Romans.

The central act of worship in the temple was the animal sacrifices. The elaborate ceremonies associated with the sacrifices and feast days provided for a dramatic and highly symbolic style of worship. Emphasis was placed on the dramatic enactment of symbolic rituals.

Along with sacrifices, temple worship also provided for prayers, singing of psalms, reading from the Law, and rabbinic teachings. In fact, the public reading of Scripture originated in the tabernacle and temple worship of the Jews (Deut 31:10–11). The great reform under King Josiah was a direct result of the rediscovery of the Law, and its immediate impact was a gathering of all people at God’s house to hear the public reading of Scripture (2 Kgs 23:2).

Temple worship was brought to an abrupt halt in 586 B.C. with the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians and the deportation of the Jews. Jewish worship was so closely tied to the temple that the Jews questioned their ability to worship God apart from that familiar environment. “How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?” (Ps 137:4), they lamented.

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As a result of their isolation from the sacrificial worship at the Jerusalem temple, a different kind of worship took preeminence. Location became less important, and a new appreciation for the use of Scriptures in public worship developed.

After the Jews returned from exile, the synagogue arose as a worship and teaching institution. The word *synagogue* is a Greek word. It appears often in the Greek version of the Old Testament to describe the place of Jewish assembly for worship and instruction. Synagogues allowed Jews scattered throughout the known world to worship apart from the temple at Jerusalem. Many Jews still made annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem, especially during Passover. But for most, worship routinely took place in the local synagogue.

During the time of our Lord synagogues were scattered throughout Palestine and the Hellenistic world. Even Jerusalem had several synagogues. Jesus and Paul customarily worshiped and taught in the synagogues (Luke 4:15–16; John 6:59; Acts 13:15).

Synagogue worship included praise, prayers, readings from the Law and Prophets, and exposition of Scripture. As the community gathered for worship at the synagogue, the ruler of the synagogue (chosen from among the elders) would select readers. Since synagogue worship was lay oriented, any qualified male Jew might read the Scriptures. Following the readings, an explanation or exposition of the meaning of the Scripture would be given. The exposition of the Word also was a task shared by the worshipers. The one who preached or explained the Scripture might even be a visitor. Such was the case with Paul (Acts 13:15). Jesus also fulfilled this task at his home town in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–30).

Not all Jews understood Hebrew. Thus, the readings would sometimes be translated into Aramaic, the common language of Palestine in Jesus' day. This practice goes back to the times of Ezra. After the Jews returned from exile, many no longer understood Hebrew. Thus Ezra read the Scripture but had to give "the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read" (Neh 8:8).

Two pieces of furniture in the synagogue indicates the importance of Scripture in synagogue worship. The *ark* was a repository for the scrolls. The *bema* was an elevated podium used for the reading of the texts. The use of a podium can be traced back to Ezra's reading of the Law from "a high wooden platform" (Neh 8:4).

Scripture passages from the Law read in synagogue worship were not always chosen at random. Jewish feasts required certain appointed readings. By the first century B.C. in Palestine, the Law was divided into about 155 sections with designated readings for each Sabbath. This permitted a triennial cycle of readings so that once every three years the Pentateuch would be read in its entirety in public worship.

During the time of Jesus there were no prescribed passages from the Prophets. The choice of Scripture was made by the priest or attendant, who took the scrolls from the ark and invited persons to read and comment on Scripture.

Worship and Scripture in the New Testament Church

The earliest church was established in Jerusalem. Its first members were Jewish Christians. Naturally, these first Christians brought to their Christianity many of the Jewish patterns of worship. The use of Scripture in worship was one such pattern.

The initial setting for worship among these first Christians was the Jewish temple (Luke 24:52–53; Acts 2:46; 3:1). In fact, many Jews must have thought of Christianity at first as a sect within Judaism, much like the Pharisees or Sadducees. These early Jewish Christians, however, sensed the need for occasions for separate worship apart from the temple. Therefore they held special meetings in homes for the apostles' teaching, fellowship, prayers, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46).

The church grew rapidly, expanding beyond Jerusalem. Both Jews and Gentiles were converted and baptized into the church. For the Jews outside Palestine, the chief mode of worship had always been the synagogue, not the temple. In fact, Paul commonly used the synagogue as a point of contact for the evangelization of non-Palestinian Jews (Acts 13:5; 14:1, 10, 17; 18:4, 19).

Jewish Christians finally had to break away from the synagogue. This break did not occur uniformly in time and place, and we know that in Paul's life he preached in both synagogues and house churches. Eventually, however, Jesus' warning that his followers would be put out of the synagogue came to pass (John 16:2).

Since the reading and exposition of Scripture was such an important part of synagogue worship, it is logical that Jewish Christians would make these elements a vital part of Christian worship. In addition to Scripture and preaching, the early church incorporated into their worship blessings, prayers, and the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7). All of these elements of worship were interpreted in light of the person and work of Christ.

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The use of Scripture in Christian worship is attested to in the Bible when Paul admonished Timothy to give himself to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4:13). The Scriptures initially used in worship were those of the Old Testament. Special attention was given to Psalms and hymns (Eph 5:14; Col 3:16; 1 Cor 14:26). Some of the hymns recorded in Revelation may have been sung by the early church (Rev 5:9; 5:12–13; 12:10–12; 19:1–2, 6–8.). It is logical to assume that these early Christians selected for their reading those portions of the Prophets and Psalms which found their fulfillment in Christ.

Even though the Gospels appear first in our New Testament, Paul's letters were written earlier. Eventually Paul's letters came to be accepted as Scripture, equal to the Old Testament.

We see the initial stages of this process at work even on the pages of the New Testament itself. Though Paul may not have known that all of his letters would become Holy Scripture, he nonetheless instructed churches to read his letters aloud to the brethren. Even before they were recognized as Scripture, they were held in high esteem (2 Pet 3:15–16) and were probably read in the context of worship (1 Thess 5:27; Col 4:16).

Worship and Scripture in the Early Church

One of the earliest documents detailing Christian worship in the period after the New Testament is the *Apology* of Justin Martyr (written about 150 AD). According to Justin, the gathering of the community of faith included the readings of "the memoirs of the apostles [the gospels] or the writings of the prophets."

The sermon or exposition of Scripture immediately followed. "After the reader has finished, the president in a discourse urges and invites [us] to the imitation of these noble things." Other elements included in this early order of worship were prayers, the Lord's Supper, the pronouncing of the Amen, and an offering for orphans, widows, prisoners, strangers, and "all those in need."

Clearly, Scripture played a vital function in the worship of the early church. As time went on, it seemed appropriate to the church to include readings from different parts of Scripture. These readings (known as *lections* or *lessons*) were numerous and diverse prior to the early fourth century. They usually included selections from the Old Testament, the Psalms, and the New Testament.

Later, it became common to have only three lections: the Old Testament, the Epistle, and the Gospel. Unlike the synagogue worship which used a descending order of importance in the readings (beginning with Law which the Jews considered most important, then the Psalms and Prophets), the church used an ascending order of importance beginning with the Old Testament, then the Epistle, and finally the Gospel. Special attention was given to the Gospels since they record the life and words of our Lord.

By the fifth century in the East (Constantinople) and the sixth century in the West (Rome) the number of lections had been reduced to two: the Gospel and the Epistle. In this period of transition the Psalms continued to be an important part of worship, but they were chanted or sung. Between the readings of the Epistle and Gospel a single cantor or soloist would chant Psalms from a raised pulpit called an *ambo*. Later, this practice would give way to the chanting of Psalms antiphonally (alternately) by two choirs.

Gestures related to Scripture and worship also became important in this period. Some of the gestures used in the early centuries of the church and still used today by some congregations include the so-called Gospel procession, kissing the Gospel, the congregation standing for the reading of the Gospel, and the Gospel as the climax of the three readings. Though these gestures are subject to misunderstanding and abuse, their original intention was to show respect and reverence for God's Word. Many evangelicals also stand for the reading of Scripture as a sign of reverence.

CHURCH CALENDAR

The church year calendar does not follow the secular calendar but begins with Advent four weeks before Christmas. This season is the time of expectation and preparation both for the first coming of Christ into this world but also for His second coming in glory.

The season of Christmas marks the incarnation of God into human flesh. It also points to the fundamental need that Christ also be born within every single human heart.

Christmas is followed by the season of Epiphany, which means *manifestation* in Greek. During this season Christ began to be manifested to the world for who He is, first to the shepherds and magi, then as the Son of God at His baptism, and finally as the Messiah beginning with the first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee and culminating on the mount of transfiguration.

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The manifestation of Christ, however, resulted in struggle and confrontation with the forces of darkness. So the next season, Lent, marks the beginning of the work of God in Christ to overcome the powers of evil both within the world and in ourselves. That great struggle reached its climactic encounter in Holy Week, where evil was vanquished by the death of Christ upon the cross. Though only one week long, the season of Holy Week and its central focus, the atoning death of Jesus, is magnified and extended throughout time and history, bringing the offer of salvation and redemption to the whole world.

The season of Easter immediately follows and celebrates the victory of Christ over death and the lifting of the whole creation into the kingdom of God. The themes and readings for Easter speak of this great triumph, which is promised us as a hope and fulfilled in Jesus Christ, who has gone before us.

The final season of the church year is marked by the ascension of Christ into heaven and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the church at Pentecost. This season is a new beginning because of the gift of life the risen Christ has given to the church for its task of missions and ministry to the whole world. The readings for the season following Pentecost emphasize the greater work of the Holy Spirit ministering to the world through the church. These seven seasons, therefore, provide an extremely rich and fruitful context for the daily reading of Scripture whereby the whole plan of salvation can be grasped in its fullness.

How did the church choose the passages of Scripture to be used in worship? At first readings were taken from the Bible itself. A particular book would be read in segments until its completion (called a *lectio continua*). Eventually, the church began to commemorate annually significant seasons of the year such as Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and the death of martyrs. As a result, texts were assigned to be read to coincide with these special events. Still later, the readings were gathered into single books called *lectionaries*.

Evangelical Christians have also used lectionaries, often without calling them such. The hymnal, the only liturgical book routinely used by evangelicals apart from the Bible, contains Scriptures for individual, unison, responsive, or antiphonal reading. Some hymnals relate Scripture to specific holy days and/or secular holidays, others index the passages topically.

College students in the country of Zambia (on the continent of Africa) engage in a time of Bible study and worship led by Southern Baptist missionaries Lonnie and Fran Turner.

In the quotation from Justin cited earlier, we saw that the reader of Scripture was not the same person as the worship leader. At first the church followed the pattern of the synagogue in using lay persons to read Scripture. The worship leader would appoint persons from the congregation whom he considered apt for reading.

In the manuscripts used by the early church, words were run together, and little punctuation was used. Thus not everyone would have the expertise to read in public. As a result, an order of readers or *lectors* developed who eventually formed a part of the clergy. Though the evolution of this order indicates how important Scripture reading was to worship in the church, the laity was effectively cut off from the Word of God.

Worship and Scripture in the Reformation

In the early church it is very likely that the service of the word (Acts 5:42) and the service of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:26) formed two parts of the same gathering. Scripture gives no indication that the church considered one more important than the other. After the close of the New Testament period, however, the Lord's Supper, not the reading and exposition of the Word of God, became the central part of the worship service.

By the time of the Reformation (sixteenth century), the Mass had become the center of Roman Catholic worship. The Mass focused principally on the "bloodless sacrifice of Christ." This sacrifice was enacted when the Priest said the words of consecration, transforming the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Since the Lord's Supper had taken on such a central position in the worship service, the service of the Word became peripheral.

The Word of God was not understood by ordinary people because the language used in worship was Latin and only the clergy were proficient in Latin. Moreover, the sermon fell into disuse as many clergy were biblically illiterate and unable to expound the Word of God. Thus, Scripture ceased to be a significant part of worship.

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Out of this setting God raised up reformers, three of whom were especially important: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli. Each argued in his own way for the centrality of the Word of God. “This is the sum of the matter: that everything shall be done so that the Word prevails” stated Luther. The priority of the Word would also lead to the priority of preaching. Both Luther and Calvin would magnify the exposition of the Word, and each wrote lengthy commentaries on Scripture.

In an attempt to reestablish the importance of the preaching of the Word of God, unfortunately some vital elements of worship practiced by the early church were lost or minimized. For example, the reading of Scripture tended to be a prelude for the sermon and not a separate part of worship. Calvin’s order of worship called for Scripture to be read immediately prior to the sermon.

Both Luther and Calvin believed the service of the Word should occur in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper. Even though the evidence indicates that the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper each time it gathered, the reformer Zwingli separated the two. He did so out of reaction to Roman Catholic abuses in the Mass, and because he considered the Lord’s Supper as a means of preaching. Many evangelical churches have traditionally followed the pattern established by Zwingli, celebrating the Lord’s Supper only quarterly.

One of the results of the Reformation was to make Scripture available to believers in their native tongue. In fact, the availability of Scripture in the vernacular was such a novelty that the six volumes of the 1539 English translation of the Bible had to be chained throughout the sanctuary lest it disappear. Moreover, the clergy requested that the king issue a decree forbidding the people to read the Bible aloud while the pastor was delivering the sermon!

Worship and Scripture Today

As a result of the influence of the Reformation, most evangelical congregations have made the Word of God the center of worship. This pattern follows Paul’s high regard for the Word when he wrote, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). The centrality of the Word is underscored architecturally in evangelical churches by locating the pulpit at the center of the chancel rather than to the side. Also, an open Bible is usually found on the Lord’s Supper table.

It would be improper, however, to magnify the service of the Word in worship to the detriment of the Lord’s Supper. Since the Word appeals to the understanding, an overemphasis on the sermon, for example, can easily result in worship that is too rationalistic.

The Lord’s Supper is a dramatic enactment and symbolic representation of the gospel. It incorporates into worship more than the mind, appealing to the senses of sight, smell, and taste. Just as Christ is made known through verbal communication, so He is revealed in the breaking of the bread, as He was to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Early in the church’s history this dual pattern of Word and Lord’s Supper was established in order to proclaim the gospel through both Word and symbol.

Though Evangelicals have tended to magnify the importance of the Word and are sometimes called a “people of the Book,” Scripture itself is often strangely silent in our worship services. We need to recapture the early church’s practice of reading Scripture aloud in worship. During the Reformation Scripture became little more than a prelude for the sermon. If we believe the “word of God is living and active” (Heb 4:12) and does not depend on the exposition of a preacher, then Scripture must be allowed to speak for itself.

In a visually oriented society, congregations today are not as disciplined to listen to Scripture read aloud. The fault, however, does not always lie with the congregation. Often Scripture is poorly or hurriedly read. Sometimes passages are ill-chosen, or repetitious, or chosen with little sensitivity to special seasons in the Christian year.

Evangelical churches today should reinstitute some of the practices of the early church concerning Scripture and worship. For example, standing for the reading of Scripture is appropriate since it is God’s Holy Word. Also, laypersons should be involved as readers in worship services. Scripture passages should be prayerfully selected to reflect special concerns and emphases, and not chosen simply as a starting point for the sermon.

Scripture reading, no less than Scripture exposition, is a way to minister the Word of the Lord to the congregation. Those who read Scripture publicly should read with a sense of holy responsibility. Appropriate to such ministry is a concluding statement, such as “may the Lord add His blessings to the reading of His Word,” or “The Word of the Lord.” The congregation in turn can affirm the Word by saying “Amen,” or “Thanks be to God” or “Glory to Thee, O Lord.”

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This active participation of God's people in the reading of Scripture is attested to in Scripture itself. When Ezra read the Law before God's people, they stood, lifted their hands, responded with the Amen, and bowed their faces to the ground (Neh 8:5–8).

Conclusion

In the worship of God through Word and symbol, our lives become "living sacrifices." The offering of ourselves to God is a "spiritual act of worship" that is "holy and pleasing to God" (Rom 12:1).

THE BIBLE FOR THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY

In sociology an "institution" is an established pattern of social life. Sociologists typically identify five institutions: (1) government, (2) economics, (3) education, (4) religion, and (5) family. But to a greater degree than any other institution, the family incorporates all the functions of a society. It exhibits patterns of authority and organization (government). It receives and disperses funds (economics). It teaches skills and knowledge (education). It teaches some knowledge of God (or ultimate reality) or some form of devotion (religion). The family is thus the basic unit of society.

Families are both personally and socially necessary. Persons need families for intimacy, belonging, and security. Societies need families to ensure their continuity and to prepare responsible members. Not surprisingly, then, more than 95 percent of all persons marry. And despite some differences in form, marriage and family are foundational to every known culture.

Recent years have brought radical changes to family life in most Western countries. In the United States the number of single-parent families has more than doubled since 1965. More than 20 percent of all families with children are now single-parent families. The crude divorce rate hovers at about 5.5 per 1,000 (compared to 2.5 in 1965). Marriages last, on average, less than ten years. There are strident calls for homosexual marriage and adoption. Premarital sexual activity seemingly is the world's norm. Approximately 70 percent of all college students report that they have engaged in sexual intercourse. A like proportion of married persons report extramarital infidelity.

Calls to redefine the family have accompanied these changes. In the face of such calls, the Bible remains a source of constancy and hope by (1) teaching a normative *model* for family living, (2) addressing the major *issues* that confront the family in its society, and (3) providing resources and guidance for *building* the family.

A Biblical Model of Family

The Bible recognizes that every culture needs the family. The family replenishes the population (Gen 1:28). It establishes control on the sexual drive (1 Thess 4:3–6; Heb 13:4). It gives its members an identity (Ps 127:3–4). It provides basic training for social living (Prov 4:1–27).

The main concern of the Bible, however, is to relate the family properly to God. The biblical teaching is organized around three key concepts: (1) the absolute primacy of marriage, (2) the function of the family, and (3) the role relationships of the family.

The Priority of Marriage. Scripture strongly affirms the primacy of marriage as the basic unit of social living. This is done in at least three ways.

Psychologically. The most fundamental marriage principle is complementarity, the interdependence of male and female in marital intimacy. It is an important theme in the creation accounts.

Genesis 1:27 records that "God created man in his own image ... male and female he created them." Some scholars have suggested that the "image of God" consists in the union of male and female. The image of God seems to include more than maleness/femaleness. And of course, the Bible allows for, at times encourages, singleness (Matt 19:12; 1 Cor 7:8, 32). Nevertheless, marriage does permit the full expression of sexual identity.

The principle of complementarity is more explicit in the account of the creation of the woman: "The Lord God said: 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him' " (Gen 2:18). Man's aloneness was "not good" (compare Gen 1:31), so God provided a "suitable helper." The Hebrew word for "suitable" literally means "set opposite him so as to be compared to him." It suggests a correspondence or a fitting together, an interdependence of different yet similar kinds of persons.

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The climactic statement of complementarity comes from Genesis 2:24: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” In Hebrew thinking, “flesh” can refer not only to biological matter but to what is nowadays called “personality.” A married couple thus does not only become one biologically but one emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. They give and take of each other’s inner selves. This may partly explain the frequent biblical euphemism of “know” for sexual intercourse (Gen 4:1; 19:8).

Sociologically. Marriage also has primacy as the basic *social* unit. Marriage is a “creation ordinance,” not a church ordinance. This means that marriage is valid for, and binding upon, all persons, irrespective of faith in Christ (1 Tim 4:3–5).

Scripture presents marriage as God’s provision for the regulation and sanction of sexual activity (Heb 13:4; Gen 2:24). This is crucial for any society. In the Bible all of the privileges, responsibilities, and consequences of sexual life are entrusted to the marital environment of mutual commitment and social approval.

Theologically. Marriage is a formally committed relationship as the familiar terms of “leaving” and “cleaving” show (Gen 2:24; also Matt 19:5; Mark 10:7; Eph 5:31). This commitment results in social approval for the union of marriage.

For believers, biblical marriage carries the commitment ideal further. It is a “covenant” between the partners (Mal 2:14) and with God (Mal 2:10). Christian marriage is thus to be “in the Lord” (1 Cor 7:12–16; 2 Cor 6:14–18). It also has theological significance, symbolizing the relation of Christ and the church (Eph 5:32).

The Family as Functional Unit. The Bible uses two groups of words to describe a family. By far the more common of the two is “house” or “household” (Greek *oikos*; Hebrew *bayit*). In the Old Testament it occurs more than one thousand times; in the New, more than three hundred.

The words frequently refer simply to a dwelling place. But typically they refer to persons who live together in family relationship. Often the words have an extended sense, like the “house of Israel” (Exod 40:38) and “house of Levi” (Num 17:8) or the “house of Saul” (2 Sam 3:1). Sometimes they denote a nuclear or immediate family (Mark 6:4; 1 Tim 3:5).

These words define the family in terms of *function*. An *oikos* (*bayit*) is a functioning group. It is a system, or an environment, characterized by certain essential activities. The English word “economy” gives a good illustration. It comes from *oikos* and *nomos* (“law”), hence its earliest meaning is *the law of the household*. In Greek *oikonomia* denotes the management or administration of the household (Luke 16:3).

The *oikos* (*bayit*) is a social unit to which certain responsibilities are assigned by God. These include the provision of basic needs (1 Tim 5:8), rearing of children (1 Tim 3:12), protection (Matt 12:25), and enhancing the quality of life for parents and children (“building a house,” Prov 24:3). The Bible assumes that these tasks demand a certain structural order both within the family, and with respect to the family in society.

Within the family, order must prevail (1 Tim 3:5, 12; Prov 11:29). Legitimate authority is recognized but carefully qualified. The husband is charged to lead his family in love (Eph 5:24), understanding, and respect (1 Pet 3:7; Col 3:18–19). The wife is charged to respect that leadership responsibility (Eph 5:22; Col 3:18), to encourage her husband in it (Titus 2:4; Prov 31:10–11), but with no sense of fear of intimidation (1 Pet 3:5–6).

The tasks of maintaining and building the house thus establish spheres of primary responsibility. The husband’s sphere is care and leadership for the household. In 1 Timothy 5:8, for example, he is held accountable for “providing” for his house. The wife’s sphere is care and leadership within the household. In 1 Timothy 5:14 women are instructed “to manage their homes” (also Titus 2:4–5; Prov 31:27).

Of course these areas are not exclusive. The difference is one of *focus*. The husband’s focused responsibility is the provision and direction for the household. The wife’s is the care and management of the household.

Not only must families have order within, but they must have order with respect to the society. Scripture regards the family as the primary caregiving unit for its members. Responsibility for the training of children (Ps 78:4–6; Prov 22:6) and the care of the elderly (1 Tim 5:4), for instance, belongs to the family, not to other social institutions. In a highly complex society these tasks are usually performed indirectly. But Scripture clearly lays them to the family’s charge.

Moreover, the Bible speaks of the family as the strategic contact point between the individual and the larger community. The family is a buffer, offering refuge and peace (Prov 25:24; Luke 10:5; Mark 3:20–21). It is an environment for developing relationships (compare 1 Tim 5:1–2), meeting needs (Rom 12:13), and communicating ideas (especially the gospel) in a selective but liberal way (Matt 9:10–11; 10:12–13; Phlm 2). It is noteworthy that homes were the primary instruments of evangelization and ministry in the early church (Acts

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2:46; 1 Cor 16:15; Col 4:15). It is the training ground for responsible citizens (Deut 11:19–21), who can impact a society for good (Ps 127:3–5; Mal 2:15). It is above all a nurturing environment for living faith (Deut 6:7; 2 Tim 1:5).

The Family as Relational Unit. The second word group for “family” is *patria* (and the related *genos*) in the New Testament (Hebrew *mispahah*). They occur less than twenty-five times in the New Testament, while *mispahah* occurs in the Old Testament about three hundred times. These words emphasize the *relationships* that bind families together, that is, kinship.

Loose associations sometimes called “family” in contemporary culture are unknown in Scripture. The family is formed by marriage, then birth or adoption (Gen 15:3). Biblically a relationship is not an emotional attachment. It involves a set of responsibilities required by covenant (marriage) and natural (children) bonds.

Biblical principles for building relationships must be interpreted in these terms. Scripture betrays little interest in such modern concerns as relational skills or interpersonal dynamics. Family relationships primarily rest on responsibility *to* spouse, children, parents, and kin (Eph 5:22–6:4).

The Bible and Family Issues

As the basic social unit, every social issue impacts the family in some way. Clearly, however, some issues lie close to the center of family identity and well-being. In contemporary society these would include gender roles (see above), the extent and type of sexual behavior, and marriage patterns.

The Bible and Human Sexuality. The first biblical principle of human sexuality is that sex is legitimate *exclusively* within the marriage covenant. The concise statement of that principle in Genesis 2:24 is the court of appeal throughout the New Testament in questions related to marriage and sexual behavior (see Matt 19:5–6; Mark 10:8; Eph 5:31). The implications of this guiding principle are also explored in Scripture.

First, all sexual deviations are condemned (Gal 5:19; Rom 1:24). These include child molestation (pedophilia, see Matt 18:6), incest (Lev 20:11–21), and homosexual behavior (Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26–27).

Second, sexual activity is always related to family-building. This does *not* mean that the only purpose of sexuality is children, important as that is (Pss 127:3–5; 128:3–6). It does mean that the Bible places sex within the framework of family-building. Every sexual act ordinarily has the potential for conception. And sexual intercourse is the means by which God’s mandate to bear children is carried out (Gen 1:28). It also expresses love (Heb 13:4), nurtures companionship (Prov 5:18–19), and strengthens commitment (1 Cor 7:3–4). As an operational principle, therefore, any sexual activity that cannot be said to enhance family-building is unscriptural. Pre-marital sex, for instance, places sexual intimacy before the covenant of marriage. It also has the potential of producing children for whom a secure home (marriage) environment has not already been prepared. Therefore it fails to build a family.

Third, sexuality has powerful psychological consequences. Sex is the mode of union in marriage (Gen 2:24). It brings two persons together into “one flesh” (see above). Sex in marriage enhances the personality. But outside of marriage it distorts and damages emotionally (1 Cor 6:18; Mal 2:16).

Fourth, marriage is God’s provision for sexual expression (1 Cor 7:9). As such it is normal and good (John 2:1–11; 1 Tim 4:3; 5:14). The Bible certainly allows singleness and commends it for a life of complete devotion (1 Cor 7:7–9, 32–34). But the notion of selfish or pleasure-seeking singleness is alien to Scripture. Biblical singleness always includes celibacy and devotion (Matt 19:10–12; 1 Cor 7:32–34; 1 Tim 5:9–11).

The Bible and Divorce/Remarriage. As is true today, divorce was common throughout the Greco-Roman world and in Israel after the exile (about 536 B.C.). This explains the stern warnings in Malachi (about 430 B.C.) and throughout the New Testament concerning divorce and remarriage. As divorce has grown more acceptable socially, Christians have increasingly questioned the biblical teaching on this subject.

The questioning involves four key passages in the Gospels (Matt 5:32; 19:3–12; Mark 10:2–12; Luke 16:18), one in Paul’s Letters (1 Cor 7), and several in the Old Testament (especially Deut 24:1–4). The decisive issue in these passages is whether allowances are made for divorce and, if so, what.

Extensive debate has yielded different conclusions among evangelical Christians. Some find no allowances for divorce at all. Some argue for one, two, or several. Others allow for divorce, but not for remarriage.

An important crux in these debates is Matthew 19:3–9 (also Mark 10:2–12), where Jesus cited Moses’ allowance of a “certificate of divorce” in the context of His own teaching. Jesus stated that Moses “permitted” this practice because of hardened hearts. The practice is described in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 which, however, does not prescribe any grounds for divorce at all. Rather, it prohibits the remarriage of a previously divorced couple.

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The reason for the divorce (“he finds something indecent about her”) is ambiguous in Hebrew. Yet during the New Testament era, Jewish rabbis divided over the meaning of the clause. The followers of Rabbi Shammai limited the meaning to “adultery.” The followers of Rabbi Hillel included anything displeasing. The Pharisees’ question reflects this debate (19:3). Jesus avoided the intended trap and, at the same time, elaborated three important points about divorce.

First, He declared that the divorce question was misplaced. God intended marriage as a covenant relationship and a lifelong “one-flesh” union (19:4–6).

Second, Moses did not institute divorce, nor did he provide grounds for divorce. He only permitted and regulated divorce as a social reality resulting ultimately from sin.

Third, the Lord designated sexual immorality as the only ground for divorce (19:9). The word used is *porneia* (compare the English “pornography”), a rather broad term including other sorts of immorality as well as adultery.

Paul’s teaching in 1 Corinthians 7 has long been held to add a second “exception” for divorce. In this case a believer “is not bound” if an unbelieving spouse leaves the marriage relationship (1 Cor 7:12–15). Taken in their natural sense, these words seem to indicate release from the marital bond and thus freedom to remarry (compare 7:39). In 7:10–11 Paul reiterated the Lord’s teaching on the marriage ideal. Husbands and wives “must not divorce.” If they do “separate,” they are to seek reconciliation or remain single. The word for “separate” here (*chorizo*) may include divorce.

It seems most natural to assume that the Bible accepts remarriage in cases of sexual immorality and abandonment. In 1 Corinthians 7:8–9 Paul said it is better for the “unmarried” to marry than to risk sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 7:27–28 Paul gave an even more general guideline dealing with such persons. The word for “unmarried” (*agamos*) does *not* refer exclusively to persons never married (“virgin,” *parthenos*) or to widows (*chera*). It seems to encompass singleness resulting from some other condition. Note the contrast between “unmarried” and both “widows” (7:8, 39) and “virgins” (7:27–28).

The Bible emphasizes that God Himself intends marriage to be a lifelong covenant relationship between one man and one woman. God declares His hatred of divorce (Mal 2:16). Both the Lord and Paul appealed consistently to the creation ordinance of marriage for their teaching. The Bible *nowhere* demands or even recommends divorce. Instead, forgiveness and reconciliation are urged (1 Cor 7:11). Any exceptions are given grudgingly, as a way of regulating sinful conditions. In short, the easy acceptability of modern divorce is foreign to the Bible.

The Bible as Resource for Family-building

The well-known inspiration passage 2 Timothy 3:16 is a statement not only of the Bible’s origin but of its usefulness in “teaching, reproving, correcting, and training in righteousness.” Interestingly, the verse was a link between Timothy’s ministry at the time and his upbringing (2 Tim 3:15). Paul reminded him that the Scriptures that had molded his character in childhood now provided the foundation for his life’s work. Scripture played the crucial role in the impartation to Timothy of the same “sincere faith” possessed by his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5).

A worn and well-used Portuguese Bible held tenderly in the lap of an elderly Brazilian woman during Bible study.

Ancient writers like Tertullian (died about A.D. 215) affirmed that the reading of the Bible formed the core of early Christian home life (*To His Wife* 2.8). Augustine (died A.D. 430) mentions the family’s reading of Psalm 101 for comfort in his mother’s home at her funeral (*Confessions*, 10.12). Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John (died about A.D. 155), commended the church in Philippi for constancy in family devotion: “I am confident that you have been well-versed in the holy Scriptures and have forgotten nothing” (*To the Philippians*, 12.1).

Unfortunately much of this emphasis on family devotion dissolved during the Middle Ages. The Bible was restricted to the clergy, and more stress was placed on the scholarly study of the Bible. The Reformation (about 1500) did much to revive family devotional life, though not to the levels of the early Christian centuries. In recent years the practice has again fallen into neglect.

Biblical family-building, however, depends on family *devotion*. God’s statutes and commandments are to be taught constantly. Children are to be raised to fear God and live obediently (Deut 6:1–8). Lovingly they are to be instructed and guided “in the Lord” (Col 3:21; Eph 6:4).

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Scripture encourages the family to create an atmosphere of devotion (Exod 12:25–27; Deut 12:7; Ps 78:1–8; Isa 38:19), where the Word of God is *taught* and consistently *obeyed*. Thus in Deuteronomy 6 children are taught as the parents make God’s statutes the *constant* subject of family attention. Negatively, this implies that the Bible must not be used inaccurately or improperly. Positively, it implies that the reading of Scripture takes place regularly. More importantly it implies that the Bible must be obeyed; and the Savior of whom it speaks, worshiped.⁴

HOW TO UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

The sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments have been the subject of uninterrupted study for thousands of years by multitudes of Bible students. The Bible has been central to all Christians regardless of their denominational affiliations. Along with Jews and Muslims, who are also part of our common Semitic culture and heritage, Christians have traditionally been called “people of the Book.” This means that at the center of the spiritual life of Christians is a precious written document that contains a treasury of sacred wisdom and the core of its revelation. In addition, Christians hold that the Scriptures contain all things necessary for salvation. To study the Bible as a sacred text, therefore, is part of the duty of the followers of Jesus Christ. For not only do the Scriptures reveal who Jesus Christ is, but in them also is found the way to eternal life.

Some say the Bible is a dark and mysterious book, difficult to read, impossible to understand, and that one must take care in reaching out to it because it is obviously obscure and does not yield its secrets easily. Others treat the Bible in an opposite way, as an old and beloved friend, easily approached and more easily read. Often people with this view imagine that reading and understanding the Bible is much like picking up the Sunday newspaper and reading it through. They would claim that if you can read, you should have no trouble with the Bible.

Problems exist, of course, with either position. The difficulty with the first position that the Bible is inaccessible and mysterious is that it assumes the Bible was never really written for ordinary people, only for religious experts or the spiritually elite. Parts of the Bible do address different groups of people, the Jewish people, for example, or Christians in a particular city. These portions, however, are normally expressed to ordinary Jews and Christians with the common concerns of average human beings who have religious and spiritual interests. The Bible is not meant to be a book only for the experts or for a special, chosen few.

The difficulty with the second position, however, is that the Bible is not just a “simple” book. The Bible is really a library of books that have been written by many different authors. All sorts of literary styles are used, and the Bible contains, in fact, almost all the kinds of literature ever written. Furthermore, the Bible comes to us from a history and culture different from our own. This makes the Bible both very interesting and yet more complex than reading the newspaper from our own familiar hometown. Also the Bible was written for purposes other than merely passing along information, which is the major purpose of a newspaper. The Bible has many purposes, only one of which is to give us factual information. Its main task is to help change or transform the spiritual nature of human beings.

The study of Holy Scripture is a necessary obligation for any educated Christian and also a sacred responsibility for those who take their faith seriously. Many questions arise about how to approach the study of the Bible. Some questions that need to be answered before we can begin a meaningful study of Scripture are: How do students of the Bible approach the study of sacred Scripture? With what attitudes should we come? What tools and preparation should we bring? What methods can be used to enrich that study? What results are we to expect from such a study? These questions are to be answered in this survey on the subject of Bible study.

Approach

A serious Bible study should be approached first with the knowledge that the Bible invites our inquiry and that it is possible to learn deeply from it if we take the opportunity to do so. As in any other serious endeavor, it will take time and patience to build a good, working knowledge of the Bible. And like any other important and complex subject of study we undertake, we must be prepared to invest ourselves in the work, giving it both concentrated time and energy.

⁴ Dockery, D. S., ed. (1992). [*Holman Bible Handbook*](#) (pp. 843–855). Holman Bible Publishers.

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The Bible as an object of study cannot be mastered quickly. Understanding the Bible is not only a matter of learning the many facts and details of biblical history. We must also live with the truth of Scripture in order to know it. For example, when we say, "I know how to ride a bike," we do not mean that we understand all the laws of physics concerning motion, balance, velocity, and the aspects of momentum and wheel rotation. In fact, we may know none of these. We mean something far more important, which is sometimes difficult to put into words. We in fact are saying that we *know by experience* the art of bicycle riding. We in fact know how to ride a bicycle because we have actually tried it, and the knowledge of bicycle riding is now "inside" us or a part of us in a way that the knowledge of certain other facts is not. The Bible is exactly like that. You cannot really say you "know" the Bible until you have lived out its truth in experience to see how it actually works in real experience. The practice of the truth of Scripture is perhaps the most important concept of all to understand before we ever do formal Bible study.

Attitude

Like any other subject we have decided to learn, how well we do will depend on the kinds of attitudes with which we begin. For example, if our minds are already made up on what the Bible says or means and we are basically closed to new understanding, there is no real reason to study the Bible further. Openness in learning, as opposed to being closed minded, is the first key to studying the Scriptures. This is an attitude that says, "I am teachable because I do not know everything but want to learn more."

The second attitude is characterized by a hunger and thirst for truth. No one who does not possess a strong desire to learn the truth of Scripture in the way we have just described will pursue it for very long. A real longing to know truth is accompanied, of course, by a willingness to let the Holy Spirit teach us through our own efforts as well as through the work of others. This means, of course, that we will have to learn how to listen both with our minds and with our hearts to the Spirit of God who dwells in all those who have come to know and follow Christ.

Two other vital attitudes are more difficult to explain. One is the necessity of ambiguity when it is called for. Ambiguity is the willingness to let issues remain indefinite or undecided until we have more information or better understanding. We will not jump to conclusions too quickly, remembering that growth is a progressive thing. We should expect, therefore, that the truth of Scripture will be made known to us gradually, and we should not assume we will know everything at once. Knowing the truth of Scripture is like the way we came to know many other complicated subjects in school; one grade or level builds upon another. You cannot know, for example, the complex theorems of geometry if you have not first studied basic math. The same is true spiritually. Certain complex ideas follow more basic truths, and many of them must be learned in progression or only after we have developed in our spiritual maturity. We therefore should have the attitude that allows for the progressive unfolding of truth.

Tools and Preparation

Besides the obvious fact that students of Scripture must begin with a basic ability to read English literature, other essential tools are needed. In order to study the Bible, it would be good to have two or three readable translations of the Bible available and perhaps one paraphrased edition. There are many good translations in English today, and reading them side by side helps to explain difficult passages much more easily. Various publishing houses in fact print the Bible in parallel versions so the versions can be compared easily. Study Bibles, such as the *Disciple's Study Bible*, can be very helpful tools.

Next, a student should purchase a complete Bible concordance, which is an index of the English words used by one of the major translations. With a concordance words and phrases that are used over and over can be looked up, and different usages of the same word can be compared to see how they are used in different contexts to help clarify the many meanings a word may have or the different ways it can be used.

Many guides and commentaries have been written on the Bible. Some guides, like the present volume you are using now, give considerable background material for Bible study. Commentaries on the meaning of the text and the background of the book are available for every book of the Bible and can be quite helpful. A good religious book store will carry different types of commentaries, some for beginners and some for advanced Bible students. If you are studying just one book of the Bible, it is helpful to use several commentaries such as *The New American Commentary* to help you better understand that book.

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For the advanced Bible student it is possible to learn to use what are called lexical aids and advanced critical commentaries. These are books that help the student to understand the original languages of the Bible and the historical, literary, and theological issues that concern scholars of Scripture study today. Even though you may not have a knowledge of the ancient Greek and Hebrew languages, which are the original languages of most of the Bible, you can still use these books if only to learn the alphabet of each language.

To start you will need an interlinear text of the Bible (one line in English and the next in the original Greek or Hebrew). You will also need a dictionary like *The Holman Bible Dictionary* to help you look up the definitions of words and trace their original meanings. Finally, students of Scripture need to be part of a worshiping and studying community of committed people. It is very important to be able to share your study and discovery with others and receive help from others as well. To study alone is more difficult than to be a part of a group of people who also love the Scriptures, who worship and pray together, and who share what they learn comfortably together.

Methods

Two basic methods of Bible study are topical study and exegetical study. Topical study means that you take a topic or theme and follow it through the entire Bible, seeing all the ways it is used or discussed by the writers of the Scripture. You might, for example, take the topic of the relationship between God and humanity and see how it develops throughout the Bible. There are of course innumerable ideas and topics to be studied. It is good, usually, to begin with a practical topic that both interests you and relates to the way you live now. The subject of “priestly dress” as described in the Old and New Testaments might be interesting for some, but it does not relate to where most people live today.

To do a topical study you would need both a Bible and its concordance. Some study Bibles have topical indexes at the back that list different topics and the basic references. Using that as a guide, the student would need to begin a list of references and put them perhaps in chronological order, beginning with the oldest books in the Bible and moving toward the ones written last. Note that the order of books in the Bible is a traditional order and not necessarily chronological. It would be good to find out about biblical chronology as a first part of your study.

Another important area for topical study is to notice how different kinds of biblical literature (poetry versus letters or epistles, for example) use themes and words differently. Do not assume that all writers will mean the same thing by a similar topic or word. This should be part of your study. Next, after listing each reference and usage so that you understand it, then you might want to group the topic into categories that seem to say separate things about the same topic. You might want to write out a summary statement for each grouping and then summarize the whole topic, so that in your own words you feel you do understand that theme. Finally, you might also want to check to see what has been written on that same theme by other Christian authors. Compare your findings with theirs, helping you to expand your own understanding.

Exegetical study is different from topical study because typically it takes a particular book or passage in one of the books of the Bible and studies it in depth by looking at many different levels in and around that particular text. Exegetical study also examines various topics and themes, but usually only in relationship to what is addressed in a particular book or passage, and tries to understand these in the larger framework of that particular book or in the context of other books written by the same author. This form of study is somewhat more complex, but it usually yields interesting results.

To better understand what exegetical study is and how it is done, it is important to know about the levels of meanings that surround a book or passage in the Bible. Meanings are always understood “in context.” You have perhaps joined a conversation in the middle of a topic. Though you knew all the words used, still you did not understand what was being said because you did not know what the actual context or background for the conversation was. Only after a while did you understand the context, that the words actually made sense. This is true often in Bible study. What a passage means is usually made clear when it is put in context.

This concept explains why many times in exegetical study a student of the Bible will begin with the largest context around the Scripture first and later move to the meaning of a particular passage. Others, however, prefer to start with the words of a passage themselves and then continue outward until as much of the context is understood as possible. Exegetical study could either begin on the “inside” of a particular passage and work out or on the “outside” and work in. Either way is possible. But picture a circle with five smaller circles inside it. To understand the Scriptures it is important to pass through all the circles.

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If we start on the “inside,” the first circle is the meaning of the words of Scripture in their immediate context. This first step in study involves understanding the definitions and shades of the meaning of words used in that book or by that author. It also entails understanding how those words are employed in particular sentences. Defining words, seeing how they are used in sentences, and then understanding the sentences themselves as they are placed in groups of larger ideas is the first important part of exegetical study. These ideas are then seen in the whole context of the complete message of the book. This is the first circle, and its focus is the literary meaning of the text. But it also examines the symbols and stories and ideas of that book as they are woven together to form one whole piece. Students would do well to make a list of all the important meanings of words and sentences; usages of idioms, symbols, and ideas; and then outline how they fit together in the whole book. Also it would be important to list what you do not yet understand.

We move from the first circle to the second in order that the first meaning of the immediate text is put within wider context of the life and circumstances of the author of the book, what the author was “about.” The questions we would want to ask are: Who was this person, what did he intend to say, and why did he wish to say it? Answering these questions is often much more difficult than it seems. First, we can never get back into the mind of the author. Yet through the study of other parts of an author’s work, the events that became the context for writing a particular text, and by knowing something of the person of the author and the reasons he had for writing the book, it is possible to understand partially the immediate context for the larger meaning.

We are then ready to move to the third circle and look at the larger historical and cultural setting and the influences that prevailed to help create this literary work. Knowing another culture even in our own day is often difficult for us. When that culture existed in the past, understanding it becomes even more complex. Yet serious study of the cultural and historical context can make much of the thought and events of that time available to us and provide a historical context whereby we might better understand the meaning of a particular text of Scripture. For example, what was Semitic or Hebrew culture like in contrast to Greek culture or the Roman world? How did the cultural and religious thought of Persia influence the later writing of the Old Testament? These are the sorts of questions that can be asked in circle three.

For the Christian, however, human culture cannot be examined in isolation from an understanding of the unfolding of the divine drama. Our human story must also be seen against the backdrop of the sweep of the purpose of God within our human story. As part of a long spiritual tradition we inherit a certain understanding of the themes and motifs of our sacred past which we can use to begin to determine the goal of the revelation of God. This area of study, the fourth circle, weaves the themes of the whole Bible together to form a tapestry of thought that guides all our study. This tapestry is often called biblical theology since it attempts to understand in one piece all of the themes of the Bible as one whole story.

An understanding of Scripture arrives in our day through the living tradition of faith as the church has come to understand itself on its long historical journey. The traditions, teachings, doctrines, and history of the church therefore contribute greatly to our contemporary understanding of Scripture. We do not understand Scripture without that context. The apostle Peter expresses the profound insight that no Scripture is of any “private interpretation” (2 Pet 1:20–21). One way of understanding what he means is to see that none of us finds meaning in a vacuum. Each person is part of an “interpretive community” that sees things in its own unique fashion and shares those perceptions with its members. What we understand, therefore, and the meanings we perceive are part of a heritage that is passed down to us through history and tradition. The community of Christian faith, therefore, is a living organism with a tradition that shapes and is shaped by the meaning of the Scriptures and forms the fifth circle.

A final circle of meaning around the Bible by which we seek to understand and interpret for ourselves is perhaps the largest circle of all. It is the area of our contemporary world where our own current needs as individuals and as Christian communities are expressed and exposed to the wisdom of the Scriptures. We need to ask ourselves: What is happening in our own world, culture, and society that calls upon the truth of Scripture? What is the need of the community of faithful Christians worldwide that elicits out of the ancient writings new understandings applicable to our own time? What, finally, do we need to understand and do that will help us become better followers of Jesus Christ? Ultimately, we are the immediate context through which the power and significance of Holy Scripture meets and interacts with the present moment. We are filters through which its meaning is passed. Who am I? What have I become in my own spiritual development? Where have I journeyed spiritually? What am I currently able to understand that will help define the meanings Scripture can express to me?

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Results

Each individual Christian is an active participant in the process of understanding the meaning of the Bible. As a member of the Christian community, each student is placed within all these layers of meaning and can use them as lenses through which to explore the truth of God. The meaning of Scripture is not, therefore, a static thing. It is extremely dynamic. What is happening to each of us personally and to our world invites the truth of the Word of God to act in new ways, and we are challenged by it to change into new creatures, to be transformed. We should expect the study of the Bible to help revolutionize our understanding, our behavior, our awareness of the world and ourselves, and to bring us into closer relationship with God Himself.

READING SCRIPTURE

Today we are told that more Bibles are sold than any other book on the market. The implication is that the Bible is read more than any other piece of literature, at least in Christian society and perhaps in the entire world. One wonders, of course, whether there is an exact correlation between Bibles sold and Bibles read? Regardless of the answer, however, the fact remains that the Bible has stood at the center of the Western spiritual tradition, and it is the basic foundation of both its literature and its faith. It is the ultimate authority for the church's teaching and has been the text that informs and enriches the lives of Christian people everywhere and in every age. Therefore it is critical that all Christians have a basic knowledge of Scripture, which can come only from personal reading and the effort to understand it.

The Bible as Library

It would be easy to imagine that since the Bible is the book that is central to Christian faith, the most obvious thing to do would be to simply find a translation easily understood and start at the beginning of the Bible, as you would do with any normal book, and proceed straight through reading the text until you reach the end. The Bible, however, is not a "normal" book. As has been said elsewhere in this guide, the word Bible means, literally, in the Greek language *library* (*Biblos*).

The Bible is in fact a library of many books written by a wide variety of authors at separate times for different purposes and in many diverse styles. You would never go into a library and treat all the books alike. Neither would you read all of the books in the library starting with the one nearest the entrance and proceed straight through every text until you exhausted all there was to read. As in any library, you would want to start selectively. First you would probably browse, get familiar with the whole library. Later you would find out about all the different categories of books in the library and then start to read from the standpoint of your own personal needs or interests. Eventually you would want to learn how to utilize the whole library.

This is indeed what this project of the *Holman Bible Handbook* is about, acquainting you with the library of the Bible. Again, understanding the library is not all you would need to know if you are to read the Holy Scripture. There are in fact many different ways of reading. We read for pleasure differently from reading for study or analysis. When we pick up the daily newspaper, for example, we read the comic pages differently from the business or advertisement section, and these are read differently from the editorial page. Each of us utilizes many separate skills in reading. The same should be true for reading the Bible. There are various ways of reading Scripture, and each has its own specific purpose.

Two of the primary ways of reading the Bible are for study (the gaining of basic knowledge concerning the facts of Scripture) and for worship, personal devotion, or spiritual growth. These are not necessarily opposite ways of reading, but they do entail different skills. The skills needed for Bible study are complex and are discussed in a separate section of this text. In this article the focus is on general Bible reading and more particularly on the reading of Scripture for personal, spiritual sustenance and insight. Again, even here there are multiple approaches to reading the Scriptures that require special consideration. Throughout the church's life, Christians have developed certain helpful disciplines and methods that enrich the way they have read Scripture. These methods have been passed on to us as our present heritage.

Systematic Reading

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Normally we feed ourselves day by day in order to sustain normal human life and growth and also for enjoyment. The regular and systematic intake of food is considered to be essential for human living. The same principle holds true for the spiritual life. Throughout history Christians have maintained that the regular and systematic intake or reading of Scripture was of great spiritual benefit.

Systematic daily reading was first used by Jewish believers and was developed during the time of their exile when, in synagogue worship, readings from different portions were appointed for each day. The first Christians, of course, were Jews. So this tradition continued on into the life of the early church and has been maintained down through the centuries up until the present time. Today many Christians follow what is called the “common lectionary,” which is a two-year cycle of daily readings through the entire Bible and a three-year cycle of weekly readings appointed for Sunday worship. Others adopt readings in accordance with the weekly Sunday School lesson or other devotional guides. Systematic reading in this way has proved to be of great benefit in maintaining balanced, long-term Bible reading.

Reading in Context

One practice adopted by some Christians involves selecting readings within the context of the “Church Year Calendar.” In this calendar the church observes the entire life of Christ and remembers His work on earth by dividing the year into seven sections or seasons of differing lengths, much in the same way that a week is divided into seven days. Each of these seven seasons or sections emphasizes a different aspect of the life of Jesus Christ and God’s revelation and work through Him.

Normally the readings from the common lectionary are selected to reflect upon the particular significance of each season observed in this yearly cycle and the meaning for the body of Christ, the church, in the world and also each individual member of it.

Prayerful Reading for Spiritual Growth

Christians in every century have stressed that the reading of Scripture should be done carefully and deliberately. In that way its spiritual strength can be assimilated and digested into one’s entire being through prayerful reflection. The reading of the Bible as spiritual food cannot be done as one would read a newspaper in the morning, skimming over it for interesting tidbits of information. The following approaches can give guidance for reading Scripture for our spiritual development and growth.

1. Oral Reading. Read each portion of Scripture aloud, allowing yourself to hear the Scripture as though it were the very first time and in a new way. Such reading should be done slowly and deliberately so that it can be truly heard with the whole of one’s being.

2. Active Reflection. Explore the many meanings of the readings perhaps through its story and narrative forms or through the multiple symbols and metaphors used by the authors. Allow these to offer fresh insight and understanding concerning the spiritual truth that is available to you as spiritual food.

3. Careful Application. Enter into a personal and vigorous dialogue with the reading, permitting its truth to offer you new understanding and its insights to challenge and confront you in ways that demand your acceptance and obedience.

4. Prayerful Listening. Sit silently and attentively in the presence of God and permit the Holy Spirit to quietly illumine your mind and begin His inner work of transformation. Listen prayerfully as He teaches and instructs you, seeking for His guidance upon the path of your life.

Each aspect of general Bible reading as it has been outlined above constitutes means by which the Scriptures can become a source of spiritual sustenance. Systematic reading in a larger context that follows the steps outlined above will inevitably strengthen the Christian life. The methods shared in this article are part of our Christian heritage, made available to us through the patient labor of our fellow Christian brothers and sisters through the centuries. We should accept with thanks their gift to us.

52-WEEK BIBLE READING PLAN

Guides the reader through the Old Testament once and the New Testament
twice in one year.

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4— Mark
5— Exodus 1-21
6— Exodus 22-40
7— Luke
8— John
9— Leviticus
10— Acts
11— Numbers 1-18
12— Numbers 19-36
13— Romans; Galatians
14— 1, 2 Corinthians
15— Deuteronomy 1-17
16— Deuteronomy 18-34
17— Ephesians; Philippians;
Colossians;
1, 2 Thessalonians;
1, 2 Timothy; Titus;
Philemon
18— Hebrews; James;
1, 2 Peter
19— Joshua
20— 1, 2, 3 John; Jude;

Revelation
21— Judges; Ruth
22— Job 1-31
23— Job 32-42; Ecclesiastes;
Song of Solomon
24— 1 Samuel
25— 2 Samuel
26— Psalms 1-50
27— 1 Kings
28— 2 Kings
29— Psalms 51-100
30— 1 Chronicles
31— 2 Chronicles
32— Psalms 101-150
33— Ezra; Nehemiah; Esther
34— Proverbs
35— Matthew
36— Isaiah 1-35
37— Isaiah 36-66
38— Mark
39— Luke
40— Jeremiah 1-29

41— Jeremiah 30-52;
Lamentations
42— John
43— Acts
44— Ezekiel 1-24
45— Ezekiel 25-48
46— Romans; Galatians
47— 1, 2 Corinthians
48— Daniel; Hosea; Joel; Amos
49— Ephesians; Philippians;
Colossians;
1, 2 Thessalonians;
1, 2 Timothy; Titus;
Philemon
50— Obadiah; Jonah; Micah;
Nahum; Habakkuk;
Zephaniah; Haggai;
Zechariah; Malachi
51— Hebrews; James;
1, 2 Peter
52— 1, 2, 3 John; Jude; Revelation⁵

MEMBERSHIP CURRICULUM:

Essential Doctrines Week #1
Biblical Doctrine · The Bible is Inspired · Trinity – One True God

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE:

{Student manual pages 1&2}

Table Discussion: Name and if you were raised in a church/denominational background.

ASK: Definition of Doctrine

{A teaching or instruction, a principle of law established through past decisions.}

Christian Doctrine:

In the Bible = Systematic arrangement of the Bible's fundamental truths.

Theology: Reasoned discourse about God and His relationship w/humanity. God science.

Dogma: Belief statements. Human statement of truth set forth as a creed.

ALWAYS examine and measure against scripture.

Common base for fellowship and unity.

1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought

⁵ Dockery, D. S., ed.
(1992). Holman Bible

Handbook (pp. 88-93).
Holman Bible Publishers.

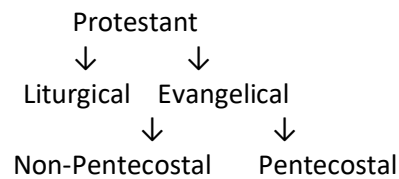
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Acts 2:42

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

- How did those who determined what these fundamental truths would be arrive at this particular list?
1. Some were picked up from foundational Protestant theology.
 2. Agreed upon from common experience and belief by those who formed the movement to which we belong: The Assemblies of God.

Catholics



Ask yourself what problem does Paul seek to address in this passage:

{Vs. 1: The tendency of end-time believers to abandon the faith because they are not fully committed to the doctrines of that faith.}

- **1 Timothy 4:1-16**

¹ The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- **How does false doctrine enter a church?**

{Vs. 2-5: Those with authority and something to gain may try to control their followers by introducing their own twists on the truth.}

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- **What should we do if we see that someone in our church is trying to manipulate others through false doctrine?**
{Vs. 6: We must confront false teacher and warn others of the errors they are teaching}
- **How can we avoid being entrapped by a false teacher?**
{Vs. 7-10: We must AVOID spiritual fads that celebrate obscure or questionable doctrines. Instead we need to FOCUS primarily on Christ and living a godly life.}
- **What promise did Paul make to those who watch their lives and doctrine closely?**
{ Vs. 16: Believers who are careful to make sure their beliefs are biblical will be saved and will protect those with whom they fellowship. In this verse, being saved has more to do with being glorified in heaven in the future than with being justified in the present.}
- **How do Paul's instructions to Timothy apply to us today?**
{We are closer to the end of time now than ever before. The philosophies of the world and false teachers are still problems for the Christian. We must be aware of these dangers by being grounded in the truth of God's word [Stop here for MAG MM](#)}

Handout: Ingesting Doctrine article by Ravi Zacharias

▪ **Scriptures for further study: Jude 3-23**

³ Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that the Lord has once for all entrusted to us, his people. ⁴ For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about ^[a] long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord.

⁵ Though you already know all this, I want to remind you that the Lord ^[b] at one time delivered his people out of Egypt, but later destroyed those who did not believe. ⁶ And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their proper dwelling—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day. ⁷ In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.

⁸ In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings. ⁹ But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not himself dare to condemn him for slander but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" ^[c] ¹⁰ Yet these people speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; and what things they do understand by instinct, like unreasoning animals—these are the very things that destroy them.

¹¹ Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain; they have rushed for profit into Balaam's error; they have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion.

- "Way of Cain" Genesis 4:3-9

A willingness to attack a member of the family and an arrogant, unrepentant attitude toward God.

- "Balaam's error" Numbers 22; 31:8; 2 Peter 2:15

Greed at the expense of God's people.

- "Korah's Rebellion" Numbers 16

Uprising against authority. False teachers will try to discredit godly leadership in their bid for authority.

The CHARACTER of a teacher is a witness of their personal doctrine/belief system.

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¹² These people are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. ¹³ They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.

¹⁴ Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones ¹⁵ to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the defiant words ungodly sinners have spoken against him." ^[d] ¹⁶ These people are grumblers and faultfinders; they follow their own evil desires; they boast about themselves and flatter others for their own advantage.

According to the following scripture, what would you say motivates a false teacher? {False teachers want to please themselves by using their own instincts instead of relying on the Holy Spirit to fulfill their needs. A form of narcissism.}

A Call to Persevere

¹⁷ But, dear friends, remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold. ¹⁸ They said to you, "In the last times there will be scoffers who will follow their own ungodly desires." ¹⁹ These are the people who divide you, who follow mere natural instincts and do not have the Spirit.

²⁰ But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, ²¹ keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

²² Be merciful to those who doubt; ²³ save others by snatching them from the fire; to others show mercy, mixed with fear—hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh. ^[e]

Footnotes: a. [Jude 1:4](#) Or individuals who were marked out for condemnation b. [Jude 1:5](#) Some early manuscripts Jesus c. [Jude 1:9](#) Jude is alluding to the Jewish Testament of Moses (approximately the first century A.D.). d. [Jude 1:15](#) From the Jewish First Book of Enoch (approximately the first century B.C.) e. [Jude 1:23](#) The Greek manuscripts of these verses vary at several points.

- **Titus 1:9**

⁹ He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.

- How did Titus, an elder and overseer, obtain the doctrine he believed?
- What was he instructed to do with it?
- What does the verse indicate about the nature of doctrine?

Essential Doctrines Week #1
Biblical Doctrine · **The Bible is Inspired** · Trinity – One True God

Doctrine #1:

THE BIBLE IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD

{Student manual pages 3&4}

The Scriptures are:

- 1.) God's revelation of Himself to mankind.
- 2.) They are infallible (never wrong).
- 3.) Divinely authoritative guide for our faith, belief, and manner of living.

2 Timothy 3:15-17

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,

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¹⁵ and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

¹⁶ All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,

¹⁷ so that all God's people ^[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Footnotes: a. [2 Timothy 3:17](#) Or that the servant of God

➤ **How does Paul describe the Scriptures? (Vs. 15)**

{Paul called the scriptures 'holy' = uniquely divine in nature.}

➤ **According to this passage, what are the Scriptures able to do? (Vs. 15)**

{The Scriptures give us the wisdom we need to accept salvation through Christ by faith.}

➤ **According to verse 16, where did Scripture originate?**

{Although human authors penned the books of the Bible, the bible originated with the Holy Spirit.}

➤ **What role is Scripture to play in the direction of a Christian's life? (Vs. 16)**

{The Bible teaches us, rebukes us, corrects us, and trains us in how to live a righteous life.}

➤ **What happens when we internalize the truths of Scripture? (Vs. 17)**

{We will be equipped to do the whatever the LORD lays before us.}

God- Breathed = Inspired

{The word inspiration literally means "breathed" or "breathed on". The Holy Spirit "breathed on" the hearts of the biblical authors, moving on them to write what they did w/o overriding their unique styles and personalities.}

{Dictation Theory: God specifically told the authors the exact words to write. This would not account for the variety of writing styles, vocabularies, and personalities evident in the books of the Bible.}

➤ **What is the biblical canon?**

{Canon literally means "measuring rod" or "standard". In literature studies, canon has come to mean a particular body of work. The biblical canon is the 66 documents contained in both testaments of the Protestants Bible.}

The books were selected by:

- 1.) Written by an Apostle or a close associate.
- 2.) Written during the Apostolic age.
- 3.) Comply doctrinally with faith taught by Disciples.
- 4.) Universal acceptance by early church.

[Not in student handbook

How the Bible Developed:

It took centuries of the entire Bible to be written. The Old Testament is essentially the Scripture used by Jesus and Paul. These Scriptures developed over time, as the Jews accepted various books or groups of books. The Law of Moses was the first to be accepted, followed by the Writings or Wisdom Books, the Historical Books, and the Prophets. By the time of Jesus, the entire Old Testament had been endorsed and translated into a Greek text called the Septuagint. The New Testament developed

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much like the Old, one document at a time. The bible we have today was formally recognized at the Council of Carthage, in A.D. 397.]

Jesus accepted scripture as authority:

*"On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"²⁷ He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself."²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live." **Luke 10:25-28***

[Stop here for MAG MM](#)

No Handouts.

- *Scripture for further study:*

1 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

- How does the way we view the Bible affect how we respond to its message? *{direct us towards belief or unbelief.}*
- What are the implications to our life if scripture is God's revelation of Himself and therefore, contains all truth?
- What are the implications to our life if scripture is not God's revelation of Himself? *{relativism, uncertainty}*
- Where does the Bible do its work? How do we know it is working?
{The Bible does its work in us. We know it is working as our life changes.}

2 Peter 1:19-21

¹⁹ We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. ²⁰ Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. ²¹ 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.

If someone claims the Bible is just a collaboration of human ideas, how would you use the above scriptures to respond? (Vs. 20)

What process did inspiration follow? (Vs. 21)

{Holy Spirit guided and directed the biblical authors to record the message God placed in their hearts and minds.}

What effect does the Bible's truth have on those who read and believe it? (Vs. 19)

{Enlightens into the dark places & is reliable.}

Deuteronomy 31:16-19

2 Samuel 23:2

Psalms 119:9-16

Luke 10:26-28

Romans 4:1-3

1 Corinthians 14:37

Galatians 1:11-20

Ephesians 3:1-11

2 Peter 3:15-16

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James 1:17 ¹⁷ Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Essential Doctrines Week #1
Biblical Doctrine · The Bible is Inspired · Trinity – **One True God**

Doctrine #2

ONE TRUE GOD: THE TRINITY
(Known in Three Persons)

{Student manual pages 5&6}

Large Group Question: How would you attempt to describe the Trinity?

- What natural aspects of our world point to the existence of God?
{Intricacies of the universe, humanity's urge to serve a higher being, universal belief in a divine being...}

- Deity Belief:
Two misunderstandings

- Three distinct, separate gods = Polytheism.
- Multi-personality personality who manifests himself differently at different times (as the Father, or the Son, or the Holy Spirit) = Sabellianism.

Truth:

Monotheism

- Worshipping the one true God produced animosity amongst the Jews and their relationships with other peoples.
- Custom to honor you by honoring your nationalistic god.
- Produced feelings of rejection.
- Similar today with Christians who know the one true God and absolute truth within a pluralistic society that embraces there is no ONE god and therefore no absolute truth. (relativism).
- The Father, The Son, The Holy Spirit are three functioning Persons who are one God.
- The three cooperate with one mind and purpose.
- They are one in essence and activity. (as the following scriptures support)

John 5:16-47 The Authority of the Son

¹⁶ So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. ¹⁷ In his defense Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." ¹⁸ For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁹ Jesus gave them this answer: "Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. ²⁰ For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed.

²¹ For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it. ²² Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, ²³ that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

²⁴ "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life. ²⁵ Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when

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the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. ²⁷ And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man.

²⁸ "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out—those who have done what is good will rise to live, and those who have done what is evil will rise to be condemned. ³⁰ By myself I can do nothing; I judge only as I hear, and my judgment is just, for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.

Testimonies About Jesus

³¹ "If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. ³² There is another who testifies in my favor, and I know that his testimony about me is true.

³³ "You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. ³⁴ Not that I accept human testimony; but I mention it that you may be saved. ³⁵ John was a lamp that burned and gave light, and you chose for a time to enjoy his light.

³⁶ "I have testimony weightier than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to finish—the very works that I am doing—testify that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, ³⁸ nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent. ³⁹ You study ^[a] the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me to have life.

⁴¹ "I do not accept glory from human beings, ⁴² but I know you. I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe since you accept glory from one another but do not seek the glory that comes from the only God ^[b]?"

⁴⁵ "But do not think I will accuse you before the Father. Your accuser is Moses, on whom your hopes are set. ⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. ⁴⁷ But since you do not believe what he wrote, how are you going to believe what I say?"

Footnotes: a [John 5:39](#) Or ³⁹Study b. [John 5:44](#) Some early manuscripts the Only One

➤ Why did the Jews try to kill Jesus? (Vs. 18)

{Because He broke their Sabbath and equated Himself with God. They did not understand that Jesus was, in fact, God in the flesh.}

➤ What does verse 19 teach concerning the unity that exists between the Father and the Son?

{The Son does what the Father shows Him. They work in harmony, never in conflict.}

➤ What function has the Father given to the Son and why? (Vs.22-27)

{The Son is the judge, a function the Father has given Him and so ensured that the Son receives added honor.}

➤ How dependent is the Son on the Father? (Vs. 28-30)

{Even when performing His unique function, Jesus confers with the Father in making His decisions. What does this say about our dependency on the Father and Christ?}

➤ To what proofs of His divinity did Jesus point? (Vs. 31-37)

{Jesus held up the testimony of John the Baptist and God the Father to confirm His divine nature.}

➤ How does this passage support the doctrine of the Trinity?

{The Father and the Son are separate and distinct, yet They work in unity to accomplish Their will.}

[Not in student handbook:

God in the Old & New Testament:

Many people complain that God in the Old Testament seems more judgmental, rules oriented, and singular in nature than God in the New Testament, who seems more loving, forgiving, and Trinitarian. This apparent contradiction comes from an improper perception of God as He is seen in the Old Testament. In the Old

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Testament, God also called people to repentance. He was longsuffering. And He provided for His followers. There are also indications of the Trinity in the Old Testament: The Spirit's 'hovering over the waters' (Genesis 1:2). God's plural monologue (Genesis 1:26, 27). His promise to pour out His Spirit (Joel 2:28).]

Mark 1:9-13

⁹ *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* ¹⁰ *Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* ¹¹ *And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."*

¹² *At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness,* ¹³ *and he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted ^[a] by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.*

Footnotes: a. [Mark 1:13](#) The Greek for tempted can also mean tested.

- What roles do the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit play in this passage?

{The Son was baptized, the Holy Spirit descended on Him in the form of the dove, and the Father announced His approval.}

- Why do you think it was vital for all three members of the Trinity to be present at this crucial inaugural event in the ministry of Jesus?

{The full manifestation of the Triune god at Jesus' baptism confirmed His role in the divine plan and demonstrated the unity of purpose within the Trinity.}

- What does Jesus' response to the Spirit's directing Him into the wilderness indicate about the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit?

{Jesus was willing to submit to the Holy Spirit's direction, fully recognizing and respecting the Spirit's role and function in the Trinity.}

Isaiah 42:1

¹ *"Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen one in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
and he will bring justice to the nations.*

Personal Question: Can our finite minds ever grasp the concept of Trinity?

[Stop here for MAG MM](#)

Matthew 28:18-19

¹⁸ *Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.* ¹⁹ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in [into] the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,*

- What claim does Jesus make for himself? (Vs. 18)

{'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me' Jesus in God as only God has ALL authority.}

- Why did Jesus command His disciples to baptize people in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

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{Jesus had the disciples use a Trinitarian formula when baptizing converts as an acknowledgement that the members of the Trinity work together to make salvation possible.}

[Not in student handbook

The Trinitarian Defense:

The New Testament authors speak of the Trinity in a way that assumes their readers will understand what they are teaching. When we read the New Testament, it is clear we are not witnessing a new theological concept being introduced. Nowhere is the doctrine of the Trinity laid out like the doctrines of salvation of the Church. The New Testament is built on the assumption of the Trinity, and references are made to the unified workings of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit without explanation.]

- What promise did Jesus make to His disciples? What does this promise tell us about Jesus' nature? (Vs. 19)

{Jesus promised to be with His disciples 'to the end of the age'. This statement confirms that Jesus is, in fact, eternal in nature.}

Getting to know Him:

Genesis 1:1, 2

John 14: 16, 17

2 Corinthians 13:14

Deuteronomy 6:4

Isaiah 43:10, 11

1 John 1:1-4

John 1:1-14

Zechariah 14:9

John 10:30

Handouts: What Christians Believe about the Trinity from Rose Publishing. "What Does God Do?" article from RZIM. "Creative Collaboration" article from RZIM.

CELEBRATION OF DISCIPLINE – CHAPTER 5 THE DISCIPLINE of STUDY by RICHARD FOSTER

Chapter 5: The Discipline of Study

He that studies only men, will get the body of knowledge without the soul; and he that studies only books, the soul without the body. He that to what he sees, adds observation, and to what he reads, reflection, is in the right road to knowledge, provided that in scrutinizing the hearts of others, he neglects not his own. — CALEB COLTON

The purpose of the Spiritual Disciplines is the total transformation of the person. They aim at replacing old destructive habits of thought with new life-giving habits. Nowhere is this purpose more clearly seen than in the Discipline of study.

The apostle Paul tells us that we are transformed through the renewal of the mind (Rom. 12: 2). The mind is renewed by applying it to those things that will transform it. "Finally, brethren, whatever is

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true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Phil. 4: 8, [italics added]). The Discipline of study is the primary vehicle to bring us to “think about these things.” Therefore, we should rejoice that we are not left to our own devices but have been given this means of God’s grace for the changing of our inner spirit. Many Christians remain in bondage to fears and anxieties simply because they do not avail themselves of the Discipline of study. They may be faithful in church attendance and earnest in fulfilling their religious duties, and still they are not changed. I am not here speaking only of those who are going through mere religious forms, but of those who are genuinely seeking to worship and obey Jesus Christ as Lord and Master. They may sing with gusto, pray in the Spirit, live as obediently as they know, even receive divine visions and revelations, and yet the tenor of their lives remains unchanged. Why? Because they have never taken up one of the central ways God uses to change us: study. Jesus made it unmistakably clear that the knowledge of the truth will set us free. “You will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8: 32). Good feelings will not free us. Ecstatic experiences will not free us. Getting “high on Jesus” will not free us. Without a knowledge of the truth, we will not be free. This principle is true in every area of human endeavor. It is true in biology and mathematics. It is true in marriages and other human relationships. But it is especially true in reference to the spiritual life. Many are hampered and confused in the spiritual walk by a simple ignorance of the truth. Worse yet, many have been brought into the most cruel bondage by false teaching. “You traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves” (Matt. 23: 15). Let us therefore apply ourselves to learning what constitutes the Spiritual Discipline of study, to identify its pitfalls, to practice it with joy, and to experience the liberation it brings.”

— Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster

<https://a.co/6lfzOlo>

“What Is Study? Study is a specific kind of experience in which through careful attention to reality the mind is enabled to move in a certain direction. Remember, the mind will always take on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates. Perhaps we observe a tree or read a book. We see it, feel it, understand it, draw conclusions from it. And as we do, our thought processes take on an order conforming to the order in the tree or book. When this is done with concentration, perception, and repetition, ingrained habits of thought are formed. The Old Testament instructs the Israelites to write the Laws on gates and doorposts and bind them to their wrists so that “they shall be as frontlets between your eyes” (Deut. 11: 18). The purpose of this instruction is to direct the mind repeatedly and regularly toward certain modes of thought about God and human relationships. A rosary or a prayer wheel has the same objective. Of course, the New Testament replaces laws written on the doorposts with laws written on the heart and leads us to Jesus, our ever-present and inward Teacher. We must once again emphasize that the ingrained habits of thought that are formed will conform to the order of the thing being studied. What we study determines the kind of habits that are formed, which is why Paul urges us to focus on things that are true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, and gracious. The process that occurs in study should be distinguished from meditation. Meditation is devotional; study is analytical. Meditation will relish a word; study will explicate it. Although

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meditation and study often overlap, they constitute two distinct experiences. Study provides a certain objective framework within which meditation can successfully function. In study there are two “books” to be studied: verbal and nonverbal. Books and lectures, therefore, constitute only half the field of study, perhaps less. The world of nature and, most important, the careful observation of events and actions are the primary nonverbal fields of study. The principal task of study is a perception into the reality of a given situation, encounter, book, etc. We can go through a major crisis, for example, without any perception of the real nature of the tragic situation. But if we carefully observe and reflect upon what occurred, we can learn a great deal. Four Steps Study involves four steps. The first is repetition. Repetition regularly channels the mind in a specific direction, thus ingraining habits of thought. We may smile condescendingly at the old teaching method of recitation, but we must realize that sheer repetition without even understanding what is being repeated does affect the inner mind. Ingrained habits of thought can be formed by repetition alone, thus changing behavior. This is one reason why so many forms of spirituality emphasize the regular rehearsal of the deeds of God. This is also the central rationale behind psychocybernetics, which trains the individual to repeat certain affirmations regularly (for example, I love myself unconditionally). It is not even important that the person believe what he or she is repeating, only that it be repeated. The inner mind is thus trained and will eventually respond by modifying behavior to conform to the affirmation. This”

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<https://a.co/d76sjjL>

“principle has, of course, been known for centuries but only recently has it received scientific confirmation. This is why the issue of television programming is so important. With innumerable murders being portrayed each evening on prime-time TV, the repetition alone trains the inner mind in destructive thought patterns. Concentration is the second step in study. If, in addition to bringing the mind repeatedly to the subject matter, the person will concentrate on what is being studied, learning is vastly increased. Concentration centers the mind. It focuses the attention on what is being studied. The human mind has an incredible ability to concentrate. It constantly receives thousands of stimuli, each one of which is stored in its memory banks while it focuses on only a few. This natural ability of the brain is enhanced when, with singleness of purpose, we center our attention upon a desired object of study. We live in a culture that does not value concentration. Distraction is the order of the day. Many will, for example, go through all the activities of the day and evening with the radio on. Some will read a book and watch TV at the same time. Most people find it virtually impossible to go through an entire day focusing on a single thing. We are the lesser for this dissipation of our energies. When we not only repeatedly focus the mind in a particular direction, centering our attention on the subject, but understand what we are studying, we reach a new level.

Comprehension then is the third step in the Discipline of study. Jesus, as you remember, reminds us that it is not just the truth but the knowledge of the truth that sets us free (John 8: 32).

Comprehension focuses on the knowledge of the truth. All of us have had the experience of reading something over and over and then, all of a sudden, we understand what it means. This “eureka” experience of understanding catapults us onto a new level of growth and freedom. It leads to insight and discernment. It provides the basis for a true perception of reality. One further step is needed: reflection. Although comprehension defines what we are studying, reflection defines the significance of what we are studying. To reflect, to ruminate, on the events of our time leads us to the inner

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reality of those events. Reflection brings us to see things from God's perspective. In reflection we come to understand not only our subject matter, but ourselves. Jesus speaks often of ears that do not hear and eyes that do not see. When we ponder the meaning of what we study, we come to hear and see in a new way. It soon becomes obvious that study demands humility. Study simply cannot happen until we are willing to be subject to the subject matter. We must submit to the system. We must come as student, not teacher. Not only is study directly dependent upon humility, but it is conducive to it. Arrogance and a teachable spirit are mutually exclusive. All of us know persons who have taken some course of study or attained some academic degree who parade their information in an offensive manner. We should feel profound sorrow for such people. They do not understand the Spiritual Discipline of study. They have mistaken the accumulation of information for knowledge. They equate the spouting of words with wisdom. How tragic! The apostle John defines eternal life as the knowledge of God. "And this is eternal life, that they know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John 17: 3). Even a touch of this experiential knowledge is sufficient to give us a profound sense of humility. Now, having laid the basis, let us move on to consider the practical implementation of the Discipline of study.

Study of Books When we consider study, we most naturally think of books or other writings. Though only half of the field, as I stated earlier, books are the most obvious and clearly important. Unfortunately, many seem to think that studying a book is a simple task. No doubt this flippant attitude accounts for the poor reading habits of so many people. Studying a book is an extremely complex matter, especially for the novice. As with tennis or typing, when we are first learning it seems that there are a thousand details to master and we wonder how on earth we will keep everything in mind at the same time. Once we reach proficiency, however, the mechanics become second nature, and we are able to concentrate on our tennis game or the material to be typed. The same is true with studying a book. Study is an exacting art involving a labyrinth of details. To convince people that they must learn to study is the major obstacle. Most people assume that because they know how to read words they know how to study. This limited grasp of the nature of study explains why so many people gain so little from reading books. When we read a book, three intrinsic and three extrinsic rules govern our study.* The intrinsic rules may, in the beginning, necessitate three separate readings but in time can be done concurrently. The first reading involves understanding the book: What is the author saying? The second reading involves interpreting the book: What does the author mean? The third reading involves evaluating the book: Is the author right or wrong? Most of us tend to do the third reading right away and often never do the first and second readings at all. We give a critical analysis of a book before we understand what it says. We judge a book to be right or wrong before we interpret its meaning. The wise writer of Ecclesiastes says that there is a time for every matter under heaven, and the time for critical analysis of a book comes after careful understanding and interpretation. The intrinsic rules of study, however, are in themselves inadequate. To read successfully we need the extrinsic aids of experience, other books, and live discussion. Experience is the only way we can interpret and relate to what we read. We read a book on tragedy with different eyes when we have walked through the valley of the shadow ourselves. Experience that has been understood and reflected upon informs and enlightens our study. Other books can include dictionaries, commentaries, and other interpretative literature, but great books that precede or advance the issue being studied are more significant. Books often have meaning only when they are read in relation to other writings. People will find it exceedingly difficult to understand the New Testament books of Romans or Hebrews, for example, without a grounding in the literature of the Old Testament. It is nearly impossible to read The Federalist Papers without first having read the Articles of Confederation and the U.S.

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Constitution. The great writings that take up the central issues of life interact with one another. They cannot be read in isolation. Live discussion refers to the ordinary interaction that occurs among human beings as they pursue a particular course of study. Often my students and I will read from Plato or St. Augustine and have only a fragmentary grasp of the meaning or significance of what we have read. But when we gather for discussion, debate, and Socratic dialogue insights emerge that would never have come without this exchange. We interact with the author, we interact with each other, and new creative ideas are born. The first and most important book we are to study is the Bible. The psalmist asks, "How can a young man keep his way pure?" He then answers his own question, "By guarding it according to thy word," and adds, "I have laid up thy word in my heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119: 9, 11). Probably the "word" that the psalmist refers to is the Torah, but Christians throughout the centuries have found this to be true in their study throughout Scripture. "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3: 16, 17). Note that the central purpose is not doctrinal purity (though that is no doubt involved) but inner transformation. We come to the Scripture to be changed, not to amass information. We must understand, however, that a vast difference exists between the study of Scripture and the devotional reading of Scripture. In the study of Scripture a high priority is placed upon interpretation: what it means. In the devotional reading of Scripture a high priority is placed upon application: what it means for me. All too often people rush to the application stage and bypass the interpretation stage: they want to know what it means for them before they know what it means! Also, we are not seeking spiritual ecstasy in study; in fact, ecstasy can be a hindrance. When we study a book of the Bible we are seeking to be controlled by the intent of the author. We are determined to hear what he is saying, not what we want him to say. We want life-transforming truth, not just good feelings. We are willing to pay the price of barren day after barren day until the meaning is clear. This process revolutionizes our lives. The apostle Peter found some things in the epistles of "our beloved brother Paul" that were "hard to understand" (2 Pet. 3: 15, 16). If Peter found it so, we will as well. We will need to work at it. Daily devotional reading is certainly commendable, but it is not study. Anyone who is after "a little word from God for today" is not interested in the Discipline of study. The average adult Sunday School class is far too superficial and devotional to help us study the Bible. (There are exceptions and some churches offer serious courses in the Bible.) Perhaps you live close to a seminary or university where you can audit courses. If so, you are fortunate, especially if you find a teacher who dispenses life as well as information. If, however, that is not the case (and even if it is) you can do several things to begin studying the Bible. Some of my most profitable experiences of study have come through structuring a private retreat of two to three days' duration. No doubt you will object that, given your schedule, you cannot possibly find that kind of time. I want you to know that it is no easier for me to set aside the time than for anyone else. I fight and struggle for every retreat, scheduling it into my datebook many weeks in advance. I have suggested this idea to many groups and found that professional people with busy schedules, laborers with rigid schedules, homemakers with multiple schedules, and others can, in fact, find time for a private study retreat. I have discovered that the most difficult problem is not finding time but convincing myself that this is important enough to set aside the time. Scripture tells us that following the marvelous resurrection of Dorcas, Peter "tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner" (Acts 9: 43, KJV). It was while tarrying in Joppa that the Holy Spirit got through to Peter (with visual aids no less) about his cultural and ethnic prejudices. What would have happened if, instead of tarrying, Peter had immediately struck out on a speaking tour to tell of the resurrection of Dorcas? Is

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it possible that he would have failed to come to that shattering insight from the Holy Spirit, “Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation any one who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10: 34)? No one knows. But I do know this: God desires various “tarrying” places for all of us where he can teach us in special ways. For many people, a weekend is a good time for such an experience. Others can arrange a block of time in the middle of the week. If only one day is possible, a Sunday is often excellent. The best place is almost anywhere, as long as it is away from home. To leave the house or apartment not only sets us free from the telephone and domestic responsibilities, but it also sets our minds into a learning mode. Motels, as well as cabins, work well. Camping is less desirable since the tasks of living distract us more. Most retreat centers can accommodate private retreatants; Catholic centers”

— Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster

<https://a.co/22mmdwG>

“centers in particular have a long tradition of encouraging private retreats and therefore have appropriate facilities. Organized group retreats almost never take study seriously so you will probably need to structure the retreat yourself. Because you are alone you will need to discipline yourself and use your time carefully. If you are new at it you will not want to overdo and thus burn yourself out. With experience, however, you can put in ten to twelve hours of good study each day. What should you study? That depends on what you need. I do not know your needs, but I know that one of the great needs among Christians today is simply the reading of large portions of Scripture. Much of our Bible reading is fragmentary and sporadic. I actually have known students who have taken Bible courses and never even read, as a whole, the book being studied. Consider taking a major book of the Bible, like Genesis or Jeremiah, and read it straight through. Notice the structure and flow of the book. Note areas of difficulty and return to them later. Jot down thoughts and impressions. Sometimes it is wise to combine the study of the Bible with the study of some great, devotional classic. Such retreat experiences can transform your life. Another approach to the study of the Bible is to take a smaller book, like Ephesians or 1 John, and read it through each day for a month. More than any single effort this will put the structure of the book into your mind. Read it without trying to fit it into established categories. Expect to hear new things in new ways. Keep a journal of your findings. In the course of these studies you will obviously want to make use of the best secondary aids available. In addition to studying the Bible, do not neglect the study of some of the experiential classics in Christian literature. Begin with The Confessions of St. Augustine. Next turn to The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis. Don't neglect The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence. For an added pleasure read The Little Flowers of St. Francis by Brother Ugolino. Perhaps you might want something a bit heavier next like the Pensées of Blaise Pascal. Enjoy the Table Talks of Martin Luther before you wade into Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. Consider reading the pacemaker of religious journal writing, The Journal of George Fox, or perhaps the better-known Journal of John Wesley. Read carefully William Law's A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life; its words carry a contemporary ring. From the twentieth century read A Testament of Devotion by Thomas Kelly, The Cost of Discipleship by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis. Obviously this is only a sampling. I completely passed over the Revelations of Divine Love by Juliana of Norwich, Introduction to the Devout Life by Francis de Sales, The Journal of John Woolman, and many other books. Nor should we forget the great body of

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literature by men and women from many walks of life. Many of these thinkers have unusual perception into the human predicament. Writers like Lao-tse of China and Zarathustra of Persia, Shakespeare and Milton, Cervantes and Dante, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky, and, in our century, Dag Hammarskjöld. One word of caution is in order. Do not be overwhelmed or discouraged by all the books you have not read. You will probably not read all those listed here and will undoubtedly read others not noted. These writings have been listed to help you see the excellent amount of literature at our disposal to guide us in the spiritual walk. Many others have traveled the same path and have left markers. Remember that the key to the Discipline of study is not reading many books, but experiencing what we do read. Study of Nonverbal “Books” We now come to the least recognized but perhaps the most important field of study: the observation of reality in things, events, and actions. The easiest place to begin is with nature. It is not difficult to see that the created order has many things to teach us. Isaiah tells us that “. . . the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isa. 55: 12). The handiwork of the Creator can speak to us and teach us if we will listen. Martin Buber tells the story of the rabbi who went to a pond every day at dawn to learn “the song with which the frogs praise God.” 1 We begin the study of nature by paying attention. We see flowers or birds. We observe them carefully and prayerfully. André Gide describes the time when he observed a moth being reborn from its chrysalis during a classroom lecture. He was filled with wonder, awe, joy at this metamorphosis, this resurrection. Enthusiastically, he showed it to his professor who replied with a note of disapproval, “What! Didn’t you know that a chrysalis is the envelope of a butterfly? Every butterfly you see has come out of a chrysalis. It’s perfectly natural.” Disillusioned, Gide wrote, “Yes, indeed, I knew my natural history as well, perhaps better than he. . . . But because it was natural, could he not see that it was marvelous? Poor creature! From that day, I took a dislike to him and a loathing to his lessons.” 2 Who wouldn’t! Gide’s professor had only amassed information; he had not studied. And so the first step in the study of nature is reverent observation. A leaf can speak of order and variety, complexity and symmetry. Evelyn Underhill writes, “Gather yourself up, as the exercises of recollection have taught you to do. Then . . . stretch out by a distinct act of loving will towards one of the myriad manifestations of life that surround you. . . . As to the object of contemplation, it matters little. From Alp to insect, anything will do, provided that your attitude be right.” 3 The next step is to make friends with the flowers and the trees and the little creatures that creep upon the earth. Like the fabled Dr. Doolittle, talk with the animals. Of course, you can’t really talk to each other . . . or can you? There is certainly a communication that goes beyond words, and often animals seem to respond to our friendship and compassion. I know this because I have experimented with it and so have some first-rate scientists, and we have found it to be true. Perhaps the stories of St. Francis taming the wolf of Gubbio and preaching to the birds are not so farfetched. Of this much we can be sure: if we love the creation, we will learn from it. In *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoyevsky counsels, “Love all God’s creation, the whole and every grain of sand in it. Love every leaf, every ray of God’s light. Love the animals, love the plants, love everything. If you love everything, you will perceive the divine mystery in things. Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend it better every day.” 4 There are, of course, many other “books” beside nature that we should study. If we will observe the relationships that go on between human beings, we will receive a graduate-level education. Watch, for example, how much of our speech is aimed at justifying our actions. We find it almost impossible to act and allow the act to speak for itself. No, we must explain it, justify it, demonstrate the rightness of it. Why do we feel this compulsion to set the record straight? Because of pride and fear, because our reputations are at stake! This compulsion is particularly easy to observe among salespeople, writers,

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ministers, professors—all those who earn their living by being good with words. If, however, we gradually make ourselves one of the principal subjects of study we will be delivered from a haughty spirit. In time we will be unable to pray like the Pharisee, “God, I thank thee that I am not like other men . . .” (Luke 18: 11). We should become attentive to the ordinary relationships we encounter throughout the day: at home, work, school. We notice the things that control people. Remember, we are not trying to condemn or judge anyone; we are only trying to learn. If we do find a judging spirit emerging within ourselves, we observe that and learn. As I mentioned earlier, one of the principal objects of our study should be ourselves. We should learn the things that control us. We observe our inner feelings and mood swings. What controls our moods? Why do we like certain people and dislike others? What do these things teach us about ourselves?* In doing all this we are not trying to be amateur psychologists or sociologists. Nor are we obsessed with excessive introspection. We study these matters with a spirit of humility, needing a large dose of grace. We want only to follow the dictum of Socrates: “Know thyself.” And through the blessed Holy Spirit we are expecting Jesus to be our living and ever-present Teacher. We would do well to study institutions and cultures and the forces that shape them. Also, we should ponder the events of our time, noting first, with a spirit of discernment, what things our culture lifts up as “great events.” Let’s look at the values of the culture—not what people say they are, but what they actually are. Let’s learn to ask questions. What are the assets and liabilities of a technological society? What has the fast-food industry done to the tradition of a family gathering for dinner? Why do we find it difficult in our culture to have time to develop relationships? Is Western individualism beneficial or destructive? What in our culture is in harmony with the gospel and what is at odds with it? One of the most important functions of Christian prophets in our day is the ability to perceive the consequences of various forces in our culture and to make value judgments upon them. Study produces joy. Like any novice, we will find it hard work in the beginning. But the greater our proficiency, the greater our joy. Alexander Pope says, “There is no study that is not capable of delighting us after a little application to it.” 5 Study is well worth our most serious effort.”

— Celebration of Discipline, Special Anniversary Edition: The Path to Spiritual Growth by Richard J. Foster
<https://a.co/1IXfMlk>

PSALM 119

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Delight in God's Word

□ Alef

¹ How^(a) happy are those whose way is blameless,^(a)
who live according to the Lord's instruction!^(a)

² Happy are those who keep His decrees^(a)
and seek Him with all their heart.^(a)

³ They do nothing wrong;^(a)
they follow His ways.

⁴ You have commanded that Your precepts^(a)
be diligently kept.

⁵ If only my ways were committed
to keeping Your statutes!^(a)

⁶ Then I would not be ashamed^(a)
when I think about all Your commands.

⁷ I will praise You with a sincere heart^(a)
when I learn Your righteous judgments.

⁸ I will keep Your statutes;
never abandon me.^(a)

□ Bet

⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping Your^(a) word.^(a)

¹⁰ I have sought You with all my heart;^(a)
don't let me wander from Your commands.^(a)

¹¹ I have treasured Your word in my heart^(a)
so that I may not sin against You.

¹² Lord, may You be praised;
teach me Your statutes.^(a)

¹³ With my lips I proclaim
all the judgments from Your mouth.^(a)

¹⁴ I rejoice in the way revealed by Your decrees^(a)
as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts^(a)
and think about Your ways.^(a)

¹⁶ I will delight in Your statutes;^(a)
I will not forget Your word.

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□ Gimel

17 Deal generously with Your servant^(U)
so that I might live;
then I will keep Your word.

18 Open my eyes so that I may contemplate
wonderful things from Your instruction.

19 I am a stranger on earth;^(W)
do not hide Your commands from me.

20 I am continually overcome
with longing for Your judgments.^(W)

21 You rebuke the proud,
the ones under a curse,^(W)
who wander from Your commands.^(W)

22 Take insult and contempt away from me,^(Z)
for I have kept Your decrees.

23 Though princes sit together speaking against me,^(AA)
Your servant will think about Your statutes;^(AB)

24 Your decrees are my delight
and my counselors.^(AC)

□ Dalet

25 My life is down in the dust;^(AD)
give me life^(AB) through Your word.

26 I told You about my life,
and You listened to me;
teach me Your statutes.^(AF)

27 Help me understand
the meaning of Your precepts
so that I can meditate on Your wonders.^(AG)

28 I am weary^(J) from grief;
strengthen me through Your word.^(AH)

29 Keep me from the way of deceit
and graciously give me Your instruction.

30 I have chosen the way of truth;
I have set Your ordinances before me.^(AJ)

31 I cling to Your decrees;
Lord, do not put me to shame.^(AJ)

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32 I pursue the way of Your commands,
for You broaden my understanding.^{[GJ](AK)}

□ He

33 Teach me, Lord, the meaning^[GJ] of Your statutes,
and I will always keep them.^{[GJ](AL)}

34 Help me understand Your instruction,^(AM)
and I will obey it
and follow it with all my heart.^(AN)

35 Help me stay on the path of Your commands,^(AO)
for I take pleasure in it.^(AP)

36 Turn my heart to Your decrees^(AO)
and not to material gain.^(AR)

37 Turn my eyes
from looking at what is worthless;^(AS)
give me life in Your ways.^{[GJ](AT)}

38 Confirm what You said to Your servant,^(AU)
for it produces reverence for You.

39 Turn away the disgrace I dread;^(AV)
indeed, Your judgments are good.

40 How I long for Your precepts!^(AW)
Give me life through Your righteousness.

□ Vav

41 Let Your faithful love come to me, Lord,^(AX)
Your salvation, as You promised.^(AY)

42 Then I can answer the one who taunts me,^(AZ)
for I trust in Your word.

43 Never take the word of truth from my mouth,
for I hope in Your judgments.^(BA)

44 I will always obey Your instruction,
forever and ever.^(BB)

45 I will walk freely in an open place^(BC)
because I seek Your precepts.^(BD)

46 I will speak of Your decrees before kings
and not be ashamed.^(BE)

47 I delight in Your commands,
which I love.^(BF)

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48 I will lift up my hands^(B6) to Your commands,
which I love,
and will meditate on Your statutes.^(B4)

□ Zayin

49 Remember Your word to Your servant;
You have given me hope through it.

50 This is my comfort in my affliction:^(B1)

Your promise has given me life.

51 The arrogant constantly ridicule me,
but I do not turn away from Your instruction.^(EJ)

52 Lord, I remember Your judgments from long ago
and find comfort.

53 Rage seizes me^(B3) because of the wicked
who reject Your instruction.^(EJ)

54 Your statutes are the theme of my song
during my earthly life.^(H)

55 Yahweh, I remember Your name^(B4) in the night,^(B4)
and I obey Your instruction.

56 This is my practice:
I obey Your precepts.^(B0)

□ Khet

57 The Lord is my portion;^{(I)(B2)}

I have promised to keep Your words.

58 I have sought Your favor^(B0) with all my heart;
be gracious to me^(B3) according to Your promise.

59 I thought about my ways^(B5)
and turned my steps back to Your decrees.

60 I hurried, not hesitating
to keep Your commands.

61 Though the ropes of the wicked^(B1)
were wrapped around me,
I did not forget Your instruction.^(EJ)

62 I rise at midnight to thank You^(B4)
for Your righteous judgments.^(EJ)

63 I am a friend to all who fear You,^(B4)
to those who keep Your precepts.

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64 Lord, the earth is filled with Your faithful love;^(B)
teach me Your statutes.^(B2)

□ Tet

65 Lord, You have treated Your servant well,
just as You promised.

66 Teach me good judgment and discernment,^(CA)
for I rely on Your commands.

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,^(CB)
but now I keep Your word.

68 You are good,^(CC) and You do what is good;^(CD)
teach me Your statutes.

69 The arrogant have smeared me with lies,^(CE)
but I obey Your precepts with all my heart.^(CF)

70 Their hearts are hard and insensitive,^(CG)
but I delight in Your instruction.^(CH)

71 It was good for me to be afflicted^(CI)
so that I could learn Your statutes.

72 Instruction from Your lips^(CJ) is better for me
than thousands of gold and silver pieces.

□ Yod

73 Your hands made me and formed me;^(CK)
give me understanding
so that I can learn Your commands.^(CL)

74 Those who fear You will see me and rejoice,^(CM)
for I put my hope in Your word.^(CN)

75 I know, Lord, that Your judgments are just
and that You have afflicted me fairly.^(CO)

76 May Your faithful love comfort me
as You promised Your servant.

77 May Your compassion come to me^(CP)
so that I may live,
for Your instruction is my delight.^(CQ)

78 Let the arrogant be put to shame^(CR)
for slandering me with lies;
I will meditate on Your precepts.

79 Let those who fear You,

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those who know Your decrees, turn to me.

⁸⁰ May my heart be blameless regarding Your statutes^(C)
so that I will not be put to shame.

□ Kaf

⁸¹ I long for Your salvation;^(C)

I put my hope in Your word.^(C)

⁸² My eyes grow weary

looking for what You have promised;^(C)

I ask, "When will You comfort me?"

⁸³ Though I have become like a wineskin dried by smoke,
I do not forget Your statutes.

⁸⁴ How many days must Your servant wait?

When will You execute judgment on my persecutors?^(C)

⁸⁵ The arrogant have dug pits for me;^(C)

they violate Your instruction.

⁸⁶ All Your commands are true;

people persecute me with lies—help me!^(C)

⁸⁷ They almost ended my life on earth,

but I did not abandon Your precepts.

⁸⁸ Give me life in accordance with Your faithful love,
and I will obey the decree You have spoken.

□ Lamed

⁸⁹ Lord, Your word is forever;^(C)

it is firmly fixed in heaven.

⁹⁰ Your faithfulness is for all generations;^(D)

You established the earth, and it stands firm.^(B)

⁹¹ They stand today in accordance with Your judgments,^(C)
for all things are Your servants.^(D)

⁹² If Your instruction had not been my delight,
I would have died in my affliction.^(B)

⁹³ I will never forget Your precepts,
for You have given me life through them.^(B)

⁹⁴ I am Yours; save me,^(C)

for I have sought Your precepts.^(H)

⁹⁵ The wicked hope to destroy me,^(D)
but I contemplate Your decrees.

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96 I have seen a limit to all perfection,
but Your command is without limit.

□ Mem

97 How I love Your instruction!^(LJ)

It is my meditation all day long.^(LX)

98 Your commands make me wiser than my enemies,^(LJ)
for they are always with me.

99 I have more insight than all my teachers
because Your decrees are my meditation.^(LM)

100 I understand more than the elders^(LN)
because I obey Your precepts.^(LO)

101 I have kept my feet from every evil path^(LP)
to follow Your word.

102 I have not turned from Your judgments,^(LO)
for You Yourself have instructed me.

103 How sweet Your word is^(LB) to my taste—
sweeter than honey in my mouth.

104 I gain understanding from Your precepts;^(LS)
therefore I hate every false way.^(LT)

□ Nun

105 Your word is a lamp for my feet^(LU)
and a light on my path.

106 I have solemnly sworn^(LV)
to keep Your righteous judgments.

107 I am severely afflicted;
Lord, give me life through Your word.^(LW)

108 Lord, please accept my willing offerings of praise,^(LX)
and teach me Your judgments.^(LY)

109 My life is constantly in danger,^(LJ)
yet I do not forget Your instruction.^(LZ)

110 The wicked have set a trap for me,^(EA)
but I have not wandered from Your precepts.^(EB)

111 I have Your decrees as a heritage forever;
indeed, they are the joy of my heart.^(EC)

112 I am resolved to obey Your statutes
to the very end.^(ED)

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□ Samek

113 I hate those who are double-minded,^(E3)
but I love Your instruction.^(E3)
114 You are my shelter and my shield;^(E3)
I put my hope in Your word.^(E4)
115 Depart from me,^(E1) you evil ones,
so that I may obey my God's commands.^(E1)
116 Sustain me as You promised,^(E4) and I will live;
do not let me be ashamed of my hope.^(E1)
117 Sustain me so that I can be safe^(E4)
and always be concerned about Your statutes.^(E4)
118 You reject all who stray from Your statutes,^(E1)
for their deceit is a lie.
119 You remove all the wicked on earth
as if they were^(E1) dross;^(E1)
therefore, I love Your decrees.^(E1)
120 I tremble^(E1) in awe of You;^(E1)
I fear Your judgments.

□ Ayin

121 I have done what is just and right;^(E1)
do not leave me to my oppressors.
122 Guarantee Your servant's well-being;^(E1)
do not let the arrogant oppress me.
123 My eyes grow weary^(E1) looking for Your salvation
and for Your righteous promise.
124 Deal with Your servant based on Your faithful love;^(E1)
teach me Your statutes.
125 I am Your servant;^(E1) give me understanding^(E1)
so that I may know Your decrees.
126 It is time for the Lord to act,^(E1)
for they have violated Your instruction.
127 Since I love Your commands^(E1)
more than gold, even the purest gold,
128 I carefully follow^(E1) all Your precepts^(E1)
and hate every false way.^(E1)

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□ Pe

129 Your decrees are wonderful;^(E9)
therefore I obey them.^(ED)

130 The revelation of Your words^(EB) brings light
and gives understanding to the inexperienced.^(EF)

131 I open my mouth and pant^(EG)
because I long for Your commands.

132 Turn to me and be gracious to me,^(EH)
as is Your practice toward those who love Your name.

133 Make my steps steady through Your promise;^(EI)
don't let any sin dominate me.^(EJ)

134 Redeem me from human oppression,^(EK)
and I will keep Your precepts.

135 Show favor to Your servant,^(EL)
and teach me Your statutes.^(EM)

136 My eyes pour out streams of tears^(EN)
because people do not follow Your instruction.

□ Tsade

137 You are righteous, Lord,^(EO)
and Your judgments are just.

138 The decrees You issue are righteous
and altogether trustworthy.^(EP)

139 My anger overwhelms me
because my foes forget Your words.^(EQ)

140 Your word is completely pure,^(ER)
and Your servant loves it.^(ES)

141 I am insignificant and despised,^(ET)
but I do not forget Your precepts.^(EU)

142 Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,
and Your instruction is true.^(EV)

143 Trouble and distress have overtaken me,
but Your commands are my delight.^(EW)

144 Your decrees are righteous forever.^(EX)
Give me understanding, and I will live.

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□ Qof

145 I call with all my heart; answer me, Lord.
I will obey Your statutes.^(EY)

146 I call to You; save me,
and I will keep Your decrees.^(EZ)

147 I rise before dawn and cry out for help;^(GA)
I put my hope in Your word.

148 I am awake through each watch of the night
to meditate on Your promise.^(GB)

149 In keeping with Your faithful love, hear my voice.
Lord, give me life in keeping with Your justice.^(GC)

150 Those who pursue evil plans^{(GJ)(GD)} come near;
they are far from Your instruction.

151 You are near, Lord,^(GE)
and all Your commands are true.^(GF)

152 Long ago I learned from Your decrees
that You have established them forever.^(GG)

□ Resh

153 Consider my affliction and rescue me,^(GH)
for I have not forgotten Your instruction.^(GI)

154 Defend my cause and redeem me;^(GJ)
give me life as You promised.

155 Salvation is far from the wicked
because they do not seek Your statutes.^(GK)

156 Your compassions are many, Lord;^(GL)
give me life according to Your judgments.

157 My persecutors and foes are many.^(GM)
I have not turned from Your decrees.^(GN)

158 I have seen the disloyal^(GO) and feel disgust^(GP)
because they do not keep Your word.

159 Consider how I love Your precepts;
Lord, give me life according to Your faithful love.^(GQ)

160 The entirety of Your word is truth,
and all Your righteous judgments endure forever.^(GR)

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□ Sin/ □ Shin

161 Princes have persecuted me without cause,
but my heart fears only Your word.^(GS)

162 I rejoice over Your promise^(GT)
like one who finds vast treasure.

163 I hate and abhor falsehood,^(GU)
but I love Your instruction.^(GV)

164 I praise You seven times a day
for Your righteous judgments.^(GW)

165 Abundant peace belongs to those^(GX)
who love Your instruction;
nothing makes them stumble.^(GY)

166 Lord, I hope for Your salvation^(GZ)
and carry out Your commands.

167 I obey Your decrees
and love them greatly.^(HA)

168 I obey Your precepts and decrees,
for all my ways are before You.^(HB)

□ Tav

169 Let my cry reach You, Lord;^(HC)
give me understanding according to Your word.^(HD)

170 Let my plea reach You;^(HE)
rescue me according to Your promise.^(HF)

171 My lips pour out praise,^(HG)
for You teach me Your statutes.^(HH)

172 My tongue sings about Your promise,^(HI)
for all Your commands are righteous.^(HJ)

173 May Your hand be ready to help me,^(HK)
for I have chosen Your precepts.^(HL)

174 I long for Your salvation, Lord,
and Your instruction is my delight.^(HM)

175 Let me live, and I will praise You;^(HN)
may Your judgments help me.

176 I wander like a lost sheep;^(HO)
seek Your servant,^(HP)
for I do not forget Your commands.^(HQ)

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Footnotes

- a. [Psalm 119:1](#) The stanzas of this poem form an acrostic.
- b. [Psalm 119:9](#) *Or keeping it according to Your*
- c. [Psalm 119:28](#) *Or I weep*
- d. [Psalm 119:32](#) *Lit You enlarge my heart*
- e. [Psalm 119:33](#) *Lit way*
- f. [Psalm 119:33](#) *Or will keep it as my reward*
- g. [Psalm 119:37](#) Some Hb mss, Tg read *word*
- h. [Psalm 119:54](#) *Lit song in the house of my sojourning*
- i. [Psalm 119:57](#) *Lit You are my portion, Lord*
- j. [Psalm 119:109](#) *Lit in my hand*
- k. [Psalm 119:112](#) *Or statutes; the reward is eternal*
- l. [Psalm 119:119](#) Some Hb mss, DSS, LXX, Aq, Sym, Jer read *All the wicked of the earth You count as*
- m. [Psalm 119:120](#) *Lit My flesh shudders*
- n. [Psalm 119:128](#) *Lit I therefore follow carefully*
- o. [Psalm 119:150](#) Some Hb mss, LXX, Sym, Jer read *who maliciously persecute me*

Cross references

- A. [119:1](#) : [Ps 101:6](#); [Pr 11:20](#)
- B. [119:1](#) : [Ps 128:1](#); [Mc 4:2](#)
- C. [119:2](#) : [Ps 25:10](#); [119:10, 22, 168](#)
- D. [119:2](#) : [Dt 4:29](#); [10:12](#); [11:13](#); [13:3](#); [30:2](#)
- E. [119:3](#) : [1Jn 3:9](#); [5:18](#)
- F. [119:4](#) : [Dt 4:13](#); [Neh 9:13](#); [Ps 19:8](#)
- G. [119:5](#) : [Dt 12:1](#); [2Ch 7:17](#); [Pr 4:26](#)
- H. [119:6](#) : [Jb 22:26](#); [Ps 119:80](#)
- I. [119:7](#) : [Ps 119:62, 106](#)
- J. [119:8](#) : [Ps 38:21](#); [71:9, 18](#)
- K. [119:9](#) : [2Sm 22:31](#); [Ps 12:6](#); [19:9-10](#); [119:140](#); [Pr 20:11](#); [30:5](#); [Php 4:8](#)
- L. [119:10](#) : [Ps 119:2](#)
- M. [119:10](#) : [Ps 119:21, 118](#)
- N. [119:11](#) : [Ps 37:31](#); [40:8](#); [Lk 2:19, 51](#)
- O. [119:12](#) : [Ps 119:26, 64, 108, 124, 135, 171](#)
- P. [119:13](#) : [Ps 40:9](#); [119:72](#)
- Q. [119:14](#) : [Ps 119:111, 162](#); [Pr 3:13-15](#); [8:10, 11, 18, 19](#)
- R. [119:15](#) : [Ps 1:2](#); [119:23, 48, 78, 97, 148](#)

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- S. [119:15](#) : [Ps 25:4](#); [27:11](#); [Is 58:2](#)
- T. [119:16](#) : [Ps 1:2](#); [119:24](#), [47](#), [70](#), [77](#), [92](#), [143](#), [174](#)
- U. [119:17](#) : [Ps 13:6](#); [119:144](#)
- V. [119:19](#) : [1Ch 29:15](#); [Ps 39:12](#); [119:54](#); [Heb 11:13](#)
- W. [119:20](#) : [Ps 42:1](#), [2](#); [63:1](#); [84:2](#); [119:40](#), [131](#)
- X. [119:21](#) : [Dt 27:26](#)
- Y. [119:21](#) : [Ps 119:10](#), [118](#)
- Z. [119:22](#) : [Ps 39:8](#); [119:39](#)
- AA. [119:23](#) : [Ps 119:161](#)
- BB. [119:23](#) : [Ps 119:15](#), [27-28](#)
- CC. [119:24](#) : [Ps 119:16](#); [Rm 7:22](#)
- DD. [119:25](#) : [Ps 44:25](#)
- EE. [119:25](#) : [Ps 119:37](#), [40](#), [88](#), [93](#), [107](#), [149](#), [154](#), [156](#), [159](#)
- FF. [119:26](#) : [Ps 25:4](#); [86:11](#); [119:12](#), [26](#), [64](#), [68](#), [124](#), [135](#), [171](#)
- GG. [119:27](#) : [Ps 105:2](#); [119:15](#), [73](#), [125](#); [145:5](#)
- HH. [119:28](#) : [1Pt 5:10](#)
- II. [119:30](#) : [Ps 16:8](#)
- JJ. [119:31](#) : [Ps 119:116](#)
- KK. [119:32](#) : [1Kg 4:29](#); [2Co 6:11](#), [13](#)
- LL. [119:33](#) : [Ps 119:112](#); [Mt 10:22](#); [Heb 3:6](#); [Rv 2:26](#)
- MM. [119:34](#) : [Ps 119:125](#), [144](#), [169](#)
- NN. [119:34](#) : [1Ch 22:12](#); [Ps 119:2](#), [69](#)
- OO. [119:35](#) : [Ps 25:4](#); [Is 40:14](#)
- PP. [119:35](#) : [Ps 119:16](#)
- QQ. [119:36](#) : [1Kg 8:58](#)
- RR. [119:36](#) : [Ezk 33:31](#); [Mk 7:21](#), [22](#); [Lk 12:15](#); [Heb 13:5](#)
- SS. [119:37](#) : [Is 33:15](#)
- TT. [119:37](#) : [Ps 119:25](#)
- UU. [119:38](#) : [2Sm 7:25](#)
- VV. [119:39](#) : [Ps 119:22](#)
- WW. [119:40](#) : [Ps 119:20](#)
- XX. [119:41](#) : [Ps 119:77](#)
- YY. [119:41](#) : [Ps 119:58](#), [76](#), [116](#), [170](#)
- ZZ. [119:42](#) : [Ps 102:8](#); [Pr 27:11](#)
- AAA. [119:43](#) : [Ps 119:49](#), [74](#), [81](#), [114](#), [147](#)
- BBB. [119:44](#) : [Ps 119:33](#)
- CCC. [119:45](#) : [Pr 4:12](#)
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