

# *Living Well: Christian Practices for Everyday Life*

## **Small Group Guide: “Reading the Bible”**

(LifelongFaith Associates)

### **Advanced Preparation**

1. Every household (individual, couple, or family) will need a Bible for this session. It is important that it is the same translation.
2. Review the Bible activities in Part 4 and determine which ones you want to include in your small group session. Some of the activities require a leader to guide the process. This person should be selected in advance, so he or she can prepare. Once you have selected the learning activities then you will need to make copies of the handouts (where applicable) and find any supplies or materials you need for the learning activities. The following handouts are included with this session:
  - *The Bible in Our Lives*
  - *Studying the Bible Worksheet*
  - *Lectio Divina: Prayerful Bible Reflection*
  - *Getting the Most Out of Your Bible Reading* (American Bible Society)
  - *Three Approaches to Bible Reading* (American Bible Society)
  - *Different Kinds of Literature in the Bible* (American Bible Society)
  - *The Seven Habits of Effective Bible Readers* (Scripture Union USA) Only in PDF file.
  - *The Scripture Union Bible Reading Method* (Scripture Union USA) Only in PDF file.
  - *The E100 Bible Reading Plan*. (Scripture Union USA) Only in PDF file.
  - *The E100 Discussion Guide*. (Scripture Union USA) Only in PDF file.
  - *Online Bible Reading Resources*
3. Develop a display table of Bible reading resources that individuals and families can use at home, such as recommended Bibles, daily Bible reading booklets, and devotions. Many publishers will send you sample copies to give people. Consult the resources appropriate to your denomination.

### **Part 1. Yearning: Stories of Reading the Bible**

#### **1. Opening Activity: The Bible in the Media Activity**

Here's a fun activity to help everyone identify how the Bible is part of so much of the media we watch. Everyone will need a piece of paper and pen.

It is safe to say that most people, even those who are not very religious, have a strong interest in the Bible. The consistent presence of the Bible in movies, cartoons and television shows indicates that we spend a good bit of our time thinking about the Bible even if we don't spend much time reading it. In the next 3 minutes identify as many films, cartoons and television shows that have a Bible theme as you can. Write down all of the examples.

After three minutes share your lists with the group.

## 2. Yearning for God's Voice – Stories

There are many ways to hear God's voice, but we hear God's speaking in a very distinctive and remarkably clear way by listening to God's word in the Bible. Begin the session by reading or presenting the three opening stories on pages 11.2–11.4 in *Living Well: "I Found Courage in My Closet," "Cover to Cover,"* and "Johnny Cash's Lifesaving Verse." Think about how these stories reflect connect with your own experience of reading the Bible.

### Part 2. *Reflecting*: The Bible in Our Lives

The handout, *The Bible in Our Lives*, presents a tool to help you identify your memories of reading and studying the Bible and your present experience of reading the Bible. Take a few minutes to complete the worksheet.

After everyone has completed the worksheet, share your responses to the three questions with your group. This is a storytelling experience so be sure to give each person time to share his or her story without interruptions or discussion.

### Part 3. *Exploring*: The Christian Practice of Reading the Bible

The Exploring section of the "Reading the Bible" chapter in *Living Well* (pages 11.6–11.9) is organized into four sections:

- 1) Reading with Mind and Heart
- 2) Hearing and Obeying
- 3) Hearing with Hopeful Obedience
- 4) Acting on What We Hear

Divide up the four themes among the members of the group with people working in pairs or triads. Each group takes one of the themes, reads the text from the *Living Well* book, section, and prepares a summary of the key points to present to the whole group.

Begin with theme 1 and have each group present their summary. Be sure to read to the group at least one of the Bible passages for your theme.

After the last presentation discuss the following questions as a group:

- What new insights into the Christian practice of Reading the Bible did you discover through the presentation?
- Why is Reading the Bible such an important practice for Christians?
- What are two or three things you need to keep in mind when you read the Bible?

### Part 4. *Living*: Application of the Christian Practice to Daily Life

#### Part 1. Developing the Practice of Reading the Bible: Bible Reading Methods

The "Living" section in the "Reading the Bible" chapter serves as a guide for helping you develop the skills or tools for making the Christian practice of Reading the Bible part of everyday life. The Bible reading methods included in this section give your group a direct experiences of Reading the Bible so

that you can find ways to integrate the practice into daily life. Select that activities that you want to experience.

**Method 1. Reading with Heart (*Living Well* page 11.12)**

*Select a Gospel story with lots of action (e.g., a parable or healing story) and have one person guide the group through the process of “reading with heart.”*

1. Read a Bible passage slowly.
2. Read it again and pay attention to any verses that draw your attention.
3. Read those attention-grabbing verses again until one really settles in your heart.
4. Write that verse down on a piece of paper and carry it with you for the day.

**Method 2. Studying the Bible (*Living Well* pages 11.14 – 11.15)**

*Using the example in the *Living Well* book or another Gospel story, have one person guide the group through the three steps in of studying a Bible passage. The process and questions are also on a handout.*

1. What is happening in the reading?
2. How is the occurrence in the reading present in today’s world?
3. How is the occurrence in the reading present in my life?

**Method 3. Getting the Most Out of Your Bible Reading (American Bible Society)**

*Use the handout to guide the group through an experience of reading and reflecting upon a Bible passage. Select an appropriate passage from the Bible for this activity.*

**Method 4. The Scripture Union Bible Reading Method (American Bible Society)**

*Use the handout (PDF only) to guide the group through an experience of reading and reflecting upon a Bible passage. Select an appropriate passage from the Bible for this activity.*

**Method 5. Lectio Divina: Prayerful Bible Reading**

*Using the handout, have one person guide the group through an experience of Lectio Divina. Select an appropriate passage from the Bible as the focus of the experience.*

In addition to the Bible reading methods, there are a variety of Bible Basics in the *Living Well* book on pages 11.10-11.11. Review the basics of beginning Bible reading and the suggestions for integrating Bible reading into daily life.

- Choosing a Bible
- Browsing the library
- Seeing your Bible
- Connecting your cell phone and Bible
- Using devotional aids
- Proclaiming a Bible verse
- Searching for a life messages
- Sharing your life message
- Development a lectionary reading plan
- Finding topical readings

**Part 2. Developing a Plan for Living the Practice**

**1. The Essential One Hundred Challenge (E100) (American Bible Society)**

([www.e100absministry.com/pages](http://www.e100absministry.com/pages))

A great way to begin or strengthen their practice of reading the Bible is the Essential 100 Challenge™ developed by the American Bible Society and Scripture Union. Introduce the participants to the

Essential 100 Challenge™ using the handouts. The E100 is Bible reading program built around 100 carefully selected short Bible passages – 50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament. The passages are usually one to two chapters in length and can easily be read in 10 minutes or less. The E100 Challenge takes a reader through all of the major types of biblical writing including Historical books, Poetry and Wisdom Literature, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. The Bible passages in The E100 Challenge are organized into 20 sets of five readings each. The E100 enables people to get the big picture of God’s Word and in the process develop a daily Bible reading habit.

Handouts:

- *The E100 Bible Reading Plan*
- *The E100 Discussion Guide*
- *The Scripture Union Bible Reading Method*
- *The Seven Habits of Effective Bible Readers*

## **2. Developing a Bible Reading Action Plan**

Give each household (individuals, couples, or families with children/teens) several minutes to decide on which strategies they would like to adopt to strengthen their practice of Reading the Bible. Here is a simple process of moving from idea to action. Give people a worksheet or piece of paper to create their action plan.

1. List three actions you would like to take to live begin or strengthen the Christian practice of Reading the Bible in your daily life.
2. Choose the action that you would like to do first.
3. List the potential roadblocks to implementing this action.
4. Develop strategies for overcoming these roadblocks.
5. Describe in detail the action you will undertake and the steps you will take to ensure that it will happen.

After households have created a plan for living the practice in their daily life, invite each household to share their plans for one idea with their table group.

## **Part 5. *Praying*: Prayer for the Practice**

Conclude in prayer using the prayer in the “Reading the Bible” chapter (page 11.16).

# The Bible in Our Lives

## 1. What memories do you have about reading or not reading the Bible? (Check all that apply.)

- I remember a parent or grandparent reading the Bible for himself or herself.
- I experienced a parent or grandparent reading the Bible to or with me.
- I heard the Bible in Sunday school, religious education classes, and/or vacation Bible school.
- I began reading it for myself when I received a Bible of my own.
- I participated in a Bible study group.
- I took a course in Scripture in college or in an adult religious education program.
- I received a background in Bible through hearing sermons.
- There was a Bible in our home, but I do not recall people reading it.
- I really don't have any memory of reading the Bible when I was growing up.

## 2. How do you remember reading and studying the Bible? (Check all that apply)

- I remember listening to Bible stories at church.
- I remember lectures about the Bible at church.
- I remember discussions about the Bible at church.
- I memorized verses from the Bible.
- I remember singing biblical verses in songs and hymns.
- I remember doing dramatic readings and acting out Bible stories.
- I remember studying the Bible when taught Sunday school or religious education classes.
- I have no memories of studying the Bible in a church community.

## 3. What is your experience of reading the Bible today? (Check all that apply)

- I enjoy reading the Bible and am strengthened by it.
- I take time for a daily Bible reading or use a daily devotional book that has Bible passages.
- I am inspired and guided by the Bible to help me practice my faith in daily life.
- I turn to the Bible as a source of help in time of trouble.
- We have family devotions and conversations using the Bible.
- I have discussions/conversations with my friends about the Bible.
- I participate in a Bible study group in my church community.
- I study the Bible on the Internet.
- I consult the Bible in order to make good decisions in life.
- I do not read the Bible very often.
- I turn to the Bible as a guide for my moral living.
- I believe that reading and studying the Bible leads us to Christ and a deeper faith.
- I do not know where to start reading the Bible.
- I feel intimidated by reading and studying the Bible.
- I am not sure the Bible has much relevance for my life today.
- I just don't have time to read the Bible regularly.

(Adapted from "Book of Faith Assessment Tool." Copyright © 2008 Augsburg Fortress.)

# Studying the Bible Worksheet

## 1. What is happening in the reading?

- Identify the characters by name.
- Identify the words and phrases that seem significant to you.
- Identify the emotions or feelings that are expressed by the characters.
- Identify the plot and theme of the reading.
- Consult a commentary that will help you discover if there are any important details that a twenty-first century reader would likely miss.

## 2. How is the occurrence in the reading present in today's world?

## 3. How is the occurrence in the reading present in my life?

- How does this reading connect to my own life experiences? Where is this story happening in my own life? How does this reading affirm or challenge my own life experiences?
- What characters do I like or dislike in the reading? Why do I like particular characters? Why do I dislike particular characters? How do I see what I like and dislike in my own personality?

# Lectio Divina: Prayerful Bible Reflection

Use Lectio Divina to guide people in a prayer reflection on a Biblical story or text and in imagining how they will live the story or text in their daily life.

## Step 1. *Lectio* (Reading)

Read the Bible passage to the group. Read it a second time. Invite people to let the words really sink in deeply. Ask them to open their minds and hearts to the meaning of the words; and let the passage speak to them.

## Step 2. *Meditatio* (Meditation)

Invite people to reflect on the Bible passage. Ask questions such as the following:

- What does this passage say to me?
- Who am I in this Scripture?
- What do I see and hear?
- What do I think?
- Which character do I most relate to?
- What do I need to learn from this passage?

## Step 3. *Oratio* (Prayer)

Move into the heart of the matter. Consider the following questions to help people respond to God.

- What do you want to communicate to God?
- What do you most want in your relationship with God?
- What emotions do you want to express to God? joy? fear? gratitude? grief?

## Step 4. *Contemplatio* (Contemplation)

Provide quiet time for people to rest in the presence of God. Play some quiet instrumental music.

## Step 5. *Action* (Action)

Conclude by inviting people to decide on a course of action and make a commitment to follow through with their plan.

- How is God challenging me?
- Is there a good thing that God is calling me to do?:
- Is there a harmful thing that God wants me to stop doing?
- What is the next step I need to take?

# Getting the Most Out of Your Bible Reading

## *Helpful Tips for Reading the Bible*

(American Bible Society: [www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin](http://www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin))

Reading the Bible is one way to learn about God and what God wants from us. When we read the Bible, we read about a specific people and their relationship to God, but we also can learn about our own relationship with God.

### **Set aside time...**

to read the Bible on a regular basis. Be realistic. For some people, this may be a few minutes once a day. For others, it may be a longer time a few times a week. Try to make it about the same time each day, whether in the morning, at lunchtime, or just before going to bed.

### **Find a quiet place...**

so that you can be alone with your thoughts without being disrupted. If you find it helpful, you might want to have a notebook nearby to jot down questions and thoughts you have as you read and reflect on the biblical text.

### **Begin by praying...**

You may want to spend a few minutes in prayer before you begin reading. Ask for an open mind and for God's guidance.

Here are some suggestions for reading the Bible. These are only suggestions for you to use as a model as you find your preferences for spending time with the Scriptures.

### **1. Select a passage.**

Some people find it helpful to follow a specific Bible reading plan to guide their reading. Many Bibles have reading plans included at the back. The American Bible Society provides a Daily Bible Reading plan that you might want to consider. Other people want to read through the Bible on their own. Still others move from one passage to another based on preference, lectionary readings, or Church School lessons. Any of the above ways to select a passage is fine. The important thing is not to spend too much – if any – of your reading time in selecting the passage!

### **2. Read the passage the first time.**

Read the passage the first time without stopping in order to gain an overall sense of the passage. Listen to your initial reactions to the text...both positive and negative.

### **3. Read the passage a second time.**

As you read, pause from time-to-time and answer questions about the background (or context) of the passage. You might choose to pause between verses or small groups of verses, between significant events or announcements in the passage, or between any natural break you see as you read. Below are some types of questions about the context of a passage that you might find helpful as you read.

- *In what book of the Bible is this passage found? Is this book a prophetic book? A historical book? A book of poetry? A Gospel? A letter?*



- *What happens immediately before and after the passage? In other words, what is the specific literary context of this passage?*
- *Who are the main characters in this passage? Do they speak or do others speak for them? What are the relationships between these characters? What is the relationship between God and the characters in this biblical text?*
- *Where did these things take place? What are the key places mentioned or assumed in the passage? What has happened before this passage? What is happening during this passage? In other words, what is the specific historical context of the passage?*
- *What are key words or phrases that are repeated in the passage? What is the significance of these words?*
- *Are there any cause and effect relationships established in this passage? Are any comparisons made or similarities pointed out? Are there any contrasts made between people, things, or ideas?*
- *What is the intent or purpose of the passage?*

As you ask yourself these questions, answer them in your words. Be careful to listen to the text. Try to avoid listening to what you want the text to say to you. If you are using a notebook, take a few minutes to write down your answers to these questions. Be prepared to be comforted by the text, but also be aware that you may also be confronted, even challenged.

#### **4. Read the passage a third time. Then reflect on your answers to these questions.**

- *What did I learn about God from this passage?*
- *What did I learn about human nature?*
- *What did I learn about my own relationship to God? In other words, how does this passage apply to me?*
- *Is there anything I need to change in my life based on my reading of this passage? How can I be stronger in my faith? What can I do to show God's love to people in my life?*

If there is one verse or part of a verse you would like to remember, you might want to write it on an index card and carry it with you throughout the day.

#### **5. Finally, thank God for the time you had to read from Scripture.**

Ask God to help you make the changes you identified.

# Three Approaches to Bible Reading

(American Bible Society: [www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin](http://www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin))

Reading any document, even the Bible, can often become routine. And reading the Bible in the same way every time can keep us from discovering biblical truths that can be found beneath the actual words on the page. So when we become intentional about reading the Bible with a particular approach or method in mind, the Bible can speak to us in new and exciting ways. Three primary approaches to reading the Bible include the social-historical, the literary, and the theological. By following any one of these approaches, we read the Bible with certain questions in mind, constantly interacting with the words of the text and their context. Each of these approaches can reveal different aspects of the Bible. Exploring these can deepen our experiences with Scripture and broaden our awareness of God.

## Social-Historical Reading

The social-historical approach is primarily interested in the world behind the text, that is, the social structures, historical events, customs, as well as social issues related to roles, power, and class. We learn to ask questions about the events described or assumed in the biblical text, the key places mentioned (like cities, nations, geographical features, or trade routes), and the political scene within ancient Israel (for the Old Testament) or the Greek-Roman world (for the New Testament). Likewise, attention to the social world behind the text can involve exploring such issues as how the characters relate to one another in terms of power and class (for example, king/servant, parent/child, or teacher/student), what customs are assumed in the biblical text, and how the biblical world is shaped by the religion and philosophy of the larger world (like the Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, or Roman worlds).

## Literary Reading

The literary approach, by contrast, is interested in the words of the text itself, that is, how they are put together and how they convey the biblical message. This approach helps us pay attention to literary features like key words or themes that are repeated throughout a passage (or an entire book), the type of literature being read (for example, law, prophecy, Gospel, letter), the use of unique or unexpected words, the literary context of the passage (what happens immediately before and after it), and how the plot or storyline is developed. In addition, the literary approach is interested in the characters of the biblical text: how they are described and how they interact, what they know or do not know, how they solve problems and deal with conflict, achievements, downfalls, and what they discover or teach about God.

## Theological (Devotional) Reading

The theological (or devotional) approach seeks to discover new truths about God and our relationship to God. This approach, the most personal of the three approaches, is interested in the overall purpose or intent of the passage being read. It seeks to answer questions like What did I learn about God (or Jesus Christ) from this passage? What did I learn about human nature? And what did I learn about my own relationship to God and Jesus Christ? In other words, the theological approach wrestles with the “So What” question of reading the Bible: How does this passage apply to me and how is my life changed (or need to be changed) in light of my reading it?

As you begin to be intentional about reading God’s Word, you might want to select a passage and read it several times, following each of the approaches described above. Whichever approach we choose to follow, the challenge for all of us is to become more and more aware of the relevance of the Bible and how we can be changed by making it a part of our lives.

# Different Kinds of Literature in the Bible

(American Bible Society: [www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin](http://www.bibles.com/brcpages/diggingin))

We know the Bible as one large book, but it is really more like a collection of several books of many different kinds of literature. So when studying the Bible, it is important to recognize the type of literature we are reading, that is, the literary form the biblical author used to tell the message. The two largest categories of biblical literature are prose and poetry. Prose is often used when telling stories about people and historical events, and it usually includes dialogue. Most of the Bible is written in prose, with such features as plot, character, and timing. Poetry is also used throughout the Bible, and certain books are written completely in poetic form. Much of the poetry in the Old Testament can be described as ancient Hebrew poetry, which is marked by a literary feature called parallelism. This feature is the repetition or reinforcement of a single idea in successive lines of poetry. Poetry in the Bible also uses features common to modern poetry of word plays, rhymes, and meter to communicate its message.

Beyond these two categories, the Bible includes a large number of specific types of literature (some expressed in prose and others in poetry). Some types comprise entire books; the most important of these are laws, historical prose, psalms and songs, wisdom and proverbs, Gospels, and letters. Other types are included within books, like prayers, parables, prophecy, and genealogies (family lists).

## Laws

Many ancient Near Eastern cultures developed law codes. One of the most famous was the Law Code of the Babylonian leader Hammurabi (1792-1750 B.C.). Like these cultures, ancient Israel developed its own law code. The first five books of the Hebrew Bible (the Old Testament) make up the section known as the Torah, or the Law. Not all the literature in these five books is legal material, but much of it is. God gave these laws to the people of Israel to help them worship properly, to live as God's holy people, and to treat one another with respect and care. The laws in the books include ones that forbid things (Do not...) and others that encourage things (Do...). The most well-known collection of laws in the Bible is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20.1-17; Deuteronomy 5.6-21). Other collections are found in Exodus 21.1 – 23.19; Leviticus 1.1 – 7.36; Numbers 6.1-21; Deuteronomy 14.3 – 17.7; James 4.11,12.

## Historical Prose.

Throughout the Bible, historical prose tells the story of God's people. Historical prose intends to tell a story and includes characters, events, dates, places, and details of conflict and resolution. In the Old Testament, this literature tells about ancient Israel's history from the settlement in the Promised Land of Canaan around 1250 B.C. to the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and beyond. The historical books like Joshua, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings describe the activities of important characters like the leader Joshua, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and kings David and Solomon. These books also describe what happened to the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah, including how they were defeated by foreign enemies. In the New Testament, the book of Acts tells the history of the early church, from its beginnings in Judea to its influence in Rome.

## Psalms and Songs

The book of Psalms, considered the hymnbook of ancient Israel, is a collection of 150 psalms or songs that were used in private and public worship. Each psalm is a song or poem; some with only a few verses and others with more than one hundred verses. There are poems in other biblical books, and the prophetic books (like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea) use poetry to deliver their messages. Many of the poems and songs in the Old Testament are among the oldest pieces of biblical literature (Judges 5.1-31).

Other examples of poetry in the Old Testament include the books of Job and the Song of Songs, as well as the poems at Exodus 15.1-8; Deuteronomy 32.1-43; 1 Samuel 2.1-10; Judges 5.2-31; Isaiah 5.1-7; Jonah 2.2-9. Poems are also found in the New Testament. Some examples are Luke 1.46-55; Philippians 2.6-11; and Revelation 15.3,4.

## **Wisdom and Proverbs**

Wisdom literature occurs throughout the Bible, but it is concentrated in the Old Testament books of wisdom: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Wisdom literature in the Old Testament has very little to say about Israel's history and the worship of God. Instead, it is focused on practical advice, wise counsel, and philosophic reflections about God and human beings. The book of Proverbs is a collection of short, wise sayings about everyday issues like friends, marriage, finances, honesty, hard work, and loyalty. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are more lengthy and philosophical, as if their wisdom is being passed on from a wise teacher to younger students. These books, in particular, deal with morality and hard questions about life and death. In addition to these three books, wisdom literature can be found in certain psalms (like Psalms 1 and 37). The wisdom tradition is also evident in the New Testament. Examples can be found in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7) and in James 3.2-8 and 4.13-17.

## **Gospels**

The word "Gospel" comes from the Old English word "godspel," which is a strict translation of the Greek word "euangelion," meaning "good news." As such, the New Testament Gospels tell the good news about Jesus Christ: primarily his life, death, and resurrection. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are not repetition of one another. They each present various accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. Since Jesus himself left no writings, the Gospel writers collected stories and eyewitness descriptions that had been passed on by word of mouth for several years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The Gospels were probably written down in the present form between thirty and sixty years after Jesus. Without the Gospels, we would have very little information about the actual life of Jesus, his crucifixion, and how God brought him back to life.

## **Letters**

Several books in the New Testament are actually letters written by the apostle Paul or other leaders in the early Church. These letters are written in the traditional Greek letter-writing style of the first century A.D. Following a standard structure of parts, the person writing the letter is clearly identified at the opening of the letter (see, for example, Romans 1.1-6). This is followed by the addressee, that is, the persons being written to, and greetings (Romans 1.7). In many New Testament letters, a prayer of thanksgiving follows the greeting (Romans 1.8-15). The largest section of the letter is the "body," which deals with problems, advice, explanation, encouragement – whatever the overall intent of the letter is (Romans 1.16 – 15.35). A final greeting and blessing closes the letter (Romans 16.1-27). In most New Testament letters, different kinds of literature can be found, including prayers, teachings, wisdom, warnings, hymns, and personal news.

Most of Paul's letters address specific Jewish or Christian communities with specific purposes in mind. Other letters in the New Testament, however, deal with more general questions that were of concern to the early Christian churches. The books of Hebrews and James, as well as 1 John, are examples of these general types of letters.

## **Prayers**

Prayers appear throughout the Bible, in both prose and poetry. What makes prayer a unique type of literature is that it expresses direct communication between human beings and God. The book of Psalms contains many prayers that are written in poetic form, some asking for God's help (Psalms 79, 80), some giving thanks to God at the time of harvest (Psalm 126), and others asking God for

forgiveness (Psalms 12, 51, 120). Both the Old and New Testaments contain numerous prayers from God's people. Some examples are Genesis 18.27,28; Exodus 17.4; Judges 5.2-31; 1 Kings 3.6-9; Jonah 2.2-9; Luke 11.2-4; John 17.1-26; Romans 16.25-27; Hebrews 13.21. Perhaps the most famous prayer in the Bible is the one Jesus taught his disciples found in Matthew 6.9-13 (the Lord's Prayer).

## **Parables**

Parables are brief stories that use familiar, everyday lessons to teach an important truth about God. Parables can be short sayings or longer stories that build on common human experience (like farming). The stories themselves are usually simple, but the more important truth is sometimes harder to grasp. The prophet Isaiah told a parable about a vineyard that failed to produce grapes, so the vineyard owner cut away the vines. He then explained that the vineyard were the Israelites of his day who had been unfaithful to God, so God was ready to punish them for refusing to do right (Isaiah 5.1-7). Other examples of parables in the Old Testament include a lesson about kingship (Judges 9.1-21) and a warning to King David from the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12.1-15). In the New Testament, Jesus frequently used parables when teaching about how God wanted people to live (Mark 4.33,34). Some of his parables were short sayings (Matthew 6.22,23; 15.14), while others were longer stories. The most well-know parables of Jesus are about the farmer who planted seed (Matthew 13.3-9), the Great Banquet (Matthew 22.1-10), the Good Samaritan (Luke 10.30-37), the Prodigal Son (Luke 15.11-32), and the Unfair Judge (Luke 18.1-8).

## **Prophecy**

Prophecy (or prophetic speech) accounts for a large portion of the literature of the Old Testament. The prophets delivered their prophecies (or oracles) to various audiences, like the king, the priests, or people at the temple. What is most important about prophecy is that these messages are not directly from the prophets. Rather, the messages of the prophets are from God; the prophets are the spokespersons who deliver God's prophecies to the respective audiences. A prophecy is usually introduced with the phrase "The LORD has said," or "The LORD God says." Prophetic speech is often expressed in vivid poetry, usually taking advantage of metaphors, symbols, and elevated language. The prophets of ancient Israel were less concerned about predicting the future than they were about what it means to live as God's people. Matters of justice, proper worship, respect, treatment of the poor are frequently mentioned in the prophetic books. The books of prophecy in the Old Testament usually combine information about the prophet with the prophet's messages from God. Some powerful examples of prophetic speech include Isaiah 1.2-31; 10.24-27; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 36.22-32; Amos 5.4-27; and Zechariah 9.1-17. Examples of prophecy in the New Testament can be found in the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus (Matthew 3.1-12; 24.1-31).

A special type of literature related but not identical to prophecy is called apocalyptic literature. This literature, which takes its name from a Greek word meaning "a revealing or an unveiling," is entirely future oriented, even otherworldly in nature. In addition, apocalyptic literature contains startling visions from God, people who appear in the shape of animals or beasts, numbers that have secret meanings, and detailed predictions about the future. This literature was usually written during times of extreme trouble when hope had all but vanished. Its authors spoke about a time in the future when God will destroy the present world and bring about a new creation. At that time, everyone who has been faithful to God will be rewarded. The two books of Daniel and Revelation are examples of apocalyptic literature in the Bible.

# Online Bible Reading Resources

## **American Bible Society: [www.americanbible.org](http://www.americanbible.org)**

- Bible Resource Center: [www.americanbible.org/bibleresources](http://www.americanbible.org/bibleresources)
- Engage the Word: <http://engage.americanbible.org/>
- Resources for Learning the Bible: [www.americanbible.org/brcpages/learningbible](http://www.americanbible.org/brcpages/learningbible)

## **American Bible Society—The Essential 100 Challenge: [www.e100absministry.com/pages](http://www.e100absministry.com/pages)**

The Essential 100 Challenge™ (The E100) is an effective Bible reading program built around 100 carefully selected short Bible passages—50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament. The passages are usually one to two chapters in length and can easily be read in 10 minutes or less. The E100 Challenge takes a reader through all of the major types of biblical writing including Historical books, Poetry and Wisdom Literature, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. The Bible passages in The E100 Challenge are organized into 20 sets of five readings each. The E100 enables people to get the big picture of God's Word and in the process develop a daily Bible reading habit.

## **Bible Gateway: [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)**

BibleGateway.com is a free service for reading and researching Scripture online—all in the language or translation of your choice. We provide advanced tools you can use to search the Bible by keywords or verse, as well as other tools to enhance your study of the Bible. The Bible Gateway is maintained by a team of Christian technologists who are dedicated to spreading the Gospel by means of the internet and other media.

## **ELCA Daily Bible Reading: <http://archive.elca.org/scriptLib/CO/bible/tbrBibleView.asp>**

## **Scripture Union: [www.scriptureunion.org/index.php](http://www.scriptureunion.org/index.php)**

Scripture Union USA encourages people of all ages to meet God every day. To that end, we publish Bible reading guides for children, youth and adults. For adults and the household their resources includes free daily email Bible study: *Discovery: A Guide for Finding Practical Help from the Bible* (read through most of the Bible in 4 years, reading 10-20 verses each day), and *Encounter with God: A Guide for Meeting God Daily in His Word* (read through the O.T. once and the N.T twice in a five year cycle, reading 10-20 verses per day). For children and teens resources include *PrimeTime*® faith-based after school programs, *SuperKids*™ summer outreach missions, and daily Bible reading programs for children and youth.

## **United States Catholic Conference: [www.usccb.org](http://www.usccb.org)**

- New American Bible Online: [www.usccb.org/nab/bible](http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible)
- Daily Lectionary Readings: [www.usccb.org/nab/today.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/nab/today.shtml)
- Daily Lectionary Readings Podcast: [www.usccb.org/nab/nabpodcast.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/nab/nabpodcast.shtml)
- Daily Video Reflections on the Reading of the Day: [www.usccb.org/video/reflections.shtml](http://www.usccb.org/video/reflections.shtml)

## **Upper Room Ministries: [www.upperroom.org](http://www.upperroom.org)**

- Online Daily Devotional: [www.upperroom.org/Devotional](http://www.upperroom.org/Devotional)
- Daily Reflections: [www.upperroom.org/daily](http://www.upperroom.org/daily)

# Resources for Developing the Christian Practice of Reading the Bible

*At Home with the Word: Sunday Scriptures and Scripture Insights.* (Annual) Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications.

For each Sunday of the liturgical year the book provides the three Scripture readings and psalm, insights into the readings written by Scripture scholars, and suggestions for putting the readings into practice in daily life.

*The Bible For Dummies.* Jeffrey Geoghegan and Michael Homan. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, 2002. Ninety percent of Americans own a copy of the Bible, and while it's the most widely read book, it's also the least understood. Regardless of your religion, understanding the Bible brings much of Western art, literature, and public discourse into greater focus – from Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" painting to the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* movies. People have historically turned to religion to deal with tragedy and change, and with the right insight, the Bible can be an accessible, helpful guide to life's big questions. *The Bible For Dummies* appeals to people of all faiths, as well as those who don't practice any particular religion, by providing interfaith coverage of the entire Bible and the often fascinating background information that makes the Bible come alive. You'll find answers to such questions as: Where did the Bible come from? Who wrote the Bible? How is the Bible put together? Follow the history of the Bible from its beginning thousands of years ago as tattered scrolls to its status as the bestseller of all time. *The Bible For Dummies* covers these topics and more:

- Ten people in the Bible you should know
- The Hebrew Bible
- The Apocrypha's hidden treasures
- What's new about the New Testament
- Israel's wisdom, literature, and love poetry
- The Bible's enduring influence
- The prophets: more than fortunetellers

Discover the world's all-time bestseller in an entirely new light. Whether you're interested in broadening your spiritual horizons, uncovering the symbolism of Western culture, or gaining a deeper understanding of the book you grew up reading, *The Bible For Dummies* has all the information you need to navigate this ancient and fascinating book.

*Bringing Home the Gospel – A Weekly Journal for Catholic Parents.* (3 Volumes: Matthew, Mark, and Luke). Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2006, 2007, 2008.

*Bringing Home the Gospel* is designed for busy parents who want to share the faith with their family and reflect on their spiritual journey. Each week, parents will find a reflection based on a Sunday Gospel. These reflections will help bring the Word of God home and apply it to life and help parents grow in their relationship with God as individual and as parent. "Family Response" questions or suggestions give parents an opportunity to talk with children about God and the things that are important to the family. There's plenty of room for parents to journal and record on how the Gospel reading touches them in a particular way or relates to something significant happening in their life.

*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth.* Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2003.

Understanding the Bible isn't for the few, the gifted, the scholarly. The Bible is accessible. It's meant to be read and comprehended by everyone from armchair readers to seminary students.

A few essential insights into the Bible can clear up a lot of misconceptions and help you grasp the meaning of Scripture and its application to your 21<sup>st</sup>-century life. Covering everything from translational concerns to different genres of biblical writing, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* is used all around the world. In clear, simple language, it helps you accurately understand the different parts of the Bible – their meaning for ancient audiences and their implications for you today – so you can uncover the inexhaustible worth that is in God’s Word.

*How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002. Reading the Bible need not be a haphazard journey through strange and bewildering territory. Like an experienced tour guide, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* takes you by the hand and walks you through the Scriptures. For each book of the Bible, the authors start with a quick snapshot, then expand the view to help you better understand its key elements and how it fits into the grand narrative of the Bible. Written by two top evangelical scholars, this survey is designed to get you actually reading the Bible knowledgeably and understanding it accurately. In an engaging, conversational style, Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart take you through a given book of the Bible using their unique, progressive approach:

- Orienting Data: Concise info bytes that form a thumbnail of the book
- Overview: A brief panorama that introduces key concepts and themes and important landmarks in the book
- Specific Advice for Reading: Pointers for accurately understanding the details and message of the book in context with the circumstances surrounding its writing
- A Walk Through: The actual section-by-section tour that helps you see both the larger landscape of the book and how its various parts work together to form the whole. Here you are taken by the hand and told, “Look at this!”

*How to Read the Bible Book by Book* can be used as a companion to *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. It also stands on its own as a reliable guide to reading and understanding the Bible for yourself.

*Invitation to the Old Testament: A Catholic Approach to the Hebrew Scriptures*. Alice Camille. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2004.

For Catholics, merely relying on the Sunday readings to provide a full understanding of the Bible can be unsatisfying. It is only through a deliberate study of the book as a whole that contextual understanding can be reached. The Bible is not one long narrative about God, but rather a collection of smaller books “clustered around a revolving cast of characters who understand themselves to be, in an essential way, the people of God,” according to the author. This is especially true of the Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Scriptures. Camille begins by offering readers tips before beginning their study of the Bible, discusses the history behind its writing, then finally moves into a study of all the major books of the Hebrew Scriptures. Each chapter ends with discussion questions and prayer activities to spark reflection.

*Invitation to the New Testament: A Catholic Approach to the Christian Scriptures*. Alice Camille. Chicago: ACTA Publications, 2004.

More than merely a retelling of events, the New Testament was written for the purpose of evangelism – not journalism. With that in mind, author Alice Camille offers this enlightening and informative explanation of the New Testament from a Catholic viewpoint. Intended to give readers an appreciation for what compelled the early church to form the New Testament as we know it, this book covers the four gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, letters, and concludes with the Book of Revelation. Careful explanations bring readers into the world of the biblical scholar with language that is both inviting and accessible. Each chapter opens with an anecdote to draw readers in, and concludes with discussion questions for personal reflection or group use.



*Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation.* Richard J. Foster. San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008.

Too often, our study of the Bible focuses on searching for specific information or some formula that will solve our pressing needs of the moment. But what if we approached the Bible differently, and instead of transforming the text to meet our needs, allowed it to transform us? That's exactly the idea behind *Life with God*. Richard Foster claims that God has superintended the writing of Scripture so that it serves as the most reliable guide for Christian spiritual formation. According to Foster, the Bible is all about human life "with God." As we read Scripture, we should consider how exactly God is with us in each story and allow ourselves to be spiritually transformed. By opening our whole selves – mind, body, spirit, thoughts, behavior, and will – to the page before us, we begin to grasp all the Bible has to teach about prayer, obedience, compassion, virtue, and grace and apply it to our everyday lives to achieve a deeper relationship with God. With a wealth of examples and simple yet crucial insights, *Life with God* is an indispensable guide to approaching the Bible through the lens of Christian spiritual formation, revealing that reading the Bible for interior transformation is a far different endeavor than reading the Bible for historical knowledge, literary appreciation, or religious instruction.

*The MAP: Making the Bible Meaningful, Accessible, Practical.* Nick Page. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. The MAP is a smart, user-friendly guidebook for anyone who wants to explore the world of the Bible. It's informative, thought-provoking, fun to read, and full of fascinating facts and illuminating graphics. Tackling the Bible with creativity, honesty, and humor, The MAP helps you understand how the Bible works, guides you through it, and shows you both its high points and its easily missed places of interest. The MAP features:

- Quick Guide: an at-a-glance introduction to every book of the Bible
- Bible Questions: a lighter look at difficult issues
- Puzzling Points: explanations of things that make you go "hmmm . . ."
- The Route Through: a street map showing you how each biblical book is put together
- Landmarks: important events and themes of the Bible
- Bible Postcards: introductions to the cities and countries of the Bible
- Details, Details: fascinating facts that otherwise might go unnoticed
- Viewpoints: a guide to opposing interpretations
- Brief Lives: a quick summary of the lives of major Bible characters
- Over fifty maps, timelines, and diagrams that bring the world of the Bible to life

*A Walk through the New Testament: An Introduction for Catholics.* Margaret Nutting Ralph. New York: Paulist Press, 2009.

*A Walk through the New Testament* is designed to be a companion for adult Catholics who want to read and better understanding the New Testament. The author marshals new extensive knowledge of both scripture and adult education to gear this introduction to the interested but, as yet, not well-informed Catholic who wants to understand the original biblical author's intent, as well as to hear scripture as the living word that can cut to the marrow of the bone. For each book of the New Testament Ralph provides: the setting of the author and audience; a discussion of issues important from both an interpretive and a pastoral point of view; review questions for Bible study; and discussion questions for faith sharing. Using the contextual approach to scripture taught by the Catholic Church Ralph guides her readers on a journey that avoids a literalist, fundamentalist interpretation of scripture and, at the same time, encourages readers to apply these truths to their own lives.

## For Children and Families

*At Home with God: Family Devotions for the School Year.* Anne Broyles, Marilyn Brown Oden, Elizabeth Lynd Escamilla, Paul Lynd Escamilla. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2002.

Many of today's families struggle in nurturing their children in the Christian faith beyond attending church services. Finding time at home to talk together about faith can be challenging when so much else demands attention. *At Home with God* gives families with school-age children (ages 6 to 11) solid spiritual help. Designed to bring a family together in worship at home for 10 to 15 minutes each day, the devotions require little to no advance preparation and speak to families large and small. You'll find in this book's pages for the days from September through May:

- daily devotions based on specific scriptures
- prayers and litanies to say and learn together
- stories and activities to share
- songs to sing with familiar melodies
- colorful illustrations and symbols to direct young readers
- articles to help adult family members prepare

Children's Bibles (This is just a small sampling of some of the best children's Bibles.)

1. *The Beginner's Bible: Timeless Children's Stories.* Illustrated by Kelly Pulley. Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2005. (95 classic Bible stories rewritten in a language children can understand.)
2. *The Beginner's Bible Book of Devotions – My Time with God.* Illustrated by Kelly Pulley. Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2007.
3. *The Children's Daily Devotional Bible.* (Contemporary English Version, American Bible Society) Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996.
4. *Children's Everyday Bible.* Selina Hastings. New York: DK Publishing, 2002. (Retellings of Old and New Testament stories are presented in 366 segments for daily reading.)
5. *The Children's Illustrated Bible.* Stories retold by Selina Hastings. Illustrated by Eric Thomas. New York: DK Publishing, 2004.
6. *The NIV Holy Bible Beginner's Bible.* (New International Reader's Version) Illustrated by Kelly Pulley. Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2005.
7. *Read and Learn Bible.* (Contemporary English Version, American Bible Society) New York: Scholastic Inc., 2005.

*Making Time for God: Daily Devotions for Children and Families to Share.* Susan R. Garrett and Amy Plantinga Pauw. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.

This daybook engages the family in exploring the Bible, while helping children develop a strong pattern of daily devotions and prayer. The authors combine biblical teaching with engaging stories that children can identify with, as well as thoughts for personal application. The book draws from most books of the Bible, and includes both the best-loved Bible verses and the harder-to-understand passages. The 366 entries emphasize the seasons of the church year and correlate to the secular calendar as well.

*VeggieTales Bible Atlapedia: Bible Atlas and Encyclopedia All in One!* Cindy Kenney. Franklin, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006. [[www.bigidea.com](http://www.bigidea.com)]

Great resource for parents to help lead the spiritual development at home - also a great teaching tool for church classes. Bob & Larry have received so many great questions about the Bible, from kids all around the world! Questions like- who wrote the Bible? Where did the stories in the Bible take place? Why should we read the Bible? We put our Veggies to work finding the facts, and brought all the research together in one amazing *Atlapedia!*

- Books of the Bible: Learn how God created this whole library of books inside one BIG BOOK! Learn what each book is about, what major events took place, and read a summary of each important person and their part in history.
- Bible Timeline: Pa Grape invents a time machine that begins at the very beginning of time as we know it – Creation! 13 pages of colorful charts and descriptions take you on a trip through Bible history, ending with John’s Revelation of the second coming of Christ.
- People of the Bible: Archibald Asparagus has done a lot of research, and gives us a report on all the people of the Bible – from Abednego, to Boaz, to Lot.. all the way through to Zipporah!
- Bible Life & Times: So what kind of desserts did the Israelites eat in the desert? Certainly not pudding cups! Learn about family life in Israel, homes in the desert, Synagogue worship services, and clothing made from camels & goat hair!
- Bible Maps: Maps of the earth in Bible times help bring all that we’ve learned together. Check out the route God led the Israelites across the Red Sea through Sinai. Learn where Jesus was born and where he traveled in his ministry. Follow Paul’s missionary journeys and more!

*VeggieTales Bible Mania.* Cindy Kenney. Brentwood, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2006. [www.bigidea.com] Astound kids (and grown-ups, too!) with an entire book of amazing-but-true Bible facts, all hosted by our favorite VeggieTales characters. These little-known nuggets of truth include Bible wonders and miracles, facts about the human body, nature, creation, weapons, armor and much, much more. Kids won’t want to put this seemingly endless encyclopedia of information down as they discover fun facts, like the oldest person in the Bible, best fighter, biggest villain, longest drought, worst hail storm, people most talked about in the Bible, etc. And they’ll laugh at some of the zany Veggie facts included for fun! Whether it’s finding out the most extreme weather, the craziest miracles, or the weirdest things mentioned in the Bible, VeggieTales Bible Mania is sure to make children laugh, learn... and love it!

*VeggieTales Bible Storybook.* (New International Reader’s). Grand Rapids: Zonderkidz, 2006. [www.zonderkiz.com] [www.bigidea.com]

With this beautifully illustrated collection, kids will learn classic Bible stories as well as gain an overview of the entire Bible. Includes scripture selections from the NIV - the NIV Bible for Kids! Each Bible story is introduced Veggie style, helping kids understand the important lessons that God has to share with us!

- Old Testament: The Ballad of Little Joe (Joseph) - Babysitter in DeNile (Baby Moses) - Frog Wars (Moses & Pharaoh) - Gideon: Tuba Warrior (Gideon) - Dave & the Giant Pickle (David & Goliath) - Josh & the Big Wall (Joshua) - King George & the Ducky (King David) - Esther, the Girl Who Became Queen - Madame Blueberry (Psalm 324) - Rack, Shack, and Benny (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) - Daniel and the Lion’s Den - Jonah
- New Testament: The Stable that Bob Built (Jesus’ Birth) - Where’s God When I’m Scared (Jesus walks on water) - The Story of Flibber-o-loo (The Good Samaritan) - Larry’s Lagoon (The Prodigal Son) - An Easter Carol (Jesus is Risen) - Minnesota Cuke (Wisdom from Proverbs) - Lyle the Kindly Viking (A Cheerful Giver) - The Gourds Must Be Crazy (The Conversion of Paul) - LarryBoy & the Rumor Weed (New Life... New Ways)

*VeggieTales Family Devotional.* Cindy Kenney and Doug Peterson. Franklin, TN: Integrity Publishers, 2005. [www.bigidea.com]

The *VeggieTales Family Devotional* contains 52 devotionals organized into seven parts: The Faith Connection, The Communication Connection, The Love Connection, The Trust Connection, The Time Connection, The Joy Connection, and Holiday Lessons. Each devotion includes a Veggie

story, a Bible story, discussion questions, guided prayers, family activity, and a “think-link-act” connection to help everyone find a practical way to apply God’s messages to their lives every day.

# The Seven Habits of Effective Bible Readers

I'm sure you'd agree with me that establishing and maintaining a regular time of Bible reading and prayer can be a real challenge. We've already talked about some of the obstacles. We may well be hungry to know God better but with all the pressures and distractions of modern life, sometimes it's just easier to live on spiritual snack food rather than a healthy diet of God's Word.

How can we satisfy that deep hunger for real spiritual nourishment?

How can we overcome the challenges and enjoy the many benefits of daily Bible reading and prayer?

Let me offer seven simple suggestions to help you develop a more effective and meaningful time with God in his Word.

## 1. Begin with the Basics

Your most basic "tool," of course, is the Bible. There are many different—and very good—translations of the Bible available today. For years, my favorite has been the New International Version (NIV). But depending on your church tradition, you might enjoy the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) or the New American Bible (NAB). It's also helpful to visit a Christian bookstore to browse through the Bible section. But no matter which translation you choose, the key is to select one that's easy for you to read and understand. In addition, you might want a notebook and pen to write down insights you gain from the Bible, or answers to prayer.

## 2. Pick a Spot

Then, choose a convenient time and place for your meeting with God. It doesn't have to be lengthy, perhaps just 15 minutes. Find a quiet place where there are minimal distractions so you can concentrate. This could be a quiet corner of your house while you have your morning cup of coffee (that's my preference!), in your office before the workday begins, or during your lunch break. Give some thought to the time and place that works best for you.

It's true that maintaining a regular Bible reading habit will take some discipline. But remember that a habit is only a means to an end. Your higher goal is to transform your Bible reading and prayer habit into a meeting with God. Think of it as an appointment with God. If you do, Bible reading and prayer will become less of a discipline and more of a dialog with God.

## 3. Don't Feel Guilty

Have you ever heard someone say, "I'm having trouble keeping a regular quiet time with God? I know I ought to but ..."? Maybe you've felt that way. As we've already acknowledged, maintaining a "spiritual discipline" like Bible reading can be a challenge. Even so, we should be careful not to think of it as "paying our dues to God" or assume that God is waiting to "zap" us if we fail to read the Bible for a period of time.

The important thing to remember is God loves you and he wants to meet with you (John 4:23-24)! Don't let guilt over what you haven't done in the past rob you of the joy of meeting with God in the present. With whatever time you do have, focus on enjoying God's Word today. If you do that, you'll soon find yourself feeling less guilty and more excited about meeting God every day.



## 4. Find a Plan that Works for You

I've heard people say, "I love to cook but I hate to decide what's for dinner every night." The same is often true when it comes to daily Bible reading. That's why I've found it helpful to use a daily Bible reading plan or guide. Scripture Union has two guides for adults: Discovery and Encounter with God. (For more information on these see pages 31-32 in this booklet, or go to [www.ScriptureUnion.org](http://www.ScriptureUnion.org).) There are many other good Bible reading plans available from Christian publishers. Perhaps your church denomination offers one too. Different plans will appeal to different people. The key is to find one that gets you into the Bible and stick with it. Then, you won't have to spend your quiet time in "menu planning" and can focus more on "the joy of cooking."

## 5. Be Creative, Add Variety!

Even good things can become routine. We all go through times when our walk with God feels dry and lifeless. When that happens, it helps to remember that those feelings are normal; you won't see spiritual fireworks every time you open your Bible. But the way to overcome them is to try something new. Here're some ideas that have worked for me.

**"I love to cook but I hate to decide what's for dinner every night." The same is often true when it comes to daily Bible reading.**

It's a simple change, but I've found it helps to read the day's passage in a different Bible translation than usual. Perhaps you could try the New Living Translation (NLT), the Contemporary English Version (CEV), or even a paraphrase like The Message (MSG). Another helpful technique is to keep a journal of my reflections; I don't write in it every day, only when something especially stands out. Every so often I'll try a through-the-Bible-in-a-year reading schedule; it's good to read "the whole thing" at least once. Sometimes I'll read through one book of the Bible and try to study it in depth using a commentary. Other times, after I've read a Bible passage, I'll also read a few pages from a classic Christian book. A little variety can make a big difference.

## 6. Give the Distractions to God

It's a noisy world out there! Even the most disciplined Bible reader faces plenty of distractions: unexpected phone calls, family interruptions and pet emergencies. I've also learned that the biggest distractions come from within: my fears, frustrations, temptations and worries.

Unfortunately we can't always control or avoid these distractions. So when they come, use them for good! Incorporate them into your time with God. If young children interrupt, invite them up on your lap and read the Bible together. If the phone rings, pray for the caller after you hang up. If your thoughts wander to worries and concerns, give those thoughts to the Lord in prayer. Don't get too frustrated by the distractions. They may be the very things God wants you to pray about.

## 7. Learn to Listen

My wife Carol and I have been married for more than 30 years. Over the years we've learned that listening to each other is essential to a healthy relationship. The same is true in developing a relationship with God. Prayer isn't just reciting a laundry list of requests. Prayer also involves listening to God. The question is, how can we do that?

Begin by taking time to quiet yourself in God's presence. You might imagine that your cares and burdens are packages and you are handing them to God. Then think back on the prior day. Recall the ways you saw God at work in and around you. When you feel that your heart is still, some call it "centered," then slowly read a passage of the Bible. After you read, wait in silence, reflecting on the verse or phrase that jumps out at you. What do you sense God is saying to you from this Word? How does it apply to the specific issues you face now? When you love someone, you listen to them. Practice the art of listening to God.

## The Best Time to Start...is Now!

There's no better time to begin reading the Bible than today. Decide on a time, a place and a Bible reading plan. Ask God to give you a hunger for him and his Word. Use these seven steps and the other ideas and resources in this Bible Reading Start-Up Guide to begin. Soon, you'll discover that those few quiet minutes with God will become the most meaningful part of your day!

# The Scripture Union Bible Reading Method



**“A time-tested, effective way to help you get the most out of reading the Bible.”**

Now that we’ve reviewed the basic steps needed to establish a successful daily appointment with God—you’ve decided on a time, a place and a plan—you’re ready to “dig in” to the Bible itself. The Scripture Union Bible Reading Method is a simple, 5-step method that has been used by millions of people around the world for over 100 years. It’s a time-tested, effective way to help you get the most out of reading the Bible. Here’s how it works.

## **PRAY**

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Prayer is the starting point; remember, you’re beginning a dialog. Before you read the Bible, ask God to help you understand the passage for the day. God, through the Holy Spirit, is the “author” of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). He’s given us his written Word to communicate his eternal truth. So ask God to speak to you as you read. As the boy Samuel was taught to pray “Speak Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9), so let that be your prayerful attitude as you start your time with God.

## **READ**

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Next, read slowly and carefully through the Bible passage. Sometimes, you’ll want to read the passage more than once. You may also find it helpful to read the preceding or following passages to get the context. Take the time to read it as thoroughly as you can, expecting God to answer your prayer for understanding of his Word.

## **REFLECT**

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This is a key part of the process, reflecting or meditating on what you have just read. First, ask these questions: What does this passage say? What is its main point? What does it reveal about God, or about me? What does it require of me now, in thought, word or action? These questions will help you “dig deeper” into the meaning of the passage as you study and reflect. Many people find it helpful to write their answers in a journal or notebook. Next, it helps to read the thoughts of someone else who’s studied the same passage. That’s why so many people like Scripture Union’s Bible Guides Discovery or Encounter with God, they provide helpful commentary from Christians around the world.

## **APPLY**

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God gave us his Word for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Its purpose is not only to give us information about God, but, also to help us live in the proper relationship to him and others. If we are willing, the Holy Spirit can use God’s Word to shape our lives in the direction of greater godliness. That’s why this step is so important. After you’ve reflected on the meaning of the passage, ask yourself this: How can God’s Word apply to my life today; my situations at home, at work, school or church? Your goal is to use what you’ve learned to become more like Jesus. The application questions and exercises suggested in Discovery or Encounter with God are very helpful for this.

## **PRAY**

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End your time in God’s Word as you began, in prayer. Make your discoveries from the Bible the basis of your prayer time. Ask God to help you live out and apply what you learned that day. Thank God for meeting with you and sharing his Word with you. There are other suggestions for prayer each day in the “Prayer Journal” on the inside back cover of Discovery and Encounter with God. As you can see, the Scripture Union Bible Reading Method is simple, but it’s also effective. In the worldwide Scripture Union network, we have a phrase that sums up our approach to Bible reading: Pray it in; live it out. That’s the way to make God’s Word come alive every day.

# E100

## THE ESSENTIAL ONE HUNDRED CHALLENGE

### Take The E100 Challenge

The Essential 100 Challenge™ (The E100) is a new exciting way to read through the Bible. The Challenge is based on carefully selected short Bible passages – 50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament – that helps you get the big picture of the Bible without getting bogged down.

To take The E100 Challenge, follow these simple steps:

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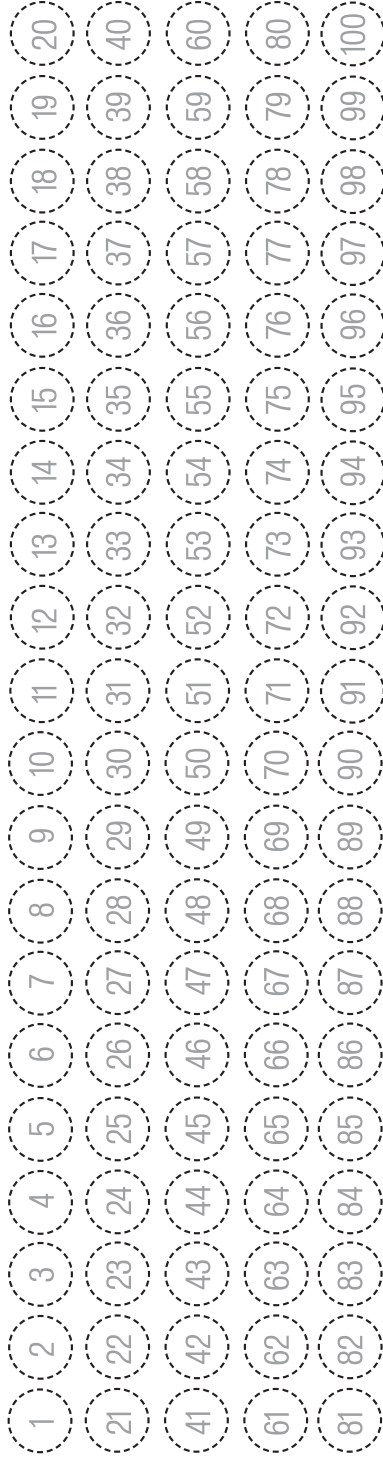


### SCRIPTURE UNION'S BIBLE READING METHOD

- PRAY: before you read, asking God to help you understand.
- READ: the Bible passage for the day, perhaps more than once.
- REFLECT: on the passage. Write your thoughts in a journal.
- APPLY: what God teaches you from His Word to your life.
- PRAY: again, asking God to help you live out His Word.

At Scripture Union, we want to help you meet God every day in the Bible and prayer. That's why we have developed several follow-on resources for developing a daily habit of Bible reading. For more resources go to: [www.TheE100challenge.com](http://www.TheE100challenge.com)

### CROSS OFF YOUR PROGRESS



## THE BIBLE READING PLAN PEOPLE LOVE TO COMPLETE

THE E100 CHALLENGE IS  
BROUGHT TO YOU BY: **SCRIPTURE UNION**

### Personal Action Plan

1. My goal is to read The E100 over the next:
  - 100 Days
  - 20 Weeks
  - 1 year
  - 2 years
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
2. My plan is to take \_\_\_\_\_ (minutes) to read the Bible and pray...
  - In the Morning
  - During my Lunch Break
  - In the Evening/Before Bed
  - On the Weekend
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
3. To help me keep going, I will read The E100 with my:
  - Small Group
  - Friend(s): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Sunday School
  - Family: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  - Co-worker: \_\_\_\_\_
4.  I will add my name to The E100 Wall to symbolize my desire to take The E100 Challenge at: [www.E100Challenge.com](http://www.E100Challenge.com)

### Help With the Journey



**The Essential Bible Guide** is your companion for The E100 Challenge. It takes you through the 100 Old and New Testament passages – so you'll see how all the major Bible themes fit together. Written in a warm & engaging style, it provides life-related explanation for all 100 passages; plus application questions, prayer help and more.

Also available for small groups and Sunday School classes is **The E100 Discussion Guide**. A perfect addition for groups who are taking The E100 together. The Discussion Guide contains relevant questions for each passage.

TO ORDER THESE RESOURCES GO TO [E100CHALLENGE.COM](http://E100CHALLENGE.COM) OR CALL 800.621.5267

## OLD TESTAMENT

### IN THE BEGINNING

1	Creation	Genesis 1:1-2:25
2	The Fall	Genesis 3:1-3:24
3	The Flood	Genesis 6:5-7:24
4	God's Covenant with Noah	Genesis 8:1-9:17
5	Tower of Babel	Genesis 11:1-11:9

### ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

6	The Call of Abram	Genesis 12:1-12:20
7	God's Covenant with Abram	Genesis 15:1-15:21
8	Isaac's Birth and "Sacrifice"	Genesis 21:1-22:19
9	Jacob and Esau Compete	Genesis 27:1-28:22
10	Jacob and Esau Reconcile	Genesis 32:1-33:20

### THE STORY OF JOSEPH

11	Sold Into Slavery	Genesis 37:1-37:36
12	Prison and a Promotion	Genesis 39:1-41:57
13	Ten Brothers Go to Egypt	Genesis 42:1-42:38
14	The Brothers Return	Genesis 43:1-44:34
15	Joseph Reveals His Identity	Genesis 45:1-46:7

### MOSES AND THE EXODUS

16	Birth of Moses	Exodus 1:1-2:25
17	The Burning Bush	Exodus 3:1-4:17
18	The Ten Plagues	Exodus 6:28-11:10
19	Passover and Exodus	Exodus 12:1-12:42
20	Crossing the Red Sea	Exodus 13:17-14:31

### THE LAW AND THE LAND

21	The Ten Commandments	Exodus 19:1-20:21
22	The Golden Calf	Exodus 32:1-34:35
23	Joshua Succeeds Moses	Joshua 1:1-1:18
24	Crossing the Jordan	Joshua 3:1-4:24
25	The Fall of Jericho	Joshua 5:13-6:27

### THE JUDGES

26	Israel's Disobedience	Judges 2:6-3:6
27	Deborah Leads Israel	Judges 4:1-5:31
28	Gideon Defeats the Midianites	Judges 6:1-7:25
29	Sampson Defeats the Philistines	Judges 13:1-16:31
30	The Story of Ruth	Ruth 1:1-4:22

### THE RISE OF ISRAEL

31	Samuel Listens to God	1 Samuel 1:1-3:21
32	King Saul	1 Samuel 8:1-10:27
33	David and Goliath	1 Samuel 16:1-18:16
34	David and Saul	1 Samuel 23:7-24:22
35	King David	2 Samuel 5:1-7:29

### THE FALL OF ISRAEL

36	David and Bathsheba	2 Samuel 11:1-12:25
37	King Solomon	1 Kings 2:1-3:28
38	Solomon's Temple	1 Kings 8:1-9:9
39	Elijah and the Prophets of Baal	1 Kings 16:29-19:18
40	The Fall of Jerusalem	2 Kings 25:1-25:30

### PSALMS AND PROVERBS

41	The Lord Is My Shepherd	Psalms 23:1-23:6
42	Have Mercy on Me	Psalms 51:1-5:19
43	Praise the Lord	Psalms 103:1-103:22
44	Godly Wisdom	Proverbs 1:1-4:27
45	Proverbs of Solomon	Proverbs 16:1-18:24

### THE PROPHETS

46	The Suffering Servant	Isaiah 51:1-53:12
47	Jeremiah's Call and Message	Jeremiah 1:1-3:5
48	Daniel in the Lion's Den	Daniel 6:1-6:28
49	The Story of Jonah	Jonah 1:1-4:11
50	The Day of Judgment	Malachi 1:1-4:6

## NEW TESTAMENT

### THE LIVING WORD

51	The Word Became Flesh	John 1:1-1:18
52	Gabriel's Message	Luke 1:1-1:80
53	The Birth of Jesus	Luke 2:1-2:40
54	John the Baptist	Luke 3:1-3:20
55	Baptism and Temptation	Matthew 3:13-4:17

### THE TEACHING JESUS

56	Sermon on the Mount - Part 1	Matthew 5:1-6:4
57	Sermon on the Mount - Part 2	Matthew 6:5-7:29
58	The Kingdom of Heaven	Matthew 13:1-13:58
59	The Good Samaritan	Luke 10:25-10:37
60	Lost and Found	Luke 15:1-15:32

### THE MIRACLE OF JESUS

61	Feeding the Five Thousand	Luke 9:1-9:36
62	Walking on Water	Matthew 14:22-14:36
63	Healing a Blind Man	John 9:1-9:41
64	Healing a Demon-Possessed Man	Mark 5:1-20
65	Raising Lazarus from the Dead	John 11:1-11:57

### THE CROSS OF CHRIST

66	The Last Supper	Luke 22:1-22:46
67	Arrest and Trial	John 18:1-18:40
68	The Crucifixion	John 19:1-19:42
69	The Resurrection	John 20:1-21:25
70	The Ascension	Acts 1:1-1:11

### THE CHURCH IS BORN

71	The Day of Pentecost	Acts 2:1-2:47
72	Growth and Persecution	Acts 3:1-4:37
73	The First Martyr	Acts 6:8-8:8
74	Sharing the Word	Acts 8:26-8:40
75	Good News for All	Acts 10:1-11:18

### THE TRAVELS OF PAUL

76	The Road to Damascus	Acts 9:1-9:31
77	The First Missionary Journey	Acts 13:1-14:28
78	The Council at Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-15:41
79	More Missionary Journeys	Acts 16:1-20:38
80	The Trip to Rome	Acts 25:1-28:31

### PAUL TO THE CHURCHES

81	More than Conquerors	Romans 8:1-8:39
82	The Fruit of the Spirit	Galatians 5:16-6:10
83	The Armor of God	Ephesians 6:10-6:20
84	Rejoice in the Lord	Philippians 4:2-4:9
85	The Supremacy of Christ	Colossians 1:1-1:23

### PAUL TO THE LEADERS

86	Elders and Deacons	1 Timothy 3:1-3:16
87	The Love of Money	1 Timothy 6:3-6:21
88	Good Soldiers of Christ	2 Timothy 2:1-2:26
89	All Scripture is God-breathed	2 Timothy 3:10-4:8
90	The Coming of the Lord	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

### THE APOSTLES' TEACHING

91	The Most Excellent Way	1 Corinthians 13:1-13:13
92	A New Creation in Christ	2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2
93	A Living Hope	1 Peter 1:1-2:12
94	Faith and Works	James 1:1-2:26
95	Love One Another	1 John 3:11-4:21

### THE REVELATION

96	A Voice and a Vision	Revelation 1:1-1:20
97	Messages to the Churches	Revelation 2:1-3:22
98	The Throne of Heaven	Revelation 4:1-7:17
99	Hallelujah!	Revelation 19:1-20:15
100	The New Jerusalem	Revelation 21:1-22:21



# DISCUSSION GUIDE

The Essential 100 Challenge™ (E100) is a new exciting way to read through the Bible.

The Challenge is based on carefully selected short Bible passages

– 50 from the Old Testament and 50 from the New Testament

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Whitney T. Kuniholm is the President of Scripture Union/USA and author of The Essential Bible Guide, the book that first introduced The Essential 100™ concept.

For more information on The Essential Bible Guide, or on a church-wide Bible reading program called “The Essential 100 Challenge,” go to E100Challenge.com

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## THE BIBLE READING PLAN PEOPLE LOVE TO COMPLETE

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**Introduction**

Wouldn't you like to read through the Bible at least once in you life? And wouldn't you like to discover the secret that makes regular Bible reading enjoyable and meaningful? Great! That's what The Essential 100 Challenge can help you do.

This Discussion Guide leads you and your friends or group through 100 easy-to-read Bible passages—The Essential 100™—and organizes them into 20 sections of five excerpts each, so you'll see how all the pieces fit together. You'll get the big picture of the Bible without getting bogged down!

The excerpts are carefully selected from both the Old and New Testaments and cover all major types of biblical writing including Historical Books, Poetry and Wisdom, the Prophets, the Gospels, Acts, the Epistles and Revelation. Most of the excerpts are 1-2 Bible chapters in length and can be read in 10 minutes or less.

**How to use this Discussion Guide**

It's always more difficult to take a significant journey all by yourself. That's why you may find it helpful to read through The Essential 100™ with another person—a friend, family member, spouse, fellow seeker. Another way to read through The Essential 100™ is with a group, such as a book group, Sunday School class, home group, Bible study group or other church-related group.

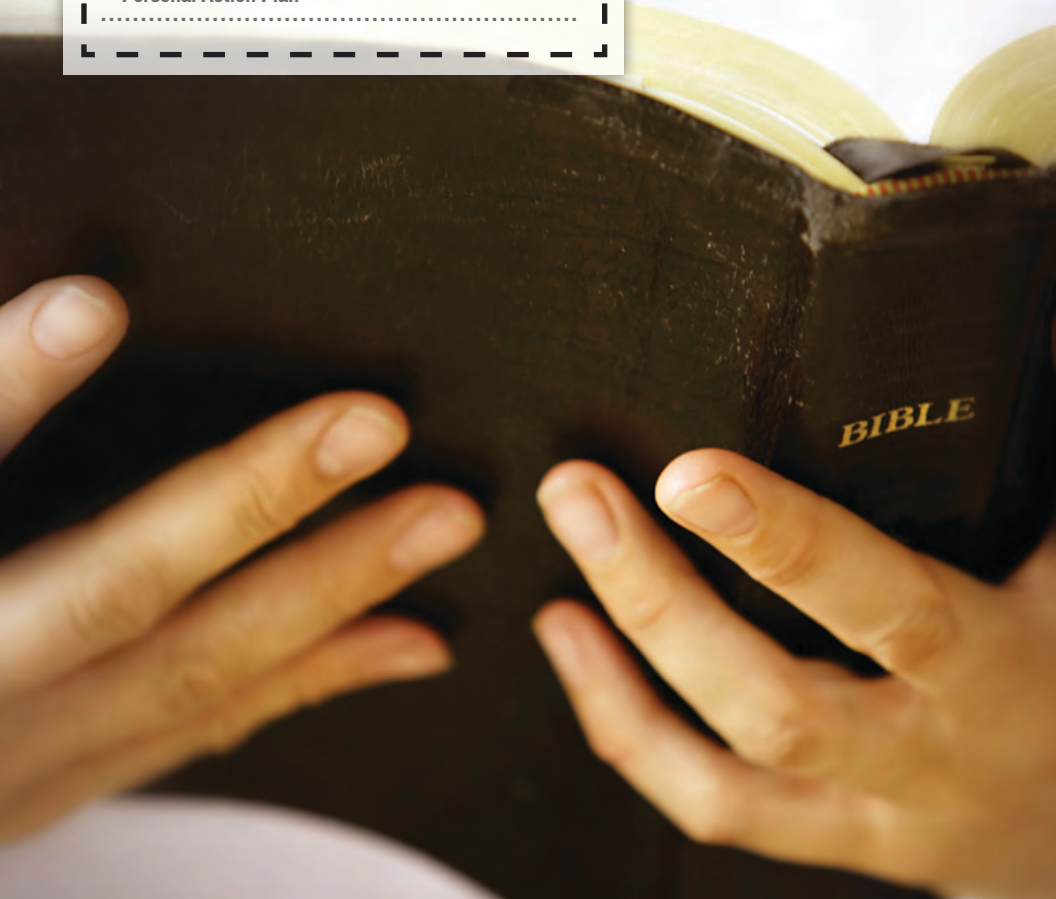
Here's what to do:

Individually read one excerpt each day for a week. You may want to jot down insights in a notebook or journal. And be sure to take time for prayer. (Note that there are five excerpts in each section so it will be easier for you to keep up.)

Then...

As a Group, get together once each week to talk about what you've learned from reading the previous section. Use the discussion questions to help get the conversation going. Try to allow everyone to participate in the discussion. And again, take time to end with prayer.

Discussing the Bible with another person or group can be one of the most enjoyable and rewarding ways to grow closer to God. May God bless you as you and your family and friends begin to seek him in the Word and then serve him in the world.



In the Beginning

- 1

**Creation (Genesis 1:1-2:25)**  
 What do you believe about God? Who is he?  
 In what ways do you see evidence for God—if any—in the world around you?  
 Other Insights
- 2

**The Fall (Genesis 3:1-24)**  
 How do you define “sin”?  
 What makes you feel guilty? How do you handle your feelings of guilt?  
 Other Insights
- 3

**The Flood (Genesis 6:5-7:24)**  
 Do you ever find yourself in situations where, like Noah, you are surrounded by sin?  
 How do you resist temptation? What do you think about “judgment”?  
 Does God still judge people today? Is that fair? Other Insights
- 4

**God’s Promise to Noah (Genesis 8:1-9:17)**  
 Do you think God loves you? Why?  
 Would you like God to give you a “clean slate”? Why?  
 Other Insights
- 5

**The Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9)**  
 When is pride a bad thing? A good thing? Why?  
 Are there people in your life with whom you have strained or even broken communication?  
 How could you change things for the better? Other Insights

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

- 6

**The Call of Abram (Genesis 12:1-20)**  
 Does God “call” people today? In what ways?  
 How would you describe your calling in life?
- 7

**God’s Covenant with Abram (Genesis 15:1-21)**  
 Are there any things in your life that seem impossible to overcome?  
 How might “faith” make a difference?
- 8

**Isaac’s Birth and “Sacrifice” (Genesis 21:1-22:19)**  
 Have you ever felt God might be testing you? When and how?  
 How has a “time of testing” made you a stronger person?
- 9

**Jacob and Esau Compete (Genesis 27:1-28:22)**  
 Do you think Jacob and Esau had a healthy family?  
 How did your family experience shape you?  
 In your opinion, what are the patterns of a healthy family?
- 10

**Jacob and Esau Reconcile (Genesis 32:1-33:20)**  
 Have you ever had a strained or broken relationship with someone close to you?  
 What happened?  
 What things have you learned from Jacob and Esau about healing broken relationships?

The Story of Joseph

- Sold Into Slavery (Genesis 37:1-36)**  
 What causes tension and conflict in your family, or in families you know?  
 What’s the best way to resolve family conflict?

11
  - Prison and a Promotion (Genesis 39:1-41:57)**  
 Have you ever been unfairly put in a tough situation? When and what happened?  
 Have you ever learned an important lesson from an unfair or tough situation?

12
  - Ten Brothers Go to Egypt (Genesis 42:1-38)**  
 Why do you think people hide their true feelings? Do you?  
 In what situations would you feel comfortable sharing “the real you”?

13
  - The Brothers Return (Genesis 43:1-44:34)**  
 How should a person deal with unresolved hurts from the past?  
 How could you help others who are struggling with past hurts?

14
  - Joseph Reveals His Identity (Genesis 45:1-46:7)**  
 Are there issues in your past that still drive you today?  
 Is the effect positive or negative?  
 What lessons have you learned from the life of Joseph?

15
- Moses and the Exodus
- The Birth of Moses (Exodus 1:1-2:25)**  
 How have the difficulties in your past prepared you for life today?  
 Do you have a mission in life? If so, how would you describe it?

16
  - The Burning Bush (Exodus 3:1-4:17)**  
 What are some ways that people encounter God today?  
 Have you ever had a “burning bush” experience? Explain.

17
  - The Ten Plagues (Exodus 6:28-11:10)**  
 Some people today think natural disasters expressions of God’s judgment?  
 What do you think?  
 How involved do you think is God in the world today?

18
  - Passover and Exodus (Exodus 12:1-42)**  
 What does this account of the original Passover and Exodus teach you about God?  
 Why do you suppose the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt has inspired people throughout the ages?

19
  - Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 13:17-14:31)**  
 What have been the defining moments in your life? How have they affected you?  
 Have you had any defining moments with God? If so, what happened?

20

## The Law and the Land

21

**The Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:1–20:21)**

What place should the Ten Commandments have in our pluralistic society today?  
Which of the Ten Commandments is most challenging to you? Why?

22

**The Golden Calf (Exodus 32:1–34:35)**

What motivated the Israelites to worship the Golden Calf instead of God?  
What things pull you away from God? What makes you feel closer to God?

23

**Joshua Succeeds Moses (Joshua 1:1–18)**

From what you know about Moses, why was he a good spiritual mentor for Joshua?  
Is there anyone you view as a spiritual mentor—either a living person or someone from history?  
How does their example help you today?

24

**Crossing the Jordan (Joshua 3:1–4:24)**

Some people see the Israelites crossing the Jordan as an image of death. What do you think?  
What is the Promised Land for you? Do you ever think you'll reach it? Why?

25

**The Fall of Jericho (Joshua 5:13–6:27)**

How do you think the Israelites felt as they marched around Jericho?  
Have you or someone you know ever taken a step of faith that seemed odd?  
What did you learn?

## The Judges

26

**Israel's Disobedience (Judges 2:6–3:6)**

How do you explain the Israelites' pattern—falling away from God, getting in trouble,  
crying out for help? Do you ever experience ups and downs in your relationship  
with your loved ones? With God? Why?

27

**Deborah Leads Israel (Judges 4:1–5:31)**

What lessons do you learn from the experiences of Deborah?  
Do you think faith can be a source of courage? Explain.

28

**Gideon Defeats the Midianites (Judges 6:1–7:25)**

Do you think Gideon was bold or timid? Why?  
Does God still guide people today? How can you find God's guidance?

29

**Samson Defeats the Philistines (Judges 13:1–16:31)**

How would you analyze the way Samson related to women?  
How can you develop and maintain healthy relationships with members of the opposite sex?

30

**The Story of Ruth (Ruth 1:1–4:22)**

What character traits are evident in Ruth's life?  
What character traits would others say are most evident in your life?

## The Rise of Israel

**Samuel Listens to God (1 Samuel 1:1–3:21)**

Which character from this passage do you identify with most? Why?  
Do you think God still speaks to people today? Why and how?

31

**King Saul (1 Samuel 8:1–10:27)**

What are the traits of a good leader?  
Are there Christian leaders—either today or from history—that you admire? Who and why?

32

**David and Goliath (1 Samuel 16:1–18:16)**

What do you think really motivated David to challenge Goliath?  
Are there any "Goliaths" in your life? What are they and how might faith in God  
help you confront them?

33

**David and Saul (1 Samuel 23:7–24:22)**

What underlying issues drove Saul's attitude towards David?  
Is there anyone who has an irrationally negative attitude towards you?  
What could you do to make things better?

34

**King David (2 Samuel 5:1–7:29)**

What made David such a great king?  
From all you know about him, what lessons from David's life could you apply to yours?

35

## The Fall of Israel

**David and Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11:1–12:25)**

"What I do in my personal life is nobody's business but my own." Agree? Disagree? Why?  
What do you learn from Nathan about how to respond when the people you care  
about make bad choices?

36

**King Solomon (1 Kings 2:1–3:28)**

How would you honestly answer if God said to you, "Ask for whatever  
you want me to give you"?  
What are the greatest sources of wisdom in your life?

37

**Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 8:1–9:9)**

What makes worship come alive for you?  
What would you change about the worship services you've attended? Why?

38

**Elijah and the Prophets of Baal (1 Kings 16:29–19:18)**

What do you do when you feel spiritually dry?  
What things give you a sense of personal and spiritual renewal?

39

**The Fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1–30)**

What have you learned from the "disasters" in your life?  
Have you ever felt closer to God during a tough time in your life? In what way?

40

## Psalms and Proverbs

41

**The Lord is My Shepherd (Psalm 23:1-6)**

What images in this psalm are most comforting to you?  
To what contemporary image would you compare the Lord? "The Lord is my..."? Explain.

42

**Have Mercy on Me (Psalm 51:1-19)**

What do you learn from this Psalm about confessing your sins?  
Have you ever experienced a sense of forgiveness for something you've done wrong?  
What happened?

43

**Praise the Lord (Psalm 103:1-22)**

What things motivated David to praise God in this Psalm?  
Do you have reasons for praising God? If so, what are they?

44

**Godly Wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-4:27)**

How would you characterize your relationship with your earthly father?  
Do you think your relationship with your earthly father has shaped your relationship with God? If so, how?

45

**Proverbs of Solomon (Proverbs 16:1-18:24)**

If you were writing a few "proverbs," what would you say?  
What wisdom have you gained from your experiences in life? Your relationship with God?

## The Prophets

46

**The Suffering Servant (Isaiah 51:1-53:12)**

In what ways does this passage seem to describe what happened to Jesus Christ hundreds of years later?  
Why did the servant of God described in this passage have to suffer?

47

**Jeremiah's Call and Message (Jeremiah 1:1-3:5)**

Why did Jeremiah resist God's plan for him?  
Do you ever feel like Jeremiah, that you are resisting something God wants you to do? Explain.

48

**Daniel in the Lion's Den (Daniel 6:1-28)**

Have you ever had to stand up for what you believe, in spite of significant consequences? What happened?  
Do you think people today should be more "up front" about their religious beliefs? Why?

49

**The Story of Jonah (Jonah 1:1-4:11)**

Have you ever "run away from God"? When and why?  
Have you ever been disappointed with God? When and why? What did you learn as a result?

50

**The Day of Judgment (Malachi 1:1-4:6)**

What do you believe about judgment? Do we really need it?  
Do you think there will be a "day of judgment" at some point in the future?  
How does that affect your actions today?

## The Living Word

**The Word Became Flesh (John 1:1-18)**

What does this passage teach about who Jesus is?  
If someone asked, "What do you believe about Jesus?" what would you say?

51

**Gabriel's Messages (Luke 1:1-80)**

Try to imagine how you would have felt if you were one of the people in this passage—Elizabeth or Mary, Zechariah or Joseph.  
Has God ever done something surprising in your life? If so, what happened?

52

**The Birth of Jesus (Luke 2:1-40)**

In our pluralistic society, do you think Christmas should be more Christ-centered? Why? Why do you suppose God allowed his Son to be born where and how he did?

53

**John the Baptist (Luke 3:1-20)**

Would you consider John the Baptist to be a "religious extremist"?  
Is it bad to be passionate and public about what we believe? Why?  
Who would you consider to be a modern example of John the Baptist? Why?

54

**Baptism and Temptation (Matthew 3:13-4:17)**

What situations do you think pose the greatest temptation for you today?  
What helped Jesus resist temptation? What steps could you take to resist temptation?

55

## The Teachings of Jesus

**Sermon on the Mount—Part 1 (Matthew 5:1-6:4)**

What would you say is the secret to true happiness?  
Which part of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is the most challenging to you? Why?

56

**Sermon on the Mount—Part 2 (Matthew 6:5-7:29)**

What do you suppose Jesus would have to say to people walking through a modern day shopping mall? Which part of this portion of the Sermon on the Mount is the most challenging to you? Why?

57

**The Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 13:1-58)**

How would you explain the Kingdom of Heaven to a modern person?  
Why do you suppose Jesus talked so much about the Kingdom of Heaven?

58

**The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)**

In our global community today, what do you think it means to be a "neighbor"?  
What is your responsibility towards that person?

59

**Lost and Found (Luke 15:1-32)**

How would you summarize the main point Jesus is making through these parables?

60

## The Miracles of Jesus

61

**Feeding the Five Thousand (Luke 9:1-36)**

What's your view of the miracles of Jesus? Do you believe they actually happened as reported in the Bible? Why does it matter?  
What does this miracle—the feeding of the five thousand—teach you about Jesus?

62

**Walking on Water (Matthew 14:22-36)**

Have you ever trusted God during a stormy period in your life? What happened?  
What does this miracle—walking on water—teach you about Jesus?

63

**Healing a Blind Man (John 9:1-41)**

Why do you suppose the religious leaders were so skeptical about the blind man's healing?  
Why are people skeptical about faith issues today?  
What does this miracle—healing a blind man—teach you about Jesus?

64

**Healing a Demon-Possessed Man (Mark 5:1-20)**

How is the power of evil generally portrayed in the media today? What's your view of evil?  
What does this miracle—healing a demon-possessed man—teach you about Jesus?

65

**Raising Lazarus from the Dead (John 11:1-57)**

How do you feel about your own death?  
What does this miracle—raising Lazarus from the dead—teach you about Jesus?

## The Cross of Christ

66

**The Last Supper (Luke 22:1-46)**

Imagine that you were around the table at this “first communion.”  
Describe what you might have thought and felt.  
What causes you to “remember Jesus” today?

67

**Arrest and Trial (John 18:1-40)**

Explain the motivations and actions of the three key players in this passage—Caiaphas, Pilot and Peter. What was their attitude towards Jesus?  
Do you believe there is such a thing as “absolute truth”? Why?

68

**The Crucifixion (John 19:1-42)**

Why did so many people seem to hate Jesus? Do people still feel that way about Jesus today? Why?  
For you, what is the significance of Jesus' death on the Cross?

69

**The Resurrection (John 20:1-21:25)**

For you, what is the most convincing evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?  
Some people say that Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the “linchpin” of the Christian faith?  
Do you agree? Why?

70

**The Ascension (Acts 1:1-11)**

Imagine that you witnessed Jesus' ascension into heaven. How would you have felt?  
Do you think Jesus will return to earth someday? How does that affect your beliefs and actions today?

## The Church is Born

**The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-47)**

What do you believe about the Holy Spirit?  
Have you ever sensed that the Holy Spirit was at work in your life?

71

**Growth and Persecution (Acts 3:1-4:37)**

What is your view of the church today? Why does it exist? What  
What would you suggest as a “church growth strategy” today?

72

**The First Martyr (Acts 6:8-8:8)**

Why were the religious leaders so threatened by Stephen's sermon?  
Is a “threat” to some people today? Why?  
Have you ever been persecuted or ridiculed for what you believe?

73

**Sharing the Word (Acts 8:26-40)**

Some people say, “Religion is important but it should be kept private.”  
Have you ever shared your religious beliefs with another person?  
and what happened?

74

**Good News for All (Acts 10:1-11:18)**

How would you describe the good news of the Gospel? What specifically  
Do you think the church today is inclusive or exclusive? Why?

75

## The Travels of Paul

**The Road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-31)**

Have you or someone you know ever had a dramatic experience of God? What happened?  
Is it possible to “see the light” about Jesus without having a dramatic experience? Explain.

76

**The First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:1-14:28)**

What is your view of “missionaries” today? Are they a positive influence in the world?  
What risks have you taken for what you believe?

77

**The Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-41)**

Who do you think has more disagreements—Christians or non-Christians? Why?  
What does this passage teach you about how to resolve a major disagreement?

78

**More Missionary Journeys (Acts 16:1-20:38)**

Why do you think Paul was such a tenacious witness for Jesus?  
Has God ever used a detour in your life to accomplish something good for you or others?

79

**The Trip to Rome (Acts 25:1-28:31)**

How do you think Paul was feeling in this passage: that things were out of control  
or that they were all going according to plan? Why?  
Do you have a God-given purpose in life? If so, what is it and how are you fulfilling it?

80

Paul to the Churches

81

**More Than Conquerors (Romans 8:1-39)**

What are the biggest influences in your life? Would you say anything “controls” you? What could it mean to be “controlled by the Spirit”? Do you think Paul was a pessimist or an optimist? Why?

82

**The Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-6:10)**

Which qualities of the “fruit of the spirit” do you think are hardest to cultivate? Which fruit would you like to see more of in your life? Why?

83

**The Armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-20)**

Do you believe there is such a thing as spiritual warfare? How would you describe it? Have you ever been in a spiritual battle? What happened and how did you find strength to press on?

84

**Rejoice in the Lord (Philippians 4:4-9)**

Is rejoicing part of your life? Why? What would you say is the key to real, inner peace? Have you ever experienced it?

85

**The Supremacy of Christ (Colossians 1:1-23)**

What words would you use to describe who Jesus Christ is to you? “He is....” Is it possible to be a “good Christian” without believing in Jesus Christ? Why?

Paul to the Leaders

86

**Elders and Deacons (1 Timothy 3:1-16)**

Which of the leadership characteristics in this passage are most common and most uncommon among Christian leaders you know? How should a Christian leader be different than other leaders?

87

**The Love of Money (1 Timothy 6:3-21)**

How would you summarize Paul’s teaching about money? Do you agree with him? Why? What is our culture’s philosophy about money? What’s your philosophy about money?

88

**Good Soldiers of Christ (2 Timothy 2:1-26)**

What do the analogies Paul uses in this passage—of a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer—teach you about being a follower of Jesus Christ? How can you avoid being distracted from doing the things you believe God wants you to do in life?

89

**All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:10-4:8)**

Paul says that those who want to live a godly life will be persecuted? What do you suppose he meant? Does it matter if the Bible is really true? Why?

90

**The Coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)**

What do you think it means to be “alert” for Christ’s return? How does the promise of Christ’s return affect the way you live your life now?

The Apostles’ Teaching

**The Most Excellent Way (1 Corinthians 13:1-13)**

What is the greatest example of love you’ve seen or experienced in your life? Why do you think Paul says love is the greatest virtue?

91

**A New Creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 4:1-6:2)**

In what ways does one become a “new creation” as a result of following Jesus? How can an ordinary person become an effective ambassador for Christ?

92

**A Living Hope (1 Peter 1:1-2:12)**

Do you think it’s possible to be sure about matters of faith? Why? What things make you the most hopeful in life?

93

**Faith and Works (James 1:1-2:26)**

What have been the biggest trials you’ve faced in life? Did they make you a better person? How? What are you most comfortable with, faith or works? Why?

94

**Love One Another (1 John 3:11-4:21)**

What would you say are the marks of a true Christian? Do most Christians you know bear those marks? Do you?

95

The Revelation

**A Voice and a Vision (Revelation 1:1-20)**

What are the benefits and dangers of wanting to know more about the future? What do you learn about Jesus from this passage?

96

**Messages to the Churches (Revelation 2:1-3:22)**

How do you think Jesus would feel about your church or the churches in your area? What message might he have for them?

97

**The Throne of Heaven (Revelation 4:1-7:17)**

What’s your view of heaven? What is it and who is it for? If God said to you, “Why should I let you into heaven?” what would you say?

98

**Hallelujah! (Revelation 19:1-20:15)**

Do you think “the end” could come in your lifetime? Why? What is your view on a “final judgment”? How does it make you feel and how does it affect the way you live now?

99

**The New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-22:21)**

Is the idea of a “new heaven and a new earth” an encouraging or scary thought for you? Why? Are you looking forward to the return of Jesus Christ? Why?

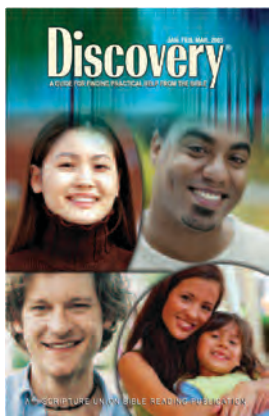
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