

How to Read the Bible

| | |
|--|--------------|
| LESSON ONE: PROPER APPROACH TO READING THE BIBLE | 2-4 |
| Foundation Stones for Reading the Bible | 2-3 |
| Proper Attitudes for Reading the Bible | 3-4 |
| Exercise 1: Observations and Questions | 4 |
| | |
| LESSON TWO: HELPFUL METHOD FOR READING THE BIBLE | 5-8 |
| Six Steps for Reading the Bible | 5-8 |
| Exercise 2: Literary and Historical Context | 6 |
| | |
| LESSON THREE: PROPER TOOLS FOR READING THE BIBLE | 9-13 |
| Basic Tools for Bible Students | 9 |
| Overview of Popular English Translations | 10 |
| Useful Websites & Apps for Bible Study | 11 |
| Exercise 3a and 3b: Words and Sentences | 12-13 |
| | |
| LESSON FOUR: THE STORY OF THE BIBLE | 14-17 |
| Looking at the Overall Theme of the Bible | 14 |
| The Story of the Bible in Symbols | 14-17 |
| Exercise 4: Parallel Passages | 17 |
| | |
| LESSON FIVE: PARTICULAR LITERATURE IN THE BIBLE | 18-19 |
| Looking at different types of Biblical Literature | 18 |
| Exercise 5: Commentaries | 19 |
| | |
| LESSON SIX: LIFE TRANSFORMATION BY READING THE BIBLE | 20-22 |
| The Final Step: Hear & Obey | 20 |
| From the Word to Our World | 20-21 |
| Bringing it All Together: Scripture Reading Practices | 21-22 |
| Exercise 6: Application | 22 |
| | |
| APPENDICES | 23-30 |
| APPENDIX 1: Major Covenants of the Bible | 23 |
| APPENDIX 2: Overview of Each Bible Book | 24-26 |
| APPENDIX 3: Genre Questions | 27-30 |

LESSON ONE: PROPER APPROACH TO READING THE BIBLE

The most important part of a home or building is the foundation. Much like a home, proper Bible study must begin with a strong foundation. As we look at God's Word, several foundation stones must be acknowledged.

Foundation Stones for Reading the Bible

Foundation Stone #1: The Bible is the Inspired Word of God.

The Inspiration of Scripture sets the Bible apart from every other book in all of history. The word inspired means, "God-breathed." The apostle Paul gives some clear instruction to a young minister Timothy about the importance of God's Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says, "¹⁶ *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*"

Some people suggest that the Bible is merely a product of a few people who wanted to put a book together. People suggest that the Bible is just a collection of myths, fables, or moral teachings. However, the apostle Peter refutes those claims when he writes, "²⁰ *But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, ²¹ for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*" (2 Peter 1:20-21)."¹

Foundation Stone #2: The Bible is the True Word of God.

Not only is the Bible the inspired Word of God, but it is also entirely true. Some critics suggest that the Bible is full of errors. A good response to that critic is, "Please show me one of the errors." Generally, a person cannot do so.

We can be confident that the Bible is the true Word of God because of three lines of evidence: history, geography, and archaeology. First, there are ancient historians that were not Christian that verify people, places and events from the Bible. Second, by studying geography, one can locate places and locations that the Bible mentions. Third, archaeologists are finding coins, pottery, and other artifacts that confirm the trustworthiness of the Bible.

Foundation Stone #3: The Bible has been accurately translated.

There are over 5,000 Greek manuscripts (copies of the New Testament, either partial or whole). When the copies of the New Testament are compared to Caesar's *Gallic Wars* which was composed between 58 and 50 BC, there are only nine or ten reliable copies.² With the wealth of manuscript evidence, scholars have been able to determine accurately the text of the Scripture.

¹ *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995.

² F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?*, (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 16.

Foundation Stone #4: The Bible can be understood by man.

Man is a rational being, made in God's image to think and to reason. By exercising this divine right, man is able to read the mind of God—that portion which God revealed, the Bible. No other created being has this privilege.³ Christian, be encouraged that God is communicating to you through His Word. Have confidence that you can understand His message.

Foundation Stone #5: The Bible is authoritative and demands submission.

Most people enjoy going to buffet restaurants. People like these restaurants because of all the choices. A person picks and chooses what foods he/she wants to eat. Unfortunately, this mentality has crept into the church. Some Christians are guilty of picking what verses and passages of Scripture they like and neglected those they do not. When we study the Bible, we must always submit our lives to the authority of Scripture. Berlin Christian Church feels so strongly about God's Word that it is listed as our number one core value.

BOTTOM LINE FOR BIBLE STUDY IS TO HAVE A SPIRIT OF HUMILITY.

Proper Attitudes for Reading the Bible⁴

Once the foundation is in place, the student of the Bible must examine oneself to make sure he or she has the proper attitudes to read and study God's Word. If one has the proper attitudes, Bible study will be much more profitable. As you prepare to study God's Word, these eight attitudes will prove invaluable.

Right Attitudes for Bible Study

1. Desire to know what the Bible teaches.
2. Expect to find something understandable.
3. Don't manipulate the text to say something it was not intended to say. Seek to find the **AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING (AIM)**.
4. Be humble and honest.
5. Find the facts before you form your views.
6. Seek answers to questions from the Bible itself (not from traditions). Use caution with commentaries and Study notes. Be like the Bereans who "were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see* whether these things were so" (Acts 17.11).
7. Have confidence that the Bible is true, consistent, and harmonious.
8. Recognize that the Bible is a covenant from God for us to live.

³ This material has been gathered from *How to Understand the Bible* by W. Robert Palmer (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1980), pp. 7-15.

⁴ These proper attitudes can be found in *Learning From God's Word* by Seth Wilson and Lynn Gardner (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 1989), pp. 57-58.

In lesson two, we will look at six helpful steps to reading your Bible. Throughout all of your Bible reading, pray for God to open your eyes to His word and the transforming power of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

*“Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.”*
(Psalm 119.18, ESV)

1. Write down observations and questions of the Bible passage.
2. Study the context of the Bible passage.
3. Study the words and sentences of the Bible passage.
4. Study the parallel passages of the Bible passage.
5. Study the commentaries related to the Bible passage.
6. Draw life application from the Bible passage.

Step 1: Write down observations and questions about the Bible Passage.

As you read a Bible passage, take notes on what you observe from the Bible text. When you look at a passage, here are some questions you will want to ask to help guide your observations:

- Who is speaking?
- Who is the audience?
- Is this passage a story or poetry or some other type of writing?
- Is this in the Old Testament or New Testament?
- Are there any repeated words or phrases? Anytime an author repeats a word or phrase, the reader should take note.
- Are there words or phrases you do not understand? In the observation step, write any questions that you have of the text that you do not have answers? Take note of anything that confuses you about this passage.

Many questions about a Bible passage can be answered by making careful observations of the text. You may want to make a photocopy of the Bible passage you are studying and underline or circle words that are important for the passage. In short, this step can be summarized in three words: OBSERVE, OBSERVE, OBSERVE!

Exercise 1: Make Observations of Philippians 1.1-11.

For each of these steps, you will have the opportunity to put into practice what you are learning. In the space below, write 20 different observations and/or questions that you have about Philippians 1.1-11. Refer to the above bullet points to guide you in your study.

LESSON TWO: HELPFUL METHOD FOR READING THE BIBLE

We have been reminded that the Bible is God's Word and demands our submission to its authority. Now we must begin focused study on individual Bible passages. Without a proper plan or method, our Bible study may lack depth and consistency. Below are six steps that we see as a proper way to studying the Bible. While these steps are not the only ones for healthy Bible study, these six steps outline the basics:

1. Write down observations and questions of the Bible passage.
2. Study the context of the Bible passage.
3. Study the words and sentences of the Bible passage.
4. Study the parallels passages of the Bible passage.
5. Study the commentaries related to the Bible passage.
6. Draw life application from the Bible passage.

Six Steps for Reading the Bible

Step 1: Write down observations and questions about the Bible Passage (see lesson 1).

Step 2: Study the Context of the Bible Passage.

Most questions about a Bible passage can be answered by studying the context of the passage. Context is the verses immediately preceding and following your passage of study. Since the study of context is so important, many Bible teachers tell their students, "CONTEXT IS KING!" (Although only Jesus is King!) Studying the context of the passage is essential to understanding the Author's Intended Meaning (AIM).

Literary Context

In the study of context, there are two areas where a Bible student must focus his or her attention. This first area is the literary context. The literary context is the verses around your passage of study. When studying the literary context of your passage, it is vital to read the entire book where your passage of study is found. By reading the Bible book, you can gain a big picture of what the author is trying to communicate. Once you have read the book (if possible in one sitting), see how your particular passage fits into the book as a whole.

Historical Context

The second area of context is historical context. This area focuses on the times and culture that relate to your Bible passage. For example, when Jesus says that he is the good shepherd in John 10, it is important to understand what a shepherd was like in first century Palestine. To find out what shepherds were like, you will need to consult a Bible dictionary.

When studying historical context, you will need to focus on the time and place of the Bible passage. The time will help you understand what is going on in the world at the time of the Bible passage. The world of David (1000 B.C.) was much different than the world of the apostle Paul (1st century A.D.). Geography will help you understand the meaning of a passage, too. When Paul writes to the church at Ephesus (book of Ephesians in the New Testament), you will need to know some things about the city of Ephesus. Studying the geography and cultural customs will help you understand the situation of the church in that area.

Contrasting Methods of Studying Literary and Historical Contexts⁵

Literary context

- Studies the written text
- Can ignore identity of author and audience
- Can study words in themselves
- Considers what any competent reader hears
- Is accessible to any attentive reader
- Rewards intensive study of one text

Historical context

- Studies the people and culture receiving the text
- Stresses identity of author and audience
- Stresses author's intent (AIM) as he uses words
- Considers what the original audience heard
- Is accessible to readers who know background
- Rewards cumulative study of many texts

Exercise 2: Study the Literary and Historical Context of Philippians 1.1-11.

1. Read the book of Philippians in one sitting. This should take about 10 minutes. Take notes on some of the main ideas of the book.
2. Does Paul refer to any themes from Phil. 1.1-11 in the rest of the letter? If so, what themes do you see repeated?
3. In Acts 16.11-40, Paul is in Philippi. Read these verses. What do you learn about the historical background of the church in Philippi?
4. Read a paragraph about "Philippi" from a Bible Encyclopedia (see next page). What do you learn about this place that may help you understand this letter?

⁵ Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message. A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1996), p. 44.

Philippi. Minor village of Thrace (known in antiquity as “The Springs” [Krenides]) until about 357 BC. when the father of Alexander the Great, Philip II of Macedon, conquered the site and rebuilt it. He gave the village his name (“Philip’s City”), fortified it as a military stronghold in subduing the area, and exploited the nearby gold mines. Two hundred years later in the Roman era it became a chief city of one of the four Roman districts into which Macedonia was divided. But because it was about 10 miles inland from the port of Neapolis, its growth was limited. Nearby Amphipolis (southwest) was the center of Roman government. [From *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*]

Step 3: Study the Words and Sentences of the Bible Passage.

Words are the most basic elements of communication. Words have different meanings in different contexts. Words can change in meaning over time. So, it is vital to understand what the author meant when he/she used certain words to communicate the message of the Bible. It would be very difficult to study every single word in the passage you are studying. However, you can look at 3-5 words that seem to have importance to the author. A Bible student will want to study *repeated* words in the selected passage or book. For example, Paul’s use of righteousness in the book of Romans would be a major word to study. Words such as grace, redemption, sin, forgiveness, mercy, disciple, and doctrine would be some examples of words that you will want to study.

Two tools that are extremely helpful in studying words are a concordance and a Bible dictionary. Your concordance will give you a listing of other places in the Bible where your word is used. A Bible Dictionary will give you some deeper information about your word. Both tools are crucial for word study.

Once you feel comfortable that you understand the basic parts, words, of the Bible passage, you need to look at the phrases and sentences of the passage. You may want to ask questions like the following?

- Is the author giving a command like Exodus 20.3, “*You shall have no other gods before me*”?
- Is the author describing an event like Matthew 14.13, “*When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place.*”
- Is the author using poetry like Psalm 19:1, “*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*”
- Is the author asking a question like Romans 6.1, “*What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?*”

As you study the sentences, determine the subject and verbs of the sentence. Again, take note of any repetitions.

Finally, when looking at sentences it is important to look at the little words. **Little words can bring big meanings.** Take note of the following words: and, but, then, if, for, since, behold, now, therefore, etc. Do not forget prepositions, such as: in, out, from, to, up, down, etc. For example, when Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, the priest is going down from Jerusalem. Since he is going down, he has already been at the Temple and yet does not take pity on the hurt person.

Step 4: Study the Parallel Passages of the Bible passage.

Parallel passages are passages that are similar to your Bible passage. This step is helpful for you to find out what other Bible writers teach about a theme that is in your passage. For example, if you are looking at the theme of joy in Philippians, it may be helpful to find out other passages where the apostle Paul talks about joy. You may want to see what the gospel writers teach about joy or the psalms of the Old Testament.

The key for parallel passages is to let the Bible interpret the Bible. If you own a Bible, then you already possess the best commentary. **The best commentary on Scripture is Scripture.** Parallel passages will help you harmonize your study with the rest of Scripture. Remember that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. So, if your view of the current passage contradicts other parallel passages, you will need to rethink your view.

If you are studying a gospel passage, it is very helpful to see if the other gospel writers record the story or teaching that you are studying. Each gospel writer will describe the essential details but may include other details that you would not know if you did not read their account, too.

Two good tools to help you study parallel passages are your study Bible and a concordance. Most study Bibles will help you with cross-references to other topics that are in your passage. A concordance will guide you to the words related to them you need to study.

Step 5: Study the commentaries related to the Bible Passage.

Once you have done your own work on the passage, you are now ready to consult two to three commentaries and study notes. It is important to do your own study first, so that other thinkers and ideas do not influence your initial reading and study of the text. They are helpful, but not inspired understandings of the text. Commentaries are a great help to guide you in a correct understanding of Scripture, but make sure you have done your homework before you consult these tools.

Step 6: Draw life application from the Bible Passage.

It is not enough to know about your Bible passage. You must take what you have learned and apply it to your life. Jesus said the good hearer of the Word of God hears, understands, accepts, remains faithful and bears fruit (Matt. 13.23; Mark 4.20; Luke 8.15). Here are some good questions to consider as you apply a Bible passage to everyday life.⁶

- How should I respond to this Scripture? (What does this mean to me should only be asked after, “What did this mean to them?”) Are there any promises that I can claim? Is there a command that I need to obey or an example I need to follow? Is there a warning I need to heed or an error I must avoid?
- How does this passage help me become a better follower of Jesus? What is the Holy Spirit telling me to start, stop, or continue?
- How does this text speak into different parts and roles of my life?

Please remember that an application must be in harmony with the rest of the message of the Bible. In summary, these six steps outline the basics of good Bible study:

1. Write down observations and questions of the Bible passage.
2. Study the context of the Bible passage.
3. Study the words and sentences of the Bible passage.
4. Study the parallels passages of the Bible passage.
5. Study the commentaries related to the Bible passage.
6. Draw life application from the Bible passage.

⁶ Lynn Gardner, p. 82.

LESSON 3: STUDYING THE BIBLE WITH THE PROPER TOOLS

Much like a carpenter has tools for his job, the student of the Bible must be equipped with some basic tools. These tools will help aid in understanding.

Basic Tools for Bible Students

1. Study Bible
 - a. More literal translations: English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), New American Bible (NAB, Catholic), New International Version (NIV)
 - b. More readable translations Good News Bible, New Living Translation, Contemporary English Version
 - c. Paraphrases: Phillips, Living Bible, *The Message*
 - d. King James and New King James: Less readable, based on late and less reliable manuscripts
 - e. Every translation is an interpretation of some kind.
 - f. You want to check with the original language or have a translation that is as true to original language.
 - g. Study Notes are not inspired.
2. Bible Dictionary
 - a. Helpful in historical background and cultural issues. For example, if you want to find out about marriage customs of Bible times, then you would want to consult a Bible Dictionary.
3. Concordance: Two uses: 1) Find a verse and 2) Study the use of a word
4. Bible Handbook
 - a. Brief, but helpful overview of each Bible book.
5. Bible Survey
 - a. Bird's Eye View of the Book.
 - b. A Bible Survey helps you see the big picture of the Bible.
 - c. Outline of the book
6. Bible Introduction
 - a. A Bible Introduction helps you understand date, place of writing, author, and main issues in each Bible book.
7. Commentaries
 - a. Use toward end of Bible study.
 - b. Three types of commentaries
 - i. Literal, Heavy Hitters (Word Biblical Commentary)
 - ii. Devotional (Warren Wiersbe's "Be" Commentaries, NT Wright "For Everyone" Series)
 - iii. Middle of the Road (Tyndale Set, College Press Commentary)
8. See websites that can be helpful (see recommended)
9. Computer Programs
 - a. Logos Bible Software (www.logos.com). This software program is probably the best one available.

Overview of Popular English Translations⁷

| | | <i>Word-For-Word Translations</i> | <i>Thought-For-Thought Translations</i> | <i>Free Or Paraphrase</i> |
|---|------------------------|---|---|--|
| | | <i>Formal Correspondence High.....Low</i> | <i>Dynamic Equivalent Low.....High</i> | <i>Mild.....Loose</i> |
| | | Good for studying words & grammar | Good for general Bible reading, reflection and memorization | Good for light devotional reading |
| <i>Difficult Reading Level</i> | 12 th grade | KJV | | |
| | 11 th grade | Amplified NET | | |
| | 10 th grade | NASB | JB | |
| | 9 th grade | RSV-ESV NKJV | | Phillips |
| <i>Average Adult Reading Level</i> | 8 th grade | NAB | NEB | |
| | 7 th grade | NIV NRSV | TNIV? TEV | TLB |
| | 6 th grade | | NLT | |
| <i>Children's Reading Level</i> | 5 th grade | | CEV | Message |
| | 4 th grade | | ICB ICV | |
| | 3 rd grade | NIrV | | |

Amplified Bible—1965
 NET—New English Translation 2019
 NIV—New International Version 2011
 NIrV—New International Readers Version 1994
 ICB—International Children's Version
 JB—Jerusalem Bible 1966
 Phillips—Philips Paraphrase 1972
 KJV—King James Version 1611
 Message—The Message 2005
 NAB—New American Bible 1970
 NASB—New American Standard Bible 1971

NEB—New English Bible 1961
 CEV—Contemporary English Version 1995
 ESV—English Standard Version 2016
 NKJV—New King James Version 1982
 NLT—New Living Translation 1996
 NRSV—New Revised Standard Version 1989
 ICB—International Children's Bible 1982
 RSV—Revised Standard Version 1952
 TEV—Today's English Version 1976
 TNIV—Today's New International Version 2002
 TLB—The Living Bible 1971

⁷Compiled from Philip W.Comfort, *The Complete Guide to Bible Versions* (Carol House, IL: Tyndale, 1991); John Kohlenberger, "Which Bible Translation is best For Me?" *Moody, May 1987*: 17-19; and Eugene Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?* (Downers Grove, IL:IVP, 1981).

Useful Websites & Apps for Bible Study

<https://bible.faithlife.com/> This website offers multiple translations and their Faithlife Study Bible notes for free. They are also the creator of the Logos Bible software. Your Faithlife/Logos account works online and on the app. This is a lightweight introduction to deeper Bible study where you'll get a small library of Bibles, interlinears, commentaries, and dictionaries for free. This is probably the best paid option as well. You can pay for more features and resources.

<https://biblehub.com/> features topical, Greek, and Hebrew study tools like concordances, commentaries, dictionaries, sermons, and devotionals. It also offers a great Bible atlas at <https://biblemapper.com/web> for looking up Biblical geography and places. This might be the best free resource for Bible study online.

<http://bibleproject.org> This website and app offers helpful articles, visually stimulating videos, and practices for developing Bible reading skills, and podcasts to show how the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. They also offer free seminary level classes.

<https://biblicaltraining.org/> This is an incredible resource. These classes are taught by some of the world's best Christ-following seminary professors, and every class is free. I cannot recommend highly enough if wanting to dive deep into Bible study.

<http://blueletterbible.org> This is a searchable concordance with commentaries, Hebrew/Greek dictionaries, hymns and other tools attached. This is one of the best, free tools.

<https://netbible.org> This free tool has the NET Bible (2nd edition) with its 58,000+ notes, Greek, Hebrew, texts linked to Strong's numbers, and it allows you to search all the translations of the Bible to find your favorite verses. This is one of the best resources for studying in the original languages without knowing the languages.

<https://occ.edu/series> These are Next Level Bible classes are taught by different Ozark Christian College professors to help you (and your community) grow in biblical knowledge. These classes are a helpful next step in learning specific Bible books.

<https://rightnowmedia.org> This is like the Christian Netflix of Bible studies and children's entertainment, with thousands of different Bible studies. To create a free account, go to <https://app.rightnowmedia.org/account/invite/berlinchristianchurch> or text BERLINCC to 49775.

<https://ccel.org/> This is an *unbelievable* array of classics online. There are full texts of different church Fathers from Augustine to Wesley. This will save you hundreds of dollars if you don't mind reading online.

<http://perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/> The Perseus Project is an evolving digital library of resources for the study of the ancient world, particularly Greek and Latin. It is full of texts and pictures with a search engine to boot. This is a top-flight site.

Exercise 3a: Study the Word “Joy” in Philippians 1.

1. Go to a concordance and look up “joy.” (see a concordance selection below)
2. How many times is joy found in Paul’s Letters? In Philippians?

JOY (NEW AMERICAN STANDARD CONCORDANCE OF PAUL’S LETTERS)⁸

| | | |
|--|----------|------|
| peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. | Ro 14:17 | 5479 |
| with all joy and peace in believing, | Ro 15:13 | 5479 |
| so that I may come to you in joy by | Ro 15:32 | 5479 |
| are workers with you for your joy ; | 2Co 1:24 | 5479 |
| my joy would be <i>the joy</i> of you all. | 2Co 2:3 | 5479 |
| you all that my joy would be <i>the joy</i> | 2Co 2:3 | |
| with joy in all our affliction. | 2Co 7:4 | 5479 |
| even much more for the joy of Titus, | 2Co 7:13 | 5479 |
| their abundance of joy and their deep | 2Co 8:2 | 5479 |
| fruit of the Spirit is love, joy , | Ga 5:22 | 5479 |
| always offering prayer with joy in | Php 1:4 | 5479 |
| your progress and joy in the faith, | Php 1:25 | 5479 |
| make my joy complete by being of the | Php 2:2 | 5479 |
| and share my joy with you all. | Php 2:17 | 4796 |
| same way and share your joy with me. | Php 2:18 | 4796 |
| Receive him then in the Lord with all joy , | Php 2:29 | 5479 |
| I long <i>to see</i> , my joy and crown, | Php 4:1 | 5479 |
| with the joy of the Holy Spirit, | 1Th 1:6 | 5479 |
| hope or joy or crown of exultation? | 1Th 2:19 | 5479 |
| For you are our glory and joy . | 1Th 2:20 | 5479 |
| in return for all the joy with which we | 1Th 3:9 | 5479 |
| so that I may be filled with joy . | 2Tm 1:4 | 5479 |
| I have come to have much joy and | Phm 1:7 | 5479 |

⁸ For the sake of space, we have included a sample of the concordance entry on “joy” in reference to Paul’s letters.

Exercise 3b: Study the Sentence found in Philippians 1.4-6. (See Lesson 2, Step 3)

1. Are there any repeated words or phrases in these three verses?
2. Are there any little words that you should notice?
3. Look up Philippians 1.4-6 in two other translations. Are there any major differences? If so, list them.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Philippians 1:4–6 (NIV) ⁴ In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, ⁶ being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.</p> | <p>Philippians 1:4–6 (ESV) ⁴ always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, ⁵ because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.</p> |
|--|---|

4. Any questions that you have of this text? Any new observations?
5. What is the main idea of Philippians 1.4-6?

LESSON 4: THE STORY OF THE BIBLE

Looking at the Overall Theme of the Bible

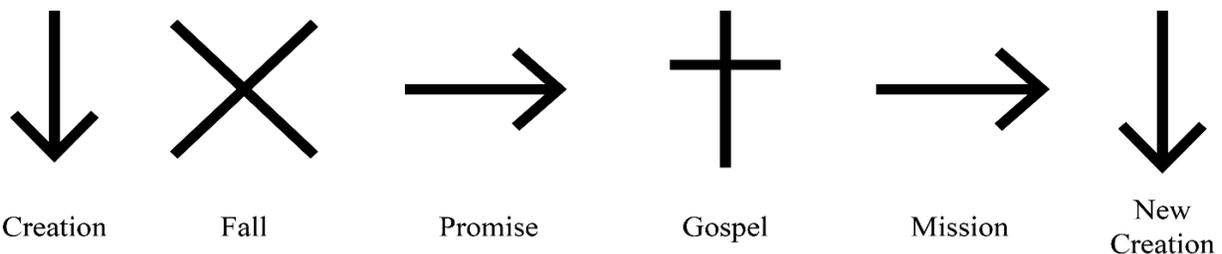
It is amazing that a book that was written over a period of 1600 years, covering sixty generations, by 40 different authors under varying circumstances, in three different continents (Asia, Africa, and Europe), in three different languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek), still has one consistent message. **The central message of the Bible details God’s plan to save the world through Jesus Christ. The Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.** While there are religious customs, moral teachings, and historical narratives composed throughout the Bible, the main storyline is about Jesus Christ. “Like a scarlet thread weaving its way throughout a patchwork quilt, Jesus is interwoven throughout the pages of the Bible.”⁹

Unity in Diversity

While the Bible has so much diversity, it is united around the central person of Jesus Christ. In fact, one can see the unity of Scripture in five distinct areas:¹⁰

1. **The Bible is united in purpose:** God revealing His will to sinful man in order that he may be saved or redeemed (Ephesians 1.1-23).
2. **The Bible is united in theme:** The history, the nature, and the hope of this grand theme of redemption is the very thing that unites all of these separate books into one Bible.
3. **The Bible is united in story:** The coming of Jesus Christ is the real story of the Bible. It is actually “His-story” (John 20:30-31).
4. **The Bible is united in structure:** Every book is essential to the Bible as a whole. Each has its place and function in the total Bible. The very acceptance of the Bible as it is shows its nature of being a unit.
5. **The Bible is united in doctrine:** There is one harmonious flow of teaching throughout the Bible. Each law, covenant, commandment, warning, blessing, etc., has its designated place, producing a unity that attests to the divine authorship from beginning to end.

The Story of the Bible in Symbols¹¹



At BCC, we talk about the story of the Bible in 6 symbols (see above—You can also see the Bible divided into 4 key covenants in APPENDIX 1). Understanding and memorizing these symbols is extremely helpful for Bible study. The different books of the Bible speak into multiple different symbols, but the framework we will use is: Creation (Gen. 1-2), Fall (Gen. 3-11), Promise (Gen. 12-Malachi), Gospel (Matthew-John), Mission (Acts-Jude), New Creation (Revelation).

⁹ William R. Kimball, *The Book of Books*, p. 49.

¹⁰ Palmer, p. 56.

¹¹ Adapted from Christopher Wright, *How to Preach and Teach the Old Testament for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

Creation (Gen. 1-2)

Though God did not need to create us, He chose to create us because of love. He created everything good and perfectly. But out of all His creation, God created humanity as the pinnacle to rule over all of creation with Him as His partners (Ps. 8). Genesis 1.26-28 says, “²⁶ Then God said, “*Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.*” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, “*Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.*” Humans were made to dwell with God forever.

Fall (Gen. 3-11)

But that relationship with God was shattered when Adam and Eve chose to follow their own desires instead of listening to God’s voice. He gave them one prohibition in the Garden of Eden, found in Genesis 2.16-17, “*And the LORD God commanded the man, You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.*” But Eve listened to the serpent’s voice instead of God’s. Genesis 3.6-7 says, “⁶ When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasurable to the eyes, and alluring with its wisdom, she took from its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.” In that Fall, sin entered the world and shattered four key relationships:

1. Broken Relationship with God—Adam and Eve hide from God (Gen. 3.8-11).
2. Broken Relationship with Ourselves—Adam and Eve clothe themselves because they were ashamed of their nakedness (Gen. 3.7).
3. Broken Relationship with One Another—There’s a breakdown in the family relationship between husbands and wives, and Cain kills his own brother, Abel (Gen. 3.16; 4).
4. Broken Relationship with All of Creation—The ground is cursed, the work of the ground will be painful, and the worldwide flood is a result of humanity’s sin (Gen. 3.17-19; 6.5-8)

The cycle of sin continues throughout Genesis 3-11, and the most intimate of relationships, such as husband/wife and brothers, are broken. All seems lost. But there’s hope because the LORD always finds a way to rescue His people.

Promise (Gen. 12-Malachi)

In response to humanity’s rebellion, God entered a covenantal relationship with Abram. In Genesis 12.1-3, “¹ The Lord had said to Abram, “*Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*” ² “*I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.*” ³ *I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.*” God promised to bless the world through Abraham’s family, which would later become Israel. God reaffirmed this promise to Abraham multiple times, to Moses, David, and through the Prophets. The problem, though, was that God’s people followed their parents, Adam and Eve, in rebellion and sin. Instead of listening to God’s prophets and repenting, they faced the consequences of their actions by experiencing destruction and exile. First, the Northern Kingdom was destroyed in 722 BC by Assyria (see 2 Kings 18) and then the

Southern Kingdom was forced into exile in 597-586 BC by Babylon (see Jeremiah 39-43). Though Israel started its return from exile in 538 BC- (see Ezra-Nehemiah) and re-built the Temple, it was a shadow of its former glory (see Ezra 3.12-13 and Haggai 2.3-9). God's peoples' rebellion had caught up with them and they were forced to face the consequences.

But God keeps His promises, even when His people fail. He would still bless the world through Abraham's line.

Gospel (Matthew-John)

God's promise to bless the world through Abraham's family came to fruition in the perfect God-Man, Jesus. Gospel means "good news" and the four gospels tell the story of the good news of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension as King.

Jesus is God in the flesh (Matthew 1.23; John 1.14; Heb. 1.3). During his life on earth, Jesus was perfect and never sinned, unlike Israel (Matthew 4). He healed the sick, forgave sins, exorcised demons and established God's kingdom on Earth (Matthew 4.23; 9.35). He restored the brokenness of the world. Then Jesus willingly took our place upon the cross as the perfect sacrifice for us. He paid for our sins (Rom. 5.8; Heb. 2.14). Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead, defeating the power of Satan (the serpent in Genesis 3), Death, and Sin. Now he brings new life to all who follow him! (John 3.16; 10.10; Rev. 20.10). Jesus then ascended to heaven, where He is now at the right hand of the Father, reigning as the King of the universe.

Mission (Acts-Jude)

Jesus' mission did not come to a stop when he ascended into heaven. Acts 1.1 says, "*In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about **all that Jesus began to do and to teach**...*" The gospels were just the beginning of Jesus' ministry, which is continued through his followers, the Church, to make more and better followers of Jesus Christ all over the world (Matthew 28.18-20; John 20.21). This mission to witness about Jesus is empowered through the Holy Spirit and takes place primarily through Acts and the letters that follow. Acts 1.8 says, "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

Through our words about Jesus, our walk with Jesus, and our work for Jesus, we witness to Jesus as our saving King today (Col. 3.23). 2 Corinthians 5.19-20 reminds us about our influence, "*He has committed to us the message of reconciliation.* ²⁰ *We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*" We are Christ's witnesses and his fellow-workers. Therefore, we are called to sacrificially love God and others with our whole hearts (Matthew 22.36-40) By doing so, *we shine our lights so that others "may see our good deeds and glorify [our] Father in heaven"* (Matthew 5.16).

New Creation (Revelation)

God's desire has always been to dwell with His people, like in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, in the end, Jesus will return and defeat Satan, sin, death, and the curse from Genesis 3 once and for all (Rev. 20.9-14; Gen. 22.3). He will purge the earth and remove all sin and evil (Rev. 21.3). He will restore creation, the New Heaven and New Earth, so that all who trust in Jesus as their saving king will be resurrected and dwell with Him in a perfect paradise forever (Isa. 65.17-25; Rev. 21.1-6; 22.5). Those who do not trust Jesus as their saving king will face judgment and be left outside the city (Rev. 21.8). Revelation 21.3-4 sums up the beautiful vision of the future new creation, "³ *And I heard a loud*

voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

For a one sentence summary of each Bible book, see APPENDIX 2.

Exercise 4: Study the parallel passages related to Philippians 1.1-11. (See Lesson 2, Step 4)

1. If your Bible has cross references, look up three or four references and take notes on how they apply to your passage. If you need some guidance, look up Acts 16.1; Romans 1.10; Psalm 138.8; 1 Corinthians 1.8; 2 Corinthians 7.3

2. Which parallel passage (cross-reference) was particularly helpful in your understanding of Philippians 1.1-11?

LESSON FIVE: PARTICULAR LITERATURE IN THE BIBLE

When you choose to watch a movie, you have lots of choices. Movies are classified in categories such as: comedy, drama, action, horror, family favorites, classics, and new releases. The Bible is similar to movies because there are different types of categories of literature in the Bible. If you want to impress your friends and family, you can use a neat word called, “genre” to explain the concept of types or classification. The different types or genres of literature found in the Bible are: law, history, poetry, prophecy, gospel, epistle (letter), and apocalyptic. Below is a chart identifying what books of the Bible fit into the different genres.

Old Testament

| Law | History | Poetry | Prophecy |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|
| Genesis | Joshua | Job | Isaiah |
| Exodus | Judges | Psalms | Jeremiah |
| Leviticus | Ruth | Proverbs | Lamentations |
| Numbers | 1 Samuel | Ecclesiastes | Ezekiel |
| Deuteronomy | 2 Samuel | Song of Songs | Daniel |
| | 1 Kings | | Hosea |
| | 2 Kings | | Joel |
| | 1 Chronicles | | Amos |
| | 2 Chronicles | | Obadiah |
| | Ezra | | Jonah |
| | Nehemiah | | Micah |
| | Esther | | Nahum |
| | | | Habakkuk |
| | | | Zephaniah |
| | | | Haggai |
| | | | Zechariah |
| | | | Malachi |

New Testament

| Gospel | History | Epistle (Letter) | | Apocalyptic |
|---------|---------|---------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Matthew | Acts | Romans | Titus | Revelation |
| Mark | | 1 & 2 Corinthians | Philemon | |
| Luke | | Galatians | Hebrews | |
| John | | Ephesians | James | |
| | | Philippians | 1 & 2 Peter | |
| | | Colossians | 1, 2, 3 John | |
| | | 1 & 2 Thessalonians | Jude | |
| | | 1 & 2 Timothy | | |

For more information on genre studies, see APPENDIX 3.

Exercise 5: Study a commentary or study Bible for Philippians 1.3-11.

1. Read the notes in your study Bible and/or commentary for Philippians 1.3-11. Write your notes below.

From *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*

1:3–8 Mutual Participation

- The focus of Paul's thanksgiving was mutual fellowship in the gospel ("partners," 1:5; "shared together," 1:7). Paul thanked God for the Philippians' partnership in the progress of the gospel. The word "partnership" (koinonia) refers to what is shared in common, in this case, a joint ministry in the gospel of grace.
- Paul's confidence was in God's continual work (1:6). The words "prison," "defending," and "telling" were courtroom terms that reflected Paul's circumstances in Rome (1:7; cf. Acts 28:16, 20).
- Paul longed for fellowship with the Philippians in Christ (1:8). Prison did not depress Paul into a "me-centered" wallowing. His longings still conformed to his Lord's desires for the Philippians' perfection (1:9–11). The longings of Paul's heart (1:7) matched those of Christ. Prison did not deflect Paul's desire to know Christ or to make him known (3:8).

1:9–11 Prayer for Fullness in the Day of Christ

- Paul prayed that the Philippians would abound with love (1:9). But that love needed to be channeled in "knowledge and understanding." They needed to find discerning ways to exercise love and righteousness. The elements of real knowledge brought out in the letter are knowledge of Paul's own circumstances as causes of rejoicing rather than being depressed (1:12); standing firm rather than alarmed by opponents (1:27–28); being of one mind in the face of selfishness and conceit (2:1–4); putting confidence in Christ when pressured to put confidence in the flesh (3:2–4); standing firm in the face of disharmony (4:1); and knowing how to face circumstances of prosperity as well as need (4:10–13)—a return to the first perspective on Paul's prison circumstances. Throughout the letter Paul taught knowledge and discernment for choices and action that would produce love. On the day when "Christ returns" (1:10), or the "day of Christ," see the Bible-Wide Concepts for this book.¹²

¹² Hughes, R. B., & Laney, J. C. (2001). *Tyndale concise Bible commentary* (p. 603). Tyndale House Publishers.

LESSON SIX: LIFE TRANSFORMATION BY READING THE BIBLE

Discussion Question: Do you want to hear from God? How have you tried hearing from Him?



"If you would just show me your plan for my life, and just reveal your truth to me, Father God," he continued, somehow missing the fact that God's truth had already been perfectly revealed to him in the Scriptures. "I just really need you to speak to me personally, Lord." At publishing time, sources had confirmed that a frustrated Harrison eventually gave up on trying to hear God's words and resigned himself to just reading the Bible instead."¹³

The goal of reading the Bible is for the information we learn in our head to lead to transformation in our heart. The information allows us to know truths about God to help inform and transform how we know God in a personal way. Reading the Bible is incomplete until we live out what we have learned.

The Final Step: Hear and Obey

- **James 1:22–24 (NIV)** — *22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.*"
- **Exodus 19:5–6 (NIV)** — *5 Now if you obey (hear) me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.*"
- Other passages to reflect on: Matthew 7.24-27; John 14.15; 1 John 5.3-4

Dimmer Switch Principle: "When we respond to the light we have, God gives us more. When we don't, he takes away the light we already have."¹⁴ "The more we respond to the Holy Spirit and choose to digest God's Word, the more the Holy Spirit has to use to transform us."¹⁵

From the Word to Our World

To apply the Bible to our lives, we must understand the Bible as a beautiful *work of art* and *window*. We study the Bible with admiration like we would a work of art, but we also approach the Bible as a window that we look through to see our world.¹⁶ Applying the Bible helps us look outward at the world and inward into our own souls. "When done accurately [studying the Bible] leads to spiritual transformation, and the application of certain insights to our personal lives."¹⁷ Application helps us partner with God's Spirit to change the world and ourselves.

The Basic Process:

- How did the text apply to the original audience?
- How is their world different from ours?
- How might the text apply to us today?

¹³Babylon Bee, "Man Sitting Literally Three Feet Away From Bible Asks God To Speak To Him."

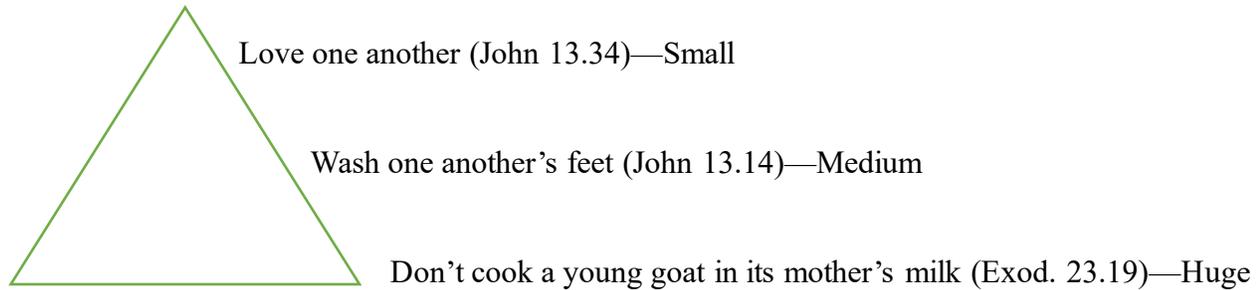
¹⁴Larry Osbourne, *Spirituality for the Rest of Us*, 75.

¹⁵Walt Russell, *Playing With Fire*, 85.

¹⁶Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, 315.

¹⁷Russell, 41.

The Gap Between Their World and Ours: How big is the gap?¹⁸



Reflection Questions:

- How should I respond to this Scripture? (What does this mean to me should only be asked after, "What did this mean to them?") Are there any promises that I can claim? Is there a command that I need to obey or an example I need to follow? Is there a warning I need to heed or an error I must avoid?
- How does this passage help me become a better follower of Jesus? What is the Holy Spirit telling me to start, stop, or continue?
- How does this text speak into different parts and roles of my life?

Distinguish between "degrees of certainty" in application.

- What is this text definitely demanding of me?
- What is this text probably asking of me?
- What is this text possibly asking of me?

Bringing it All Together: Scripture Reading Practices

PRAY¹⁹

Pause & Pray—Pause and pray Ps. 119.18, "Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Law."

Read and Reflect—Slowly read, reflect on observations, rejoice in God's promises, and repeat.

Ask—Turn your reflections and God's truth into prayers.

Yield—Enjoy God's presence, and live a life surrendered to Him.

HEAR²⁰

Highlight—Highlight a verse that sticks out. Write it out and any observations about it.

Explain—Briefly explain the context of the passage.

Apply—Ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply the passage.

Respond—Respond in prayer and obedience.

SOAP²¹

Scripture—Read a set Scripture in an unhurried pace.

Observations—Make observations on the text, ultimately focusing on one main observation.

Application—Ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply the passage personally.

Prayer—Spend time in prayer with the LORD and then live out your prayer.

¹⁸Adapted from Michael Defazio's, "How to Read the Bible," Next Level Course.

¹⁹Adapted from Pete Greig, *How to Hear from God*, 64.

²⁰Adapted from Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 149-153.

²¹Adapted from Wayne Cordeiro, *The Divine Mentor*, 104-105.

Psalm 19:7–14 (NIV)

The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.

The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.

They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.

By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.

Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.

KEY Takeaway: Studying the Bible is a challenge, but the Holy Spirit uses the Bible to help us hear from God and be transformed.

Exercise 6: Read & Apply Philippians 1.1-11 to your life today.

1. How should I respond to this Scripture? (What does this mean to me should only be asked after, “What did this mean to them?”) Are there any promises that I can claim? Is there a command that I need to obey or an example I need to follow? Is there a warning I need to heed or an error I must avoid?
2. How does this passage help me become a better follower of Jesus? What is the Holy Spirit telling me to start, stop, or continue?
3. How does this text speak into different parts and roles of my life?
4. What is this text definitely demanding of me?
5. What is this text probably asking of me?
6. What is this text possibly asking of me?

APPENDIX 1: Major Covenants of the Bible

Each covenant that God makes with man has four essential parts.

1. The first party (God)
2. The second party (man)
3. Conditions (responsibility of man)
4. Promises (responsibility of God)

ADAM

Conditions: *“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”* (Gen. 1.28)

Promises: Given the garden to live in, and every herb and tree for food (Gen. 1.29; 2.8, 9, 16)

ABRAHAM

Conditions: The LORD had said to Abram, *“Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you.”* *I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”* (Genesis 12:1-3)

Promises: God would make Abraham into a great nation (Gen. 12.2)

MOSES (Law)

Conditions: *“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words but saw no form; there was only a voice. ¹³ He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.”* (Deut. 4.11-13)

“Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. ² The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. ³ It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.” (Deut. 5.1-3)

Promises: Israel will be a special and holy nation (Exodus 19.5-6); God will give them good harvests and ample food, safety, peace, deliverance from wild beasts, protection from and power over enemies, respect, growth in number, His presence (Leviticus 26).

JESUS (NEW COVENANT)

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.” (Matthew 26.26-29)

Conditions: Hear the gospel (Rom. 10.13-14), Believe in Jesus Christ (John 20:30), Repent of sins (Acts 2.38), Confess faith in Jesus (Acts 8.37), Be baptized into Jesus (Matthew 28.19), Live a life of faithfulness (John 15.5) Continue to grow in Christ (Matt. 28.20).

Promises: Forgiveness (Eph. 1.7), Redemption (Rom. 3.23-26), Grace (Eph. 2.8), Salvation (2 Tim. 2.10), Hope (1 Thess. 1.3), Wisdom (James 1.5), Victory (2 Cor. 2.14), Eternal Life (Rom. 6.23; 1 John 5.11)

APPENDIX 2: Overview of the Each Bible Book

Below is a one sentence summary of all the books of the Bible. Since only one sentence is given, it is impossible for these descriptions to be exhaustive.²²

Genesis: The beginning of the world, man, the family, sin, and the chosen nation; from the creation through the life of Joseph.

Exodus: The chosen people are led out of Egypt by Moses and given the law (including the Ten Commandments) and the tabernacle.

Leviticus: The ceremonial law, in regard to sacrifices, the priesthood, and holy seasons.

Numbers: The forty-year wanderings of Israel in the wilderness and a census of the people.

Deuteronomy: A rehearsal of Israel's history, laws, and wanderings.

Joshua: The conquest of Canaan with the tribes settling in the land.

Judges: The rule of the judges, with oppressions and deliverances, from Joshua to Samson.

Ruth: The ancestry of the Messianic family.

1 Samuel: The founding of the Hebrew kingdom under Saul and David.

2 Samuel: The reign of David.

1 Kings: The "golden age" of the kingdom under Solomon, with the beginning of division and decay.

2 Kings: The divided kingdom to the captivities of both the northern and southern tribes.

1 Chronicles: Hebrew history, including the reign of David.

2 Chronicles: Further Hebrew history under Solomon, and the history of Judah after the division.

Ezra: The return from captivity in Babylon and the rebuilding of the temple.

Nehemiah: The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem.

Esther: The Jews are delivered from destruction by a Hebrew maiden who became queen of Persia.

Job: The problem of human suffering through the trials and triumph of Job's faith in God.

Psalms: A collection of poems and hymns used by Hebrews for praise and worship.

Proverbs: A collection of wise sayings about the practical issues of life.

Ecclesiastes: A poem dealing with the search for happiness.

²² Palmer, p. 58-63.

Song of Solomon: A poem of love and longing.

Isaiah: Exhortations on repentance and predictions on the coming Messiah.

Jeremiah: Warnings to Jerusalem about the Babylonian captivity and approaching suffering.

Lamentations: Poems lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel: Visions of judgment and the restoration of Israel.

Daniel: The story of the captives in Babylon, including Daniel.

Hosea: Denouncement of Israel and prediction of Jerusalem's destruction.

Joel: Predictions concerning the coming day of the Lord.

Amos: Prophecies denouncing apostasy and wickedness, predicting punishment and final restoration of Israel.

Obadiah: The doom of Edom.

Jonah: Prophecies concerning Nineveh; the prophet's errand and error.

Micah: Prophecy concerning the fall of Israel and Judah.

Nahum: Doom of Nineveh.

Habakkuk: The invasion of Judah and destruction of Chaldeans foretold.

Zephaniah: Destruction and restoration of Judah foretold.

Haggai: Urgency of rebuilding the temple.

Zechariah: Rebuilding the temple and predictions of coming Messiah.

Malachi: Denunciation of vice and warnings to repent.

Matthew: The life of Jesus, the Messiah.

Mark: The life of Jesus, the worker of wonders.

Luke: The life of Jesus, the Son of man.

John: The life of Jesus, the Son of God.

Acts: The beginning and spread of the gospel and of the church under the apostles.

Romans: Fundamental issues of the Christian faith.

1 Corinthians: Correction of several church disorders.

2 Corinthians: A vindication of Paul's apostleship and further reproof and instruction.

Galatians: Salvation is by grace, not by law.

Ephesians: The glory of redemption and the real unity of the church.

Philippians: Christian testimony of love, gratitude, and encouragement to the faithful.

Colossians: The supremacy of Christ.

1 Thessalonians: The Lord's return.

2 Thessalonians: Further instruction on the return of Christ.

1 and 2 Timothy: Instructions to a young evangelist.

Titus: Instructions to a young evangelist.

Philemon: Letter concerning a runaway slave.

Hebrews: The superiority of the New Covenant over the Old.

James: Christian wisdom and good works.

1 Peter: Encouragement to persecuted Christians.

2 Peter: Prediction of apostasy.

1 John: Christian love and conduct.

2 and 3 John: Caution against false teachers, and confidence in the faithful.

Jude: Warning against false teachers.

Revelation: Ultimate overthrow of Satan and final triumph of Christ and His faithful.

APPENDIX 3: Genre Questions from *One-to-One Bible Reading* by David Helm
COMA (Context, Observation, Meaning, Application)

QUESTIONS FOR THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

Context

What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?
What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation

What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?
Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?
Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?
Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?
What surprises are there?

Meaning

Are there any 'editorial' comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?
What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
Is there some attitude you need to change?
What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?

QUESTIONS FOR OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE

Context

What has happened so far in the narrative? Have there been any major events, characters or themes?
What has happened just prior to the section you are reading?

Observation

What do you learn about the main characters in this section? How does the author describe them? How do they describe themselves?
Is time or place significant in the events that happen in the passage?
Is there a conflict or high point in the passage?
Do you think there is a main point or theme in this section of the story?
What surprises are there?

Meaning

Are there any 'editorial' comments from the author about the events in the narrative? How do these comments illuminate what is happening?
Does someone in the narrative learn something or grow in some way? How? What does this person learn?

How does the passage point forward to what God is going to do in the future? Does it prophesy or anticipate Jesus Christ in some way?

How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

How does this passage challenge your understanding about who God is and what he is like?

Is there some attitude or behavior you need to change?

QUESTIONS FOR THE EPISTLES (LETTERS)

Context

What can you learn about the person or situation to which the letter is written?

What clues are there about the author and his circumstances?

What was the main point of the passage immediately before this one? Are there logical or thematic connections to the passage you are reading?

Observation

Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? Are there key connecting words (for, therefore, but, because) that indicate the logical flow of the passage?

What is the main point or points? What supporting points does the author make?

What surprises are there in the flow of the argument?

Meaning

How does this text relate to other parts of the book?

How does the passage relate to Jesus?

What does this teach you about God?

How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

Application

How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?

Is there some attitude you need to change?

How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

QUESTIONS FOR HEBREW WISDOM LITERATURE AND POETRY

Context

Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the passage was written?

What has happened so far?

Observation

Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?

What images or metaphors does the author use? What do they indicate about God or the other people in the text? What might they indicate about modern readers?

What is the tone of the passage? What emotions is the author arousing?

What is the main point or points?

What surprises are there?

Meaning

Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?

How does the author motivate the reader/audience, or make his appeal?

What does the passage teach us about God, and his people, and life in his world?

Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application

How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?

Is there some attitude you need to change?

How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

QUESTIONS FOR PROPHETIC LITERATURE

Context

Are there any clues about the circumstances in which the prophecy was given or written?

Are any people or places mentioned that you aren't familiar with? (Chase them up in earlier parts of the book, or refer to a Bible dictionary or commentary.)

Are other bits of the Old Testament mentioned or alluded to in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

Observation

Are there repetitions or multiple instances of similar ideas? Do these repetitions make a particular point, or point to the structure of the passage?

Paying attention to when the prophet is speaking and when God is speaking, what does the passage tell us about God's plans? What does it tell us about God's character?

What kind of human behavior, if any, is condemned or rewarded? What response is called for (if any)?

What is the main point or points?

Meaning

Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?

Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?

Does the passage point forward to Jesus? Is the gospel anticipated or foreshadowed in some way?

Application

How is your own situation similar to or different from those being addressed?

How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?

How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus?

How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?

QUESTIONS FOR APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Context

Are there any clues about the historical circumstances the literature is addressing?

Are other bits of the Bible mentioned or hinted at in the passage? What part do these 'memories' play in the text?

Observation

What images are used in the passage? What effect do they have?

What emotions does the passage arouse (e.g. fear, expectation, awe)?

How does the passage seek to reveal what God is like? Where in this passage might we find hope for men and women?

Is there a crisis in the passage? What is the tension/conflict about, and how does it relate to readers?

Meaning

Are there specific instructions/commands given to the reader? Does this passage mention any consequences for not following God's commands?

Does the text have a sense of expectation about something happening in the future? What is to be expected and when? How should this motivate action in the present?

Does the passage point to Jesus? Is the gospel foreshadowed or looked back upon in some way?

Application

How is your situation similar to or different from those being addressed?

How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?

How does this passage lead you to trust God and his promises in Jesus?

How does this passage call on you to change the way you live?