

DOES THE
BIBLE

← **REALLY** →
MATTER?

50 PRACTICAL WAYS
TO APPROACH GOD'S WORD



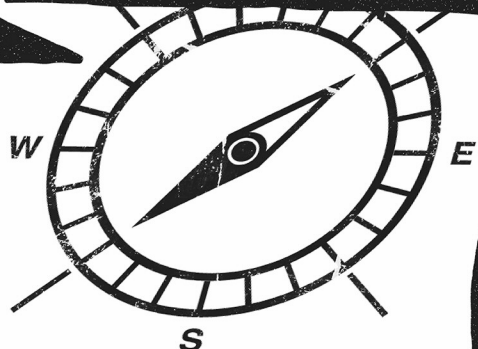
Charlie Miller





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A FIELD GUIDE FOR FOLLOWING JESUS
BOOK 2

CHARLIE MILLER



Does the Bible Really Matter?
50 Practical Ways To Approach God's Word

A Field Guide for Following Jesus — Book 2

By Charlie Miller

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To my sister, Holly.

Thanks for being the best Bud ever.

You'll always be my Bud!

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INTRODUCTION

For years I have searched for a book, or series of books, that practically approaches spiritual growth in the average Christian's daily life. When Donald S. Whitney's *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* was recommended to me in March of 2021, I was immediately struck by how directly it cut to the core issues of Christian faith. I heartily recommend his book to anyone who wants to grow in their faith without getting bogged down by legalistic lists of dos and don'ts. Whitney asks that Christians reflect on the fruits of their faith without resorting to the kind of quick hacks and perfect routines that come at us from all sides in our social media world. Jesus may have summarized the gospel with two commands, but we Christians don't have a great track record of successfully implementing them. Seriously, if

you're coming to this book before *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, go read that one first — you can come back to this one when you're finished!

The idea for this book series grew as I started leading my own congregation through Whitney's ten questions. Based on his insightful work, I developed a tool that would help our church members begin assessing how they were doing with each foundational block of the Christian walk. The Personal Spiritual Assessment considers each of Whitney's ten questions with ten personal reflections. Congregants took time to thoughtfully read, pray, and meditate on each statement before giving themselves a numeric score. They added up the scores for each of the statements, which allowed them to objectively identify areas of their faith that presented opportunities for growth. These folks then decided on one or two specific areas of their faith to emphasize over the next several months.

This assessment worked well, but it presented a new challenge: once someone understood which areas of their faith they could focus on for spiritual growth, what next? What work could they do to *actually* grow in that area? Whitney's book wonderfully asks and explains the ten questions, and the Personal Spiritual Assessment provides key focus and direction for growth — all that is left is to actually take a step! A Christian who wants to grow in their

faith must begin doing specific, actionable things. A mind that understands spiritual growth and a heart that desires it are essential at the trailhead, but actions are necessary to bring that understanding and desire into the daily walk of real life. This book — and the entire series — is the answer to that need.

In Chapter one you will find a brief description of why the Bible matters for followers of Jesus. If this book tackles the “how,” the first chapter is the “why.” Again, I strongly recommend Whitney’s book for a longer discussion of this topic.

Chapter two introduces the portion of the Personal Spiritual Assessment addressing the question, “Is God’s Word important to me?” This will give you an opportunity to assess for yourself whether a belief in the significance of Scripture is a strength of your walk or whether it is an area that presents an opportunity for further growth. This assessment is meant to be taken before you dive into the action steps suggested in the rest of the book. By taking the assessment up front, you can start with an honest idea of how important the Bible is in your life. Whether or not you find the strategies in this book helpful, I strongly recommend you come back and repeat the assessment in several months, or even in a few years, to see what progress you have made. If you would prefer to have the full

assessment available to take at once, you can find a copy of the complete Personal Spiritual Assessment here:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/personal-spiritual-assessment>

Chapters three through eight are the real heart and purpose of this book. This is where you will find 50 practical ways to make God's Word more important in your life. Some of these will be things you have thought of before, and others might feel totally new. Some of the suggestions will resonate with you, and others will probably leave you feeling "Meh." Some will challenge you, others will be no big deal. This is by design! I have not included 50 practices with the hope you find time for all of them. Rather, I have included 50 practices with the belief that there are a *few* here for *everyone* to incorporate into their daily rhythms. You will notice that some of these ideas will sound similar in action, but each of them is different in its focus. Don't be afraid to try something that is out of your comfort zone. Allow God to stretch you. But most importantly, find the ones that work for you.

Finally, Chapter nine is a collection of resources related to making God's Word more important in your life. In it you will find a number of books — as well as a link to our website where you will also find devotions, blogs, sermons, videos, and other helpful tools — to reference as you walk

down this path of personal spiritual growth. There is no “one thing” that is right for everyone, and we are not looking for quick shortcuts to our spiritual growth. Quick faith is usually shallow faith. We want to pursue a faith that is deep, grounded, and well rooted. That is the kind of faith that will stand when life is hard, when days are challenging, and when God doesn’t seem so near.

Thank you for investing your time, energy, and money in this book. My prayer is that you will find it useful as you seek to become more like Jesus, and that you will work each day, in big and small ways, to strengthen your faith. I welcome your feedback, and I would love to hear about your own faith journey — please get in touch via email at charlie@heychurchmedia.com. May the love of God the Father, the guiding of the Holy Spirit, and the peace of Jesus Christ be with you.

ONE

WHY DOES THE BIBLE MATTER ANYWAY?

What images come to mind when you hear the word “bible?” A large, leather-bound, dust-covered tome? The place where the family genealogy is recorded and kept? An out-of-date, out-of-touch relic from a past best left behind? A mysterious and undecipherable book requiring a PhD to understand? These are all common responses, so, if your mind jumps to one of them, you are not alone.

Many Bibles are large and heavy. Some haven't been opened in quite a while. Some older translations use words that we no longer see in other books. For many millions of people, however, the Bible has been a source of hope and peace in troubled times. It contains wisdom for the joys, challenges, and questions of life. By understanding Scripture, we come to know God so that we may live in His

presence and blessings. The trouble is: how do we approach such an intimidating text in our modern world?

As I shared in the introduction, Donald S. Whitney's *Ten Questions To Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* is a powerful work which I highly recommend. In it, he expresses the supreme value of the Bible before asking, "Are you governed increasingly by God's Word?" That is a tremendously important question! I encourage you to read and digest Whitney's book to gain a deeper understanding of why it is so important.

Here, I will share with you 50 practical, specific, actionable ideas for making God's Word more important to your life. These are ideas that — if taken seriously — will increase the value of the Bible beyond your wildest expectations and unleash its power in and through your life. My prayer is that you will drink deeply from these ideas, season them with your prayers, chew on them thoughtfully, and whether you already spend time in God's Word or haven't opened it in a long while use them to approach Scripture in a new and refreshing way.

TWO

HOW DO I KNOW HOW I'M DOING?

When we are trying to understand our spiritual development, it can be difficult to accurately assess ourselves in a healthy manner. We sometimes fall into the legalistic trap of “checking boxes” to see if we are doing enough, which can leave us burned out as we try to cram spiritual activities into our already overfilled lives. This is neither helpful nor healthy.

An alternative approach is to self-evaluate by briefly comparing moments and patterns from our own lives to what we know of others’ relationships with God. “I think about God pretty often,” I might think, “especially compared to others who never give God a second thought — I’m doing well!” Unfortunately, this method of evaluation is usually inaccurate, and in some cases it is

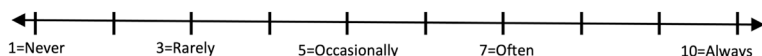
downright deceptive. We tend to overinflate our own thoughts about ourselves, and we consider our intentions as if they are concrete actions that have already become reality (or soon will). Conversely, we observe the actions of others and believe we can clearly discern their intent and motives based solely on what we see them do or say. As a result, we end up making assumptions about others we would never want them making about us. These tendencies can lead us to believe we are further along in our spiritual growth than those around us, as we compare our intentions to their actions. We then remain in the developmental stages of our spiritual life rather than taking intentional steps of growth that, after many years, lead to greater maturity in the faith.

This chapter presents a way for you to evaluate yourself honestly and critically. By doing so, you can clearly see if this area of spiritual development — making God’s Word more important in your life — is an opportunity for spiritual growth or if it is already an area of significant strength for you in your walk with Jesus.

This assessment is a tool that has helped many people take an honest look at their current relationship with God’s Word. However, it is still just a tool. And like all things we humans come up with, it is imperfect. If you are approaching this book as someone who is curious about

the Bible but who is not committed to the Christian life, this tool may not be helpful for you at this point. On the other hand, if your history with Christianity has been marked by constant criticism and judgement, or you've been made to feel like you can never do enough to please God, you might not be a person who would find this tool helpful right now. Whatever your specific circumstances and background, I hope you believe this: you are loved by God, and He desires to know you just as you are. I would encourage you to use the tips in this book to find ways of reading Scripture that work for you.

For this personal assessment, you will use a 10-point scale like the one shown below.



Using this scale, you will read 10 statements that are related to this specific area of spiritual health and development. Take your time with each statement. Think through examples you can recall from your life. Since you are trying to evaluate your current spiritual condition, focus on more recent responses to the statement rather than ones that might have been accurate years ago but are less reflective of your current faith experience.

As you work your way through the list of statements, make a note of the numeric rating you give yourself for each of them. Write them down in a notebook or a notes app on your phone or other device.

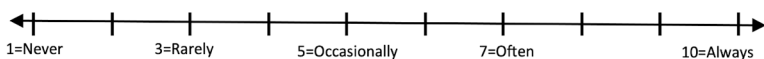
This book is focused on a single aspect of spiritual growth — making God’s Word more important by engaging with Scripture more intentionally — so the statements in this chapter only cover that portion of the assessment. If you would prefer to take the complete Personal Spiritual Assessment — which includes one hundred evaluation statements across ten important areas of spiritual health and growth — you can download and print a copy here:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/personal-spiritual-assessment>

Whether you choose to download the full assessment or use the one below for this single area of spiritual health and growth, you are now ready to take your Personal Spiritual Assessment. I encourage you to get your favorite beverage, find a comfortable place to sit where you can concentrate without distractions, and begin working through the assessment statements. Remember — this assessment will be most helpful if you are thoughtful and sincere. Try your best to be accurate and honest as you score each statement, thinking about how you are really doing — not about how you wish you were doing or how

you want anyone else to perceive you are doing. This is between you and God. The beautiful part is that — no matter what the results show — you will have a much more accurate picture of how much God’s Word plays a part in shaping and influencing your life. By knowing this, you will be able to move forward in your faith journey with clarity, purpose, and intentionality.

Please write down your answer to each of the statements below on a scale of 1-10, using the following guide:



Remember to take your time. Think carefully about each question, then evaluate yourself as truthfully as possible using the 1-10 numeric scale.

___ 1. I eagerly read the Word of God.

___ 2. I keep an established time for reading the Bible regularly.

___ 3. I read Scripture as divinely given from God.

___ 4. When I read God’s Word, I seek to understand it better by using other books and materials.

___ 5. I work to apply God’s Word to specific aspects of my life.

___ 6. When making decisions, I question whether God's Word addresses the situation.

___ 7. When considering my opinion on topics, I rely on Scripture to guide and inform me.

___ 8. I enjoy reading and discussing God's Word with other believers.

___ 9. When I find my actions in conflict with Scripture, I change them to align with God's Word.

___ 10. I find myself at odds with culture because of my obedience to God's Word.

When you have given yourself an assessment score for all 10 statements, add the scores together and write the total down.

Total Score: _____

Now that you have your assessment score, you can use the following evaluation scale to determine whether this specific area of spiritual health is an opportunity for growth for you.

If your score is in the range of 10 – 39: This is definitely an area of spiritual growth that needs attention and focus. Consider making the commitment to spend the next 6-12 months being intentional in your efforts to grow this area

of your spiritual walk. A great place to start is by working through the list in the following chapters. Pick one of the practical suggestions and put it into practice this week. Then pick another one each week for the next several months. Over time, as you do these things, you will find God's Word becoming more and more important in your life. Ideally, you will return to this assessment in 6-12 months and score yourself again to see how you are making progress in this area of your life. Eventually you will want to look at one of the other nine areas of spiritual health to see where other opportunities for growth and development might be.

If your score is in the range of 40 – 69: This is not an area of urgent need for you, but it would be wise to consider how you might promote further growth. You might want to look through the list of ideas in the following chapters and find ones that might help to stretch you in ways which might not be the most comfortable for you. Choose a few specific ideas, then begin working them into your weekly routine one at a time. I would suggest you spend 3-6 months doing so, then return to the assessment and score yourself again. Do you see an increase in your overall score? Do you notice a particular statement that seems to be challenging for you? That might give you an idea of a specific way to help make God's Word more important to your life.

If your score is in the range of 70 – 99: This area of spiritual health is most likely a key strength for you in your Christian walk. That is wonderful and is truly a cause for celebration. It would not hurt you in any way to go through the list of suggestions in the following chapters and look for the ideas that strike you as the most interesting and/or challenging, then work at putting them into practice. It would be helpful to pick up a copy of the full Personal Spiritual Assessment from our website and take time to work through it in its entirety. This will allow you to see which areas of your spiritual health might provide more immediate opportunities for growth and development.

If your total Personal Spiritual Assessment score is 100: It is most likely that you have either not been honest with yourself, or you have a highly inflated opinion of your own spiritual development. I would gently admonish you to toss out your results. Humbly ask God to open your heart and eyes to what He would say to you, and then start over with the assessment from the beginning.

You have completed your self-assessment, and now you're looking for some for practical ways to make the Bible more important in your life. Grouped into six helpful categories, the following chapters contain 50 specific ways you can accomplish this goal. Let your journey begin!

THREE

SPENDING TIME IN GOD'S WORD

So many of us have believed the lie that we don't have time for a book as old as the Bible, or that there's nothing we can get out of it that applies to our lives today. We are pulled in a thousand different directions, and it can be tempting to take shortcuts whenever possible to save time and just get through the day. When we finally do collapse for a few minutes of downtime before crawling into bed, the mindless scroll we find on social media is so enticing. The truth we have lost sight of is this: there is no better way to release the power of God's Holy Word in your life than to invest your time reading it. No matter how many other things promise to help, no matter how tempting it is to take a quicker path, nothing will substitute for reading the Bible for yourself.

But how do we start changing our habits and building new ones? We start by taking just a few small steps every day! In this age of the “go big or go home” mantra, starting small seems like such a waste of time. But you will be amazed at how spending time in God’s Word even just a few minutes every day will greatly improve your ability to hear God as He speaks into your life through the Scriptures.

Do you want to know God better? The Bible is the revelation of God that we have been given. And we have been given the Bible from God Himself! If you have struggled to spend time in God’s Word, here are fifteen ideas to help make doing so easier and to make the experience more meaningful.

1. Make a commitment to reading the Bible every day for one month.

The single most important way to make God’s Word more important in your life is to spend time reading it. There’s no way around this central truth! If you are not already a regular reader of Scripture, then begin by making this commitment to reading the Bible every day for one month. Focus on reading single verses or short passages. It is far better to read slowly and digest what you are consuming than to gorge yourself with chapters and books of the Bible with little understanding. This is a case where quality and consistency are more important than quantity!

If you're unsure of how to get started reading God's Word, begin by selecting a translation you are comfortable reading. Because there are so many translations available, it can be difficult to know which one to choose.

Why are there different translations of the Bible? Because the original Scriptures were written in the Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic languages, which are not widely used anymore. To bring God's Word to modern audiences, individuals and teams have translated the original Scriptures into our modern languages. And even within a common modern language such as English there have been many significant changes over the years, making a translation from the 17th century challenging to read for someone in the 21st century. Because of this ongoing transformation that all languages experience, there have been many different translations of the original Scriptures over the years into many modern languages and dialects.

Here are a few suggestions I would make for someone new to reading the Bible on a regular basis:

- **New Living Translation (NLT):** This is one of the easiest versions of the Bible to read, simply because it uses regular English that normal people speak today. It is an accurate thought-for-thought translation of the original Biblical languages, and

it is both widely read and widely accepted as a reliable choice.

- **English Standard Version (ESV):** This version is highly regarded as a quality translation for serious Bible reading and study. It attempts to translate the Bible as literally as possible using a word-for-word translation of the original Biblical languages. It is a higher reading level than the New Living Translation, but it is not overly challenging and does not contain many archaic words.
- **Contemporary English Version (CEV):** This version is great for younger readers as well as for those who speak English as a second language. It is written in a simplistic style that is accessible to those with limited vocabularies and English exposure.

There are many other Bible translations available, and it is beyond the scope of this book to list and explain them all – but Google is your friend! Try not to get too hung up on translations at first. God’s Word is God’s Word, and reading it consistently will bring great joy and benefit into your life, regardless of which version you choose.

2. Read a different version of the Bible for a month.

We are creatures of habit, and it can be so easy for us to fall into a rut in just about any area of our lives. Bible reading is — unfortunately — no exception. One way you can shake up your Bible reading and re-engage with God’s Word is to switch up your reading every so often by trying a different Bible translation for your daily time in the Word (see the previous idea for a quick explanation of why there are so many different Bible translations). This is especially easy if you read with online or with an app, as many of those come with multiple translations available. But even if you’re reading from print, it is worth your investment — both in dollars and in spiritual development — to purchase a different translation from time to time. One way to decide which version you will read next is to determine what general type of translation you are currently reading and then choose the next from a different category. Some broad categories to help you decide are as follows:

Literal Translations (also known as word-for-word translations). In these versions, the translators’ goal is to stay as close as possible to the words and phrases that are used in the original Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic languages. While usually considered more accurate, these versions are often more difficult to read. Some popular literal translations include the following versions:

- King James Bible (KJV)
- American Standard Version (ASV)
- Revised Standard Version (RSV)
- New King James Version (NKJV)
- New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)
- English Standard Version (ESV)

Dynamic Equivalent (also known as thought-for-thought translations). Translators using this method attempt to find modern equivalents of the original language words and phrases. By translating the text in this way, the results are often easier to read and understand than literal translations. What the reader needs to keep in mind, however, is that the thoughts of the translator by necessity change and shape the words of the original authors. This means the intent of a given passage may be subtly — or not-so-subtly — changed in the translation. Some popular dynamic equivalent translations include the following versions:

- Amplified Bible (AMP)
- Good News Bible (GNT)
- New International Version (NIV)
- Contemporary English Version (CEV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)

Free Translations (also known as paraphrases). When translators utilize this method, they essentially rewrite the Scripture using modern words, slang, and expressions. While these translations may be much easier to read and to understand, the results can sometimes stray significantly from the original author's words in an attempt to capture the inherent meaning of any given passage. Some popular free translations include the following versions:

- The Living Bible (TLB)
- The Message Bible (MSG)

3. Read a passage and substitute your name in place of pronouns like “you” and “we” and “they”.

One way to invest more deeply in God's Word is by making it more personal. It is far too easy to read it as a third-party spectator, observing the lives of the many characters at a distance and viewing its teachings as general principals offered up hopefully to those who might stumble upon them in a particular time of need. It takes a focused mindset to read the Bible as a personal text from God to you! One great way to make your reading more personal and applicable is to re-read passages while substituting your name in place of pronouns. It may take a little work to read a passage in such a way that it sounds natural, but you'll find that the work is well worth it as God's promises,

warnings, and encouragements become much more personal and meaningful to you. Here are a few examples to help you with this method:

- *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. – John 3:16*

Personalized -> *For God so loved **Kim**, that he gave his only Son, that if **Kim** believes in him, **Kim** will not perish but have eternal life.*

- *But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. – Malachi 4:2*

Personalized -> But for **Holly** who fears my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. **Holly** shall go out leaping like a calf from the stall.

- *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. – 1 John 3:1*

Personalized -> See what kind of love the Father has given to **Eli**, that **he** should be called a child of God; and so **Eli** is.

We are not “changing Scripture” when we practice this exercise — we are personalizing it, so that the impact upon our lives is felt more fully and deeply.

4. Pray as you are reading the Bible.

The Bible can be a powerful force in our lives. One of the best ways to experience that power and open the door for the Holy Spirit to work deeply in our lives is to spend time in prayer as we read through the Scriptures. You can think of this as a way to “power up” what is already the mighty Word of God by calling on Him to come and dwell in and through that Word. To give you an idea of how to do so, here is an example of a short passage along with a sample prayer that you might offer while reading. The Scripture is from 1 John 1:5-10. The words in italics are the Scripture itself, and the words in bold are a sample of what one might pray as they read the passage:

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

Lord, I know that you alone are light, and that in you is no darkness. I praise you for your amazing light. Thank you for giving light to all of your creation.

⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

I don't want to be a liar. Please help me to see when I am walking in darkness and guide me back out and into your light. Let your truth shine in and through and around my life for all to see.

⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Keep me walking in your light! Lead me into fellowship with you and with fellow believers. Let the blood of Jesus wash away my sins and take sinful desires far from me as your light reveals all truth.

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Do not let me be deceived! Help me to see the sin that so easily entangles my life and trips me up. Let my life reflect your light and your truth for all to see.

⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

You are faithful! You are just! I confess my sins to you, the Great Forgiver! Cleanse me of my unrighteousness. Make me clean in your light.

¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

I know I have sinned. Don't let me make you a liar! I want your word in my life. Flood me with your light and remove the sin and darkness that is constantly seeking to overtake me.

Here are a few passages you might consider using as you work on this practice of praying while reading God's Word:

- Psalm 24:1-6
- Colossians 2:6-15
- Romans 8:12-17
- Matthew 6:1-4

5. Read with a partner.

An interesting aspect of the faith experience is the tension held between personal belief and the communal experience of knowing and understanding God. While each person is certainly responsible for their own spiritual growth, that growth is not intended to take place in a vacuum apart from the greater faith community. A significant part of this “walking together” in our faith journey is reading the Scriptures with others, and choosing to read with a fellow believer is a great way to dive into this form of cooperative growth. Here are a few specific ideas you might consider as

you find your reading partner and begin this adventure together:

- Consider whether you will read on your own and come together regularly to discuss your readings or if you will read out loud together and discuss as you go.
- Choose a specific reading plan to follow, with regular times to meet and discuss what you have read.
- Choose a book of the Bible to read through together, deciding each week how much you will read and then discussing that section before moving on to the next.
- As you read, use text messaging or email to share thoughts, ideas, and questions that arise out of each day's reading.

6. Read with a group.

Following from the previous idea, consider expanding your shared faith journey by joining with a group of individuals to read through Scripture together. Jesus instructed his disciples that, "*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*" (Matthew 18:20). Reading through God's Word with a small group of others creates a wonderful dynamic of sharing, questioning, and exploring

the truths of the Bible. Whether you're joining a group from church, a few coworkers, several friends who already meet regularly, or a collection of acquaintances who simply want to read the Scriptures, meeting together in a small group can be a stimulating way to walk through God's Word while simultaneously cultivating rich personal relationships. Some suggestions to help you begin your group experience are:

- Choose a book of the Bible to read, and be sure to let everyone know the reading expectations. This might be a specific plan, with dates and passages spelled out, or it might be a simple statement like, "We'll read this chapter for next week."
- Consider using videoconferencing interspersed with face-to-face meetings to allow everyone more opportunities to participate without making a regular meeting feel like a huge commitment.
- If using a daily reading plan, use text messaging to encourage each other, ask questions, and share meaningful thoughts and passages. Our family has done this in the past when reading through a daily devotional together for a year – each person was assigned a day of the week to share their thought about that day's reading, even if that was just a few words.

7. When faced with a question or decision — whether big or small — take time to see what the Bible says about that subject before responding or deciding.

The main goal of reading the Bible is to know God better. One of the great benefits of doing so is to let that understanding of God change our hearts, our thoughts, and our actions. While this certainly happens in an organic way, we can also be very intentional about allowing Scripture to shape and affect us. A great way to do this is to proactively seek out answers to our questions and decisions in God’s Word, looking to see how the issue or topic is handled throughout the Bible. One option for doing this is, of course, to Google something like, “What does the Bible say about overcoming insecurity?” The only caution we should take is to be sure the results we are reading are actually Scriptures and not just someone’s opinion about what Scripture says regarding the topic. Another very helpful tool is the concordance, which is found in many printed Bibles. A concordance is a reference tool that provides an alphabetical listing of Biblical words along with their Biblical references. Many Bibles have a concordance included. If your Bible does not have a concordance, or if you desire a more robust one, there are many standalone concordances available to purchase as well as ones available to use online. You can find a list of some of these in Chapter nine and on our website.

8. Take note of the Scriptures read during your church's worship service. Then go back throughout the week and reread and meditate on those passages.

Many Christians attend church worship services a practice I highly encourage either in-person or online. You will usually hear the preacher reading and referencing passages from the Bible during their sermon. It can be easy to find ourselves passively listening to these Scriptures without engaging with them on our own. A great idea for anyone who wants to grow in their faith is to take note of these verses (it's not a sin to mark them in your Bible!) and then return to them throughout the rest of the week. Re-read them each day, and pray that the Holy Spirit will give you greater clarity into their meaning and better understanding of how to apply them to your life and actually live them out. It can be especially helpful to go back and read them again after hearing the entire context of the sermon or message. This will also help you to be more engaged with the preacher's message and understand more fully how God's Word is relevant to your life.

9. Memorize a Bible verse.

One of the best ways to make God's Word have a bigger impact on your life is to memorize it, so that you can recall it at any time and in any circumstance. Psalm 119:11 states, *"I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you."* When we 'store up' God's Word, it becomes a part of us! We don't have to wonder what He thinks about the things in our life we know because we remember what His Word actually says. Unfortunately, many people are intimidated by the thought of memorizing Scripture. If you're one of those people, let me encourage you to think about a song whose lyrics you can sing, even if you aren't listening to the song at that moment. Most of us have many songs committed to memory; they have for all intents and purposes become a part of our lives. Be encouraged by this admission! You have the ability and the capacity to memorize Scripture as well! The secret to being successful at memorizing Scripture is to begin by keeping it short and sweet. Don't start by trying to memorize a long passage or a complicated verse; start with short, easy verses. Once you have picked a verse to memorize, read it out loud to yourself a few times. Then write it down on a card or post-it note you can carry around and look at when you need to. Recite the verse mentally and out loud multiple times a day. A good check when you think you have it memorized is to go a day or two without looking at it or saying it out

loud, then see if you can recite it without looking. When you have that verse down, select another verse and work on it. As you do, be sure to recite the first verse you learned from time to time as well. Before long, you will find that you can recall several verses! Here are a few short verses you might want to try committing to memory:

- *“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.”* – Hebrews 13:8
- *“When I am afraid, I put my trust in you.”* – Psalm 56:3
- *“Rejoice always.”* – 1 Thessalonians 5:16
- *“Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.”* – Romans 12:12
- *“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.”* – Proverbs 3:5

When you are able to recite several shorter verses, you may want to work on committing a longer verse or passage to memory. The process is the same, but one additional tip is to break the longer verse or passage up into sections, memorizing one section at a time and then slowly adding the next section, and then the next. It may take a little longer, but you find that recalling even lengthy passages are possible when you work on them in this manner. Here are a few longer verses and passages to try:

- *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” – Romans 8:28*
- *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” – Galatians 2:20*
- *“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” – Philippians 4:6-7*
- *“Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.” – 1 Peter 3:13-17*

10. Memorize an entire psalm.

The Book of Psalms is one of the most powerful and prayerful books of the Bible. These poetic prayers are a remarkable reflection of the human condition, capturing the pain, hope, doubt, struggle, and joy that all humans experience. For centuries, many nuns and monks have memorized the psalms by heart for their use in prayer and reflection. By committing to learn one or more psalms, you can both join in this rich tradition and grow in your own walk with the Lord. A great place to start is with the shortest of the psalms, Psalm 117, which is only two verses in length:

Praise the LORD, all nations!

Extol him, all peoples!

For great is his steadfast love toward us,
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures
forever.

Praise the LORD!

-Psalm 117

Some other psalms to consider memorizing include:

- Psalm 23 (6 verses)
- Psalm 130 (8 verses)
- Psalm 63 (11 verses)

- Psalm 51 (19 verses)

11. Spend time reflecting on a verse while observing the beauty of the world and the diversity of its people.

The Bible is certainly the best way for us to learn about and know God's character. But we shouldn't forget that the God who reveals Himself to us through His Word is also the same God who created the world and all of the beauty and diversity it holds. To help you better connect Scripture to your everyday moments, consider memorizing a verse and then intentionally looking for ways and places to meditate on it that further reflect its significance to your life. Here are a few suggested verses, along with ideas for how you might spend time reflecting on each of them in a more intentional way:

While observing a sunrise:

This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. – Psalm 118:24

While observing a sunset:

From the rising of the sun to its setting, the name of the LORD is to be praised! – Psalm 113:3

While at the ocean:

He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. – Micah 7:19

While in the city:

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. – Matthew 5:14

While walking or hiking:

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. – Psalm 16:11

While at a stream or river:

As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. – Psalm 42:1

While around children:

But Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven." – Matthew 19:14

While having breakfast:

Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do. – Ecclesiastes 9:7

When you pick up your phone:

So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. – Romans 10:17

When bathing:

Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! – Romans 10:17

12. Practice Lectio Divina.

Lectio Divina which translates as “sacred reading” is an ancient technique for reading Scripture. The intention of Lectio Divina is to approach reading God’s Word as a sacred activity, not simply a task to be checked off our daily to-do list. It is also an attitude a mindset in which the reading of Scripture is expected to be a transformational experience every time. The process of Lectio Divina involves four steps for the reader as they interact with God’s Word. Using this method, the individual prayerfully reads a passage of Scripture, slowly and repetitively, inviting the Holy Spirit to reveal truth to us them through the following four movements:

- **Reading** – Read a verse or passage slowly and carefully. Read the passage multiple times, perhaps even using different translations if possible.
- **Meditating** – Ponder the words you have just read. Is there a word or phrase that jumps out at you, attracts you, prods you? Ask yourself why it does so. Ask yourself what God is saying in what you have read. Read the passage again, slowly.
- **Praying** – Ask God what He would have you do with this Scripture you have read. Ask Him to reveal its significance to you and to your life. Ask Him to plant these words in your heart, and in your life.
- **Contemplating** – Think seriously about how this Scripture might be personally lived out in your daily life. How does it change you? How does it challenge you? What do you need to do? What do you need to do differently? What do you need to stop doing? Where do you need to go? Who do you need to see? What does God ask of you?

Once you have completed the four traditional steps of Lectio Divina, it can be helpful to follow them up with a very practical fifth step summarized as:

- **Living** – Connect all you have done and thought through in this Scripture to your life today. How will you put these thoughts and revelations into actual practice in your life today and tomorrow? Make specific, concrete, actionable plans and a timetable for accomplishing them. Do not leave God’s Word resting in your mind, but commit to making it an active reality in your life.

13. Meditate on a verse or short passage.

Meditation is often condemned in Christian circles as a “New Age” practice that runs contrary to God’s Word. While it is certainly true that forms of meditation have been practiced in Eastern philosophy and New Age religions, it can also be a powerful activity for the Christian who wants to get the most from God’s Word. Meditation, by definition, means “to engage in contemplation or reflection.” Like all things created by God, this practice can be used for both helpful and harmful purposes. When the focus of meditation is placed on God and His Word, it is a wonderful tool for spiritual growth and the understanding of Scripture in one’s life. While there are many methodologies for implementing meditation as a part of studying God’s Word, the following steps are common ones that have proven to be quite helpful:

- **Read the Word.** Slowly read the Bible verse several times. Discover key phrases or words. Look for repetition and points of emphasis. Read multiple translations to gain a fuller appreciation and understanding of the author's intent.
- **Write the Word.** Write the entire verse at least once. Use multiple colors and highlighters to emphasize points and make links, comparisons, and contrasts within the passage. Use your artistic abilities to add flourishes, doodles, and word art that help you to express the beauty of God's Word.
- **Memorize the Word.** Having the verse in your mind and heart frees you up to not have to look for your place on the page. It quite literally puts God's Word into your heart and makes it a part of your life. Being able to quickly recall Scripture in times of stress, temptation, danger, helplessness, joy, and celebration keeps us firmly rooted in God's Will and on His path.
- **Speak the Word.** It is always good to hear God's Word in your head, but speaking it aloud several times can help you focus and process the verse in ways that silently reading may not accomplish. There is power in God's Word, and speaking it allows that power to be unleashed and activated.

- **Sing the Word.** Colossians 3:16 instructs us to, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”* Singing can unlock the heart and emotions, and it has been an important part of many traditions in monasteries, convents, and churches throughout history. Don’t get hung up on what you (or other people) think about your singing talent God loves to hear you sing! Especially when you are singing His Word!
- **Pray the Bible.** Take the opportunity to turn the Bible into a dialogue with God. Thank Him for the truth that the verse is revealing. Commit to obey what you find in the Scriptures, and ask God to empower your heart to actually live it out.
- **Picture the Bible.** Create in your mind’s eye a mental image of what you are reading. For example, when Jesus says faith is like a mustard seed, picture that tiny seed in your mind. Then imagine how that seed bursts open with life, as it grows into the large mustard plant that spreads like wildfire across a field. When you use your imagination to visualize what God’s Word actually looks like, it will create powerful connections that

will help to make His Word much more important to you.

14. Read God's promises that are found in the Bible.

God's Word is full of promises He has made to you and to me. Imagine the God of all creation, who holds unlimited power in His hand, who is always loving, and who is Himself Truth He has made promises to you! And when God is the one making the promise, you can be sure that it will be kept. As you read His Word, look for these promises God has made. Write them down in your journal, or on index cards you can leave where you will see them and be reminded. And if you want extra help identifying the promises of God in Scripture, Google is your friend and there are many books that help identify them. We have listed a few of such books in Chapter nine and on our website, but here are a few examples of God's promises to get you started:

- *Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.* – Isaiah 41:10
- *Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!* – 1 Chronicles 16:34

- *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.*
– 2 Corinthians 1:3-4
- *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places* – Ephesians 1:3
- *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* – John 10:28

15. Read through the entire Bible.

In an earlier suggestion I stated that when it comes to reading Scripture, quality and consistency are more important than quantity. While I believe this to be absolutely true, I also believe that it is important to read the entire breadth of God's Word. By reading the Bible from cover to cover, we gain a more complete understanding of God's plan for His creation and for humanity. We are also better able to grasp the progress and process of the development of faith in the One God and in His chosen people. We can also clearly see the promise of God's coming Messiah and the ultimate fulfillment of that promise in the person of Jesus Christ. There are many ways to approach reading through the Bible, including the most

direct path starting at Genesis 1 and proceeding through Revelation 22. There are numerous other plans to read the Bible in a month, in six months, and in a year. On our website we have a collection of links to Bible reading plans you can look through to find the one best for you. We also recommend a few different “One Year” Bibles that are laid out with 365 daily readings to take you through the entirety of God’s Word. Check out Chapter nine for the link to our site as well as additional resources to help with your Bible reading plans.

FOUR

INTENTIONALLY STUDYING GOD'S WORD

Reading the Bible is not where your engagement with the Bible ends, it is where it begins. This expression is commonly used by Christians who understand the value of purposefully studying the Bible. Once you have begun to make reading the Bible a priority in your life, the natural next step is to delve deeper and begin mining it for the treasures it contains. When we become intentional in our study of Scripture, we begin to see connections throughout God's story, and we begin to see how we are meant to be a part of that story. God's Word has the power to shape us, to change us, and to draw us much closer to Him. The following ideas will help you become more intentional in your pursuit of God's Word, and the rewards you will reap along the way will be far greater and more significant than you can imagine.

16. Read a Scripture passage, then write out 10 questions that are relevant to the passage.

A saying I have found true throughout the years is: “If you really want to understand something, teach it to someone else.” I cannot overemphasize how true this is! Many times, in my life, I have thought I understood something a process at work, the definition of a word, a difficult theological concept only to discover while trying to explain it to someone else that I was seriously lacking in my own understanding and knowledge. By preparing to teach others, I have almost without exception had to first teach myself! Putting this concept into practice while studying the Bible can be very helpful, even if you aren’t planning to actually teach someone else. The act of simply asking questions helps us to better understand what God’s Word is saying in a particular verse or passage. You can do this by picking your passage, reading it, and then writing down ten questions about the passage, its context, its teaching, and its application. Here is an example of questions you might ask after reading the parable of the lost sheep found in Luke 15:1-7:

- Why was Jesus hanging out with tax collectors and sinners?
- Who, exactly, are these so-called “sinners”?

- Why do the Pharisees care who Jesus was eating with?
- What is a parable?
- Is someone watching over the other 99 sheep while the man is searching for the one lost sheep?
- Why is the man so excited about the one sheep being found?
- What is so special about that lost sheep?
- Who in heaven is experiencing that joy over one sinner repenting? God? Angels? Saints?
- What does it mean to repent?
- Who do the sheep and the searching man in the parable represent in life?

As you can see, these questions are not necessarily “deep” or complicated. They are just questions that someone might have about the passage. Maybe you already know some of the answers, even as you write down the questions. That’s okay. The simple act of asking the questions forces you to reflect and think a little more than you would if you didn’t ask anything. And if there end up being questions you can’t answer, you now have the option to start digging to find those answers in the Bible, in other books, online, from a friend, from a small group leader, from a pastor wherever you have the resources and the curiosity to go ask.

17. Look for references to Jesus in the Old Testament.

Christians generally know that the New Testament is centered around the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. What many fail to grasp is that Jesus is referenced throughout the Old Testament as well. Jesus himself said in John 5:39-40, *“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”* We see Jesus stating this in Luke 24:25-27 as well, when he taught, *“And he said to them, ‘O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?’ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.”* By taking time to look for references to Jesus in the Old Testament books, we grow in our faith and understanding of God’s full plan across the breadth of Scriptures. There are many such passages throughout the Old Testament, but here are a few for you to dig into right away:

- Genesis 3:15
- Genesis 12:3
- Isaiah 7:14
- Micah 5:2
- Hosea 11:1

- Psalm 22
- Isaiah 53

18. Read and study the Bible using the SOAP method.

There are many different methods and techniques that are useful tools when studying God's Word. One of the most popular is called the SOAP method. SOAP is an acronym formed from the following words:

- ***Scripture*** – Of course all true Bible study must begin with actually reading the Bible! As you read, write down key verses or passages that have an impact on you or that generate questions for you. Reading the passage multiple times will help you see things which might be missed in a single reading. If you can use multiple translations while reading, all the better!
- ***Observe*** – As you read the verse or passage, see what you can learn and understand about the author's intentions and the purpose of the text. Is there a repeated word or theme that captures your attention? Are there interactions between characters that serve to make a point? Is there a deeper meaning you can discern in the parable, poem, or imagery? Is there a larger context that

this verse or verses play into in this chapter, or even in this book?

- **Apply** – After reading and observing the Scripture, take time to ask yourself how what you just read might change how you live your life. Is the verse or passage calling you to begin doing something new? Is it admonishing you to stop doing something? Is there a habit that needs to be broken? A relationship that needs to be evaluated? A thought pattern that needs to be challenged? A hope that needs to be fed? Or a sin that needs to be confessed? Scripture is not meant to be consumed with no effect! So how should the truth of what you are reading impact your life?
- **Pray** – Pray for God to reveal to you His truth in what you are reading. Ask Him to help you to understand His Word through the help of the Holy Spirit. Ask Him to lead you in the right direction as you consider how to apply this Scripture to your life. Pray that He will give you the strength and will to take action today — not at some well-intentioned but indeterminate point in the future — to live differently as you apply what He is teaching you through your readings. Ask Him to let your life reflect Jesus because of His Holy Word.

19. Do a character study of a character from the Bible.

Are you ready to put a bit more work into your study to get more out of it? A character study is a great way to begin swimming into the deep waters of God's Word. While this will take more time than many of the ideas we have looked at thus far, it will certainly be rewarding to you and your appreciation of the Scriptures.

- Start by ***picking a character*** in the Bible. There are so many interesting people throughout the Scriptures that you may at first be stuck trying to decide on just one! Don't worry, though. When you finish your first character study, there will be many more for you to come back to in the days ahead.
- After you have made your choice, ***find all the passages of the Bible where the person is mentioned***. For many characters this will be relatively easy to do, as many characters are found in just one passage of Scripture. For some, though, you will be noting several chapters — and perhaps even several *books* of the Bible! If you are struggling to find all the passages, don't forget that an online Bible dictionary might be a valuable tool for this task.

- Now that you know where to find your character, it's time to start reading! Take your time and ***read each passage carefully***. For some choices this will not take long, but for many it may take quite a while and several reading sessions. Don't be in a hurry! Be sure to make notes as you read, writing down any key moments that stand out and any questions that arise.
- You may find it helpful to ***make a timeline*** of the person's life, if possible. This may help you to better understand the character's place in the overarching story of the Bible and see where their story intersects with other characters, places, and events.
- Be sure to ***take note of any character traits*** you notice during your study. How would you describe the person you're investigating to someone who knows nothing about them? What are their strengths and weaknesses? What challenges do they overcome or succumb to? What seem to be the opinions of others whom they interact with? It might help to write up a character sketch, outlining everything you have discovered about the person.
- Finally, take time to ***decide what lessons you can glean*** from their life. At the end of your character

sketch, write down a bullet list of ways you can apply in your own life what you have learned from the person you are studying. Are there any personal character issues you want to avoid? Are there any commitments you want to emulate? How does knowing their story have an impact on your story?

There are so many interesting and amazing characters throughout the Bible, it can be difficult to pick one for your first study. Here is a list of some lesser-known people you may want to consider:

- Josiah – found in 2 Kings 21-23
- Rhoda – Acts 12:13-17
- Jethro – Exodus 18
- Naaman – 2 Kings 5
- Dorcas – Acts 9:36-43
- Barak – Judges 4-5

20. Study an entire book of the Bible.

Similar to a character study, a book study is a wonderful way to dive deeply into God's Word. This process takes time and commitment, but the rewards are incredibly rich. Begin your experience by choosing one book from either the Old or New Testaments. For your first few book studies,

picking a shorter book may help you to stay engaged and feel like you are making progress. Don't worry, the longer books aren't going anywhere and will be more accessible after you have gained some experience with this study method. Once you have selected your book, read through it slowly and carefully. As you read, work on the following study suggestions:

- **Study the background of the book.** Before diving in, it can be helpful to understand where the book came from and how it fits into the fullness of the entire Bible. Who wrote the book? What is the context in which the book was written? Who was the book's intended audience at the time of its writing? Is there any historical or societal information we need to understand the contents of the book more fully? Often, printed Bibles contain book introductions that will briefly summarize much of this helpful information. For more in-depth information, there are numerous study guides as well as online resources available. You can find a list of some of these in Chapter nine as well as on our website.
- **Make an outline of the book.** This will help you to see the sections and movements within the book, if there are more than one. Creating an outline will

compel you to break the book into its component parts, which can be very helpful for remembering and organizing your study. Start with the “big picture” of the book, then begin to break it down into smaller subsections.

- ***Look for key words or phrases.*** What words do you see repeated? Where does the story reach a conflict (or several conflicts)? What is the turning point of the book? Is there a conclusion? Write all these down as they will often be the source of the next step, which is to...
- ***Identify the main themes, ideas, and key verses.*** How would you sum up the point of the book in one sentence? In one word? What is the overarching theme or idea the book is conveying to the reader? What is the single most significant lesson contained in the book? If you could only use a handful of verses to convey the purpose of the book, which ones would you choose?
- ***Look for the main applications.*** It is not enough to understand what the book’s message is about — we also need to understand what difference that message makes for our lives today. What is it that God wants us to do with this information we have learned? What change do we need to make in our daily lives? What thought practices

should we work on? What relationship needs attention?

Looking for a specific book for your first study? Here are a few suggestions of some shorter books of the Bible you might want to consider:

- Jude
- Philemon
- Titus
- Jonah
- 1 John
- Ruth

21. Do a topical Bible study.

Another good way to dive deep into Scripture is to select a topic and spend time reading what God's Word has to say about it. Begin by choosing a topic to study. It may help to think about whether a specific subject you're interested in is part of a larger category or issue. For example, if you want to see what the Bible says about illegally copying movies something that didn't exist when the books of the Bible were written you might consider looking at what it says about stealing, or breaking the law, or rebelling against authority.

Once you have selected a topic or theme, begin by looking up every instance of that topic in the Bible. You may find it helpful to brainstorm a list of words and phrases that are directly related to your topic. A useful tool to get started with might be the concordance in your printed Bible, but for serious work you will want to use an exhaustive concordance (one that lists every single instance of a word found in Scripture) or an online concordance we list some of these in Chapter nine and on our web site. As you identify these specific locations in Scripture, write the verses down. Be sure to group similar passages together. Make notes of any that appear to conflict with each other. Explore the differences, examine the nuances, and make note of any connections you find in the verses.

When you have exhausted your list of Scriptures on this topic, take time to write a summary of your results. Are there clear points about the topic? Is there an overwhelming truth that flows from this topic? How do characters in the Bible interact with this topic? Finally, write a statement of how the results of your topical study will impact your life now that you understand it through a Biblical perspective. Ask yourself the question, “So what?” Does it require an action on your part? A change in thinking? Or a change in attitude?

Here are a few subjects you might consider as you dive into your first (or next) topical study:

- Anger
- Fear
- Forgiveness
- Grace
- Joy
- Overcoming Disappointment
- Prayer
- Sin
- Thankfulness
- Wealth & Possessions

22. Do a word study.

If you're feeling up to the challenge, a word study can be a great way to dig deep into a passage to fully understand the author's meaning and intent. This approach is time consuming and requires some specific tools to implement it correctly, but the knowledge you can gain from using makes it worthwhile for the serious student of God's Word. Doing a word study will require you to examine words in-depth and move beyond the simplistic dictionary definition. A thorough explanation of this approach is beyond the scope of this book, but I will provide a high-

level overview and point you toward some helpful online guides (you'll find links to these on our website).

To begin the word study process, you must have access to some basic tools for the task. These include: Multiple Bible translations, an exhaustive concordance, a Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, an English dictionary, and possibly some commentaries.

Once you have your tools, the general steps to performing your word study are:

- Choose the verse or phrase you will study and select the key word in that passage.
- Find its English definition
- Compare how the word is used in different Bible translations.
- Examine the definition of the original word in the Biblical language (Old Testament = Hebrew, New Testament = Greek or Aramaic).
- Discover where the word is used throughout the entire Bible. Note how often it occurs, what books it is found in, which book it is found in most often, where and when does the word first appear, where does it first appear in the book your verse is located in, and which authors used the word.

- Find the origin and the root meaning of the word.
How was it used by the culture of the day?
- Determine how the word was used in the Bible, and how would it have been understood by the audience that the specific book was written for.
- Finally, write down how the word should be applied today in the context of the verse or passage you are studying.

Again, this is a time-consuming method of study. But by steeping yourself so fully in the word you will be able to have a much greater appreciation for and understanding of the author's intent for using it in the first place.

23. Take a Bible class online or at a local community college or university.

A resource often overlooked especially by those who have already completed their formal education years is the local community college, Bible college, or university. And in today's connected world, online courses can bring educational opportunities right into our home. Colleges (especially community colleges) often offer discounted tuition rates or even the free auditing of courses for adults who only wish to take a handful of courses rather than pursue a full degree program of study. Search online for local college or university websites and browse through

their course catalog to find interesting topics such as *Introduction to Old Testament*, *Introduction to New Testament*, *Overview of the Gospels*, and *The Pauline Epistles*.

If attending in-person classes is not possible, you might consider taking an online class. Many colleges and universities offer online enrollment, but there are many other opportunities for online learning as well. Check out our website for a list of links to some quality online Bible study classes – many of which are free!

FIVE

LISTENING TO WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT GOD'S WORD

As you can tell from the previous two chapters, there is no substitute for reading and studying the Bible for yourself. Having acknowledged that truth, there have been many gifted individuals throughout history (and continuing today) who have written about God's Word, taught about God's Word, and helped lead others to a greater understanding of and appreciation for God's Word. In this chapter you'll find several suggestions for exploring the works of others who have spent time making the Bible more understandable and applicable to our lives.

24. Read a devotional.

One of the most popular ways of exploring what other men and women have to say about God's Word is to read a Bible

devotional. Devotionals come in so many different styles, lengths, levels, and formats that there is most certainly one (or likely several!) out there for you and your particular tastes.

One of the most common formats for a devotional is the “verse / teaching” structure, where a Bible verse is given and then the author teaches one or more truths from the verse. Often this teaching is through anecdotes and stories that help the reader to better understand and apply the truth of the verse to their life. Another style is the “journaling” devotional, where a verse is given along with a brief thought or teaching, then space is provided for the reader to write down their own thoughts, questions, and application of the verse.

Devotionals come in various lengths and focus on a wide variety of audiences. The most common are 30-day devotional and 1-year devotionals, but there are many other lengths as well. As for audiences, there are devotionals written specifically for: women, men, single women, single men, married couples, newly married couples, couples with kids, single moms, working moms, coffee-loving moms, struggling dads, outdoor-loving dads, couples with infants, couples with teens, couples who are empty-nesters, senior adults, teenagers, college students, middle school students, children, adopted children,

adoptive parents, people who are grieving, people who are lonely, people who question God, people who want to know God more deeply, firefighters, police officers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, people struggling with depression, people struggling with guilt, people struggling with porn, building your prayer life, increasing your faith, people who are fasting... as you can see, the list goes on and on.

While most devotionals are written for an individual to use as a way to grow their faith with daily readings, another fun way to use them is to work through them with another person or with a larger group of people. For the past few years, my wife and I have given a 1-year devotional to members of our family our kids, their significant others, and my sister to read through together. At times we have even assigned each person a day of the week, and asked that on that day they consider sharing via text with the rest of us something about the day's devotional. Simply knowing that others we love are also reading along with us brings a joy and satisfaction that goes beyond just reading for our own growth and enjoyment. In Chapter nine (and on our website) you will find some suggestions for devotionals that I have personally used over the past few years.

25. Read a book about the Bible.

Many books have been written about the Bible and its history, how it came to be written, who its authors were, and how it has shaped and has been shaped by the church throughout the centuries. Reading to learn more about the Bible can certainly help you to grow in your appreciation for its importance in the life of a Christian. Chapter nine contains several books that might be helpful in your readings about God's Word and how the various books came to be collected into the Bible as we know it today. You'll also find links to these books on our website.

26. Read a few books on how to study the Bible.

There are many different ways to study God's Word, and so it should be no surprise that there are a multitude of books that tackle how to go about doing so. Reading through just a few of these books will give you lots of ideas, methods, and tips for getting the most out of studying the Bible. You'll find a list of some helpful books about studying God's Word in Chapter nine and on our website.

27. Read a book about a Bible character.

The Bible is filled with so many interesting and unique people who each play a role in God's story. Some of their stories span across multiple books of the Bible, while

others are mentioned in only a single verse. If you want to get to know these characters more fully, consider reading a book specifically about one of them. Whether you want to know more about the faithfulness of Ruth or the travels of Paul, the healing of Mary Magdalene or the obedience of Joseph, the patience of Rachel or the determination of Jacob, diving deeply into the lives of these and many other men and women from Scripture is just a book away. You can find a list of some great suggested books about Bible characters in Chapter nine and on our website.

28. Read through a book of the Bible while reading a commentary.

A Bible commentary is a written explanation of a book (or books) of the Bible, which can be a very helpful tool for anyone who wants to better understand God's Word. Commentaries often give detailed overviews of a particular book of the Bible, followed by a chapter-by-chapter and/or verse-by-verse running set of notes explaining and expounding upon the Biblical text. These notes or *comments* can help the reader by discussing important insights into the text, how it would have been received by its original audience, and how it can be applied to life today. Bible commentaries are written at various levels for different audiences and range from accessible and easily

understandable works to very technical scholarly works that require an understanding of the original Biblical languages. Some commentaries are written by teams of scholars who spend years working together and editing their notes, while others are written by individual pastors who simply wish to help others understand the text more fully. Many commentaries focus on a single book of the Bible, and entire sets are comprised of these to cover the entire Bible over many volumes. In contrast, some commentaries cover the entire Bible in a single volume (obviously in much less depth) while still others cover just a particular section of Scripture (like the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments).

There are four general classifications of commentaries:

- **Critical commentaries** explore the Bible's original languages and are focused on a scholarly perspective of Scripture. They often don't strive to interpret the Scriptures in a particular manner, but stick to the more academic research and explanation of the text.
- **Exegetical commentaries** typically go verse by verse through the text, addressing the most significant issues and making observations about the original languages when doing so is helpful to better understanding the intentions of the author.

- **Expositional commentaries** are often referred to as “pastoral” commentaries, and usually focused on how one should preach or teach the Biblical text to others. Many expositional commentaries are based upon actual sermons that have been preached by the author.
- **Application commentaries** are probably the most popular for non-scholars. They strive to offer Biblical insights using concepts and language that don’t require years of theological education to understand. These commentaries are ideal for people who are beginning to grow in their understanding and study of God’s Word.

For most readers looking to use a commentary for the first time, a solid application commentary paired with an expositional commentary from a respected pastor is an excellent place to start. You will find a list of some suggested commentaries in Chapter nine and on our website.

29. Use a Bible app to read and study.

Many people love the feel, smell, and experience of printed books. And while there are certainly many valid arguments for reading physical books and studying with pen and paper, the convenience of having an electronic version in

your possession at all times should not be overlooked. An expression often used by photographers is, “The best camera is the one you have with you.” This is true for reading the Bible as well! While having a well-used copy whose margins are filled with personal notes and comments is both appealing and helpful for many, the reality is that we will often find ourselves in situations where it’s neither practical nor convenient to have a physical book with us. If you haven’t yet discovered the ease and convenience of having God’s Word on your smartphone or tablet, quickly available anytime and anywhere you like, then you are in for a pleasant surprise.

In addition to the convenience and availability, Bible apps often contain many features that aren’t found in a physical Bible. They often include numerous translations to choose from and switch between as well as a variety of study tools and aids, the ability to record notes, daily devotionals, prayer guides, Scripture image tools, the ability to join in community discussions and chats, and many more.

One of the most popular of these Bible apps is the *YouVersion Bible* by Life.Church. This amazing and incredibly helpful app was created by Life.Church to help more people experience the power of God’s Word in their lives. The app is available for free on both the iOS and Android platforms, so regardless of what smartphone or

tablet you have there is a version available for you. If the *YouVersion Bible* isn't for you, the respective app stores have many other apps available for you to download and try. There is undoubtedly a Bible app out there for every taste and preference, it just might take a bit of trial and error for you to find the one for you.

SIX

EXPERIENCING GOD'S WORD BEYOND PRINT

Scripture has not always existed in written form. The original Old Testament books were passed down in oral form from generation to generation before finally being written down by hand. New Testament books began as letters and eyewitness accounts about Jesus and His teachings. They were written by hand and circulated among the early churches, to be read and copied before being passed along yet again. There is no doubt that the collection and codification of the Scriptures into a written format — and then into a printed format in the 15th century — have made it more accessible and opened the doorway for millions of people to hear, read, know, and understand God's Word for themselves. But reading is not the only way to experience the Bible. Culture and technology have provided us with many new ways to

intimately encounter and know God through His Word. Here are some ideas for experiencing Scripture beyond the printed word and digital screen.

30. Listen to a sermon series that teaches through a book of the Bible.

Sermons come in many different styles of teaching, levels of content, methods of delivery, and expectations for application. While just about every preaching method can be effective and useful for teaching the Word of God, it's hard to argue that a series of sermons that work their way through a book of the Bible can be one of the most effective ways to understand the fullness of a particular book.

A sermon series through a particular book of the Bible can range in scope from a macroscopic view that might touch on key themes and passages from the book to a microscopic view that reads through every verse of every chapter. This verse-by-verse approach usually divides sermons by passages, which means they might cover a story or parable that covers more than one chapter, or they might cover as few as one or two verses. Such sermon series will often deliver the best opportunity for listeners to work through the Scriptures in a way that helps it all tie together, providing context and continuity from week to week.

Another advantage of the verse-by-verse sermon series is it prevents the preacher from skipping over parts of the Scriptures that might be considered by some to be irrelevant, complicated, or controversial. This makes it possible for the listener to experience the full breadth of Scripture, rather than limiting them to cherry-picked passages and truths that the preacher is most comfortable with communicating. You can find links on our website to some sermon series that teach through a particular book of the Bible.

31. Listen to a podcast about the Bible.

Podcasts have surged in popularity over the past few years. Name a topic and you can likely find a podcast to listen to about it. So why not use this growing resource for learning more about God's Word? There are numerous Christian podcasts, and many of them are specifically about the Bible. A simple Google search will get you pointed in the right direction. If you already listen to podcasts, use the search feature in your podcasting app to discover hundreds of Scripture-centric podcasts for your listening feed.

32. Watch a YouTube video about the Bible.

Similar to podcasting but with exponentially more content, YouTube has continued to grow over the years. Many of us have searched YouTube to find out how to bake bread, fix

the falling headlining in our car, repair a leaky faucet, and a million other things we've needed to know how to do. Why not use that same tool to learn a little more about God's Word and how to make it more integral to your life? Search with phrases like *Bible study*, *understanding the Bible*, *history of the Bible*, and *applying the Bible* to find thousands and thousands of potentially helpful videos. Notice, though, that I said "potentially" helpful videos! As with all things, be discerning when utilizing tools like YouTube. You never know for sure whether the presenter actually has reputable credentials and sufficient knowledge for the subject they are presenting. That doesn't mean YouTube videos can't be a quality source of information and education – they certainly can be! Just be sure to compare anything questionable you might hear with what other trusted sources have to say on a subject.

33. Read a Bible graphic novel or comic book.

For those who are interested in graphic novels and comic books, there are many great options for reading the Bible in those mediums. If you're intimidated by the idea of reading the Bible, perhaps beginning with a graphic novel adaptation would be an easier introduction to God's Word. *The Kingstone Bible* is a 2,000-page graphic novel adaptation of the Old and New Testaments which took 45 illustrators (experienced Marvel and DC comic artists

guided by evangelical writers) over seven years to produce. Its stunning, full-color comic art is a feast for the eyes and a beautiful journey through the Bible. Coming in slightly shorter (at only 832 pages!), *The Action Bible: God's Redemptive Story* is another popular and well produced graphic novel adaptation of God's Word for a modern audience. You can find links to these books and other graphic novels and comic adaptations on our website.

34. Listen to an audio Bible narration or dramatized performance.

Audiobooks are another form of media that have experienced tremendous growth over the past few years. Many of us find ourselves passing time listening to audiobooks while driving, commuting, exercising, and doing household chores. Don't let anyone tell you that listening to audiobooks is not reading if it works for you then it is a great option! It's also a wonderful way to read through the Bible.

In addition to standard narrations of the Bible, there are also dramatized audiobook versions of the Bible. These larger scale productions include multiple cast members, full score musical backgrounds, and professional sound effects. Some even feature well-known actors and actresses. Listening to one of these productions can transport the listener right into the middle of God's Story.

There are several popular audiobook stores offering a variety of audio Bible narrations and dramatizations, including Audible, Audiobooks.com, Apple Books, and Google Play Books. If you're looking for a lower-cost option, check out your local public library and see if they offer audiobooks for patrons. Many libraries have offered selections of books on cassette tape and compact disc for years, but most are transitioning to digital audiobook loans. This transition is being assisted by two major library apps: OverDrive and Hoopla. I am a huge fan of OverDrive's audiobook listening app, Libby, and highly recommend it. Hoopla is also very good, and it simply depends on what your local library utilizes. Borrowing audiobooks through these apps is free, but you will need a valid library card to access your library's selection. And a pro tip – if you don't have a local library, or if your local library's selection of audiobooks is small, there are larger libraries around the country that offer “out-of-area” memberships for a nominal fee.

Finally, there are online sites that legally allow users to stream and listen to various versions of Bible narrations for free. Usually, these translations are older ones in the public domain, but they can be a valuable tool for those who wish to listen to God's Word at no cost. You can find links to a few of these sites on our website.

35. Watch a Bible-based movie or show.

Hollywood may not always be friendly to the Christian faith, but that hasn't stopped the creation of many movies and tv shows based on the Bible. Some of the most famous movies filmed over the years include:

- The Passion of the Christ, 2004
- The Ten Commandments, 1956
- The Prince of Egypt, 1998
- Exodus: Gods and Kings, 2014
- Joseph: King of Dreams, 2000
- Samson, 2018
- The Nativity Story, 2006

If you're more interested in television shows based on the Bible (perfect for bingeing!), here are a few that have been well received:

- The Bible, 2013
- A.D. The Bible Continues, 2015
- Jesus of Nazareth, 1977
- Moses the Lawgiver, 1974
- The Chosen, 2017

I would like to specifically point out The Chosen as a particularly well-made television series, which is available

to watch for free through its own app. The series is powerfully written, the acting is outstanding, and the series remains true to the Gospel message.

36. Identify and study works of art based upon and inspired by Scripture.

Throughout history, artists have created works of art that seek to capture the message and the passion of the Scriptures. Spend time looking for and studying works of art — paintings, drawings, frescos, sculptures, architecture, and any other artistic medium — that are based upon or inspired by God’s Word. As you observe these pieces, familiarize yourself with the artist’s name and era, why they created it (if known), what artistic style they used, and anything else that might help you to appreciate the work more fully. Here are a few suggestions to get you started:

- *Creation of Adam* by Michelangelo
- *The Annunciation* by Fra Angelico
- *Adoration of the Shepherds* by Gerard van Honthorst
- *The Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci
- *Pieta* by Michelangelo
- *The Well of Moses* by Claus Sluter
- *Moses* by Michelangelo
- *David* by Michelangelo
- Saint Peter’s Basilica

- Mont-Saint-Michel
- Chartres Cathedral

37. Listen to Scripture based worship songs.

Many hymns and songs have been inspired by God's Word over the centuries. Take time to discover and listen to some of these to increase your appreciation for the beauty of the Scriptures. Consider creating a playlist of your favorites to return to whenever you want a refreshing musical encounter with the Bible. Here are a few ideas to get you started on your listening journey:

- *How Great is Our God*, Chris Tomlin (based on Psalm 104:1-2)
- *I Know Whom I Have Believed*, hymn (based on 2 Timothy 1:12)
- *Great is Thy Faithfulness*, hymn (based on Genesis 8:22 and Lamentations 3:22-23)
- *Ancient of Days*, Jamie Harvill and Gary Sadler (based on Daniel 7:9)
- *Revelation Song*, Kari Jobe (based on Revelation 4:8)
- *Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!* Reginald Heber (based on Revelation 4, 5, 15; Isaiah 6)
- *Step by Step*, Rich Mullens (based on Psalm 34 and Psalm 63)


38. Listen for Scripture in other places.

God's Word is found throughout culture, literature, and the arts. Begin keeping a log of all the places where you encounter Scriptures outside of The Bible. Whether it be in movies, music, poetry, television, theater, opera, or any number of other arenas, be watchful for verses, passages, and themes from God's Word as you go through your daily life. This idea is challenging, and you will likely find cases where Scripture is misused, misquoted, or even mocked. Keep adding to your log as you find examples and be sure to note the context of use and meaning as well. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- *The Shawshank Redemption* (movie)
- *Charlie Brown Christmas* (movie)
- *Footloose* (movie)
- *Daredevil* (tv show)
- *Lost* (tv show)
- *When I Consider How My Light Is Spent*, John Milton (poem)
- *Good Friday*, Christina Rossetti (poem)
- *God's Grandeur*, Gerard Manley Hopkins (poem)

SEVEN

EXPERIENCING GOD'S WORD THROUGH CREATIVE EXPRESSION

ur God is an infinitely creative God who delights in delighting us! We were formed in His image, and we have been created with His ability to invent, express, and communicate our hearts through a countless number of creative ways. We do not have to be limited to the “traditional” or the “normal” when it comes to knowing and experiencing God through His Word. For those who are creative and artistic — and those who wish to be more creative and artistic — here are some suggestions for engaging the Bible in more imaginative and inspired forms of expression.

39. Write out a passage of Scripture by hand.

Writing out a Bible verse or passage of verses is a great way to “get personal” with God’s Word. You might consider

getting a notebook or journal you can use just for this purpose. Take your time and purposefully write out your selected verse. You might want to try writing it in both print and cursive. Another twist is to write it multiple times, each time highlighting a different word or writing that word in all capital letters, to see how the change in emphasis affects your reading of the verses. If you are artistic, you might consider the writing out your verse/passage as word art. This can be as simple or elaborate as you choose to make it. Doing so will help you to remember the verse, and to think about it in a different light.

40. Write your thoughts about Bible verses in a journal or notebook.

Building on the idea above, after you have written out a verse or passage, write down a few of your own thoughts about the Scripture. Try rewriting it in your own words. Ask yourself: What is the intent of the author in this passage? Who or what is the focus of the passage? What questions arise from the passage? What does the passage challenge you to do? How will you respond to the passage? What other Scripture either seems to support or contradict your thoughts about this passage? Write down as much as you can and consider leaving some space to come back and add

more thoughts later, after you've allowed the passage to steep in your heart and mind.

41. Use a coloring Bible or a Scripture based coloring book for adults.

Adult coloring books have become very popular over the past several years. Many people enjoy the simple act of coloring, and it has proven to be therapeutic to many who take up it up as an activity. There are many different coloring Bibles available that feature illustrations and word art that you can color right alongside the printed Scripture, creating a personally creative and unique copy of God's Word. These coloring Bibles come in many translations and styles, so there's bound to be one for just about any taste. If an entire coloring Bible sounds like a bit much, then consider a Scripture based coloring book as an alternative. These books don't contain the text of the entire Bible, but rather they offer a selection of Scripture verses and passages laid out as word art ready for you to color. You can find many free Scripture coloring pages online which can be downloaded and colored as well. You can find links to some coloring Bibles, Scripture coloring books, and downloadable coloring pages in Chapter nine and on our website.

42. Create a Scripture graphic for social media posts.

If you use social media, you have likely seen posts that contain Scripture graphics. Why not try your hand at making some yourself? If you don't already own any graphic editing tools or software, there are many free options (or paid ones with free plans) you can use. One of the most popular is the graphic editing website Canva. Canva also has a great app, which makes it easy to use even on a smartphone. Whatever design tool you choose to use, start by selecting a verse. Pick a background, add your text, and then add any graphic embellishments you like. When you get finished, post your graphic to your social platforms and/or share them with friends and family via text messaging or email.

43. Create/draw your own graphic or comic presentation of a Scripture passage.

This idea is for anyone who has some artistic talent. Pick a Scripture passage that tells a story — Jesus's parables might be a great place to start. Then lay out a panel-by-panel outline of how you will present the story, including dialogue and narrative text. Once you have your plan, begin drawing your panels. When you finish your story, be sure to share it with others. You might consider scanning it or taking a photo of it to share online.

EIGHT

PUTTING GOD'S WORD INTO PRACTICE

In 2 Timothy, the apostle Paul instructs that, “*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness*” (2 Timothy 3:16). The true power of God’s Word is revealed as we take steps to put it into practice in our daily lives. When we allow it to teach us, to guide us, to correct us, and to move us towards God, it creates in us a clean and pure heart and a desire to know God even more. Like the ocean waves crashing upon the shore, the more we engage with the Bible the more it changes and shapes us into something different. Something better. Something more like Jesus. As you consider these remaining ideas for putting God’s Word into practice, allow it to change you and shape you.

44. Mail a verse of encouragement to someone.

Everyone needs encouragement, and Hebrews 10:24 instructs us to “*encourage one another*” as a way of building our faith in God. Think about the people in your life — whether they are believers or not — who God might be calling you to reach out to and encourage today. Pick one (or more!) of those people and pray for them. Pray that God would bless them and ask your Heavenly Father to lead you to a verse or passage that would speak a word of inspiration into their life today. When you finish praying, pick a passage that you feel might bless them. Write the verse or passage out — perhaps in a note card or on some stationary — with a brief message that you thought of them as you read the verse and wanted to share it with them. You don’t need to write them anything lengthy or fancy, just a short note to let them know they have been lifted up and thought about. Then drop the note in the mail to them. If you’re struggling to find an appropriate verse or passage, consider these to get yourself started:

- *“In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”* – John 16:33
- *“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”* – Isaiah 41:10

- *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* – Romans 8:28
- *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.* – Proverbs 3:5-6
- *“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.”* – Revelation 21:4-5

45. Offer to read the Bible to patients at a care facility.

There are many people in skilled care facilities who would love to read God’s Word but who are not able to do so themselves. You can make a real difference in their lives by offering to read to them! Think about facilities in your community like nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospice houses. Administrators of these types of facilities are often very welcoming of volunteers who wish to come visit and read to those in their care, whether that’s one-on-one or to a small group of residents. Call or visit one of these care facilities near you and offer your time to read Scripture to those who would like to hear it. Whether

you do so just one time or on a regular basis, the time spent is sure to be a blessing to those you visit, as well as yourself!

46. Offer to read the Bible to individuals who can't attend church.

Many churches have members who are unable to actively attend worship, Bible study, and other church activities. This is often due to age but can also be due to health conditions or other personal reasons. Ask the staff at your church — or reach out to the pastor or staff at other churches in your community — and see if they have “homebound” or “shut-in” members that might enjoy having someone come to their home and read God’s Word to them. Be sensitive to the fact that many people might not be open to having a stranger come in their house, but don’t be afraid to ask. If you are concerned about your own safety, ask a friend to join you in this endeavor. They may only want to come and sit with you, but they might be willing to join in and take turns reading with you.

47. Start a videoconferencing Bible reading group.

Some folks find it difficult to work out a time to gather together in person with other Christians to read the Bible. The COVID-19 pandemic has left many of us concerned about being in groups of people, whether large or small. Others are not able to find childcare. Some don’t have

transportation. And some simply don't have a local group they feel comfortable with. One way to overcome many of these challenges and concerns is to start a Bible reading group that meets using videoconferencing tools like Zoom, Skype, or FaceTime. You don't need to start big — even just two people can begin reading together!

As you continue to meet remotely, you can invite others to join in if they'd like. The beauty of videoconferencing to read Scripture is that it works with just two people as well as with twenty people! As you are deciding where to begin, consider picking a book of the Bible to read through, or perhaps read a Psalm every meeting. You might want to begin and end your time with a word of prayer if you or another participant is comfortable doing so. Decide whether your time is to be spent just reading Scripture or if you want to take time to discuss what you are reading as you go along. How often will you gather virtually? How long will each meeting last? Who will host and schedule the meeting? These are all questions you will need to decide beforehand or work through with your group. Be flexible and open to change — the group of two may be able to choose different days and times from week to week, but a larger group of five or ten or more may need a more regular schedule. The important thing is to simply begin. Who will you invite to join you this week?

48. Join an online group to study the Bible.

In our online and electronically connected world, there are many options available for finding and joining in with others who share the same interests. While some Christians avoid such online platforms, others seek to live out being “in the world but not of the world” as they navigate digital spaces. Whichever camp you find yourself in, know that God is at work in all things and His fingerprints can be found on any platform — even the digital online ones! A simple search will reveal groups that are studying and exploring the Bible on just about any online platform including Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, Twitch, Discord, and even TikTok. Each platform has its best uses, benefits, limitations, and challenges, so you may choose to stick with the ones you’re already using. But don’t be afraid to check out some of the others to see if they may have a group that works for you.

49. Let God’s word reveal sin in your life.

The book of Hebrews tells us this about the Bible’s ability to point out sin in our lives:

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight,

but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account. – Hebrews 4:12-13

As a pastor, I explained the broad concept of sin to my congregation as “missing the mark” of God’s standard of holiness. This is a simplification, but any time we are living out of alignment with God’s desire for human life, made clear in His Word, we are sinning. It is one thing to read the Bible to have knowledge of what it says. It is another thing entirely to actually evaluate our life by what the Bible says and then to take action to bring our life into alignment with God’s Word. This is the heart of the process of being sanctified — of becoming more and more like Jesus.

As you read the Bible, try to be honest about whether your life follows the teaching and example of Jesus and is in line with the character of God we see throughout Scripture. When Scripture confronts you with truths that run contrary to your life, confess that to God. Acknowledge to Him that you are missing the mark set in His Word. Ask Him to show you how you can align your life with what He wants. Acknowledging and confessing our sin is the starting point from which we can begin to turn away from it. Turning away from the sin in our life and towards God is called repenting. Ask God to help you repent and align your life with His Holy Word.

50. Read and then find an opportunity to practice a command of Jesus in Scripture.

As you read through the New Testament, you will find many commands that Jesus gave to his followers. Bible scholars will debate and argue over exactly how many commands Jesus gave, which statements were meant to be commands, and which commands overlap and say the same thing as another. What they won't argue about, though, is the fact that Jesus actually did give His followers some commands to live out in their lives. A great way to make Scripture more meaningful in your life is to find and read these commands of Jesus and figure out how to put them into practice. When we do this, we are aligning our lives with Scripture and becoming more like Jesus. That is the true goal of reading God's Word. Here are just a few of the commands you will find Jesus give in the Bible, and putting any of them into practice would be a great place to start:

- **Be happy if other people put you down.** *“Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”* – Matthew 5:11-12. Our natural reaction is to get angry or fight back when we feel

others attacking us, but we can live as Jesus instructed by rejoicing in these moments. Is there a situation in your life you could lift up to God with gladness instead of responding with anger and defensiveness?

- **Reconcile with those whom you have a conflict.**

“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.” – Matthew 5:23-25. Jesus was much more interested in people’s hearts than in their actions. Probably because he knew that our actions flow out of what is in our heart. When our heart isn’t right with other people, it can’t be right with God. Who do you have a “heart problem” with today? How can you be reconciled with that person, as Jesus commands?

- **Don’t try to avoid all suffering.** *And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself?”* – Luke 9:23-25. We all know that life can be tough, so it is normal to try to dodge as many difficult

situations as possible. But most personal growth happens when experience adversity and come through the other side. Are you facing challenges in your life? How can you lean into them, learn from them, and grow through them today?

- **Honor your parents.** *“For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’”* – Mark 7:10. For many adults, honoring their parents can be a real challenge. The key is to remember that honoring your parents does not mean always agreeing with them or doing exactly what they want you to do. Honoring them means showing them respect, whether you feel like they deserve it or not. How can you show respect to your parents while still holding fast to your own beliefs and convictions?
- **Don’t be greedy.** *And he said to them, “Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions.”* – Luke 12:15. The desire for money and possessions can be a real struggle for most people. One of the best ways to break free of the desire for “more” is to practice letting go of what we have. What can you do today to loosen your grip on the “things” in your life? The more you let go of them, the less of a hold you will find they have on you.

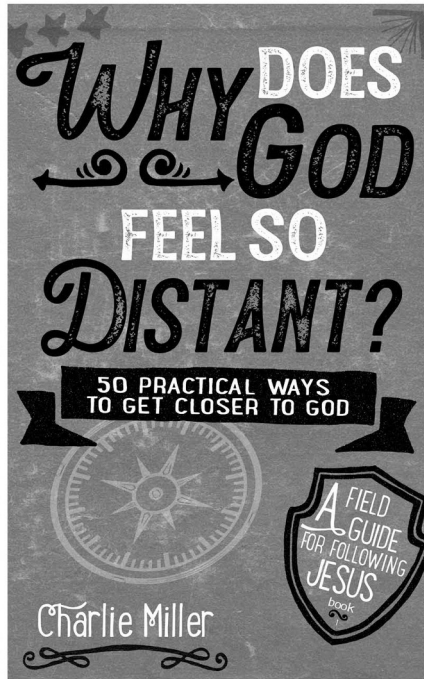
- **Love others like Jesus.** *“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”* – John 15:12. Loving other people the way that Jesus loves us is challenging, because Jesus does not base his love for us on what we do (or don’t do) for him. Loving others like Jesus means we don’t limit our love to those we like, either. It means we find ways to show love to all people in all circumstances, even when we do not feel like loving them. Who in your life needs to feel love today? What can you do to show love and kindness towards them, even if they won’t acknowledge or return it to you?

NINE OTHER RESOURCES

Listed below are several resources for you as you work on making God’s Word more important in your life. In addition to the 50 ideas contained in this book, the following titles are all wonderful works you might enjoy and benefit from.

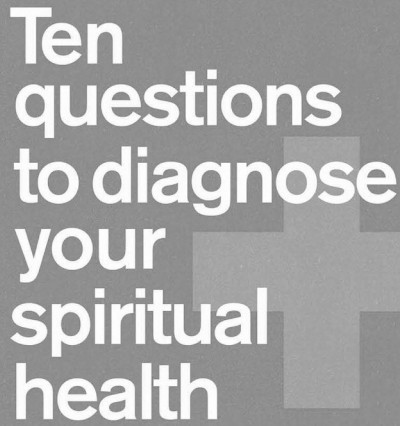
You can also find this list of books and others — along with additional links to relevant blogs, articles, and sermons — on our website at the following page:

<https://heychurchmedia.com/field-guide-resources/>



Why Does God Feel So Distant?
50 Practical Ways To Get Closer To God
by Charlie Miller

Have you read the first book in the
Field Guide For Following Jesus Series?



Ten
questions
to diagnose
your
spiritual
health

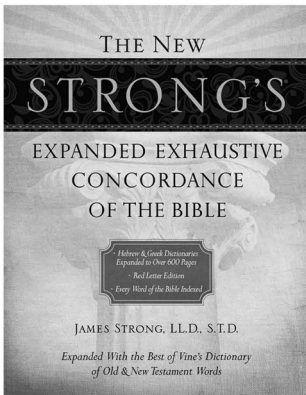
DONALD S. WHITNEY

Author of Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

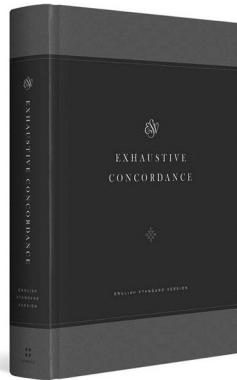
*Ten Questions to Diagnose
Your Spiritual Health*
by Donald S. Whitney

If you only get one book from this list,
this one is it!

Exhaustive Concordances

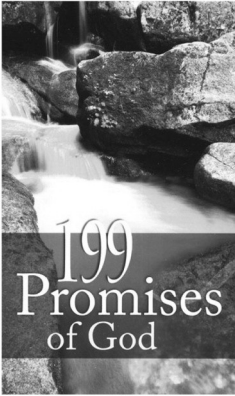


*The New Strong's
Expanded Exhaustive
Concordance of the
Bible
- James Strong*

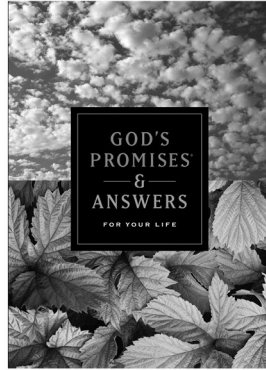


*ESV Exhaustive
Concordance
- ESV Bibles*

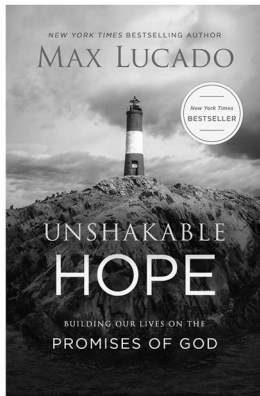
God's Promises



199 Promises of God
- Barbour Publishing

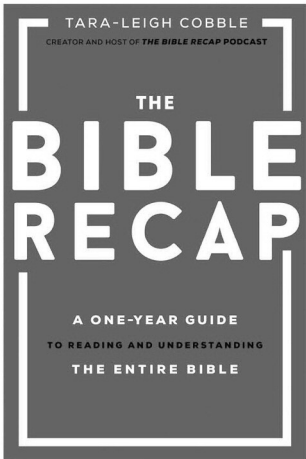


God's Promises & Answers for Your Life
- Jack Countryman

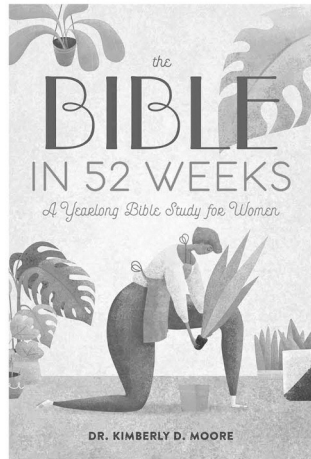


Unshakable Hope
- Max Lucado

Reading Plans

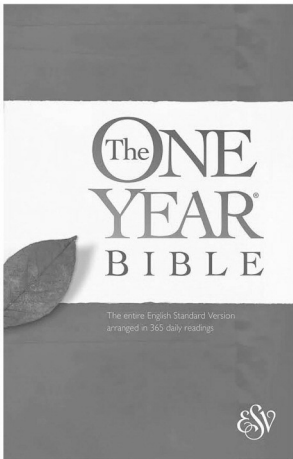


The Bible Recap
- Tara Leigh Cobble

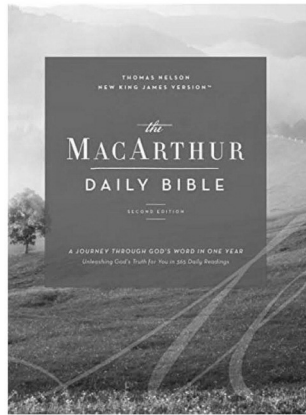


*The Bible in 52 Weeks:
A Yearlong Bible Study
for Women*
- Dr. Kimberly D.
Moore

One Year Bibles

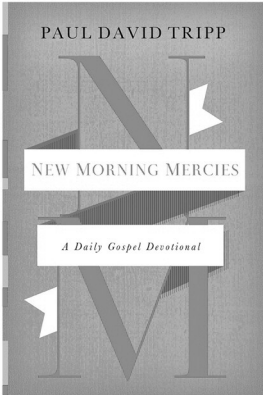


The One Year Bible
ESV

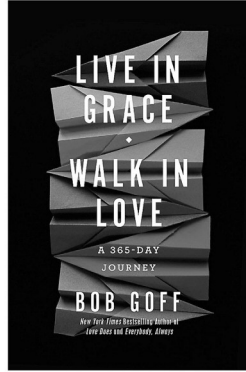


The MacArthur
Daily Bible
- John F. MacArthur

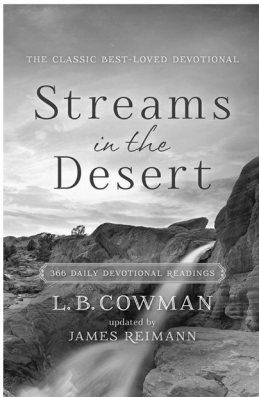
Devotionals



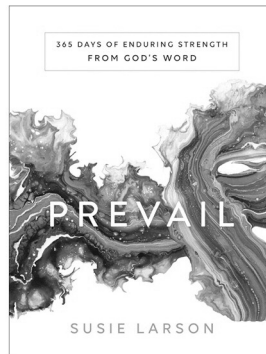
New Morning Mercies
- Paul David Tripp



*Live in Grace,
Walk in Love*
- Bob Goff

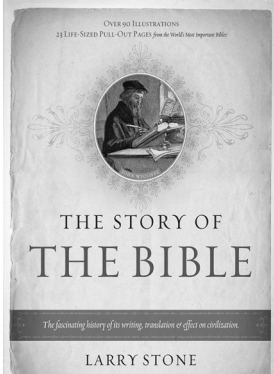


Streams in the Desert
- L.B. Cowman

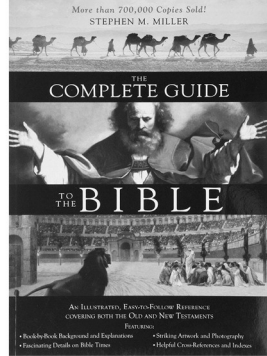


Prevail
- Susie Larson

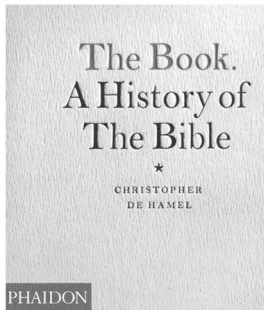
History of the Bible



The Story of the Bible
- Larry Stone

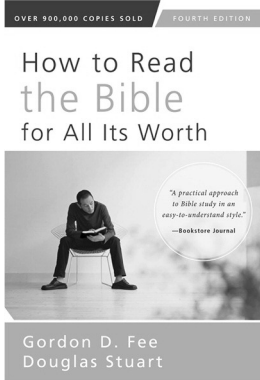


*The Complete Guide
to the Bible*
- Stephen M. Miller

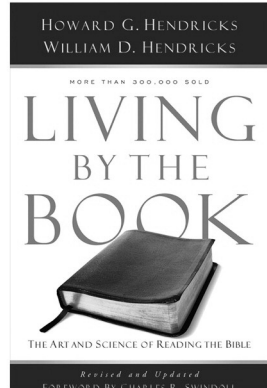


*The Book. A History
of the Bible*
- Christopher De Hamel

Studying the Bible



The Story of the Bible
- Larry Stone

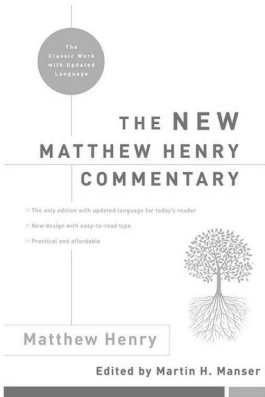


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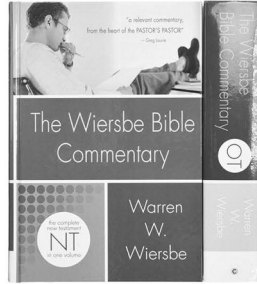


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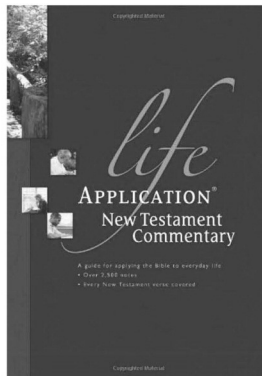
Suggested Commentaries



*The New Matthew
Henry Commentary*
- Matthew Henry

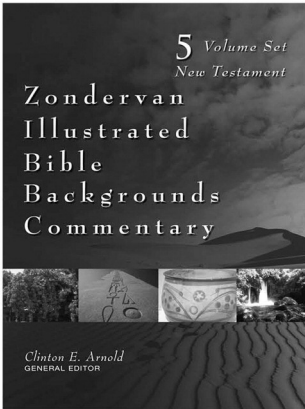


*The Wiersbe Bible
Commentary*
- Warren W. Wiersbe

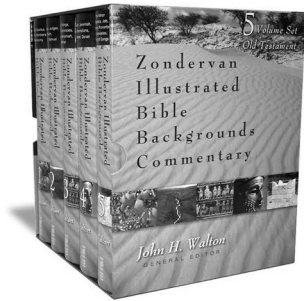


*Life Application
New Testament Commentary*
- Christopher De Hamel

Suggested Commentaries



*Zondervan
Illustrated Bible
Backgrounds
Commentary Set -
New Testament*

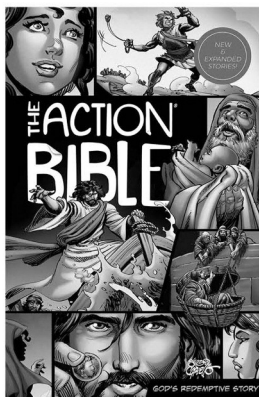


*Zondervan
Illustrated Bible
Backgrounds
Commentary Set -
Old Testament*

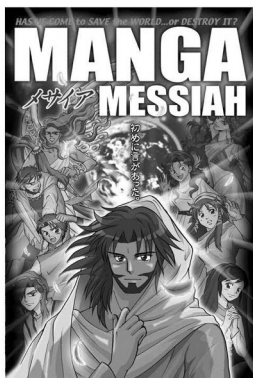
Graphic Novel / Comic Book Bibles



*The Kingstone
Bible Trilogy*



The Action Bible

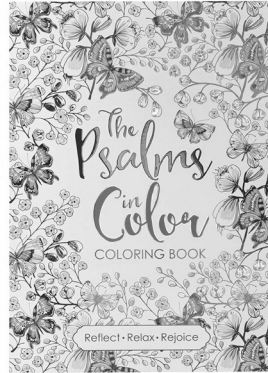


Manga Messiah

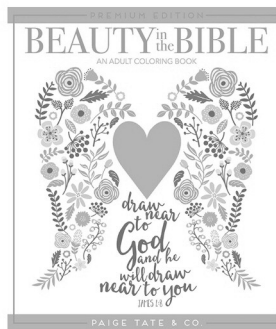
Coloring Bibles & Scriptures



*NIV Beautiful Word
Coloring Bible*



*The Psalms in Color
Inspirational
Coloring Book*



*Beauty in the Bible:
An Adult Coloring Book*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once again, I am indebted to some really great friends who have supported and encouraged me in my writing endeavors. Their help has been invaluable in making this book the best that it can be, and I am forever grateful to them all!

Many thanks to all my friends and readers who bought my first book and gave such great reviews and comments! It means a lot to me that you found it helpful to your spiritual journey.

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And of course, many thanks to my wife, Kim Miller. She has encouraged and supported me in this project every step of the way, and I'll never be able to express how much that means to me. Book 3 is coming soon, and so is the podcast! Thank you for pushing me to be my best. I love you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Charlie Miller has been a church planter, pastor, and minister for more than 25 years. He believes that following Jesus is not rocket science — but that it's not exactly easy for us, either. He lives in North Carolina with his wife, Kim. They have three children — Zach, Eli, and Joy — who help make their life a great adventure. You can contact him via email at charlie@heychurchmedia.com.

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ONE LAST THING...



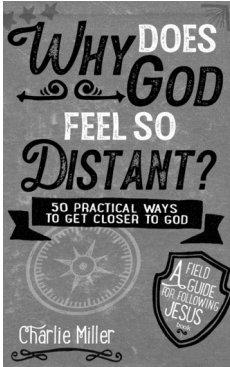
Thank you for reading my book!

If you enjoyed this book or found it useful, I'd be very grateful if you'd post a short review on Amazon, or wherever you purchased your copy. Your support really does make a difference, and I read each review personally to make upcoming books, and future versions of this book, more helpful.

May God richly bless you and your walk with Jesus. It has been my prayer that the ideas in this series will help you in some small way. Thanks again for your support!

-Charlie Miller

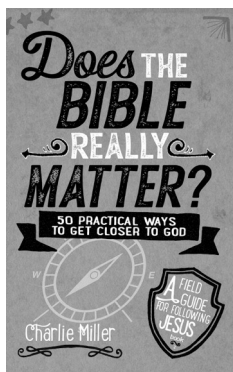
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Does God feel really far away from you? Do you wonder why you can't feel His presence in your life? Are you tired of feeling like He's a million miles away?

What if there were some simple things you could do to feel closer to God? There are! This book contains 50 practical ideas - each one designed to help you get closer to God. You can start (or restart) your journey towards Him right now!

You can know God Intimately – He's waiting for you to take a step! God wants you to know, feel, and believe in His love and presence in your life each and every day - so don't put Him off any longer!



Does the Bible seem irrelevant to you? Do you struggle trying to read it and understand it? Do you wonder if it can even make a difference in your daily life?

What if there was a way to make God's Word more important to you?

There is! This book contains 50 practical ideas - each one created to help grow your love for Scripture and your appreciation for its power in your life - whether you're a first time reader or a Bible scholar!

You can connect with the Bible – God wrote it for You! God wants you to understand His Word and incorporate it in your life each and every day - so don't put Him off any longer!

Upcoming **Field Guide for Following Jesus** books

This set of 10 books will absolutely help you grow in your spiritual life and in your walk with God. Each volume gives you 50 practical ideas for growing in your faith and becoming more like Jesus. Cultivating a deep faith isn't as hard as you might think, but it doesn't just happen by

accident. All It takes is a bit of determination and a few good ideas of where to start.

Why Is Loving Others So Difficult?

50 Practical Ways to Love Others Better

Why Don't I See God Working?

50 Practical Ways to Experience God Every Day

Why Should I Care About Helping Others?

50 Practical Ways to Serve God by Serving Others

Is The Church Relevant Anymore?

50 Practical Ways to Be the Church

Do I Really Need To Work At My Faith?

50 Practical Ways to Grow Spiritually

Why Is Sin Such A Big Deal?

50 Practical Ways to Put Sin in its Place

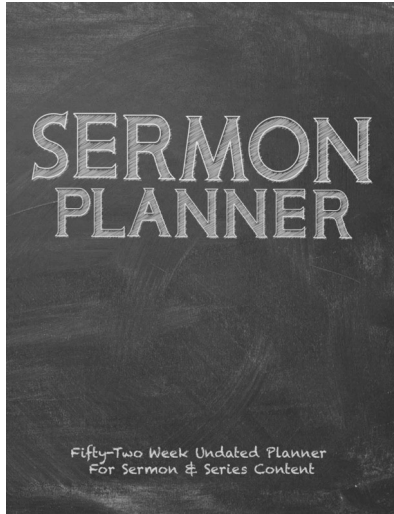
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