

# A Study of the Gospel of John

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## Letting the Bible Come Alive In Your Life! A Study of the Gospel of John

## Notes

“The Word of God is living and active.” (Hebrews 4:12) However, in talking with people over the years, I’ve found that for many of them, the Word doesn’t *seem* living and active in their lives. I long to sit with them and help them figure out how to learn the Word, live the Word and love the Word.

That’s why I’ve written this devotional guide – to give you some practices that you can apply to your study of the Bible that will allow it to come alive in your life. Then you won’t need me or someone else sitting there beside you as you open the Word and study it.

These are simple practices. Very simple! They’re practices I’ve used for years. They have helped me come to love God’s Word. I’m praying that as you begin using them in your own study, you’ll come to the place where the Bible does come alive in your life.

In addition, these practices will help you during those “dry” times that we all experience when the Bible doesn’t seem fresh. (Of course, in those times, it’s not the Bible...it’s us!)

I’ve given you twelve practices to use in studying the Bible. I’ve repeated them during the course of the 21 days so that you can become more familiar with using them. Some of them may seem like they overlap; that’s okay. If one doesn’t seem clear or helpful to you, then perhaps another one will be more useful.

This guide focuses on the Gospel of John. Once you’ve covered John, you can take apply them to another book of the Bible and find that they work wherever you use them.

You’ll probably find, like I have, that you’ll enjoy applying some of the practices more than others. Some are more difficult to apply but still very beneficial in studying the Bible. I’d encourage you to **give all the practices a try** and see if, over a period of time, you get more adept at all of them and find them meaningful in your study.

## Notes

You may think that at times I've given you too much to do at one sitting, but I'm deliberately trying to get you to stretch your time alone with God and see that it makes a major difference in your day-to-day life.

I wish so much that I could just sit down with you and take you through this guide. But since that's impossible, I'll write it as if I am sitting there, talking with you, walking you through it.

And finally, I encourage you to make prayer a top priority as you open God's Word. Begin each of your study times with prayer. Surrender your mind and heart to Him so that He can speak. Quiet yourself before Him and ask Him to speak to you through His Word.

I find Dietrich Bonhoeffer's words powerful as I open my Bible. Perhaps they will speak to your heart, too, and help you intently look at God's Word. (Maybe you'll even want to memorize the quote or keep it in your Bible so you can think about it as you study daily.)

"I ask with all my heart what God is trying to say to us through the Bible...since I have learned to read the Bible this way it has become more dear to me every day."  
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

## Practices

Practice: Read the Bible until it speaks to you. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what spoke to you.

Practice: Ask: “What does this scripture teach me about God/ Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”

Practice: Meditate on the Word.

Practice: Read the Word for application, not information alone.

Practice: Look for repetitions to find what is important to God – and should be important to you.

Practice: Read for greater knowledge.

Practice: Read for relationship.

Practice: Read for any commands to obey or any principles to apply.

Practice: Read for transformation.

Practice: Pray the scriptures.

Practice: Read the scripture in context.

Practice: Read even when you don't feel like reading.

- Well, you've learned some practices that you can apply for your own Bible study. Some of them you probably like more than others. Some of them you need to use, even if you don't like them as much. (For example, I'm not very good at meditating on scripture, because I have to slow down so much, but I really need to get better, so I've recommitted myself to doing more of it.)
- You've studied the book of John and know a lot more than you did three weeks ago. But hopefully, you have been much more transformed by the power of God and love God's Word more than three weeks ago.

**Practice: Read even when you don't feel like reading.**

- I've been there a thousand times or more: I know I should open my Bible and spend time with my Savior, but *I don't feel like it!* I'm sure you have, too!
- For the past three weeks you've had some structure to keep you in the Word, so that's probably helped you stay consistent. But now this is over and it's going to be up to you to figure out how to continue this commitment to become a person of the Word. So, how are you going to do that?
- Let me suggest a few things for you.
  - √ Stand on the promise of 2 Timothy 1:7 that God has given you "a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline." I'm convinced that much of becoming a person of the Word is based on becoming a more disciplined person. You have to become more disciplined!
  - √ Open your Bible and get down to business *regardless of how you feel*. I find over and over that if I'll just sit down and get going on my time alone with God, after five or ten minutes, I'm "feeling it" more. It's just disciplining myself to sit down and get started even when there aren't any feelings working for me!
  - √ Keep in mind that you don't live the rest of your life by feelings alone. Think of it: if you didn't go to work because you didn't feel like it, after a day or so, your boss will sit you down and help you learn to not live by your feelings. The same thing goes for spiritual disciplines. You cannot live by your feelings! Learn to do what you should regardless of how you feel. Then let your feelings catch up!
  - √ Ask someone to hold you accountable. Put your pride on the line and admit to someone that you need him/her to ask you weekly how you're doing. I still do this with some accountability partners after all these years of study!

It's important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to apply these practices. For much of my life it's been trial and error, finding out what works best to enable me to get the most out of God's living and active Word.

I have found that some of these practices work better with some parts of the Bible than others. You'll find that, too. The key is to become so familiar with the practices that you can use whatever one works best at the time you need it.

As you apply these practices to your Bible study, I pray fervently that you'll come to

Learn the Word...

Live the Word...

Love the Word.

Oh, how I love your law!  
I meditate on it all day long.  
Psalm 119:97

**Practice: Read the Bible until it speaks to you. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what just spoke to you.**

So often we fly through our Bible reading, wanting to check it off our to-do list, convincing ourselves that we've done our spiritual duty. But at the end of our time alone with God, we don't feel like it's made any difference in our lives. That's why this practice is so critically important. When we read until something in the Word speaks to us, then the Bible begins coming alive to us!

By "reading until it speaks" I mean to simply read until something in you responds to what you are reading. You may read a sentence or a paragraph or an entire chapter before something speaks to you. The key is to be open to His speaking voice through His Word.

Then, once the Lord speaks to you through His Word, take the time to talk to Him about what you've read, just as you would with a best friend - your friend talks a while and then you respond. It's a two-way conversation.

Reading the Bible until it speaks and then talking with God about how He has spoken to you develops **relationship** with Him, just as communicating with any loved one does.

When you read the Word until it speaks:

- Sometimes what you're reading might evoke praise from you. Stop reading and tell Him! "Thank you, Jesus, that you are so faithful and wise. I love you so much today."
- Sometimes what you're reading might confuse you. In those times, stop reading and honestly talk about that confusion to Him. "Lord, I just don't get this passage. I wonder what you are trying to say through it. Would you help me understand it better?" Even this serves to develop greater **relationship** as you communicate with the Lord.
- Sometimes what you're reading will cause you to recognize areas where His cleansing is needed. "Lord, I read your words about peace and realize that I don't have that in my life. I think it's

**Practice: You decide!**

- You've had lots of practice "practicing" the practices for the past few weeks. Some of them will be easier for you than others. Some you'll need to practice over and over before you become comfortable with them. But keep at it! Keep letting the Word of God be living and active in you!
- Now it's up to you to figure out what you want to apply.

**Assignment:**

- Read chapter 21 slowly.
- Take the practices you've learned during this journey and apply whichever ones seem to be most useable for this chapter.

### Practice: Read to gain knowledge.

- Well, you've almost completed an entire book of the Bible! You've read, studied and applied lots of practices that have hopefully helped you make some progress in learning the Word, living the Word, and loving the Word.
- We have four chapters to go in the gospel of John. Chapters 18-20 are all about the arrest, trial and crucifixion of Jesus. This is a great section to read in order to learn.
- But of course, you've learned by now that it's not enough to gain knowledge; you must apply your knowledge in order for it to be life-changing.

### Assignment:

- As you read these chapters (18-20), read them with a prayerful heart and mind so that these won't be just familiar words from a story you've heard hundreds of times. Ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart and mind to hear His still small voice making this fresh to you.
- Take notes, ask questions, pray over it...and learn about your Savior.

Come, my fellow believers, and let us day by day set ourselves at His feet and meditate on this word of His, with an eye fixed on Him alone. Let us set ourselves in quiet trust before Him, waiting to hear His holy voice – the still small voice that is mightier than the storm that [breaks] the rocks..." (Andrew Murray)

because I'm worrying about money or caring more about what people think than what you think. I confess this to you right now and ask you to cleanse me."

- Sometimes what you're reading will make you aware of others who need this scripture. "Lord, I pray these words for my kids. You know they need to see that you are the Bread of Life. Help them get hungry for you."

Read until the Word speaks. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what He has said to you. Sounds simple, I know. But it may very well change your life!

### Assignment:

- Begin with prayer, asking God to help you hear from Him, to focus, and to get something great out of His living Word.
- Read chapter 1 of the Gospel of John, applying this practice. Just read the chapter until it speaks to you. Be watching for:
  - √ Something that captures your attention
  - √ Something that warms your heart
  - √ Something that brings you comfort
  - √ Something that nudges you to change
  - √ Something that I haven't even mentioned!
- If you tend to get distracted as you read, apply this practice by writing down your prayers when you get to a "speaking moment". (Some call this journaling...I don't care what you call it; I just know that it helps me stay focused! It's the main way I "talk" to God when He speaks through His Word. Try it!)

"If you would follow on to know the Lord, come at once to the open Bible expecting it to speak to you."  
A. W. Tozer

**Practice: Ask, “What does this scripture teach me about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”**

- This is a practice that I was taught by one of my college professors. I find it especially helpful when I’m reading a passage that doesn’t seem to lend itself to being as applicable in my life as other scriptures. But once I begin going deeper and finding out how the passage reveals more to me about this marvelous God I serve, then I begin recognizing where I need to let Him change me.
- Let’s take an example from chapter 1 of John, which you’ve already read. I’ll give some examples of how I apply this practice.

<b>What does this teach me about God?</b>	<b>How should I then live?</b>
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Jesus was Creator of all  
(v 3)

I can live with trust  
that such a powerful  
Jesus is strong  
to meet my needs!

Jesus knew about rejection  
(v 10-11)

He is my example in  
times of rejection.

Jesus Christ, full of grace & truth  
(v 14-17)

I need to extend grace  
and truth to others.

Jesus is worthy of absolute honor  
(v 26-27)

Am I giving Him the honor  
He deserves?

Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb for  
the sins of all man-kind (v29)

I live in praise and  
gratitude for that Lamb

- You won’t necessarily use this practice on every verse, but look for sections of scripture that reveal things about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.

**Assignment:**

- Read Chapter 17 of the Gospel of John, getting an overview of what it’s about.
- Trace the chapters backward to find out what was the setting of these words. (You’ll have to trace it back several chapters to chapter 13.) Then go forward to see what’s coming next. How does the setting influence these words? (In other words, how would Jesus feel about these words, considering this setting?)
- For whom are the words in verses 20-23 prayed? Mediate on that for a few minutes. How does it make you feel? Are you living up to that prayer? (Application)
- Did you learn anything in this chapter that you didn’t already know? (Knowledge)

## Practice: Read the scripture in context.

- I've seen a lot of people take a section of scripture that they like and say, "I'm claiming this in the name of Jesus!" When that happens, sometimes I cringe, because the well-meaning people simply aren't reading the scripture in the context (setting) it was spoken and may be applying it incorrectly.
- It's very important that we read all scripture in the context of which it was written/spoken. In other words, when reading a section of scripture, we must ask questions like:
  - √ What came before the words? What comes after the words?
  - √ To whom is the speaker speaking?
  - √ What are the circumstances surrounding this scripture?
- Reading the scriptures in context keeps us true to the original intent and prevents us from making the scriptures say something that was never intended. For instance, read John 15:7. Jesus says, "...ask whatever you wish and it will be given you." Hmmm. That sounds good. I think I'll ask for a new car and a new house and a new husband. (Just kidding about the husband!) But when we read that scripture *in context*, we find that:
  1. He was talking here about letting His words remain in his followers and calling His followers to remain in Him. That implies deep relationship and great connection to Jesus before we can ask.
  2. The context further suggests that He's talking about bearing much fruit for Him.
  3. And finally, it's in the context where He's talking about bringing the Father much glory.
- So, when we read all of that, it causes us to realize that Jesus is asking us to live so close to Him and letting Him be so real in our lives through knowing His Word that we know what kinds of things He wants us to pray about. He's not talking at all about asking for stuff at all!
- So be careful to read what comes before, what comes after, and to whom it was spoken. It helps to even study as much as possible about the culture in which it was spoken.

- Be sure to answer the second part: "How should I live as a result of what I've just read?" That's implementing the first practice: read until the Word speaks and then talk to the Lord about how He just spoke to you.

## Assignment:

- Spend a few minutes in prayer, asking God to give you insight and wisdom as you study His Word. Ask Him to help you learn more about Him through His Word as you read. Getting your heart and mind ready, quiet, and attentive are tremendous keys to hearing from God through His Word.
- Read through chapter 2 of the Gospel of John for an overview of what it's about.
- Now read through it again, concentrating on this practice: Ask what it teaches you about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit and then ask how you should live as a result of that answer.
- I'd suggest you jot down your thoughts as you read. Make a chart like I did, if that helps.
- End your time in prayer, thanking the Lord for what you've learned about Him and asking Him to change you where you're in need of changing.

"Lord, teach me to listen. The times are noisy and my ears are weary with the thousand raucous sounds which continuously assault them." (A. W. Tozer)

## Practice: Meditate on the scriptures.

- To meditate on the scriptures simply means to **think** more deeply about what you've read. It's a practice where most of us are very weak. Me included! We often want to get through the reading for the day...or study as many chapters as we can...or move on to all the activities of our day. To pause and think more deeply seems to be a waste of time to us.
- But one author explains it well when he says that without meditation "the simple reading of the Word of God" can become information that "only passes through our minds, just as water passes through a pipe." (George Mueller) We need the Word to remain deep within us!
- It may be a difficult practice to use, especially when we first begin trying it, but I assure you it can help your understanding of the Word and your love for it! Sure, it takes time, but it will be so worth it! It means you'll get through less scripture, but it will go deeper into your heart and mind.
- When Joshua, Moses' successor, began his leadership of the Jewish nation, God spoke to him and said, "Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it." (Joshua 1:8) Thinking on the Word helps us follow the Word.
- The psalmist said, "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love." A pretty good think to think about!
- David declared, "...and I will mediate on your wondrous works." (Psalm 145:5) Just thinking about – mulling over – God's amazing works in our lives can move us to praise and adoration.
- To meditate, find a word or two or a phrase or two or a paragraph that seem to stand out to you as you read. Then just "dwell" on those words for a few minutes. Think about things like what they might mean in your own life, or why Jesus might have said them. Consider where those words aren't very alive in you yet, etc.

## Assignment: Chapter 16

- Read chapter 16 slowly, once or twice.
- Then go back and read it again, taking notes on what Jesus is teaching about the Holy Spirit. What do you learn about the Holy Spirit here? Make a list of those things.
- You might want to reread chapters 14 and 15 again, looking especially for teachings about the Holy Spirit.
- You'll probably even find some things you don't understand. That's okay – no one has yet understood the Holy Spirit fully, so you're in good company. Just talk to the Lord about those areas you don't understand. Even that develops relationship!
- Don't forget to answer the question: How should I live as a result of what I'm learning? For instance, how should the fact that the Holy Spirit is your counselor affect your life in times of crisis?
- Spend time in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to become more real in your life.

**Practice: Ask: “What does this scripture teach me about God/ Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”**

- The Bible reveals to us who God the Father is. Who God the Son is. Who God the Holy Spirit is. It’s a vitally important reason to study the Bible regularly.
- It’s important what you believe to be true about God. A. W. Tozer says it better than I could, “[T]he most [important] fact about a man is ...what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. We tend by a secret law of the soul to move toward our mental image of God.” That’s why our mental image must be based on the Word of God – not on books, movies, and stories we may have heard.
- When Jesus is getting ready to die on the cross, He begins to prepare His disciples for His death. In the gospel of John, chapters fourteen, fifteen and sixteen, He begins to teach them about the Holy Spirit, the one He is going to send after He dies. Today you’ll get to know more about the Holy Spirit as you study chapter 16.

“When the Holy Spirit comes into our [lives] He does something. He accomplishes something. He is more than a sentiment, a feeling, a fancy. He is an infinite force that... enables us to accomplish all for which we were called as the disciples of Christ.” (A. W. Tozer)

- I don’t think meditating usually follows a clear-cut thought process. Often it comes in short thoughts, a few words, some nudgings from the Holy Spirit.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you as you meditate. Ask Him to open your mind up more deeply to what He is trying to say to you from the scripture.

**Assignment**

- As always, take some time in prayer to get your heart and mind ready to hear from the Lord. If you neglect this part, you may gain some knowledge from the scriptures, but you may not live them out in real life.
- Chapter 3 of the Gospel of John is filled with theological truth! Read it over once or twice to get an overview of what it’s all about.
- Now take a word, a phrase or a verse, and just “dwell” on it for a while. Ask questions about it, think about it, let it wash over you.
- I’d suggest ending your time in the Word with more prayer, thanking the Lord for His amazing Word and for His presence in your life through the Holy Spirit.

May the words of my mouth and the **meditation** of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Psalm 19:14

Blessed is the man... [whose] delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he **meditates** day and night.” Psalm 1:1-2

## A review of the first three practices

- So far we've applied three practices to use in reading the Bible.
  - √ Read the Word until it speaks to you. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what just spoke to you.
  - √ Ask the question, "What does this scripture teach me about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?"
  - √ Meditate on the scriptures.
- I'll admit that it takes more time to read the Bible this way than to quickly run through a chapter in order to check it off our to-do list. But I hope you're finding that you're going deeper in the Word – **and that the Word is going deeper in you!**
- When you're studying the Bible, you won't necessarily use just one practice. You'll eventually find yourself applying several all at once. For instance, as you begin reading the Bible until it speaks to you, you will probably find yourself slowing down, thinking it over – meditating – on it more often. As you develop the discipline of meditating on scripture, you'll probably find yourself noticing how it's speaking to you more often.
- Like any new discipline or habit, all of this takes practice and attention to become adept at it. Don't get discouraged with yourself if it doesn't seem to be working for you yet. You've only just begun! Keep at it for these 21 days...and keep praying that the Lord will give you wisdom, insights, sensitivity and discernment as you study His holy Word.

### Assignment:

- Let's take all three of those first practices and use them as we study chapter 4 of the Gospel of John. It's a chapter full of action, eternal truths, and challenging thoughts.

John 15:1-8 Lord, you are the vine and I am the branch. You prune me so that I will be even more fruitful. That pruning doesn't feel good at the time, but if it's going to help me be more fruitful, I know that it's worth it. You ask me to remain in you and then you promise to remain in me. I want to get better at remaining. I'm not even sure all that remaining involves, but I know you'll be faithful to show me if I'll stay open. If I remain in you and I let you remain in me, you will produce much fruit in me. Wow! That sounds so amazing. Apart from you I can do nothing. That's so true. I know it! Help me remain!

- Strive to be aware of the Holy Spirit directing you in how to pray these scriptures. For instance, maybe you're praying John 15 for others where it talks about loving each other with the same love that Jesus demonstrated. Suddenly, as you're praying, you realize that you are the one who isn't loving sacrificially, because the Holy Spirit has put His finger on your own life. Then you stop and confess your own sinfulness and ask God to love through you the way He wants.
- Praying the scripture gets the Word buried more deeply in your mind and heart. It even will help you remember where the verses were found!

### Assignment:

- Look back over the chapters of John that you've already studied and find one that you would like to pray for yourself. Maybe an area where you're not living in obedience, or an area that needs more transformation.
- Look back over the chapters of John that you've already studied and find one that you would like to pray for others. Your family or your church or co-workers, etc.
- I'd encourage you to make a commitment to begin using this practice in your study/praying once a week (at least) for a while so that you can become more comfortable with it.

## Practice: Pray the scriptures.

- Do you ever feel like you're praying "the same old words" again and again? Do you ever wish you could pray with greater assurance that you're praying God's will? If so, then praying the scripture just might help you!
- There is no right or wrong way to pray the scriptures. It's simply taking the words of the Bible and 1) putting them in your own words or 2) taking them word for word and praying them back to God. I'll give you a few examples to get you started.
- Praying the scripture for others in your own words:

Based on John chapter 10: Lord, I am so grateful that you are the good shepherd of our people at Heritage - the shepherd that laid down his life for us, the wandering sheep who desperately needed a savior even before we knew it. You say that the sheep will know the shepherd's voice – that they will listen to your voice. Oh, Lord, I pray that your people will get better and better at listening to your voice and at knowing it. I know that this happens best as they spend time in your Word, learning who you are and how you want them to live. So, I pray that you'll help them to be committed to your Word

- Praying the scripture for yourself in your own words:

John 14:1-4 *Do not let your hearts be troubled.* Lord, why am I letting my heart be troubled? Because I get focused on my will, my way, instead of yours. But today I'm giving my life/my day to you and asking that you'll help me be so centered on you that my heart is at rest in you. *Trust in God...trust in me.* That's the key, isn't it, Lord? To simply put my trust in you today. To trust you with my life, my kids, my worries and anxieties. Fill my heart with the ability to trust as I stay focused on you.

- Praying the scriptures word for word. (John 15:4) Lord, I will remain in you and allow you to remain in me. I know that no branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can I bear fruit unless you remain in me. So, today, I will remain in you and know that you will produce fruit in me.

- Spend a few minutes in prayer, opening your mind and heart to the Holy Spirit.
- Since this is a chapter clearly telling two different stories, read each of the stories separately as you apply the three practices to each section.
- If you're very unfamiliar with the customs of the time of Jesus, the story of the Samaritan woman may bring up questions in your mind. Don't get bogged down with the things you don't understand. Just jot down those questions and thoughts and pursue the answers – but don't let your questions prevent you from getting something out of the stories.
- Read the chapter until something seems to speak to your heart or mind. Pause and talk to the Lord about that, as if He were sitting right there with you as you read. (The truth is even better: He is inside you through the presence of the Holy Spirit, if you're a Christian!)
- Read the chapter again for any places that you learn something about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It may not necessarily be a brand-new concept – just one that is true about them. Then ask the Lord, "How should that truth affect my life?"
- Then meditate on something that stands out to you. Let me give you two examples of places great for meditation:

Verses 13-14: *a spring of water* - "Lord, am I experiencing that reveal your truths to me. I'll listen."

Verse 34: *My food is to do the will of Him who sent me* – "Lord, you use the idea of "food" here. How does doing God's will satisfy? Is doing your will satisfying my soul? Why not?"

**Practice: Read the Word for application, not information alone.**

- It's so easy to read the Word, to check it off our list, and to think that we've "done our duty" as Christ-followers. But God's intent is that we take His powerful, holy Word and let it change us.
- For it to change us, we must look for places that it can apply to our lives. Places where we aren't yet living out what we're reading. You've probably been doing this during the study, but let's look at it specifically.
- To put this practice into action we have to be very open to the Holy Spirit. We have to give Him permission to convict us where we aren't currently living out His Word.
- For example, look at John 3:20. This verse would be easy for a Christ-follower to skim over and ignore. But when I'm looking to really apply God's Word to my life and let it transform me, I can pause on this scripture, do some meditating on it, and then pray,

"Lord, I wonder where in my own life I'm not willing to let your light expose my deeds? I wonder where I live in denial because I hate to admit how wrong I've been. This verse reminds me that if I'm living like this, I love the darkness and hate the light. As I read these words, you remind me how critical I felt recently of my co-worker. I tried to hide it and pretend that it wasn't there (accepting the darkness) instead of letting you bring it to the surface (the light) so that you could forgive me of it and cleanse me of this sin. So, Lord, right now I confess the darkness of my heart and ask you to forgive me and cleanse me. And then replace that darkness with the light of your love toward her. Thank you for being my light."

- I hope you see how valuable this practice could be in your life. Most Christians already know much more than they are currently living. Reading for application, not just for information, will change your life and make the Word come alive.

- Some scriptures are more conducive for this practice than others. For instance, if I'm reading John 5:44, "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?", it's fairly easy to recognize that I need God to transform me from being a people pleaser into a God-pleaser. I can immediately stop and pray and ask Him to cleanse my heart from caring more about what you think of me than what He thinks. But others are more difficult to do unless we take some good time thinking about it (meditating). That's why I'm going to give you an assignment where it's fairly easy to see where personal transformation is called for (John 15:9-17 and John 13:20-32) and one that is a little more difficult (John 12 where Mary washes Jesus' feet.)
- Keep an eager mind open to those scriptures that the Holy Spirit can use in your life to transform you...until you find yourself more and more looking like your Savior!

**Assignment:**

- Read John 15:9-17, asking the Lord to show you areas of your life that need transformation. Write down some thoughts that He seems to be giving you.
- Read John 13:1-11 and ask the Lord where your own heart needs to be transformed. (Think about Mary's extravagant love; is your love for Jesus extravagant? If not, what keeps it from being more so? Where do you need Him to transform your love? How could you show that love?)
- Read John 13:20-32, especially praying over verses 23-26. Some amazing words. To live them out requires needing some pretty significant transformation!
- You may need to spend some time on your knees after studying these scriptures and holding your life up beside the scriptures! That's a good thing!

## Practice: Read for transformation.

- Scripture is clear that God wants to transform His people to make them look more like Himself. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29, 1 John 2:6 are just a few that teach this truth. (I'd encourage you to read those verses today.) One of the main ways God transforms His people is by using the Bible, if only we'll be open to this practice while we're reading it.
- One of my professors says, "Scripture is one of the Holy Spirit's primary tools – if not the primary tool – for renovation of character and development of Christian conscience." (David Thompson) Maybe that's one reason the devil fights so hard against the believer spending much time in the scriptures!
- God transforms our minds as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We begin finding ourselves thinking His thoughts more and more; it's because we've been in the Word and it's reshaping how we think about things.
- He transforms our hearts as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. For example, we may notice that we have more compassion for others as we read about His own compassion for people and as we open our lives to that compassion.
- He transforms our words as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We may read about the tongue and the power of our words and begin to ask Him to change the words we say to be more Christlike.
- He transforms our loves as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We begin to love the things He loves and care less about the things of this world that are so temporary.
- And on and on it goes. The Lord uses His Word to transform our lives. That's such a key reason to spend time in the Word on a regular basis. And that's why we need to ask its Author to transform us as we read the words.

## Assignment:

- We're on chapter 5 today and it's a little harder to do this practice because the chapter has so much narrative. But I decided to have you try it anyway. Read especially the words of Jesus and see if you can find one or two places where you need to apply His Word.
- Read the chapter through once to get an overview of what it's about.
- In looking to apply this chapter to your life, here are some places I notice that are very convicting:

Verses 6-7 – Jesus asked the man if he wanted to get well, but the man didn't answer the question. Why do I sometimes not answer Jesus' questions to me? Am I hiding? Am I confused? Am I running? Are there any of those places in my life right now?

Verse 14 – Jesus told the man to stop sinning or something worse could happen. Do I believe that I need to actually stop sinning? Why or why not? How does my answer affect my life?

Verse 24 – Have I crossed over from death to life by believing Jesus?

Verses 41- 44 – Where do I look for my praise: from God or from people? What causes me to be such a people-pleaser? How would God feel about my answer?

- I hope you're getting the idea of reading for transformation, not information alone. It will really help you "grow up in your salvation." (1 Peter 2:2)

**Practice: Look for repetitions to find what is important to God – and should be important to you.**

- When I really, really, really want my husband to remember something – or to get something done - I'm prone to repeat it more than once. I guess I do this in order to really, really get his attention and make him know that this is important to me.
- I think God does the same thing. In many chapters he will use a word or phrase more than once. It's like He's saying, "Hey, Christian, notice this! It's very, very, very important for you to know, to learn, to live, to care about."
- Some chapters bear this out more than others. For instance, if you read Psalm 119 today, you'll find that God's Word or some word that's equivalent to it, is used over and over and over. (Am I making my point?) God, through the psalmist, is emphasizing truths about His Word.
- Whenever you find repetitions, make sure you make note of them. I try to circle them or write them down in my study notebook.
- Then begin asking, "Why, Lord"? Why is this word or phrase so important? What are you trying to say to me? What do you want to teach me as you use this over and over?
- At that point, you're actually using some meditating (!) You're mulling over that repeated word or phrase in your mind. You're actually developing relationship (!) as you're talking about the Word with the Author. And you're trying to apply the Word (!) to your life. You're getting it!

**Assignment:**

- Take chapter 14 and see how many of the above practices you can use as you study it.
- In my Bible I have this chapter marked up all over. I've read it over and over through the years so that I notice even the little word "in" has significance in this chapter. As I meditate on that little word, I pray, "Lord, am I aware on a constant basis that you are 'in' me? How should that truth affect my life today?"
- You could take one of many verses in this chapter and spend lots of time dwelling on it.

"Get alone with God and His Word every day. I recommend that you turn off the radio and the television and let your soul delight in the fellowship and the mercies of God." (A. W. Tozer)

## Review of some practices:

**Practice:** Read for any commands to obey or any principles to apply

**Practice:** Read for relationship.

**Practice:** Look for repetition.

**Practice:** Meditate on the Word

- Let's take today's chapter and apply several practices to it so that we can review them and get better at using them in times of study.
- The practice of looking for commands to obey or principles to follow will help you be a "doer of the Word" and not just a "hearer" (James 1:22). It's so easy to know more than we're living – but we need to close that gap as much as possible.
- The practice of reading for relationship means we view the Bible as God's love letter to us and so we read it partly to get to know Him better. As we know Him better, the possibility of developing relationship with Him grows. The more time we spend in the Word and in prayer, the greater potential there is for deeper relationship.
- The practice of looking for repetition allows us to find places in the Word where God wants us to notice truths that are emphasized. It's so easy to not even notice the use of repetition, but when you begin training yourself to notice it, you will find more depth in your study.
- The practice of meditating on the scriptures allows us to let God's truths go deep in our minds and hearts. It's not an easy practice to assimilate into our lives because our culture doesn't teach it or model it. But as you train yourself to meditate on scriptures, you'll find the scriptures going deeper in you!

Meditating is simply talking to ourselves about the scriptures, turning their meanings over in our minds, thinking about the implications of the words we're reading. (Jerry Bridges' thoughts.)

## Assignment:

- I hope that by now you're getting in the habit of praying before you start studying God's Word. It's such an important part of study – but one that is easy to neglect, especially if we're short on time. But don't neglect it! It will be worth your investment of time!
- Read chapter 6 of the Gospel of John to get an overview.
- Now study verses 25 to 69 and look for repetition in words or phrases. Make a list of them and then ask, "**Lord, why is this important to you and why should it be important to me?**"
- I'll start you off with a couple. I notice that these words are repeated:
  - √ believe (especially note the "believe **in**".)
  - √ bread
- What does the Holy Spirit seem to be saying to you about these words that are repeated?

Very few of us know the secret of bathing our souls in silence. It was a secret our Lord Jesus Christ knew very well...We never really come to know ourselves because we cannot keep quiet long enough. (A. W. Tozer)

### Practice: Read for greater knowledge.

- Okay, I've stressed application and told you that God longs for you to apply what you know so that you won't be increasingly knowing more than you live. I really believe that's important in our culture that has so many books and learning tools.
- Having said that, I do understand that you have to know something in order to allow God to use it in your life to transform you. So, we do have to learn! I'm just against learning for learning's sake, which I think causes us to get puffed up with pride (I Corinthians 8:1), but doesn't result in more Christlike living.
- To read for greater knowledge, take the scriptures, maybe even the scriptures that you've known for a long time, and go deeper in them, asking God to teach you. You may find things we've never noticed before. Or perhaps as you read some study notes on the scripture, you learn something about the culture of the time and how that helps you understand why God had the writers write what they did.
- I had a friend once who said, "I've read the Bible through several times and I've studied it a lot. I think I know it quite well. I don't need to spend much more time in it." Wow! I was amazed because my friend – as smart as he was – sounded unaware of the fact that this Bible is spoken from GOD – who is so vastly, infinitely, unbelievably far beyond my friend's intellect could ever be. His problem was spiritual pride. You can never learn all there is to know from the Bible!
- So, ask God to help you learn more from His Word!

### Assignment:

- Read chapter 13 of the Gospel of John, keeping an eye open and a heart and mind sensitive to the leading of the Spirit as you read it for places where Jesus would like to call you to greater obedience. The first time through, make a few notes when those ideas come from your reading.
- Now read the chapter again, more slowly, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal places where He wants you to walk in greater obedience. For instance, read verses 14-17 carefully, asking what those commands mean for your own life. Obviously we don't live in a culture that washes one another's feet regularly because we don't walk on dirty roads with sandals! – but where would Jesus want you to show greater servanthood than you currently are doing? And how should you do that? What would be the equivalent of washing someone's feet for you?
- Once you find one or two places where obedience is called for, take time to pray. Maybe you need to spend time in repentance, or time in surrender, or time in seeking God to give you greater strength in that area.

**Practice: Read for any commands to obey, any principles to apply.**

- How many times have you been listening to a sermon and realized that the Holy Spirit was nudging you to obey in a particular area – but you just sloughed it off and pretended you didn't hear Him? That's so easy to do – and a little scary, when you think about it, because Jesus was very clear that to love Him was to obey Him.
- Spending time in the Bible every day, with open and receptive hearts and minds, keeps us more sensitive to the nudging of the Holy Spirit, and better helps us live lives of loving obedience.
- When you read the scriptures, constantly keep an open mind to places where the Spirit is saying, "This is for you. You need to obey me here." As you seek to really hear from God through His Word, you will increasingly find places where He's calling you to obey His Word.
- When that happens, stop and have a conversation with Him. (I usually do this through writing my thoughts on paper, since that helps me stay focused.) If you struggle with obeying, talk to Him about that. If you wonder how in the world you could obey Him in a revealed area, share that with Him in honesty and ask for strength to obey. Just have a conversation with Him.
- This will lead to greater relationship with your Savior and Lord, which is one of God's goals for you as you study His Word.

**Assignment:**

- Read chapter 7 of the Gospel of John slowly, writing down:
  - √ Anything you never noticed before
  - √ Anything you wonder what it means
  - √ Anything you gain new perspective on
  - √ Anything you should know about but don't.
- If you have a study Bible, read the notes on this chapter and try to find two things that help you understand what the chapter is all about. For instance:
  - √ What was the Feast of Tabernacles? Why might it have been a significant or symbolic time for Jesus?
  - √ Why do you think Jesus would compare the Holy Spirit to living water?
  - √ Verse 50 shows a man standing up for Jesus. Where did you learn about him before? When he came to Jesus before, what part of the day did he come to see Him? What's significant about that compared to this situation?
- If you don't have a study Bible, you can find some helps on-line. You have to be carefully, however, because not every source is reliable. One good source is [BibleGateway.com](http://BibleGateway.com)
- What do all of these things you've just learned teach you about God? And how should you live as a result of what you've just learned?

## Review:

- I really, really want you to learn these practices and get better and better and using them as you study. (Notice I'm using repetition because I want you to get this!
- So, rather than adding another new practice today, I think it's time go back and review those practices you've been learning so far and implement them in the study of today's chapter.
  - √ Practice: Read the Word until it speaks to you. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what He has spoken.
  - √ Practice: Ask the question, "What does this scripture teach me about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?"
  - √ Practice: Meditate on the scriptures
  - √ Practice: Read the Word for application, not information alone.
  - √ Practice: Look for repetitions to find what is important to God – and should be important to you.
  - √ Practice: Read for greater knowledge.

## Assignment:

- Take a few minutes and talk to the Lord about each of these practices. Just have a conversation with Him about which ones are meaningful to you and which aren't yet. Spend a little time in praise to Him for His holy Word and for how He is touching your life through it. Give Him time to speak into your heart and mind about how He would like to continue to teach you. If you're struggling with time in the Word, or getting something meaningful out of it, talk to Him about those feelings. All along, this continues to build relationship between you and the Author of this amazing book!

## Assignment:

- You might want to read chapter 12 through one time, noting things that seem to stand out to you. It's great to get an overview of a chapter.
- Now take the chapter in sections, reading until the Spirit speaks to you. Then stop and talk to Him about that.
- For instance, as I read the story of Mary washing Jesus' feet with her hair, I'm touched by the depth of love she had for Him and it causes me to pause and pray about my own love for Him. I feel conviction as I read this beautiful story of overflowing love.
- Verses 23-26 is a great section to spend some extended time studying, meditating on, asking God for ability to live them out.

**Practice: Read the Bible until it speaks to you. Then stop and talk to the Lord about what spoke to you.**

- Well, you've been at this for a while now. Hopefully you're finding more consistency in the Word and developing more relationship with the Author!
- Never forget that the Lord wants to speak to you from His Word! I love A. W. Tozer's words that remind me of that truth: "I think a new world will arise out of the religious mists when we approach our Bible with the idea that it is not only a book which was once spoken, but a book which is *now speaking*."
- Another quote that challenges and motivates me is this one: "I ask with all my strength what God is trying to say to us through the Bible...Since I have learned to read the Bible this way...it becomes more marvelous to me every day." (Pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer)
- So, today, as you open the holy scriptures, ask with all your heart what the Lord is trying to say to you and expect Him to speak.

- Today study chapter 8 of the Gospel of John. It's a little long, so if you get distracted easily or lose focus quickly, take it in sections, according to the divisions that are put in our Bibles.
- Take the chapter section by section, implementing the practices. Write down your thoughts so that you stay focused.

Retire from the world each day to some private spot...Stay in the secret place till the surrounding noises begin to fade out of your heart and a sense of God's presence envelops you. Deliberately tune out the unpleasant sounds...Listen for the inward Voice till you learn to recognize it. (A. W. Tozer)

**Practice: Ask: “What does this scripture teach me about God/ Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”**

- You’ve already looked at this practice in chapters one and two. Now it’s time to “practice the practice” again so that you become more familiar with it.
- I find that it’s always easier to get more out of the Word if I read it slowly and deliberately. I sometimes even read it out loud if I’m having a hard time getting something from it – or if I’m getting sleepy. I try to picture what the setting was when the scripture was written. I try to imagine myself in the crowd, or one of the disciples, or another person in the story. I’m always trying to let the words come alive in my heart and mind.
- The second part of this practice is so vitally important. It’s not enough to recognize what the scriptures teach me about the Lord; I then must give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to teach me how those words can make a difference in my life.
- For instance, it’s a great truth to recognize that Jesus is the Bread of Life. (John chapter 6) But what difference does that truth make in my life? LOTS! When I take time to meditate on that truth, I begin asking myself questions like
  - √ Why would Jesus call Himself the Bread of Life?
  - √ What is there about bread that a person needs?
  - √ How often does a person need to eat?
  - √ Am I feeding on the Bread of Life?
  - √ Am I getting fed by others “bread” of this world that doesn’t satisfy?
  - √ Do I tend to treat Him as bread or as dessert, a nice extra?
- Eventually I begin to recognize some things about me. I need to feed on my Bread of Life daily. I need to understand that He IS my life, not just a nice little extra. As I reflect and pray, I come to be in awe of my Bread of Life, and praise begins to flow for all He is in and through me.

**Assignment:**

- Read chapter 11 of the Gospel of John, verses 1 – 44. Make your chart like the one above, trying to find two or three other insights/truths about God/Jesus.
- After you’ve come up with a few of those, take some time to meditate on one of them where you seem to be pretty weak. Talk to the Lord about that one and ask Him where He needs to change you. For instance, I might take the one above and tell the Lord how sorry I am that I haven’t trusted Him more and then ask for greater ability to trust Him when I can’t see Him clearly in my circumstances.
- If you tend to get sleepy or easily distracted as you do this praying, I’d encourage you to try journaling your thoughts out. I use this discipline most days because I do get distracted so easily. Journaling is simply writing out your thoughts to the Lord. I think of it as talking to Him as if He were right there – but writing it instead of speaking it.
- Then I’d suggest you read the rest of this chapter for information, learning more about the events that are leading up to the arrest and crucifixion of Jesus.

Nearly all the great examples of faith and victorious grace which we find in the Scriptures came out of situations of extremity and distress. God loves hard places, and faith is usually born of danger and extremity. (A. W. Tozer)

**Practice: Ask, “What does this teach me about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit - and how should I live as a result of that?”**

- We’ve worked at implementing this practice two other times. Now we’ll try it one more time. It’s such a great way to study the Bible because it teaches us about our God, but it also makes the Bible come alive in practical ways.
- We’ll look at chapter 11 which is filled with truths about the Lord and truths that are so relevant to our lives.
- I’ll get you started at applying this practice; then you can take it from there!

**The story of Mary and Martha’s pain**

**What does this teach me about God? How should I live as a result of that?**

It looked like Jesus didn’t care; he stayed away when Lazarus died.

I can know that He cares, even when circumstances appear otherwise.

Both M & M thought he didn’t care.

I can trust Him in those times when it looks like He doesn’t know or care about my life.

- Then I might begin to pray for others to “find the Bread”. I turn to interceding for others who are still feeding on all kinds of other foods that are leaving them unsatisfied.

**Assignment: Chapter 9**

- I’ll admit that this chapter is a little more difficult to get tons of application out of it. So, spend some time in prayer and then read it over a couple of times. (It’s pretty short.) Then see if you can put find places to apply this principle.
- In this chapter Jesus calls Himself “The light of the world”. You may realize that this is only one of several other times He says, “I am...” Try looking back over the past chapters and see if you can find the other ones. Then take some time to meditate on them and ask those truths about Jesus should affect your own life.

You do not need to seek Him here or there. He is no further off than the door of your heart. There He stands lingering, waiting for whoever is ready to open and let Him in. You do not need to call to Him in the distance. He is waiting much more impatiently than you, for you to open to Him. He is longing for you a thousand times more urgently than you are for Him. It is instantaneous: the opening and the entering. (A. W. Tozer)

## Practice: Read for relationship.

- I don't know if I can explain this one well enough. I really believe that as I read the Word, seeking God through it, He and I develop a deeper relationship. I've found over a life-time of studying the Word that time in His Word has the powerful potential of resulting in deep intimacy with the Author.
- Read carefully what A. W. Tozer once wrote, "...The presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself waiting for His redeemed children to push in to conscious awareness of His presence." In other words, God is longing for relationship with you, to make Himself known and real in your life. Spending quality time with Him in prayer and the Bible are two practices that help you develop a love relationship.
- When you read your Bible like a love letter from the One who loves you passionately, who wants relationship with you, it changes your perspective in some ways. In fact, when you really begin getting this, you'll have times when you just can't wait to open your love letter from your Lover! (Not all the time, but sometimes – and more and more often!)

"I want to **know** Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in His suffering, becoming like Him in His death..."

The Apostle Paul

## Assignment:

- Take a few minutes to talk to the Lord and ask Him for a greater ability to think of His Word as a love letter to you. Don't neglect this part, okay? Don't rush past this part in order to get to the rest of the assignment. Just seek Him for a few minutes and ask for a greater ability to view your Bible as your Savior's love letter to you.
- There are two chapters in the Gospel of John that especially make me recognize this desire He has to have this relationship with us. One is chapter 15, which we'll look at later. The other is chapter 10. Read it over once for an overview, slowly, picturing Jesus talking to you, using these words. (We're not a farming culture, I know, but open yourself up to the concept of Jesus being your shepherd.)
- Now take a few minutes and meditate on some of the main words and thoughts in this chapter: "shepherd, saved, I know my sheep, my sheep know me, they listen to me", and others that stand out to you. What thoughts come to mind? (Write them down for greater focus.)
- Think about the concept of relationship as you think of Jesus' words in this chapter. What kind of relationship does He want with you? What can you do to facilitate that?

"The Bible assumes as a self-evident fact that men can know God with at least the same degree of immediacy as they know any other person or thing that comes within the field of their experience." (A.W. Tozer)