

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

“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.

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 Bonheoffer’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 Bonheoffer)

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.

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

Day 8 - 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!
- 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)

Day 9 - 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.

- 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.
- I hope this helps you see how you can use this practice to more effectively look at the scriptures and let them come alive in you!

Assignment:

- Read chapter 9 for an overview of what it’s about. 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 ask the Lord for wisdom and guidance. (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)

Day 10 - 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, "...[T]he 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)

Day 11 - 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 about God?

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

Both M & M thought he didn’t care.

How should I live as a result of that answer?

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

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

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)

Day 12 - 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.

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.

Day 13 - 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 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.

Day 14 - 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:

- 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.

[G]et 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)