

Toward a More Biblical Approach to Bible Study

For Our Sunday School...

Fully knowing an infinite God is impossible,
but we will strive to as he is worth the effort.

May this book help us to experience, know, and enjoy God—
so we can make him known with our words and works.

Toward a More Biblical Approach to Bible Study

A Bible Study Process for Our Sunday School

O U R
SUNDAY
SCHOOL

OurSundaySchool.com

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Preface

About Our Sunday School

Our Sunday School is a Sunday school class at Stuart Heights Baptist Church in Hixson, Tennessee. We meet weekly (dv¹), and we would love for you to visit.

Our purpose is to experience, know, and enjoy God—so we can make him known with our words and works.

We take this seriously. It is our entire purpose, so everything we do is wrapped around this central tenet.

¹ “dv” is the abbreviation for the Latin phrase *deo volente*—which means, “God willing.” It is here because our plans are always subject to God’s will.

We focus on three basic practices:

- We study the Bible (engaging our heads with a substantive interaction with truth). This is orthodoxy.
- We pray for others (engaging our hearts with meaningful connections with believers). This is orthopathy.
- We serve others (engaging our hands with ministry training). This is orthopraxy.

About This Book

This book is about the first of those three ways we fulfill our purpose: studying the Bible. The Bible study process we follow in Our Sunday School is simple. We pray with others, hear with others, think with others, study with others, share with others, and invite others.

The first section of the book lays out the basis and rationale for the process.² The second section details attitudes and actions for each process step and concludes with summary statements, homework, and recommended resources. The third section provides space to practice. The appendix contains a one-page summary—a page we review in Our Sunday School prior to studying any Bible chapter.

This work is the first in a planned larger series of Our Sunday School resources studying each book of the New Testament. All resources are available at OurSundaySchool.com.

² Riffing off Seth Godin, you might think of this first section as theological throat clearing.

This book is primarily for members of Our Sunday School and Stuart Heights Baptist Church. But if you find it outside of these, then I pray it helps you too.

About Bible Study

Bible study can be overwhelming at first, but our Lord Jesus Christ tells us in **Mark 12:30** to **Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.**

While God is worthy of all our efforts in all these areas, in Our Sunday School, we emphasize the “all your mind” aspect.

There are many excellent resources on Bible study, and I recommend the following. I suggest you purchase these and engage with them. Each brings a different perspective and focus.

- *Christian Standard Bible®*
- Jen Wilkin, *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts and Our Minds*
- Jeffrey Arthurs, *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture: The Transforming Power of the Well-Spoken Word*
- Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks, *Living by the Book*
- Daniel L. Akin, *Building a Theological Library*
- Kay Arthur, David Arthur, and Pete De Lacy, *How to Study Your Bible*
- Mark M. Yarbrough, *How to Read the Bible like a Seminary Professor*

The title of this little book is *Toward a More Biblical Approach to Bible Study*. This book is not the definitive statement on Bible study. It is merely what we have learned so far.

I claim no infallibility relative to any material presented here. These materials are simply, as many have said before, one beggar showing other beggars where to find bread.

Any theology expressed here should not be construed as representing the theology of Stuart Heights Baptist Church (especially when I am wrong, being an idiot,³ or need help).

As errors are found, please let me know so I can correct them. Feel free to contact me at jim314@yahoo.com with edits, questions, or feedback.

To paraphrase a tweet from CityAlight, I pray this book might join the many thousands of books written throughout history to encourage the church and, when it has played its part, make way for the next.

Grace to you and peace,

Jim Fleming
Hixson, Tennessee
November 2022

³ Thanks to Jared C. Wilson for the helpful phraseology.

Part One:

Our Preparation

1. Introduction and Overview

Introduction

I am a teacher.

Teaching is in my blood. My grandmother taught third grade. My father was in education for more than 40 years. My mother spent time as a teacher. My wife has a degree in education.

When I turned 16, my pastor told me it was time for me to start teaching in our church. So, I began teaching 9- to 12-year-olds in junior church.

I had no clue what I was doing. But I had seen my dad teach, and I had seen my pastor preach—so I did what they did. I mimicked

my dad's approach, and I took my pastor's sermons and retaught them. It was... fine.

I found the more I taught, the more those kids asked questions. There were so many questions every single lesson.

Some of the questions I thought I knew how to answer and some of the questions I knew I did not know how to answer. Many times, I did not even know the answer. Sometimes I would hear a question I had never considered. So, I did what new teachers usually do—I answered the best I could. It was a pedagogical version of **Judges 17:6**.⁴

What never crossed my mind was that the Bible might have direction on how to study the Bible.

Over the past 30 years of teaching, I have been taught some of this direction and that is what the book you are reading is designed to do: walk you through what the Bible says about *how* to study the Bible.

Now, if you are not sure about Christianity, this is not the book for you (yet). I recommend reading through the **Gospel of Mark** and getting acquainted with our Lord Jesus Christ. Then email me and we can talk about what you read.

But if you are a Christian (meaning you have repented of your sin and placed your faith in the person and finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ), you likely have a desire to move toward a *more* Biblical approach when engaging in Bible study.

⁴ **Judges 17:6: In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him.**

I know I do. And while I take **James 3:1**⁵ seriously, this is not a book primarily for teachers leading Bible studies. It is a book for believers who want to know more about what the Bible says about studying the Bible.

But before you go far into this book, please recognize the onus is on each believer to obey individually and collectively what the Bible says about Bible study. Only eating pre-packaged food is easy, but it is not healthy. Only consuming others' finished Bible studies is also easy, but it too is not healthy. There is joy to be had learning about God, so do not outsource your Bible study.

Overview

I am a process guy.

I love a good process. Over the years I have developed a process for teaching the Bible. It has changed significantly since I was 16, and it will likely continue to change—but it is more Bible informed now than it was 30 years ago.

This Bible-informed approach includes praying with others, hearing with others, thinking with others, studying with others, sharing with others, and, finally, inviting others.

This is not a definitive list, and while the order is not prescribed by the Bible, I have tried to summarize the Bible's teachings and arrange them in a logical sequence.

⁵ **James 3:1: Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know you will receive a stricter judgment.**

There is no single passage that models or walks us through all these steps, instead we must look across the entire Bible, because if God has **given us everything required for life and godliness**,⁶ the Bible will certainly tell us how to use the Bible.

This book is not designed to be read straight through. This book is better with practice. You will want to read a bit, put it down, practice, and then pick it back up again.

This is not a book that is going to explain a Bible text, but rather one that is going to show you a process to use on *any* Bible text.

Think about the last time you had your hair cut. Hopefully, it was a good experience. If it was, it was likely due to practice on the part of the person doing the cutting. Learning how to do hair is not something you read in a book and then become an expert. It is something practiced and improved upon over time.⁷

The same goes for Bible study. Mustering my inner Allen Iverson, "We talkin' about practice." And lots of it.

Let's start by looking at some assumptions.

⁶ **2 Peter 1:3: His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.**

⁷ Thanks to John Thomas for the analogy.

2. Our Assumptions

I am a mathematician.

My favorite class in high school was Geometry, and Mrs. Rittenberry (my favorite teacher) was abundantly clear when teaching us how to lay out a proper geometric proof: "Never hide your assumptions."

She taught us how to state what we assumed to be true right up front so everyone could follow our logic.

The same holds true for Biblical assumptions.

The following assumptions form the basis for our Bible-informed process, so even though they are simple, do not skip them. These Bible study beliefs I hold need to be clearly stated.

Christians talk about the Bible

Some do it well—with faithful consistency. Some do it poorly—like me at 16 with little direction.

My desire is to see Christians talk about the Bible in ways that are consistent with what the Bible describes.

A Christian who does not talk about the Bible is incongruous with the Christians described in the Bible. Repentance and faith produce a change in a person—an internal change that results in a focus on God and his word.

What we say when we talk about the Bible comes from what we have studied about the Bible. Some Bible studies are informal—with kids, family members, coworkers, and/or friends. They can be quick, simple, and over before we know they started.⁸

Some Bible studies are formal—in church settings like Sunday schools, small groups, or worship services. These talks can be prepared for, be studied, and take an hour or more to complete.

But Christians talk about the Bible.

Christians do not always follow a Bible-informed process (when talking about the Bible)

Have you ever wanted to go back and redo a conversation you have had about the Bible? I have. In fact, I feel this way about 95 percent of the time when talking about the Bible.

⁸ I am using the term *Bible study* broadly. Any time Christians talk about the Bible for the purpose of life or godliness, I am going to call that a Bible study (because what Christians study should be the basis for what Christians say).

None of us get conversations about the Bible right all the time. Sometimes we do not listen, sometimes we move too quickly, sometimes we say things that are not true, sometimes we agree with something we know is not correct, and sometimes we just make things up.

If the Bible provides us with direction on how to study the Bible, then we should know and use that direction.

Odds are, you are using some of these directions already. I do not believe they are complicated, but they are critical. Skipping any one of them has its own issues and we will explore some of that later.

So, most of this book will be focused on these directions, how to practice them, and some tips for using them.

Christians can do better

It seems like the whole world is angry. And angry people do not communicate well. Meaning is lost, tempers flare, and relationships are broken. Unfortunately, Christians are not immune.

The message of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ deserves our best words, intentions, and approaches.⁹ Our best will not happen on accident, and it certainly will not happen if we are not aware of what we are doing.

⁹ My friend Bill Brandenburg says it this way: "As His ambassadors, we need to be consistent with the mission, methods, and character of the King."

If we believe **2 Peter 1:3** really means *everything*,¹⁰ then we should turn to God for the *how* as well as for the *what*.

The *what* is something many of us agree on: facts like the Bible is true, its message can be known, and that it is all about our Lord Jesus Christ.

The *how* does not get as much attention. The *how* is usually an afterthought. This book is about the *how*—because this message is so important that the *how* cannot be left to chance.

So, let's spend some time on the *how*—specifically the objectives we should have in mind when we study the Bible.

¹⁰ **2 Peter 1:3: His divine power has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.**

3. Our Objectives

I am a project manager.

I have managed small projects, large projects, successful projects, and a few duds.

In project management, clearly defined objectives can be critical to the success of a project.

Outside of project management, however, we rarely outline objectives for everything we do. We usually just outline objectives for things that are important.

Since Bible study is important, it should not surprise us that the Bible gives us direction here as well.

Be prepared

If our Lord Jesus Christ tarries, most of us will live to see old age. In **Titus 2:1-5**, Paul writes to Titus and tells Titus the objectives for older men and for older women (define “older” however you would like to define it).

Titus 2:1-5: But you are to proclaim things consistent with sound teaching. Older men are to be self-controlled, worthy of respect, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance. In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered.

This text tells us part of what our end-of-life goals are. And if there are future objectives for us to meet, then one of our objectives from God is to be prepared for them.

The beautiful thing is God gives us the expectations for the last part of our lives at the beginning of our lives. What a beautiful gift from a kind and loving Creator!

But these expectations are an even more beautiful gift if we recognize them, open them, and work toward meeting them. We must prepare now to meet God’s objectives of us in old age. What we do now will impact our future spiritual selves.

What we do now also impacts those around us, including when we study the Bible. We can be prepared or not—it is up to us.

Be faithful

1 Corinthians 4:1-2: A person should think of us in this way: as servants of Christ and managers of the mysteries of God. In this regard, it is required that managers be found faithful.

Paul wanted to be regarded as a servant of our Lord Jesus Christ and as a manager¹¹ of the mysteries of God.

Take a moment to recognize that we will not figure God out. There are mysteries—and that is ok. Mysteries are good for us—they remind us we are not God and of the beautiful complexities of our God.

In my church, we often hear a call to be faithful in our time, talents, and treasures.¹² This can be a helpful reminder. I will add another item to that alliterated list: truth. We are to be found faithful in our stewardship of God's truth: the Bible.

We have been given the greatest text in history, and we are responsible for what we do with it, how we talk about it, how we present it, and how we obey or disobey it.

The world is watching what we do with the Bible.

This is a lofty expectation as we have more Biblical resources and more access to those resources than at any other time.

What should we do with what we have?

We should be faithful.

¹¹ Most other translations use steward, but both words get at the idea of responsibilities without ownership.

¹² Darrell Davenport, you have now been cited in a book.

Be engaging

Mark 12:28-30: One of the scribes approached. When he heard them debating and saw that Jesus answered them well, he asked him, “Which command is the most important of all?” Jesus answered, “The most important is Listen, Israel! The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”

In **Mark 12:28-30**, our Lord Jesus Christ masterfully responds to a simple question. Jesus starts with a fact and moves to what the Christian should do.

This is an engaging answer. No part of Jesus’ response is passive. It is an active belief and action.

In Our Sunday School, we talk about engaging our heads, our hearts, and our hands.

Engaging heads is orthodoxy—getting our beliefs right and engaging our brains in believing the right things.

Engaging hearts is orthopathy—getting our emotions right and engaging our passions in pursuing the right things.

Engaging hands is orthopraxy—getting our actions right and engaging our hands in doing the right things.¹³

Believing, pursuing, and doing—good teaching does all three.¹⁴

¹³ Thanks to Dr. Sandy Zensen for rounding out my pedagogy here.

¹⁴ Bloom’s Taxonomy calls these three areas the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Teachers are trained in Bloom’s taxonomy to ensure that no area of learning is left out when presenting new information.

We, as Christians who study the Bible, can benefit from knowing this structure and engaging as much of it as possible when we study (and ultimately talk about) the Bible.

Omitting any combination of the head, heart, or hands can result in a variety of errors. This is important to address now as Bible study can sometimes be taught in a way that focuses too much on the head.¹⁵

Bible study is study, but it should convict and encourage our hearts and direct our hands. Bible study must include the head, heart, and hands.

There is one last section to walk through before we move through the process of taking a more Biblical approach toward Bible study: assertions.

¹⁵ This is my own reminder to myself to be wary of this overemphasis.

4. Our Assertions

I am a reader.

I love to read. I have loved to read since I was a little boy.

My mother taught me how to read using the Bible as a primer. The first thing I can remember reading is the first chapter of the **Gospel of John**.

I remember sounding out the words and walking through that beautiful text with her.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thanks mom.

John 1:1-4: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men.

John makes several staggering assertions (declarations of truth) about Jesus in **John 1**. John asserts that our Lord Jesus Christ (the Word) has existed since the beginning, was with God, was God, was involved in all of creation, and in Him is found life. That is a lot of assertions for a small amount of text.

John asserts all those things about our Lord Jesus Christ to be true. Those assertions are the basis for the rest of John's gospel.

Similarly, the Bible makes assertions about itself and about God—and those assertions have tremendous impact on how we should study the Bible.¹⁷

God tells us what the Bible is: it is God's authoritative, inerrant, clear, necessary, and sufficient word

2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

¹⁷ This section parallels Wayne Grudem's *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*. If you have never read a systematic theology, his is a good one to read first. If you need help getting through it, you can find resources at OurSundaySchool.com.

We do not to look elsewhere for God’s communication to man. God has already spoken to us via the Bible.

Hebrews 4:12: For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

The Bible will do what God needs it to do, so we do not look elsewhere for help understanding the Bible. It is in the Bible.

When we study the Bible in ways that make it non-authoritative, fallible, fuzzy, unnecessary, or insufficient—we sin.

If you have been part of a group that studies the Bible that way, you know it feels like wearing clothes that do not fit.

God tells us what the Bible gives

The Bible is not just God’s impersonal and impractical truth—it is everything we need for life and godliness. We have knowledge of God from the power of God through the Son of God as revealed by the Spirit of God in the word of God.¹⁸

2 Peter 1:1-4: Simeon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those who have received a faith equal to ours through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. His divine power has given us everything required for life and

¹⁸ John Stott, in *The Radical Disciple*, says the Bible could be described this way: “the Father’s portrait of the Son painted by the Holy Spirit.”

godliness through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

When we study the Bible in ways that imply the Bible is not enough for life and godliness, we sin.

It is easy to err here. We have a plethora of resources available to assist us with Bible study, but sometimes we forget what we *need* is the Scripture. We may *want* more, but we *need* Scripture.¹⁹

God tells us the resources he provides

The Bible and the Spirit are what is needed for knowing God and knowing the things of God.

In even better news, the Bible and the Spirit are provided by God to us. Not only does God determine what we need, God provides what we need.

1 Corinthians 2:9-12: But as it is written, What no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no human heart has conceived—God has prepared these things for those who love him. Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, since the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who

¹⁹ One danger is becoming a commentologist (a person who primarily uses commentaries) as opposed to a biblicist (a person who primarily uses the Bible). Spend more time with the text of the Bible than with other resources. Thanks to Joshua Waitzkin for prompting this thought.

knows a person's thoughts except his spirit within him? In the same way, no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God.

We walk in darkness apart from the work of the Spirit. The Spirit illuminates the text of the Bible, so the Christian can see God's truth. This is part of the reason why we can study a portion of the Bible for years and regularly see new things—because the Spirit illuminates different portions at different times.²⁰

As 21st century Christians, we are quick to lay aside God's word and instead focus on perceived shortcuts like books, teachings, and technology.

We tend to start with shortcuts when God can only be known through his word as revealed by the Spirit. One theme you will see repeatedly in this book is one of patience.²¹

Yes, there are helpful tools (and we will look at some later that I recommend wholeheartedly), but they do not come before God's word and Spirit.

Yet, if we only engage with God's word and Spirit, we omit an important element in God's process for knowing Him—the role of the church in confirming the teachings of its members.

²⁰ Do not feel discouraged when this happens. This should rather encourage us as it is a sign the Spirit is working in our lives.

²¹ Bible study done well is never done quickly. The end goal of Bible study is to experience, know, and enjoy God—so we can make him known with our words and works. Nothing about this is hurried or rushed.

Galatians 2:11-13: But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Paul confronted Peter directly when Peter was in error. This is one of the benefits of being involved in the church.

When we err in what we say about the Bible, we have fellow Christians who confront and correct us. When what we say aligns with the Bible, we have fellow Christians who affirm and approve us. Bible study is a group effort. If Bible study was a sport, it would be a team sport, not an individual competition.

The Bible and the Spirit are needed for knowing God and the things of God. The church is needed for confirmation and/or correction of what we say about God's word.

Three final thoughts: scale, order, and expression

Now, with the assumptions, objectives, and assertions explained, let me make three final thoughts before we turn toward a more Biblical approach to Bible study.

First, scale the following process to the situation at hand. If you have a 4-year-old daughter who asks you who our Lord Jesus Christ is, the entire pray-hear-think-study-share-invite process may take 20 seconds. If you are preparing a sermon for a church

on the topic of who our Lord Jesus Christ is, the entire pray-hear-think-study-share-invite process may take 20 hours.

Scale the process as opportunities and wisdom dictate.

Second, while I believe the order laid out in this book is directionally correct, it is rarely linear. After praying with others and hearing with others, if the Spirit leads you to pray again, pray again! If, after studying with others it feels right to hear the text again, hear the text again.

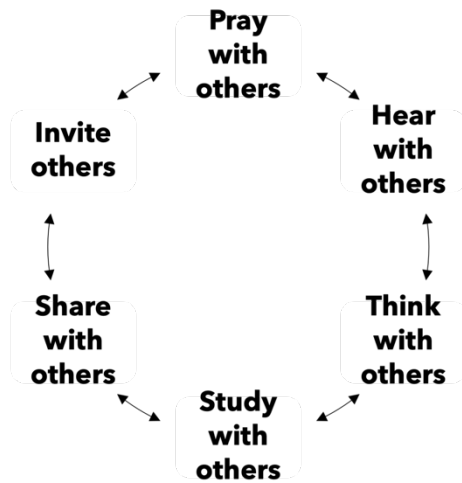
Revisit prior process steps as opportunities and wisdom dictate.

Third, while I believe these process steps are under generally expressed, there is a danger of each being over expressed. If you find yourself never completing the process, that is an issue. If you find yourself never engaging in one of the process steps, that is an issue.

Express each step as opportunities and wisdom dictate.

Part Two:

Our Process



5. Our Process Step #1: Pray with Others



I am a recipient.

I was born in the United States. I was born into a Christian home. And I was born (very) healthy. Ten-pounds-and-eight-ounces healthy. But my mother has given me something that far surpassed my US citizenship or my physical health.

My mother has prayed for me every day of my life. Every day.²²

I just turned 46, and that adds up to a lot of days. My mother has faithfully given of her time and energy every day. On easy days, she prays for me. On hard days, she prays for me.

It is a beautiful example in how to invest my time and energy as well—both for myself and for others—including for my children.

We can sometimes become enamored with our circumstances or our statuses. Those are of no use without God's help every day. Starting our Bible study process with prayer acknowledges both the source of our strength and the illuminator of our study.

For each step in our process, we will talk through the attitudes and actions. We will start with the attitudes because they should inform our actions.

Our attitudes

Fear

Recognizing who God is orients and reorients everything in our lives. When we study Bible, we are studying God's word. God does not take his word lightly. We should not either.

²² Thanks mom.

Proverbs 9:10: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.

I want us to be careful when handling God's word.

People used to ask me: "Are you nervous when you teach?" No. I am not nervous. I am terrified. Nervous is a wholly insufficient word for my emotional state when I teach—because I am handling God's word. The Bible is replete with examples of those who mishandled God's word and how it did not go well for them.

It is an honor and a privilege to teach the Bible, but it is not without fear.²³

Dependence

Many times in the Old Testament, the Israelites had their backs against a wall. They were trapped, enslaved, rescued, sold, and sometimes even killed. In **2 Chronicles 20**, they are in a particularly tight spot, but their reaction is brilliant.

2 Chronicles 20:12: Our God, will you not judge them? For we are powerless before this vast number that comes to fight against us. We do not know what to do, but we look to you.

The Israelites' dependence is great. Armies were marching toward them, and they did not know what to do, but they knew to look to God.

²³ If the terror results in never speaking, that is a wrong application.

This attitude is an acknowledgement they were not God. They did not have his ability to save or deliver.

God gave his word, and we depend on him and his word to do what he said he would do. And he will—every time.

Expectancy

Psalm 119:18: Open my eyes, that I may contemplate wondrous things from your instruction.

James 1:5: Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.

We come to God in prayer knowing our right place in the relationship and being fearful that this is the living God, the creator and sustainer of the universe.

We come to God in prayer knowing he will deliver, and he will do what he says.

We come to God in prayer knowing there are wondrous things in his law and, if we lack wisdom, he will provide.

God desires to give good gifts to his children, and prayer is one such gift.

We would be wise to avail ourselves of this gift.

Our actions

With the attitudes for prayer articulated, we can talk about the “what would you say you do here” portion: our actions.

One clarifying point to make about these actions: they can be done by you for you, and by you for the group.

Pray for hearing

God speaks to his church, but his church does not always listen.

Revelation 2:7a, 11a, 17a, 29; 3:6, 13, 22: Let anyone who has ears to hear listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.

John makes this point in **Revelation** often, but we often miss it as church and Bible study can become normal and mundane to us. It is good to be reminded that the creator of the universe is speaking, and we should be listening.

I know I am not always listening, but when I pray for hearing for the hearers (including myself), it alerts me to my level of engagement and allows me to repent and correct.

Pray for illumination

I had my gallbladder removed in 2018, and I remember being wheeled into the operating room and squinting because the lights were so bright. I started to ask for the lights to be turned down, and then I realized that was not a good idea. I needed the surgery team to be able to see everything—and they could not do that with the lights too low.

Similarly, we know there is truth in the Bible, but we cannot see it without God's help. He illuminates the text so we can see him more clearly.

1 Corinthians 2:12: Now we have not received the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who comes from God, so that we may understand what has been freely given to us by God.

Yes, God freely gives, but we also need his help to understand.

Ephesians 1:15-19: This is why, since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I never stop giving thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the mighty working of his strength.

There are Biblical truths we cannot comprehend without God opening the eyes of our hearts. We should ask for his help!

Pray for wisdom

I do not know anyone who does not want more wisdom. And God promises just that to all who ask him.

James 1:5: Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God—who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly—and it will be given to him.

If God is speaking and his illumination helps us see his truth, then wisdom helps us know what to do with the truth we see.

God is a generous and ungrudging giver of wisdom. He is not holding back, and he is not stingy. God gives wisdom liberally, so be liberal in asking.

Summary: pray for help with the text

Now, before you move to your homework, you will want to pick a Biblical text to study. One of the beautiful things about this specific process, is that since it is a Bible-informed process, it will work for any portion of the Bible.

Take a moment and pick a chapter of the Bible to practice. I would recommend you pick a chapter your Bible study or church is currently studying.²⁴

Homework

- Pray for help with the text

Suggested resource

Pages 111-117 of *Women of the Word*, by Jen Wilkin, are helpful on this topic. The entire book is superb, but this section on prayer is exceedingly beneficial.

And do not let the title scare you—it is not a book just for women—even if you have to Google “rhumba tights.”

²⁴ If your Bible study is studying a book other than the Bible—it is not a Bible study, it is a book study. Find a Bible study. If your church is teaching or preaching something other than the Bible, find a church that teaches and preaches the Bible.

6. Our Process Step #2: Hear with Others



I am a teammate.

A substantial portion of the first 19 years of my life was spent in basketball gymnasiums. My dad coached basketball from elementary to the college level. He has been associated with incredible programs and has more state and national championship rings than he can wear at any given time.

One of the first things he teaches a new player is how to listen. How to listen to coaches, team members, and the other team.

I can only estimate how many times I have heard him explain this, but it boils down to one misconception—you only listen with your ears—and one epiphany—you also listen with your eyes.

Most people think listening is something done with the ears. And it is—in part. But there is so much more to listening than soundwaves. Listening is a whole-body activity.

When someone is speaking and the listener is not paying attention, it is a good sign the listener is not fully engaged in the message. But when the listener is listening and paying attention to the speaker, that is another level of engagement.

This chapter is about that other level of engagement.

Most resources that help believers study the Bible spend a great deal of time talking about reading the Bible. And reading the Bible is great, it is just not what this step in the process is. This step in the process is hearing the Bible being read aloud by someone else.

In fact, the Bible itself talks far more often about hearing God's word being read than reading God's word individually.

There are many reasons for this (literacy rates, availability of printed Bibles, etc.), but I want to focus primarily on what the Bible focuses primarily on, which is hearing God's word.

Your view of hearing may be passive. I would like to gently nudge you to a different view: hearing is active. Remember, one of our attitudes of prayer was expectancy. Expectancy is an active position, not a passive one.

Our attitudes

Respect

Yes, things have changed since the Old Testament times, but the level of respect given to God's word in the Old Testament is a thing to behold.

Nehemiah 8:1-8:²⁵ All the people gathered together at the square in front of the Water Gate. They asked the scribe Ezra to bring the book of the law of Moses that the LORD had given Israel. On the first day of the seventh month, the priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could listen with understanding. While he was facing the square in front of the Water Gate, he read out of it from daybreak until noon before the men, the women, and those who could understand. All the people listened attentively to the book of the law. The scribe Ezra stood on a high wooden platform made for this purpose. Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah stood beside

²⁵ Biblical texts with lots of foreign names can be intimidating, so feel free to use your favorite Bible app (try YouVersion) or website (try BibleGateway.com) and listen as the following text is read aloud.

him on his right; to his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Ezra opened the book in full view of all the people, since he was elevated above everyone. As he opened it, all the people stood up. Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God, and with their hands uplifted all the people said, "Amen, Amen!" Then they knelt low and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah, who were Levites, explained the law to the people as they stood in their places. They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.

The people being read to in this text were active listeners. They listened attentively, stood up,²⁶ lifted their hands, knelt low, and worshipped. This is not passive listening.

This is an active attitude of "I will stop what I am doing and respond" because something greater than me is happening. In Our Sunday School, I sometimes summarize this as, "sit still and pay attention," because it is hard to listen when we are moving.

Listening is more than something we do with our ears. It involves our entire bodies, yes, but it certainly involves our ears, our minds, and, as we see in the next verse, our hearts.

²⁶ If you have been in a courtroom, you are familiar with what happens when the judge walks in: everyone stands. This is a holdover from a time when the judge walked in with a Bible, so everyone stood out of respect for the ultimate law: God' word. Thanks to Bryan Decker for this reference.

Deference

Nehemiah 8:9: Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to all of them, "This day is holy to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep." For all the people were weeping as they heard the words of the law.

These people were moved by how their lives did not match what the word of God said, and they wept. They deferred to the Bible on how their lives were to be lived. They literally stood under the authority (both physically and theologically) of the Bible.

We behave at times as if we are the supreme authority in the universe. J. Vernon McGee puts it bluntly: "This is God's universe, and God does things his way. You may have a better way, but you don't have a universe."

This is God's universe, and we must defer to whatever he says.

Our actions

Read the Bible aloud

1 Thessalonians 5:27: I charge you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters.

Paul was clear to the Thessalonians that reading the Bible to all the brothers and sisters was obedience to God. Paul is defining what normal should look like for believers. Normal believers read the Bible to each other. As Seth Godin puts it, "people like us do things like this."²⁷

²⁷ Yes, I get the irony of quoting an unbeliever in this way.

1 Timothy 4:13: Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching.

Paul charges Timothy to give his attention to public reading.

Do we give attention to the public reading of the Bible in our Bible studies, in our Sunday schools, in our church services? Do we give it the same attention as we give to exhortation and teaching?

Here is a scenario I see often when a Bible teacher is teaching a longer portion of Scripture: more time is taken summarizing a passage of Scripture than reading it aloud would have taken. This is a low view of Scripture as it values our words as more substantive than God's words.

If we are guilty of this, we should ask why. Most often, my why is that I view my words as more important than God's words.

At the end of the Bible, there is a special promise for those who read aloud the prophecy of **Revelation**.

Revelation 1:3: Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near.

It should make us happy to read the Bible out loud for others to hear. To be able to participate in the spreading of God's word is a blessing. Give each other this blessing!²⁸

²⁸ And be sure to thank those who bless us in this way.

Hear the Bible read aloud

This is the flip side of reading—someone needs to be listening. We need readers, and we need hearers.

1 Thessalonians 5:27: I charge you by the Lord that this letter be read to all the brothers and sisters.

1 Timothy 4:13: Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching.

Revelation 1:3: Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear the words of this prophecy and keep what is written in it, because the time is near.²⁹

Believe it or not, this is one of the most skipped portions of Bible study—the oral reading of God’s word and hearing God’s word read aloud. It is also one of the easiest ways to be obedient to God’s commands: reading and hearing God’s word.

Summary: hear the text read aloud

Two more points before the homework.

First, when I am asked a question about the Bible, it is astonishing how often the question is answered by reading the text aloud. There is much truth in the old maxim, “If you want to hear God speak, read the Bible. If you want to hear God speak audibly, read the Bible aloud.” May we never skip hearing directly from God.

²⁹ If it crossed your mind that printing these verses twice is too much—then I gently encourage you to read this chapter again.

Second, many of us are encouraged to bring a copy of the Bible to church and read along with the speaker. Believe it or not, that practice is not based on any Biblical text.³⁰ After teaching the Bible this way for 30 years (asking people to read along with me), I am convinced it is not a helpful way to listen. Multitasking is almost never beneficial. Hearing is active listening, not reading along with someone.

Homework

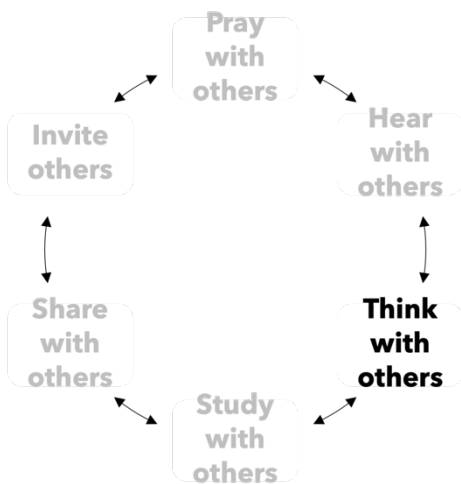
- Pray for help with the text
- Hear the text read aloud

Suggested resource

A humbling and helpful book on this topic is *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture*, by Jeffrey Arthurs. With a focus on obeying **1 Timothy 4:13**, Jeffrey provides easy-to-practice advice to help oral readers of God's word do so with excellence. The book comes with a DVD for real-life examples to emulate.

³⁰ **Acts 17:11: The people here were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, since they received the word with eagerness and examined the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Acts 17:11** does not imply the Bereans examined the Old Testament *while* Paul taught.

7. Our Process Step #3: Think with Others



I am a puzzler.

From a young age, I have loved solving just about any kind of puzzle imaginable.

I enjoy Sudokus, jigsaw puzzles, riddles, and Wordles.

I am relaxed when I think about how to solve a puzzle. I enjoy exploring the implications of a choice and how that choice will play out. I enjoy intensely focusing on the minutiae until a solution presents itself.

It will not strike you as odd that I probably enjoy this step in our process more than any other: thinking.

Once we have prayed for help with the text and heard the text read aloud, the next step is to think deeply about the text.

One question we may need to ask before we get to our attitudes and actions is *why do we need to think about God's word?*

1 Corinthians 13:11: When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put aside childish things.

There is a childish way of speaking. There is a childish way of thinking. There is a childish way of reasoning.

We are well served to focus on whether our thinking is childish or mature. Self-examination of our thoughts is helpful.

Isaiah 55:8-9: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not my ways." This is the LORD's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so my ways are higher than your ways"

God does not think like we think. He thinks *of* us, yes, but not *like* us. This is good news for us because we do not, in fact, want a God who thinks and acts like we do. What an immature world that would be!

Christians are described as those who are thinking about spiritual things. Paul puts it this way in **Romans 8:5: For those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit have their minds set on the things of the Spirit.**³¹

What Paul is describing is focused and intentional thinking. This is purposeful thinking. There is no sense of hurry or rushing. This is slowly orienting ourselves on the things of the Spirit.

Our attitudes

Humility

Our starting attitude is one that recognizes we are not God.

Psalm 119:15: I will meditate on your precepts and think about your ways.

Meditation on the words and ways of another—more than meditating on the words and ways of ourselves—implies we are not the primary source of truth. We are subject to God and his word. This is a humble approach that lowers our view of self and exalts our view of God. We are the creation, not the creator and it is good for us to see that truth clearly.

³¹ A wonderful temperature check for a believer is, “What have I been thinking about? The things of the flesh or the things of the Spirit?”

One of my favorite books on Bible study is Hendricks and Hendricks' *Living by the Book*. They say this about Biblical meditation: "It's not just an exercise that you carry out for fifteen or twenty minutes and then check off your list. It's a mental discipline that you carry throughout your day. It's a mind-set and a lifestyle in which the Word courses through your mind. That's what makes biblical meditation altogether different from meditation as we know it in our society. Meditation as popularly taught by the Eastern philosophies tells you to empty your mind. But that's the exact opposite of what the Scripture says. Biblical meditation means filling your mind with the truth that God has revealed."³²

One more note about meditation. Meditation is not a hurried activity. Rushed meditation is not meditation. Meditation is slow and purposeful. It is emptying ourselves of ourselves and filling ourselves with Scripture.

The conclusion, then, is that humility has a slowness about it. Humility does not hurry, so neither should our approach to studying the Bible.

Delight

Psalm 119:27-28: I delight in your commands, which I love. I will lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and will meditate on your statutes.

I hope there are times when you think about God's word, and you throw up your hands in delight. If yes, that is a Biblical

³² Said another way, it is not, "clear your head," but "fill your mind."

response. God's word is a delight, and we can approach it with an attitude of joy and appreciation.

Think about something you delight in doing. Do you rush through it, or do you savor it? It is ok to savor God's word.

Psalm 92:5: O LORD, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep.

God's thoughts are very deep. My thoughts are not very deep. Sometimes I think I have deep thoughts, and then I read the Bible and realize not so much.

This is a reason to delight in God's word: his words record his works, and God is good, right, and holy in all that he does.³³

Sit in the delightfully deep word of God and do not rush.

Steadfastness

Joshua 1:8: This book of instruction must not depart from your mouth; you are to meditate on it day and night so that you may carefully observe everything written in it. For then you will prosper and succeed in whatever you do.

I teach in America, and we like to focus on the "good success" part of that verse and equate it to the American dream.³⁴ The reality is Biblical success only comes after day and night meditation and obedience to God's word.

Day and night.

³³ My friends John and Ann Pike would be disappointed if I omitted that line.

³⁴ Heavy sigh.

Day and night.³⁵

This steadfastness is part of our job and joy as Christians—to meditate on God’s word day and night.

My friend Bill jokes that my generation is the generation who taps our feet at the microwave. We are impatient and want results immediately.

Drinking deeply from the Bible is the opposite. It requires a commitment to daily meditation. Yes, the microwave is fast, but there is no substitute for the Crock-Pot.

Psalm 1:2: Instead, his delight is in the LORD’s instruction, and he meditates on it day and night.

A few years ago, I was in a business conference in New York City, and I heard one of the richest people in the world talk about how she started her day by centering herself on what she wanted to accomplish. I could not help thinking the entire time, “She has got this completely backward.” And then my next thought was, “And so often I do too.”

We are to think day and night on *God’s* word and plans, not *our* words and plans.

Our actions

Think about God’s word day and night

Psalm 63:6: When I think of you as I lie on my bed, I meditate on you during the night watches.

³⁵ Yes, that was intentional repetition.

Psalm 119:148: I am awake through each watch of the night to meditate on your promise.

What should we do when we cannot sleep? God's word tells us: meditate on God's word.

It is probably good to pause here and mention that meditation is not something that is valued in our society. When was the last time you told someone, "I need a few days to think" and were *commended* for it? But this is exactly what we are commanded to do with the Bible. Never rush interactions with God.

We have a tendency in American Christianity to time-box our interactions with God into 5-, 10-, or 15-minute daily chunks. The Bible knows nothing of time-boxing God into our schedules. The Bible only teaches an all-day and all-night approach.

Think up

Colossians 3:2: Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

When we say we understand God's word, what we are saying is we stand under it. We stand under its authority, so we are like the Israelites mentioned earlier, looking up to God for God's input. We are thinking upward about God and God's word.

One caution if you plan to think deeply about God's word: you will be assaulted with distractions. You will hear noises you did not hear before. Your mind will wander, your phone will buzz, and you will need to refocus. But the more we practice thinking about God's word, the more skillful we can become.

Additionally, notice the plural **minds** in **Colossians 3:2**. Thinking with others is not efficient. Thinking with others flies in the face of our hyper-efficiency-focused culture.

We rob ourselves of the blessing of what God is teaching others when we only think alone. Thinking alone makes group-wide or church-wide alignment more difficult as we tend to fall in love with our own thoughts and opinions as opposed to submitting to others.³⁶ But it also makes alignment sweeter.

Summary: think slowly about the text

Homework

- Pray for help with the text
- Hear the text read aloud
- Think slowly about the text

Suggested resource

One of the classic works on Bible study is *Living by the Book*, by Howard G. Hendricks and William D. Hendricks. The breadth and depth of the content make it a supremely accessible work, and modern updates have made it visually appealing. The entire book is commendable, but pages 110-114 describe meditation in a clear and compelling way as contrasted to modern approaches to meditation.

³⁶ Or is that just me?

8. Our Process Step #4: Study with Others



I am a student.

I always loved school. In college, I was blown away at the educational psychology courses I took introducing me to metacognition, Bloom's Taxonomy, and neuroscience.

What I eventually understood is I love learning about learning. The process itself is fascinating and reminds me to thank God who allows us this capability.

One of my passions is breaking down a concept into easily consumable and orderly pieces for the learner. This can be tedious, but rewarding, work.

It directly applies to Bible study as we are all students. We study the Bible to glorify our Father. We study the Father to know his will. We study our Lord Jesus Christ and the way he lived to live as he lived. We study the Spirit to be better vessels for him and his illumination, filling, and empowerment.

Christians are students. And students study.

More has been written on this step than the other steps, so I kept this chapter short and suggested more resources.³⁷

Let me state the unspoken but obvious right away: Bible study is not easy. Bible study is work. Bible study takes time, effort, and other believers. Bible study can be immensely frustrating, but it can also be immensely rewarding. But Bible study is not opening a commentary and swallowing whole whatever the

³⁷ A wise man once told me there is no reason to reinvent the wheel, because, even if you did, it would still be round.

commentator wrote. Bible study is studying with other believers to better understand God and his word.

Our attitudes

Resolve

Before we start the studying process, we should resolve to do so. This may seem obvious, but since we know we will hit obstacles, it is best to commit to lives of study and obedience in advance.³⁸

Ezra 7:10: Now Ezra had determined in his heart to study the law of the LORD, obey it, and teach its statutes and ordinances in Israel.

Ezra was a scribe. In Ezra's day, a scribe's primary function was to copy and recopy parts of the Old Testament. This would often involve teaching, but being a scribe was slow and tedious work.

Ezra committed to doing the work—and not just the work, but the application of the work. He was not training to be a Pharisee, but a faithful servant.

When done right, Bible study is the most intellectually challenging thing we do. To undertake an effort to know an infinite God will be inherently difficult.

³⁸ Eugene Peterson wrote a book entitled, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. That is a great way to describe our commitment to learning more about God.

Incompleteness

Luke 2:52: And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people.

My father taught me this verse when I turned 16. He handed me four envelopes and asked me to think about my life in four parts: increasing in wisdom, stature, favor with God, and favor with people. Inside each envelope were ideas for each part.

It is a construct that has served me well, and there is a point I want to lean into: if our Lord Jesus Christ (the only flawless human ever to live) can increase in wisdom and favor with God, certainly we have room to increase as well.

This is the idea behind incompleteness. We are incomplete right now. We will be complete one day, but today is not that day.

Incompleteness creates space for the next attitude.

Teachableness

Have you ever been around a skilled person who was still eager to learn and grow? It is refreshing. Luke describes such a person in **Acts 18:24-28: Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus, although he knew only John's baptism. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately. When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters wrote to the disciples to**

welcome him. After he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.

Apollos was a mighty man, but he had incomplete knowledge. Apollos knew about our Lord Jesus Christ, but not about Easter.

That is a big knowledge gap. This is, to borrow a phrase, a gaping, sucking chest wound of a hole in his theology. Someone needed to help Apollos—and Priscilla and Aquila did.

Priscilla and Aquila leaned in and engaged with Apollos and served him by teaching him what he did not know. And because Apollos was teachable, it completed his message and his life.

Do not miss Apollos' humility in this: he had resolved to learn, and he was exceedingly competent—but he was incomplete in his knowledge of God. He overcame this obstacle by being teachable. Without recognizing our incompleteness and being teachable, our ability to know God is ultimately limited.

Our actions

Talk to teachers

When Priscilla and Aquila took Apollos aside, Apollos could have ignored them. He could have reveled in his eloquence and competence, but he engaged with his new teachers.

Acts 18:24-28: Now a Jew named Apollos, a native Alexandrian, an eloquent man who was competent in the use of the Scriptures, arrived in Ephesus. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately about Jesus,

although he knew only John’s baptism. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. After Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained the way of God to him more accurately. When he wanted to cross over to Achaia, the brothers and sisters wrote to the disciples to welcome him. After he arrived, he was a great help to those who by grace had believed. For he vigorously refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating through the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah.³⁹

One of God’s gifts to the church are teachers. Fundamentally, teachers explain God’s word and make the meaning clear.⁴⁰ We have teachers in our churches, and we have teachers who have long since passed on to heaven who left behind valuable resources. We can (and should) continue to learn from both.

Use available resources

2 Timothy 4:13: When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments.

Paul wrote a substantial portion of the New Testament, but his canonical works were letters—not books. The scrolls and

³⁹ One helpful Bible study approach is to read a text from the perspective of every character in that text. In **Acts 18:24-28**, the applications and personalizations change focusing on Apollos versus Priscilla and Aquilla.

⁴⁰ A great reference to this is in **Nehemiah 8:8: They read out of the book of the law of God, translating and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was read.**

parchments Paul references in **2 Timothy 4:13** were resources that helped him that he wanted with him at the end of his life.

I can relate to Paul. I have books like this in my home library. Some are signed by authors, some were given as gifts, and some are worn down from use. In your life, there are likely writings that are valuable to you. Things that, if given the time to save in an emergency, you would save.

There are thousands of helpful resources when it comes to Bible study. In part, this glut of resources is what makes Bible study difficult. But answering the question, “What is a good resource?” can be overwhelming. I recommend starting with people we know and study with—and with others who have been helpful.

Some of my favorite online resources are BlueLetterBible.org⁴¹ and StepBible.org.⁴² I have listed a few of my favorite print resources at the end of this chapter, so check those out and let me know your favorites (and why they are your favorites).

Summary: study the text with all available resources

Homework

- Pray for help with the text
- Hear the text read aloud
- Think slowly about the text
- Study the text with all available resources

⁴¹ Specifically, check out the LexiConc feature.

⁴² Specifically, check out the morphological analysis feature.

Suggested resources

Three resources come to mind when I think about studying.

The first is a resource about resources. Danny Akin's *Building a Theological Library* (a free download from danielakin.com), is a wonderful way to build a theological library. Dr. Akin's book divides helpful resources into a variety of categories: from topical to theological to books of the Bible. What's especially helpful is he tags each work as technical, pastoral, or devotional. This provides an easy onramp regardless of your objective or experience.

The second is *How to Study Your Bible*—a resource from the colored-pencil-wielding Bible study godmother herself, Kay Arthur. What I especially love about this book are the appendices. They are as good a summary of Bible study as you can find, with a summary of the inductive process, word study tools, and a great intro to Greek verbs. There's even an accompanying workbook that's also helpful.⁴³

The last is *How to Read the Bible like a Seminary Professor*, by Mark M. Yarbrough. This is a more advanced treatise that covers a variety of perspectives you may not be familiar with, but that are helpful to be aware of. If you've been reading through the resources recommended in this book so far, once you finish with *Living by the Book*, this would make a great follow up.

⁴³ Thanks to Thesa Morgan for telling me about these Precept resources.

9. Our Process Step #5: Share with Others



I am a coach.

Coaching is something I learned from my dad,⁴⁴ but also from different coaches I have had. I enjoy encouraging, mentoring, and serving people. I think part of it comes from the joy I receive from giving my time and experiences.

The antithesis of coaching is hoarding. Coaches do not hoard knowledge, experience, perspective, or passion. They share it.

The same goes for Bible study. It is meant to be shared.

Something that has struck me the past few years is how different Bible study is presented today compared to in the New Testament. In the New Testament, Bible study is only successful as a group activity—never as an individual practice. There is an example of an unsuccessful Bible study (the Ethiopian eunuch in [Acts 8](#)), but never an unsuccessful group Bible study.

But before we look at actions related to sharing with others, there are attitudes to explore.

Our attitudes

Intention

Proverbs 15:28 (ESV): **The heart of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things.**

⁴⁴ My mom says I was born an old man, and I attribute this to believing (as a child) that I was an adult because I so often “helped” my dad coach.

Here, Solomon talks about *how* to answer, not *what* to answer. Solomon assumes the righteous know the answer to the question. It is easier to focus on the *how* when you know the people you are sharing with well.

Our Lord Jesus Christ masterfully demonstrates this to us over and over in the gospels. He responds differently to different people because they are different people. Sometimes his answer was a question. Sometimes his answer was a statement. Sometimes his answer was intentional confusion. Sometimes his answer was healing. Sometimes his answer was living out the principle he was teaching. One time his answer was drawing in the dirt. Our actions should be informed by our Lord Jesus Christ's: we change the *how* (not the *what*) to fit the situation.⁴⁵

Not only should we consider how to answer, but also how to arrange the answer.

Ecclesiastes 12:9: In addition to the Teacher being a wise man, he constantly taught the people knowledge; he weighed, explored, and arranged many proverbs.

There is a skill in validating, organizing, and sequencing information to provide the best possible result.

A thoughtful answer not only involves the answer itself, but also how to answer and how to arrange the answer.

Finally, we should consider if we should even give an answer.

Proverbs 26:4-5: Don't answer a fool according to his foolishness or you'll be like him yourself. Answer a fool

⁴⁵ Jesus engaged heads, hearts, and hands when answering questions.

according to his foolishness or he'll become wise in his own eyes.

We must know when to engage and when not to engage. This is easier when you know the people you are sharing with well.

We live in a society where everyone is expected to have an immediate answer. We should not be bound by that view.

We have a Savior who often answered questions with both questions and silence to help people evaluate what they believed, point them to the truth, and give them space to reflect. He knew when to engage and when to redirect.

Lowliness

I am not right all the time. In fact, I am wrong more often than I am right. It is stress relieving to write that and even more stress relieving to believe it.

Proverbs 15:1-2: A gentle answer turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath. The tongue of the wise makes knowledge attractive, but the mouth of fools blurts out foolishness.⁴⁶

A helpful concept to keep in mind is that we are never commanded to argue or stir someone up to anger. Our speech—especially about the Bible—should be calm and clear, not curt and coarse.

⁴⁶ It is helpful to read **Proverbs** from the perspective of the wise and the fool.

In addition to an attitude of lowliness, the wise use knowledge unselfishly—not for their own glory or reputation, but for God’s glory and reputation.

John 3:30: He must increase, but I must decrease.

John the Baptist gives us a speed bump to check ourselves with: is our Lord Jesus Christ increasing or are we increasing?

Bob Goff says, “When we care more about what our faith looks like than what it is, it is time to take a walk around the block.”

Calm

I have heard teachers and preachers emphasize the overturned moneychangers’ tables as if it were our Lord Jesus Christ’s normal practice. It was not. His normal practice was **Proverbs 17:27: The one who has knowledge restrains his words, and one who keeps a cool head is a person of understanding.**

Our Lord Jesus Christ was a calm man who did not get carried away when those around him did.

Patience

Wisdom takes a minute, and it is never rushed.

Proverbs 18:13: The one who gives an answer before he listens—this is foolishness and disgrace for him.

This verse almost seems like it was written to safeguard us from reading an article’s headline and thinking we are experts. Our approach when sharing about the Bible should have a slowness, a thoughtfulness, and an intentionality to it.

Proverbs 26:17: A person who is passing by and meddles in a quarrel that's not his is like one who grabs a dog by the ears.

Take a moment and google "President Johnson grabs dog by ears." Now, once you stop laughing, think about this: there will be people foolish enough to do this and there will be other people who stand around smiling at the fool doing it. Go back and look at the picture again—people were literally smiling at him. Foolishness is popular as fools always have an audience.

There are always arguments about the Bible we have not prepared sufficiently to engage in. "I do not know" is a glorious answer for these situations. Jumping into a discussion about the Bible without praying, hearing, and thinking, looks a lot like grabbing a dog by the ears. It may be momentarily popular, but it will not turn out well for you or the dog.

Our actions

Speak the truth in love

Sharing the truth is critical, yes. But sharing that truth in love creates an environment for the truth to be heard.

Ephesians 4:11-16: And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the

truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

In all our communications, speaking truth in love is not an option—it is a requirement.

Trust God

I far too often look at a conversation, a lesson, or even a sermon from the perspective that the truth taught is all up to me to accomplish. But that is never the whole story. It is up to God.

That is great news for me, because I am not strong enough or wise enough to shoulder that burden.

2 Timothy 3:16-17: All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete,⁴⁷ equipped for every good work.

There is good work to be done, and God's word is the place to prepare for it. While we are getting ready, we must remember God is sovereign over all outcomes, so we can trust him and his word to do what he said he and his word will do.

⁴⁷ **Complete** is a passive verb. If we ever get the idea we (or any other human) can complete ourselves, we are wrong. While we may be actively involved in Bible study, God alone completes us.

Summary: share with love and trust

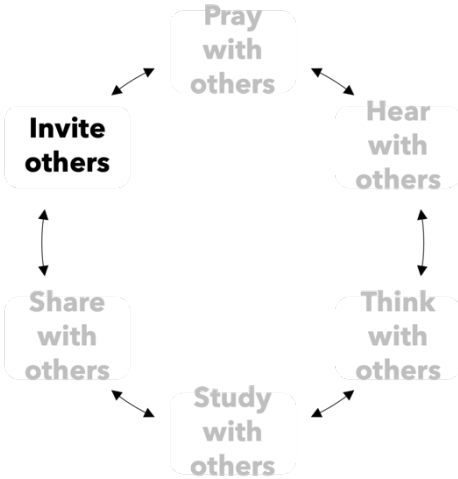
Homework

- Pray for help with the text
- Hear the text read aloud
- Think slowly about the text
- Study the text with all available resources
- Share with love and trust

Suggested Resources

There are no suggested resources for this and the next chapter as I think the Scripture referenced is clear and easy to follow.

10. Our Process Step #6: Invite Others



I am an introvert.

I feel energized after being alone or being with my immediate family. Large groups exhaust me and sap me of energy. At times, the idea of being around other believers is daunting.

If you are an extrovert, I am amazed that you can be invigorated by groups. That is as foreign to me as speaking Urdu.⁴⁸

But I am not the body of Christ.⁴⁹ I need other believers.

Despite our personalities, God invites us into his story and asks us to invite others so he can expand his family. It is amazing that we get to be involved at all, but to be personally involved in expansion of God's family is a gift.

The last step in our Bible study process is inviting others to participate with us. While perhaps the simplest step, it too is often one that is ignored.

But it should never be ignored. Bible study is not for a select few intellectuals. Knowing the infinite God of the universe is not just for intellectuals. Knowing God must involve all of God's family.

As Christians, we have the greatest message the world has ever known. The Holy Spirit empowers us to share that message of hope and redemption.

We should encourage those studying with us to be faithful and invite those outside to come inside.

Yes, the way of Jesus is narrow, but the invitation is wide.

⁴⁸ I do not speak Urdu.

⁴⁹ Thanks to Rick Warren for this thought.

Our Attitudes

Urgency

Entropy is the process of everything breaking down. Every day has more brokenness than the day before. This may sound odd coming from a Christian, but Christians are not scared of truth.⁵⁰

And the truth is, we have limited time in a broken world to obey God. So, a sense of urgency is always with us.

Ephesians 5:16: Making the most of the time, because the days are evil.

Colossians 4:5: Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time.

Over and over in the Bible we are provided with a sense of urgency to our invitation. Christ's return is imminent and with every passing second, people move into eternity without Jesus as their Savior.

Let us make the most of this time!

Obedience

One attitude should always be obedience.

Luke 14:23: "Then the master told the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges and make them come in, so that my house may be filled.'"

⁵⁰ Truth is simply a reflection of God's sovereign plan being implemented, so telling the truth reveals who God is and what he has done.

God desires for his house to be filled. We have the responsibility to obey God and urge all to be part of his family. Obedience to this command allows us to be participants with the Father, Son, and Spirit in the salvation of our family, friends, and neighbors.

Our Actions

Invite those inside

One of the benefits of belonging to the church is the impact we can have in each other's lives.

Hebrews 10:24-25: And let us consider one another in order to provoke love and good works, not neglecting to gather together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Neglecting is a nautical term, and it refers to skipping a scheduled stop at a port. Christians have a scheduled weekly stop with other believers. Invite each other to be present, but ensure your invitation is done in an encouraging way.

Invite those outside

Everyone is made in the image of God, and all are therefore worthy of an invitation. We must ask them to join us.

Matthew 22:9: Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find there, invite to the wedding feast.

Summary: invite everyone

Homework

- Pray for help with the text
- Hear the text read aloud
- Think slowly about the text
- Study the text with all available resources
- Share with love and trust
- Invite everyone

Part Three:

Our Practice

11. Practice Pages

The following pages are designed for you to practice the *how* described in chapters 5 through 10.

In chapter 4, I talked about how this process should be scaled to fit the situation at hand. As such, practice pages increase in complexity so you can practice at different scales.

Space is provided for you and your group to select a chapter of the Bible or question to study, then pray, hear, think, study, share, and invite.

Visit OurSundaySchool.com/toward for pages your group can print for additional practice.

Chapter or question chosen: _____

Pray with others

A sample prayer: Father, thank you for your word. Help us answer this question. In our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Hear with others

Read a portion of the Bible that answers the question.

Think with others

Spend a few seconds thinking about what was just read.

Study with others

Look up unfamiliar words.

Share with others

Explain the unfamiliar and allow space for questions.

Revisit steps 1 through 4 as needed.

Invite others

Who else might have this question?

Chapter or question chosen: _____

Pray with others

A sample prayer: Father, thank you for your word. We ask you to help us hear what the Spirit is saying. In our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Hear with others

Read a portion of the Bible that answers the question.

Think with others

Spend one minute thinking about what was just read.

Study with others

Look up unfamiliar words and cross references.

Revisit steps 1 through 4 as needed.

Share with others

Listen to what others learned, and share what you learned.

Invite others

Who in your group did you invite?

Chapter or question chosen: _____

Pray with others

A sample prayer: Father, thank you for your word. We ask you to help us hear what the Spirit is saying. We ask you, Father, for wisdom to live out your truth. In our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Hear with others

Select one person to read the chapter aloud.

Think with others

Spend a few minutes thinking about what was just read.

Study with others

Resolving to be faithful, look up unfamiliar words and cross-references.

Revisit steps 1 through 4 as needed.

Share with others

With a calm and patient attitude, listen to what others in your group learned, and share with them what you learned.

Invite others

Who in your group did you invite?

Who outside of your group did you invite?

Chapter or question chosen: _____

Pray with others

A sample prayer: Father, thank you for your word. We ask you to help us hear what the Spirit is saying. We ask for the Spirit to illuminate the text. We ask you, Father, for wisdom to live out your truth. In our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Hear with others

Select one person to read the chapter aloud while everyone else in the group respectfully listens.

Think with others

Spend five minutes slowly thinking about what was just read.

Study with others

Resolving to be faithful, and with attitudes of incompleteness and teachableness, look up unfamiliar words and cross-references.

Revisit steps 1 through 4 as needed before using additional resources like commentaries.

Share with others

With a lowly, calm, and patient attitude, listen to what others in your group learned, and share with them what you learned.

Invite others

Who in your group did you invite?

Who outside of your group did you invite?

Chapter or question chosen: _____

Pray with others

A sample prayer: Father, thank you for your word. We come fearfully, depending on you, and expecting wondrous things. We ask you to help us hear what the Spirit is saying. We ask for the Spirit to illuminate the text. We ask you, Father, for wisdom to live out your truth. In our Lord Jesus Christ's name, Amen.

Hear with others

Select one person to read the chapter aloud while everyone else in the group respectfully and deferentially listens.

Think with others

Spend 10 minutes slowly thinking about what was just read.

Study with others

Resolving to be faithful, and with attitudes of incompleteness and teachableness, look up unfamiliar words, cross-references, and conduct morphological analysis.

Revisit steps 1 through 4 as needed before using additional resources like commentaries.

Share with others

With an intentional, lowly, calm, and patient attitude, listen to what others in your group have learned, and share with them what you have learned.

Invite others

Who in your group did you invite?

Who outside of your group did you invite?

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Appendix

Our Sunday School's Bible Study Process

Our Process Step #1: Pray with Others

Our attitudes: fear, dependence, and expectancy

Our actions: pray for hearing, illumination, and wisdom

Our homework: pray for help with the text

Our Process Step #2: Hear with Others

Our attitudes: respect and deference

Our actions: read the Bible aloud and hear the Bible read aloud

Our homework: hear the text read aloud

Our Process Step #3: Think with Others

Our attitudes: humility, delight, and steadfastness

Our actions: think about God's word day and night and think up

Our homework: think slowly about the text

Our Process Step #4: Study with Others

Our attitudes: resolve, incompleteness, and teachableness

Our actions: talk to teachers and use available resources

Our homework: study the text with all available resources

Our Process Step #5: Share with Others

Our attitudes: intention, lowliness, calm, and patience

Our actions: speak the truth in love and trust God

Our homework: share with love and trust

Our Process Step #6: Invite Others

Our attitudes: urgency and obedience

Our actions: invite those inside and invite those outside

Our homework: invite everyone

