

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

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

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

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

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

When you read the Word until it speaks:

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

what people think than what you think. I confess this to you right now and ask you to cleanse me."

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

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

Assignment:

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

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

A. W. Tozer

Day 2 - Practice: Ask, “What does this scripture teach me about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”

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

What does this teach me about God? How should I then live?

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| ○ Jesus was Creator of all
(v 3) | I can live with trust that such a powerful Jesus is strong to meet my needs! |
| ○ Jesus knew about rejection
(v 10-11) | He is my example in times of rejection. |
| ○ Jesus Christ, full of grace & truth
(v 14-17) | I need to extend grace and truth to others. |
| ○ Jesus is worthy of absolute honor
(v 26-27) | Am I giving Him the honor He deserves? |
| ○ Jesus is the sacrificial Lamb for the sins of all man-kind
(v 29) | I live in praise and gratitude for that Lamb. |

- You won’t necessarily use this practice on every verse, but look for sections of scripture that reveal things about God, Jesus, or the Holy Spirit.
- Be sure to answer the second part: “How should I live as a result of what I’ve just read?” That’s implementing the first practice:

read until the Word speaks and then talk to the Lord about how He just spoke to you.

Assignment:

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

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

Day 3 - Practice: Meditate on the scriptures.

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

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

Assignment

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

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

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

Day 4 - A review of the first three practices

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

Assignment:

- Let's take all three of those first practices and use them as we study chapter 4 of the Gospel of John. It's a chapter full of action, eternal truths, and challenging thoughts.
- Spend a few minutes in prayer, opening your mind and heart to the Holy Spirit.
- Since this is a chapter clearly telling two different stories, read each of the stories separately as you apply the three practices to each section.
- If you're very unfamiliar with the customs of the time of Jesus, the story of the Samaritan woman may bring up questions in your mind. Don't get bogged down with the things you don't understand. Just jot down those questions and thoughts and pursue the answers – but don't let your questions prevent you from getting something out of the stories.
- Read the chapter until something seems to speak to your heart or mind. Pause and talk to the Lord about that, as if He were sitting right there with you as you read. (The truth is even better: He is inside you through the presence of the Holy Spirit, if you're a Christian!)
- Read the chapter again for any places that you learn something about God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit. It may not necessarily be a brand-new concept – just one that is true about them. Then ask the Lord, "How should that truth affect my life?"
- Then meditate on something that stands out to you. Let me give you two examples of places great for meditation:

Verses 13-14: *a spring of water* - "Lord, am I experiencing that kind of life with you? If not, why not? Dig deep into my heart and reveal your truths to me. I'll listen."

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

Day 5 - Practice: Read the Word for application, not information alone.

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

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

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

Assignment:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Day 6 - Practice: Look for repetitions to find what is important to God – and should be important to you.

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

Assignment:

- I hope that by now you're getting in the habit of praying before you start studying God's Word. It's such an important part of study – but one that is easy to neglect, especially if we're short on time. But don't neglect it! It will be worth your investment of time!
- Read chapter 6 of the Gospel of John to get an overview.
- Now study verses 25 to 69 and look for repetition in words or phrases. Make a list of them and then ask, "**Lord, why is this important to you and why should it be important to me?**"

I'll start you off with a couple. I notice that these words are repeated:

- believe (especially note the "believe **in**".)
 - bread
- What does the Holy Spirit seem to be saying to you about these words that are repeated?

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

Day 7 - Practice: Read for greater knowledge.

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

Assignment:

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

