

## 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 15 - Practice: Read for transformation.

- Scripture is clear that God wants to transform His people to make them look more like Himself. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29, 1 John 2:6 are just a few that teach this truth. (I'd encourage you to read those verses today.) One of the main ways God transforms His people is by using the Bible, if only we'll be open to this practice while we're reading it.
- One of my professors says, "Scripture is one of the Holy Spirit's primary tools – if not the primary tool – for renovation of character and development of Christian conscience." (David Thompson) Maybe that's one reason the devil fights so hard against the believer spending much time in the scriptures!
- God transforms our minds as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We begin finding ourselves thinking His thoughts more and more; it's because we've been in the Word and it's reshaping how we think about things.
- He transforms our hearts as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. For example, we may notice that we have more compassion for others as we read about His own compassion for people and as we open our lives to that compassion.
- He transforms our words as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We may read about the tongue and the power of our words and begin to ask Him to change the words we say to be more Christlike.
- He transforms our loves as we get the Word deeply imbedded in us. We begin to love the things He loves and care less about the things of this world that are so temporary.
- And on and on it goes. The Lord uses His Word to transform our lives. That's such a key reason to spend time in the Word on a regular basis. And that's why we need to ask its Author to transform us as we read the words.
- Some scriptures are more conducive for this practice than others. For instance, if I'm reading John 5:44, "How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the

praise that comes from the only God?", it's fairly easy to recognize that I need God to transform me from being a people pleaser into a God-pleaser. I can immediately stop and pray and ask Him to cleanse my heart from caring more about what you think of me than what He thinks. But others are more difficult to do unless we take some good time thinking about it (meditating). That's why I'm going to give you an assignment where it's fairly easy to see where personal transformation is called for (John 15:9-17 and John 13:20-32) and one that is a little more difficult (John 12 where Mary washes Jesus' feet.)

- Keep an eager mind open to those scriptures that the Holy Spirit can use in your life to transform you...until you find yourself more and more looking like your Savior!

### Assignment:

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

## Day 16 - Practice: Pray the scriptures.

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

- Praying the scripture for others in your own words:

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

- Praying the scripture for yourself in your own words:

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

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

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

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

### Assignment:

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

**Day 17 - Practice:** Ask: “What does this scripture teach me about God/Jesus/the Holy Spirit – and how should I live as a result of that answer?”

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

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

## **Assignment: Chapter 16**

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

## Day 18 - Practice: Read the scripture in context.

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

So, when we read all of that, it causes us to realize that Jesus is asking us to live so close to Him and letting Him be so real in our lives through knowing His Word that we know what kinds of things He wants us to pray about. He's not talking at all about asking for stuff at all!

- So be careful to read what comes before, what comes after, and to whom it was spoken. It helps to even study as much as possible about the culture in which it was spoken.

### Assignment:

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

## Day 19 - Practice: Read to gain knowledge.

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

## Assignment:

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

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

## **Day 20 - Practice: You decide!**

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

## **Assignment:**

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

## Day 21 - Practice: Read even when you don't feel like reading.

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

Well, you've learned some practices that you can apply for your own Bible study. Some of them you probably like more than others. Some of them you need to use, even if you don't like them as much. (For example, I'm not very good at meditating on scripture, because I have to slow down so much, but I really need to get better, so I've recommitted myself to doing more of it.)

You've studied the book of John and know a lot more than you did three weeks ago. But hopefully, you have been much more transformed by the power of God and love God's Word more than three weeks ago.