

# A Short Guide for Developing Good Bible-Reading Strategies

Pastor Michael Head

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- 23 Being borne a new, not of mortal sēde,  
but of 9 immortal, by the worde of God,  
who liueth and endureth for euer.
- 24 For all \*flesh is as grasse, and all the glo-  
rie of man is as the flower of grasse. The  
grasse withereth, and the flower falleth a-  
way.
- 25 But the worde of the Lord endureth for  
euer: and this is the worde which is prea-  
ched among you.

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# INTRODUCTION

**Question: What do the Scriptures mainly teach?**

Answer: The Scriptures mainly teach what man is to believe about God and what duty God requires of man.

...from the Baptist Catechism (Question 7) by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

Welcome! I've written this guide as a help for those who want to learn how to study the Bible. The material in this book is enough to build a solid foundation of study habits. It is not complete or exhaustive, but sets you on a path that will protect you from many errors and will equip you to handle the Word of God in an able manner.

There are two things that set this discipleship guide apart from others I've seen. First, we'll let the Bible tell us how to read it. The categories laid out for you aren't taken from theological/denominational presuppositions, modern human felt needs, or any other man-made artificial areas of study. Instead, we will look at what the Bible says about itself and use those statements to guide our reading.

The second thing that sets this study method apart is that our object of study is not some natural product of human creativity or intelligence. The God of the universe wrote this book to His people; He is a living, active, and present God, and the moment we come to His Book, He is there to teach us, convict us, guide us, reveal Himself further to us, and bring us into more perfect conformity with the image of God the Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup> This is the work of God the Holy Spirit as we come to the Book He authored. So my goal for writing this is to give you greater opportunity to enjoy "*the fellowship of the Holy Spirit*" (2 Corinthians 13:14), to be taught by the Holy Spirit, and to learn to pray in the Holy Spirit. These communal moments with the third Person of the one true God do not come primarily through feelings, personal impulses,

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<sup>1</sup> Being made into the image of Jesus is called "sanctification" (being made holy, or absolutely set apart for God like Jesus is). God uses everything in the universe - including unbelievers (Romans 9:22,23) - to achieve this goal in the lives of His people: "...we know that God causes all things to work together for good [God Himself is the Source and Definition of Goodness] to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son [Who Himself perfectly reflects the Goodness of the Father]..." (Romans 8:28,29).

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mystical experiences, or giftings, but through the Book He wrote. DO NOT believe the lie that there are two sides to Christian experience, represented on one side by intellectual study of the Word, and seen on the other side in experience of the works of the Holy Spirit in your life through power and strong feelings. The Spirit of Truth works through His Word of Truth, and it is unbiblical to assert anything else! Learning to read His Book in His presence is the greatest path to Christian growth, Church empowerment, and a life reflective of the glory of God.

A God-centered approach to the Bible is the only appropriate approach:

- He is the Author.
- The content of the Bible is His bringing a portion of humanity into relationship with Himself and the judgment of those who refuse to give Him glory and obedience.
- Remember that what you are reading was not first written to you; you are, in essence, reading someone else's mail! That being said, we must not make the Bible serve contemporary events or our circumstances. Rather than "making the Bible relevant for today" (eternal realities are more relevant than temporary situations) or trying to "make the Bible come alive" (God is the source of life, so it is we that need to be made to come alive to His Word), we need to have a teachable, humble, and Christ-centered attitude toward the Bible. The guiding principle of interpretation is not our experiences or feelings ("I feel like this text is saying..."). God the Holy Spirit moves our spirits in guiding the mind, and then our emotions (guided under Spirit and redeemed intellect) are encouraged to respond in celebration, awe, or even grief.
- This strategy will involve repeated readings over nine weeks of a single text. Each week will lead you to pay attention to a different aspect of the Scripture.
- The goal is to gain sensitivity to the guidance and teaching of God the Holy Spirit through the Book He Authored, the Bible.

"I will worship toward thine holy Temple and praise thy Name,  
because of thy louing kindnesse and for thy trueth:  
for thou hast magnified thy Name aboue all things by thy word."

Psalm 138:2, from the Geneva Bible (1560)

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### **Sit Under Bible Teaching in the Congregation of the People of God in Christ**

*1 Corinthians 12:27* Now you are Christ's body, and individually members of it. *12:28* And God has appointed in the church...teachers...

*Ephesians 4:11* And He gave some as...pastors and teachers, *4:12* for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; *4:13* until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. *4:14* As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; *4:15* but speaking the truth in love ["truth" being God's Word taught to the Church], we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, *4:16* from Whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

*1 Thessalonians 5:12* But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, *5:13* and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

*1 Timothy 5:17* The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching.

*Hebrews 13:7* Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.

It has been said by someone smarter than me that if you think you can study the Bible without a teacher, you show yourself to be in need of a teacher since you don't know that the Bible says you must have a teacher.

"Be careful to listen" (Deuteronomy 12:28), and maintain three attitudes while listening. First, be teachable. Second, diligently compare the teaching to the text (Acts 17:11). Third, remember that the teaching time is a divine interaction between congregation, teacher, the Bible, and the ever-present God the Holy Spirit.

The congregational teaching times are not replacements for your personal study of the Word of God. Ever. They should be times to learn new aspects of texts with which you're already familiar, encouragements to explore the Word more, and times of challenge as the Holy Spirit uses the congregational teaching time to bring the Church closer together and closer to Her Lord.

A large following is not a sign of good teaching (Luke 6:26; John 6:66). Great speaking abilities and good looks are not a sign of good teaching (2 Corinthians 10:10). Teachers that tell

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you what you want to hear and never challenge you are not good teachers (2 Timothy 4:3,4). Teachers who “*preach the word...in season and out of season,*” and teachers who “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with great patience and instruction*” are teachers worthy of students (2 Timothy 4:2).

### A Final Exhortation to Pray in the Spirit While Reading the Word

<sup>John 15:26</sup> “*When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is the Spirit of truth Who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me.*”

<sup>John 16:13</sup> “*But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come.*”

<sup>John 16:14</sup> “*He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. <sup>16:15</sup>All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you.*”

<sup>1 John 4:6</sup> “*We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.*”

We are not, on our own, capable of truly understanding the Word of God or what it teaches without the Holy Spirit. We are not able, on our own, to choose or properly apply its truth to our lives. Apart from the Spirit of Christ we can do nothing (John 15:5).

Always keep this in mind while reading/studying/meditating. I say it again: when you come to the Word of God you should come to its Author, as well. Developing an awareness of the teaching presence of God the Holy Spirit around, in, and through His Word is your ultimate goal. Remember, too, that you are never going to learn the Word solely for yourself. You are part of the Body of Christ, and are gifted through the Spirit primarily for the benefit of the Body as a whole. Be diligent, consistent, patient...and GROW, all the while making other disciples!

<sup>Hebrews 5:12</sup> “*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food. <sup>5:13</sup>For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is an infant. <sup>5:14</sup>But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*”

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### **How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God?**

Answer: The Bible evidences itself to be God's Word by the heavenliness of its doctrine, the unity of its parts, and its power to convert sinners and to edify saints. But only the Spirit of God can make us willing to agree and submit to the Bible as the Word of God.

...from the Baptist Catechism (Question 5) by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

### **Be Aware of the Genre**

Hebrews 1:1 *God...spoke...in many portions and in many ways...*

God did indeed use many different ways of speaking to His people in the Bible. There are historical narratives, poems, wisdom writings, letters, prophecies, apocalypses, etc., and none of them are to be approached in the same way! Within each genre (type of writing) there are differences between the ways the different authors speak. Paul will not write a letter the way Peter, James, or John will. Isaiah does not write in the same way as Malachi. In writing a gospel (a unique genre that defies easy explanation), Luke and Mark have very different styles. Sometime genres overlap (as in the case of prophecy and poetry, or prophecy and historical narrative, or prophecy and apocalypse...I think we're seeing a pattern here, aren't we?).

Here are a few basic things to keep in mind with various genres:

- Letters are almost always written to specific groups to address specific problems. Sometimes the problems are easy to spot (as in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians). Other times the problems are not clear (as in Paul's letter to the Ephesians). Still, make a good effort to identify the problem the writer is addressing. Letters also can be found in historical narratives (Ezra 1:2-4; 4:6-22; 5:6-6:12; 7:11-26; Acts 15:23-29) or even apocalypses (Revelation 2:1-3:22), so shift your approach when appropriate. With Paul's letters some of the sentences can get long and/or complicated. Simplify it by finding the main noun and verb and then begin adding back in direct objects, adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, etc.
- Historical narratives are pretty easy to grasp. Still, you need to be aware of the purpose for which the history was written. Chronicles presents a much more

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positive picture of the history of Israel and Judah than Kings does. Why? Because Chronicles is written after the Exile in Babylon to a people newly returning to Judah to rebuild. Chronicles is meant to be an encouraging look back. Kings is written to serve as a warning against idolatry. Same history, two different narratives with two different purposes.

- Legal language is found throughout the Bible, but especially in the Old Testament. Always ask: who is giving the law? To whom is it given (very important question)? Is there a reason for the law given in the text? Are there punishments and/or blessings mentioned in relation to the law? There are several types of legal language of which you should be aware:
  - Apodictic law is found in short, universal, timeless rules for conduct. The most basic and obvious examples are the Ten Commandments.
  - Casuistic law regulates specific circumstances, often dealing with unique cultural/societal conditions that are not found everywhere and at all times. An example of this can be found in the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4. Verses 1-3 describe a specific circumstance to us, and verse 4 gives the actual command governing the situation. It has also been observed that casuistic law applies apodictic law (it takes the short, non-specific statements of apodictic law and applies it to specific situations).
  - The treaty, or covenant (a relationship agreement), is a legal form woven throughout the Scriptures. Be aware of the following elements of the covenant treaty:
    - There is usually a dominant party in the treaties in the times of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> This would often be a conquering ruler who determines the stipulations of the agreement, has the power to enforce it, the ability to deliver the blessings of obedience, and the will to punish with the curses of disobedience.
    - The lesser of the two parties is named.
    - The stipulations (laws) of the treaty are given.

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<sup>2</sup> Usually called a “suzerain” in scholarly literature.

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- Blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience are listed.<sup>3</sup>
- The lawsuit is another form of legal language, used especially by the prophets as they preached to an unfaithful people. The lawsuit was a common form in the Ancient Near East (the part of the world in which the events of the Bible, especially the Old Testament, occur).<sup>4</sup> Here are some elements of the lawsuit to be aware of as you read:
  - The naming of the parties involved (usually the LORD and His people).
  - The summoning of witnesses. Often the witnesses to God's lawsuit against His unfaithful people are "*the heavens and the earth*" (representative of all of God's Creation).<sup>5</sup>
  - A stating of the violations of the relationship agreement, or covenant.
- Poetry is the expression of human experiences/feelings and God's actions/character as described by the spiritual eye of the faithful artist/mystic. Whereas photographer Ansel Adams captured stark, black-and-white photos of landscape, Vincent van Gogh emphasized color and selected aspects of his subject to highlight. The poet (whether he be psalmist or prophet) is not out for details, but the heart of what needs to be said. He will often say the same thing several different ways – this is called parallelism.<sup>6</sup> He will use vague ideas, mind-stretching metaphors, and will never be purely sequential or orderly. The poet does not write observed history or a technical how-to manual. He is heart and art (oh yes, and they use plays on words). Rather than dissecting his technique, step back and admire the results of his brush-strokes. Study larger groups of verses at a time (as opposed to single phrases or verses).

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<sup>3</sup> This is found most obviously in Deuteronomy 27-28.

<sup>4</sup> Called a רִיב (pronounced "reev" in Hebrew).

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 31:28; 32:1; Job 20:27; Psalm 50:4; Isaiah 1:2.

<sup>6</sup> A great and easy-to-see example of parallelism occurs in Psalm 19:7-9. The Word of God is described with six different titles, six different adjectives, and six different effects. We are not meant to make a chart and separate all of these elements! Rather, see the eighteen different descriptors as a single snapshot of the Word of God.

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- Prophets speak to their generation first (not centuries or millennia down the road).  
99% of prophetic material can be solidly anchored in either the day it is uttered or within a generation of that day. Some interpretive strategies make it all future, or speak of double- or even triple- fulfillment. This is always representative of a self-centered interpretive style that wants everything to be about my current world situation now. This is not the “how” or “why” of the Bible’s composition! If, after developing a good Bible study discipline, you are led into a prophetic book of the Bible, do the historical background work. Use what you’ve learned about reading poetry (especially O.T. poetry). Start with the events and issues contemporary to the prophet, and don’t go far from that framework. Look for what God was doing and saying then. Look for aspects of His character and the situation of His people as they were then. Draw from this principles and application. But do the hard work first, and please ignore anyone who applies the prophetic material of the Bible to the headlines of today. If you ever hear anything from me, ever, hear this and follow it for your own good and for the sake of the integrity and honor of the Word of God.
- Wisdom writing is where you get to draw universal ideals without much historical baggage (there’s still baggage, but it’s not as heavy). Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs (along with a few Psalms, sections of prophets, and maybe the letter of James in the N.T.) can all be applied with little effort to our own day and time. Sure, the ideal woman is not necessarily dressed like a belly-dancer like it seems the woman of Song of songs is dressed, but the erotic passion and attention sanctioned in the context of marriage is still universal and part of God’s plan. Still, be aware of the “why” when reading wisdom literature, especially with Job or Ecclesiastes. And remember that it’s poetry so, those rules apply, too.
- Apocalypse is 95% figurative. It’s historical narrative written with the wild heart of a mystic/poet with the purpose of a prophet. Examples are Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation (though these are not exhaustive). Zechariah and Revelation are written as apocalypse to confound enemies of God’s people who might be listening or reading. The key to understand this genre is to have a copious and

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long experience with O.T. themes, poetical metaphors, and historical references. Many times apocalypse will explain itself, though most readers don't let it do so.<sup>7</sup> Revelation is written to a people being hunted and persecuted by the Roman Empire (and before that the Jews); every verse is build from O.T. building blocks (NOT TODAY'S NEWSPAPER!!!!). It is written to comfort them in their trial. Apocalypse takes work and a mind experienced with reading the Word of God. It also takes a healthy understanding of the history of the day in which it was written. Please be cautious about studying it or listening to teaching on it.

### Notes on Our English Translations

Some English translations of the Bible place certain words or phrase in italics. What does this mean? These italicized sections are NOT emphases (I saw someone read the Bible like this on television once). Translating a text from one language to another is challenging work, especially when great care must be taken...this is the Word of God we're talking about! As translators present the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts of the Bible to us in English, sometimes a few words or phrases need to be added to make the translation understandable. Understanding this sometimes makes a significant impact on interpretation! For example, look at this infamous section from Paul's letter to the Ephesians:

5:21...be subject to one another in the fear of Christ. 5:22 Wives, *be subject* to your own husbands, as to the Lord.

What words are italicized? In the Greek of 5:22, there are no verbs. So where do English translators get the verb? From the previous verse, where we are all told to submit to one another in the fear of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Paul doesn't repeat the verb in 5:22, but he intended for his original readers

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<sup>7</sup> For example, Daniel 7's "*Son of Man*" is not primarily Jesus. Jesus will quote 7:13 (sort of) a lot, but that doesn't hijack the entire chapter and push its "fulfillment" into the future. Daniel's "*Son of Man*" is representative of the people of God as a single unit. That's not my conjecture; the text clearly says it in several places. Another example? Okay, but only because you said "please." Revelation 21:2,9,10 clearly states that the New Jerusalem is not heaven or a future millennial reign, but the Church on earth. All the detail after that is a highly figurative exalting in the Church, painting it as more glorious than Rome or Jerusalem (remember, the original recipients were being persecuted by both!). Let apocalypse interpret itself whenever possible. Another example is the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24:4-25:46), which answers the disciples' question about the timing of the destruction of Herod's Temple (24:1-3), which occurred in A.D. 70.

<sup>8</sup> Consider circling the words "be subject" in 5:21 and 5:22, drawing an arrow from the italicized verbs in 5:22 to the source verbs in 5:21 so you can see more clearly what's happening.

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to bring the previous verb forward (which the Greek readers would have done naturally). We don't do that in English...5:22 would be considered an incomplete sentence in English. So our translators – who deserve our respect and thanks for this weighty work they do – repeat the verb, putting it in italics so we'll know what they've done. The subjection of the wife to the husband is a picture of the Church's submission to Christ, but it is also to be modeled in the life of the congregation, as well. 5:22 is a joke in our modern culture, even in the Church.<sup>9</sup> The reason is we have disconnected it from 5:21! We do not model Christ-revering (Spirit-filled) mutual submission in the Church, so where are wives to learn it so it may be lived in Christian marriage? So you see, in this case especially, the italics can make a big difference.

Chapter headings, verses, and publisher-added headings are helpful to us, but sometimes they cause us to separate sections of Scripture more than we should. These things are meant to help us in our study, but they are not an original part of the inspired Word of God. How do sections or chapters relate to one another?

Our English translations in the Old Testament will sometimes write “the LORD” in all capital letters. What does this mean? “God” is a title, not a name; there is no difference when it is used to describe the one true God of the Bible and the false gods of Canaan, for example (there are no capital letters in the original Hebrew). We know the difference because of the context. If “God” is a title, what is God's name? God only gives His name to the people with whom He is in relationship (“covenant”). No one else is given this name. When God's name is used in the Hebrew, our English translators write “the LORD.” While “Lord” is a title, too, remember that the translators put it in all capital letters to signify the Divine Name.<sup>10</sup> Sometimes “God” is put in all capital letters to represent the name of God.<sup>11</sup> Pay attention to how God is named; a shift in

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<sup>9</sup> I don't read 1 Corinthians 13 in weddings, because that passage is not about marriage. When I read Ephesians 5 in weddings, I know – from experience – that I will hear quiet laughter from the congregation and a “humph” from the bride when I get to 5:22.

<sup>10</sup> The Holman Christian Bible is one of the only English translations I know that have replaced this practice of writing “the LORD” with actual inclusion of God's name in the text. “*Then Moses asked God, ‘If I go to the Israelites and say to them: The God of your fathers has sent me to you, and they ask me, ‘What is His name?’ what should I tell them?’ God replied to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.’ God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the Israelites: Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is My name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation*” (Exodus 3:13-15).

<sup>11</sup> For examples, see Psalm 69:6; 71:5,16.

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how He is named can be important. For example, the name “the LORD” starts appearing in the creation narrative in Genesis 2:4 (it has been “God” up to this point). As He creates man and interacts with man, He is called “the LORD.” Notice what happens, though, when the serpent comes to Eve and she responds to it. She doesn’t use the covenant (relationship) name “the LORD,” but uses the title “God,” used by the serpent. Some have suggested that by not using the relationship name of God, Eve has already separated herself in her heart from the LORD. If the title “God” had been used throughout the creation narrative, there would be no problem, but the sudden shift from “the LORD” to “God” could be important.

### **Thoughts on Copiousness and “Coincidence”**

You’ll be spending a lot of time (nine weeks) in a single text if you go through this study in a consistent, disciplined manner. You may not reach a point where you have the text memorized, but it is definitely going to be ingrained in your mind and spirit. Even after you move on to another text, the Spirit will begin drawing connections between your new text and the old text. Over the years, as you learn regularly commune with the Spirit in His Word, you will develop a critical mass, or copiousness, concerning the Word. You’ll start to see the Word as a whole. There’s no short-cut to this maturity-in-the-Word, but it is an grace given by the Spirit to those who persevere in being His pupil in the Scriptures.

Also, don’t be surprised if you start hearing themes in sermons, other reading, or the wisdom of other believers that coincides with what the Spirit is teaching you in the Word. He is, after all, not a spirit subdivided into millions of individual-sized portions for our own edification. He is One Spirit, drawing us from being “many” into being “one” in Christ. God the Holy Spirit will speak through His living Word, but will also echo these lessons in the rest of your life.

### **Before You Start**

- I once heard a popular American Bible teacher (I won’t tell you who since I agree with nothing else he teaches!) say, “if your Bible’s too holy to write in, get one that’s not quite that holy.” I strongly encourage you to be in the practice of writing notes in your Bible and highlighting important words, phrases, or verses (I use crayon made in a pen form – they will never bleed through).

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- Have either a journal, notebook, or word processor file on a computer at hand when you study. These are good for compiling lists or writing out longer observations. Save them. Use them as references for later study, and feel free to build on them. None of us remember everything, and life is full of interruptions. Careful recording the study/meditation process enables us to stay on track with the teaching of the Spirit in His Word.
- Be in prayer. While our minds are incredibly important for the Bible studying task, and our emotions should be open to feeling the touch of the Word, our spirits are the most important element in Bible study. You are coming to the Word, written by God the Holy Spirit (Who indwells every believer). Reading, studying, and meditating upon the Word should be a time of dedicated communion with God the Holy Spirit.<sup>12</sup>
- Reading/memorization plans are good, but nothing replaces the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. It is wise to start with smaller books when beginning this discipline of study (no one runs a marathon without building up endurance, strength, and skill by running smaller distances!). As far as memorization, let me encourage you to read through the selected book four or five days. The Spirit will show you what verses you should memorize (in most cases I would say don't look for verses to memorize...try to let the Spirit highlight them for you).
- I will give several biblical categories to look for as you repeatedly read your selected text.<sup>13</sup> Mark these things in your Bible and begin compiling lists and notes in your selected study journal. This is not an exhaustive list. I have taken Scriptures that speak of the Word of God and used those truths as a starting-point for your study. Consider reading the book to which you've been led at least once a day for five days of the week. Tackle one of these **"look-for marks"** a week. If other things in the text

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<sup>12</sup> The Holy Spirit and the Word of God cannot be separated from each other, for *"the Spirit is the Truth"* (1 John 5:6). Unbridled affection and enthusiasm without a corresponding deepening in the Word is false religion and will quickly lapse into error. A Spirit-less dedication to the Word will lapse into godless legalism that will begin treating the Word of God no differently than any other well-written human document.

<sup>13</sup> In other words, I have looked at Bible passages about Scripture (listed under the title of every week's assignment), taken note of the truth about Scripture in the passage, and made that truth one of the "marks" we're going to get in the habit of noticing as we read Scripture. The Author has told us the purpose of His Book in these guiding passages; we're going to use those purposes to teach us how to read the Word.

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(outside of the week's assigned "mark") divert your study, let them. This is a guide, not a rule. We are learning in this to let the Holy Spirit teach us the Word as we read/study/meditate, not adopting a man-made system!

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## **A NINE-WEEK SYSTEM OF STUDY**

### **WEEK ONE: Look for the Marks of the Good News**

*<sup>2</sup> Timothy 3:14 You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, <sup>3:15</sup> and that from childhood you have known **the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.***

*James 1:18 **In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures.***

*<sup>1</sup> Peter 2:2...like newborn babies, long for **the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.***

As you read the section of text you to which you have been led, write out **the elements that relate to the salvation found only in Christ**. Identify which part of the Good News you think this phrase/verse specifically highlights:

- God’s planning of salvation before time or in history and His sovereignty over the saving of humanity (and individuals). This includes (but does not exclude) the work of the Holy Spirit in salvation.
- Man’s depravity (sinfulness), need for salvation, and/or inability to save himself.
- The work of Christ on the cross. What does your passage say about this work?
- Judgment (in this life and after this life) and blessing (in this life and eternally).
- Get used to using the theological terms for the aspects of the Good News:
  - Regeneration (being born again or given new life).
  - Justification (being declared right before God).
  - Sanctification (being made holy by the Holy Spirit...a continually process for every believer in this life).
  - Glorification (being finally and perfectly conformed to the image of God the Son...not fully realized until after our deaths).
  - We use these terms not because big words are good for your self-esteem, but because they’re handy shorthand for big ideas. Plus, as you compile a list of Scriptures under certain specific ideas like “justification,” you begin to

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understand what the whole Bible has to say about these aspects of the Good News.

**How is the Word of God made effective for salvation?**

Answer: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.

**How is the Word to be read and heard that it may become effective for salvation?**

Answer: That the Word may become effective for salvation we must attend to it with diligence, preparation and prayer, receive it in faith and love, lay it up in our hearts and practice it in our lives

...from the Baptist Catechism (Questions 96 & 97) by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

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### WEEK TWO: Look for Truths About God's Character That Lead You to Worship Him

*John 4:23 "But an hour is coming, and now is, when **the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth**; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers. 4:24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth."*

The Word of God is the foundation for true worship. Why? Because it tells us of the character of God. The bigger our picture of God is, as described on every page of the Bible, the greater our ability to worship Him. If an individual attempts to worship God apart from how He has revealed Himself in His Word, he is probably going to be worshipping something of his own creation/imagination under the name "God." This is idolatry. The true God of the Bible does not like idolatry, for His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14).

We want to pay attention to those passages that describe God. We want to ask the Spirit to give us a heart of worship that responds to His truth with great rejoicing. We don't need giant coliseums of tens of thousands of singers, professional 20-piece worship teams (with orchestra and choir), awesome video work, awe-inspiring architecture, a million-dollar check from the Lord in the mail, perfect health, resurrected loved ones, children worthy of boasting (obedient, successful, and, oh yeah, godly), a trophy husband/wife, a vacation house, etc., to worship our God. If, after we are given saving grace through faith in Christ Jesus, we are given a Bible and thrown alone onto a desert island, the testimony (truth) about God's character in His Word and the guidance of His Holy Spirit should be enough to lead us into true worship. God alone, not His manifold blessings (which are but reflections of His glory), should be our ultimate desire, for it's the reason He saved us: *1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God...* "To God," not the cool stuff of heaven we sing about, and not to every whimsical desire of our earth-anchored hearts. God alone is the joy, satisfaction, peace, ecstasy, fulfillment we were created to enjoy. Everything else is a mirror of His glory.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> This is the true horror of Hell: the mirrors of God's glory in all that humanity enjoys, remembers enjoying, or hopes to enjoy, will go dark. "...the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Eternity without God's reflected glory will be an endless, gnawing hunger that will never abate. He is the Giver of ALL good (James 1:17), and when His lights are cut off, there will be nothing left to satisfy.

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He is the full Light. If we desire anything lesser than God (and all is lesser than God) in our contemplation of the end of the Good News, we are dabbling in idolatry. Think of those who received the apostle Peter's first letter. They didn't have our American "perfect worship service" experience, the charmed life, and they didn't have Jesus to see face-to-face. They had persecution (the theme of Peter's letter). How did they respond? <sup>1 Peter 1:8</sup>...*and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory...*

So, as you read, **look for, mark, and begin compiling things about God Himself that are worthy of worship.** Worship Him in Spirit (God the Holy Spirit Who dwells within you) and in truth (His Word).

**Question: How do we know there is a God?**

Answer: The light of nature in man, and the works of God, plainly declares that there is a God; but His Word and Spirit only, do effectually reveal Him unto us for our salvation.

...from the Baptist Catechism (Question 3) by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

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### WEEK THREE: Look for Standards of Conduct in How We Treat Each Other

*<sup>1</sup> Peter 1:22 Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, **fervently love one another from the heart**, <sup>1:23</sup> **for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.** <sup>1:24</sup> For, “ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS, AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS. THE GRASS WITHERS, AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF, <sup>1:25</sup> BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER.” And this is the word which was preached to you.*

The Bible has a lot to say about how God wants us to treat one another in the covenant family of God. If you want, think of this category as “Christian ethics.”<sup>15</sup> It should not be the trends and standards of society or our own comfort zones that determine how we relate to one another. **Look for, mark, and highlight those areas that speak of God’s will for our treatment of each other.** How do these behaviors, commanded by God, point back to His character or actions? Be open to the Spirit’s examination of your own life after that, in light of what you’ve learned.

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<sup>15</sup> Jesus listed “love your neighbor as yourself” as the second-greatest commandment, and it’s not even one of the “Ten Commandments” (Leviticus 19:18, in Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27). He also quoted Hosea 6:6 (Matthew 9:13; 12:7). Despite these two things, He did not hesitate to point out sin in people’s lives, and did not hesitate to highlight God’s truth and will over the practices, opinions, and false worldviews of His day. Love and mercy include saving someone from a fruitless life and a glory-less eternity!

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### WEEK FOUR: Look for Quotes, Allusions, or References to the Old Testament When Reading the New Testament

Luke 24:27 *Then **beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures**...<sup>24:32</sup> they said to one another, “Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?”*

Luke 24:44 *Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that **all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.**”<sup>24:45</sup> Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures...*

John 5:38 *“You do not have His word abiding in you, for you do not believe Him whom He sent. <sup>5:39</sup> You search **the Scriptures** because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that **testify about Me...**”*

Acts 20:27 *“For I did not shrink from declaring to you **the whole purpose of God.**”*

A good translation will make Old Testament quotes clear in the New Testament. Some translations, like the New American Standard, will put O.T. quotes in all capital letters (as you can see in some the citations in this guide). Other translations will put clear footnotes or sidenotes giving the O.T. “address,” while others will put the “address” directly below the O.T. quote. **PAY ATTENTION TO THIS! Mark passages that quote from the Old Testament (and mark the spot in the Old Testament that is quoted in the New Testament).**

Take the time to go back and read the larger context of the O.T. passage quoted. Why did the N.T. author, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, quote this specific verse? Does the original context shed any illumination on the N.T. passage you’re studying? Are there any parallels in what God was doing at the writing of the O.T. verse and what God is doing in the N.T. verse’s immediate context? In other words, are we seeing a pattern in God’s actions in history toward His people?

This might be a good place to mention some important things about studying the O.T., whether you’re looking at a passage quoting in the N.T. or not.

“All Scripture is a testimony to Christ, Who is Himself the focus of divine revelation.”

..from the Baptist Faith & Message, I (2000)

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### The Heart of the Matter

In Hebrew thought, the most important part of a literary section is the middle (we generally put the most important point toward the end).<sup>16</sup> We see this in the very first sentence of the Bible. Let me illustrate it with a diagram (Hebrew reads right-to-left, which is why this looks “backward”):

the earth.	and (+ sign of direct object)	the heavens	(sign of direct object)	<b>God</b>	created	In- beginning
הָאָרֶץ	וְאֵת	הַשָּׁמַיִם	אֵת	אֱלֹהִים	בָּרָא	בְּרֵאשִׁית

God is at the heart of the sentence, not the creation.<sup>17</sup>

You will notice this the most in larger sections. Let me give you a few examples of this “heart of the matter” principle in narratives.

- The heart verse of the creation narrative (Genesis 1:1-2:25) is 1:27, “*God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them*” (notice this triple repetition, or parallelism, too!).
- The heart verse of the story of the Flood (Genesis 6:8-8:22) is 8:1, “*God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the cattle that were with him in the ark; and God caused a wind to pass over the earth, and the water subsided.*”
- In the heart of Jeremiah’s Lamentations we see this famous confession of faith in the LORD: *3:22 The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. 3:23 They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*
- The heart of Jonah is this confession of faith, summarizing the point of the small book: *2:9 Salvation is from the LORD.*

Identifying these heart-statements in passages of the Old Testament can help us understand the purpose of the book and its main theme.

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<sup>16</sup> The marking in the middle of each Hebrew sentence in the O.T. (called “Masorah”) is called an אֶתְנַחַח (pronounced *athnach*).

<sup>17</sup> You also see that when we speak of the middle, we don’t mean the exact middle. In Genesis 1:1, “God” is not in the perfect middle, but the heart of the sentence as far as meaning goes.

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### A Word for the Day

We've all seen the well-intentioned lists of hundreds of O.T. "prophecies" fulfilled in Jesus' life. I personally don't count them as true prophecies of Christ unless the N.T. specifically uses them that way (in other words, I don't try to read Christian prophecy back into the O.T. unless the N.T. has told me to in a specific verse). Whether or not an O.T. verse points to Christ, the verse NEVER, NEVER, NEVER EXISTS FOR THAT PURPOSE ALONE!! There is ALWAYS an original context and a later fullness given to the verse in the work of Christ (in His earthly life or in His Church). Let me give you an example.

In Isaiah 7:14 these famous words are uttered by the prophet: *"Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel."* The evangelist and apostle Matthew, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit some 800 years later then records these words from an angel to Joseph in a dream: <sup>1:20</sup>*"Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife; for the Child who has been conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. <sup>1:21</sup>She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."* <sup>1:22</sup>*Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: <sup>1:23</sup>"BEHOLD, THE VIRGIN SHALL BE WITH CHILD AND SHALL BEAR A SON, AND THEY SHALL CALL HIS NAME IMMANUEL,"* which translated means, *"GOD WITH US."* Isaiah 7:14 was not written on a fortune cookie-sized slip of paper and saved for 800 years. It is surrounded by a historical narrative in which it plays a real and immediate purpose to that day (the reign of Ahaz king of Judah, who reigned from 735-715 B.C.). The prophecy is given in the royal court with a time limit of a few years given for its fulfillment (7:15,16). The child whose nickname will be "God with us" is Ahaz's son Hezekiah, one of the godliest kings in Judah's history (2 Kings 18:5).<sup>18</sup> Jesus Christ, to Whom the angel applies Isaiah 7:14, will similarly be God's presence and deliverance among God's people, but in an ultimate and everlasting manner. Do you see what I mean when I say we must respect the O.T. in its contexts? We want to be like the <sup>Matthew 13:52</sup>*"scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old."* The O.T. tells the story of God's reaching out to a remnant of lost humanity, reaching its highest,

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<sup>18</sup> The name "Immanuel" recurs several times after this (8:8,10), still referring to Hezekiah's reign (715-687 B.C.).

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most perfect, and final point in the arrival of God Himself to save us. Everything before the coming of Christ is building blocks so we'd properly understand Christ. Everything after the coming of Christ explains Christ to us.

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### WEEK FIVE: Look for Repeated Words, Ideas, and Phrases

*Galatians 1:8* But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! *1:9* As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

It's not always as easy to spot repetition as Paul makes it in his letter to the churches in the region of Galatia. Still, **look for important words or phrases that are repeated in whatever book of the Bible you're reading.** This takes numerous readings. Sometimes the repetition is spread out, as when the phrase used in Isaiah 5:25 does not occur again until 9:12,17,19,21; 10:4. Sometimes the repetition is a single word used an inordinate amount of times, as with "earth" in Isaiah 24:1,3-6,11,13,16,17,19,20,21. Generally, though, you want to be sensitive to patterns. If I want to understand, for example, what Paul means by "righteous" in his letter to the Romans, I'm going to write a list of verses where that word (or "righteousness") occurs. I will not draw a conclusion based solely upon 1:17. Of course, after I do this and understand the use of that word in 1:17, I'm going to want to understand what Paul means by the word "faith" in Romans. Maybe after that I'll look into the verb "revealed" (which is repeated in 1:18...which also uses the word "unrighteousness" not once but twice in a single verse). This takes work, time, and long-term meditation on Romans, but the goal is depth, not a land-speed record.

When looking at repetition, stay in the same book for a while. After mastering its key words, look at how the same author uses that word/phrase in other books.

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### WEEK SIX: Look for Unique Words, Ideas, and Phrases

*1 Corinthians 15:29* *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why then are they baptized for them?*

Yes, this is actually in the Bible. What in the world does it mean? I don't know, and no one else who's honest knows either. Sometimes things are written in Scripture that have virtually no parallel in the rest of Scripture and no parallel in any other kind of writing contemporaneous to it. **Mark these unique features.** Sometimes it's words or phrases that stump the translator, as in the prophet Hosea. Written to the northern ten tribes, it sometimes uses their dialect of Hebrew. The problem is that they were dispersed from the land in 722 B.C. and vanished into history (along with their dialect of Hebrew). So translating certain phrases or words is a problem. Sometimes we just don't have enough information about the culture to make a really accurate interpretation (and application) of the text, as in the case of Jesus' parable of the unrighteous steward in Luke 16:1-9. So what do we do?

We make a concerted effort to look for similar passages that might shed light on our difficult passage. We read what history we can about the time or key events/practices described in the passage. We read every commentator we can. If we are still confused, what do we do then? Well, I'll tell you what we don't do. We don't build a doctrine or alter a doctrine based on a single perplexing passage. We put it in a special folder in our minds – well-isolated from accepted doctrine and practice – and we begin the years- or decades-long meditation on it. Every once in a while lift it back up to the Lord and ask for His further illumination. Who knows? You may be the one to make 1 Corinthians 15:29 fit into our biblical doctrine of baptism.

This same idea applies to larger sections of Scripture, like entire chapters, that describe events, occurrences, or doctrines that are not reflected in the rest of Scripture (like the drinking of poison/handling of serpents in Mark 16:18, the “tongues” of 1 Corinthians 12-14, or the “millennium” of Revelation 20). We do not build doctrines on ideas that seem to be found only in one place. Rather, we look for similar passages that may teach us how to read the challenging texts in the right way. This does not mean we cut-and-paste Scripture, though! Let me give you an important example.

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“Experts” in end-times doctrine will often speak of “the Antichrist” in their teaching of the Revelation. Here’s the problem: the title “Antichrist” does not appear in this book! “Antichrist” appears in two of the small letters of the Apostle John, and the Apostle does NOT use this title to describe a ruler who controls the world throughout “the Great Tribulation.” What does the Apostle John say about “Antichrist”?

- <sup>1</sup> John 2:18 *Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.*
- <sup>2:22</sup> *Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son.*
- <sup>4:2</sup> *By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God; <sup>4:3</sup>and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world.*
- <sup>2</sup> John 7 *For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist.*

John describes antichrist as an attitude, false belief, or “spirit” inhabiting many individuals who seem to be causing trouble within the church.<sup>19</sup> Their main work is to spread false teaching about the nature of God the Son. Is there any justifiable reason to project the name “Antichrist” onto a single individual who operates on the world political stage, based on John’s two little letters? NO!

Let the Bible speak for itself, even when it uses unique words, phrases, or ideas. The Holy Spirit doesn’t need you to cut-and-paste His inspired Book to match a man-made system! When looking for precedent or echoes in other parts of Scripture to illuminate difficult passages, do not ignore the immediate context!

“The infallible rule for the interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself, and therefore whenever there is a question about the true and full sense of any scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other passages which speak more clearly.”

...from the Baptist Confession of 1689, I.9.

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<sup>19</sup> And specifically in his time, which he calls “*the last hour*.” This is not a fore-seeing to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but a prophetic call to the Church in his day to look out for these false teachers.

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### **WEEK SEVEN: Look for Calls to a More Dedicated, Holy, and Pure Life**

*2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 3:17 so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

*Hebrews 4:11 Therefore let us be diligent to enter that rest, so that no one will fall, through following the same example of disobedience. 4:12 For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 4:13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.*

*John 17:17 "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*

Remember, the goal of the Bible and its author (God the Holy Spirit) is not to apply knowledge of God and His will to your life to achieve success, orderliness, and contentedness with all this life has to offer. The purpose of the Word is to assist in conforming you to the image of God the Son, Who spent His life in eternity past overjoyed and full of love just looking into His Father's face and reflecting that glory that looked back. The Bible exists to lift us up to the Father, not to make everything clean and orderly down here. Don't have a "down here" focus in your application of the Bible or in your spiritual life, which is your real life (Colossians 3:1-5).

**Look for those "upward callings" to living a heavenward life on earth in your study.**

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**WEEK EIGHT: Look for What a Disciple of Jesus Must Learn and Teach**

*Matthew 28:18* And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. *28:19* Go therefore and **make disciples** of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, *28:20* **teaching them to observe all that I commanded you**; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

We usually call this the “Great Commission” at the end of the Gospel of Matthew. Who has authority? Over what has He been given authority? Is there anything that is not subject to His authority? A disciple is a learner; He speaks to disciples (28:16) and tells them to make disciples. What two things must we do to make disciples (presumably these are two things we ourselves have experienced and to which we are dedicated)?

The second of these two things is to teach the commandments of Jesus. These are not limited to the “red letter” commands of Jesus. The word “apostle” means “sent-out one.” Jesus commissioned the apostles to go out and teach the world about Him. The New Testament as a whole is the teaching of the apostles and their immediate associates. So when we read anywhere in the New Testament **we need to be especially sensitive to the commandments of Christ and subsequent commands of Christ’s apostles (and their immediate associates) – mark them!** An apostle’s command directly comes from the authority of the commanding Christ. The early Church was *Acts 2:42* *continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching*. They were not replacing Jesus’ teaching! Let me ask you something. Who wrote the Gospels? Apostles and their associates. So, concerning these “red letters” of Jesus, who was inspired to select only some of the words of Jesus and who wrote them under the inspiration of God the Holy Spirit? Apostles and their associates. Even the “red letters,” therefore, are teachings of the apostles. Everything afterwards applies the truth of Christ to our lives as His Church.

**Mark in your Bible or make a separate list of the commands in the sections of Scripture you are reading.**

There are three layers of application that need to be considered from your list of commands. First, how should the Church apply these commands? Second, how should you as an individual (an inseparable part of the Church) apply these commands? Third, how can these commands be taught to others in the process of making disciples (this includes our children)?

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Remember the promises made in connection with obedience to Christ's commands:

- It is a testimony to true love for Christ: John 14:15 *"If you love Me, you will keep My commandments."*
- It includes and us in the love of the Trinitarian God and brings us into a deeper illumination of Christ Himself in our lives: John 14:21 *"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."*
- It cultivates our friendship with Christ: John 15:14 *"You are My friends if you do what I command you."*
- Again, we are drawn through obedience to Christ's commands into the very love of the Trinitarian God: John 15:10 *"If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love."*

**Question: What is the Word of God?**

Answer: The Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, being given by divine inspiration, are the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.

...from the Baptist Catechism (Question 4) by Benjamin Keach (1640-1704)

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### WEEK NINE: Look for What the Text Says About the People of God (the Church)

<sup>1</sup> Timothy 3:15...*I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of **the truth**.*

When Paul writes to the Church in Rome, he lists the blessings of being a Jew, one of which was that they “*were entrusted with the oracles of God*” (3:2).<sup>20</sup> Since the Church is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Book He Authored is the foundation, the guide, the vision statement, the covenant, the constitution, the by-laws, and the final evaluator of all the Church is or will be. As you read the text, **mark** those statements that either describe something about the people of God as a whole, give us insight into God’s actions/attitudes toward His people, or are commands to action for God’s people.

Pay attention to commands to or statements about individuals. Then look for commands to or statements about the congregation of God’s people as a whole. Do not confuse the two! We have a tendency to see things from a very individualistic point of view, but the Bible often addresses the people of God as a corporate whole. Rather than forcing texts to address our individual lives, we should be moldable, allowing the Holy Spirit to give us more of a “Body” mentality toward our own lives, thoughts, decisions, and sense of identity.<sup>21</sup>

Let me give you two examples, one simple and one a little more complicated. First is in the “Lord’s Prayer” (Matthew 6:10-13).<sup>22</sup> Are the pronouns singular or plural? What are the implications for our prayer life? What role should prayer take in the corporate life of the Church? Second, in 1 Corinthians 6:19 we read “*your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit Who is in you.*” We immediately think of our individual physical bodies, don’t we? Then, tying in 1 Corinthians 3:17, we tell people of the evils of smoking, over-eating, and chewing bubble gum. But is Paul

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<sup>20</sup> Stephen called them “*living oracles*” (Acts 7:38). Even though the Old Testament tells us of a “*ministry of death*,” it still “*came with glory*” (2 Corinthians 3:7). It is a valuable treasure of the Church because it tells us of God’s working in salvation history, His character, and our great need for Christ’s salvation.

<sup>21</sup> SUGGESTION: write a simple “p” (plural) or “s” (singular) by those pronouns or statements that the Spirit highlights for you.

<sup>22</sup> How do we reconcile the plural pronouns of the prayer with the admonition to pray secretly in the verses immediately preceding this (6:5-9)?

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talking about our physical bodies? Take a look at this chart showing the 6:19 phrase; take note of Paul’s switching between singular and plural.

τὸ σῶμα	ὑμῶν	ναὸς	τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος	ἐστίν
the body	of you	a temple	of the in-you Spirit-holy	is being
Singular	plural	singular	"you" is plural	singular

How many bodies and temples? Is Paul speaking to an individual? We see that Paul is speaking to a group (the Corinthian Church) as though they were one (a single body or temple). How does this change our understanding of the passage?

I know what you’re going to say. “Pastor Michael, we don’t know Greek, modern English doesn’t have a different singular and plural pronoun for ‘you,’ and my Bible doesn’t have ‘ya’ll’ or ‘you guys’ in it to help me!” This is true, which is why you need to have a King James Version nearby.<sup>23</sup> Whenever, in the New Testament, you read “you” or “ye,” it is plural (“thee,” “thou,” or “thy” is singular). Using a K.J.V. as a supplemental translation to your study gives you the benefits of Elizabethan English (clearer pronouns) without the negative issues accompanying that translation.<sup>24</sup> A quick check of the K.J.V. shows us the plural pronouns and singular body-temple idea Paul is trying to teach us: “...*your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you...*” So now we won’t twist this verse to make it address personal bodily stewardship, but will see it to be an admonition to see ourselves as a single Body (Christ’s), inhabited by one Holy Spirit, and to make God-glorifying decisions on that basis.

What is God the Holy Spirit saying to His people through His Word?

**May God the Holy Spirit**  
**give you His illumination, dedication, and renewal**  
**as you learn to study His Word under His tutelage.**

<sup>23</sup> When I don’t want to go to the Greek or don’t have a Greek Testament nearby, I personally use the Geneva Bible (1560) to hunt down singular and plural pronouns.

<sup>24</sup> You also have another resource: your pastor. Many of Jesus’ teaching times come from questions asked Him by others; this was a common Jewish teaching technique. The Greek philosophers did the same centuries before Christ. Ask questions!

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**Meditations on Word-Focused Praying<sup>25</sup>**

Reading Psalm 119 this morning, I was struck by the prayers of the Psalmist to God over the Word. Coming to the Word should always be a prayer-filled event, asking for God the Holy Spirit to be present and teach us through His Word. It's not enough to schedule time and make ourselves read...we must seek the presence of the Author and that He'll bring us to the Word in His timing...let's look at a few of these prayers.

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*Oh that my ways may be established to keep Your statutes (119:5)! Who establishes our ways? The God of the Word. The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9).* This is a prayer of the Psalmist, that God would establish his ways in a certain way – not the way he wants, but according to what God wants and has shown in His Word.

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*With all my heart I have sought You; do not let me wander from Your commandments (119:10).* Why do we struggle through times when we wander from the Word? Well, it's not just a book. It's the living Word of God, breathed by the Holy Spirit. When we have divided hearts and our singular desire is not His presence and glory, He gives us over for a season to those things that damage our inner faithfulness to Him. Whether it's stuff, non-Kingdom priorities, relationships, our own pleasure, His name is Jealous (Exodus 34:14 – we don't pray to Him using that name, do we?) and He will not allow divided loyalty (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13), anymore than spouses would allow it in the marriage relationship (which is nothing more than a picture of the relationship with God). Even when we go through a period of closeness and outward fidelity to Him, He knows the heart. Sometimes we are Providentially sent on a period of miserable wandering to highlight the infidelity in our hearts (Jeremiah 29:12,13 – a promise to those exiled for spiritual infidelity). The Psalmist pleads with God to save Him from such a time of wandering from the Word, the place of our primary communion with God. Pray this for yourself, and pray it over those who are wandering.

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<sup>25</sup> Reprinted from [www.desertratofmorgan.blogspot.com](http://www.desertratofmorgan.blogspot.com), September 9, 2009.

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*Incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to dishonest gain. Turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Your ways (119:36,37).* More “defensive” prayer. Consider this preventative to wandering. It’s also almost confessional, isn’t it? I’m reminded of the hymn: “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, Lord, take and seal it; seal it for Thy courts above.”<sup>26</sup>

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We’ve all been blessed in life by great Bible teachers. They are all conduits themselves for the Holy Spirit, Who longs to teach us directly (in addition to His gift of human teachers in the Church – Ephesians 4:8,11).

- *Blessed are You, O LORD; teach me Your statutes (119:12).*
- *I have told of my ways, and You have answered me; teach me Your statutes. Make me understand the way of Your precepts, so I will meditate on Your wonders (119:26,27).*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Deal bountifully with Your servant, that I may live and keep Your word (119:17).* This is the basis for a prayer for life; not fear of sickness, calamity, or death, but a prayer for a life keeping God’s Word. How backward is this to our fallen nature, which places itself first! The new creation puts God’s Word first. Life serves the Word, not the twisted view of the fleshly christian, who sees the Word as a means to get what he/she wants. *Your testimonies are righteous forever; give me understanding that I may live (119:144).*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Your law (119:18).* The Psalm recognizes Who the Teacher is. Prayer is the most neglected part of Bible study for us. We have such an intellectual (even the least intellectual among us) attitude about it. It’s a book. Books are

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<sup>26</sup> “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” by Robert Robinson (1735-1790).

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read with the intellect. It's something to be dissected and categorized scientifically, its facts absorbed like so much history or trivia. No! This thing is the breath, the voice, the essence of God. It is alive, and contains more wonderful things than our tiny minds can pull from it. Pray to see the wonder!

\* \* \* \* \*

*My soul cleaves to the dust; revive me according to Your word...My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word. Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Your law (119:25,28,29).* Grief, depression, sorrow. O, would that God would put this conviction in our hearts, that the remedy is not an outward change in circumstance, but an inward application of the Word of life to our weary souls! Even in moments of joy, pray that the next valley is lit by the light of the Word.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Teach me, O LORD, the way of Your statutes, and I shall observe it to the end. Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law and keep it with all my heart. Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it...establish Your word to Your servant, as that which produces reverence for You (119:33-35,38).* The Psalmist doesn't ask once, does he? Look at all the ways he has to describe the Word: statutes, law, commandments, word. It's always reminded me of lovers who have a multitude of secret names for each other. The Psalmist isn't a "five-minute devotion" kind of guy. God has gifted him with a wonderful, multi-faceted, passionate, singular fidelity and intimate love for the Word. If that's not something worth praying for, I don't know what is! What's the goal: "...that which produces reverence for You." How can we say we love this God without showing Him reverence? How can we show Him reverence when we aren't devoted to the source of that reverence?

\* \* \* \* \*

*The earth is full of Your lovingkindness, O LORD; teach me Your statutes (119:64).* Natural revelation, the imprint of God's character and attributes on creation (Psalm 19:1; Isaiah 6:3; Romans 1:20), inspire the Psalmist to go back to the Word. Nature doesn't teach us the Word,

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though. It inspires us to a conception of a God of beauty, order, and power, but we still ask God to teach us through His Word.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments (119:66).*

Do we really believe His way is best, or is this just some religious confession that isn't reflected in our lives? The Psalmist comes to the Teacher with this offering: belief.

\* \* \* \* \*

*O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, and teach me Your ordinances (119:108).* Part of our prayer before studying the Word or hearing it taught (and during and after these times, too) is not just asking for teaching only, but an offering of praise for the previous times of teaching, for God's promise and provision to teach, for the marvelous fruit the Word has produced in your spirit-life, and for the closeness of relationship with the matchless God the Word provides. *Let my lips utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes (119:171).*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Deal with Your servant according to Your lovingkindness and teach me Your statutes. I am Your servant; give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies (119:124,125).* God is not the cold, impersonal professor. He deals with us and teaches us according to His character, the embodiment of lovingkindness. He knows the reason and purpose of our creation. He knows what is best for us (an existence of giving Him praise and enjoying His glory). On this basis (a God-centered reality as opposed to the false self-centered reality) He will teach. *Your hands made me and fashioned me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments (119:173).* Not only does the Creator enable His creation to enjoy His love through His Word, but His goodness: *You are good and do good; teach me Your statutes (119:68).*

\* \* \* \* \*

*Make Your face shine upon Your servant, and teach me Your statutes (119:135).* The Word itself is an unfathomable expression of God's radiant glory. The more we spend time in the Word

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and Spirit (as He answers our prayer to give us opportunity), the more we'll reflect and enjoy that "shining."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Let my cry come before You, O LORD; give me understanding according to Your word* (119:169). Job's experience is not unique – when difficulties come, we all seem to be surrounded with people who don't give us God's wisdom for dealing with the situation. Their advice will often appeal to our fleshly desires for revenge, justification, or wallowing self-pity. The Psalm asks for correct, God-oriented thinking. This takes a maturity and a willingness to die to those parts of ourselves that want to come out on top in difficult situations (rather than embracing the cross).

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*I am a stranger in the earth; do not hide Your commandments from me* (119:19). We need to confess this every day. Unless we remind ourselves before God of this truth, there is an almost irresistible tendency to start feeling at home here. His Word should be the constant flag of a foreign country lifted up before us here on our pilgrimage. If He hides His commandments from us, we would immediately forget our true home. *Your statutes are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage* (119:54). Songs! Not brief times of study we force ourselves to endure to assuage a guilty conscience! Songs touch the emotional seat of our souls, don't they? We don't sing songs to stimulate ourselves intellectually. They are capable of radically modifying our mood, and equally capable of expressing the inexpressible. This is how the Psalmist views the word in land far from home. Pray this becomes your passion!

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I hope this has given you some ammunition as you pray for yourself, those close to you, and all of the Church of Jesus Christ. O, that we, the Bride, would come to desire to enjoy all we can of the Bridegroom in His Word. May this be our prayer.

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