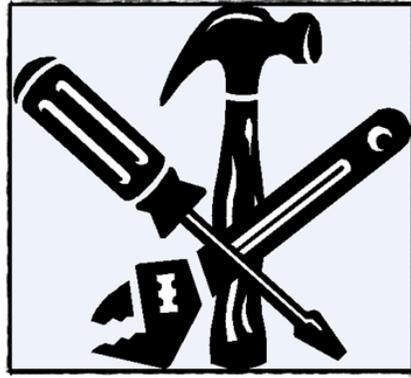


# 5 Tools



for

# Engaging Bible Reading

BY

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We know that reading the Bible is important.

**The Bible is God Speaking to Us:** 2 Timothy 3:16<sup>1</sup> tells us, *All Scriptures is inspired by God...* This is an amazing phrase. It literally means that the written word in our Bible is the breath of God. The Bible you hold in your hand or look at on your phone or tablet, is the Word of God.

**Reading the Bible Makes Us Better People:**

It keeps us from sin: *I have treasured your word in my heart so that I may not sin against you.* (Psalm 119:11)

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

It helps us know God and his ways: *All Scripture is inspired by God[a] and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* (2 Timothy 3:16 -17)

Despite these promises and benefits, very few Christians read the scriptures regularly and those who do, often battle with. . . well let's face it, we battle boredom. It isn't that the Bible is boring. It is filled with the types of stories that we pay money to watch or read about. But for some reason, regularly reading of the Bible drifts from excited engagement into monotony or legalistic ritual.

In this little paper, I want to explain five simple tools that will help you engage God's Word more deeply and plant it deeply in your life.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references are from the Christian Standard Bible copyrighted 2017 by Holman Bible Publisher.

## ASK QUESTIONS

Questions stimulate thinking and fire our imagination. When you are watching a movie and the music changes, immediately you ask questions. *What is about to happen? How is she going to get away? Is someone in my house right now?* Ok, hopefully you don't ask that last one, but you get the point. These questions drive us deeper into the scene and actually make the scene more memorable.

Unfortunately, when we read the Bible, we have stopped asking questions. We bounce across the surface of the text like a balloon across dunes at the beach. I think we do this because the stories are familiar or, we have trained ourselves to ignore what we don't understand. One way to engage more deeply in the scriptures is by asking a series of questions and taking time to write the answers.

### 1. What does this say? OR What is happening here?

This is our time to reflect on the actual text. We don't assume we know what is happening because we read about it somewhere, or because we listened to a sermon about it. We read God's Word and then pause to ask what is going on. What has actually been written.

We summarize the passage in our own words.

What is the action that is taking place?

What does the letter say?

What is the poem or prayer talking about?

Slow down. Answer the question. Write the answer in a notebook or type it if you are using technology.

### 2. What does this mean?

Once we know what the Bible actually says, we explore the meaning.

Is there a principle to apply or a sin to avoid?

What is this teaching us about God?

What is this teaching about God's world or God's plan?

What does it teach about us?

What does this teach us about suffering, success, persecution?

Keep in mind, we are not asking "What does this mean to me?" You and I are not the main character of God's Word. He is. Our goal is to discover the meaning God intended from this text.

Slow down and record the answer to this question.

### 3. What should I do about this today?

This question makes the Bible a mirror. It speaks to shows us who we are. James, the brother of Jesus, reminds us: *But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was.* (James 1:22–24)

We don't want to be this kind of Bible reader. This is why we take time to ask one more question:

- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there a sin to confess?
- Is there an area of life we need to surrender to God?
- Is it time to worship God?
- Thank God?
- Confess to God?

Record your thoughts and then, think about your day. Make plans to apply what you have learned.

### Two Weeks of Practice

Here are 14 Scripture passages to engage the tool of “Asking Questions.”

- |                       |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Exodus 32          | 8. Philippians 1:21-30  |
| 2. 1 Samuel 17        | 9. Philippians 2:1-11   |
| 3. 2 Samuel 11        | 10. Philippians 2:12-30 |
| 4. 1 Kings 18         | 11. Philippians 3:1-11  |
| 5. Psalm 23           | 12. Philippians 3:12-20 |
| 6. Psalm 51           | 13. Philippians 4:1-9   |
| 7. Philippians 1:1-20 | 14. Philippians 4:10-23 |

## PRAY IT

When we read the scriptures, we are hearing from God. When we pray, we are talking to God. If we combine these practices, we are having an engaging conversation with God. If you have never learned to use the scriptures as the source for your prayers, you are in for a real treat. Your Bible reading is about to take a huge leap forward.

There are two different techniques for praying the scriptures.

### 1. Allowing the Scriptures to be a Springboard for your Prayers

In any conversation, the different parties are playing off what the other person says. This is exactly what we do when we pray the scriptures. We read a passage and respond in prayer with what the Lord brings to mind. Let this conversation go as necessary, then read further.

God speaks, we talk with him about it, and he speaks again. This practice adds life to our praying and our Bible reading. You engage God's word at a deeper level; this drives it deep into your heart. I find that this conversation lasts throughout the day; praying doesn't quit when I close my Bible. Meditation on the scriptures doesn't stop when I go to other activities.

How does it work?

#### Consider Psalm 1

The opening line says: *How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked.* . .

You read this and think, "Yesterday I acted in a way that was not in line with what Christians should do. It wrecked my whole day. I felt guilty and others were upset with me."

You pray: "Lord, I am sorry that I followed bad advice yesterday. Please forgive me. I want my life to be happy and I want to make others happy in you."

You talk with God about the whole situation. Then you move to the next phrase, reading until you sense God's voice calling you to pause and talk to him again.

When we pray like this, it isn't important to use complicated study tools. We are having a conversation. Allow the Lord to speak through his word and draw you closer to him.

### 2. Use the Prayers in the Bible as your Prayers.

The Bible is full of prayers. These are inspired recordings of people talking to God and we should use them as our very own. Of course, the most famous prayer in scripture is the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. But there are others.

In Paul's letters, he tells his readers that he is praying for them. Sometimes, he includes the prayer itself, or the details of his requests. Look at Ephesians 1:17-19.

*I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father,  
would give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.  
I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened  
so that you may know what is the hope of his calling,  
what is the wealth of his glorious inheritance in the saints,  
and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe,  
according to the mighty working of his strength.*

What an amazing prayer for our children, for new believers, for your pastor, or for yourself.

In your Bible reading, when you come across one of the many prayers pause and ask yourself, “Who, or in what circumstance, might this prayer be helpful.” Then pray it, word for word or substituting names and circumstances, over that situation.

For Ephesians 1:17 we could pray:

*Glorious Father, I pray for my son. Give him the Spirit of wisdom and revelation to know you.*

*Open the eyes of his heart so that he may know the hope of your calling . . .*

With prayers like that, we know we are praying according to the will of God. We also find depth and meaning in God’s word.

### Two Weeks of Practice

Here are 14 Scripture passages to engage the tool of “Praying Through It.”

- |            |                            |
|------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Psalm 1 | 8. Ephesians 1:15-19       |
| 2. Psalm 2 | 9. Philippians 1:9-11      |
| 3. Psalm 3 | 10. Colossians 1:9-14      |
| 4. Psalm 4 | 11. 1 Thessalonians 1:2-6  |
| 5. Psalm 5 | 12. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12 |
| 6. Psalm 6 | 13. Revelation 5:9-14      |
| 7. Psalm 7 | 14. Matthew 6:9-13         |

Remember, all the Psalms are prayers.

\*Two helpful books on this topic:

D. A. Carson, *Praying with Paul* (Baker Academic, 1992).

Donald Whitney, *Praying the Scriptures* (Crossway Books, 2015).

## WRITE IT

When we read the familiar stories and verses in the Bible, sometimes our minds shutdown. Some say, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” But, for most of us, familiarity breeds mind-numbing boredom. Honestly, we don’t want to turn off our minds when we read God’s Word, but it happens. However, unless we are facing problems or are searching for answers, we often go through the motions.

A solution for this problem is to find a way to engage our minds and bodies. One of the most effective ways I have discovered for doing this is to write out the scriptures. When we slow down to write, the Scriptures come alive again. We see things in a new light. We engage our bodies (writing by hand) and this serves as a tool for memory and meditation.

There are at least two ways I want to encourage you to write scripture as a way of engagement.

### 1. Write Each Word, Long-hand, in Large Chunks

In Deuteronomy 17:18 we read these words: *When he [the king] is seated on his royal throne, he is to write a copy of this instruction for himself on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. It is to remain with him, and he is to read from it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to observe all the words of this instruction, and to do these statutes. Then his heart will not be exalted above his countrymen, he will not turn from this command to the right or the left, and he and his sons will continue reigning many years in Israel.*

Did you see that? One of the first responsibilities of the kings of Israel was to hand write the law and to use his copy for the rest of his life. This activity drove God’s word deeply into their minds and set the course for their leading the nation according to God’s rules.

What an amazing challenge. I have found that this discipline makes God’s word come alive. The company, *Reformation Heritage Books* has produced a resource specifically for this practice. They call it *Journibles*. These are fine; but, I have discovered that a notebook and a pen work just fine.

What do you do?

Select a long passage of scripture, or better an entire book of the Bible. Start writing. I suggest that you only write the scriptures on one side of the page then, on the back of the page before, keep any insights and notes you want to make. This is the way *Journibles* are structured, and I find it very helpful.

Write as long as you can, then pause to meditate/pray over what you have written. The next day, start where you left off.

## 2. Create a Song, Poem, or Hymn from the Passage You Read

Some people are naturally creative. Others of us have to work at it. Regardless of which type of person you are, we know that God has made us to be creative people. I recommend a second form of writing the Word to fire your creative energies.

It is hard for me to recommend a method here. Each of us is different. But try something like this.

- Choose a passage of scripture.
- Read it slowly.
- Read it several times in a row.
- Pause and meditate on each section and each idea.

See if you can re-write the verses or the theme in the style of a worship chorus or poem. How far you can get? Can you sing or recite it back to the Lord?

It is tempting to be self-conscious when we try to do this. But remember, this is not art for public consumption. This is your offering to the Lord - singing and reciting back to him what you have learned and how you feel.

“I am not creative.” You say? Give it a try. You never know what you will find. If it doesn’t work. What have you lost?

### Two Weeks Practice

Here are 14 Scripture passages to engage the tool of “Write it.”

- |              |                      |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Exodus 20 | 8. Matthew 7         |
| 2. Joshua 1  | 9. Luke 15           |
| 3. Psalm 51  | 10. John 13          |
| 4. Psalm 72  | 11. John 14          |
| 5. Isaiah 6  | 12. John 15          |
| 6. Matthew 5 | 13. 1 Corinthians 13 |
| 7. Matthew 6 | 14. Hebrews 1        |

## TEACH IT

I have been teaching the Bible for over 30 years, and I can tell you that there is no greater tool for engaging the scriptures than the responsibility of having to look someone else in the eye and explaining it to them.

Teaching is not dumping information on someone. Teaching is communication. It is working to make sure that the other person accurately understands the topic. When we teach the Bible, we are not allowed to change the message but, we must consider the needs and learning styles of the other person. After you read the scriptures for yourself, you then consider how it applies to others. This forces us deeper in the Bible.

Please don't panic! I am not recommending that you become a preacher, or even that you stand in front of a large crowd. All I am recommending, is that you make plans to teach what you learn to some else.

Maybe it is to your children or your parents.

Maybe to your girlfriends or the guys you work out with.

Maybe it is to a co-worker or someone in your neighborhood.

It doesn't matter whom. What matters, is that you plan to teach it.

How do we do this?

### 1. Follow Each of the Steps from our "Ask Questions" Section

Choose a passage and ask our three questions: What does it Say? What does it Mean? What Should I do About it Today?

### 2. Think About Someone Else Who Might Benefit from the Lesson You Learned

It is a mistake for us to read the Bible only for the purpose of teaching. It is important that the Bible speak to us before we speak to others. This is why we need to ask, "What should I do about this today?" Once we have asked, and answered, this question, we can ask the Lord to show us someone else that might benefit from this lesson.

### 3. Pray for the Person.

Ask God to purify your motives and make the other person receptive.

### 4. Make Plans to Teach

Consider how and when you will teach. Examine your schedule for the day. Ask yourself, "What needs to happen to signal that the door is opening?" Think about the questions your teaching will raise and consider how to teach so that the lesson will be received.

Remember, this is not a formal teaching lesson. Our goal here is a conversation in which you can drop a spiritual nugget. You are trusting God to honor his word in your life and in the life of the person you care about.

### Two Weeks Practice

Here are 14 Scripture passages to engage the tool of “Teaching it.”

1. Romans 5:1-5
2. Romans 5:6-11
3. Romans 5:12-17
4. Romans 5:18 - 21
5. Romans 6:1-11
6. Romans 6:12-14
7. Romans 6:15-23
8. Romans 7:1-6
9. Romans 7:7-13
10. Romans 7:14-25
11. Romans 8:1-11
12. Romans 8:12-17
13. Romans 8:18-30
14. Romans 8:31-39

## STUDY IT DEEPLY

The Bible is a unique book. Its message is simple enough for a child to understand. At the same time, it is deep enough to keep scholars probing — mining its depths. In order to engage with the Scriptures, you need to study it deeply. There was a time when Bible study required years of special training and expensive tools. While I believe in study and education, Christians have produced an abundance of tools to assist, even arm-chair scholars, in the task of studying the Bible.

For this tool, I am thinking about the type of study that helps you discover the meaning of a passage. You will learn the context and compare it to other passages in scripture. Then, you will record your discoveries and press deeper.

How do you do this?

### 1. Gather Your Tools

I suggest you get access to:

- A Good Study Bible (one that is not simply the work of one person).
- Several different versions of the Bible
- Reference tools: Commentary, Cross-reference, Bible Dictionary
- Several Colored Pens or Pencils
- A notebook (or open computer document)

NOTE: All of these are available online and many can be accessed free of charge.

### 2. Read the Passage Several Times and Read the Context of the Passage

Start your study by reading over the passage several times. Some find it helpful to read it in different translations to see how words and ideas are communicated,

Read the passage in the context of the larger chapter. If possible, read it in the context of the entire book. Every Bible passage is set in a literary genre and the meaning you discover must fit inside this context — history, poetry, narrative, letter — this should also guide your interpretation.

### 3. Highlight any Words/Phrases That are Repeated or are Important

Are any words repeated? Do any words or phrases seem to summarize ideas or main ideas? Highlight these. Write them down and find out what they mean.

You can use basic reading skills and interpretive tools to guide this.

You aren't looking for a deeper, more mystical, meaning. You want to understand what the passage means in its original context, to its original readers.

#### 4. Study Any Similar Verses or Cross-References

Most study Bibles have a cross-reference section, pointing to similar verses. Study these verses. How do they inform the meaning of your passage? Can you think of any verses that are similar? Study these passages too.

#### 5. Read What Others Have said About the Meaning of the Passage

After you have done some work on your own, then look at what others say about the passages. You can do this by using online commentaries, listening to sermons/podcasts, or by getting books on the subject. If you get serious about Bible study, I recommend you select one book in the Bible and study that book. You can purchase a couple helpful resources to guide you. This is more cost effective than trying to cover the entire Bible. In time, you will build a quality library.

#### 6. Write out your Interpretation of the Passage, Include Any Important Quotes or Details from your Study

You have done a lot of work. Make sure that you write out all of your findings. Take time to write out your interpretation of the passage. What does it mean? How does your interpretation fit with the findings of others? How does your interpretation fit within biblical teachings?

### Two Weeks Practice

#### Week 1

Study Luke 24 & 23

This is the story of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus

#### Week 2

Study Acts 1-2

This is the story of the birth of the church and the sending of the Holy Spirit

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

To take full advantage of the lessons provided in this booklet, it is important that you begin working on them. Here are some suggestions for your success.

1. **Focus on one tool for the next two weeks** - I think they are all good. But, rather than trying all five at one time, choose one and work it through.
2. **Commit to a time of the day, each day, to engage in Bible reading** - look at your calendar for the next two weeks. Set aside between fifteen and thirty minutes each day.
3. **Get ready** - none of these tools require complicated resources, but not having something will be death to your commitment.
4. **After two weeks, decide** if you want to choose your own exercises and keep working this tool, or if you want to try a different tool.
5. **Begin each session with prayer** - Ask the Lord to speak to you and to engage with you through his living word.

Remember, these tools will not do the work for you. It is possible to go through the motions and still not engage with the Lord.

My prayer is that you will meet the risen Christ in the pages of his living word and that your life will be forever changed because of this discipline.