

## WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

Personal Bible study is absolutely crucial in the life of a Christian for at least two reasons. The first reason is the nature of the Bible itself. Through the Bible God speaks to His people corporately and personally, generally and specifically, about creation, revelation, salvation and sanctification. The Bible reveals the unfathomable nature of God and guides our everyday decision-making, such that we can live a God-pleasing life. Everything we know about God, Jesus, the Gospel, salvation, marriage, parenting, finances, prayer, evangelism, love, the beginning of life and the end of this world is found in the Bible. Because God is inerrant, infallible and all sufficient, so is His Word.

The second reason personal Bible study is crucial for believers is that all of us, in one way or another, are commanded to be teachers of His Word. Husbands are to “wash their wives in the Word” (Eph. 5:26), parents are to “bring their children up in the instruction and discipline of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4), the spiritually mature Christians are to reach out and teach the less spiritually mature Christians, and all disciples are to make more disciples by “teaching them everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20). Understanding the Scriptures deeply allows us to obey these commands. As Christians, we should know God’s Word and live a life that is obedient to it because we love and trust its Author.

We pray God’s richest blessings on you as you begin, or continue, this journey of personal Bible study.

- Pastors Jim Gillespie and Jason Hall

## SESSION 1: READ AND PREPARE

READ BELOW AND GET READY FOR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS ON AUGUST 27-28

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### Why the Bible?

Chances are if you are reading this and committed to small group life at the Creek, then following God and knowing Him more are important to you. Our assertion is that Bible study is a critical means of accomplishing that goal. But does the Bible itself bear that out? While we do not have time or space to pursue everything the Bible has to say on the matter, we will pause to look at three key texts: **John 17:17**, **2 Timothy 3:14-17**, and **Isaiah 55:11**. Read those three passages before continuing below.

### JESUS BELIEVED THE WORD

John 17 records Jesus' thoughts and words as He prays to His Father, for His followers, as He prepares to endure the shame and pain of the cross. Since Christians are, by definition, those who follow and worship Jesus Christ as Lord, then we should pay attention to what Jesus said and believed. In John 17:17 He makes a strikingly simple request:

**Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.**

**John 17:17**

Jesus is asking the Father to use truth to cleanse his followers from sin and make them more like Him, their Savior. And what exactly is truth? God's Word is truth or, to put it another way, God's Word *equals* truth. One of Jesus' primary concerns for those who would follow Him is that they would know God's Word, God's truth, which is the Bible.

### GOD'S WORD IS INSPIRED AND EFFECTIVE

The apostle Paul wrote 2 Timothy to give heartfelt instructions to his fellow pastor and student, Timothy, a younger man who was just beginning his journey of leadership in the church. In 2 Timothy 3:14-17, we can notice first how it is that Timothy came to his knowledge of God and calling to teach: The Scriptures made him "wise for salvation;" that is, the Bible gave him the understanding to place his faith in Jesus Christ. How was the Bible able to do this? Because the Bible is, in the words of Paul, "breathed out" or "inspired" by God. When we study the Bible we are corrected, trained and instructed.

When we made the statement in the introduction that Bible study is abso-

lutely crucial in the life of a believer, much of that conviction comes from an understanding of 2 Timothy 3:17. The inspired word of God equips men and women of God for **every** good work. Not some, or several, or most good works, but **every** good work. Deep and heartfelt study of God's Word leads to understanding, which then leads you to obey God, and the Word is completely sufficient for this task.

And just in case you are doubting that Bible study can yield fruit in your life, note the prophet Isaiah's conviction in Isaiah 55:11: The Word of the Lord will always accomplish God's purposes. This is true not only for Isaiah's prophecies, but for all of the inspired Word of God.

**To review:** Jesus believed that the Word of God is true, and desired us to be changed by it. The Bible itself is inspired by God, completely true, and sufficient for us to grow in Christlikeness. And we have God's promise that His Word will accomplish His work in our lives. With those fundamental convictions, let's proceed to a basic definition of Bible study.

## What is Bible Study?

Bible study can be spoken of in two ways: corporate and personal. In both dimensions, believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with great prayer, use God-given tools to understand the meaning and application of the Bible. When we say tools, we mean first and foremost our minds, but tools can also be study helps, pastors and teachers, or other believers.

Bible study is not just reading the Bible devotionally. Reading the Bible devotionally is a great thing that all Christians should do, but we must also dig in and study it. For an illustration of the difference between reading devotionally and reading for study, let's look at 1 Corinthians 6:9-11:

**<sup>9</sup> Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.**

When we read this passage devotionally, we certainly come away with a sense of awe for God's mercy and the depth of our sin. However, when we study, we dig in and ask questions, particularly looking at what the words mean and the conclusions the author draws from them.

When looking at word meanings, study helps like a basic English dictionary and a Bible dictionary can be helpful. What is a fornicator, idolater, or adulterer? What does it mean to be washed, sanctified and justified? If certain people mentioned in this text will not inherit the kingdom of God, we should know what these words mean and then apply these verses to others and ourselves. I may discover that I am the one who is living a life that is unrighteous and deceiving myself into believing I will inherit the kingdom of God when in reality, I will not. Then I can repent and be washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of our Lord and the Spirit of our God.

When we read devotionally, we gather information. But when we study, we ask deeper questions and work hard to understand that information. Reading devotionally is terribly important, but we must also study the Bible.

### **CORPORATE BIBLE STUDY**

The first and most important way to study the Bible is to learn from a biblically qualified elder of a local congregation. God has gifted men through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit to teach the Bible, helping us to understand and obey the Word in our everyday lives. God has also gifted men to help the elders of a local church by teaching with the elders. At Richland Creek, we have several opportunities to engage in corporate Bible Study:

- Saturday night and Sunday morning worship services. This is where you will participate in Bible study with our senior pastor and other elders of the church, walking word for word through the Bible, thinking on its meaning and how we are to obey it.
- Small groups and equipping classes. These groups on Saturdays, Sundays and Wednesdays are Bible studies that can focus on individual books of the Bible, the application of God's Word to our lives in specific circumstances, or accountability to live biblical principles in our everyday life.

The key to corporate Bible study in a worship service, small group or equipping class is your participation:

- Listen and pay attention. Keep your focus on the teaching; do not let anything distract you from studying the Word of God.
- Ask questions when you do not understand. At an appropriate time, ask your elders or teachers to help clarify anything you do not understand or how to practically apply the Word to your life.
- Take notes and continue the study at home. We will discuss personal Bible study next.

Corporate Bible study is universal in God's plan for the redemption of His people. Wherever you find Christians with many copies of the Bible or just one, in open churches or underground meetings, you will always find God-gifted men teaching the Word of God to the people of God for the glory of God.

## SESSION 1: GROUP TIME

FILL IN THE ANSWERS BELOW AS YOU GATHER WITH YOUR GROUP

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**In your own words, explain why you think it is important to study the Bible. If you do not agree it is important to study the Bible, explain that as well.**

**Review 2 Timothy 3:14-17, and fill in the blanks below with what we discover about the Bible.**

It is \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_.

It is \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ us.

It will \_\_\_\_\_ us for \_\_\_\_\_ good work.

**After reading Nehemiah 8:7-8, what do you take away from those verses about the importance of corporate Bible study?**

**In what ways can you improve your participation in corporate Bible study, so that you gain more from it?**

## SESSION 2: READ AND PREPARE

READ BELOW AND GET READY FOR SMALL GROUP MEETINGS ON SEPTEMBER 3-4

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### Personal Bible Study

Last week we looked at the nature of the Bible, what Bible study is, and the importance of corporate Bible study. This week we are going to spend all of our time on personal Bible study. Before we talk about how to study the Bible, let's briefly look at why we should study our Bibles. Read **Matthew 4:4**, **Ephesians 6:17**, and **Psalms 119:9-13**.

#### PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY WAS PRACTICED BY JESUS

Jesus knew the Word of God. He says, in Matthew 4:4, that we live by God's words. Jesus would not have had only passing familiarity with something that was essential for spiritual life. We know, from reading about Jesus' ministry, that he not only read the Bible, but that He taught it and quoted it, in its proper context and giving its proper meaning, throughout His ministry.

We who call ourselves Christians should always seek to emulate our Lord, and it seems clear that our Lord studied the Bible.

#### PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY GUARDS US FROM SIN

In Psalm 119:9-13 we read about David's love for God's law, which is found in the Scriptures. We notice that David, like Jesus who would come after him, does not just glance at God's Word, but has a hunger and desire to know it and follow it.

Both verses 9 and 11 of Psalm 119 reference the Word's work in keeping us pure and away from sin. That only happens when we pay close attention to what it says, and paying close attention means careful study.

#### PERSONAL BIBLE STUDY IS OUR WARTIME WEAPON

The Bible sometimes describes our current lives in this world as spiritual war against Satan and his influence. That is the metaphor Paul employs in Ephesians 6 when he commands believers to "take up the whole armor of God" in this spiritual fight. What, according to Paul, is our weapon of choice in this battle? It is our spiritual "sword," which is the Bible, God's Word.

What serious soldier do you know who only glances at his weapon every once in awhile? What soldier, who wants to stay alive and make a difference for his army, only takes his weapon into battle once a week? That is unthinkable! A

serious soldier knows his weapon backwards and forwards. He knows every detail of how it works and what it does, so that when the time comes that he needs to use it, he will not hesitate.

We should approach Bible study with the same life-or-death attitude. If we want to be effective in spiritual warfare, we must know the Word deeply and broadly. The only way to know the Bible in that kind of way is to study it.

## **A Basic Bible Study Must be Foundational And Transferable**

When we say that you should be familiar with a Bible study approach that is foundational, we mean that it should be so basic and straightforward that anyone can do it. We should not skip any of the basic steps (we'll talk about the steps in a moment), because we do not want to assume we know what the words and concepts in the Bible mean.

Transferable means that this approach of Bible study can be passed on to another believer. As you grow in your understanding of the Word and your familiarity with the Bible, you may develop shortcuts that will aid your study. No doubt you will personalize your study approach to fit your learning style. But you should still be very familiar with a foundational, simple approach that is easily transferable to a new believer.

There is much about personal Bible study that we will not be able to cover in this basic guide, or in this week's small group lesson. The purpose of this lesson is to either a) get you started if you are brand new to personal Bible study, or b) if you are a Bible study veteran, to remind you again of its importance and to encourage you as you pass along this knowledge to others.

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## ABOUT STUDY HELPS

For your personal Bible study, you will need a few study tools. These tools are not the inspired words of God, but they are made to help us understand the meaning and application of God's Word. Two tools you will need are:

**A Bible dictionary.** You want a Bible dictionary, in addition to a basic English dictionary, because how we use words in today's English may not be how God uses them in His Word. A Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary is a good one to get started.

**A study Bible with commentary.** The study Bible with commentary will come with several tools to help understand the meaning and application of the Word from cross references to definitions of words. We would suggest the *ESV Study Bible* from Crossway (As a word of caution, not all study bibles or bible dictionaries are created equal. Some are written that do not believe as we do--that Scripture is inerrant, infallible and sufficient. When in doubt, please ask a pastor or elder).

## A Basic Bible Study Plan

### STUDY ONE BOOK AT A TIME

The writers of the Bible, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote 66 entire books that we have now as the complete canon of Scripture. We should generally study each book as a whole before moving on to others. It is possible to study more than one thing at a time, but in that case if we are not careful, we risk losing the context of what we have studied.

### WHAT DO I DO FIRST?

Once you have chosen a book to study, remember to move through it slowly. Bible study is not a sprint, it's a marathon. Sometimes our goal turns into getting a certain amount finished, when our goal should be understanding and applying what we have read.

In choosing what to study in a given day or week, concentrate on the paragraphs or, if you prefer, the headings in your Bible. That way you have enough to study to give you some context, but not so much that you get lost.

### WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

After reading carefully over your chosen text a few times, take time to look up any words or phrases you do not know. Many times as we read the Bible, we encounter words and phrases we don't know. Since the words of Scripture are inspired, we must do the work to study them and understand them. Do not assume you know what a word or phrase means just because you have heard it or read it many times.

Remember that the most important thing in determining what a word means is context, or the words, phrases and sentences around it. With that said, a Bible dictionary and a study Bible are very helpful tools to help understand words or concepts we are unfamiliar with, especially for those just beginning in Bible study.

### AFTER I UNDERSTAND THE WORDS, WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP?

Once you feel comfortable with what the words mean, you should ask additional questions. Some examples of questions to ask are in the appendix of this study guide, but they generally fall into basic categories: who, what, when, where, why and how?

And finally, you should take some time to see where key words or concepts used in the text you are studying are mentioned in other parts of the Bible. The Bible speaks as a whole, and nothing is more valuable in understanding one part of the Bible, than other parts of the Bible. To help you in this, make



sure your Bible has cross references (those columns in the middle or outside edge of your Bible text that have the small superscript letters). You can also use a concordance or a Bible search engine.

### **DISCOVER THE AUTHOR'S INTENDED MEANING**

The goal of personal Bible study is to discover the author's intended meaning, not just what we want the Bible to say. Because of this, a great final step is to write down, in your own words, the basic meaning of the verse or paragraph you are studying.

### **An Example: Romans 1:1**

Let's say, for example, we are going to study the entire book of Romans. Where do we begin? At the beginning. First, pray and ask God to give you understanding of His Word and to be led by the Holy Spirit.

Next, it would be valuable to read the introduction to the Book of Romans from a study Bible. Then, we begin to slowly read the book, using tools as necessary to define any words or phrases that we do not know.

Naturally, we come first to Romans 1:1: *Paul, a bondservant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God.* After we read that, we can ask:

Who is Paul?

What is a bondservant?

Who is Christ Jesus?

What does it mean to be called?

What is an apostle?

What is the Gospel?

Who is God?

Not every verse in Scripture has this many words to define, but any word that you do not know you should look up. This is the difference between reading your Bible and studying your Bible.

So, you're beginning to see what Bible study looks like. How long does it take to study the entire Bible? More than your lifetime! We could, and should, spend the rest of our days on earth digging into God's Word, and we will still never uncover all of its treasures.

## SESSION 2: GROUP TIME

FILL IN THE ANSWERS BELOW AS YOU GATHER WITH YOUR GROUP

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**What are some excuses you have used to stay away from personal Bible study? In light of Matthew 4:4 and Psalm 119:9-13, how do those excuses look?**

**What is the most intimidating thing about personal Bible study for you? How should you handle this apprehension?**

**Read Galatians 5:22-23. Pick a few key words that it would be important to understand as you study, and write them below (there are a lot, so just jot down a few).**

**Look at the words you wrote down above. Would you be able to sit down with an unbelieving co-worker, a child, or a very young fellow believer and explain what these words and concepts mean? If not, then you're not finished studying!**

## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***How often should I study my Bible?***

The Bible doesn't give a specific number of days or how long each day you should study your Bible. The Bible does say how important it is and its importance should drive our participation. Consider Matthew 4:4 for an example. Jesus says that the Word is as important to life as food. How often do you eat?

### ***What is the best time for Bible Study?***

Whatever time works best for you such that you can make a plan and stick with it. Having a plan is the most important part. When we think something is important in life, we plan for it. You plan on how to go to work and school, or you plan your vacation. Therefore, we should also plan Bible study time: place, time, book, duration, etc., and then make this our lifestyle. We are a people of the Word.

### ***What is the best translation to use?***

For the purpose of study, some translations are better than others. Because when we study we are tracking down words and phrases, we need a translation that accurately translates those words from the original languages into English. This means that for purposes of study, avoid using a paraphrase translation, like the New Living Translation or The Message. Pastor David preaches weekly from the New King James Version (NKJV), which is an excellent choice. Several of our other elders use the English Standard Version (ESV). Another good one is the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

## **Bible Study - Questions to Ask**

- Who is the author of the book?
- To whom is the book written?
- Who are the characters in the book?
- Who is speaking?
- To whom is he/she speaking?
- What is the atmosphere of the book or passage? Friendly? Chastening? Loving?
- What is the author's general topic? What is he saying about his topic?
- What is the context?
- What are the key words? What do they mean?
- When was the book written?
- When did this event happen in relation to other events?
- When was this prophecy fulfilled or has it been fulfilled?

- Where was the book written?
- Where were the recipients of the book living?
- Can you locate the places mentioned on a map?
- Where else does this topic appear in Scripture?
- Why does the author include this material and not other things?
- Why does the author give so much space to a certain topic and so little to another?
- How many times does the author use the same word in this book, chapter, passage, verse?
- How does the author do this? Say this?
- How does the statement I'm studying relate to the preceding statement? To the succeeding statement?

*These are just a short sample of the kind of questions you can ask to dig deeper into the Scripture. Brainstorm others!*

## **Things to Look For**

- Pay attention to the verbs (action words!)
- Relationships between words, phrases, clauses, sentences and paragraphs
- Things that are emphasized
- Things that are repeated
- Things that are related and how
- Things that are alike (uses words like "as" or "like")
- Things that are unlike/unusual (contrasting words such as "but")

## **Application Questions**

- Is there an example to follow?
- Is there a command to obey?
- Is there an error to avoid?
- Is there a sin to forsake?
- Is there a promise or truth to claim?
- Is there a new thought about God?
- Is there a deeper understanding of the sacrifice Jesus made?

## PERSONAL DAILY BIBLE STUDY WORKSHEET

Record the Scripture Passage here: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Note below the author's main point, record any relevant information and key word definitions from commentaries and/or dictionaries, and answer the following questions, if applicable: Is there an example to follow, command to obey, error to avoid, sin to forsake, truth to claim, a new thought about God, or a deeper understanding of the sacrifice Jesus made?

Key Words: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Answers to all Applicable Questions: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Main Point: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Record below the most meaningful word, phrase, verse or thought you read today.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Reword the most meaningful word, phrase, verse or thought into a prayer of response to God. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Write below what you believe God wants you to do in a specific or practical way as a result of your study. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_