

Chapter 5

Habits of a follower of Christ: God's Word & Prayer

To grow in your relationship with God, begin to develop the habit of listening and talking to God each day! The foundation for our listening?

God's Word, or, the Bible, is one of the main ways God has provided for us to know, love, and enjoy Him.

In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we read:

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." *(NRSV)*

In the following pages you'll find a brief (VERY!) overview of the Bible, with some "helps" for reading and understanding God's Word.

Prayer facilitates spiritual growth by making Christ a guest in our mind, through the power of the Holy Spirit. When that happens, we grow spiritually in many ways. Four of these are especially important:

First, we find a guidance system for life priorities that is wiser than our unaided rational thinking.

Second, we find a strength greater than the strength of our will-power.

Third, we can find a new kind of love, more powerful than that which we can manufacture through good intentions.

Fourth, we find a feeling of joy that lifts us beyond our circumstances.

In the following pages you'll discover a "Pattern" for prayer
HOW CAN I READ AND UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE?

- **AN OVERVIEW**

The Bible contains 66 books.

The Central figure of the Bible is Jesus Christ.

The world was made by Him and for Him (Col.1:16).

World history will culminate in Him (Rev. 11:15).

The Old Testament looks forward to Him.

The New Testament reveals Him.

The Bible gives us a sweeping picture of God's dealings with Humanity. It records primarily what God has to say to us about:

- a. GOD — His character, thoughts, feelings, heart, and actions;
- b. Humanity — God's intentions for us; our subsequent sin and it's consequences;
- c. How to live in a dependent relationship with God through Jesus.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The first portion of the Bible is called the Old Testament. It contains 39 books.

It explains God's dealings with humanity from creation until 400 years before Christ. It contains:

A. The Books of the Law —

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy (These books are the beginnings of all things and the beginnings of Israel, the nation through which salvation by grace would be made available to the entire world).

B. The books of History —

Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther. (These books picture the rise and fall of Israel over a 1,000 year period).

C. The Books of Poetry —

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon (These books were written as poetry to share depth of human feelings, yet to trust in God alone).

D. The Books of Prophecy —

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi (These books are not in chronological order. The prophets, official spokespersons whom God raised up to speak for Him, especially in times of unbelief and rebellion, came into special prominence during the decline and fall of Israel and Judah).

THE NEW TESTAMENT

This contains 27 books, and reveals God's dealing with humanity during and after Christ. It includes:

A. The Gospels —

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. (These record the earthly life and ministry of Jesus Christ).

B. Acts —

This book records the first church and early growth of Christianity (through the apostles) after Jesus' resurrection and ascension.

C. Epistles —

Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians; 1,2,3 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 & 2 Peter; 1,2, & 3 John, Jude (These books contain the inspired correspondence of the apostles and those chosen by our Lord to communicate His truth to His children — followers of Jesus).

D. Prophecy —

Revelation (This is the climactic book of the Bible giving us a glimpse into the future and the culmination of all history in the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ).

• THE POWER OF THE WORD

Isaiah 55:11 "It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it."



A. What promise do we find in Isaiah 55:11?

Psalm 1

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with scoffers. But they delight in doing everything the LORD wants; day and night they think about his law. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season without fail. Their leaves never wither, and in all they do, they prosper.

But this is not true of the wicked. They are like worthless chaff, scattered by the wind. They will be condemned at the time of judgment. Sinners will have no place among the godly. For the LORD watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction.

A. What results from meditating on the Word? (See Psalm 1)

• PERSONAL APPLICATION OF THE WORD

Unless we **APPLY** what we read to our personal lives, we've missed the boat! Remember... The **GOAL** of reading Scripture is **TRANSFORMATION** not just **INFORMATION** !

Suggested versions: The New Living Translation (very easy and readable); The New Revised Standard Version (slightly more cumbersome, yet also gender inclusive); The New International Version (easy)

Help! I'm totally new to reading the bible.
Where do I start?

SUPER! YOU'RE STARTING ON AN ADVENTURE!

Ideally, you'll want to read through your whole Bible. Many Christians read through the Bible each year, "bit by bit." If you're just starting out though, try *A Month-Long Journey With Jesus* (The format is from the Word in life Study Bible. Each reading is located in the New Testament).

1. Before you read the passage, ask God to guide you in your reading and reflection.
2. Look for a verse that stands out to you, or speaks to you personally.
3. Take a pen or pencil and underline the verse.
4. Spend a few minutes meditating on how and why this verse is your favorite.
5. Using that verse, pray for yourself and others. For example, in James, chapter 1, your favorite verse might be verse 5, which might cause you to pray something like this:

(For yourself) — "Give me Your wisdom, God, that I might see life, myself, and people through Your eyes. Thank

You that You will give me Your wisdom generously."

(For others) — "Please begin to reveal your truth and wisdom to

First, try reading between 1 and 3 chapters daily, through the following books:

1. James (a book on faith and action).
2. John (this will walk you through the life of Christ).
3. Philippians (positive attitudes during difficult circumstances).
4. Mark (the life of Christ from a slightly different perspective).
5. Ephesians (all that we have been given in Christ and how to live).
6. Matthew (another walk through the life of Christ).
7. Romans (the big picture of life and salvation from God's

perspective).

8. Acts (the history of the early church)

9. Luke

10. 1 & 2 Corinthians

11. Galatians

12. 1 & 2 Thessalonians

13. 1 & 2 Timothy

14. 1 & 2 Peter

15. 1-3 John

16. Jude

17. Hebrews

18. Rev. 1-3 (It is appropriate to wait until you have read through the whole Old Testament to read the rest of this book since most of the imagery comes from it. Understanding the Old Testament first helps you understand this book.)

Next, Read the 365 Key Biblical Chapters in a Year (on the following pages).

After that, you will want to read the entire Bible and make a habit of reading it cover-to-cover in a systematic way. Enclosed in your notebook is a guide to help you. (These guides are always available at the brochure rack.)

365 Key Biblical Chapters

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A Love Letter from Jesus to you

How are you? I just had to send you this letter to remind you of how much I love and care about you.

I saw you yesterday as you were walking with your friends. I waited all day, hoping you would walk and talk with me, too. As evening drew near, I gave you a sunset to close your day, and a cool breeze to rest you. Then I waited, but you never came. Oh, yes it hurt me, but I still love you because I am your friend.

I saw you fall asleep last night, and I longed to touch your brow. So I spilled some moonlight on your pillow and across your face... again I waited, wanting to rush down so we could talk. I have so many gifts for you!

You awakened this morning and rushed off for the day. My tears were in the rain. Today you looked so sad and alone, it made my heart ache because I understand. My friends let me down and hurt me many times, but I still love you. I try to tell you in the quiet green grass, I whisper it in the leaves and trees, and breathe it in the color of the flowers. I shout it to you in the mountain streams, and give the birds songs to sing of joy. I clothe you in warm sunshine, and perfume the air. My love for you is deeper than the biggest want or the greatest need you could ever have.

We will spend eternity together in Heaven. I know how hard it is on earth. I really do know because I was there, and I want to help you. My Father wants to help you, too. He's just that way, you know. All you have to do is call me, ask me, talk to me. It's your decision. I have already chosen you, but because of my love for you I will wait until you ask me...

Your Friend,
Jesus

"Prayer is...keeping company with God." – Clement of Alexandria
"My heart has heard you say, 'Come talk with me.'

Biblical Principles of Prayer

8

Rom. 8:26-29

And the Holy Spirit helps us in our distress. For we don't even know what we should pray for, nor how we should pray. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will. And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son, so that his Son would be the firstborn, with many brothers and sisters.

A. What does the Holy Spirit do for us? (Romans 8:26-29)

1. Prays for us when we cannot express our heart in words

(John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 3:16)

2. Pleads for us in harmony with God's Will

B. God hears our attitude/heart/motives more than the words in prayer.

C. God will always respond (vv. 28-29)

1. NO, I've got something better. (Matt.26:36-39)

God is more interested in our character than our circumstances.

2. NO, Not right now; hold on. (John 11)

3. NO , Get right within.

Psalm 66:18 "If I had not confessed the sin in my heart, my Lord would not have listened."

James 4:3 "And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure."

Matthew 6:14-15 "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. ¹⁵But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.

4. YES, I thought you'd never ask. (John 16:24)
5. YES, and here's more! (Ephesians 3:20)

A Guide to Prayer

You do NOT have to follow this format every time you talk to God. This is a possible guideline to follow in your communication with God.

From Lk. 11:1-4

Praise... "Our Father, which art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name"

- For who God is
- For what He has done in your life

Cooperation... "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

- Submit to God's Will and Leadership in your life.
- Pray for God's Kingdom to come in your city... your church... your family.... your marriage... your personality, mind, motives, emotions.
- This day's appointments and relationships

Petition... "Give us this day our daily bread."

- Share the concerns of your life.
- Intercession for others
- Ask for wisdom, guidance, and power to follow Him.

Forgiveness... "And forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us."

- Confess sins
- Seek strength to forgive when difficult

Victory... "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever."

- Thanks to God for the power to overcome temptation
- Deliverance from Satan's attacks