

HOW TO

# ABIDE

a practical guide for studying Scripture



The Bible is an extraordinary book. It's alive and active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). It's breathed out by God and is profitable for teaching and equipping (2 Tim 3:16-17). It's the account of how God's story intersects humanity's story. It's God's love letter to His people, and yet can be incredibly convicting. Thus, when it comes to reading the Bible, we must handle it with care.

The A.B.I.D.E. Bible Study Method helps people engage with the Word in order to be transformed by it. The acronym A.B.I.D.E. stands for **Acclimate**, **Behold**, **Interpret**, **Dwell**, and **Exercise**. Each of these five steps contribute to helping the Bible reader not only gather information and understand what the Bible has to say, but to also apply that information to their life and be transformed by it. Just like this study seeks to engage all three aspects of a biblical disciple (head, heart, hands), the A.B.I.D.E. Bible Study Method seeks to do the same as you engage the Bible on your own.

The name A.B.I.D.E. is rooted in John 15:5 which says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." In order to bear any spiritual fruit, we must abide in Christ as he abides in us. The primary way we abide in Christ is through abiding in his Word. The A.B.I.D.E. Bible Study Method helps people read, study, and meditate on scripture so that they can abide more fully in Christ, and properly position themselves to be sanctified by the Spirit of God with the hope of bearing much fruit.

### **ACCLIMATE** | *prepare your heart for God's word*

***Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain! Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things; and give me life in your ways. (Psalm 119:36-37)***

To "acclimate" simply means to become accustomed to a new climate or a new condition. When it comes to Bible reading, this means getting our hearts ready for the transformational work that God wants to do through his Word. Because the Bible is a divine book written by a divine author, we need divine assistance to understand Scripture the way God intends for it to be understood. Thus, the first step in approaching the Bible is always to acclimate our hearts through the means of honest prayer.

The reason we say honest prayer is because often times our prayers are lighthearted and superficial. Honest prayers, however, position ourselves before God in our truest form so that He can meet us in our weakness and we can meet Him in His sufficiency (2 Cor 12:9). To do this, we must come to the Lord in prayer, asking Him to remove the distractions of our minds and the stress of our hearts for a moment, so that we can clearly hear from Him. This does not mean that those things are not important, but rather, that they are so important that we cast them upon Him so that He can properly care for us through the revelation of His written Word (1 Peter 5:7).

If the purpose of Bible reading is to be transformed into Christ-likeness, then the heart has to be engaged. Being honest about the state of where your heart is before reading allows you to come to the Word humbly and truthfully in order to better engage with it. Pray that the Lord would open your eyes and ears to see and hear Him more clearly, and prepare your heart to delight in Him more fully through the text.

An important note to make about acclimating your heart is that you may need to refocus your heart throughout your abiding. If you find yourself getting distracted while reading, or if your mind begins to wander to things on your to-do list or other outside stressors, take a moment to enter back into the Acclimate step. When we let our minds distract us from the truth we are reading, it's hard to move into the Interpretation and Dwell stages of Bible reading. Spending extended times in prayer is typically the best thing you can do if your heart is particularly hardened or burdened that day.

Prayer is an expression of our dependence on God. Jesus teaches us how to pray in Matthew 6:9-13, where he outlines three critical components of prayer:

1. Adoration: Begin your prayer with a praise of thanksgiving to God.
2. Repentance: Take time to humbly confess any sin and realign your heart with God's heart.
3. Supplication: Now bring your requests to the Lord.

If you don't know what to pray, praying Scripture is always a great option. Pick a Psalm to personalize and pray through. Psalm 119 has great verses to pray asking the Spirit to enlighten your eyes, mind, and heart to God's truth and give you understanding in his Word.

**BEHOLD** | *look and see what the text says*

***And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. (2 Corinthians 3:18)***

To behold something simply means to look or to see something for what it truly is. In John chapter one, as John the Baptist sees Jesus walking towards him at the Jordan River, he declares, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, emphasis added).

In a similar way, when it comes to Bible reading, before we can properly interpret a passage of Scripture and apply it to our lives, we first must see what it has to say. Knowing the full context of a text is foundational for understanding its message. We cannot understand what we do not know, therefore, the first step in engaging the Bible is to know what the text says in its entirety.

To do this well, we must slow down our reading and make appropriate observations. Read the whole passage or chapter to understand context. Using a journal to keep track of observations, questions, and thoughts while reading is highly encouraged and recommended. Marking up the text can also help you see it in its entirety. Highlighting certain aspects of the text will make them stand out. For example, use a consistent color to denote the attributes of God so that you can quickly identify God's characteristics. Overall, find a method that works for you! Below are some helpful observation questions to ask:

- Ask questions, such as: Who? What? Where? When? Why? and How?
- What genre of literature is the book?
- Who is the author? To whom is the author writing?
- What attributes and actions of God (Father, Son, and Spirit) are present in this text?
- Are there any repeating words or phrases?
- Does the text contain any commands or promises of God?
- What figures of speech (if any) are in the passage?
- Are there any comparisons or contrasts?
- What connection words (*therefore, because, so that, rather, etc.*) are in the text? What two thoughts do they bridge?

**INTERPRET** | *discover the meaning of the text*

***No prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)***

While beholding helps us see what the text has to say, interpreting helps us understand what the text means. This is where we really start to study the text and get into the richness of its beauty and depth. In this stage, as we dive deeper into the biblical passage, we want to make sure that we stay true to the biblical author's intended meaning and aim to understand the Scripture in light of its cultural context. A helpful way to make sure that we are interpreting Scripture correctly is by using clearer passages of the Bible to help us understand more obscure passages. Since Scripture will never contradict Scripture, leveraging the Bible to help interpret the Bible is one of the most helpful tools we have for interpretation.

To properly interpret the text, you should be able to answer the question, "What is the main message of this text?" Using commentary and outside resources to help you understand certain topics or details can be useful here. However, don't jump to commentaries or other resources right away! Sit with the text and wrestle with your questions on your own first. Let the Spirit enlighten your understanding. Once you have wrestled with it and thought through what the message is on your own, go to outside resources and see what other people have to say about the text in order to solidify your thoughts and interpretations. Once you are able to properly identify the main idea of a text, summarize it in one or two sentences with your own words. Below are some helpful interpretive questions to ask:

- What is the overall message of the passage?
- What does the text say about God? What does it say about me?
- Is the passage prescriptive (God telling us how to live) or descriptive (describing what happened)?
- Where does this passage fit within the historical framework of the Bible?
- What historical background or context is needed to better understand the text?
- Is there a particular way the text is arranged? Why is it ordered this way?

**DWELL** | *think deeply on the text and let it stir up convictions in your heart*

***Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)***

Up to this point, our engagement with the Bible has primarily been on the head level. However, if the goal of Bible reading truly is transformation and not just information, then we need to make sure that we take time to dwell or meditate on the Scriptures so that the information our head is absorbing can sink down into our hearts. To put it this way, meditation is the bridge that connects the head to the heart.

It's important to note that the vast majority of our actions are simply reactions to the world around us, and how we react shows what's within us - it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). Therefore, we must leverage the bridge of meditation so that our hearts are transformed along with our minds. This means that we must spend significant time dwelling on the Word of God so that it will stir up holy affections within us and create change through us.

Pick a verse, a concept, an attribute of God, etc. from your reading to meditate on. Write it out in a journal and think about it throughout your day. Allow the Spirit to move in your heart to stir up affections and convictions. Wrestling with the text in this way also allows the Spirit to lead you into further sanctification. Because of what meditation does in us, this is certainly one of the most important steps in the process of Bible reading. As you schedule out your time with the Lord, be sure to set aside enough time to properly rest and dwell on the Scriptures - do not rush this step. Below are some helpful meditation techniques to consider as you dwell on the text:

- Rewrite a verse or paragraph in your own words. This helps you synthesize the details and explain the main point clearly. It is likely you know the subject well if you are able to explain it yourself.
- Write down at least ten observations about the verse that sticks out to you the most. This will train your brain to think deeply on what is being communicated through a few words or sentences.
- Memorize a key verse. Memorizing Scripture is one of the best ways you can meditate because it allows you to dwell on the truths you are studying all day/week.
- Think about any convictions the Spirit raises within you. If there's something that keeps coming to mind while you are reading, spend time dwelling on why it keeps coming up and if there is anything you need to do about it.
- Emphasize different words in the text. For example, take the phrase, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6) and spend time thinking about why each word in that sentence is important. Jesus is the way: the way to what? How is he the way? Jesus is the truth: what truth does he embody? How does this truth apply to me? Jesus is the life: How does he provide life for me? What about my life is insufficient and in need of renewal?

## EXERCISE | *live in a way that reflects the text*

***Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. (Philippians 2:12-13)***

The last step in the Bible reading process is application. Now that the text has made its way into our head and down into our hearts, it now needs to make its way through our hands - it needs to be lived. To do this well, we must see how the Bible shapes our lives and live in a way that reflects the text. This does not always mean that we need to find some sort of action item to go do. Rather, we are to ask ourselves questions like: "How does my life need to change?" or "What truths of God do I need to be constantly reminded of?" And from there, begin to live in the newness of life (Romans 6:4).

Part of living what you are learning is allowing fellow believers to support you in this. Find a few people who can be praying for you, encouraging you, and keeping you accountable for your application of the Word. Challenge yourself to memorize verses so that they begin to become part of your natural reaction for resisting temptation. Keep a list of verses you can easily access that will encourage you through difficult seasons. Below are some helpful application questions to ask.

- How does the key verse or overall message of the text apply to you?
- How should you respond to the truth of this text?
- Do you need to confess any unrepentant sin to a trusted friend or mentor?
- What areas of your life are not fully surrendered to God and how can you trust him more?
- How can you love the people in your life in a Christ-centered manner?