

read the text, read your life.

It reads you back.

Learning to exegete Scripture and yourself. How to draw out what God actually said, and how to read your own seasons, emotions, and patterns under the same light.

A SIMPLE GUIDE TO BIBLE STUDY

bring your Bible and your story

read the text, read your life. It reads you back. Learning to exegete Scripture, and yourself. How to draw out what God actually said, and how to read your own seasons, emotions, and patterns under the same light.

COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

Pastor Tony Lee

Reading the Text, Reading Your Life: Learning to Exegete Scripture, and Yourself © 2026
Community of Hope AME Church. All rights reserved. Sunday Worship: Crossland High School, 6901
Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748. Sundays at 10:00 AM www.hiphopenation.com · Facebook
@CmtyofHope · YouTube @hiphopenationtv Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New
International Version® NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission.
All rights reserved worldwide.

WHAT'S INSIDE

start anywhere

The road map PART ONE: THE BOOK THAT READS YOU BACK

1 · More Than a Book

2 · Drawing Out, Not Reading In

3 · You Are Not the First Reader PART TWO: FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK THE TEXT

4 · Context: What Is Happening Here? 5 · Audience: Who Was This For? 6 · Genre: What Kind of Writing Is This? 7 · Key Words: What Stands Out? 8 · God's Character: What Does This Reveal About God? PART THREE: FIVE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR LIFE

9 · Season: What Time Is It in Your Life? 10 · History: What Came Before This? 11 · Emotion: What Are You Actually Feeling? 12 · Patterns: What Keeps Repeating? 13 · Presence: Where Is God in This?

PART FOUR: WHERE THE TEXT MEETS YOUR LIFE

14 · The Word Gets the Last Word 15 · Practice Run: The Storm PART FIVE: READING WITH HELP

16 · The Interpreter Lives in You 17 · Never Read Alone CLOSING

A Guided Reflection A Closing Blessing Scripture Index

twenty years in the making

From the Community of Hope family This book comes to you from Community of Hope AME Church, the family God planted in the DMV in 2006, in a nightclub, with eight people who believed God meant every word. Twenty years in the making. Still going. Still hungry. Still convinced that everyone has a chance.

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path."

PSALM 119:105 (NIV)

Whoever picked up this book, whether you have read the Bible cover to cover or you have never made it past Genesis, the welcome is the same. We don't care how you come to Community of Hope. We only care about the way you leave: empowered, saved, hopeful, renewed, encouraged. This book exists to put a lamp in your hand.

bring your whole story

A letter to the reader Real talk. When was the last time the Bible actually read you? Not the last time you read it. The last time it read you, the last time a verse found something in you that you had been hiding from everybody, including yourself, and put it on the table in the kindest, firmest way possible. If you have felt that, you know there's nothing else like it. If you have never felt it, this book was written for you.

Here is what I have learned in twenty years of pastoring: most people don't struggle with the Bible because it's too hard. They struggle because nobody ever taught them how to read it. They open it in the middle, land on a verse about ancient warfare or a list of names they can't pronounce, feel dumb, and quietly close it. Then they carry a low-grade embarrassment about it for years.

Meanwhile they are making the biggest decisions of their lives, who to love, what to do with their anger, how to handle money and grief and fear, with no light on the path. This book teaches two skills, and they are really one skill. The first is how to read Scripture faithfully: how to draw out what God actually said instead of reading in what we wanted God to say.

The old word for that's exegesis, and don't let the seminary sound of it scare you. It just means reading honestly. The second skill is how to read your own life the same way, your seasons, your history, your emotions, your patterns. Because here is the truth nobody tells you: people misread their lives the exact same way they misread the Bible. They rip a moment out of context and build a whole story on it. The chapters are short on purpose.

Read one with your morning coffee. Bring a Bible: any honest translation you can understand.

Bring a pen. And bring your actual life, not the cleaned-up version. The Book can handle it. My only ask is the same one I always make: come hungry. It's never too late to start over, begin, or keep going. With you on the road,

Pastor Tony Lee SENIOR PASTOR, COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

the Book that reads you back

Drawing Out, Not Reading In

Two words are going to run this whole book, so let us get them straight now. Exegesis means drawing the meaning out of a text. It asks: what is actually being said here? It honors the text as it's, not as we wish it were. Eisegesis is the opposite: reading our own ideas into the text. It asks: what do I want this to say? It bends Scripture to fit our preferences instead of letting Scripture bend us. One of these is reading.

The other is ventriloquism: making the Bible move its mouth while we do the talking. And before you assume eisegesis is harmless, look at who does it in Scripture. In the wilderness, the devil quoted the Bible to Jesus. Quoted it accurately, by the way. Psalm 91, word for word: "He will command his angels concerning you" (Matthew 4:6). The words were right. The use was wrong.

He pulled a promise out of its context and weaponized it to push Jesus toward self-destruction. Jesus answered him with Scripture read rightly. Learn the lesson: being able to quote the Bible isn't the same as being able to read it. The enemy can quote it too. Even the apostles saw this problem coming.

Peter wrote that Paul's letters "contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction" (2 Peter 3:16). Distortion isn't a modern problem. It's a human problem. Which means the answer isn't being smarter than everybody, it's being humbler than your preferences.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

2 TIMOTHY 2:15 (NIV)

Correctly handles. The phrase paints a picture of a worker cutting a straight line. You can handle the Word crooked or you can handle it straight, and God cares which one you do. Not because God is grading

you, but because people build lives on what you tell them this Book says. So do we. Here is the honest test, and it stings a little: when was the last time the Bible changed your mind? If the Book always agrees with you, if every verse you find happens to bless what you already wanted to do, you are probably not reading. You are shopping. The Word of the living God will comfort you, and it will also contradict you. Let it do both.

TRY IT: THE MIRROR CHECK

Think of one opinion you hold strongly. Now ask: do I believe this because Scripture taught me, or did I go find verses after I already decided? No shame either way. Just notice. Honesty is the doorway to exegesis.

You Are Not the First Reader

Here is a sentence that will save you years of confusion: the Bible was written for you, but it wasn't written to you. Every book of Scripture was written by a real person, to real people, in a real place, facing a real situation: centuries before you showed up. Paul wrote letters to actual churches with actual drama. The psalms were songs for a nation walking through war, exile, and worship. That doesn't make the Bible distant.

It makes it sturdy. Before a single verse speaks to your Tuesday, it spoke to somebody else's crisis first. So faithful reading works in three layers. First: what did God say, the actual words. Second: what did it mean to the people who received it first. Third: what does it mean for us today. Skip a layer and you get in trouble. Skip the first and you never really look at the text.

Skip the second and you make ancient words mean whatever this morning's mood needs. Skip the third and Bible study becomes a museum tour, interesting, distant, and powerless. All three layers, every time. That's the whole method. And no, you aren't supposed to be able to do this alone. That idea isn't even biblical.

Watch what happens in Acts 8: an Ethiopian official is riding home reading Isaiah out loud, and Philip runs up and asks him the exegesis question: "Do you understand what you are reading?" The man's answer is one of the most honest sentences in the Bible:

"How can I, unless someone explains it to me?"

ACTS 8:31 (NIV)

No shame. No pretending. And heaven's response to his honesty wasn't embarrassment, it was a teacher, sent running. That same posture shows up in Nehemiah 8, when Israel gathered to hear the Scriptures read aloud: the Levites "read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and

giving the meaning so that the people understood what was being read" (Nehemiah 8:8). Making it clear. Giving the meaning.

God has always provided interpreters, teachers, and community around God's Word. So drop the pride and drop the shame, they are the same weight in different pockets. Needing help to understand the Bible doesn't make you a weak Christian. It makes you a biblical one. One more thing before we get practical. The next five chapters hand you five questions to ask every passage you read.

They are simple enough to teach a middle schooler and strong enough to carry you for life. Don't rush them. A question a day is a fine pace. This is a walk, not a sprint.

TRY IT: SAY IT OUT LOUD

Find one person this week, a friend, a group chat, a Bible study, and tell them what you are reading. Not teaching it. Just sharing it. The eunuch got his breakthrough because he let somebody into the passenger seat. Who is in yours?

five questions to ask the text

Audience: Who Was This For?

Question two: who received these words first? The Bible is a library with a lot of addressees. Some words went to Israel under the old covenant. Some went to specific churches with specific problems. Corinth's mess isn't Philippi's mess. Some went to individuals: Timothy got instructions for pastoring; Joshua got instructions for conquest.

If you ignore the address line, you will end up claiming mail that was never sent to you and missing the mail that was. This isn't a technicality. Think about how much pain has come from skipping this question. Promises made to a king in a covenant get claimed like coupons. Commands given to ancient Israel's courts get quoted at neighbors.

Meanwhile, the actual inheritance addressed to believers in Jesus, forgiveness, adoption, the Holy Spirit, a commissioned life, sits unopened. Asking about audience doesn't shrink the Bible. Paul says the opposite: "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). All of it, every genre, every era, every addressee, is useful for you.

But useful isn't the same as addressed. A letter to Corinth about their divisions is useful to you the way a doctor's case study is useful: you learn how the Physician works. You don't take somebody else's prescription to the pharmacy. Here is the simple filter. When you read a command or a promise, ask: was this for one person, one nation, one church, or all believers everywhere? The answer is usually visible right in the passage: who

is named, who is greeted, what covenant is in play. And when the New Testament repeats a promise to the whole church, you can grab it with both hands. One more encouragement, because this question can feel like it takes toys away. It does the opposite. When you know which words are addressed to you in Christ, you stop holding promises loosely. You stop wondering deep down whether you are quoting something you had no right to quote. The promises that are yours become unshakeable, because you checked.

TRY IT: CHECK THE ADDRESS

Open one of Paul's letters and read just the first five verses. Write down: who wrote it, to whom, and what seems to be going on. That's thirty seconds of work, and it changes how you hear every verse that follows.

Genre: What Kind of Writing Is This?

Question three: what kind of writing am I holding? You already read this way everywhere else in your life. You don't read a text from your boss the way you read song lyrics. You don't read a lease the way you read a birthday card. Change the genre and you change how the words work: automatically, without thinking.

The Bible deserves the same respect, because God chose to speak through poetry and history and prophecy and wisdom and letters and gospels. God picked the containers on purpose. You don't read Psalms the same way you read Acts. Psalms are songs, they speak the language of the heart, with metaphors that would break if you handled them like lab reports. When David says God is his rock, no geology is being claimed.

Acts is history, Luke is telling you what happened, not always what should happen every time. Proverbs are wisdom, they tell you how life generally works, not what God guarantees in every case. "Train up a child" is a principle to build on, not a contract to wave at heaven when your grown child wanders. Prophecy confronts and comforts with pictures. Letters argue and instruct, line by line.

The Gospels put Jesus in front of your eyes and dare you to stay the same. Genre confusion is where so much bad theology is born. Read poetry like law and you become rigid in ways God never asked. Read wisdom like promises and you will accuse God of breaking commitments God never made. Read narrative like command and you will try to copy scenes that were recorded, not prescribed. The Bible never fails. Our labels do.

The fix is nearly free: before you read, ask what you are reading. Most Bibles tell you in the introduction to each book. It costs ten seconds and saves ten years.

TRY IT: TWO CHAIRS

Read Psalm 23, then read Acts 2. Notice how differently they sit in you, one is a song for your soul, the other a report that demands a response. You just did genre analysis. It isn't seminary. It's paying attention.

Key Words: What Stands Out?

Question four: what is the passage leaning on? Biblical writers didn't have bold fonts or highlighters, so they emphasized the old way: repetition, position, and weight. When a word or phrase shows up again and again, that isn't sloppy editing. That's the author tapping the microphone. When Jesus says "truly, truly," lean in. When a psalm repeats a refrain, that refrain is the spine of the song.

When John says "remain" eleven times in one chapter, the chapter is about remaining. The Bible underlines itself, you just have to read slowly enough to see the ink. So slow down and hunt. Look for repeated words and phrases. Look for commands, what is the passage telling somebody to do? Look for promises, what is God committing to? Look for warnings: what is at stake?

Look for connector words like therefore, but, and so that, because they carry the logic. An old teacher's rule that still works: when you see a "therefore," ask what it's there for. This is also where reading out loud earns its keep. Scripture was written for the ear before the eye: most believers in history heard the Word before they ever owned a copy. Reading aloud slows you to the speed of meaning.

Words you have skimmed twenty times will suddenly stand up and introduce themselves.

"Blessed is the one ... whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season."

PSALM 1:1-3 (NIV)

Meditate is the key word in that key psalm, and in Hebrew it carries the sense of muttering, chewing something over under your breath. Not emptying your mind; filling your mouth. That's what this whole question trains you to do: chew. Fast readers stay hungry. Slow readers get fed.

TRY IT: ONE CHAPTER, THREE COLORS

Take one chapter, try Philippians 2, and mark it three ways: circle repeated words, underline commands, star promises. Don't interpret anything yet. Just look. You will be shocked how much the passage explains itself once you can see its skeleton.

God's Character: What Does This Reveal About God?

Question five is the one that turns study into worship: what does this passage show me about God? Here is the quiet mistake underneath most frustrated Bible reading: we open the Book asking what it says about us. Our victory. Our purpose. Our week. And the Bible does speak to all of that, but not first. Every passage of Scripture is first a revelation of who God is. God's nature. God's heart. God's mission.

Read the Bible as a book about you and it will constantly disappoint. Read it as a book about God that includes you, and it will never run dry. This question rescues the difficult passages especially. Stuck in Leviticus? Ask what all that blood and detail says about God, the holiness, the nearness, the insistence on dwelling with the covenant people without pretending sin is fine. Lost in a genealogy?

Ask why God keeps names, because God doesn't lose people in crowds. Confused by a hard prophet? Ask what wounds God is answering. The question always has an answer, because the Author shows up on every page. Jesus tied error to a double ignorance: "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God" (Matthew 22:29). Not just the Scriptures, the God of the Scriptures. It's possible to know the Book and miss the Person.

The Pharisees proved it weekly. The goal of exegesis was never to win Bible trivia. It's to know the One who wrote it, and to let every page correct the broken pictures of God that life painted for you. Because you have broken pictures. We all do. Some of us read every passage through the face of a father who left. Some read through a

church that policed them. Scripture read rightly is how those portraits get repainted: passage by passage, until the God you pray to matches the God who actually is.

TRY IT: THE FIRST QUESTION

For one week, every time you read Scripture, answer this before anything else: what does this passage show me about God? One sentence, written down. Seven days of this will change more in you than a year of reading for tips.

five questions to ask your life

History: What Came Before This?

Question two for your life: what is the backstory? Every text has a background, and so do you. You didn't fall out of the sky into this week. You arrived here carrying a childhood, a family system, old victories, old wounds, and a thousand lessons you absorbed before you were old enough to vet them. That history is quietly interpreting your present all day long. The question isn't whether your past shapes your reactions.

It's whether you know how. Think about how much sense people's reactions make once you know their story. Scripture works this way constantly. Cain's rage reads differently when you remember he grew up in the wreckage just outside Eden, the first child of parents who lost paradise. Israel's panic at the Red Sea reads differently when you remember four hundred years of slavery had taught them that power never rescues, it only crushes.

Backstory doesn't excuse a reaction. But it explains it, and what can be explained can be brought to God for healing instead of just managed with willpower. Now turn that reading on yourself. Why does being overlooked hit you so much harder than it hits your friend? Why does a certain tone of voice put you instantly on defense? Why does success make you anxious right when you should be celebrating? Those reactions have receipts.

Somewhere upstream there's a moment that taught you a rule, people leave, love is earned, mistakes are fatal, and you have been reading every new chapter of your life through that old rule ever since.

"Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

PSALM 139:23-24 (NIV)

Notice David doesn't say "I will search myself." He invites God into the archives. That's the move. You don't dig through your history alone, and you don't dig to wallow, you dig with the Author, to understand the chapters God is ready to redeem. And hear this plainly, because we say it around here all the time: getting help with your history isn't weak faith. Praying people go to counseling. The Counseling Center exists on purpose. God works through the Word, the Spirit, and wise professionals: often all three in the same story.

TRY IT: FIND THE RECEIPT

Next time you overreact to something small, don't judge it. Trace it. Ask: when is the first time I remember feeling exactly this? Write down what surfaces and hand it to God in one honest sentence. That's life exegesis in real time.

Emotion: What Are You Actually Feeling?

Question three: what is actually going on in you: beneath the label you usually use? Most of us run our inner life with a vocabulary of about three words. Fine. Tired. Mad. But "mad" is almost never the whole sentence. Underneath mad is usually hurt, or fear, or rejection, or shame, or grief, and each one of those needs a different medicine. Unexamined emotions don't disappear. They become misinterpreted stories.

Feel fear and call it anger long enough, and you will build a life around fighting things you were actually supposed to bring to God and cry about. Here is the good news you may never have been told: the Bible isn't embarrassed by your emotions. There's a whole songbook in the middle of it, and almost half of the psalms are laments. Songs that open with "how long, LORD?" Songs that accuse, weep, and shake their fist on the way to trust.

God didn't edit those out. God commissioned them. God put words for your worst nights in the hymnal on purpose, which tells you God would rather have your honest mess than your polished distance.

"How long, LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?"

PSALM 13:1 (NIV)

That's a man naming what he actually feels, to God's face, and by the end of the same short psalm he is singing about trust. Not

because the situation changed. Because named feelings can be carried to God, and unnamed feelings can only be carried alone. So build the skill. When something surges in you, pause and get specific. Not "I'm fine", what is it? Not "I'm mad", what is under it? Hurt that they forgot? Fear that it's happening again? Shame that you were seen? Precision isn't navel-

gazing. Precision is what turns an emotion from a fog into a prayer. God can handle your real feelings. God just wants you to bring them by name.

TRY IT: UNDER THE MAD

Today, when a strong feeling hits, ask twice. First: what am I feeling? Second: what is under that? Then pray one sentence that uses the second word, not the first. "God, I am afraid" goes places "I'm fine" never will.

Patterns: What Keeps Repeating?

Question four: what keeps showing up? Read the book of Judges some time and watch the loop: Israel drifts, trouble comes, they cry out, God rescues, peace returns, and then the same cycle runs again. And again. Seven times. The book is practically begging its readers to see the pattern, because the pattern is the message. God doesn't just speak through moments. God speaks through repetition. Your life has loops too.

The same argument with different people. The same wall in every job. The same type of relationship with a different face. The same promise to yourself every January. When something keeps repeating, stop treating each occurrence like breaking news and start reading it like a refrain. In chapter seven we said repetition is how biblical writers underline things. It's also how your life underlines things.

A repeated struggle is a formation issue waving at you, and formation issues are exactly the things God is most committed to addressing. Be careful how you hear that. A pattern isn't proof that you are broken beyond repair. It's proof that something in you is still running an old script, an unhealed wound from question two, an unnamed emotion from question three, a lie you absorbed somewhere that keeps casting the same play with new actors.

The pattern isn't your identity. It's your assignment. And don't miss the mercy in it: God lets patterns repeat because God is more interested in transforming you than in merely relocating you. You can change the job, the city, the relationship, and ship the

same unexamined self to the new address. The wilderness generation covered a lot of miles and never left their fear. The pattern goes where you go, until you and God read it together.

TRY IT: SPOT THE REFRAIN

Write down the last three times you felt the same familiar frustration. Different people? Different places? Now ask the exegesis question: what is the one common element in all three scenes? (Gently: it may be you.) Then ask God the formation question: what are You trying to grow in me here?

Presence: Where Is God in This?

The last question for your life is the one that changes the temperature of all the others: where is God working in this? Notice what the question isn't. It isn't "why is this happening to me?" That question has its place, but parked there, it will read your whole life as a courtroom where you are always the plaintiff. Life exegesis shifts the question from why is this happening to me to where is God within this: from interrogating the storm to looking for the One who is in the boat with you.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

ROMANS 8:28 (NIV)

Read that verse with the skills you now have. It doesn't say all things are good. Losses aren't good. Diagnoses aren't good. The verse is honest about that, it says God works in all things, for good, for God's people. Romans 8:28 isn't a greeting card to slap over pain. It's a set of reading glasses to interpret pain with. It tells you that no chapter of your story, however dark, is outside the Author's working. Joseph is the masterclass.

Betrayed by brothers, sold, slandered, forgotten in prison: thirteen years of chapters that read, in the moment, like abandonment. And at the end, with his brothers trembling in front of him, Joseph gives the greatest one-sentence life exegesis in Scripture: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many

lives" (Genesis 50:20). Both clauses are true. Real harm, really intended. Real God, really working. Faithful reading holds both without flinching. So ask it of your current chapter. Where is God in this? Sometimes the answer is visible, a person who showed up, a door that closed you now thank God for, a strength you didn't have last year. Sometimes the answer is simply presence: close to the brokenhearted, whether or not the plot

makes sense yet. Either way, you aren't reading an abandoned book. The Author is on the page. Keep looking.

TRY IT: REREAD A HARD CHAPTER

Pick one past hardship: far enough back that you can look at it steadily. Answer in writing: where can I now see God working in that chapter? What did it grow? Who did it make me? You are learning to read your history the way Joseph read his.

where the text meets your life

Practice Run: The Storm

Time to run the whole method on one story. Open your Bible to Mark 4:35–41. Read it slowly: out loud if you can. Here is the scene. Evening comes, and Jesus says, "Let us go over to the other side." The disciples take Him into the boat. A furious squall comes up: waves breaking over the sides, water filling the hull, seasoned fishermen certain they are dying. And Jesus is in the stern, asleep on a cushion.

They wake Him with one of the rawest prayers in the Bible: "Teacher, don't you care if we drown?" He gets up, rebukes the wind, and speaks to the sea: "Quiet! Be still!" Dead calm. Then He turns to them: "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?" And they are more terrified after the miracle than during the storm: "Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!" First, exegete the text.

Context: Jesus had just finished a full day of teaching, and the crossing was His idea, the storm didn't interrupt the plan; it was inside it. Audience: Mark writes to believers facing persecution in Rome, people in an actual storm, wondering if Jesus was asleep on them. Genre: gospel narrative, a real event, told to reveal who Jesus is. Key words: the fear words.

Notice the storm never gets called the problem: fear does, and fear appears after the danger has passed. God's character: present in the storm, unbothered by it, in authority over it, and patient with the frightened people in the boat. Read that way, the passage is barely about weather at all. The question of the whole scene is the disciples' question: who then is this? Now exegete your life with the same story open.

What storm makes you feel abandoned by God right now? Where have you decided God is

asleep, that God must not care, because nothing has moved on your timeline? What fear in your life currently speaks louder than your faith? And here is the sharpest one: the disciples woke Jesus with an accusation, don't you care?, and He answered it with power and a question, not with rejection. What accusation have you been too religious

to say to God's face? Say it. God can handle the prayers you have been editing. Notice what just happened.

The scriptural questions kept you anchored in truth, who Jesus actually is, what the story actually says. The life questions made that truth personal, where you are in the boat. Neither reading is complete without the other. Text without life is a museum. Life without text is a storm with no one to wake. Together, they are the practice this whole book has been building toward: reading both, honestly, with the Spirit's help.

TRY IT: YOUR OWN PASSAGE

This week, run both sets of questions on one more passage by yourself. Try Psalm 23, John 21, or Exodus 14. Five questions for the text. Five for your life. One page of notes. This is the skill, and now it's yours.

reading with help

Never Read Alone

One last skill, and it might be the one American Christianity forgot most: the Bible is a family book. For most of history, most believers couldn't read, and nobody owned a personal Bible. The Word was heard: read aloud in the gathering, explained in community, chewed on in company. Almost every "you" in the New Testament letters is plural. The Book assumes a room, not just a lamp and a chair. Your private reading matters: keep it. But if your Bible study never happens with other people, you are playing a team sport alone and wondering why it's hard.

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."

ACTS 17:11 (NIV)

Look at the Bereans, the Bible's gold star students. Two things made them noble. Eagerness: they wanted the Word. And examination: they checked everything, even an apostle's preaching, against the Scriptures, daily, together. That's the culture we are after. Not a room where one person does the thinking, and not a free-for-all where every opinion weighs the same, but a family with open Bibles, asking the five questions, sharpening each other's readings, catching each other's blind spots. Your sister sees what you skip. Your brother's question gets you unstuck. The Spirit teaches rooms, not just readers.

Community is also the safety rail for everything this book taught you. Private interpretation with no accountability is how cults start, and how good people drift. When your reading of a text or your reading of your life goes sideways, it's almost always alone. So put your study inside the family: a small group, a Bible study, a couple of friends who will meet you weekly with open Books and honest lives.

At Community of Hope we aim to produce disciples, not just members, and disciples are made at tables, not just in rows. So here is the whole

book in four moves. Read the Word with the five questions. Read your life with the five questions. Let the Word get the last word. And do all of it with the Spirit inside you and the family around you. Do this for a year and you won't recognize your old way of reading, or your old way of living.

Keep reading. Both books. All the way home.

TRY IT: FIND YOUR BEREANS

Name two people you could study with, even once a month, even by phone. Reach out this week and ask. If you can't think of anybody, come see us Sunday. We keep tables ready. (Details in the back.)

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THE BOOK

slow down here

A guided reflection Before you close this book, sit with it. These questions aren't meant to be rushed, they are invitations to slow down, pay attention, and let God speak through both the Word and your story. A journal helps. So does silence. Exegete the Scripture. What is one verse that has spoken to you recently? Go past your first impression. What is its context? Who received it first? What kind of writing is it? What word is it leaning on?

And what does it reveal about God? Exegete your life. What season are you in? What history is shaping how you are reading this moment? What emotion have you been avoiding naming? What pattern keeps repeating? And where is God working in all of it? Then hold your answers under one truth: many people know Bible verses but don't know themselves. Many people know themselves but don't know Scripture.

Growth happens where the two conversations meet, and you now know how to host that meeting.

Read the Word. Read your life. Trust the Spirit.

GO IN LIGHT

hand it to somebody

A closing blessing Friend, you made it to the last page, so receive this before you go. May the Word of God be a lamp for your feet and a light on your path. May you never again read a verse alone in the dark, ripped from its story, and may you never again read your own life that way either. May the Spirit of truth guide you into all truth, opening the Scriptures on every road you walk.

May the mirror of the Word show you the truth in kindness, and may you have the courage to act on what you see. May your seasons make sense in God's hands, your history heal in God's light, your emotions find their names in God's presence, and your patterns break under God's patient work. And from the Community of Hope family, to whoever the Lord placed this book in front of: you are seen. You are wanted.

There's a seat at the table and a Bible we will open with you. It's NEVER too late.

Simple. In the name of Jesus, by the light of His Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit: amen.

you know how now

Scripture index A handful of the most important passages behind this book. Bookmark them. Read them in context, you know how now. •

Genesis 50:15–21 • Ezra 7:10 • Nehemiah 8:1–8 • Psalm 1; 13; 23; 119:97–105; 139:23–24 • Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 • Jeremiah 29:4–14 • Matthew 4:1–11; 22:29 •

Mark 4:35–41 • Luke 24:13–35 • John 16:12–15 • Acts 8:26–40; 17:10–12 •

Romans 8:18–30 • 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 • Philippians 4:10–13 • 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14–17 • Hebrews 4:12–13 • James 1:22–25 • 2 Peter 3:14–18

Soli Deo Gloria

pull up Sunday

You're invited The Bible is a family book, and there's a seat at our table. Community of Hope AME Church started in 2006 in a nightclub with eight people, because we believe church should meet people where they actually live. Twenty years in the making, that hasn't changed. We preach and teach Jesus unapologetically. We open the Book and we open our lives. And we mean our name: this is a community where everyone, everyone, has a chance. We don't care how you come. Come with questions. Come with a past. Come with a Bible you have never understood. We only care about the way you leave.

PULL UP SUNDAY

Sundays at 10:00 AM Crossland High School 6901 Temple Hill Rd, Temple Hills, MD 20748

CAN'T MAKE IT IN PERSON?

Watch live on YouTube: @hiphopenationtv Facebook: @CmtyofHope · Web: www.hiphopenation.com

WANT TO STUDY WITH PEOPLE?

If this book lit something in you and you want a table to read at, reach us at info@hiphopenation.com or 240-273-9115. We keep tables ready. Disciples are made at tables, not just in rows.

We'll save you a seat.

where everyone has a chance. We'll save you a seat.

WWW.HIPHOPENATION.COM

COMMUNITY OF HOPE AME CHURCH

Sundays 10 AM · Crossland High School