

Study Guide: How to Read the Bible (week 1)

Session 1 — Does Anybody Read Anymore?

Overview

In this opening session of the series, the pastor explores a growing cultural crisis — the decline of reading in American life — and what that means for Christians who are called to be people of the Word. The session introduces two foundational postures for approaching the Bible: reading it as Scripture and reading it as Story.

Key Takeaways

- 1. We live in a post-literate culture.** Sociologists have documented declining reading comprehension, shrinking attention spans, and reduced critical thinking among American adults. For Christians, this trend carries serious spiritual consequences, since daily Bible reading remains the number one spiritual discipline associated with continued growth and maturity.
 - 2. Attitude matters more than technique.** The scribes and Pharisees were the most technically skilled Bible readers in the ancient world, yet Jesus told them they had missed the point entirely. A humble, submissive heart before God is more important than mastering exegetical method.
 - 3. Read the Bible as Scripture.** The 66 books of the Bible are not merely ancient literature or a collection of moral wisdom. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes all Scripture as breathed out by God — sacred, authoritative, and profitable for every dimension of the Christian life. We approach it not to evaluate it, but to be shaped by it.
 - 4. Read the Bible as Story.** The Bible is not a disconnected anthology. It is a unified narrative — creation, fall, redemption, consummation — that encompasses the whole of reality. Every individual passage must be read in light of the whole, and the center of that whole is the person and work of Jesus Christ.
 - 5. The story we tell ourselves determines how we live.** The Bible is the only true story. When we immerse ourselves in it daily, it reorients our imagination and reshapes our lives from the inside out.
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Reflection Questions

Opening

1. When was the last time you read a book from cover to cover? How has your reading life changed over the past several years? Do you notice any connection between how much you read and how you feel spiritually?
2. The pastor described the cultural shift toward post-literacy — people can read, they just do not. Have you observed this in your own home, your workplace, or your community? What do you think is driving it?

On Attitude vs. Technique

3. The pastor drew a contrast between Jacob wrestling with God — refusing to let go until he got a blessing — and coming to the Bible in a posture of submission, letting God do whatever He wants in the time you spend in the Word. Which of those postures best describes how you typically approach your Bible reading? Be honest.
4. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees not for failing to read the Scriptures, but for missing the point of them entirely. What do you think it looks like in everyday life to be a skilled Bible reader who is still missing the point?
5. The pastor said, "A humble and submissive Bible reader is a better reader of the Bible than the most learned Bible scholar." Do you agree with that statement? What does humility before the text actually look like in practice?

On Reading the Bible as Scripture

6. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul describes all Scripture as breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, correction, and training in righteousness. Are there parts of the Bible you tend to skip or treat as less inspired than others — books like Leviticus, Numbers, or 1 and 2 Chronicles? What would it look like to approach those portions with the same expectation you bring to the Psalms or the Gospels?
7. The pastor said we should come to the Bible not to dissect and analyze it, but to be encountered by it. What is the difference between those two approaches in your daily reading? Have you experienced both?

On Reading the Bible as Story

8. The four-act structure of the Bible — creation, fall, redemption, consummation — was described as the meta-narrative, the story of stories. Before this session, how often did you think about individual Bible passages in light of that larger story? How might that change the way you read?

9. The pastor pointed to the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the Ethiopian eunuch as examples of people who needed help reading individual passages in light of the whole. Who in your life has played that role for you — someone who helped you see how a passage connected to the bigger picture of Scripture?
 10. The pastor said, "The stories we tell ourselves determine the way we live. The Bible is the true story." What are some of the competing stories that culture tells you about who you are, what you need, and what a good life looks like? How does daily engagement with Scripture push back against those stories?
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Practical Applications

This week, try one or more of the following:

- **Begin with prayer before you open your Bible.** Before reading, spend sixty seconds asking God to speak to you through what you are about to read. Set aside your agenda and ask Him to set the agenda for your time in the Word.
 - **Start a Bible reading plan.** If you do not currently have a structured plan, choose one this week and begin. The goal is not speed or volume — it is consistency. A simple plan that you actually follow is better than an ambitious one you abandon.
 - **Read a familiar passage with fresh eyes.** Choose a story you know well — the call of Abram, the life of Joseph, the story of Samson — and read it slowly, asking: where does this story fit in the larger narrative of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation? Where do I see Jesus in this passage?
 - **Reflect on the story you are living.** Based on the Colossians 3 passage referenced in the sermon — the idea that you have died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God — write down in a journal or notebook what it would look like for that story to shape your decisions this week in one specific area of your life.
 - **Share your Bible reading experience with someone in the group.** Before next session, text or call one other group member and tell them one thing you read in Scripture this week and what it meant to you.
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Closing Reflection

Pastor Brad shared a personal moment from his own life — a 19-year-old pulling his car over on Old Shell Road in Mobile, Alabama, overcome with purposelessness, going home and opening to Judges 13, and reading the story of Samson. That single encounter with the Word of God altered the entire trajectory of his life.

Take a moment before closing to ask yourself: Is there a moment in your life when reading the Bible changed something for you? If so, what? If not, what would it mean to open yourself to that possibility this week?

Closing Prayer Points

- Pray for a renewed hunger for the Word among your group members.
 - Pray for consistency and discipline in daily Bible reading.
 - Pray for humility — that each person would come to Scripture ready to be shaped rather than ready to evaluate.
 - Pray for your church, that it would be a community deeply rooted in the Word for generations to come.
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Next Session: We will continue with the third posture for reading the Bible — reading it for sustenance.