

HOW TO

PRAY

AND READ YOUR

BIBLE

Simple steps for spending time with God



JAMES 4:8

Come **close to God**,
and God will come close to you.

IT CAN BE CHALLENGING TO SPEND TIME WITH A

God you can't touch or see. *The good news is when we take steps to move closer to God, he promises to do the same.*

If you've picked up this resource, you're most likely looking for some practical ways to start spending regular time with God through prayer and Bible reading. While getting some new ideas and tools can be helpful, *the most important step is putting these ideas into practice.* As you work through this resource, identify the steps you'll put into practice, writing them down in the space provided. Make notes about what stands out to you, questions you have along the way, and ideas you want to try first.

The most important thing to remember is that God loves you and is eager to meet with you. So be honest with him, ask your questions, and know you're not alone! As you begin, write down a few things you're hoping for.

What's drawing you to this resource? Why do you want to learn how to pray and read your Bible?

One word or phrase that describes your experience with prayer:

One word or phrase that describes your experience with the Bible:

HOW TO PRAY

What do you notice about Jesus' example prayer?

"Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace."

Matthew 6:6 (MSG)

Prayer is simply being with God—talking to him and also listening. Many worry about having the right approach or the correct words to say. It may encourage you to know that the first followers of Jesus asked him how to pray. We can ask him the same thing! Jesus offered his followers an example, which may be familiar to you as “The Lord’s Prayer.” Read through this version of Jesus’ prayer from the New Living Translation:

We can pray those exact words to God or we can let Jesus' prayer inspire us to approach God with a similar attitude, offering our own words. What would his prayer sound like in your own words?

*Our Father in heaven,
may your name be kept holy.
¹⁰ May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
¹¹ Give us today the food we need,
¹² and forgive us our sins,
as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
¹³ And don't let us yield to temptation,
but rescue us from the evil one.*

Matthew 6:9-13

THE LANGUAGE OF JESUS' EXAMPLE PRAYER

FATHER

We approach him as children coming into the presence of a good father.

HOLY

Distinct from everything and everyone else.

KINGDOM/HEAVEN

Where God gets everything he wants.

TODAY

Focusing on today, not tomorrow.

AS WE HAVE FORGIVEN

Got any grudges you need to hand over to him?

TEMPTATION/THE EVIL ONE

The devil and his deceitful schemes.

“The best bit of advice I ever received about how to pray was this: keep it simple, keep it real, keep it up.”

– Pete Grieg, How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People

TRY IT OUT

Find a quiet, undistracted place to be with God, using this simple prayer plan that follows the acronym, PRAY.ⁱ

Pause – Take a few moments to be still and silent, turning your whole focus toward being with God.

Rejoice – Thank God for what you’ve seen him do, for the good things he’s given, and for who he is. You might give praise to God through the words of a Psalm from the Bible (e.g. Psalm 8, 23, 100, etc.). Express your gratitude to God.

Ask – What questions do you have for God? God loves you and wants us to ask him for things that are on our hearts and minds. What do you want to say to him today?

Yield – Surrendering and saying “yes” to God’s way above our own is a key part of prayer. Be quiet in God’s presence, listening and taking a yielded posture. If you need to confess something to him, be honest and open with him. Open your hands in a palms-up posture, kneel, or turn your face upward. Receive God’s love and forgiveness.

*Which part of that experience came more easily for you?
Which part was more difficult?*

How did it compare to what you usually experience in prayer?

Want to use a guided audio reflection that follows the P-R-A-Y pattern?

**Check out the Lectio 365 app:
24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365**

WAYS TO PRAY

There are many ways to pray, keeping a connection to God open and active throughout the day. Here’s a list of various types of prayer to get you started.ⁱⁱ *As you look over each one, put a star next to the one you’d like to try first.*

Conversational Prayer

While it may take some adjustment, talk to God just like you’re having a conversation with a friend. Whether praying out loud or silently, be relaxed and talk as naturally as you would in a regular conversation. This simple way of talking with God keeps a connection to him open and active throughout the everyday moments of life.

Journaling

Writing things down can be a spiritual practice that helps us pay attention to how God is speaking to us in our everyday lives. Use a notebook to take notes during Sunday's sermons, during Bible reading and prayer, or any other time you want to notice God's activity around you. Here are some prompts to help you get started:

- *What is God saying to me today? (Is there a quote, image, idea, or observation that helps me look toward God?)*
- *God, today I want to say thank you for...*
- *A question I have for God today is...*

Prayer Walking

Some people pray best when moving and engaging their physical body. Go for a walk, asking God to show you what to pray for as you walk. Use this method to pray for significant places such as your home, neighborhood, or workplace. Ask God to show you the needs in each space.

Intercessory Prayer

This type of prayer is simply asking God to act on behalf of others. God invites us to come to him, and to ask him repeatedly, without giving up. Keep a regular list or use prompts that will help you intentionally hold people, places, and topics up to God, asking for specific things. Offer to pray for people in your life and ask them how you can do so. If someone comes to mind seemingly randomly, offer up a prayer for them in that moment. Close your time of prayer by pausing and surrendering to God.

Praying Scripture

There are many prayers in the Bible you can use as springboards for your own prayers. The book of Psalms has 150 different prayers to use, collectively expressing the full range of human emotions to God. You can also search online for prayers in the Bible (e.g. prayers of Jesus, Paul, Mary, Daniel, Hannah, etc.) for additional ideas.

Breath Prayer

By silently praying a short phrase in rhythm with your breathing, be reminded of this truth: God, the Holy Spirit, is as close to you as the breath you breathe every moment of the day. Breath prayers can be especially helpful when you're anxious, hurried, and needing to remember that God is with you. Examples of some phrases to pray:

- [Breathing in] *Jesus, Son of God...*
[Breathing out] *Have mercy on me, a sinner.*
- [Breathing in] *I am still...*
[Breathing out] *I know you are God.*
- [Breathing in] *Speak, Lord...*
[Breathing out] *Your servant is listening.*

Fixed-Hour Prayer (the "Daily Office")

Pausing at set times throughout the day (morning, midday, and evening) is a prayer rhythm used by people throughout the Bible, including Jesus and his followers. Set alarms or plan some checkpoint moments throughout your day to pause and say a short prayer as a way of connecting to God. The Lord's Prayer, a Psalm, or a short written prayer can be helpful to use during these pauses.

Which of these ways of praying do you want to try first?

When, where and how will you try it out? Jot down your plan here:

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

The Bible is... the record of God's dealings with his people over thousands of years and within several different cultures.

– Mark Strom, The Symphony of Scripture: Making Sense of the Bible's Many Themes

The Bible has been a source of comfort, challenge, and inspiration to people for thousands of years. Its size can be daunting, and its content is often confusing to those reading it for the first time. Many people set out to read the Bible from front to back but get stuck somewhere along the way. If you've ever tried to read through the Bible by starting in Genesis, but found yourself frustrated, lost, or asleep by the book of Leviticus... you're not alone! With a basic understanding of how the Bible is structured and some advice on getting started, you can use the Bible to engage with God.

God used the writings in the Bible to communicate specific messages to specific groups of people for specific purposes. And with a growing understanding of the Bible's genres, storyline and people, we can hear God's voice communicating with us today.

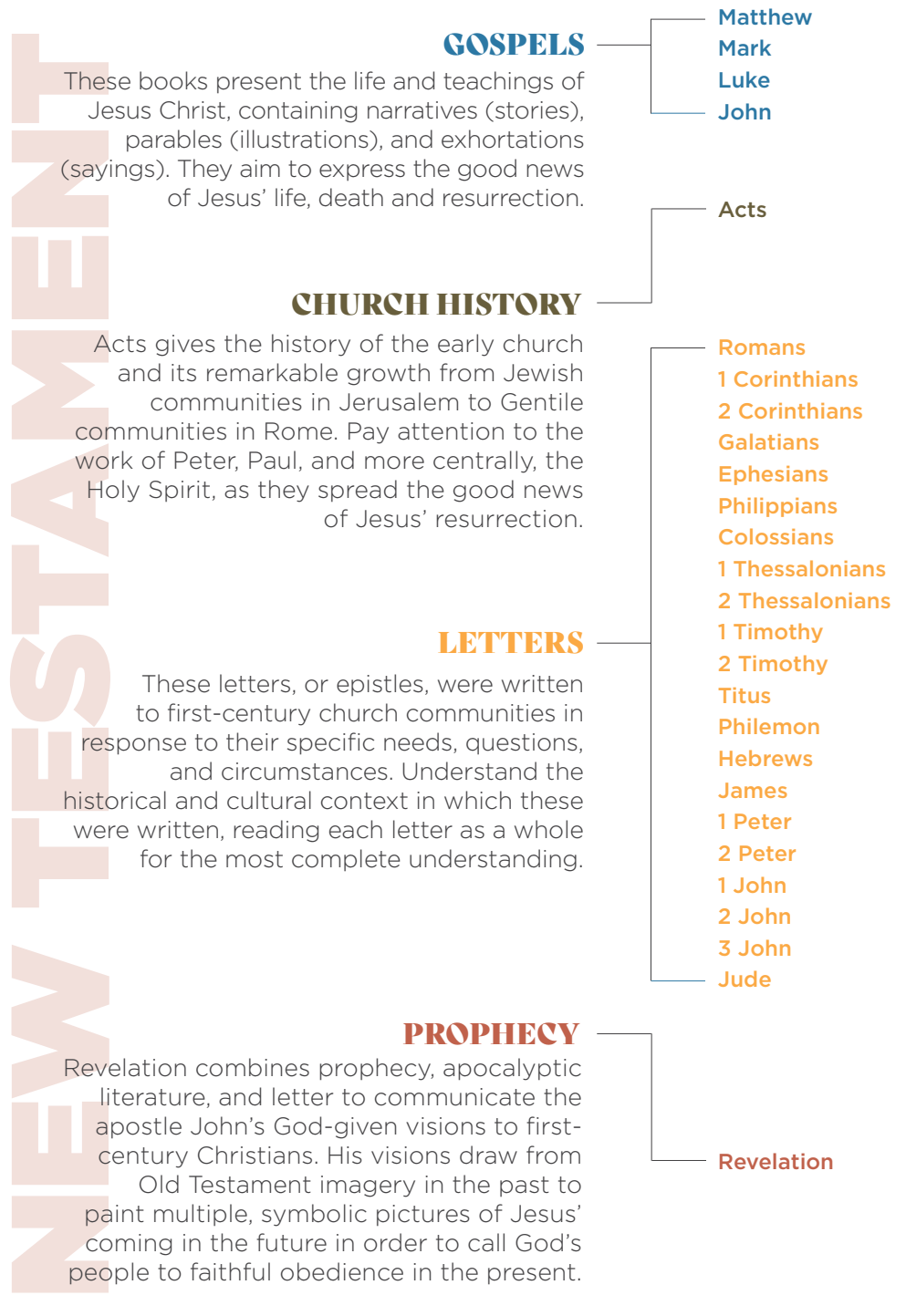
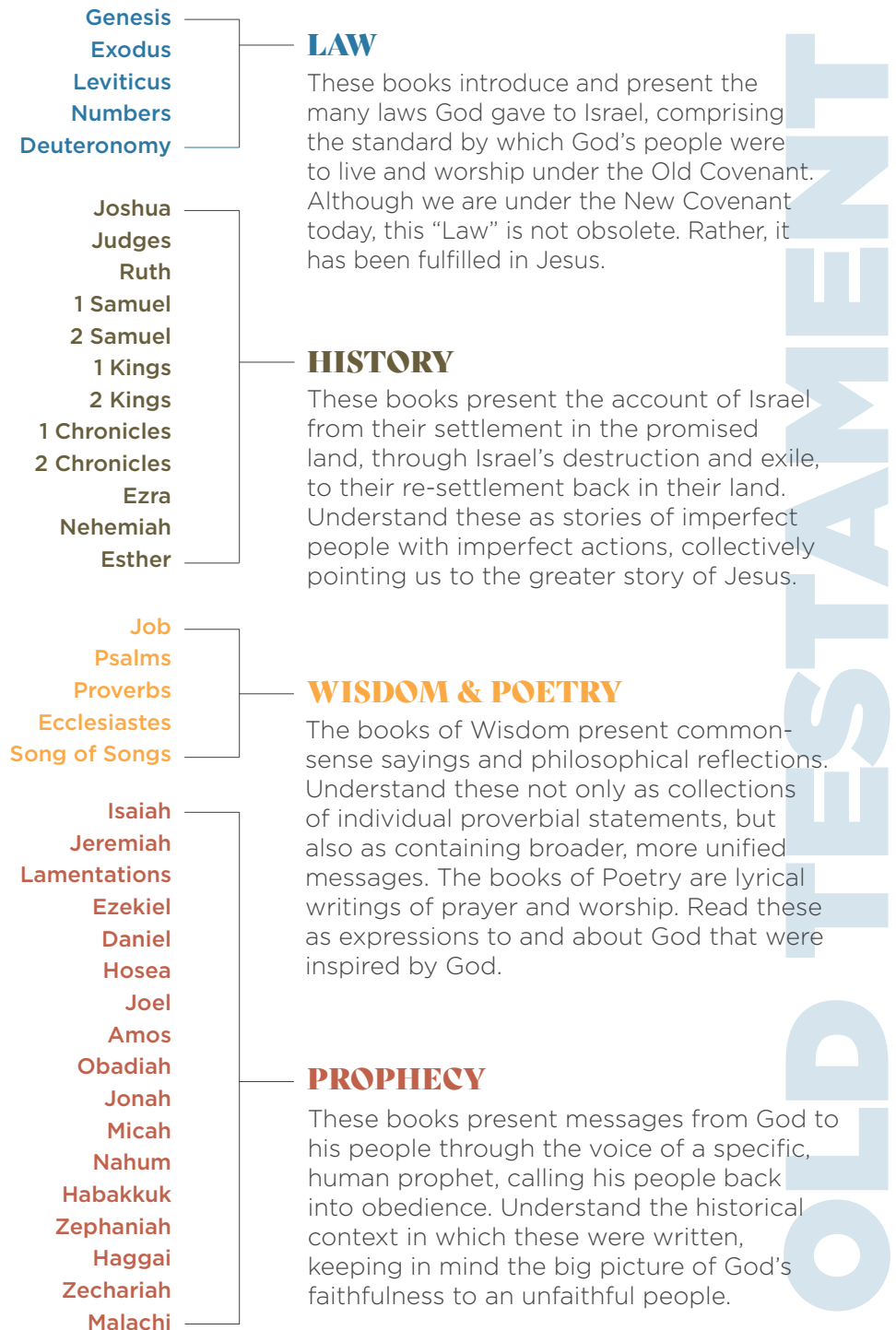
BEFORE YOU GET STARTED

Some basic information about the Bible

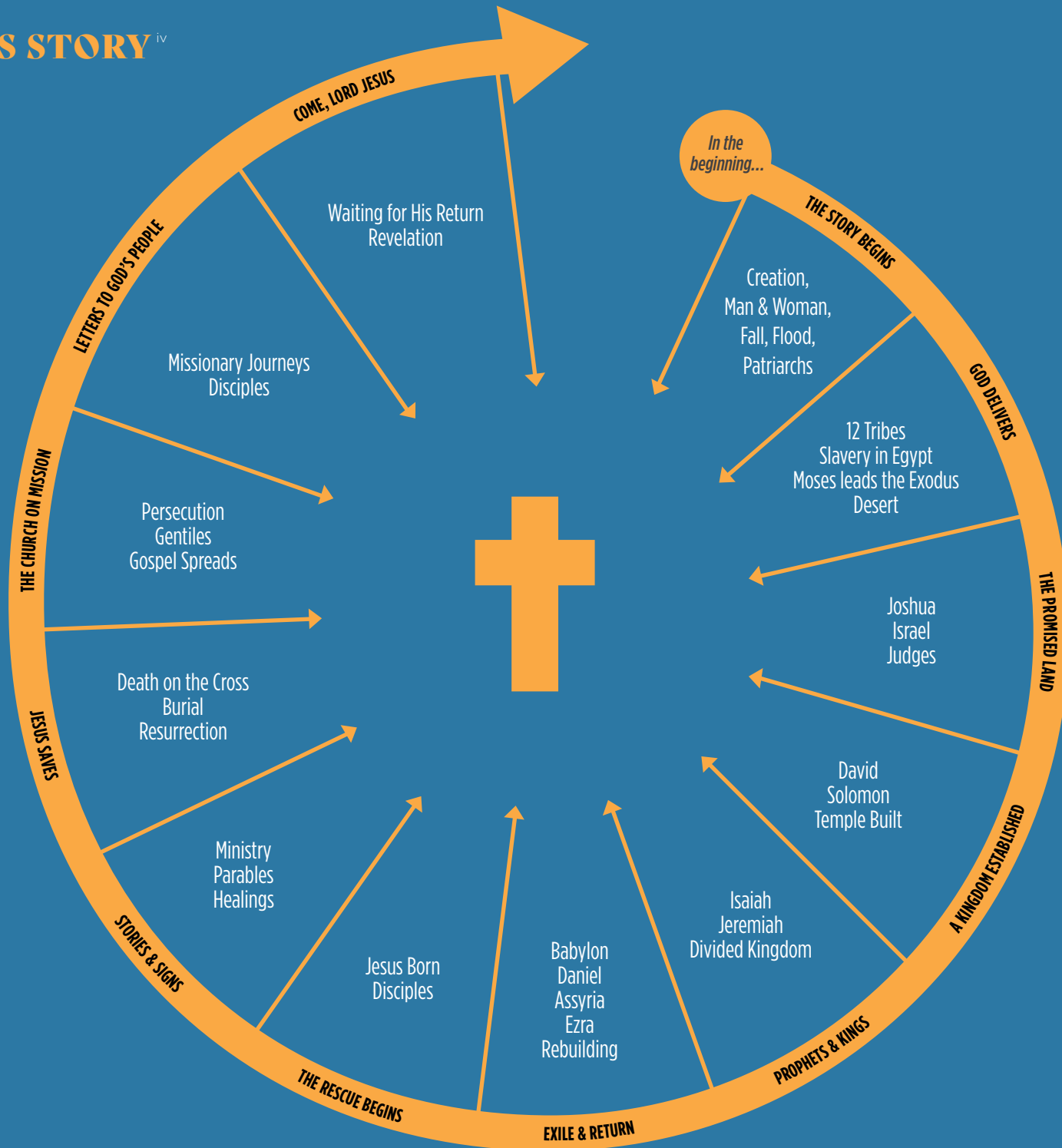
Though we refer to the Bible as one book, it's actually a library of 66 smaller books written by various God-inspired human authors throughout the span of over a thousand years. It's through these writings that the God of the universe began revealing himself to humanity, and it's through the life of Jesus—to whom all Scripture points—that God revealed himself most completely.

What's the difference between the Old and New Testaments? A "testament" is a covenant, or a promise-based relationship. So, the "Old Testament" (comprising the first three-fourths of your Bible) is the collection of books relating to God's covenant relationship with people before Jesus. The "New Testament," which begins with stories about Jesus, is the collection of books and letters relating to God's relationship with people since Jesus' life and ministry.

The Bible contains different genres, or literary styles, employed by its writers to convey its divinely inspired message. Knowing the type of literature we're reading helps us understand how to read it.



THE BIBLE'S STORY^{iv}

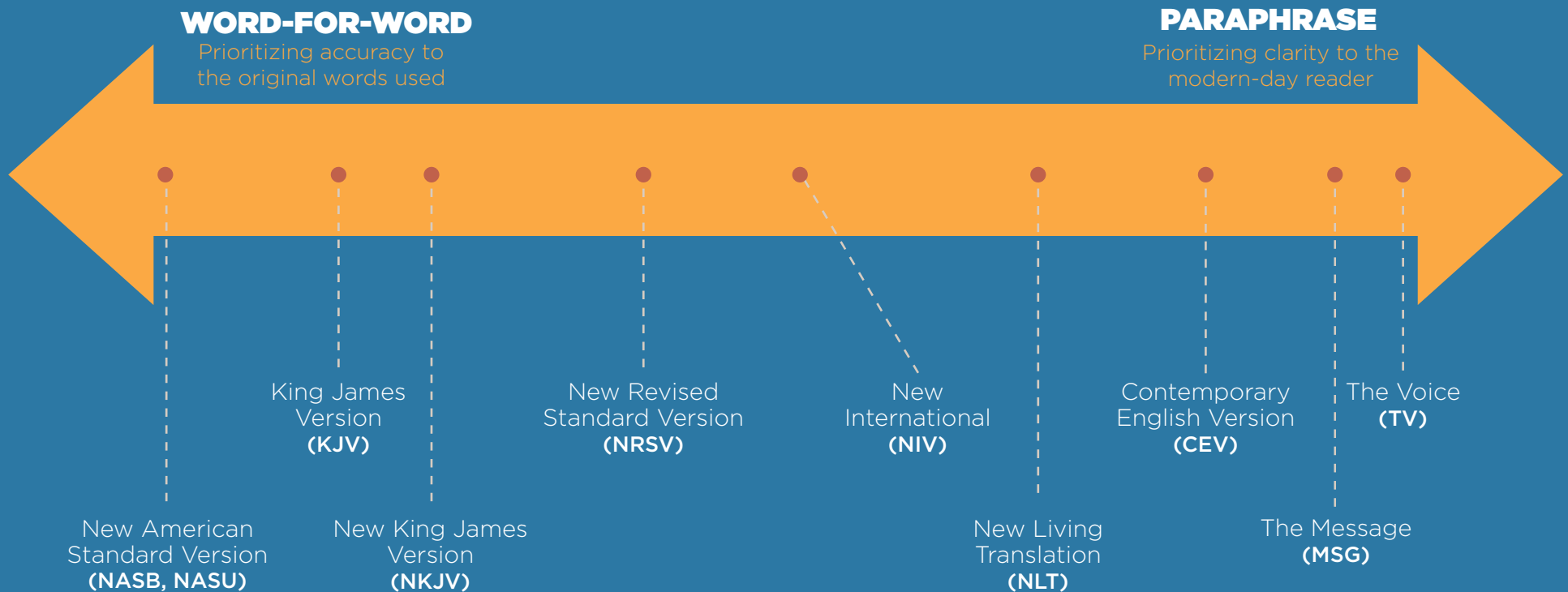


WHY SO MANY TRANSLATIONS?

The Old Testament was originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the New Testament, in Greek. Fortunately for the many who are unfamiliar with these ancient languages, the Bible has been translated into modern day languages. Translation always requires some interpretation, so there is no single “correct” translation. English readers are extremely fortunate to have a wide and diverse range of translations of the Bible, ranging from more literal, word-for-word translations to more meaning-based.

One helpful strategy for studying a biblical passage is to read it in several different translations, paying attention to the subtle differences. Digital Bibles, such as those available at **biblegateway.com** and **youversion.com**, offer a wide range of English translations. Download one of their apps to your phone today.

If you don't have a Bible in a translation you can easily understand, we would love to give you a copy of the New Living Translation! Email info@wschurch.org to let us know.



GETTING STARTED

Start with Humility

It can be tempting to read the Bible with an agenda to confirm your prior-held beliefs and behaviors, but that approach interferes with God's agenda. Instead, approach Scripture with a humble and open posture toward God, inviting him to surprise, challenge and change you from the inside out.

Start with a Gospel

If you're new to the Bible, you might be wondering where you should begin. Rather than reading the Bible through like a novel or picking a page at random, we recommend beginners start by reading one of the Gospel books that tell the story of Jesus, such as Matthew or Mark. Read one section or chapter a day. Write down what stands out to you from the chapter, what questions you have, and talk to God about it. Try to discover all you can about Jesus as you read. Ask yourself the following questions^v:

- What seems important to Jesus?
- What sort of questions does he ask people?
- What sort of questions do people ask him?
- What is Jesus inviting me to be and do?

Start with a Bible Reading Plan

Another helpful tool for getting started is to use a Bible reading plan. These plans break the Bible down into daily readings, making it easier to get into the rhythm of connecting with God each day. The Bible app (youversion.com) organizes hundreds of different plans by topic. Find one that seems to fit your interest and purposes, commit to it, and start reading.

“The goal of Scripture is that we would know God better – not that we would know Scripture better.”

– Robert Mulholland

WAYS TO READ THE BIBLE

As with prayer, there are many ways to engage with the Bible. Below is a list of various approaches.^{vi} *As you look through them, circle one you'd like to try.* Perhaps you already have a usual way of studying the Bible but want to add some new methods.

Devotional

Prayerfully meditate on a passage, reading it several times slowly. Spend time in silence before and after each time you read it. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you understanding and ways to apply it to your own life.

Book Survey

Read an entire book of the Bible through several times. Study the book's background and make notes on its content.

Chapter Analysis and Summary

Read one chapter of the Bible repeatedly. Pour over it verse by verse, word by word, observing every detail. Write a summary of the central message of the chapter and how it connects with the chapters that precede and follow it.

Verse-by-Verse Analysis

Choose one passage of Scripture. Examine it in detail by asking questions, finding cross-references to other scriptures, and paraphrase each verse. (You can pull up and compare several versions of the Bible at one time on biblegateway.com.)

Word Study

Study important words of the Bible. How many times does a word occur in Scripture? In what context is it used? Explore the original meaning of the word. Tools such as biblehub.com or bibleproject.com can be helpful.

Biographical

Choose a person in the Bible and read all the passages associated with him or her. Take notes about what is known about the person's life and character. Note his or her attitudes, strengths, weaknesses, and ways of interacting with God

Topical

Collect and compare all the verses you can find on a particular topic, using an online search tool (e.g. biblegateway.com) to find each instance a particular word or theme appears in the Bible.

Which of these ways of reading the Bible will you try first?

When, where and how? Jot down your plan here:

Remembering the Goal

Our goal in reading the Bible is not simply to gain more information—it's to be transformed. Listening to God's Word, studying it, and putting it into practice is a life-long pursuit. As you grow as a Bible reader, stretch yourself, put into practice the things God makes clear, and allow God's Spirit to change you into someone who's more like Jesus every day.

UNDERSTANDING THE MEANING

You may know how counterproductive it can be to take a person's statement out of context. Whenever we disconnect *what someone said* from *what they meant*, we completely miss the other person's perspective, mind, and heart. Understanding people's *intended meaning* is essential to effective, relationship-building communication with them.

Likewise, when we try to understand Scripture, we're seeking to understand the *intended meaning* of the author—both the human author and God. The closer we get to grasping the human author's intended meaning of a written passage, the closer we get to knowing the perspective, mind, and heart of God, who inspired the human author to write it.

What God intends for a biblical passage to mean in your life today is strongly connected to what the original author meant and how the original readers would have understood it in the past. Here are some ways to get back to the intended meaning of a passage:

- Read the full chapter or section surrounding the passage you're reading. Get into the author's flow of thought. How does your passage connect to the passages immediately before and after it?
- Read your passage in multiple translations. How does your interpretation align with multiple translations?
- Consider the author. Look for clues throughout the book that suggest what the author was experiencing and, most importantly, why he was writing. What can you know about the author from what's included in the book?
- Consider the original readers. Look for clues throughout the book that suggest what the original readers were curious about, struggling with, or experiencing. What can you know about the original readers from the book itself?

TRY IT OUT

First, take a moment to read Philippians 4:13, summarizing what you think it means. Write out your summary here:

Next, read the entire section (Phil 4:10-19). How did reading the surrounding context affect your initial summary of verse 13?

How is the meaning of verse 13 affected when you consider that the author (Paul) is writing this line from imprisonment (Phil 1:13)? How about when you consider that the church originally reading this was experiencing some division (Phil 4:2)?

HOW TO GROW WITH OTHERS

We are not meant to go on this journey alone. A growing faith not only includes rhythms of prayer and Scripture in solitude, but it also includes praying and sharing with others.

Who are a few other people in your life who are following Jesus and whom you could connect with on a regular basis?

Which of the following sounds like something you might plan to do with them?

- Set up a regular time to connect. (Try to meet at least monthly.)
- Share a meal together.
- Make weekly Sunday worship a habit and meet up at church with friends to sit together.
- Talk about what God has been making clear to you and share the questions you're wrestling with.
- Ask how you can pray for them and share your requests with them. Pray together.
- Go through a Bible reading plan together or choose a study and prayer plan that you can share for a season.
- Choose a book that you will read on your own and plan a time to meet and discuss it together.

PLANNING TO SUCCEED

Hopefully, you've picked up a number of good ideas as you've worked through this booklet. Now it's time for the most important step: *putting them into practice*. Spend a few moments looking over your notes throughout this workbook and use the questions below to create a plan. Make a plan that's realistic and within reach of where you're already at in your journey.

Make a plan

When will you regularly make time for being with God? (e.g. weekday mornings, evenings before bed, etc.)

What tool or approach to prayer and Bible reading will you use?

Pick a place

Where is a place where you can regularly go to be with God? (Choose a quiet spot where you can be away from distractions, including technology.)

Find your people

Who are a few people with whom you can share your plans and progress?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES FOR PRAYER AND BIBLE STUDY

There's no shortage of helpful, accessible prayer and Bible-reading resources. Here are several of our favorite recommendations. Remember that each author has his or her own perspectives and theology. Ask God to guide your mind and heart as you seek him through prayer and Scripture.

The Bible App youversion.com

If you're new to the Bible, this is the place to start. This most-downloaded Bible app not only gives your phone or tablet quick access to several versions of the Bible, but it also has a growing number of resources to help you: Bible reading plans, daily guided reflections, prayer tools, and ways to connect with your friends about what you're reading. You can even use the Bible App to listen to an audio version of Scripture.

The Bible Project bibleproject.com

If you're a visual learner, you may find the illustrative videos at the Bible Project to be an engaging way to understand the themes and books of the Bible. Start by watching their "Intro to the Bible" series or watch one of their Bible Book Overview videos.

Lectio365 24-7prayer.com/resource/lectio-365

Want to listen to a spoken reflection with prayer and Scripture prompts? Lectio 365 is a free daily devotional resource that helps you slow down and pray with the Bible every day. You can use their app to access morning and evening prayers.

One-Year Bible Plans

Some people love the challenge and accountability of reading through the entire Bible in one year. Here are two such plans with insightful commentary, helping you make sense of the harder-to-understand portions you're sure to encounter.

- ***The Bible in One Year*** - bibleinoneyear.org - **Nicky and Pippa Gumbel** - Each day includes passages from a Psalm or Proverb, the New Testament and the Old Testament, along with a daily commentary. It's available in an app or as a reading plan.
- ***The Bible Recap*** - thebiblerecap.com - **Tara Leigh Cobble** - This plan leads you through the Bible chronologically and includes a podcast episode for each day, giving background and commentary. A book version is also available.

RightNow Media Series

West Side provides access to a digital library of Bible study resources at RightNow Media. There are many practical video series available to help you learn and grow. Sign up for a FREE account at wschurch.org/rnm and look for playlists of our recommended videos.

Book Resources

- *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* - Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* - Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart
- *Core52: A Fifteen Minute Daily Guide to Build Your Bible IQ in a Year* and/or *Quest52: A Fifteen Minute-A-Day Year-long Pursuit of Jesus* - Mark Moore
- *Open Your Bible* - a Bible Study from She Reads Truth
- *How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People* - Pete Grieg

WE ARE WITH YOU ON THIS JOURNEY

and want to help you succeed. Please contact us if you have questions, want more ideas, or need some people to talk to about your relationship with God.



Call: 217.793.2800

Email: info@wschurch.org

JEREMIAH 29:12-14A

“In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me. I will be found by you,” says the Lord.

ⁱ Adapted from 24-7 Prayer and “How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People” by Pete Grieg

ⁱⁱ For a detailed resource to explore spiritual practices, see “Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us” by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun. All of these prayer practices and more are explored in more detail.

ⁱⁱⁱ Chart adapted from “Open Your Bibles” by She Reads Truth

^{iv} Chart adapted from “Open Your Bibles” by She Reads Truth

^v Adapted from “Spiritual Disciplines Handbook” by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun

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