



A Guide for Getting Intimacy With God—MAPS

Next week, Lord willing, we will begin a journey through the Bible together as a church. Let me encourage you to pick up one of the guides for reading through the Bible. It's six days a week, a chapter or two a day, that will take us from cover to cover through the story of Scripture chronologically.

Many people have no idea how the entire Bible fits together, so I have taken a Bible reading plan a good friend of mine, Robby Gallaty, who is a pastor in Tennessee and whom I actually had the opportunity to baptize and disciple when I lived in New Orleans years ago. I've taken a plan he put together called the F-260 Plan (f for foundational). It's 260 chapters of the Bible arranged chronologically. I've adapted it just a bit for our purposes.

My prayer is that over the next ten months, as many of you as possible might know, love, enjoy God and life more by reading through the Bible this way. I want you to know, love and enjoy life more—which I'm guessing everybody in the sound of my voice right now wants. Even if you're not a Christian—maybe you're exploring Christianity or maybe you're listening to me right now because someone made you come to church—I'm guessing you want to enjoy life more.

I know that people across this church are walking through some really challenging times in life right now. You might be tempted to think, "I've got this and that going on in my life right now that's really hard and you're going to talk about reading the Bible?" Yes, that's exactly what I'm going to talk about, because God's Word is exactly what you need for joy, peace, strength, comfort and hope for whatever you're walking through in life right now.

Others of you might say, "Well, I really enjoy life right now." I would say, "I'm with you." But I'm guessing you'd like more enjoyment. I would. I want to experience more and more and more. The problem is people don't often equate reading the Bible with enjoying life. Very few, if any, non-Christians believe that reading the Bible leads to enjoyment of life, and unfortunately I think many Christians don't equate reading the Bible with enjoying life. My hope is that you will see this year, or even today, that reading this Book is the path to ever-increasing joy and strength and hope in life.

Now, some of you might think I've lost it. I'm over-exaggerating. But I want to show you this and my aim is to show you in such a way that wherever you are in your spiritual journey right now, at the end of our time today, you might be ready to take one small practical step forward when it comes to the role of the Bible in your life. If you aren't reading the Bible—if you've never even touched a Bible—maybe your step forward will be to pick it up and read it some this week. That might be your simple step.

Maybe you are reading the Bible a ton right now, so your step forward might be to read it a little bit differently, maybe even more slowly, maybe even to read less. Maybe you'll take a step forward when it comes to memorization or journaling or sharing what you've studied. We all, including myself, have a step forward we can take here. So at the end of our time here today, I'm going to ask, "What's your step?" I'm going to guarantee you that whatever step forward you take, it will lead to more enjoyment of life.

You say, "How can you say that?" Well, listen to what God says about His Word in Psalm 19. Feel how this Psalm builds. Starting in verse one, the Bible says:

*The Heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.
² Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.
³ There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.
⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.
In them he has set a tent for the sun,
⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber,
and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy.
⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,
and its circuit to the end of them,
and there is nothing hidden from its heat.*

Let's stop there for a second. The psalmist here, King David, has just written about how God's glory is displayed in creation. Picture a beautiful sunrise over a snow-covered mountain or canyon— or over a beach, if you want to go to a warmer place right now. It lights up the sky with all sorts of colors. The Psalm is saying it's like a bridegroom who excitedly leaves his house on his wedding day. The sun rises like a champion runner racing on a course. It makes its circuit across the sky.

The language of creation spans the world. It's pretty awesome. The same sun you and I see today here is the same sun that shines in the heights of the Himalayas and over the savannahs of South Sudan, shouting to all people everywhere the goodness, greatness and grandeur of God in ways that evoke awe, peace, wonder and joy.

So that's the picture in the beginning of the Psalm. Then things go up a notch. The Psalm builds as if to say, "Even greater, even more astounding, more awe-evoking, more wonder-inducing, more peaceful, more joy-giving, God speaks even more powerfully through His Word. The Psalm continues:

*⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right,*

*rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.*

Did you notice what just happened? God's name was mentioned once over the course of the first six verses, then six times in the next three. You'll notice His name, "the Lord," in these last three verses is different from His name "God" in the first verse. In verse one, God is a more general name—*el*—in the Bible, but then six times in verses seven through nine we see "the LORD" —*Yahweh*—a more specific name for God that represents His personal love for His people. Far more even than the beauty of creation in the world, we see a greater, higher, more wonderful revelation of God in His Word, for this is where God speaks to us personally. And He speaks to us for our joy.

*¹⁰ More to be desired are [your words] than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.*

*¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

Why do we read the Bible?

Let me summarize what we just read in Psalm 19:7-11. We read the Bible, God's Word to us, because it is perfect, trustworthy, right and radiant. That's a summary of all kinds of adjectives here in Psalm 19. It's perfect—a complete explanation of God's instruction for our lives. The word there in verse seven means "comprehensive or sufficient." We don't need any other book to know and enjoy life with God. This Book is perfect—it lacks nothing.

It's sure, which means certain or trustworthy (19:7). You can bank your life on this Book, no matter what comes at you. Think of King David writing this. He was a man who understood life's trials, troubles and tribulations. He knew what it was like to have his life threatened continually. He knew what it was like to be tempted and fall deep into sin. He knew what it was like to betray and be betrayed. He knew what it was like to have a child die, then another child rebel against him and his entire household. He knew what it was like to have a messed-up marriage and a messed-up family. But at the end of it all, he says, "This Word can be trusted in every circumstance we face."

The Word of God is sure, and the Word of God is right (verse 8). It's true, righteous and altogether completely without error. I wish I had time to dive into that and every one of these descriptions. The Bible, the Word of God, is flawless in its revelation of God. It's radiant, pure, clean and

bright, enlightening the eyes. Have you ever been in pitch black dark where you can't see anything and you don't know where anything is? Think about lying in a hammock in the Amazon under a canopy of trees, totally pitch black, with all sorts of sounds from creatures around you. You think you hear something near you, so you quickly turn on a flashlight. This is the Word of God in a sinful world. In a dark world where we can't see, the Word of God is light to help us see what matters, to help us see rightly, to help us see what is good, to help us follow a path that leads to that which is good.

This leads to the effects of God's Word throughout this passage. The Word of God gives us life, makes us wise, brings us joy and helps us see. It gives us life. Back in verse seven, it revives our soul. It has the power to transform us from the inside out. Earlier I mentioned pastor Robby. When I first met Robby, he was just coming off the streets, totally addicted to drugs—a huge dude, like an MMA fighter, very intimidating, really rough. Now he's a pastor with a gentle heart. He's still a massive dude, but God has totally transformed his life.

How did that happen? He heard the good news in God's Word, that although he was a sinner against God, totally addicted to all kinds of things in this world and separated from God, God has come to us in the Person of Jesus. Jesus has paid the price for all our sin against Him. When Robby turned from himself and put his trust in Jesus, he was forgiven of all his sin before God; he was filled with the Spirit of God and reconciled to a relationship with God—and everything changed.

The gospel, the good news of God's love in Jesus at the center of this Book, has the power to revive your soul, to make you an entirely new person. This Book gives life. It makes us wise and helps us avoid foolishness (19:7). Who wants to live the life of a fool? I'm guessing there won't be many hands raised, "Yeah, that's me. I want to be a fool." No. None of us wants to waste our lives on what doesn't matter. We want to live our lives for what counts. The Word of God is what enables us to do that. Apart from this Word, we live foolish lives. With this Word, we live wise lives.

The Word of God brings us joy. Psalm 19:8 says it "*rejoices the heart.*" I love that phrase. This Word causes your heart to leap and your eyes to see. This is why the psalmist says the Word of God is more valuable than money and more satisfying than food. This Book is more to be desired than gold, even a lot of gold (19:10). When the psalmist hears the Word of God, it feels like he's just inherited millions of dollars. He feels like he's tasting something sweeter than the sweetest thing he could think of.

This is God saying to us right now, "Do you want to find joy? Do you want to experience awe? Do you want to know peace? In a world full of unmet expectations, unfulfilled desires, empty pursuits and hollow pleasures, in a world full of pain and sorrow, anxiety and depression, despair and separation, do you want to find life? Here it is. This is God saying, "Here it is. I give you life, so go to this Word. It will guard you from danger and lead you to treasure." Verse 11 states, "*By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*" I love Psalm 119:162. The psalmist says, "*I rejoice at your word*

like one who finds great spoil.” Every morning you wake up, there’s spoil waiting for you in this Word. There’s treasure every single day.

Here’s the deal. I’m showing you all this in Psalm 19, but some of you are thinking, “You lost me. You’re saying the Word leads to enjoyment of life, but that’s not been my experience. I open the Bible and I’m bored. Reading the Bible feels like a chore to me. Honestly, I have no desire for it.” I get that, because I’ve been there. When my taste buds for the Bible were practically non-existent, I had no desire. I’m guessing some and maybe many of you are there right now, if you were honest.

You might say, “I want to experience joy, but I don’t even have a desire for God’s Word. So what do I do then?” If that’s where you are, here’s what I want to encourage you to do. . You want your desire for God’s Word to grow because you just don’t have it right now. You can even say, “Okay, I trust that this leads to joy, but I just don’t even have a desire to be in it, so what do I do to have that desire?” If you want that desire to grow, here are three words of encouragement I would give you: Read The Bible. I guarantee you—especially if you are a follower of Jesus—that when you read the Bible, even when your desire is not there, that desire will grow and you will begin to enjoy it and long for it more than gold, more than millions of dollars.

I remember the first time I ever went over to Heather’s house when we were starting to date. Her family was cooking food. I grew up in a house where we never ate seafood. My dad didn’t like seafood, so we never ate seafood, therefore I didn’t like seafood

We get over to her house and her family has prepared a seafood feast. I want to make a good impression on her family, so I downed that seafood like a champ. With every other mouthful, I said, “Ah, this is so good! Thank you.” The problem is they bought it. So the next time I came over for dinner, they’re like, “Hey, David’s coming over. Let’s do seafood again. He loves seafood.” “Oh, of course.”

This became the pattern. I started going on vacation with their family. I remember the first time we went down to the beach on vacation. They asked, “Oh, so many seafood restaurants! David, which one is your favorite?” “Ah, they’re all so amazing.” Inside I’m thinking, “I know where the good burgers are. I have no idea—I’ve never been in seafood places.” Anyway, the end of the story is this: today, I love seafood. I love seafood now, because I had to eat it to get a wife.

Here’s the principle to take away here. Once you start to feast on something, your taste buds start to change and grow. Now, don’t take this too far. I’m not saying, “Just eat the Word. It doesn’t taste good, but just get it down and eventually you’ll start to like it.” That’s not the point. Here’s the point. If we spend all our time feasting on the trivial things of this world—we’re on our phones looking at all kinds of stuff, or on TV, or on Netflix or movies, whatever—we should not be surprised that we don’t have a stomach for God’s Word. Of course, our stomachs are full from nibbling at the table of this world and we’ll have no hunger for that which really matters.

But when you start to feast on the Word, your hunger for those other things will start to decrease, because you'll begin to taste something better. It's like once you've tasted a nice steak, then processed hamburgers at McDonald's just don't taste the same. Once you've tasted that which is good, you realize millions of dollars doesn't even compare to this.

So that's what I'm praying for. Even before coming out here today, I was praying, "God, cause a supernatural hunger to arise in Your people for Your Word. Help us see its goodness." The key is in how we read the Bible. Yes, if you just open this Book up, read some words on a page, check off a box, then move on with your life, you will miss it.

How do we read the Bible? Dangerous Approaches

That brings us to our second question this morning which is so important as we prepare to read the Bible together. There are actually dangerous approaches to reading the Bible. Let me just give them to you quickly.

One is the emotional approach, where we're driven by the question, "What feels right to me?" If we're not careful, we can read the Bible looking to twist it somehow to fit our tastes.

Then there's the spiritual approach, where our primary question is, "What deep, hidden meaning is there for me?" as if we're looking to find something new that Christians for 2,000 years have totally missed, and Christianity is just waiting for you or me to come on the scene to discover this new truth.

Or there's the pragmatic approach, where we're asking, "What works best for me?" It's where we read the Bible with an agenda to adapt whatever we read to accommodate our lives.

Then finally, there's the all-too-common superficial approach. "What does this passage mean to me?" This approach happens all the time in small group Bible studies. You'll have people sitting around in a room. They'll read a verse or a chapter—let's say Genesis 22 with Abraham offering his son Isaac, then God providing a ram for the sacrifice. So you read that chapter and somebody says, "Okay, what does this mean to you?" All of a sudden in this small group, people start saying all kinds of different things about what the passage means to them.

Bob over here will say, "Well, I think this chapter means I need to go hiking with my son more, just like Abraham went hiking into the mountains with Isaac." Okay, Bob. That's probably a good thing. Anybody else? Then Joe chimes in over here and says, "Well, I think it's clear from this passage that it's okay to sacrifice animals, which means no one should be a vegetarian." To which Joe's wife Mary, who happens to be a vegetarian, replies, "Well, that's not what this passage means to me. Maybe this passage means I need to sacrifice you, Joe."

I joke, but when we start Bible reading with the question, "What does this passage mean to me?" the conversation will inevitably congeal into a pool of ignorance, where a group of people find

themselves sitting around sharing what they don't know about the Bible. I'm not talking about any particular small group, but overall, this is how we often approach the Bible.

The same thing can happen in our personal Bible reading. This is where we need to realize that the first question we ask is not, "What does this passage mean to me?" The first question we should ask is, "What does the Holy Spirit mean in this passage?" Quite frankly, I don't care what this passage means to you, or to me for that matter. I want to know what this passage means.

Some people might say, "Well, David, don't you know that different verses mean different things to different people?" No. That's application, which we'll get to. There's no question that different verses apply to our lives in different ways, but our goal in reading the Bible is not to determine our personal meaning for a verse. Our goal is to hear what the Holy Spirit meant when He gave us this Word. That's the key to experiencing life in this Word.

How do we read the Bible? A Dependable Approach: MAPS

Here's a dependable approach to reading the Bible. A few weeks ago I gave you some acrostics to hopefully help you remember some of these teachings. We looked at . PRAY: Praise, Repent, Ask and Yield. We looked at FAST: Focus on God, Abstain from food, Substitute prayer and study, and Taste and see that God is good.

I want to give you one more acrostic called MAPS. The whole point here is to help you remember how to read the Bible. This is a guide, a MAP, which I hope will help you get from reading the Bible to experiencing intimacy with God and life in God.

We've talked multiple times this month already about how the greatest need in your life is intimacy with God. All day today, I've been thinking about how this Word leads to life. I want to give you a MAP to get to life and intimacy with God through reading the Bible. I'm going to make it plural, because the S is really important—so, MAPS. Here we go.

M – Meditate and Memorize

Interestingly, the word we see used over and over again in the Bible when it comes to reading God's Word is "meditate." It's used in Psalm 19:14. Let's look at a couple other examples. Joshua 1:8:

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Psalm 1:1-3:

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;*

² *but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*
³ *He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.*

Are you hearing this? Do you want to prosper in your life? Do you want success in your life? Then meditate on God's Word. Now, what does it mean to meditate? It means to read the Bible prayerfully, humbly and reflectively. Read it prayerfully, realizing this is a supernatural activity. Whenever we read the Bible, we are not alone. God is with us. Reading the Bible is a supernatural activity in which God, by His Holy Spirit, is speaking to our minds and our hearts. This is communion with God. So when we open the Bible, we pause and pray, "God, please speak to me supernaturally right now."

Meditation is reading the Bible prayerfully and humbly. We read the Bible in a way that is different from the way we read any other book in the world, because this Book has authority in our lives. We're not coming to the Bible looking for options to consider. We are coming to the Bible looking for commands to obey. That changes the way you open up a book. Come to the Bible saying, "God, Your Word is my guide. Before I even open it up, whatever You say, I will do it—no matter what it means to me in this world. I trust You know what is best for my life. You know the way to life better than I do. So I'm going to read this Book prayerfully, humbly and reflectively." We need to read the Bible slowly. The goal is not to see how fast we can get it done. Reading the Bible is not like going to a drive-through fast food restaurant. We're sitting down for a nice dinner. We want to be patient with God's Word, pondering over it.

I think I've mentioned when I first started dating Heather that she would write me letters. She's a year older than me and had gone off to college, so we would write each other a pretty good amount. I would dissect every letter I received from her. She was the first girl I ever dated, so I'd never received letters like this before. She'd write, "Dear David..." I thought, "Dear. Dear. Does she say that to everybody, or am I particularly dear?" Then she'd talk about our friendship. I thought, "Ah—are we just normal friends, or more than just normal friends." I just dissected every word. She'd write, "I'm praying for you." I'd wonder, "Is that generally, or is it like she's praying for her future husband?" She'd put a smiley face here and there. A smiley face—that's huge! Call me obsessive or whatever, but I was dissecting every word.

This is how we should read the Bible, realizing the Holy Spirit of God has inspired every single word. Why this word? Why that one? Why is it put together in this way? What's the flow happening here? When we read the Bible reflectively, we ask questions. What is happening in this passage? Again,

our goal is not to find our meaning. Our goal is to see what the Holy Spirit meant when He first inspired this Word, because that's the same thing He's saying to us now.

So we ask “who, what, when, where, why and how” questions. Who wrote this? That's important to know. Who was originally reading this? Who are the main characters? Where is all this taking place? When is all this taking place? That changes the way you understand the book of Revelation, when you realize it is written to Christians who are being persecuted, who are walking through all kinds of suffering and trial in the first century in the Roman Empire. John is writing it from exile. That changes everything about how you read that book.

It's the same for all the different books. What's happening? What's the flow? What's the author saying? How is the author saying it? Why is the author saying it that way? How did the people originally hear it? We want to get in the shoes of who's writing this and who's reading this.

Then after that, we start to think about how what we're reading wasn't just for them—it's also for us. So we ask questions like, “What does this passage teach about Who God is, who we are, Who Jesus is and how we are to follow Him?” Those four questions will lead you to all kinds of treasure in the Bible. Very simply, as you're reading, ask, “What does this chapter I just read teach me about Who God is?” Reflect for a minute on that. “What does this teach me about who I am, who we are? What does this passage teach me about Who Jesus is and why I need Jesus and what it means to follow Him, what it means to trust God, what it means to walk with God?” Ask those four questions and you'll discover all kinds of treasure.

This is meditation—reflecting like this. As we meditate, we look for opportunities to memorize key verses, passages and chapters. I think memorization is one of the most practical ways of meditating. We did this when we walked through 1 John1. You're just repeating it over and over again, and it's getting hidden in your mind and heart. You say, “I just don't memorize well.” I know that people have differing abilities to memorize. But I'd put it this way. Regardless of ability to memorize, what if I told you that over the next 24 hours—between this time right now and this time tomorrow—I would give you a thousand dollars for every verse you could memorize? I'm guessing you could learn at least a few verses. Just find the smallest ones: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Boom. Done.. You'd start to memorize pretty quickly. So the question is what do you think is more valuable, money or God's Word? God gives value here and it's better than much fine gold.

I think of a conversation I was having a couple weeks ago with a brother in our church. He's a big, strong man, retired military and he was telling me that during the 1 John series, he told his teenage son, “Hey, why don't we get together every morning before you go out to the bus stop and we'll work on memorizing this together.” So they started doing that every morning before his son went to school. When they finished, the teenage son said, “Dad, are we going to stop?” He responded, “No, we don't have to.” He said, “Well, let's memorize some more.”

This brother said to me, “David, I had a hard time memorizing a verse before. I never could have fathomed memorizing a chapter. My son came to me and said, ‘Instead of just doing a chapter, why don’t we do a book together?’” So he and his teenage son right now are memorizing the book of Philippians together. He said, “That just felt way out there; I couldn’t comprehend it. But now I’m memorizing a book of the Bible with my son.” Just think about the fruit that is bearing—not only in his heart, but in his son’s heart and in their relationship.

So don’t underestimate what memorization might look like.

A - Apply

M is meditate and Memorize, then A is apply. This is where I want to encourage you to think about how what you’ve read applies to your life. There are three ways it applies: to your head, to your heart and to your hands. First, how does this passage transform your thoughts? Pause and reflect: how does what you just read in any way change the way you think? Romans 12:2 says the Bible transforms us by the renewing of our minds. We start to think differently.

Then consider your heart. How does this passage transform your desires? Pause and reflect: how does what you just read change what you want in life, what you want for you family, what you want in the world?

Then consider your hands. How does this passage transform your actions? What does whatever you just read compel you to do—or maybe not do, for that matter?

It’s not that you’ll have a clear answer for every one of these areas but think through that lens. I’m trying to give you some practical ways for you to apply this. Head, heart, hands—thoughts, desires, actions.

P – Pray

Then after asking those application questions, this leads you to pray. This is where we need to think about that acrostic we talked about three weeks ago, that we are to PRAY according to God’s Word. Last week we said God’s Word is key to driving our praying, so we are to P—praise according to God’s Word. Spend time thinking, “How does what I just read lead me to praise God?” Then R—repent according to God’s Word. How does what you read lead you to repent of sin before God? Just like we see here in Psalm 19:12-13:

Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

This is how the Word purifies us. “God, what needs to change in my life? How can I confess my need for God in some way as a result of reading this particular passage?” So Repent according to God’s

Word. Then A—Ask according to God’s Word. What does the part of the Bible you read lead you to ask for in your life or in other people’s lives? How does God’s Word lead you to ask for certain things? “God, I pray for this for this person, for that person, for this in my own life.” Finally, Y—yield to God’s Word.. “God, give me grace to follow and obey Your Word, to put this Word into practice, to think differently, to desire differently, to act differently.

S - Share

Meditate and Memorize, Apply, Pray—then the final word is critical: S—share. It’s not just an option tagged on at the end—it’s critical. This Word is not intended to stop with us. God wants us to have life and He wants others to have life. So we share. This is where we should think of Deuteronomy 6:6-9. We’ve studied this before together. God said:

⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Do you get the point here? The Word of God is not intended just to stop with personal time we have with God. It’s intended to be put on public display in our lives, in our conversations, as we walk by the way, when we sit down around the table, when we rise—in other words, all the time. It needs to be everywhere: on our hands and between our eyes.

Then think about Matthew 28:19-20, which we quote every week in the Great Commission. What did Jesus say? *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”* What He’s commanded us is not just for us; it’s to be passed on to others. That’s the whole point in the Great Commission. This Word is not intended to stop with you or me; it’s intended to spread through you and me.

In order to do this, I want to encourage you in two practical ways. One, I want to encourage you to seriously consider writing down your reflections. This is what many people call journaling. I would say to you—and I don’t think this is an overstatement—this one practice has probably influenced my personal relationship with and intimacy with God more than just about any other discipline I can think of in my life. Considering the times when I have been distant from God compared to the times when I’ve been close to God in my life, journaling has been a strong discipline in the latter times and almost non-existent in the former.

I journal on my iPad or on my computer. I sit down with the Word and as I read it, I’m doing all this MAPS stuff. I am meditating, asking questions and I’m writing down different things. “This Word is

saying this. God, I learned this about You here.” That that leads me to pray, “God, I praise you for this.” All of a sudden, this journaling—this writing down of reflections—leads to praising and repenting and asking and yielding.”

Just this morning, as I was reading different Proverbs, I was writing down, “The way of foolishness is this...” Then the next sentence caused me to pray, “God, keep me from being foolish. Help me to be wise in this way.” Then, “God, I pray this not just for me. I pray this for my wife. I pray this for my kids. I pray this for the church. God, please make us wise in Your church.” For me, writing things down is really helpful in focusing and reflecting; it helps my mind wander a lot less. And then it is such a blessing to be able to look back and see what God is teaching me. I would just offer that as a practical encouragement. Some of you may already do that. If you don’t, I would encourage you to try it. I’m not saying all the same things work for everybody, but seriously consider writing down your reflections.

Then here’s the second thing. After you read and reflect on the Bible, then that day, look intentionally for opportunities to talk with others about your reflections. I’m not saying that you need to organize a Bible study that day. When you sit down for breakfast or lunch or dinner with your wife or your kids or your coworkers or your friends or your neighbors, look for opportunities—not to launch into a sermon, but just to share. “God taught me this today...”

Even around non-believers, this is such a testimony to the goodness of God and His Word in our lives. It doesn’t have to sound preachy; it’s just the overflow from your life. It’s Deuteronomy 6 in action. So just look for those opportunities when you walk along the way, when you’re in conversation. There are so many trivial things we fill our conversations with that really don’t matter. So at some point, fill some conversation with something that actually matters for eternity. It will be good for you and it will be really good for others. So intentionally look for opportunities to talk with others about your reflections in everyday life.

Next week, as we begin with a kick-off week, then start the Bible reading plan after that, I want to point you to resources to help you with all the above. Right now, if you go to our church website, on the front page it says “Bible Reading Plan” that you can download. If you want an electronic copy, it’s certainly there. I’d also encourage you to pick up a physical copy.

Then starting next week, each Sunday when we gather together, we’ll dive into a passage that either we’ll be reading in that next week or one we’ve just read in the past week, and we’ll think about it together. In a sense, We’ll do MAPS together. Then each week, on that website, there will be resources. If you’re in a small group or if you just want to get together with a few others, you can use these to help you process what you’re reading. There will also be a link on the website to a podcast I started a little over a year ago called “Pray the Word,” in which I take a verse or two of Scripture, comment on it, then pray through that verse. It’s a four-minute podcast—Dale jokes with me that he didn’t think I could do anything in four minutes—but I do.

Starting next week, that “Pray the Word” podcast will coincide with our Bible reading plan. So every day you could have one of the verses from that Scripture in your in box or on the podcast. And it’s translated into multiple languages. That’s one resource that hopefully will be helpful for you to use individually or maybe in your family.

Heather suggested yesterday, “Maybe we’ll listen to the ‘Pray the Word’ podcast over breakfast in the morning.” I’m thinking, “You’ve got the real thing; you don’t necessarily have to listen to that.” She said, “No, I think we’ll listen to it. The time length there will be more sure.”

Or maybe listen to it while taking your kids to school or going to work. Hopefully it will be a resource that will encourage you. I just want you to experience and enjoy life in God through His Word and I pray this will happen in a powerful way over the next ten months.

All that leads to one more question. You know where you are on your spiritual journey. What one step forward do you think God is leading you to take when it comes to the Bible in your life?

I want us to do something very similar to what we did a few weeks ago. Before we move on to anything else in our day, I want to take a moment to reflect. I want to encourage you to pause, pray and write down what God might be leading you to do. What’s your one step forward?

There’s one other thing I want to mention, one idea that might be helpful. Some of our folks took Psalm 119, divided it into five days, and put listed some questions along the lines of MAPS. If you’d like, you can use that this week to prepare for the journey ahead. There are 176 verses in Psalm 119, so it’s split up into five days, with a reading for each day and some questions to practice MAPS with: meditate and memorize, apply, pray, then look for opportunities to share. That could be helpful in your step forward.

So take a couple minutes now to write down one step forward that might God be leading you to take when it comes to reading His Word. Then after a couple minutes, I’ll lead us in prayer. So in the quietness of this room, ask God, “What is the one step forward You’re leading me to take?”

Feel free to continue reflecting and writing, but I want to pray for us.

O God, we want to take You at Your Word. We believe Your Word is better than gold, than much pure gold. It’s sweeter than any food we could put in our mouths. We don’t live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from Your mouth. God, we are tempted and prone to feast on so many other things in this world apart from Your Word, so we pray for Your help in our lives. We pray You would help us to believe the treasure that’s found in Your Word and to find it—to discover it, see it, experience it. God, I pray for this across our church.

Please, O God, cause a supernatural hunger and thirst to rise in us. We believe Your Word will indeed prove right, radiant, trustworthy, sure, certain and satisfying in all these things it says it is. We want to experience intimacy with You through Your Word, life with You through Your Word. We want to

experience and enjoy life, to find Your peace, Your strength, Your hope amidst all that life brings us in Your Word. So help us, we pray.

God, I pray that even today You would bring some folks here to salvation through Your Word, to be saved from their sins, to have their lives transformed by Your Word.

Then God, amidst all our struggles and all the besetting sins that we are prone toward in our lives, I pray that You would give us victory through Your Word. Lord, make us people who don't just give lip service to Your Word once a week. Make us people who love it, who lift up our hands to it, who worship You through it, who are conformed more and more into the image of Christ through Your Word. We pray that You would lead us to greater, deeper intimacy with You. Lord, especially for people to whom this seems so far off right now, I pray this would become a reality in the days to come. Please bless this journey through Your Word over the next ten months in ways that resound to Your glory in our lives, in Your church, in our families, in this city and wherever You lead us in the world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material provided that you do not alter it in any way, use the material in its entirety, and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. For web posting, a link to the media on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be approved by Radical.

All Scriptures are quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By David Platt. © David Platt. Website: Radical.net