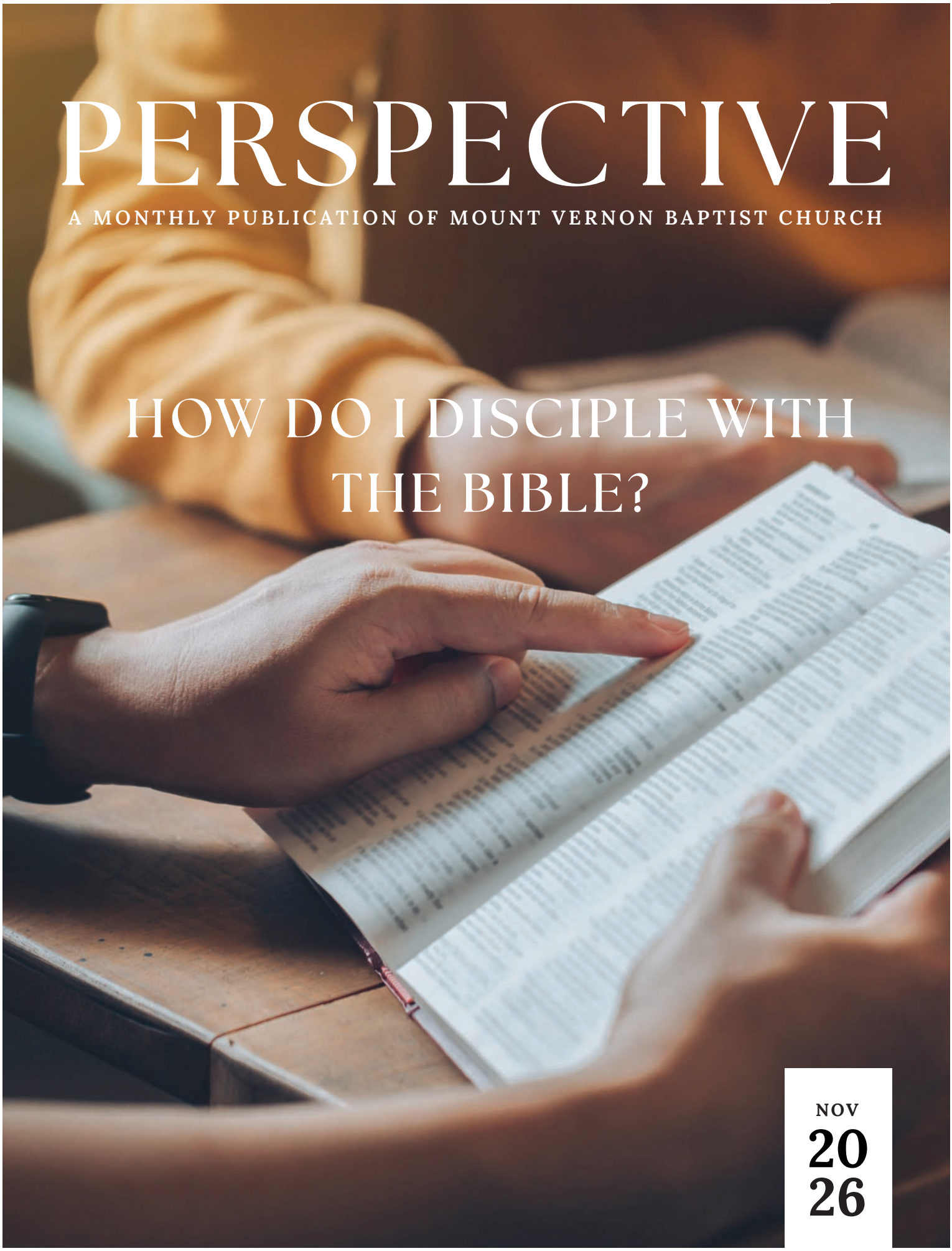
PERSPECTIVE

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF MOUNT VERNON BAPTIST CHURCH



HOW DO I DISCIPLE WITH THE BIBLE?

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ARTICLE

HOW DO I DISCIPLE WITH THE BIBLE?



I'll be honest. Last February, when I was asked if I'd be willing to write a Perspective article entitled, "How Do I Disciple with the Bible?" my first thought was: "I don't remember the last time I discipled someone with the Bible." I had just finished reading *The Holiness of God* by R.C. Sproul with a brother. Before that, *Holiness* by J.C. Ryle, *The Pleasures of God* by John Piper, and so on. Those were all great books. But I couldn't remember the last time I spent time with other Christian brothers going through a book of the Bible. So, what did I say to the person who asked me to write the article? Perhaps I should have said no. But I actually said yes. The request motivated me, and I took it as an opportunity to start reading the Bible with others. Thankfully, Mount Vernon plans ahead. They asked me eight months before the deadline! For the last eight months or so, it has been deeply encouraging to see myself and others grow and be affected by Scripture.

Maybe you can relate. You faithfully read Scripture every day. But perhaps, like me, you don't remember the last time you read the Bible with someone else to help each other grow spiritually. Maybe you don't even know where or how to start such a relationship. I hope this article will help you start one.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO "DISCIPLE OTHERS?"

To understand why and how we should disciple with the Bible, we must first understand what it means to "disciple." Even before that, we need to understand who "a disciple" is. The first and last commands of Christ (while on earth) to the twelve disciples are instructive. The first: "Follow me." (Matt. 4:19). The last: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, *baptizing* them… *teaching* them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20, emphasis mine). The first command helps us define terms. A disciple is simply someone who follows Christ. In this sense, discipling is helping someone else follow Christ.[1] So, when I use the term "discipling," I include believers and non-believers alike. We disciple other believers to help them follow Christ better, and we make disciples (of non-believers) by evangelizing them to follow Christ for the first time.[2]

And the last earthly command of Christ teaches us *how* we disciple others. Notice that Christ's command to "make disciples" is followed by two descriptive participles: baptizing and teaching. In other words, we help others follow Christ by instructing them to observe Christ's

ordinances (e.g., baptism and the Lord's Supper) and teaching them all that Christ commanded.

WHY SHOULD I DISCIPLE WITH THE BIBLE? (VS. OTHER BOOKS?)

The Bible is the only book in which we can find "all" that Christ has commanded us

At this point, I want to think more deeply about Christ's command to *teach* (i.e., teaching as a Christ-given way to make disciples). To teach, you must have content to introduce and educate. When I was a math teacher, I had a year-long pre-algebra curriculum to teach my middle school students (which, of course, all of them were very thrilled about!). What content did Jesus command His disciples to teach? Answer: "Teaching them to observe *all* that I have commanded you" (emphasis mine). And where can we find *all* that Christ has commanded? The Gospel of John tells us it is found in the New Testament, written by the Apostles to whom Christ entrusted *all* of His Words. Jesus said to them, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name . . . will teach you *all* things and bring to your remembrance *all* that I have said to you" (John 14:26; emphasis mine). And Christ's Words are found not only in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament, because Christ's teaching, life, death, and resurrection affirmed and fulfilled the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 5:17; Luke 24:27; Matt. 4:4). In short, the Bible is the primary source Christ commands us to use in helping others to follow Him.

The Bible is the only book that is alive

Another reason we should disciple with the Bible is that it is the most powerful book in the world. One of my seminary professors once said something along the lines of this: "John Piper's books are great, but they are dead writings. Tim Keller's books can be helpful, but they are dead writings. The Bible is the only book that is alive." What he said has stuck with me since then because it helped me approach the Bible with a sense of awe and eagerness, expecting to see God's Word doing a great work in me whenever I open it. Truly, the Word of God is "living and active" (Heb. 4:12), and "all Scripture is breathed out by God" (2 Tim. 3:16). The most amazing thing I get to witness when I disciple others with the Bible is literally watching God's Word do the work of cleansing.[3] I get to see the power of the Holy Spirit uniting a man's heart to the truth of the gospel found in God's Word.[4]

Is it wrong to disciple with other books?

No, it is not wrong to disciple with books other than the Bible. There is a place for them. Books that faithfully point us to the truth of the Bible can be helpful in our spiritual growth (e.g., reading a topical book like *Knowing God* by J.I. Packer). Some books even help us understand the Bible better (e.g., commentaries). However, they are not the Bible. The primary source of Christian discipling should be the Bible. As C.H. Spurgeon said, "Visit many good books, but live in the Bible."

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR DISCIPLING WITH THE BIBLE

So how can we help others follow Christ better with the Bible? Simply by inviting them to read and talk about it together. In outlining the guidelines below, I was hugely helped by David Helm's book, *On-to-One Bible Reading*, and Peter Krol's book, *Sowable Word*.

1. How do I start?

(a) Pray. Whether you are trying to read the Bible with a person you are already discipling or you are planning to ask a friend, family member, or non-believer, your first step must be a prayer. Pray that God would put someone in your mind. Pray that God would give desire and hunger to the person you are planning to invite (Eph. 2:5). Pray that God would open every participant's eyes (including yours) to see wonderful things out of His Word (Psalm 119:18).

(b) Invite. David Helm puts it plainly: "Once you know who you want to ask, you must then ask them. It requires boldness."[5] If you are like me, this can be one of the most obvious and yet daunting steps, especially if you are seeking to invite an unbeliever or someone who seems to show no interest in Christianity. And yet, we must pray that God would give us courage. Ask others to pray for you for boldness. I am comforted by the fact that even the apostle Paul asked other believers to pray for him to have

courage (Eph. 6:19-20). For the glory of God and for the eternal good of others, we can ask this gentle question: "Would you have any interest in reading the Bible with me for a few weeks?"[6]

(c) Plan to Meet. If, by God's grace, your friend or family member accepts your invitation, set up a meeting to get started! The frequency and the meeting location should be flexible based on the circumstances—though once it is set, you should seek to be consistent. For example, I am reading the Gospel of Mark with my sister over the phone every month because she lives in another state and she is busy raising a child. But I meet up more frequently with a single brother from Mount Vernon--about once every two or three weeks. With my coworkers at the office, we meet every Thursday at 7:30am (before work starts) to give others ample opportunity to join us.

2. What might a typical meeting look like?

(a) Pray and Read. Start your meeting with a prayer asking God to provide insight and understanding. Read the Bible passage aloud together, alternating between participants.

(b) Talk Together. After you pray and read the Bible passage, discuss what you read. One of the most important principles here is to talk *with* them and not *at* them.[7] People's understanding is formed, corrected, and challenged when they are exposed to God's Word and interact with it. And one way they interact is by talking. So, discipling someone with the Bible one-on-one (or in a small group) should look very different from teaching a Sunday School class. When you teach Sunday School, you end up talking the most (though you are still responsible for facilitating a robust discussion). However, when you are reading the Bible one-on-one (or in a small group), your goal should be for others to speak more than you do.[8] Put another way, "When leading Bible studies, your goals should be, first, to hear others, and second, to give an answer."[9]

This is why many would say the most important skill (or preparation) for a Bible study leader to have is that of asking good questions.[10] Krol put it this way: "Questions are the fuse to ignite the explosives of interaction. Questions are the trigger to fire the ammunition of interaction."[11] A good question not only helps others to engage in a discussion but also helps them to interact more deeply with the Scripture itself. While I will provide a brief overview of what good questions look like in the next section, remember that you can always say these four simple words to sustain a discussion: "What do you think?"[12]

Lastly, it is important to have an attitude of mutual learning. You are approaching God's Word to learn as much as the other person is. So, you should also be ready and eager to learn from and be challenged by the other person's insight and conviction. Do not be too fixated on making a particular point or spending time on a specific topic that you miss out on venturing into what the other person is particularly struck by. Feel free to linger on the areas in which others show interest.

(c) Apply the Passage in Real Life. God's Word is alive. It gives conviction to our souls. And the convicted soul produces real fruit in real life. Spend some time discussing how you can apply what you have learned from the passage in your life. And it is good to remember that good applications should spring out of the text itself.[13]

(d) Pray. Finish the meeting with prayer. Give thanks to God for what you have learned from Scripture and for providing areas of application.

(e) Confirm Calendars for Next Time. While this is self-explanatory, it is helpful to end your meeting by scheduling when you will meet next time. This creates a seemingly small yet clear sense of commitment.

TWO HELPFUL FRAMEWORKS FOR "TALKING TOGETHER"

While you should feel free to read and discuss the passage without any agenda, I want to equip you with two of the best-known ways to facilitate Bible discussion.

• Swedish Method:[14] This is a super simple framework. Because of its simplicity, it is a helpful framework for a discussion with a non-believer, a new believer, or someone who has not read the Bible for a long time. I have used

this framework, separately, with my dad (an unbeliever) and my sister (who had not read the Bible for a while), and we have had enjoyable and profitable discussions. In this framework, as the group reads the passage, each person looks for three things and discusses them:

- o  **A light bulb**: Anything that shines out in the passage. "What stands out to you?" It can be something important, or something that particularly strikes the reader.
- o  **A question mark**: Anything that is surprising or hard to understand; something that the reader would like to ask the Biblical author about.
- o  **An arrow**: Anything that applies personally to the reader's life.

• COMA Method:[15] Context, Observation, Meaning, and Application. Generally speaking, this framework pushes people deeper into the passage than the Swedish method. That is simply because the categories like "context" and "meaning" force people to think more deeply about the biblical author's original intention for the original audience. So, this method is useful for mature Christians who want to deepen their understanding of the Bible. I have used this framework when reading Romans 5-8 with a brother at Mount Vernon this year, and it has been mutually encouraging. In this framework, after reading the passage, you would discuss each of the sections below:

- o **Context**: What kind of writing is this? (A letter, a narrative, a poem, etc.); Are there any clues about the circumstances under which it was written? What has happened so far?
- o **Observation**: Are there any major sub-sections or breaks in the text? What is the main point or points? What surprises are there? What are the key words? What words or ideas are repeated?
- o **Meaning**: How does this text relate to other parts of the book? How does the passage relate to Jesus? What does this teach us about God? How could we sum up the meaning of this passage in our own words?
- o **Application**: How does this passage challenge (or confirm) my understanding? Is there some attitude I need to change? How does this passage call on me to change the way I live?

TWO IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES TO CONSIDER

Prep or no prep (e.g., reading the passage before)? It depends. You need to know yourself and your participant(s) in terms of preference and level of commitment. For example, if all participants read the passage beforehand and come up with questions, the meeting will be more efficient, and you will likely cover more ground. However, I agree with Helm's argument that not preparing in advance has some advantages: "It communicates very clearly what is happening in your partnership—that is, you are simply getting together to read the Bible and encourage each other from it. It is not a teaching session (requiring detailed preparation and study), but an opportunity simply to feed from God's word together."[16]

What makes a good question? Earlier, I mentioned that the most important skill for a Bible study leader to have is that of asking good questions. If you decide to do some prep work, one thing you should do is to prepare a few thoughtful questions. Below are Krol's six characteristics of good questions that I found helpful:[17]

1. *Asked in a natural order*: Questions should generally move from easy to difficult and observation to personal application.
2. *Honest*: The best questions are asked in humility, with a posture that even the most studied Christians have much to learn from others
3. *Tethered to the text*: Ask observation questions about the passage. Application questions should be driven by the author's main point
4. *Understandable*: A good question should not be too long (Amen!). Try not to use big words. Make it concise and clear. Ask

people to consider something specific.

5. *Purposeful*: Time is limited. Choose questions carefully, ones that help people to understand the main idea of the passage.

6. *Prayerfully considered*: Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who convicts people's souls, not our insights or even the quality of our questions. Ask for God's help.

CONCLUSION

I want to conclude this article by sharing a story. For the past several months, I have been reading the Gospel of Mark with my sister, a confessing Christian who, by her own account, had not read the Bible for a long time. I have been surprised by how God's powerful Word has been convicting her in a way I did not expect. And her convictions, to my surprise, also helped me learn something of God's Word better, too. Back in July, we were reading Mark 3, in which the Jews are watching to see if Jesus would heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. Jesus asks: "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" (Mark 3:4) The answer is that it is lawful on the Sabbath to do good and to save life. The law is for the good of the people, not the other way around. This passage convicted my sister. As a doctor, she had previously been pressured by the hospital management to make a subtle decision that would benefit the hospital's bottom line rather than a patient's well-being. Just as the law is for people, doctors are for the patients, not the other way around. The Scripture gave her a practical application point (even though it may not be the bull's-eye main point of the passage).[18] And her life example gave me another color for understanding the purpose of the Law and Christ's teaching in a way that I had not expected. All this happened because there is power in God's Word. When we read the Bible together, we get to witness God's Word do the work of creating, cleansing, and convicting. I hope you can experience this soon, too.

— Soon Hyong Kwon

Resources

[1] Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 15.

[2] Some people, including Mark Dever, limit the word "discipling" only to a sense of helping other Christians grow. In this sense, you cannot "disciple" non-believers. However, in Matt 28:18, Christ uses the word "disciples" in a context of evangelizing non-believers. So in this article, at least, I am using the term "discipling" comprehensively to include both "making disciples of non-believers" and "helping other Christians to mature."

[3] Peter Krol, *Sowable Word* (Minneapolis: Cruciform Press, 2022), 63.

[4] David Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading* (Chicago: Matthias Media, 2011), 38.

[5] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 23.

[6] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 23.

[7] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 28.

[8] This is advice from Owen Beightol, a full-time campus minister in the D.C. area, who has devoted himself to leading Bible studies with college students for the past decade.

[9] Krol, *SowableWord*, 129.

[10] Krol, *SowableWord*, 99.

[11] Krol, *SowableWord*, 99.

[12] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 28.

[13] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 28.

[14] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 44.

[15] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 46-48.

[16] Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading*, 34.

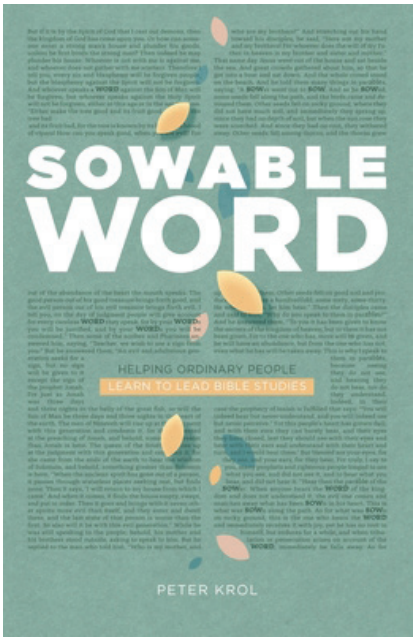
[17] Krol, *Sowable Word*, 100-102.

[18] I believe, ultimately, this passage is about Christ and His identity as "the Son of man." He is "lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). In other words, Jesus is God. But at the same time, I believe what my sister took away is also a legitimate application point.

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

SOWABLE WORD

Written by Peter Krol | Recommended by Tyler Young



Peter Krol's book *Sowable Word: Helping Ordinary People Learn to Lead Bible Studies* aims to equip Christians with the tools to cultivate a heart to faithfully lead others in studying the Bible. The book is divided into three Parts: Building a Foundation, Preparing to Lead, and Leading the Group. Within each Part, Krol encourages the Christian to grasp the idea that a Bible study leader is one who is first changed by the Word, and as a result, in careful and humble leadership. It is God who gives the growth as he or she labors to share Biblical truth with others. This truth frees us to faithfully teach from God's Word without having to lean on commentaries or other books.

Leading a Bible study often raises more questions than we anticipate. From preparing to lead to navigating discussions and evaluating whether we have faithfully handled God's Word, the responsibility can feel daunting. One helpful reminder from Krol is the importance of keeping the proper measure of success in mind. He writes, "If you remained faithful to the truth, there's a good chance you led them to the one who is the Truth." Recognizing that our primary responsibility as leaders is to faithfully teach Christ frees us from the expectation of having a perfect meeting every time. Rather, we can measure our success by whether we have faithfully taught the truth with Christ at the center.

The book offers several frameworks to help us uncover the truth of the gospel, along with practical examples of what a lesson and its preparation might look like. One particularly helpful method is OIA: Observe, Interpret, Apply. At each stage, we ask a guiding question: Observe: What does the text actually say? Interpret: What does the text mean in its context? Apply: How should its truth shape our lives? Using this framework to guide group discussion helps keep our time grounded in Scripture and directs us toward understanding and applying its truth.

Whether you are leading a Bible study for the first time or have a gift for gathering people to study God's Word, this book is for you. If we desire to lead others in drinking from the well of God's Word, we must first drink from it ourselves. To rightly apply God's Word, we must first be changed by it. Although there are many encouraging and helpful books that point us in the right direction when it comes to Bible study, I believe *Sowable Word* provides accessible resources and insights that help the new Bible study leader blossom and the experienced leader grow sharper in accurately handling God's Word.

BOOK EXCERPTS

We might be led to believe some Bible study groups need to focus on the gospel, while others need to focus on the Christian life or discipline or growth. But we should see the gospel of Jesus Christ in every passage of Scripture, regardless of who attends the study.

– "Starting a Group: Group Identity," p. 38

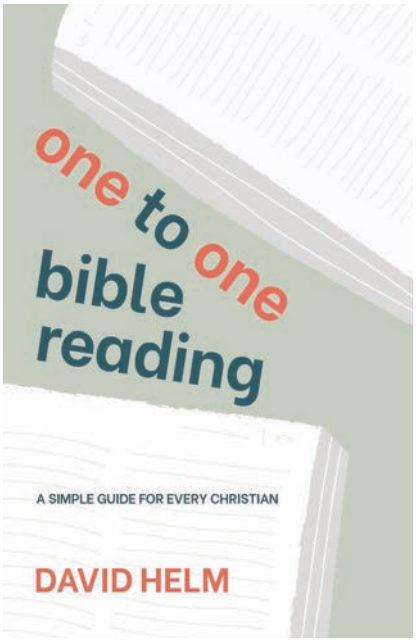
Allowing the message of the designated text to change you isn;t a nice perk or luxury; it's a prerequisite of Christlike leadership. This should be obvious, but often isn't: we can't teach what we haven't learned. Our words are merely words if we can't show them in our lives.

– "Figure Out How to Apply What God Has Said: Beware Sanitized Hypocrisy," p. 72

BOOK HIGHLIGHT

ONE-TO-ONE BIBLE READING

Written by David Helm | Recommended by Christie Gerber



One-to-One Bible Reading by David Helm is a short, accessible guide for reading the Bible with another person in an evangelism or discipleship relationship. The first part of the book outlines the "what, why, and how" of one-to-one Bible reading, including recommended preparation and what a typical meeting might look like. The approach provided is similar for reading with non-believers or with fellow Christians, since either reader will be guided through the Word of God according to their needs by someone who cares for them. The second part of the book gets more into the technicalities of Bible reading by first outlining two frameworks—the Swedish and COMA methods. These provide methodical ways to approach a text and ask questions of it together. Next, Helm offers suggested books of the Bible to read for different situations (such as with non-Christians, new Christians, or established Christians) and even breaks down the texts into smaller chunks for each meeting. Then comes a helpful chapter introducing the different genres of biblical literature and offering potential COMA (Context, Observation, Meaning, and Application) questions that can be used for each category. The final chapter outlines an eight-week study through Mark's gospel with discussion questions provided for each week's passage.

In reading this book, I was reminded that the personal nature of one-to-one Bible reading makes it one of the most effective approaches for introducing a non-Christian to the Word or helping another believer to grow in sanctification. I gleaned some approaches for my own Bible reading and was encouraged to try reading through a book of the Bible with someone else.

One-to-One Bible Reading would be helpful for anyone interested in discipling a fellow believer or reading the Bible with a non-believer in their life. The first part provides encouragement to get started and the second part functions more like a reference guide that could be used throughout the entire process. The appendix even has worksheet pages with questions for different Bible reading situations that can be photocopied and used during preparation and discussion. David Helm has made one-to-one Bible reading approachable for all believers, removing much of the guesswork involved from a process that some may find intimidating.

BOOK EXCERPTS

Reading one-to-one is a variation on that most central Christian activity - reading the Bible - but done in the context of reading with someone. It is something a Christian does with another person, on a regular basis, for a mutually agreed upon length of time, with the intention of reading through and discussing a book or part of a book of the Bible.

– "Why Read One-to-One," p. 11

The entire Bible is the word of God, and all of it is useful for "teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness", as Paul says. In one sense, then, you can read any part of the Bible with anyone, and derive great profit from the experience. However, some parts of Scripture are particularly suitable for one-to-one Bible reading with different sorts of people..

– "Books of the Bible for Different Situations," p. 49

BIBLE READING PLAN

NOVEMBER

TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message.
Take Up & Read!

November 1	**Revelation 22:6-21**
November 2	Matthew 11:20-24
November 3	Jonah 3:1-10
November 4	Isaiah 5:1-7
November 5	Hebrews 2:1-4
November 6	Genesis 19:15-29
November 7	John 15
November 8	**Matthew 11:20-24**
November 9	Proverbs 10
November 10	Proverbs 1
November 11	Proverbs 2
November 12	Proverbs 3
November 13	Romans 11:33-12:2
November 14	Proverbs 4
November 15	**Proverbs 10**
November 16	Proverbs 11
November 17	Proverbs 5
November 18	Proverbs 6
November 19	Proverbs 7
November 20	Colossians 3:1-11
November 21	Proverbs 8
November 22	**Proverbs 11**
November 23	Matthew 11:25-30
November 24	Proverbs 9
November 25	Proverbs 14
November 26	Proverbs 15
November 27	Jeremiah 6:13-16
November 28	Proverbs 16
November 29	**Matthew 11:25-30**
November 30	Proverbs 12

***Sermons in Bold**

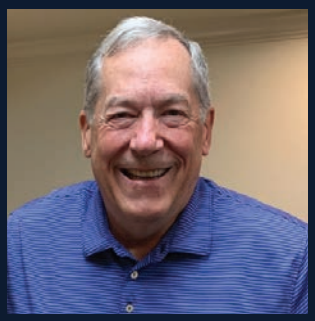
NEW MEMBERS



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BREWER



DAKOTA
MCINTIRE



ROSS
MURPHY



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MURPHY



MIKE
SCHILLACI



JORDAN
SHABABY



LAUREN
SHABABY



ZACH
SMITH



EDEN
SMITH



PAUL
TEMPLE



GABRIELLA
TEMPLE



NELSON
WANG

"We must grasp once again, the idea of church membership as being the membership of the body of Christ and as the biggest honour which can come a man's way in this world."

MARTYN LLOYD-JONES



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