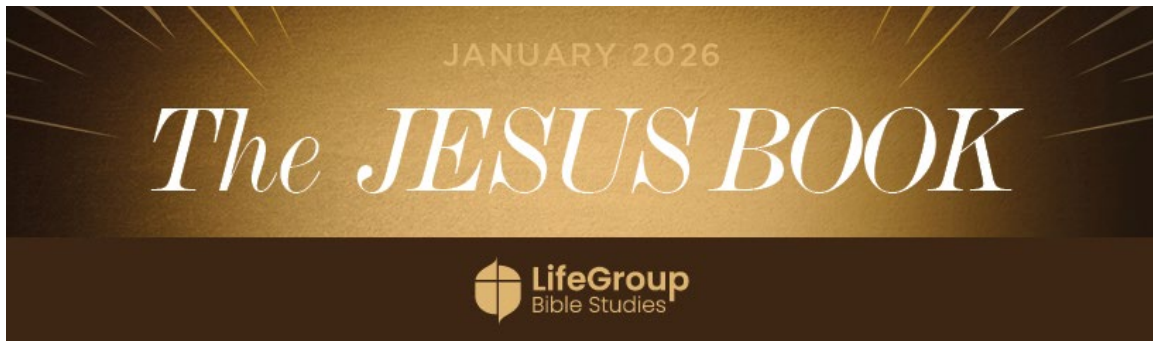


Week 4: Reading the Bible for Life

Hook



Main Point: The Bible is meant to sink deep into our hearts and be lived out in our lives.

Q: When you buy something new, are you the kind of person who reads the owner's manual? Or do you only dig it out when you've already broken something – or can't figure out which button does what?

Q: Is there any piece of equipment that you own or work with that is so complicated, you've found yourself referencing the owner's manual with some regularity?

Some equipment is so complicated that even the most experienced users end up referring back to the manual again and again. Interestingly, while not the very first user's manual, Ford produced one of the earliest for its Model T. A 1915 version included three full pages titled *"Don'ts for Ford Owners."* Among them were these gems:

- Don't see how much and how often you can abuse your car.
- Don't see how much you can scare elderly folks by driving close, sounding the horn, etc.
- Don't drive fast when passing a school.
- Don't use your horn when passing a hospital.
- Don't fill the gasoline tank with oil lamps lit, motor running, or cigars burning.
- Don't listen to the accessory man – you haven't room on your car for all the "unnecessary attachments" he has for sale.
- Don't try to improve the design of your car, or the material in it.¹

Transition: Life is far more complicated than any piece of machinery we'll ever own – yet God has graciously given us the Bible to guide us. Today, we'll be reminded that the

Bible isn't just helpful – it's *vital* for daily living. The Holy Spirit uses the Word to transform, and equip us in living life as He intends.

RECAP: This is a four-part series based on *The Jesus Book* by Dr. Jack Graham. The heart of *The Jesus Book* is that the purpose of the Bible is to bring us to know Jesus so we can live in fellowship with God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In the first lesson, we learned about the Bible itself. The Bible is trustworthy and true, the only authority for life and faith. It is living and active; the Holy Spirit speaks to us through it, and reading it is a supernatural experience for the believer. The Bible is the story of God's relationship with humankind from creation, to the Fall, to redemption in Christ – how the world was made, how it was broken, and how it will be redeemed. The point of the Bible is for us to come to know Jesus so we can be saved and live in fellowship with Him.

In the second lesson, we learned we can read the Bible as a lens to see the world and to find hope and reassurance. We also learned reading the Bible is a daily discipline that not only leads to spiritual growth but is also a joy and a pleasure for those who love Jesus.

In the third lesson, we learned how we can know God's will through Scripture, how to protect ourselves from inaccurate Bible reading, and how to study the Bible faithfully.

In this fourth and final lesson, we will see that the Bible is meant not to be just read but meditated upon – chewing on its “meat,” reflecting deeply, coming back to it again and again over time. We will also see how the Bible is our “sword” in spiritual warfare, our primary weapon against the lies and schemes of the Devil. And lastly, we are not just called to know the Word of God but to live it out.

*This fourth lesson covers chapters 9–10 of *The Jesus Book*. All page numbers listed below are from *The Jesus Book* unless otherwise noted.

Week 4: Reading the Bible for Life

Book

Main Point: The Bible is meant to sink deep into our hearts and be lived out in our lives.

Deuteronomy 17:14–20; Joshua 1:7–9; and Psalm 1:1–2; 119:9–16, 97–104 [Read]

Talking Point 1: The Bible is meant to be meditated upon.

Q: When should we meditate on God’s Word?

Q: What difference does it make to meditate on it rather than just read it or glance over it?

Q: What are some practical ways we can meditate on God’s Word?

Scripture is not like a novel, which you read once and then move on to the next book. It does contain a beautiful overarching story and lots of smaller stories within that story, but even the narrative parts of the Bible were not written to be read through just once or twice. The Bible is meditative literature, intentionally designed for a lifetime of ongoing reflection. It was designed to be read over and over, meditated on, and wrestled with. The Bible is a multilayered work, offering new levels of insight each time we read and reflect.

Meditation is a spiritual discipline commanded by God in His Word but one many American Christians neglect because of a misunderstanding of what meditation is, particularly thinking it’s related to New Age or eastern religions. When we hear “meditation,” we imagine the New Age practice of sitting still and trying to empty our mind. But biblical meditation is the act of *filling* one’s mind with God’s Word. The word “meditate” just means to think deeply or carefully about something, to focus one’s mind on something for a period of time.

When done in a biblical way, meditation is a valuable spiritual exercise that Dr. Graham says is “an antidote to the unprecedented stress of our age” (p. 132). Our lives are so overstimulated with constant noise that our souls need the break of taking time away to contemplate, to deeply reflect on God’s Word. Back in the 80s and 90s, many of us called our daily Bible reading “having a quiet time.” That’s a great description of what it looks like to take time away from the noise of our culture to meditate on God’s Word. God can speak to us in many ways – through sermons, music, situations, friends, mentors – but there is something about setting aside that “quiet time” to meet with

God in His Word. That's when we can hear the "still, small voice" of the Holy Spirit (1 Kings 19:12). Dr. Graham wrote, "the purpose of silence for the Christian is to listen to God's Word, because when the Bible speaks, God speaks" (p. 131).

- Meditation involves **focus**. Getting to a quiet place, getting still, and getting rid of distractions can all help us focus on what we are reading. For us who are so accustomed to having a phone constantly in our hands, this can be hard, but the more we do it, the easier it becomes, and the more we'll cherish and crave this time.
- Meditation involves **repetition**. Reading and reflecting, then re-reading and reflecting again. Don't rush; don't skim. Take the time to mull over the words, to chew on every word the way a cow chews its cud. You can even read the passage aloud multiple times to help you reflect, listen and memorize.
- Meditation involves **contemplation**. Paul said to "think on" whatever is good, pure and lovely and "set your mind on" things above (Philippians 4:8; Colossians 3:2). When we spend the time contemplating God's Word in our quiet time, it "hides His Word in our hearts" so we can access it all day long (Psalm 119:11). This is how we can meditate on it "day and night." When we start our day with focused reading and thinking about God's Word, that thinking is carried throughout our day as we do our regular tasks.

To help us focus, Dr. Graham suggests note-taking, journaling and even highlighting and marking directly in our Bibles. Other ideas that can help us focus when we read might be drawing, illustrating or other visual aids. He also suggests not just reading and meditating on the Scriptures but praying the Scriptures. Praying God's Word back to Him is a spiritual practice that sets His Word in our hearts and on our lips. The more we truly meditate on God's Word, the more it will sink deeply into our hearts and transform our lives.

Q: Share any experiences you have had with Christian meditation. How did you practice it? How did it help you hear from God?

Q: Why is it hard to get away in quiet time? What obstacles get in our way? How do you navigate those challenges?

2 Corinthians 10:3–6 and Ephesians 6:10–18 [Read]

Talking Point 2: The Bible is our "sword" in the daily spiritual warfare we face.

Q: How do we wage war as Christians? What weapons do we use?

Q: How can we stand firm against the schemes of the Devil?

Q- What are some practical ways we can daily remind ourselves to be clothed with God's armor?

Scripture tells us that, whether we realize it or not, Christians are engaged in a daily battle with the forces of evil in the spiritual realm. Every day, Satan and his demons try to distract us from following Jesus with earthly pleasures and the stresses and worries of life. They constantly try to manipulate the truth, distort the Word of God, and/or flat out lie to us about what is really good, right and true. The very first sin of Adam and Eve in the garden began with Satan's questioning the Word of God – "Did God *really* say...?"

This is why it is so crucial not just to read God's Word but to really know it. When Paul described the spiritual "armor of God" we need to stand firm against the schemes of the Devil, the only offensive weapon he listed was "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Ephesians 6:10–18). Everything else – truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, faith, salvation – is defensive, armor that protects us from the flaming arrows of the evil one. But the Word of God is our sword, not to use as a weapon against other human beings, for our battle is not against flesh and blood but against the spiritual forces of darkness in the heavenly realm. But it is certainly a weapon to use against Satan. Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and the way to combat lies is with the truth (John 8:43–45).

Paul told the Corinthians that the battle begins in our minds. Our weapons have divine power to "destroy strongholds," which he described as "arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God." He implored us to "take every thought captive to obey Christ" and let the Holy Spirit renew our minds so we think like Him (2 Corinthians 10:3–6; Romans 12:2). When Jesus was tempted in the wilderness, Satan used the same tactics he used with Adam and Eve, but they didn't work on Jesus. Because Jesus *knew* the Word of God. Every time Satan tempted Him, Jesus responded with Scripture (Matthew 4:1–11).

To describe this offensive weapon we use against the spiritual forces of wickedness, Paul used the same word for "sword" that is used in Hebrews that describes the Bible as able to cut deep into our souls and "discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). The Bible is not only a sword; it's a scalpel that cuts open our hearts to cut out the spiritual sicknesses, heal us, and restore us to spiritual health. When we read God's Word, it should pierce our hearts and show us ways God wants to grow us, refine us, and change us to be more like Jesus. When we read God's Word, we should pray, like David, that God would reveal to us any wicked ways in us (Psalm 139:23–24). We should use the Bible as a weapon only against spiritual forces, not other people, but we can use it like a scalpel on ourselves as well as our Christian friends and family to correct one

another in love (2 Timothy 3:16–17; Proverbs 27:5; Ephesians 4:15). Scripture *expects* us to correct one another, not out of a nitpicky, holier-than-thou kind of legalism but from a desire to help one another grow (Galatians 6:1; 2 Timothy 4:2; Hebrews 12:11) and to sharpen one another as iron sharpens iron, not to attack, stab, or bite one another (Proverbs 27:17; Galatians 5:15).

Q: How have you seen Satan distort Scripture or manipulate the truth in our world? How can we respond to those distortions with the truth of God's Word?

Q: How can you and your friends be "iron" for one another? Which friends can you count on to help sharpen you, not attack you?

Matthew 7:24–27 and James 1:22–25 [Read]

Talking Point 3: We are not just called to know His Word but to live it out.

Q: What does the "sand" tell us about what happens when we don't live out God's Word?

Q: What does James's metaphor of the mirror tell us about God's Word?

After all we have learned about God's Word in this series, now comes the action step. God's Word is not meant just to be read, studied, discussed, or even memorized; it's meant to be lived. Our faith is not just a set of rules or a belief system; it's a way of life. This is why Jesus said, "Follow me," not just "believe in me." It is why the Church was originally called "the Way." Faith in Jesus isn't just believing in Him. It's putting our faith in Him. Not just trusting in Him to save us and get us into heaven but walking in His ways in the here and now.

At the end of His most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said to His hearers that essentially none of the stuff He taught will do you any good if you don't live it out. His metaphor isn't a contrast between those who believe in Him and those who don't. It's a contrast between those who hear His words and do them and those who hear His words but don't do them. The difference is in the *doing*. For those who hear His words but don't do them, it's like building a house on sand. When the hard times come, the house won't stand. When we just hear Jesus' words but don't live them out, we don't have a solid foundation. Our lives will be easily "blown over" by the winds of struggle and suffering. This isn't just about what we believe, it's about what we do. Building our spiritual house on the firm foundation of "the rock" is not *just* about making sure we have the right "sound doctrine." It's about making sure we know His Word, *and* we do it.

This is because doing what Jesus says is the firm foundation. Doing what Jesus says is the right way to live, so living His way builds a strong life that can weather the storms. To use a financial metaphor, if you build a firm foundation through saving and investing, then you will have the resources to weather the storm if you lose your job or some emergency happens. You won't fear the hard times because you know you'll make it through. But this only works if you do the saving and investing. It doesn't help just to know what you need to do; you have to actually do it.

James said to hear the Word but not do it was like looking in a mirror and then walking away and forgetting what you look like. The mirror is a metaphor for self-reflection, feeling convicted by the Word of God but then walking away from that encounter with God's Word and doing nothing about it. In contrast, the one who looks at the law and does it will be "blessed in his doing." Because doing what God says leads to blessing – not as a reward (as God gives blessing to those who do what He says), but because what God says is right and good. When you follow it, things will go well for you, just like our financial responsibility example above.

Scripture tells us King Herod enjoyed listening to John the Baptist preach the truth, but it didn't change his behavior (Mark 6:20). Scripture tells us the Pharisees knew God's Word backward and forward, but they didn't live by it; they didn't practice what they preached (Matthew 23:3). James said those who hear God's Word but don't do it are deceiving themselves (James 1:22). They think they're good because they know God's Word, but knowing the truth means nothing if it isn't lived out. Knowing and believing are not the same. If we really believe God's ways are best, we will live by them. Instead, we often give lip service to God's ways while we live the way we want.

Dr. Graham tells us that studying God's Word should always result in a transformed life. When we read our Bibles, we should always ask ourselves, what am I going to *do* about this? (p. 137). The purpose of Scripture isn't just to fill our heads with knowledge; it's to create disciples of Jesus, people who live by His ways as a light to the world, showing them what God is like (Matthew 5:14–16). Biblical interpretation is crucial. We want to learn to interpret the Bible rightly. But application, not interpretation, is the end goal of studying the Bible. The question is not just, "What does this passage mean?" but "What does it mean for my life?" Each and every time we read Scripture, whether it's a story, a more theological passage, a poem, or any other genre, the ultimate question we should ask ourselves is, How will I *live differently* from this moment on because I studied this passage of Scripture? We must learn proper interpretation so we know what the Bible really means. But the purpose in knowing what it really means (interpretation) is so we can know how to really live (application).

Q: Reflect on how studying the Bible has changed your life. How do you live differently now than before you started studying God's Word?

Q: Look back at the Sermon on the Mount, "these words of mine" about which Jesus was talking. According to His words, what does it look like to live in the ways of Jesus?

Q- Can you share a recent example of how you or someone you know has 'lived out' God's Word?

Week 4: Reading the Bible for Life

Took

Main Point: The Bible is meant to sink deep into our hearts and be lived out in our lives.

Pastor Graham concludes *The Jesus Book* with a challenge:

There is no substitute for God's Word in your life. Whether you are a new Christian or a veteran believer, we all desperately need the Word of God, and we never grow beyond that need. Could it be that you have neglected God's Word and find yourself spiritually dry, in need of renewal and personal revival?... I pray you are convinced the Bible is God's truth through and through and that it's real and relevant and trustworthy. A true and trustworthy companion for your life. This is the reason we read it and apply its truths. Jesus, the Living Word of God, steps from the pages of his book and right into our souls" (pp. 162–163).

Teacher, challenge your LifeGroup to begin 2026 with a commitment to faithfully, daily spending time in God's Word. Present your reading plan and invite group members to join you on your 2026 journey through the Bible.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on your worldview. How has the culture impacted your worldview? How do your personal experiences, background, family, gender, ethnicity or socio-economic status affect your worldview? How does the Bible impact your worldview? How can you let the Spirit renew your mind so your worldview is shaped by biblical truth? What does it look like to take every thought captive in obedience to Christ?

THINK: Reflect on what it looks like to live out Jesus' words in your own life, to live like Him in our world today. How can you truly live by His ways and act on His words, not just give Him lip service, just doing "spiritual stuff" for the wrong reasons? What kind of impact could it have on the world around us if we walked by His ways all the time? How can we encourage one another to walk by His ways, even correcting and rebuking one another when needed? What friends in your life are the "iron sharpening iron" kind of friends?

PRAY for God to give you a supernatural understanding of His Word and how to live it out. Pray for wisdom to know what it looks like to live by His ways. Pray for courage to live by His ways in a world of darkness. Pray for the discernment to hold one another accountable and strengthen one another to live for Christ in this world.

ACT: Meditate. This week, spend a significant time in meditation on God's Word. Choose one passage of Scripture you can meditate on, read over and over, and reflect on every day – the same passage each day. Get yourself alone, still and quiet and meditate on God's Word, allowing His still, small voice to speak to you through it. As you meditate, ask Him to reveal what it means for you to live out this passage of Scripture. Then do it!

¹ <https://www.kentonlibrary.org/blogs/post/unique-finds-in-the-archives-model-t-owners-manual/>