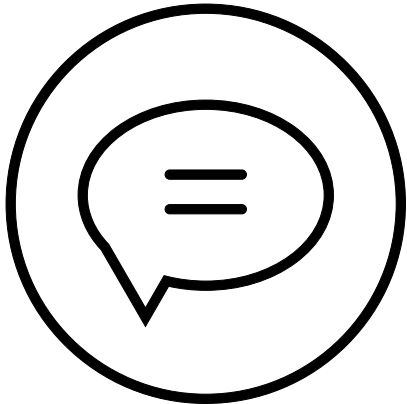


THE BIBLE READING TOOL

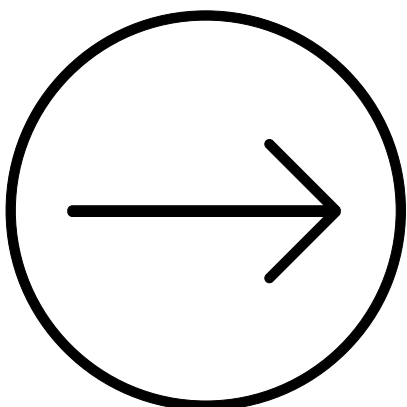
WHAT AM I FEELING?



GOD SAID



I HEARD



I WILL

THE BIBLE READING TOOL

HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

Perhaps one of the most common questions newer disciples ask is, “How do I read the Bible and understand it?”

It’s one of the most important questions you can ask as a follower of Jesus. Why? Well in the book of Luke 4, Jesus says, *“Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* The Psalmist says that *the one who delights in it, “is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither.”*

The Bible or the Word of God, nourishes us, feeds us, and keeps us vital and alive because it is the primary way God speaks to us. We like to say at Salem Chapel, “When God’s Word is open, His mouth is open.”

The Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, *“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”* Everything that we need for salvation, life and godliness is found within its pages.

The power of the Bible lies not in it being a book with a moral code, though it has guidelines for living under the rule and reign of God. It is not primarily a history book, though it has astonishingly detailed and poignant stories from the annals of history. No.

As theologian and author A.W. Tozer remarked, *“The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.”*

Now I know what some of you are thinking. “Ok. Great. Well this is all well and good...but how do you read the Bible so that what Tozer is describing actually happens in my life?”

And I want to set your heart at ease. You don’t need to feel guilty or shameful in asking that question. After all the Bible is a thick book with some strange things to say and can feel daunting when you first start reading it, right? The average American household owns 4.4 Bibles, but only 19% of adults engage with the Bible on a regular basis outside of Sunday mornings (April, 2014 Barna study). I can’t help but wonder if the primary reason Christians don’t read the Bible is because they don’t feel equipped to read it well. So let’s see if we can break it down and simplify the process.

WHEN GOD'S WORD IS OPEN HIS MOUTH IS OPEN.

I mentioned earlier that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 describes the Bible as being “breathed out by God.”. In other words the Bible in a sense is God’s words written through men to you and me. It is His primary form of communication to you. And in any relationship, communication is important. No healthy relationship is void of intimate, substantive communication. This is also true of your relationship with the Lord.

The Bible is the means by which God tells us who He is, why He can be trusted and the power He possesses to right all wrongs. His Word is also the primary way we hear, learn and grow in our relationship with Him.

God uses the Bible to communicate His love for us, His comfort for us, His sympathy and empathy for us in our pain, His will and direction for our lives, and His correction and forgiveness for when we go astray.

I wonder how many of us view the Bible this way? And what would happen if we view the Bible as essential to hear, experience and grow in our relationship with Him?

King David says of the Word of God in Psalm 19:10 - “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold, sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

When we view God’s Word as precious, something to be desired, and as the primary means by which we hear from Him and grow in our relationship with Him, it changes the way we view the Bible.

Additionally, in John 15:5, *Jesus says, “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (ESV)*

What does Jesus mean by “Abide”? The word Abide literally means ‘remain’ in the original language. Essentially, Jesus is saying, “stay with me so that you produce spiritual ‘fruit’.”

At Salem Chapel we summarize the meaning of the word Abide as simply *“walking hand in hand with Jesus as He leads the way.”* Jesus will lead me, if only I will follow Him. He is always inviting me into a deeper relationship with Him, even as he leads me to a greater experience of the new life He offers.

Opening God’s Word and asking Jesus to speak into my day IS abiding in Him. When we read and apply what God is saying in His Word, we are choosing to abide in Christ.

The Bible Reading Tool is designed to serve as a guide for you to not only read the Bible, but to help you abide in Christ as you come to His Word, whether you are brand new in your relationship with Jesus or someone who has been following Him for many years.

Before we introduce the steps of the tool, consider these two preparatory questions:

WHAT PASSAGE SHOULD I READ TODAY?

The easy answer is that there isn't an easy answer. Every person is slightly different and as such, their pattern for digging into the Word will be different. That being said, the following are some different approaches that could prove useful:

- ▶ Pick a reading plan that you do along with people in your family, small group or church. There can be power in everyone reading the same text each day. If Salem Chapel is your church home, consider using the reading guide located at salemchapel.org/teaching. Our entire church is continually reading through the same passages week in and week out.
- ▶ Ask the Lord to show you which book of the Bible he wants you to focus on and dive into it until you finish it, then ask him for the next.
- ▶ Pick a reading plan that's tailored to the way you think and process while reading. The Bible App by YouVersion has an excellent assortment of options.
- ▶ Read through the whole Bible, start to finish, reading a chapter a day.

The other piece of practical advice we might give concerns the length of text that you read. Some people are able to read a chapter or more each day, while some people read only a few verses. The amount isn't as important as is your ability to hear what God is saying to you through the Holy Spirit and His Word. Remember, this isn't about checking off a spiritual box, but connecting to the heart of the Father that very day.

Charles Spurgeon, The Prince of Preachers, once said: *“Some people like to read so many [Bible] chapters every day. I would not dissuade them from the practice, but I would rather let my soul soak in half a dozen verses all day than rinse my hand in several chapters. Oh, to be bathed in a text of Scripture, and to let it be sucked up in your very soul, till it saturates your heart!”*

Intimacy with God and spiritual maturity is the end result we are pursuing. Sometimes you might be able to read large chunks of a passage. Sometimes you might read two verses and not be able to move an inch further as the Father invites you deeper, right then and there. Whatever the amount is, live in the grace of it, knowing that the real gift is being with the Lord.

HOW WILL I RECORD WHAT GOD SAYS TO ME?

A really useful aid for studying God's Word is a journal or some other means of recording the things God is saying to you. A journal will help you both to remember and respond to the things God reveals as you move through the tool

each day and serve as a way to “look back” at the ways He spoke to you at just the right time in the past.

If you already have a journal you would prefer to use, feel free to do so. Additionally, we have created a journal resource in house called an ‘Abide Journal’ that already has the questions and headings of the Bible Reading Tool printed on each page ready for your daily use. These Abide Journals are available at a minimal cost at the Welcome Center every weekend at Salem Chapel.

Now that you have your passage selected and your journal ready, let’s begin with our first important question.

HOW AM I FEELING?

Before you begin reading the passage you have selected for today, ask yourself one simple question; “How am I feeling?” What are you experiencing right now in your life? What is occupying your thoughts or emotions? What is pressing on you today as you come to God’s Word?

Take a few moments to evaluate and write down your answer at the top of your page.

This experience of self-evaluation may be new for you, so don’t worry if it takes some getting used to. Like a muscle, identifying what you are experiencing in any given moment becomes easier with practice. Truth be told, many of us do not always give our current experience any thought at all unless we are in the throes of a major conflict or other significant moment. The reason we are taking time to ask ourselves this question ahead of reading is to prepare our hearts to receive what the Holy Spirit wants to say directly to us through God’s Word.

STOP AND PRAY

After you have taken a moment to process and have written down how you are feeling today, stop and pray. Ask the Holy Spirit to meet you today in God’s Word and speak directly to where you are. After you have prayed, you are ready to move to the next step of the Bible Reading Tool: *God Said*.



GOD SAID

WHAT IS GOD SAYING IN THE PASSAGE I READ?

Having prayed for the Holy Spirit to be present, to speak and having opened the Word to the passage you are reading for the day, we now read the passage itself. The first question we are asking in this step is a simple one: “What is God saying to me in the passage I read?” This may seem like an obvious question, but it is an important one nonetheless. Why? Because it can be easy to make the passage say what we want it to say. What we are seeking is for the text to say what God wants it to say.

The tendency for some may be to go straight to a biblical commentary or Study Bible, which are resources written by biblical theologians that help you understand the passage if you are struggling with what you are reading. These are great to use and we will include some recommendations at the end of this chapter, but I want to encourage you do the following things first as you ask yourself what God is saying in the passage you are reading.

First, look at words and phrases of the passage that repeat or are jumping out to you. Write any and all of these words or phrases down under the heading: “GOD SAID” in your journal.

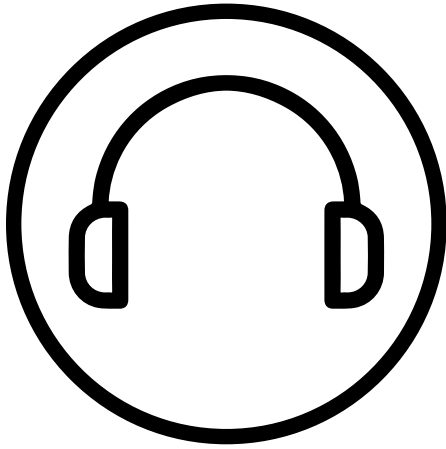
Maybe there are words, phrases or ideas that you don’t understand on the first read. Reread the passage if you need to, then pause and take time to reflect on them.

Asking questions about the passage can also reveal what the text is saying.

- Is this a story? If so, what’s the story about?
- Where do I see God’s presence in what I read? Where Do I see God’s promises in what I read? Where do I see God’s power in what I read?
- What does the passage say about me, about humanity or my identity in Christ?
- Is there a truth to embrace? Something to respond to? Something to confess or repent of? Something to be encouraged by?

As you're reading, if anything jumps out at you, make sure to write it down. Think of the 'God Said' portion of your study as a large bucket where you collect all of the words and phrases that God is saying in this passage.

Make a list, there may be quite a few, that's ok. Once you feel that you have written everything down that jumps out to you, you're ready to proceed to the next step of the tool: *I Heard*.



I HEARD

HOW IS THE HOLY SPIRIT MAKING WHAT I READ PERSONAL IN MY LIFE?

The fact of the matter is that we could just walk away at this point. We've put in some time. We've done some studying and reflecting. We could check off the spiritual box for the day.

If that is all we do, we approach the Word like any atheist could, simply trying to understand what an ancient text says. But that's not what we are after.

We want to draw close to the heart of the Father and to hear what He is saying. As John Stott says, *"We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior."*

One of the things we lose sight of is that we are not just reading God's Word, God's Word is also reading us. Hebrews 4:12 says, *"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."*

The Holy Spirit is working. He leads and guides us as our Helper in order for us to hear and discern what God wants to say to us from His Word to our situations in life. He is the one making the words come alive personally in our hearts.

So the question is not, "Is God speaking?" God is speaking! The question is, "What am I hearing?"

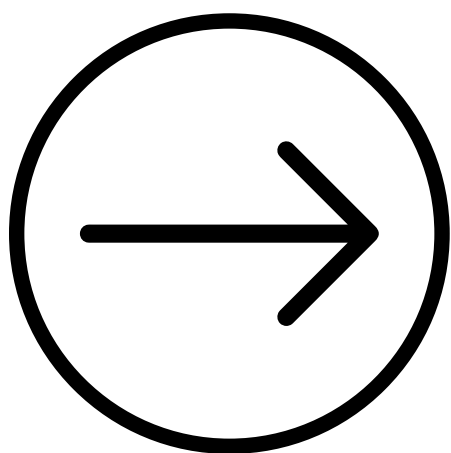
Take a moment to glance back at what you wrote down first about how you are feeling today. Now look back at the list you just made in the God Said portion. Do any of these things that God has said directly address what you are experiencing

today? From what you have heard God say, what's hitting you in a very personal way?

David, in Psalm 139, said, *“Search me and know me. Test me and know my anxious heart!”*

This is why I said that the passage of God's Word is reading us. Something is standing out to us. What's going on in my life that this passage is speaking to? Is there a lie I'm believing? Is there something God wants me to do that the Word is revealing to me? Is He inviting me to understand my identity in Christ at a deeper level?

As you identify something you've heard, again write it down under the heading “I HEARD.” Now that you've heard what the Lord wants to say to you today, you are ready to proceed to the final step of the Bible Reading Tool: *I Will*.



I WILL

WHERE DO I NEED TO BE OBEDIENT TODAY FROM WHAT I READ?

Believing something doesn't mean we just acknowledge a collection of facts somewhere out there in the wild blue yonder. No. If you want to know what someone really, truly, honestly believes, you look at his or her pattern of life.

Leonard Ravenhill, one of the great saints of the 20th century, once said, *“One of these days some simple soul will pick up the Book of God, read it, and believe it. Then the rest of us will be embarrassed.”*

We are not meant just to understand the Word. We are not meant only to hear the Word. No. We are meant to believe it and be formed by it through our obedience.

In James chapter 1, the author warns us to not simply be “hearers of the Word” but to be doers, so that we are not deceived. As disciples, when we approach God's Word we must regularly choose to cross the threshold from hearing to obeying in order to experience transformation and to become spiritually mature.

Every time you come to God's Word, in the back of your mind should be two questions:

1. What is God saying?

2. What am I going to do about it?

The expectation when I go to God's Word is that it will invite me to take steps of obedience to experience life in Christ in such a way that would not happen otherwise. Obeying God's Word is how I begin to see how Jesus makes a difference in not just my eternity but also my everyday life.

That's why we use the phrase "I Will" - what WILL I do in response to what God has said to me today?

Resist the urge to make your I WILL too generic or vague, consider these guidelines:

- ▶ **Make it personal** - What does obedience from what I read look like for me specifically? Is there something specific He wants YOU to do?
- ▶ **Make it practical** - How can I practically apply this to my life today? What is a realistic, clear way to respond so that I will know when I've done it?
- ▶ **Make it urgent** - When am I going to be obedient and act on what God has said to me?

Next Step

Oftentimes obedience to what God has said may be a multi-step process or perhaps there are parts of what that obedience looks like that may remain yet undefined, if so just remember the simple phrase "Next Step". What is a Next Step I could take today to be obedient to what God has shown me. Perhaps I need to pick up the phone and call a friend who I've hurt, or maybe I need to confess sin to God or acknowledge wrongdoing to a neighbor. Maybe I need to simply worship today reflecting on God's promises or slow down to wait on Him to act.

Once you've identified your 'I Will', write it down and make a plan to take that step at some point during your day. Additionally, think further about your "I Will" as your day goes on, chew on it and meditate on it throughout the day as God may have more to say the more we meditate on it.

What is the end result when we consistently obey the things God has said? It is summed up in Jeremiah 15:16: *"Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O Lord, God of hosts."*

Obedience to the things God has said brings joy. His Word and His ways are sweet to the soul.

Keep It Up

Like anything else that you're learning to do, reading and applying God's Word takes time and practice. And while the Bible Reading Tool is certainly not the only way to read God's Word, it will equip you to both read and apply God's Word on your own and equip you to teach someone else how to do the same.

Don't skip asking that important question at the beginning of your reading, "What am I Feeling?" This question really paints a bullseye on your heart for God's Word to target. Though the Holy Spirit already knows what you need, answering this question will help YOU see what you need and open your ears spiritually to listen for Him.

So rest in that. Trust the fact that if you are a son or daughter of God, He wants nothing more than to speak to you each day through the Word that He's given us. As you continue to grow in seeing His Word as the primary way He wants to communicate to you, you'll grow in your enjoyment of the relationship you have with Him through Jesus Christ.

Try it Out

Using the sample on the next page, use the steps of the Bible Reading Tool to read Psalm 63. Take as long as you need but don't leave your time in God's Word until you have identified at least one thing in each section.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth - Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart

Reading and Understanding the Bible - Ben Witherington III

CSB Study Bible

Gospel Transformation Bible

Preaching the Word Commentary Set

PSALM 63

1 God, you are my God; I eagerly seek you.

I thirst for you;

my body faints for you

in a land that is dry, desolate, and without water.

2 So I gaze on you in the sanctuary

to see your strength and your glory.

3 My lips will glorify you

because your faithful love is better than life.

4 So I will bless you as long as I live;

at your name, I will lift up my hands.

5 You satisfy me as with rich food;

my mouth will praise you with joyful lips.

6 When I think of you as I lie on my bed,

I meditate on you during the night watches

7 because you are my helper;

I will rejoice in the shadow of your wings.

8 I follow close to you;

your right hand holds on to me.

9 But those who intend to destroy my life

will go into the depths of the earth.

10 They will be given over to the power of the sword;

they will become a meal for jackals.

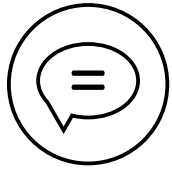
11 But the king will rejoice in God;

all who swear by him will boast,

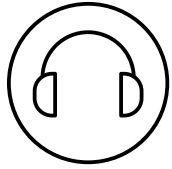
for the mouths of liars will be shut.

DATE _____ PASSAGE _____

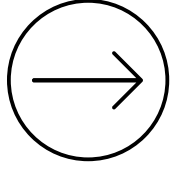
I'M FEELING: _____



GOD SAID: _____



I HEARD: _____



I WILL: _____



SALEM CHAPEL