

Thursday Nights Going Deeper: “Finding Life in the Scriptures”

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Welcome!

We are grateful you have chosen to join us for this important look into the Word of God—the Bible, which is often called “the scriptures.” The Word of God is key to knowing an experiencing God in the fullest way. Yet, it can be a daunting challenge to step into the Bible, navigate its

confusing structure, and make sense of how each passage of scripture is relevant and applicable to our busy lives today. In this “Going Deeper” series, we’ll learn how to study the Bible in a way that brings life to every passage and give you the ability to learn God’s heart on a daily basis from God’s Word.

What You Will Need:

- **Nametags** – Sharpie markers and nametags are provided for you. Please take the time to make your name visible so we can work on getting to know one another on a personal, first-name basis.
- **Internet access** – You will want to have along with you a laptop or smart-phone/iPad for Bible searches we will be doing through online tools on certain weeks; we will provide internet access point and login information on markerboard each week.
- **There will be an online option for this class if you need it** – each week we will have an online host leading discussions with those who choose to be online, or if there are only a few online, we may pair online participants with a small group on site for our discussion time.
- **Handout materials** – Each week, we will be providing you with teaching notes and take-home materials.

What We Will Do:

- 7:00 – 7:05 – **Loose conversation** / welcome / housekeeping notes / snacks
- 7:05 – 7:10 – **Opening monologue** / prayer / introductory comments / purpose
- 7:10 – 7:20 – **Break into small groups** for opening discussion
- 7:20 – 7:25 – **Come back to the large group for feedback** / what was experienced?
- 7:25 – 8:00 – **Primary content teaching** / large-group discussion
- 8:00 – 8:25 – **Break back into small groups** for Group Discussion / Lab exercise
- 8:25 – 8:30 – **Come back to the large group for feedback** / what was experienced?

What We Will Discover:

September 8: “How to Use the Bible”

The Bible promises to be a living and active text that can transform your life. It promises light, direction, insight, and guidance. It promises to be a source of victory and strength to you. In this important “Going Deeper” session, we will collaborate on the best practices you can build into your life to better understand the Bible, how to use it to its fullest potential, and how to build effective habits to make this book truly come alive!

September 15: “How to Make Sense of the Bible”

Where do you struggle to understand the Bible? Where do you feel the most confused? Where do you feel the most uneducated? What troubles you about the Bible? What do you wish you knew or understood better? The Bible can be a very daunting and overwhelming book. It is complex, made up of many ancient texts collected over more than 1,500 years. Join us as we orient you to the big picture, provide the important historical context to make sense of it, and give you the practical tools to understand it and apply it to your modern life.

September 22: “How to Overcome Doubts About the Bible”

Where do you struggle with the Bible’s authority, relevance, or trustworthiness? What do your non-Christian friends think or say about the Bible? What are the most common arguments they make against the Bible being a trustworthy source of spiritual guidance? Join us for this highly interactive discussion as we go deeper into the details of the cultural relevance, authority, and trustworthiness of the Bible.

September 29: “How to Overcome the Enemy Through the Bible”

If you could have God supernaturally touch just one aspect of your life (*or your loved ones*) what would it be? What stands in the way of that breakthrough for you? Where might unseen spiritual forces be working against God in that area? Join us for a powerful discussion on how to use the Bible to gain supernatural help and live as overcomers in every situation!

October 6: “How to Overcome in Life Through the Bible”

Are there typical habits, patterns of thought or worldview, reactions to pressures and stress in your life that are less helpful than you wish they were? Do you wish you had better tools to overcome the ordinary challenges of life? Would your life be exponentially better if you had more effective life skills? Join us as we explore how to use the Bible to uniquely overcome stress, difficulties, and challenges and to live with joyful abundance in everything we face!

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Thursday Nights Going Deeper: “Finding Life in the Scriptures”

Week 1 – How to Use the Bible



Opening discussion: Each week we will break into different small groups to engage in relational, easy-going conversation to discover how each of us process the topics at hand, consider what challenges we may be experiencing with this topic, and “crowd-source” solutions and ideas to take our engagement with God’s Word to the next level.

As we begin today, move rather quickly...spend just a minute or two with each person in your small group and discuss: *Where have you been with Bible...what is your typical experience with the Word? What do you do on a regular basis to be in the Word? How is it helpful? Where do you feel insufficient? Where do you hope to go as we journey in this 6-week experience together?*

“Often we are so burdened and overwhelmed with other thoughts, images, and concerns that it may take a long time before God’s Word has swept all else aside and come through. But it will surely come, just as surely as God Himself has come to men and will come again. This is the very reason why we begin our meditation with the prayer that God may send His Holy Spirit to us through His Word and reveal His Word to us and enlighten us.”

(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*. Harper & Row Publishers, New York, 1954; page 82-83)

“Teach me, O Lord, to follow your decrees; then I will keep them to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find my delight. Turn my heart towards your statues and not towards selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word.”

Psalm 119:33-37

If you want to find life in spiritual matters, there is simply no shortcut. We must _____

the Word, _____ the Word, and _____ the Word.

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.”

Deuteronomy 29:29

“However, as it is written: ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him’—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of man except the man’s spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God....The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

1 Corinthians 2:9-11, 14

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:14-17

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”

Hebrews 4:12

Step One to Finding Life in the Scriptures

We must _____ the Word at the _____ (and _____) levels appropriate for where we each are in our _____.

- First, discern your own level of **interest**. Be honest. Set the **pace** within that interest level.
- Make a plan for how **often**, **where**, and **when** you will engage the Bible.



The Bible is to be used in more than one way. It is a living document, breathed of God, and if we apply it in several different ways, we will gain different value from it. It becomes a tool in God’s hand to guide us, direct us, mold us, challenge, and teach us.

- **Regular “Devotions”** – read through chapters; allow the Word to guide you topically; ask God to reveal to you the take-away; ask the “so what?” question; look for common human traits; keep a journal; mark your Bible.

- **Praying Scripture** – *find a passage that speaks to your need; change the “voice” to address God; pray the basic content but add your own words and desires.*
 - **Further Study from Sundays** – *keep good notes on Sunday mornings; review and dig deeper; ask God to guide you to specific application.*
 - **Memorize** – *highlight passages in your Bible; write out key passages you want to memorize; every day, go back and look over your marked verses; when you face evil, ask God to bring a verse to mind; speak out the Word over your circumstances.*
 - **Study thoroughly** – *read the text plainly; grasp the context; apply it appropriately.*
- It is OK [at first] to **skim** and **skip** through sections of the Bible that are **bogging** you down.

*Use our Appendix – We have created a set of tools for you to discover the Bible—cover-to-cover, from Genesis to Revelation—in 50 weeks. These tools are designed to guide you through what we call an “Audit Track”, where you will experience the Bible in **150 readings**, designed to take an approximately **15 to 20-minute commitment**, three times a week. These carefully selected passages will explore the most important stories in the Bible. You will also be provided important “**skim and skip**” notes where you will be guided to understand what is in each chapter of the Bible—including the ones you skip over—and where each chapter fits into the **overarching storyline** of the Bible.*

This content has been adapted from an in-depth 50-week study guide of the Bible entitled [Revealing the Relevant Word](#), published in 2010 by CrossCurrent Ministries. While the book is currently out of print, excerpts from each week are provided for you in the Appendix of this notebook.

- Where something in scriptures **catches** your interest, commit to a deeper **study**.
 - **A sermon or devotional reading** may catch your attention—study the passages your pastor presented or the devotional presented and dig deeper:
 - **Study the broader context** of the book of the Bible in which the passage that caught you is found.
 - **Read the full chapter** and surrounding chapters; ask how the context relates to the core concept you are studying.
 - **Use a study Bible, commentary, or online study tool** to look up the historical context and purpose of the book—who wrote it, to whom, why was it written, what are major themes, etc.?

Most texts in scripture are context-specific and spoken to the immediate circumstances of the readers. In these cases, we must find the meaning to our immediate circumstances by following a healthy process to draw out its meaning. Dr. Joseph Seaborn suggests the following formula:

☐ **One Time** – What did this mean in the one specific moment it was written? Who was it written to? Why was it written? What was being said to those readers at that time? This will be found in the plain reading of the text in light of historical context.

☐ **All Time** – What *principle* can be drawn from the text that applies to all points in time, for all cultures, in all circumstances? What timeless and objective truth is demonstrated? What attribute of God’s will is shown? This will be found by looking for the simple *transferable* concept imbedded in the plain reading of the text, looking past the historical context to all cultural contexts.

☐ **Our Time** – With the *all-time* principle in hand, what context to my own life relates to the truth presented in the text? What circumstance in my life is similar to the one presented in the text? What would it look like to apply the all-time principle to my particular circumstance.

(Note: This is where the leading of the Holy Spirit to speak to us personally is so important. Remember the promises that the Holy Spirit will lead us to the Word and truth (see John 14:26 and 1 John 2:27) But also, be careful to have done the first steps in the Healthy Interpretation Checklist first—know the plain meaning and grasp the context properly before just taking any impression you receive. Remember also that our own flesh—our own desires and selfish interests—can sometimes cloud our ability to objectively listen to God. While God would never tell us something that isn’t from Him, our ability to accurately hear God speak to our inner being is flawed. So we must screen all things we believe to be “hearing” from God first through the other principles of interpretation we are using here to “test the Spirit” we think we’re hearing to see if it really is from God (see 1 John :1-3).)

- Use the Bible **devotionally** to receive personal **guidance** and **hear** from God.
 - **Slow down** – this isn’t reading a novel, a newspaper, or a social media post.
 - **Ask God to reveal to you** the specific take-away for you.
 - **Ask the important “so-what” questions:**
 - What does this passage tell me about God?
 - What does this passage tell me about myself?
 - What should I do as a result?
 - **Look for the common traits** of humans.
 - How am I similar to people or points being made in the passage?
 - **Mark up your Bible** – highlight passages, make notes in margins.
 - **Keep a journal** – record what God is showing you.

Pro-Tip: You really need to use a **physical hard copy** of the Bible. Do not use an electronic copy only; having this sit in front of you where you can **soak, contemplate, meditate**, and have your **eyes wander** into more of the text is an essential part of the learning process. Reading it only in electronic form will short-change your ability for the Word of God to speak to you. Studying in the Bible in hard copy format will allow **visual learning and retention** to be a part of your experience. Being able to **mark it up** and **make notes** in the Bible will enhance not only your comprehension, but also how well you process and glean new concepts and ideas.

- **Memorize** key passages that speak to life **change**, spiritual **battle**, or practical **application**.
 - **Highlight** meaningful passages in your Bible.
 - **Write out by hand** passages you want to memorize.
 - **Review them regularly**—go back every day and skim over key passages you have chosen.
 - **Ask God to bring verses to mind** when you are in key stress points or spiritual battle.
 - **Claim them for yourself**—in faith, read these passages out loud over your circumstances.

Step Two to Finding Life in the Scriptures

We must _____ the Word of God as our spiritual _____ and spiritual _____ plan.

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Peter 1:3-4

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned...and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:14-17

- Use the Word to **build** your own **faith** .

“...faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

Romans 10:17

- Choose how **authoritative** you are **willing** to let the Word to be in your life.

“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

Joshua 24:15

“Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Joshua 1:7-8

- **Align** your life to **“do”** the Word.

“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.”

James 1:22-25

- Change your **mind** to live from a new **“filter”**.

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”

Romans 12:2

“...[we] have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.”

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

- Use the Word as a **sword** against the **enemy**.

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes....Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

Ephesians 6:10-11, 17

Group Exercise / Lab Experience:

Break back into your small groups for more in-depth discussion on tonight's topic. Pace yourselves and plan on 20 minutes for this discussion. Be sure to leave time for as many people to comment as would like on each other the core discussion points and be sure to leave time to pray for one another. Appoint someone to be timekeeper and help facilitate the discussion to keep us moving. Appoint someone else to take key notes of the most important concepts shared that can be quickly offered back to the large group at the end of our session tonight.

Use our Appendix (the Revealing Relevant Word model) to study individually or as group – look for learnings and discoveries using this technique:

- **Use Isaiah “Audit Track” content:** as group read through one of the three select texts and the Skim & Skip narrative.
- What do you discover through the skim & skip that creates a better context for the three texts you read?
- As a result of seeing that broader narrative, what do you see in terms of **“one time/all time / our time”** application to your life?
- Report back to the larger group your experiences—what did you find helpful? What was awkward? What did you learn?

If you want to go deeper:

- Have someone (or several) share a real-life example (in you or in a loved one) of an issue where you (or they) need God's supernatural guidance.
- **Very important:** As individuals share, resist the urge to move into problem-solving mode. Do not share ideas or responses...do not go to “have you tried this?” or “when I was in a similar situation, I tried this.”
 - Rather, be exclusive in this one next step: work together as a group to find scriptures that may speak to the issue. Can you find Bible verses that are in the same subject or concept that is needing answers?
 - Use www.BibleGateway.com to find verses.
- Pray from these verses over one another.

Appendix to Week One: Some Suggested “Starting Points”

There are several ways to begin a structured lifestyle of study. No one way is right. What is most important is to find and build a plan that serves the needs and rhythms of your life, as well as the spiritual interests and hunger you have. We’ll break our suggestions into a couple of categories:

- The structure of the lifestyle
- The activities (or “path”) of study we take

The Structure of the Lifestyle

To achieve anything in life that requires our focused attention, we must create time for that activity. While our American culture creates the impression that we have no time, the truth is we have as much time each day as any human has ever had or ever will. The question is not how much time we have; the question is how we choose to use that time.

Knowing that we are busy people, there is value to structuring our lives around “blocks” of time where we are engaged purposefully in the chosen activity. We already do this. For example, if you work or attend school, the hours you are required to be in attendance are usually firmly set, they are routine, and they have a definitive “start” and “stop” time. Or, if you play sports or participate in theater, music or some other volunteer program, the same is true. You “block” the time for that activity, and you commit to being there for that specific duration. You’ve done that very thing to attend this class!!

SO...if you want to be a student of God’s Word, structure it! Block consistent time for study once a week, twice a week, daily...no particular frequency is “right.” But the key is to make the commitment, make it regular, at the same time every week.

Some suggestions include:

- Use the schedule of your work or school day to block 30 minutes—either on a lunch or coffee break, or on the way home stopping off at a coffee-shop the same day every week to study, or study while you commute (if you’re not driving!!).
- Commit to a one- or two-hour block once a week on a specific weeknight, or a weekend.
- Commit to a weekly regimen of study on Sunday morning before church (if you’re an early riser), or on Sunday night before bed.
- Plan 30 minutes into your current hygiene schedule—30 minutes before your shower in the morning, or 30 minutes after you get ready for bed.
- If you have a family, plan family study time around your kids’ homework sessions—when you have your kids doing homework, you commit to studying God’s Word at the same time. What an example you’ll set for your kids!!

One more thing...

Some other activities may have to be delayed for you to craft genuine time with God. Maybe the chores will get done less frequently, and you might let the dishes pile up in the sink one night a week so you can study the Word. Or maybe your kids will have to play in one less soccer league or take on one less evening activity so your family can

gather around the Word. Or perhaps you will have to draw tighter boundaries at work, and work a few less hours of overtime, telling your boss you have a family or religious commitment.

In the end, when life is over, we need to reflect on what we want to look back and see. Do we want our life's legacy to be a clean house, kids with 12 soccer trophies rather than 10, two more promotions in our career instead of one...or do we want to look over our life and see that we lived with a wild and unconditional devotion to God, we knew His Word intimately, and we were used mightily for His purposes?

You're not crazy if you make this your highest priority!!

The Activities of Devotional Study

Once you've learned the skills of critical study and have found the right time, space and structure to investing in God's Word, you need to have something specific to do. The options are endless, but here are a few ideas:

- Build yourself a series of topical studies to research key concepts you want to fully understand.
- Study through a timeline of some point of history in the Bible.
- Follow a key character through the Bible and study their journey with God.
- Study systematically through a specific book of the Bible, or a series of books.
- Study through the Bible (or some portion thereof) from start to finish, in sequential order to how the books are placed in the Bible.
- Study through the Bible's storyline from start to finish (or some portion thereof) in chronological sequence, which is not necessarily the order in which it is laid out.

Rules for Devotional Use of the Bible

This is reading the Bible for encouragement, perspective, rebuke, challenge, worship, and guidance for our lives. In devotional reading, we let God speak to us gently and personally.

- ***Read systematically through books or chapters*** – at times, you should let God set the agenda by letting “what’s next” in the text be the message for you. If you are on a systematic plan of reading in order through books of the Bible, then you’ll not just be looking for what you think you need. God will have something to show you.
 - But...when reading through an entire chapter or book, be sure to have a commentary, or a Bible with study notes or interpretations along with you, so you can make sense of what you’re reading.
- ***At times, allow the Word to guide you topically*** – instead of reading systematically through books or chapters at a time, you can look up themes or subjects. Use the concordance or the subject index to look up a matter that is on your heart at the moment. Look up many verses on the same subject to get a broad feel for what God might be trying to say.

- **Keep good notes on Sunday mornings** – whenever you listen to a teaching, take good notes, either in the margin of your Bible, or on the pastor’s teaching outline, or on the back of a bulletin, or in a notebook.
- **When you review, dig deeper** – follow cross-references from the passages the pastor teaches on. Look up additional verses that you find, or that come to your mind.
- **Ask God to reveal to you the specific “take-away” for you** – you will need the Holy Spirit to help you make the right application. We might think we know what a passage means, or we might see an immediate truth that seems relevant. But if God wants to say something more, then let Him! Ask Him to fulfill His promise:

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

John 14:26

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.”

1 John 1:27

- **Ask the “so what” question** – when you read, once you’ve comprehended the basic meaning of the text, then ask yourself, “so what?” Ask yourself what you have in common with the essential point of the text? What aspect of your life needs to listen to the teachings of the text?
- **When reading a narrative story, look for the common traits of humans** – humans are all pretty much alike! Ask yourself how you would likely behave in a similar storyline in your life. What do you have in common with the characters? What would make you act like they did? What do you think God wants to say to you through this story?
- **Keep a journal** – Write down passages and things you’ve learned. Write down things you think God might be saying to you, or things you think you need to apply. Go back and read over the journal from time to time to see how you’ve applied what God taught you.
- **Mark your Bible** – use a highlighter or pen to underline passages that have spoken to you. Make notes in the margin about things you are learning, messages God has for you, or something that will help you remember a key point of insight or understanding you’ve gained.

Appendix Two for Week One: An “Audit Track” example from Isaiah

Isaiah 46-66

Some call the last section of Isaiah (chapters 40-66) “The Book of Comfort” because it declared the promises of God for the ultimate redemption, restoration, and healing of His people. Through the prophet, God promised that His “servant” would come to restore Israel—understood by the Jews to be the Messiah. But this servant would also face suffering on the road to his glory, providing the clearest Old Testament prophecy to the sufferings of Jesus. Even though much of Isaiah’s prophecies in this section of scripture are yet to be fulfilled in the end times, it is clear that the establishment of God’s perfect kingdom is the purpose to which everything is building. This section was written much later in Isaiah’s life, after the northern nation of Israel had been carried into exile in Assyria, but before the southern Judah was taken captive by Babylon.

- ❑ **Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12:** *In what is perhaps the clearest Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus Christ, healing and forgiveness would come from the suffering of the Messiah. This prophecy was essential to distinguish the true purpose of Messiah from the mere political deliverance the Jews of Isaiah’s time would have simply hoped for.*

- ❑ **Read Isaiah 56:1-8 & 58:1-14:** *As God promised restoration to Israel, He also called for that restoration to be marked by social justice. Acceptance of foreigners, keeping the Sabbath as a day of worship to God, and serving the needs of the oppressed and poor were expected of the remnant being restored.*

- ❑ **Read Isaiah 55:1-13 & 61:11:** *God called to the thirsty, poor, and brokenhearted, inviting them to draw life and healing from Him. Spoken prophetically to the future captives, these passages described the supernatural work the Word of God would do, and the liberty He would bring. Jesus taught from Isaiah 61:1-3 to open his public ministry.*

Skim & Skip: As Judah neared her own judgment and exile at the hands of the **Babylonians**, Isaiah turned his prophecy against Babylon itself. God would use them to judge Judah, but they faced their own **destruction** as well (Isa. 46-47). Pleading for Judah to **listen** to Him (Isa. 48), God promised **restoration** (Isa. 49-52, 54). **Justice** was a key theme throughout Isaiah—Israel’s injustice offered as **rationale** for God’s judgment, and a **return** to justice as the mark of restoration (Isa. 57-59). Isaiah concluded his prophecy with words from God describing the **glory** of a renewed **Zion** (Isa. 60-62), His vengeance against the enemies of Israel (Isa. 63), Isaiah **praising** God and calling for Him to come with deliverance (Isa. 63-64), and final descriptions of both **judgment** and **hope** (Isa. 65-66).