ABIDE

Everyday practices for staying close to Jesus

through scripture



Book 2

Why Abide?

Nearly all households in America own at least one Bible, according to research from the Barna Group. And over half believe it contains everything a person needs to live a meaningful life. But only 16% claim to read it most days of the week. Most Christians want to read the Bible more than they actually do. We often feel like we are too busy or that the Bible is too hard to understand. Often we treat the Bible like a handbook rather than a story that leads to Jesus.

For many of us, studying the Bible is like flossing—we know we should do it, we exaggerate how much we actually do it, and we endure each sporadic attempt because we know it's good for us.

For some, reading the Bible is like eating Grape Nuts cereal straight out of the box—dry and boring but reasonably sustaining.

But for others, reading the Bible is a feast—beautiful, varied, rich food that you can't get enough of.

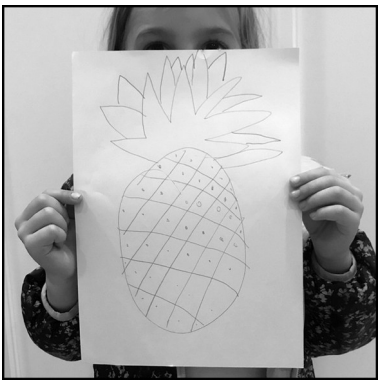
In Book 1, we read Psalm 19, which says God's Word is sweeter than honey, but that's a taste most of us have not yet acquired. Many passages in the Bible compare God's Word to food. Just like we need food to nourish our physical bodies, we need Scripture to nourish us spiritually, to transform our lives and make us healthy and flourishing, like Jesus. Remember, Jesus said he is the vine and we are the branches—the good fruit in our lives comes from our abiding connection to Jesus, particularly his word. That's why this series is called Abide.

This guide continues the everyday practices that keep us close to Jesus. Book 1 focused on prayer; this one focuses

on Scripture. As before, it works well on your own, and even better together—in DNA groups, in Missional Communities, and at our Sunday gatherings.

We will be using a method of studying the Bible that millions of people around the world have used. It's simple, tested, effective, and useful if you are brand new to the Bible or if you are an expert theologian. But it's not magic, it's just a tool.

Consider a child and a professional artist both using a pencil. Though very different, both these images are immediately identifiable as a pineapple, and they both have a certain beauty. But the pro demonstrates uncommon mastery of a simple tool we've all used. Very few people can draw something like that in a single day. There's no substitute for practice when developing skill with a tool, but there can be tremendous value every step of the way. Please don't give up or feel ashamed because you're not an expert yet—we're all on a journey.



My First Pineapple
by Callie Olsen, Age 6



Pineapple on Hermes by CJ Hendry
instagram.com/cj_hendry

Our initial goal is that you have a simple tool to help read the Bible and that you get some practice using it. The ultimate goal is that you experience God himself through

his Word, that you develop an insatiable appetite for it, and that the Holy Spirit uses the Word to make you a mature, thriving disciple of Jesus. Not just these four weeks, but for the rest of your life.

Imagine what it might be like if we all press in and learn to abide in Jesus more and more. Jesus never promised his disciples an easy life (in fact, the opposite), yet more of Jesus means more love, more joy, more peace, more confidence, more humility, more faith, more hope...

So, Soma family, let's press in and abide in Jesus through his Word, spurring each other on, expectant that Jesus will nourish our souls.

The Gospel of John

As a church we believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus. Every book in the Bible sits somewhere on a grand, redemptive story arc that climaxes in the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are four books of the Bible called gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. They sit at the climax of the biblical story, telling of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and also recording much of Jesus' teaching. The Gospel of John was written by one of Jesus' 12 apostles who was with him for the three years of his public ministry and was one of Jesus' inner circle. In this guide, the book of John will be our focus—we'll read it and practice how to learn from it. Many people point brand new disciples to John as a great first book of the Bible to read, and it's also a deep ocean of rich truth about Jesus that all of us can come back to over and over in our journey of faith. The next four weeks will be our first pass at John together—and in Book 5, we'll come back to John for a deeper look.

Near the end of the book, John states the purpose of his account, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." He wrote this so his readers would believe in Jesus and have the abundant life Jesus describes. Note that John uses the word "signs." He selected seven special events in Jesus' life he calls "signs" so that we may believe —keep an eye out for those.

How to use this guide

This little booklet is your guide for the next four weeks. Keep it with your Bible, write down what you are learning, and bring what you're hearing into your conversations with the church family.

Three practices, two journeys

The Abide series is six small books—three everyday practices for staying close to Jesus, each visited twice:

	Prayer	**Scripture**	**Slow Down**
First Journey Books 1–3	**Book 1** Meditation & the 3Rs of prayer	**Book 2 — *this book*** The Gospel of John—Observe, Interpret, Apply	**Book 3** Silence & fasting
Second Journey Books 4–6	**Book 4** The Circles & Cycles of prayer	**Book 5** John again—the I-am statements	**Book 6** Sabbath & solitude

Read the books in order and you'll walk through all three practices twice. Want to focus on one practice? Follow its column. If you're new, any book in the First Journey row is a good place to start. And remember, these practices never expire—coming back to any of these books, any time, is simply growing deeper.

Every morning

Plan for at least 10 minutes. Even if you are not a "morning person," there is something significant about putting the Father first in the morning just like we see Jesus often doing in the gospels. You'll probably need to set your alarm a tad earlier. Grab a Bible—a real, physical, paper Bible is ideal. Our phones and computers come with many

distractions that we can avoid by going old-school. Have a pen handy. You may also want a journal or notebook if you prefer writing there.

On your own or together

This book works on its own—just you, a Bible, and a few minutes each morning. But discipleship is a community project, so it's even better with others.

Each week ends with conversation starters for a DNA group and for a Missional Community. If you're going through the book with either one, use those pages when you gather. And if you're on your own, don't skip them—let them prompt your journaling, or borrow one for a conversation with a friend who loves Jesus. These practices are personal, but they were never meant to be private.

However you go through it, bring what you're learning when the church family gathers. Stories of God meeting people in these practices encourage the whole body.

DNA groups

DNA stands for Discover, Nurture, Act—it's a very small group of men or women (usually three or four) who discover Jesus together through the Bible, nurture one another with the gospel, and help each other act in ways that line up with Jesus' teaching. If you'd like to join one, talk to your Missional Community leaders or one of the elders.

Missional Communities

Missional Communities are the primary way we follow Jesus' command to make disciples, living out what it

means to be a good family of brothers and sisters, to serve like Jesus served, and be missionaries to our neighborhoods. If you're not yet a part of one, ask an elder or whoever you know best in the church to help get you connected.

We hope you use this guide every day.

Week One

We're starting off super simple and asking you to set aside 10 minutes a day. This week, we're going to read the book of John all the way through like a story. It's not as daunting as it might sound. In most Bibles, the book of John is less than 30 pages long. So, you'll only read about four pages a day. Conveniently, John has 21 chapters; that's three chapters a day for seven days. If you're on the slower end of the average adult reading pace, this will take about 10 minutes a day. That's less time than the average YouTube video.

We want this process to be very accessible, so this week, you'll breeze through three chapters without much else to do. Read it more like you're reading a novel to enjoy than a textbook to study. You're getting the high-level view of the whole book before you dig into any one section. After reading the three chapters, highlight one or two things you noticed—maybe something jumped off the page for you, maybe something provoked a question, led you to pray, or sparked your imagination. Whatever it is, you'll mark it so that you can find it easily when you meet with your Missional Community and DNA group.

Of course, if you make time for it, there's more you can do to really engage this week. Here are some ideas for going deeper:

- **Journal:** write down some thoughts and questions from the reading.
- **Pray:** use the 3Rs pattern of prayer we practiced in Book 1. Let the chapters you read be a springboard for Rejoicing, Repenting, and Requesting in prayer.

- **Read it all at once:** Students of the Bible have found it very rewarding to read an entire book in one sitting as they begin studying it. That will likely take you over an hour for John, but if you can make the time to do that during this week, you will almost certainly notice things and see connections you never knew were there before.
- **Read it again:** If you make the time for it, re-reading the chapters can help you see things you didn't even notice the first time. Maybe you read the chapters in the morning and then again that night. Or maybe you read them on your own and then again with someone in your household. Or read them in the morning and listen to them in the car.
- **Watch the videos:** You'll find links to animated videos from the Bible Project that help give you a sense of John's structure, themes, and more.

Day 1

Just like the first book of the Bible, the gospel of John starts with, "In the beginning." And before the story starts, there's a poetic introduction with cosmic claims about Jesus.

Read John chapters 1–3.

Highlight what stood out to you. Something interesting, something you have a question about, etc. You can underline or highlight in your Bible or jot down the reference here.

Have 2 more minutes? Watch the first minute and a half of the Bible Project's animated Overview of John 1–12, which briefly introduces the whole book.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/john-1-12

Have 10 more minutes? Watch the full video intro to John 1–12 from the Bible Project.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/john-1-12

Day 2

These chapters begin with Jesus breaking all kinds of cultural norms by having a one-on-one with the last person anyone at the time would have expected. And enjoy chapter 6—it's packed!

Read John chapters 4–6.

Highlight what stood out to you. Something interesting, something you have a question about, etc. You can underline or highlight in your Bible or jot down the reference here.

Have 5 more minutes? Write down questions you had as you read today. Something confusing? Something you want to know more about? Something you wonder?

Day 3

In these chapters, we see escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders as Jesus teaches, heals, and interacts with people.

Read John chapters 7–9.

Highlight what stood out to you.

Five minutes or more to go deeper? Pray with the 3Rs pattern using what you just read as a springboard to Rejoice, Repent, and Request.

Day 4

In the middle of today's reading is the story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, the culmination of his miraculous signs. We now enter into the second half of the book of John.

Read John chapters 10–12.

Highlight what stood out to you.

Have 1 more minute? Watch the first 50 seconds of the Bible Project's Overview of John 13–21, which briefly summarizes chapters 1–12.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/john-13-21

Five minutes or more to go deeper? Ponder the question, why did Jesus weep when he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead? Write down your thoughts. Later, chat with your DNA group or others about it and what this says about Jesus.

Day 5

Today, we'll read most of Jesus' "Farewell Discourse." And in chapter 15, he introduces the metaphor of the vine and the branches. That's been a very important idea for us in this Abide series—it's the very idea the series is named for. We are spiritually nourished only through an abiding connection with Jesus, and this is one of the last key things he wanted to leave his disciples with.

Read John chapters 13–15.

Highlight what stood out to you.

Five minutes or more to go deeper? What would it look like for you to abide in Jesus more than you do now? What would need to change? Do you believe that change is worth it? Write it down and tell someone about it.

Have 10 more minutes? Watch the video intro to John 13–21 from the Bible Project.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/john-13-21

Day 6

The Farewell Discourse ends with what is often called Jesus' "High-Priestly Prayer." Did you realize he prays for you in it? We are "those who will believe" through the word of his disciples like John who wrote this.

Read John chapters 16–18.

Highlight what stood out to you.

Got three more minutes? Did you know that right now Jesus, the high priest, is seated at the right hand of the Father interceding on our behalf? Imagine for a moment Jesus as your defense lawyer, and every time you rebel against God, he presents the evidence to the Judge of his death and resurrection that clears your name.

Five minutes or more to go even deeper? In John 17, Jesus prays for a mind-blowing type of unity—that we would be one with each other and with him just like he is one with the Father. What!? Meditate on that and write down your thoughts and questions.

Day 7

Today we finish the book of John with Jesus' death and resurrection—the very heart of our faith. Be ready to share something from this experience with the church family the next time you gather.

If you've gotten behind this week, carve out some time today to catch up and go into the next week having read the whole book. Even if you are just starting today, in a little over an hour you can likely read the whole book—it's probably about 30 pages in your Bible.

Read John chapters 19–21.

Highlight what stood out to you.

Got an extra 2 minutes? Jot down one or two highlights of all your highlights. What stood out to you the most out of the whole book of John?

A little deeper? Why do you think those super-highlights came to mind? Flesh out your thoughts about them.

Want to make a stronger foundation? Reading the whole book in one sitting is a great way to strengthen your understanding, see connections, and prepare you to study the book. It will probably take you just over an hour. Another option is to listen to the book while you are working in the yard, cleaning the house, doing laundry, cooking, exercising, driving to work, or whatever you might be doing on a Saturday. There are many options between mobile apps and websites where you can listen to audio of the Bible. Here's one: https://www.biblestudytools.com/audio-bible/nlt/john

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Find the passages you highlighted in John so far this week, and simply read them to each other.

What intrigues you about what you read? What questions do you have?

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

In your time together, have someone pick a passage from John that you've read so far this week. Pick a longish story rather than a very short one. And read it out loud together in a translation that is different from what the group is most used to. You might try:

- New Living Translation (a very readable thought-for-thought translation)
- The Message (a translation striving to capture the rhythm, idioms, and flavor of the original)
- Living Bible (a classic, easy-reading paraphrase)
- King James Version (a landmark English translation —from Shakespeare's era)

If you want a suggestion for a passage, try John 4:1–42. It's the story of the woman at the well.

Simply read the story out loud together and chat about what stands out to you and what questions it raises.

Week Two

Now that we've read the Gospel of John all the way through, we're going to slow down a bit and look more deeply at a handful of passages in the book and practice a simple method of studying the Bible that millions of people around the world have used to better understand the Bible and allow God to transform their lives.

John 15:1–17

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are

my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another."

The three key words to remember for this process are: **Observe, Interpret, Apply**.

In a nutshell, when looking at a biblical passage, you will ask, "What's there?" (Observe), "What's it mean?" (Interpret), and "So what?" (Apply). Formally, this method is called Inductive Bible Study. It's one of those things that seems obvious but yet can be profound. It is a simple tool, but with practice can produce amazing results. Remember the pencil drawings from the intro?

We'll start by spending a few days in one passage, giving you many tips on how to make the most of these three steps.

Day 1

Begin with prayer like the psalmist who says, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." (Psalm 119:18)

Read John 15:1–17

Sherlock Holmes had a knack for noticing small details everyone else missed. Seemingly insignificant and minor observations were often the key to unraveling a mystery. Everyone at the scene would have the same details in front of them, but only Sherlock noticed many and drew the connections. It's the same with the Bible—we all have the same details in front of us, and what separates one student of the Bible from another begins with what they notice.

Like the work of a detective or a research scientist or a portrait painter, studying the Bible is built on a foundation of observation. Spending solid time observing pays off when we get to the work of interpreting and applying the text. If you want to understand the grand narrative of the Bible and how it points to Jesus... If you want the Bible to shape you and how you look at the world... If you want to be captivated by who God is and what he's done... It all starts with careful observations of biblical texts. The interpretation and application we build won't be stronger than the observation that undergirds them.

It is so tempting to skip over observation and jump right into the other steps, but we are far more likely to misinterpret and misapply the Bible when we skimp on observing. At first we can feel like our observations are too obvious or insignificant, but stick with it. One secret to getting great observations is the same as the secret to getting great photos—you need to take a lot of them to end up with some great ones. And you don't always know

which ones will be great at first. A huge barrier to making lots of observations is a been-there-done-that attitude. If we come to a text thinking we can skip observing because we're very familiar with it, we will miss much of what God is offering us through his Word. So, let's foster our curiosity when it comes to the Bible, approach it with fresh eyes, and not rush through the Observe step.

Our practice with biblical meditation in Book 1 sets the stage for thinking deeply about Scripture beginning with observations. So, let's walk through a handful of observations from John 15:1–17 together. I (Justin Kuravackal) will point out a few things I noticed, let you in on what I was thinking along the way, and share some tips I've found helpful. Tomorrow, you'll make more observations of your own with a few suggestions to guide you.

A few observations while reading John 15:1–17

The very first word of John 15 is "I." So it seems like we are jumping into the middle of something, and to begin with, we need to know who the "I" is. We only got one, single letter into the passage, and I already have a question about the text, "Who is speaking?" To be certain, I have to back up all the way to verse 23 of the previous chapter where a quotation starts with "Jesus answered him..." As much as possible, I'm putting out of my mind the fact that I've read, discussed, and heard sermons on this passage before. I want the text to speak for itself, and I'm trying to own my understanding more than borrow it. So, I don't want to assume it's Jesus, I want to see proof in the text to answer my question if possible.

OK, so I know Jesus is speaking, but who is he talking to? We read the whole book of John last week, to get familiar with the flow of thought and the whole context of the

book. From that, we know that chapter 15 is part of the "Farewell Discourse" which captures some of Jesus' last teaching to his disciples. At the beginning of chapter 13, we see that they celebrated Passover together (the "Last Supper"), and in the sentence right before our passage, Jesus says, "Rise, let us go from here." But it's not until the beginning of chapter 18 that we see where they went—the garden where Jesus will be arrested. So, as Jesus teaches the disciples about this vine and branches metaphor, they are walking to the spot where he will be betrayed and captured—the turning point that leads to his death.

There's also a larger context. We always approach the whole Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus, so an important part of observation is to locate this text on that grand redemptive story arc. The climax of the biblical narrative is the death and resurrection of Jesus, and we are almost there. It's late Thursday night before Jesus is crucified on Friday and raised on Sunday. It's the calm before the storm that Jesus knows is coming. That makes me think maybe there's extra weight to these words.

Now to dig into the passage itself. The metaphor of the vine and branches seems to be central to this passage—it keeps coming up. Another thing that is repeated is the word "abide." I count 11 times in this short section. And a quick search for "abide" shows me Jesus only uses that word one other time in the whole book of John. If he is using that same key word over and over here, it must be significant.

I see that Jesus says, "Abide in me," "my words abide in you," and "Abide in my love." These phrases seem very related. I wonder if these are similar but distinct or if they are different ways of describing one thing. For now, I will highlight these.

The word fruit is also repeated often. The one that stands out to me is "bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples." It seems like Jesus is saying that fruit-bearing is a mark of being his disciple. That's interesting. I want to think more about that.

I'm noticing also that Jesus is explicit about the purpose behind what he is saying. In verse 11, he says it's so "that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." He doesn't always explain why he is teaching something, so that's a big deal. And it sounds like a great reason! I want more joy...

I'm also noticing a lot of cause-and-effect phrases in this passage. "Already you are clean because of the word...," "If you abide in me...," "If you keep my commandments..." and more. Seeing words like "if," "so that," "because," and "therefore" are clues that there might be a cause-and-effect statement. There are so many in this passage, I want to make sure I catch them all so I can consider what they all mean, and if there's a promise for me in there, I don't want to leave it on the table.

The image of a vine and branches is evocative. It communicates a deep, organic connection—the metaphor alone says a lot. I spend a moment meditating on that picture and making some simple observations about the physical thing to see if those might later help me understand the spiritual thing. For instance, Jesus points out that branches cannot bear fruit if disconnected from the vine. A cut branch is a dead branch. Life comes through the connection to the vine. Fruit popping out is a natural consequence of being connected. Etc.

I wouldn't normally write out my thoughts like this but rather I'd make a simple bulleted list of observations.

Sometimes, I mark up the text: I might highlight the word "abide" in green and the word "fruit" in blue. Or draw boxes and arrows connecting causes to effects and write questions in the margin—sometimes the question is just, "Huh?"

As you went for that little observation ride, what did you notice from John 15? Jot down as many observations or questions as you can in 60 seconds (they don't have to be earth-shattering).

How to: Observe, Interpret, Apply

Three simple words to remember: observe, interpret, apply—let this be your foundational approach to studying the Bible. It's an intuitive, tested method used by millions of people around the world. Use it to focus on one section of the Bible's unified story, seeking to discover what the biblical author intended to communicate to the original audience and to encounter Jesus and be transformed by his Word.

Observe: What's there?

- What comes immediately before and after the passage?
- What kind of literature is it (narrative, poetry, letter, etc.)?
- Where does this text fit in the unified story of the whole Bible?
- What is the cultural context of the original readers?
- Note characters, relationships, locations, time, actions, and reactions.
- Imagine yourself in the story. What do you see, hear, and smell?
- Look for repeated words, comparisons, contrasts, cause and effect.
- Identify the key terms.
- What questions does the text raise?

Interpret: What's it mean?

- Develop some more questions based on your observations. What stirs your curiosity?

- What sentences seem to add up to a unit of thought? Consider that a paragraph.
- Summarize each paragraph and/or the whole passage in one sentence.
- Look for connections between the paragraphs.
- What other passages shed light on this one? Let Scripture interpret Scripture.
- Answer your questions from the text.
- Why do you think this passage is here?
- How does this passage lead to Jesus?

Apply: So what?

- How does this passage challenge how I see God?
- What does this passage say about my identity?
- What can I worship God for based on what I see in this text?
- How should this passage shape the way I see the church or the world?
- Is there a command to obey, a promise to hold on to, or an example to follow/avoid?
- How did Jesus live out the big ideas from this passage perfectly on my behalf?
- If I really believed the essential truths of this passage, what would my life look like?
- What are the barriers to living out this truth?
- How can we live this out as a community?

- How does this change what I'll do tomorrow?

Day 2

Today, you'll make some observations on your own. Resist the urge to jump too quickly into figuring out what it all means. For now, you are a detective and your job is to notice as many clues and details as you can. Pray, asking the Holy Spirit to light up this passage for you.

Read John 15:1–17

Try it: Observe

Set a timer for 5 minutes and see how many observations you can write down before the bell.

Need some help? Here are some things you can look for:

- List all the people mentioned.
- Count how many times each person (or group) is mentioned.
- Notice names for God.
- Look for repeated words.
- Look for comparisons and contrasts.
- Identify statements showing a cause and effect.
- Jot down questions you have of the text.
- Imagine yourself in the story. What do you see, smell, hear, feel?
- Determine what the key terms are in this passage—the prominent words or phrases the author is using to make his point.

Day 3

Hopefully, over the last two days, you created a solid list of observations and even noticed things you have not seen before. Pray, thanking the Father for what he's shown you so far, and ask for his help in interpreting what these words mean.

Read John 15:1–17

Try it: Interpret

Look back at the passage and your observations and start piecing together the main ideas.

Here are a few questions to pick from to get you started:

- I bet you noticed the word "abide" comes up a lot. It's a key term Jesus is using in this discourse to make a point. In your own words, how would you explain what it means to abide?
- Fruit is another key term. What do you think Jesus means by "fruit"? What makes you think that?
- How would you divide this passage into paragraphs (which sentences seem to go together)? Give each paragraph a one-sentence title.
- Why do you think Jesus includes this in his teaching? Where do you see evidence for your idea?
- If you had to explain the main idea of this passage to a child, how would you say it?

Day 4

Today we get to the question, "So what?" The Pharisees in Jesus' time studied the Scriptures with unmatched diligence, but most missed the point. When the person the whole story led to was right in front of them, they couldn't recognize it. They knew about the Bible but were not transformed by it into people more like God. Our work of observing and interpreting culminates in applying the Word and letting God use it to change us. Pray for a soft heart that is open to the work God wants to do.

Read John 15:1–17

Try it: Apply

Get specific about how this passage should shape us, the way we see the world, and how we live.

A couple options to start with:

- Is there a command to obey, a promise to hold on to, or an example to follow/avoid?
- How does this change what you will do tomorrow?

A trap we can easily fall into with application is thinking it's all up to us—as if we are reading a fable to find the moral of the story so that we can try harder to do the right thing. That rule-centered and self-empowered approach to the Bible has beaten down and exasperated more Christians than we can count. What the Bible itself teaches is a gospel-centered approach. The whole story leads to the gospel of Jesus. To think it's all up to us is to miss the whole point that we needed Jesus to rescue us and we need Jesus to transform us.

So after we land on what this passage means for our lives...

1. Consider how impossible it would be to live this out perfectly on your own. It's OK to let the weight of that sink in a bit. For instance, it's probably hard to imagine abiding in God so perfectly that you always did the right thing, following all of God's commands.

2. Consider how Jesus' life embodied that application perfectly. For our sake, he lived the life that we could not live and died the death we deserve. For instance, Jesus only said and did what the Father said and did (John 5:19 and 12:49). He was sinless.

3. Consider how living in line with Jesus (applying this Scripture to our lives like he did to his) is where we find the most joy, hope, power, love, and more.

4. It's not that we have to obey the Scriptures, it's that we get to. And we do it empowered by the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead. So, ask yourself, "How can I apply this passage motivated by joy and gratitude and empowered by the Spirit?"

Applying Scripture is more than just figuring out what specific thing you will do differently based on this passage. It's also about being rightly motivated and letting the Father be in the driver's seat.

The Seven Signs

John 20:30–31 says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."

John tells us explicitly that he selected and wrote about specific events in Jesus' life, these miraculous signs, for a purpose: so that we may believe and have life in Jesus.

In the Bible, the number seven is often associated with the divine and completeness. And John chose seven signs that we will study during these four weeks.

1. Turning water into wine (2:1–11)
2. Healing the royal official's son (4:46–54)
3. Healing the paralytic at the pool (5:1–18)
4. Feeding the crowds (6:1–14)
5. Walking on water (6:15–25)
6. Healing a man born blind (9:1–41)
7. Raising Lazarus from the dead (11:1–46)

Day 5

From here on out, we'll spend two days in each of seven passages. The first day, we'll mostly Observe and begin the Interpret step. Day two, we'll Interpret and Apply.

In his book, John selected and emphasized seven "signs" Jesus did. He says in chapter 20 that these are written so that you may believe in Jesus and have life. Today's passage is the story of Jesus' first public miracle—the first sign that he is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Read John 2:1–11 — Jesus' 1st Sign, Day One

Try it: The Reporter (part 1)

Ask the classic journalist questions of the text.

Observe

"Who?," "What?," "When?," and "Where?" are good observation questions.

Who are the people involved? What happens in this story? When is it happening? Where is it taking place?

Interpret

"Why?" is a key question to interpret and find meaning.

Why do you think God included this story in the Bible?

Day 6

Review your notes from yesterday about Jesus' first miraculous sign.

Read John 2:1–11 — Jesus' 1st Sign, Day Two

Try it: The Reporter (part 2)

Ask the classic journalist questions of the text.

Interpret

"Why?" is a key question to interpret and find meaning.

Why do you think Jesus chose this miracle to be the beginning of his public ministry?

Apply

"So what?" helps you apply the text to your life.

So what—how would this make a difference in your life?

What does this passage reveal about God? How might that affect your relationship with him?

Specifically, what does turning water into wine at this wedding feast say about Jesus? How might that change how you pray?

Day 7

If you're spending 10 minutes a day in John, you may still have lots of questions and want to dig a little deeper. Take time today to revisit John 15 and/or John 2. If you missed a day or two, use this day to catch up.

Try it: 3Rs prayer

In Book 1, we practiced the 3Rs pattern of prayer. We used passages from the Bible as a springboard to Rejoice, Repent, and Request. Look back at the vine and branches passage in John 15 and let it inspire your prayer.

If you have a few more minutes after praying... Check out the Bible Project's "What is the Bible?" video. It's the first of four great episodes.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/what-is-bible

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Share with each other some highlights from what you've read and studied so far.

What are some specific applications you've come to? How can you help each other live those out?

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Watch the Bible Project video together, "How to Read the Gospel." https://bibleproject.com/videos/how-to-read-gospel

The video ends with the line, "The Gospel is designed to persuade us to trust and follow Jesus so that we can participate in the new creation that he began." Discuss what you think that means.

Looking back at what you've read this week, and notes you've taken, what examples do you see of things the video mentioned?

Week Three

Remember how John emphasized the large amount of water Jesus turned into wine and how it was the best wine anyone ever tasted? Keep your eyes peeled for more details like that in the next signs. John is drawing our attention to the exceptional nature of these miracles so we see the exceptional nature of the Messiah.

Day 1

Sometimes one of the best ways to study a passage is to back up and look at the passages around it.

Read John 4:46–54 — Jesus' 2nd Sign, Day One

Try it: Context (part 1)

Examine the larger section this passage is a part of to better understand its meanings and implications.

Observe

Skim the passages before and after this one. Do you notice any broad similarities or differences that might be meaningful?

We see three main characters Jesus interacts with: Nicodemus, a Samaritan woman, and a Roman official. Who are they? Is there any way they are related or connect with one another?

Look at the context for yourself, but if you want a little boost, consider this:

- Nicodemus is a Jewish religious elite who, unlike most of his ilk, seems to be honestly seeking God and recognizes something God-like in Jesus.
- The Samaritan woman is a pariah in her own community and is part of a religious and ethnic offshoot the Jews typically despise and avoid.
- The Roman official is a Gentile (a non-Jew), usually excluded from the faith of Israel, and he's part of a conquering enemy occupation of the country.

You see, there's a progression from an insider to an outsider to an even farther-out outsider. What else do you

notice from the context? Similarities? Differences? Repeated words or ideas?

Interpret

Begin considering what these clues from the context might mean. Jot down your thoughts.

Day 2

In the part you skimmed yesterday was the most famous verse in the Bible, John 3:16, "For God so loved the world..." It was one of our meditations in Book 1. Take a minute today to think deeply on that again and revel in the lavish love our Dad has for you. Thank him for his steadfast and sacrificial love.

Read John 4:46–54 — Jesus' 2nd Sign, Day Two

Try it: Context (part 2)

Examine the larger section this passage is a part of to better understand its meanings and implications.

Interpret

Why do you think the stories of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and the official are here in the book of John? Why might they be presented back-to-back and in this order? Write one sentence to summarize what these stories taken as a unit say about Jesus.

Apply

How does that one truth about Jesus impact your life today? What would it look like if you did NOT believe it? What if you did?

Got a few extra minutes? Check out the info below about genres in the Bible.

Main types of biblical literature

When reading the Bible, it's important to know what type of literature you are reading. We intuitively have different expectations of a blog post, a news article, a fantasy book, or a song on the radio. They all play by different rules. And we've all seen the damage that happens when people treat random social media posts with the same expectations as reference books. Not understanding the type of literature you are reading can easily lead to misinterpretation and misapplication.

The Bible uses these three broad genres or literary styles:

Narrative

All humans are story-formed people—we experience, remember, and communicate about life in stories. It's hard-wired into our brains. And we love good stories. And good stories have the power to help us see the world in new ways. So, it's no surprise that half the Bible is made up of stories. There are sub-genres like biographies, historical narratives, Gospels, parables, etc.

Poetry

About a third of the Bible is some form of poetry. Poems use rich, layered imagery, symbols, and metaphors to get us to see connections and think differently about God, ourselves, and the world around us. Songs, prophetic writings, and some wisdom literature all fit in this broad category.

Discourse

The rest of the Bible is prose. Here you'll see text about ideas and logical sequences of thought that explain, challenge, instruct, and lead us to conclusions about how to live. Laws, speeches, letters, essays, etc.

A given book in the Bible will have a primary genre but will usually have a mix of these. For instance, the book of John is a Gospel, a particular type of narrative, but the story records long passages of Jesus teaching, which is prose discourse.

The Bible Project has a great five-minute video about these literary styles:
https://bibleproject.com/videos/literary-styles-bible

Day 3

This miracle is significant because Jesus makes an important statement to his critics.

Read John 5:1–18 — Jesus' 3rd Sign, Day One

Observe

Who are the players in the story of this healing? Why would the Jews object to a healing?

If you want to know more about the Sabbath, there's a great Bible Project video that shows Sabbath as a theme throughout the Bible.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/sabbath-video

Interpret

Jesus says, "my Father is working until now, and so I am working." What do you think that means? Who is Jesus claiming to be?

Day 4

Did you realize the man by the pool was paralyzed for longer than many people lived at that time? Let's look again at how Jesus healed him and how people reacted.

Read John 5:1–18 — Jesus' 3rd Sign, Day Two

Interpret

Why do you think the religious leaders were so upset with Jesus?

Apply

The Jews were more concerned with the rules than with the person (both the paralyzed man and Jesus). Who have you (maybe unconsciously) given yourself permission to overlook? What might it look like for you to act with the kind of compassion Jesus has for them?

Day 5

This is one of only two miracles of Jesus that is shared by all four gospels (the other being the resurrection). John places this amazing event at the time of the Passover. Let's look at the connections between those events.

Read John 6:1–14 — Jesus' 4th Sign, Day One

Try it: Hyperlinks (part 1)

Because the Bible is a unified story leading to Jesus, it has themes, foreshadowing, repeated motifs, etc. So, you can often make connections from one part of the Bible to another. Think of these like hyperlinks you click on a webpage to jump to another part of the story.

Observe

What are the hyperlinks that connect this passage to other parts of the biblical story? What do you recall about the Passover and its importance for God's people?

Not sure what Passover is about? Check out this 6-minute Bible Project video, which briefly explains the Passover in context. https://bibleproject.com/videos/exodus-1-18

Since the Israelites had to leave Egypt quickly, they made bread for the journey without yeast (no need to wait for it to rise). That unleavened bread is an important part of the annual Passover celebration.

Interpret

Why is John making this connection? How does that shed light on the meaning of this passage?

Day 6

Did you know the crowd Jesus fed was likely much larger than 5000? At the time, it was customary to enumerate large groups by estimating only the men.

Read John 6:1–14 — Jesus' 4th Sign, Day Two

Try it: Hyperlinks (part 2)

Because the Bible is a unified story leading to Jesus, it has themes, foreshadowing, repeated motifs, etc. So, you can often make connections from one part of the Bible to another. Think of these like hyperlinks you click on a webpage to jump to another part of the story.

Interpret

Can you think of any other places in the biblical story that bread appears? How might that or the Passover bread add meaning to this passage?

Apply

The Bible is a story that eventually includes us as we continue to live on mission as Jesus taught his disciples. What does it mean for you to join in this story?

Day 7

Revisit one of the passages you want to look at again. If you missed a day or two, use this day to catch up.

Try it: 3Rs prayer

Use the passage you read as a springboard to Rejoice, Repent, and Request in prayer to our good Father.

If you have a few more minutes after praying... Check out the Bible Project's "The Story of the Bible" video. It's the second of four great episodes.
https://bibleproject.com/videos/the-story-of-the-bible

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Share with each other some highlights from what you've read and studied so far.

What is something that has stood out to you from the book of John about Jesus? What can you worship him for? What are you grateful for? What are you impressed by? Respond to him in prayer about these things.

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

You may not have gotten there yet, but this week in this guide we look at the story of Jesus feeding a huge crowd with only a little boy's lunch. After that, Jesus goes on to say, "I am the Bread of Life," compare himself to manna from heaven, and make some people think he wants them to be cannibals. It's a wild ride.

Read John 6:22–59

Use the section "How to: Observe, Interpret, Apply" to interact with this text together.

Begin with observations only. It's tough, but hold yourselves back from jumping too quickly into interpretation and application. There's a lot of details to notice.

Week Four

John hits all seven signs in the first half of the book. This week we'll wrap up the signs, and in Book 5, we'll take a look at John's Gospel again, looking at many passages from the second half.

Take advantage of going through this with others. Shoot someone a text or chat over coffee, and ask what they are learning. Let's learn from one another and encourage one another.

Day 1

After a long day of ministry, Jesus withdrew from those seeking him because they were wanting to make him king. As his disciples sail across the lake, he reveals more of his power over creation as he walks on water. Let's use our imagination to see how significant this was for those disciples and what it means for us...

Read John 6:15–25 — Jesus' 5th Sign, Day One

Try it: Imagine yourself in the story (part 1)

Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the characters in the story. What would this person have thought and felt as the events of the story occurred? Would you have responded similarly or differently?

Observe

What sights, sounds, and feelings do you think the disciples experienced? What emotions might they have felt? What do you think you would have felt if you were there?

Interpret

As you're sitting on the boat that Jesus just walked to (on top of the water!), what do you think Jesus is trying to teach you in this? We've seen darkness throughout the book as a metaphor of life without him. We've also seen in Scripture how the "sea" is a picture of all that is chaotic and unknown in this broken world. And now he's come in the darkness walking on top of water. What does this say about Jesus?

Day 2

As you read this story, read it slowly, picture it, and really imagine yourself there—it's dark, the sea is rough, you feel a strong wind, you are miles from shore in a small boat...

Read John 6:15–25 — Jesus' 5th Sign, Day Two

Try it: Imagine yourself in the story (part 2)

Imagine what it would have been like to be one of the characters in the story. What would this person have thought and felt as the events of the story occurred? Would you have responded similarly or differently?

Interpret

In the Bible, darkness is often a metaphor of life without God, and the sea, or water, is often a menacing picture of chaos and the unknown in this broken world. What do you think it says about Jesus that he walked on the water through the darkness?

Apply

Consider what you determined this passage says about Jesus. If you really believed that to be true, how might it affect your life today?

Day 3

In this passage it says, "Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind." That could be said of walking on water, too. John is making his case that Jesus really is the Messiah, the Son of Man, the one Israel has been waiting centuries for.

Read John 9:1–41 — Jesus' 6th Sign, Day One

Try it: Solo, Sorta (part 1)

Now that you've observed, interpreted, and applied several times, try this passage on your own. If you want a little extra help, look back at the section titled "How to: Observe, Interpret, Apply" in Week Two and use that as a guide.

Observe and Interpret

Plenty of space to write today...

Day 4

How'd it go yesterday? With the Spirit's help, you got this...

Read John 9:1–41 — Jesus' 6th Sign, Day Two

Try it: Solo, Sorta (part 2)

Now that you've observed, interpreted, and applied several times, try this passage on your own. If you want a little extra help, look back at the section titled "How to: Observe, Interpret, Apply" in Week Two and use that as a guide.

Interpret and Apply

Look at all that space to write today...

Day 5

The signs John records have steadily increased in intensity and magnitude. This last one goes to 11!

Read John 11:1–46 — Jesus' 7th Sign, Day One

Try it: Perspectives (part 1)

Put yourself in the shoes of each person in the story and imagine experiencing it through their perspective.

Observe

Start by listing all the people mentioned in the story. Some are named individuals, others are part of a group.

Pick a character. Begin by noticing all the details in the story about this person. Then imagine yourself as that character and think through the whole story as if you were that person. What do you see, hear, smell? How do you react at the key moments? What were you thinking? Who do you think Jesus is?

Do that again with as many characters as you have time for this morning. Write down your observations.

Plan ahead

If you can carve out a little extra time tomorrow, you can keep going with this imaginative process with a few more characters before the interpretation and application.

Day 6

If you can make a little extra time today, pick another character or two and go through yesterday's observation process, imagining the story from their perspective.

Read John 11:1–46 — Jesus' 7th Sign, Day Two

Try it: Perspectives (part 2)

Put yourself in the shoes of each person in the story and imagine experiencing it through their perspective.

Interpret

For each of the characters you chose, consider why they did what they did and said what they said. What insight does that give you to the essential truths of this story?

For instance, why did Thomas say that weird line about dying? Why did Martha say Jesus was the Christ? Why was Jesus glad to not be there when Lazarus died? Why did Jesus weep when he knew he was about to raise Lazarus from the dead?

Apply

In the characters you looked at, are there examples to follow? Are there examples to avoid? What might it look like for you to be more like one of the examples to follow?

Day 7

Today, don't just review the past week, but review the past month. What are the big ideas you learned and want to apply to your life? When did you get a sense that the Holy Spirit was opening something up for you to understand or leading you to make a change?

What can you worship God about based on the book of John? Which one of God's characteristics that you see in this book inspires you to praise him?

Do that! Praise God for what you've learned about him through his Word. Ask him to show you more. Ask him to let it transform you more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

Come ready to share with the church family something you learned and how you experienced God through the Gospel of John.

For your DNA group

Going through this book with your DNA group? When you gather, don't wait—within the first five minutes, get talking about your experience with these practices this week.

Share with each other some highlights from what you've read and studied so far.

What are some specific applications you've come to? How can you help each other live those out?

For your Missional Community

If your MC is in this book together, bring these to your gathering:

Watch the Bible Project video together, "Design Patterns." https://bibleproject.com/videos/design-patterns-biblical-narrative

Looking back at what you've read in John, do you see any design patterns from elsewhere in the biblical story?

Do you think the 5th sign, Jesus walking on the water, fits the pattern involving water and chaos? Why or why not?

Tying a bow on these four weeks

Soma family, our prayer is that these weeks in the Word have helped you find real nourishment through an abiding connection with Jesus. We pray you feel empowered to dig into the Word on your own, to encounter God, and to be transformed. We pray you are captivated by Jesus through the grand narrative of the whole Bible, and that as a church family we are developing an insatiable appetite for the Word. The journey continues in Book 3, where we'll practice staying close to Jesus by slowing down.

May this be the beginning of a new season of maturity for all of us and a big step toward a day when every man, woman, and child in Federal Way has a daily experience of the love of Jesus through the words and deeds of his people.

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