

## Self-Guided Bible Study

*This brochure is intended for members and friends of our church who are interested in starting or expanding their study of the Bible and theology and would like some tips on how to use our church resources.*

The Adult Education Ministries Committee has prepared this brochure to help you, by way of introduction, to access some of the available resources in our church library. This is done in a stepwise fashion. As you become more familiar with the Bible and your own interests and questions concerning Scripture, you will, no doubt, develop your own method for study. Please use this and then give us feedback so that we can continue to improve. And, finally, do remember that there are many small groups in our church that study the Bible and theological works. When you are ready, please contact any member of the Adult Education Ministries Committee or one of the pastors; they can help you choose a group for you.

**Step ONE: Pray.** It is not possible for any of us to understand the message of Scripture without assistance from the Holy Spirit. Always begin your time of study with a prayer of illumination—a prayer that God, through the Spirit, will give you light and understanding as you encounter a text. One that is used very frequently is this: *“Lord, your word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. Please let your special message to me shine through this time of study. In Jesus’ name I pray, Amen.”*

**Step TWO: Choose a Bible passage or Story** and read it or listen to it in at least THREE versions of the Bible. Many different translations of the Bible are located to the left of the reference section on the shelves to the right as you enter the church library.

You can consult the monthly *Oak Leaves*, our church newsletter, for sermon titles and Bible passages that are coming up. Sunday sermon titles and associated Bible passages are also published in a weekly E-mail blast sent out on Thursday morning. As an example, suppose the Bible passage for your study is from the Gospel of John, chapter 13, verses 1 through 17. There is a short-hand method used to note the chapter and verses of each book of the Bible. The shorthand for this passage is John 13:1-17, where the chapter always precedes the colon and the numbered verses follow. The shorthand method is used for all citations from the Bible.

There are at least 70 different translations of the Bible in print today. The Old Testament of the Bible, the 39 books that begin with Genesis and end with Malachi, was initially written in Hebrew. The New Testament, the 27 books that begin with Matthew and conclude with Revelation, was initially written in Greek. Our church library contains many different translations of both the Old and New Testaments. In addition, different translations of the Bible are available on-line at <http://www.biblegateway.com/> and may be listened to at the following sites:

- (1) <http://www.audio-bible.com/niv/>
- (2) <http://www.biblica.com/bibles/audio/niv/>
- (3) <http://www.thestreamingbible.com/>

As we learn more about the ancient languages of Hebrew and Greek, translations of the Bible are clarified, updated and re-issued. It is helpful, then, to read or listen to the passage in more than one translation. We recommend three:

- (1) The King James Version, completed in 1609, is the first comprehensive translation of the Bible from the Hebrew and Greek into English;
- (2) The New Revised Standard Version, completed in 1989, is the most current version and the one we use in the worship services of the Church;
- (3) The Message is a modern day interpretation of the Bible that is sometimes easier to read and understand than earlier, more literal, translations.

**Step THREE:** As you read the passage, **read it both silently and then aloud.** If you are listening to the passage, it would be beneficial to listen to it and then say it aloud.

The Bible was not arranged in its current written form until the fourth century and then only for clergy. The Bible was handed down to us largely by oral tradition. It enriches our understanding of the Bible to hear the stories out loud, uniting us in some small way with those who kept the stories alive until they could be set on paper.

**Step FOUR:** As you read or listen to the passage, **note any words that are unfamiliar to you or words that you do not understand.** There are a number of Bible dictionaries located in the reference section on the shelves to the right as you enter the library. Choose one of these to look up the terms that may be unfamiliar to you.

**Step FIVE:** **Ask yourself three questions about the action or the events that are taking place** in the story and then retell the story to yourself, or aloud, in your own words. Using the John 13:1-17 passage, here are some example questions you might consider. These are only a guide. What is most important is the question or questions that the passage raises for YOU.

- What is Jesus trying to teach his disciples?
- How do you explain Peter's reaction to Jesus' teaching?
- What example is Jesus trying to set for his disciples?
- In verse 1, the text reads, "he now showed them the full extent of his love." What does that mean?

Examples of general questions of this type that might apply to any passage include:

- What is the primary message of the passage?
- What role does each character play in communicating the message?

Additional study questions for each passage can be found in one of two Bibles in our library. The Serendipity Bible and the Spiritual Formation Bible offer study questions of different types in the margins of every page of text. These questions will help you develop your own questions for study.

**Step SIX: Ask yourself three questions about how the story might relate to you personally.** Here are some example questions you might consider that relate to the John 13 passage:

- What might I learn about Jesus from this passage?
- What might I learn about my own faith from this passage?
- Washing feet might be a metaphor for what other ways of showing love to one another?
- Whom do I identify with most in this passage—Jesus, Peter, Judas, the other disciples who are taking part, but remain silent?
- What is Jesus trying to teach me?

Consider these questions as well that would relate to any passage:

- What encourages or concerns me about this passage?
- Is there a personal challenge to me in this passage?
- What would I have to change in my life to live in the way this passage suggests? What would I have to maintain my life to live in the way this passage suggests?

**Step SEVEN: Zero in on a phrase or sentence from the passage**—something that spoke in a powerful way to you. Memorize it and use it as a focus for your prayers in the next [few] days until you study another passage. If the passage made little or no impression on you (and that is perfectly OK), move on to step EIGHT.

**Step EIGHT: Consult a commentary.** Now that you have formed some of your own impressions of the passage, it is time to see what others have written about it so that your understanding can be extended. Our library contains several multi-volume sets of commentaries or interpretations in the reference section. The commentary is arranged in the same way the Scripture is—by chapter and verse. Read the comments on John 13:1-17 and compare your questions and answers about the text to the questions and answers the commentator has raised.

**Step NINE:** That's enough work, but not enough prayer. **Finish your study by thinking again about how you might live the message of this story in your life.** Use these thoughts to guide your prayers in the days to come. Close your study time with a short prayer of thanksgiving such as: *“Thank you God for this time of study. As I listen for your word for me, help me grow ever closer to you. Amen.”*

**Step TEN: Do Something. Translate the message in the text into action in your life.** In this passage, part of the message was encouraging us to perform acts of loving service toward one another. Allow yourself to be open to an opportunity to serve someone else, perhaps through a brief hands-on mission project, or by accepting an invitation to act. You will be blessed when you do.