

**The
How-To
Book of the**

BIBLE

Study Guide

Karl A.
Schultz

How to Use This Guide

The purpose of this guide is to help you read, pray, or study the Bible in a competent and fulfilling manner using *The How-To Book of the Bible*. It forms the basis for a personal reading plan or for Bible/faith-sharing sessions. It can also be used in RCIA or CCD programs, or as a textbook in Catholic school Bible classes.

Not all parts and passages of the Bible are of equal spiritual value, so it is important to prioritize the most essential parts while gradually becoming familiar with the entire Bible. Enlightened Bible reading integrates both micro (individual text) and macro (the whole Bible, Church teaching, and life itself) perspectives.

Breaking the Bible into manageable components is a central principle of *The How-To Book of the Bible*. It outlines books of the Bible and highlights key passages and sections so that through selective reading you can sustain your Bible-reading habit and avoid getting bogged down in obscure sections. This guide links related book chapters to a purposeful pattern of Bible reading. By gradually progressing through the whole book and Bible, your comprehension and comfort level will grow in a synergistic manner.

First, I will preface the proposed reading plan with an overview, and then I will outline its components.

Reading the Bible: An Overview

Developing a Foundation for Interpretation

We begin by building a framework for viewing the Bible contextually and theologically. The Bible's human and divine dimensions co-exist in a similar way to Jesus' dual nature. Keeping the human development and context of the Bible and its inspired nature in a healthy tension/balance enables us to avoid the extremes of fundamentalism and skepticism. You will also learn which translation and Bible-study aids are right for you.

How to Read the Bible

Our next task is to develop an understanding of how to read the Bible holistically, dimensionally, and fluidly.

Reading the Bible *holistically* means engaging it with our whole selves, not only because of the synergies involved and the resulting spiritual- and personal-growth benefits, but primarily because God wants us to love him with our whole selves (cf. the first commandment).

Reading the Bible *dimensionally* involves recognizing and responding to the various levels of meaning it evokes. In Chapters Six through Eight, you will encounter an integrated Jewish and Christian model for experiencing both the Bible and life in all their breadth and depth. The process by which we engage the Bible mirrors our interactions with life, thereby reminding us to read the Bible with an eye to personal applications and life parallels.

Reading the Bible *fluidly* means that we don't rigidly predetermine the process and objectives. We oscillate in a natural give-and-take with Scripture, an interactivity similar to what we experience in our relationships with others and with God. We dispose ourselves to the Spirit, who helps us respond to the Bible's rhythm and message. *The How-To Book of the Bible* is designed to foster awareness of our own and Scripture's nature, capacities, and tendencies, thereby optimizing our interactions.

Now that we have developed a conceptual and procedural framework for reading the Bible, we can read it in a sequence corresponding to our objectives and the structure of the Bible.

The New Testament

We begin with the Gospels because they are the most important part of the Bible for Christians. They are the foundation of the New Testament and the lens through which the deepest meaning of the Old Testament is revealed.

We start with the Gospel of Mark because it was the first one written, and it is the shortest and most straightforward. We continue with Matthew, which most closely follows Mark. The preaching fervor and stark realism of Mark prepare us for Jesus' challenging teachings as reported by Matthew. As discussed in Chapter Nine, the first two Gospels have a subtle masculine flavor, which is nicely complemented by the feminine qualities of the third and fourth Gospels.

The intense nature of the first two Gospels is balanced by the pastoral sensitivity of Luke, our next stop. He narrates the story of Jesus and the early Church in his stylish two-volume work, Luke and Acts of the Apostles.

The first three Gospels emphasize Jesus' humanity, which we can relate to more easily than to his divinity. They form a foundation for encountering his divinity more explicitly in the mystical/theological Gospel, John. Familiarity with the human Jesus prepares us for an account handed on by his most intimate associate, the beloved disciple.

We read the letters of John in tandem with his Gospel because they share similar vocabulary, themes, and style. The first letter is like a homily or exposition of the main themes of the Gospel, particularly love, truth, and the Holy Spirit. The second and third letters of John are brief correspondence that renew communications, address specific issues, and affirm key teachings.

We then move to the most controversial, intense, and multifaceted New Testament author, St. Paul. We discover a man on fire for the Lord, yet whose discernible foibles we can relate to. Chapter Sixteen highlights his key themes and pastoral concerns, and it offers several patterns for reading his letters.

Next we go to the least read part of the New Testament, the letters attributed to authors other than St. Paul. We discover a wellspring of wisdom, inspiration, and exhortation communicated by distinct personalities, each with particular pastoral concerns. For example, Peter imparts a concise theology of suffering; James, a moral theology; and John (the author of Revelation), an eschatology (a theological vision of the end times with moral implications for the present). Jude is a short letter that bridges the other letters; it parallels 2 Peter and Revelation in its focus on the end times, and it mirrors James' emphasis of morality in practical circumstances.

Having completed our tour of the New Testament, we are ready to encounter the Old Testament, which both stands on its own and deepens our understanding of the New Testament.

The Old Testament

In Chapter Twenty, we begin by familiarizing ourselves with the Old Testament's geographical, political, and cultural context, along with its major personalities and peoples. We then begin reading Genesis, which helps us understand not only the rest of the Bible, but life and history as well. Its first eleven chapters provide a theological, anthropological, and sociological backdrop for salvation history (God's providential intervention in human history), the Bible's fundamental story line. Parallels between biblical characters and us reveal how innately the Bible is about us.

After receiving a concise course in human nature, we are left with a chaotic world estranged from its creator, despite being given a second chance through Noah.

From this foreboding setting emerges Abraham, our father in faith. The stories of the matriarchs and patriarchs acquaint us with the origins of Judaism while mirroring our own behaviors and family interactions.

We then move through the rest of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), beginning with the most sacred book to Jews, Exodus. We encounter the central person of the Old Testament, Moses; the central event, the Passover; and the fundamental moral principles, the Ten Commandments.

Deuteronomy consummates the Pentateuch with a review of the prophetic teachings, exhortations, and exploits of Moses. It concludes with the mysterious death and disappearance of Moses, preparing us for his relatively low profile in the rest of the Old Testament.

We then take a detour to acquaint ourselves with the heart of Israel's liturgy and spirituality, the Psalms. They are an accessible encapsulation of the entire Bible and a staple of Catholic liturgical and private prayer. Accordingly, we move them out of their canonical order and encounter them earlier in our reading process.

We resume our sequential movement through the Old Testament with the historical books. These narrate key events in Israel's history, beginning with the transition from Moses to Joshua. We encounter the holding pattern of the Judges period, when Israel struggles to find its identity in a new land.

With Samuel as a noble (cf. Jer 15:1) transitional figure, the historical books offer two accounts of the united monarchy, including some of the classic stories of the Bible (e.g., David and Goliath, David and Bathsheba, Solomon's judging of the two prostitutes). This gives way to the mostly depressing tales of the divided monarchy, whereby both kingdoms eventually meet tragic ends. The critical tone of the books of Samuel and Kings is softened in a revised version that immediately follows in the canon, the books of Chronicles.

The historical books then move ahead in time, spanning the period from the fifth century B.C. (Ezra and Nehemiah) to the second century B.C. (Maccabees).

Four of the historical books — Ruth, Tobit, Judith, and Esther — are classic short stories that are accessible to beginners. Their primary objective is motivational: they encourage Israel to retain faith in God despite insecurity, oppression, and threats of extinction.

The history of Israel is fascinating and instructive, but it can also be overwhelming. Following the canonical order, we happily move into the more accessible and practical wisdom books.

The wisdom books contain two of the Bible's most enigmatic books, Job and Ecclesiastes. These books contain perspectives in tension with traditional Israelite theology as reflected in earlier biblical books, and they manifest the Bible's evolving thought that our reading plan exposes.

The books of Proverbs and Sirach contain counsel resembling the wisdom of other cultures, including modern self-help literature. Song of Songs dramatizes and spiritualizes the courtship process, and it also serves as an allegory of God's relationship with his people.

The book of Wisdom, probably the last Old Testament book to be written (circa 100 B.C.), is a bridge to our time. A learned and pious Jew highlights the wisdom and history of Israel in concepts accessible to Jews living in a foreign land filled with enticing religious cults, lofty philosophical concepts, and impressive cultural achievements.

The diversity of literature and content in the wisdom books epitomizes the many ways the Bible speaks to us. The sages offer prudent and moral (accord-

ing to the law) counsel on practical issues, complementing the prophets who provide motivation for carrying it out.

We conclude our journey on a stirring note, with the timeless message of the prophets. The prophetic books are among the longest and most difficult books of the Bible — which is why we encounter them last — but they also contain some of the Old Testament's most important passages, particularly from the perspective of the New Testament. Chapter Twenty-Five outlines the most important prophetic books (the Major Prophets) while highlighting central themes and passages from the Minor Prophets.

The book's final chapter reminds us that the prophetic message and vocation are ongoing. In the spirit of Vatican II, we are called to emulate Jesus and the prophets in reading the signs of the times and responding appropriately. This brings us full circle to the challenges of life that echo those in the Bible and remind us of the dynamic and timeless nature of God's word. Now all that we have to do is live it.

Reading Plan

LESSON ONE: THE HUMAN AND DIVINE FOUNDATIONS OF THE BIBLE

Objective: *Develop a basic understanding of the historical, literary, theological, anthropological, and sociological context of the Bible.*

In layman's terms, explore the contents and compilation of the Bible and discover how the people's perspectives, circumstances, and experiences influenced its composition.

*While big words are sometimes over-used with respect to the Bible, at times they are necessary for precision and succinctness. Indubitably, **The How-To Book of the Bible** defines unfamiliar terms and helps you build a useful biblical vocabulary.*

Recommended Chapters

Chapter One: The Contents of the Bible

Chapter Two: The Word of God

Chapter Three: The Human Development of the Bible

Chapter Four: How to Select a Bible Translation

LESSON TWO: HOW TO READ AND EXPERIENCE THE BIBLE

Objective: Learn how to read the Bible organically (fluidly and cohesively in accordance with its nature), holistically (with your whole self), developmentally (facilitating spiritual and human growth), and dimensionally (according to its various levels of meaning.)

Discover parallel interpretation, assimilation, and application guidelines for group sharing, life experiences, journaling, and appreciation of religious art.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Five: How to Develop a Bible-Reading Plan

Chapter Six: How to Read the Bible Holistically

Chapter Seven: How to Apply *Lectio Divina* to Life, Groups, and Art

Chapter Eight: How to Recognize Levels of Meaning in the Bible and Life

LESSON THREE: THE TEACHING AND PREACHING GOSPELS

Objective: Learn principles for interpreting the New Testament in context and apply them to the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Nine: Introducing the New Testament

Chapter Ten: How to Read Mark, the Gospel of the Cross

Chapter Eleven: How to Read Matthew, the Gospel of the Church

LESSON FOUR: LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

Objective: Discover the cultural setting, literary style, theological themes, and key passages of the evangelist Luke.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twelve: How to Read the Gospel of the Spirit: Luke and Acts of the Apostles

LESSON FIVE: JOHN, A LITERARY LEGACY OF LOVE

Objective: Break John's writings into comprehensible parts, and identify key theological motifs, encounters, discourses, and Christological titles (Jesus' messianic identity and roles).

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Thirteen: How to Read the Contemplative Gospel and Letters of John

LESSON SIX: THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS

Objective: Explore the key themes of the passion and resurrection narratives and the significant differences among them, along with their personal and communal relevance.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Fourteen: How to Interpret and Apply the Passion Narratives
Chapter Fifteen: How to Contemplate the Resurrection Narratives

LESSON SEVEN: GETTING TO KNOW ST. PAUL

Objective: Survey Paul's life and letters; identify key events, communities, companions, themes, and passages; consider how his message impacts Church teaching and your life.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Sixteen: How to Read and Experience the Letters of St. Paul

LESSON EIGHT: THE OTHER NEW TESTAMENT LETTERS

Objective: Familiarize yourself with the overlooked letters of the New Testament, and discover their key passages and themes, along with their unique contributions to the Bible.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Seventeen: How to Read and Persevere With the Letter to the Hebrews
Chapter Eighteen: How to Read and Apply the Catholic Epistles
Chapter Nineteen: How to Read and Understand the Book of Revelation:
Where Do We Go From Here?

LESSON NINE: ORIGINS, COVENANTS, PROMISES, AND THE LAW: THE FOUNDATION OF ISRAEL

Objective: Survey the background and context of the Old Testament, and the key themes, events, and characters in the first five books of the Bible.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twenty: The Context of the Old Testament
Chapter Twenty-One: How to Read and Receive the Pentateuch

LESSON TEN: THE PRAYERS OF ISRAEL

Objective: Discover the settings and various types of psalms, their relationship to the rest of the Bible, the most prominent and inspiring psalms, and their facilitation of personal and communal spirituality.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twenty-Two: How to Pray and Live the Psalms

LESSON ELEVEN: THE HISTORY OF ISRAEL

Objective: Become acquainted with key events, characters, passages, and theological motifs in the historical books, their political and cultural contexts, and their relevance to today.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twenty-Three: How to Read and Relate to the Historical Books

LESSON TWELVE: THE WISDOM OF ISRAEL

Objective: Follow the innate divisions of the wisdom books and discover the contemporary relevance of the wisdom of Israel, particularly in contrast to modern self-help counsel.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twenty-Four: How to Read the Wisdom Books and Wise Up

LESSON THIRTEEN: THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL AND TODAY: RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Objective: Discover the various roles, personalities, and perspectives of the prophets, their influence on Israel, and the example they set for discerning and heeding the signs of the times.

Recommended Chapters

Chapter Twenty-Five: How to Read and Heed the Prophetic Books

Chapter Twenty-Six: How to Bring the Bible to Life: Reading the Signs of the Times

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Karl A. Schultz is the director of Genesis Personal Development Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He is an author, speaker, and retreat leader on motivational, gender relations, biblical spirituality, time and stress management, wellness, and organizational development topics.

Schultz is known nationally for his innovative books and workshops on *lectio divina*, the ancient Christian model of holistic spiritual reading and living. He has pioneered applications of *lectio divina* to suffering, care-giving, inner healing, time management, stress management, gender dialogue and relations, potential fulfillment, and the book of Job.

He is the author of *Where Is God When You Need Him?: Sharing Stories of Suffering with Job and Jesus* (Alba House), *Calming the Stormy Seas of Stress* (St. Mary's Press), *Journaling with Moses and Job* (Pauline Books & Media), and *Personal Energy Management* (Loyola University Press).

Additional resources on the Bible, including audiotapes and videotapes containing the author's presentations on biblical and personal growth subjects, are listed on the website karlaschultz.com and can be ordered from Genesis Personal Development Center, 3431 Gass Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15212-2239. The e-mail address is karlaschultz@juno.com, and the phone number is (412) 766-7545.

Copyright © 2004 Karl A. Schultz. All rights reserved. May be copied for personal or group use.

For more information on *The How-To Book of the Bible* published by Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division or to order, call 1-800-348-2440 or visit www.osvbooks.com.

Our Sunday Visitor Publishing Division
Our Sunday Visitor, Inc.
Huntington, Indiana 46750