

Next Steps with The Bible Challenge



-By the Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie, Rector of Christ Church Greenwich in Greenwich, CT, Founder of The Center for Biblical Studies and The Bible Challenge

www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org



Dear Friends

Thousands of people have participated in The Bible Challenge across the United States and around the world. Many participants have said that reading the Bible was the most important spiritual experience of their life. It helped them to see the grand sweep of God's loving activity in history and made them feel closer to God than ever before.

Many have said, "I loved The Bible Challenge, but I now have more questions than when I started." This is natural. Our questions inspire us to keep reading and learning more. The Bible is a library of 66 books, and we can constantly learn as we strengthen our faith and develop a life-long daily spiritual discipline of reading God's Word.

John Adams, the second President of the United States, read through the entire Bible each year of his adult life, reading the same Bible over and over again. We can wear out a beloved old Bible and highlight verses that inspire, guide and strengthen us. For those who wish to try new things to build upon their Bible learning, we offer these options:

Suggestions for further Bible reading

1. Consider reading the Bible in a different translation – Some people read the Bible in a different translation each year. Each translation renders words and verses slightly differently, allowing the Bible to speak in fresh, new ways to us. You may wish to continue reading three chapters of the Old Testament, a psalm and a chapter of the New Testament each day or slow down and read only a chapter of the Old Testament, a psalm and a chapter of the New Testament each day. The key is to read a little every day.

The following translations of the Bible have been authorized for use by the Episcopal Church: (We particularly recommend the versions in bold)

King James or Authorized Version (the historic Bible of The Episcopal Church, but more challenging to read than some other translations)

Visit: www.thekjvstore.com

English Revision (1881)

American Revision (1901)

Revised Standard Version (1952)

Jerusalem Bible (1966)

***New English Bible with Apocrypha* (1970)** Visit:

www.christianbook.com

Good News Bible/Today's English Version (1976) (This is a paraphrase of the Bible)

***New American Bible* (1970)** Visit: www.amazon.com

***Revised Standard Version, an Ecumenical Version* (1973)** Visit:

www.amazon.com

***New International Version* (1978)** Visit: www.zondervan.com

***New Jerusalem Bible* (1987)** Visit: www.christianbook.com

***New Revised English Bible* (1989)** Visit: www.christianbook.com

***New Revised Standard Version* (1990)** Visit: www.nrsv.net

***Common English Version* (2011)** Visit: www.commonenglishbible.com

2. Read the Bible and read *The Bible Challenge* with it – Our book *The Bible Challenge* coincides with our Read the Bible in a Year reading plan and to accompany each day's lessons, around the world. The Bible Challenge book is printed by Forward Movement and is available at: <http://www.forwardmovement.org/Products/2114/the-bible-challenge-read-the-bible-in-a-year.aspx> or at Amazon or Barnes and Nobles

3. Share your joy of reading the Bible with someone else – If you have enjoyed and benefited from reading the Bible on a regular basis, share your experience with a friend or family member. Consider purchasing a Bible as a gift for them. Tell them about The Bible Challenge, or get their permission to sign them up as a participant.

Consider re-reading the Bible with them and meeting regularly to share your thoughts and experiences. It will deepen your relationship with one another and with God and you will learn from one another.



4. Consider reading a Bible with a particular focus – Publishers are producing many exciting versions of the Bible that highlight passages of crucial interest to the reader. These include:

The People's Bible – This New International Version of the Bible offers a visual guide to the Bible's most searched for verses by printing famous verses in larger, bold type. Visit: www.zondervan.com

The Peoples' Bible – This New Revised Standard Version of the Bible highlights the role of cultures in shaping the Bible and the way people read it. Visit: www.augsburgfortress.com

The Jewish Annotated New Testament – This New Revised Standard Version of the Bible has study notes by an international team of scholars written from a Jewish perspective. Visit: www.oup.com or www.amazon.com

The Inclusive Bible – This inclusive-language Bible offers a fresh, dynamic modern English translation, carefully crafted to let the power and poetry of the language shine forth. Visit: www.amazon.com

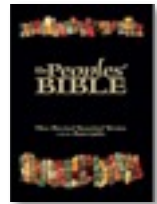
The Financial Stewardship Bible – This Common English Version of the Bible highlights over 2,000 verses about trust, provision, money and dealing with possessions. Visit: www.americanbible.org

The Poverty and Social Justice Bible – This Bible highlights Bible passages that speak about outreach, social justice, poverty and caring for the poor and needy. Visit: www.povertyandjusticebible.org

The Green Bible – This New Revised Standard Version of the Bible helps us to see God's vision for creation and engage in the work of healing and sustaining the environment. Visit: www.harpercollins.com

The Freedom Bible – This Common English Version of the Bible includes over 3,500 highlighted verses that reveal the Bible's astonishing message of freedom. Visit: www.americanbible.org

The Life Recovery Bible – This New Living Translation of the Bible helps individuals struggling with addiction to the ultimate source of healing – God himself. Visit: www.liferecoverybible.com



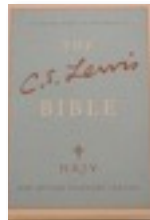
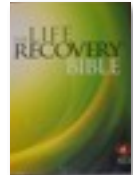
The C.S. Lewis Bible – This New Revised Standard Version of the Bible intersperses quotations from C.S. Lewis, one of Christianity’s most respected contemporary writers. Visit: www.harpercollins.com



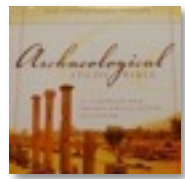
The Archeological Study Bible – This New International Version of the Bible highlights the archeological, historical and cultural background of the Bible as well as archeological excavations and discoveries that shed light on biblical stories. Visit: www.zondervan.com



5. Read the Bible using the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina* – For centuries, Christian monks have read the Bible in a slow, meditative fashion savoring God’s Word and letting it speak deeply to them. *Lectio divina* includes four movements: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio* and *contemplatio* – reading, meditating, praying and contemplating the text. Select a book of the Bible to read. We recommend starting with a gospel. Read no more than a chapter at a time, perhaps as little as a paragraph or two each time you read.



In step one, *lectio*, read the passage slowly. When something strikes you, pause and meditate upon the word, phrase or verse that has captured your attention. This is *meditatio*. Mull over the text like a cow chewing its cud. Then offer a brief prayer to God based on the text and how it has spoken to you. This is *oratio*. Finally, be quiet and listen for God to speak silently in your heart as you wait in solitude. This is *contemplatio*. This fourth step is perhaps the most important and difficult step to practice in *lectio divina*.



Visit our website at: www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org and check under *Resources* and see *Articles* to find a more detailed description of *lectio divina* or visit:

www.lectio-divina.org The goal of *lectio divina* is spiritual transformation rather than academic study. It opens God’s Word to us in ways that are constantly refreshing and engaging.



6. Scripture Memorization – Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose Driven Life* – the second best-selling book of all time after the Bible – says that Scripture

memorization has been the most important spiritual tool in his life and ministry. When we memorize something, it becomes part of us. We can recall it, recite it and use it to form our thoughts, guide our decisions and articulate our beliefs. There is even an app called *BibleMinded* that allows you to memorize verses on your own or following one of several plans.

We suggest reading a chapter of the Bible a day and highlighting one verse to memorize. Write it down on an index card. Spend a few minutes trying to memorize it. Take the index card with you and practice reciting the verse throughout the day. By the end of the day, you should have it memorized. Keep the index cards and review them once a week.

7. Listen to the Bible – There are many resources today that allow you to listen to the Bible as you commute to work, walk your dog, exercise, travel or sit at home. This is wonderful for audio learners and those who can no longer read. You can listen to the Bible in many translations.

Visit: www.Audio.com/Bible, www.listenersbible.com, www.BibleGateway.com, www.YouVersion.com and www.faithcomesthroughhearing.com. *Faith Comes through Hearing* provides excellent resources, including an MP3 player that allows you to hear the entire New Testament read aloud in 28 minutes a day for 40 days. The King James Version and the New International Version of the Bible can also be found on CD.

8. Read and study the Synoptic Gospels – The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke follow a similar timeline. Students can read these three gospels laid out on the same page in columns and compare how each of the evangelists told the same parable, story or teaching. This can be done alone or in a group.

We recommend using 1) *Gospel Parallels* edited by Joel B. Green and W. Gil Shin using the Common English Bible; 2) *Gospel Parallels* by Thomas Nelson Publishers, which uses the Revised Standard Version of the Bible; or 3) the *Records of the Life of Jesus* using the Revised Standard Version of the Bible compiled by Henry Burton Sharman, which can be purchased through Pendle Hill. Visit:

www.pendlehill.org We also recommend *Approaching the Gospels Together* by Mary C. Morrison, which is a book that offers a fresh approach to reading the gospels in small groups.



9. Read the Apocrypha – The Apocrypha is a group of ancient books found in some major translations of the Bible such as the New Revised

Standard Version used by Protestants and Catholics. The Apocrypha is often found in a separate section between the Old and New Testaments or in an appendix after the New Testament. All of these books, with the exception of 2 Esdras, were contained in the Greek translation of the Old Testament known as the *Septuagint*, but were not part of the original Hebrew Old Testament. Some churches view them as Scripture. Others do not.



The word “apocrypha” comes from a Greek word for “things that are hidden,” for these writings were considered to contain mysterious and esoteric lore. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Greek, and Russian churches consider these books authoritative, derive doctrine from them and call them deuterocanonical. Protestants refer to them as apocryphal and do not derive doctrine from them. Anglicans read them for inspiration, but not for doctrinal use. We believe that these books are engaging, inspiring and worth reading.



10. Consider reading *The Message* or *The Story* –

The Message is a paraphrase of the Bible by Eugene Petersen, a pastor and noted spiritual writer, which makes the biblical stories and verses come alive in fresh, new ways. Visit: www.messagebible.com *The Story*, published by Zondervan, is a seamless collection of Bible stories woven into one continuous narrative that reads like a novel. Transitional paragraphs connect the stories. Long dietary codes, genealogies and repetitive stories of ancient kings are eliminated. Visit: www.thestory.com *The Message* and *The Story* are helpful and engaging for persons who have struggled to read the Bible.

11. Read the Bible in a different language – Brush off your Spanish, Latin or French and read the Bible in a foreign language. It refreshes your language skills, but more importantly old familiar Bible stories come alive in new ways when reading them in a foreign language. We recommend *La Nouvelle Bible de Jerusalem* for French readers, the *Santa Biblia Dios Habla Hoy* by the American Bible Society for Spanish readers and *La Vulgata* for Latin readers.

12. Read a book of the Bible with a commentary – Start by reading one of the gospels. Then move on to the Book of Acts, some of the letters of Paul and Old Testament books such as Genesis, Exodus, I and II Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah and the Psalms. The can be done alone or in a group. Luke Timothy Johnson’s *The Writings of the New Testament*

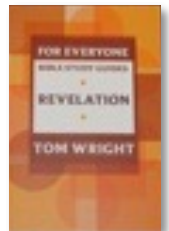
is an excellent introduction with a chapter about each book in the New Testament.

We recommend four commentary series: 1) *The People's Bible Commentary Series* is published in England by the Bible Reading Fellowship and features outstanding authors and scholars such as Professor Richard Burridge; Visit: www.brffonline.org.uk 2) *The New Daily Bible Study Series* published by Westminster John Knox Press and written by William Barclay is wonderful and easy to read and filled with down to earth illustrations. Visit: www.wjkbooks.com 3) *The For Everyone Bible Study Guides* published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge in England and written by Tom Wright. Visit: www.amazon.com and 4) *The Old Testament New Daily Bible Study* published by Westminster John Knox Press and written by John L. Gibson. Visit: www.wjkbooks.com



13. Read excellent secondary sources to assist you as you read the Bible – Review The Bible in the Life of the Church study, *Deep Engagement Fresh Discovery* available through the Anglican Communion website at: www.anglicancommunion.org We also recommend the

Morehouse Publishing series *Conversations with Scripture*, prepared in cooperation with the Anglican Association of Biblical Scholars. Contributors include Marcus Borg, Cynthia Kittredge, Stephen Cook and others. For those wanting to go a little deeper in their study, we recommend Bruce Metzger's *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, a superb and very readable one-volume resource. Also visit our website at: www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org and look under "Resources" to find a list of books about the Bible that we recommend.



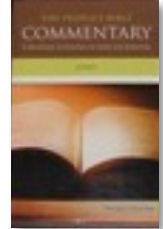
14. Learn how to read the Bible in its original languages – Consider studying Biblical Hebrew with a local rabbi or learning Koine Greek so that you can

comprehend new things by reading the Bible in its original language. There are also websites that can help make this possible. One illuminating resource is interlinearbible.org, which provides a transliterated version of the New Testament (in Greek) and Old Testament (in Hebrew), and links to the definition of each and every

Greek and Hebrew word in the Bible. Websites such as YouVersion.com offers the Bible in scores of additional languages, in addition to numerous English versions. Translations in German, Korean, Swahili and Swedish can be read in parallel with a selected English translation.



15. Go on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land – The Holy Land is often referred to as the fifth gospel. There is nothing that can compare to walking in the footsteps of Jesus and the great figures of the Bible. Numerous groups provide wonderful pilgrimages to the Holy Land. We recommend Worldwide Pilgrimage. Visit: www.worldwidepilgrimage.com



Suggestions for participating in a Biblically-centered small group

1. Join or start a Bible study – The Bible comes alive when we engage it with others. As we study the Scriptures together, we learn from others. Religion is not so much about having all the answers but asking the right questions. Bible studies help us to do this. Ask your clergy and lay leaders about which Bible study might be best for you.



You can start a Bible study in your home, school or church. Invite friends, family and members of your church, book club, neighbors and work colleagues to join you. Select a book of the Bible and study it carefully. We recommend starting with a gospel or reading the Gospel of Luke and then the Book of Acts. Then consider reading Paul's Letter to the Romans or First and Second Corinthians. If you read the Old Testament, we recommend starting with Genesis and Exodus. These captivating books help to reveal the sweep of salvation, God's Covenant and plan for humanity.

2. Education for Ministry (EfM) – This program, created by the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, is a four-year program that begins with an intensive one-year focus on the Old Testament followed by a year-long study of the New Testament. In the third year participants focus on Church history. The fourth year is devoted to theology. EfM is an ideal next step for persons who have participated in

The Bible Challenge and have many unanswered questions. Participants commit to this program one year at a time.

EfM involves significant Bible reading, homework and group discussion. Each EfM group is led by a specially trained mentor. EfM is perhaps the top educational program offered by the Episcopal Church. It is well-organized and helps participants comprehend the great Bible themes, apply biblical learning to their daily lives and reflect on their own spiritual journey. For many EfM is a life changing experience. To learn more, contact your clergy or visit: www.sewanee.edu/EFM/ or www.edowefm.org



3. Participate in the Disciples of Christ in Community (DOCC)

– The DOCC Program seeks to strengthen individual churches by helping members better receive and give the love of Christ. Begun nearly 40 years ago at Trinity Episcopal Church in New Orleans, DOCC has graduated over 35,000 participants from more than 400 churches. Each week, over a three or four month period, clergy or trained laypersons offer a 40-minute lecture on the heart of the faith, grounding their talks in Scripture. Trained small-group leaders help participants learn from one another as they apply the great themes of the Christian faith to their own lives. Each small group strives to become “a beloved community.” That sense of beloved-ness spreads to the entire church. Eighteen hours of training for presenters and small group leaders is required. To learn more, contact your parish clergy or the Rev. Canon William Barnwell at wbarnwell@trinitynola.com or visit: www.nationalcathedral.org/learn/docc.shtml or www.trinitynola.com/DOCC



4. Participate in the Transforming Literature of the Bible (TLB) –

The 36-week Transforming Literature of the Bible course strives to relate the great themes of Scripture to our own lives and stories. Once students have read the Bible in a year through *The Bible Challenge*, they may want to consider TLB. Course participants “plow deep” into transformative Bible passages and stories from Genesis, Mark and Romans. In seminar style, participants reflect on the passages and make use of a well-tested commentary. Using suggested questions, they connect the passages to their own lives. Eight to ten hours of on-site training is required for both seminar leaders and participants.

Experienced clergy and laypersons lead the training. To learn more, contact your clergy of the Rev. Canon William Barnwell at wbarnwell@trinitynola.com.

5. Participate in a Kerygma Bible Study – The

Kerygma Program’s resources provide stimulating resources to challenge minds and refresh your spirit. Kerygma leaders are trained and receive a leader’s guide that is designed to create opportunities that stimulate discussion and illuminate the Biblical material through small group encounters. For more information, visit www.kerygma.com



If The Bible Challenge has been a good spiritual experience for you and has touched your heart and nourished your soul, we invite you to contribute to the Center for Biblical Studies to help us promote The Bible Challenge globally so that others may benefit from the daily reading of God’s Word.

Your gift can be made out to Christ Church Greenwich, with a memo for “The CBS” and sent to Christ Church Greenwich 254 E. Putnam Avenue, Greenwich, CT 06830.

May God richly bless you as you engage the Scriptures, and may God’s light and love transform you and shine through you each day. To join The Bible Challenge, please e-mail me at: mzabriskie@christchurchgreenwich.org.



Marek +

The Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie
Rector of Christ Church Greenwich in Greenwich, Connecticut
and Founder of The Bible Challenge and the Center for Biblical Studies.

