

The Word Diet:
One Chapter per Day for a Year to Read & Understand the Bible
LEADER'S GUIDE

Introduction

Setting up your Group Gatherings:

- Ideally, group size will be no more than 12 people to encourage people to participate.
- Co-ed groups are fine—different, rather than better/worse.
- A 60-minute meeting can be sufficient. But 75 or 90 minutes would be more relaxed, especially with a larger group or more emphasis on prayer and building relationships.
- You can start in Week 1 (Old Testament) or Week 27 (New Testament). Especially if you have a reflex to do the NT—rather than thought and prayer—I'd encourage you to strongly consider the OT, which is often overlooked by quite powerful.
- Decide how and how much you want to encourage Bible memorization.
- Decide about levels of accountability and discuss this with potential members: intermittent vs. regular attendance; “just show up” vs. more insistent discipleship. Your church probably offers a number of intermittent and “just show up” opportunities. If so, consider making this an opportunity that requires more rigor.
- Consider using a “covenant” if you choose a more rigorous approach. (This is available on our website, ThoroughlyEquipped.org.)
- Avoid Mondays to minimize schedule/holiday disruptions.

Ground Rules / Running your Group Gatherings week-to-week:

- Add opening/closing prayer (ideally, often led by others).
- Consider what to do with “prayer requests”. A few thoughts: 1.) You probably want to avoid going around the room to hear people conjure up requests such as “the neighbor’s dog’s goiter is flaring up”. 2.) When you get impersonal requests, recast them as more-personal requests. For example, if someone asks for prayer for a neighbor’s health, turn it into praying for the person to be effective as a minister to that neighbor. 3.) Have a frank discussion with your group about this and revisit/reset the discussion as useful.
- If someone memorizes more than one verse, decide whether you want to hear both or just one.
- The group should be facilitated not taught; your comments should be no more than the most-active participant.
- Aim for even levels of “class participation” (CP). How aggressively/subtly you do this will depend on your goals and standards for the group and its members.
- Questions should be rare compared to comments. And encourage comments to be less technical and more personal. But communicate that there are no stupid comments or questions.

-Watch your “time management” (TM): As a default, spend 1/6th of your time on each day’s reading. Feel free to strategically (Spirit-led) deviate from that norm. But don’t settle for floating (in “the flesh”) into a pattern where you don’t spend adequate time on each day’s reading.

-Help participants to understand the difference between interpreting and applying the Scriptures—e.g., the sin in Genesis 3 was not sexual, but the temptations described in Genesis 3 can be applied to sexual immorality.

-Help participants with the Old vs. New Covenant as you read the Old Testament. (Andy Stanley’s *Irresistible* is a nice resource for leaders. See: my blog review at <https://schansblog.blogspot.com/2019/02/andy-stanleys-irresistible.html> for more detail.)

Shepherding your group members outside the Group Gatherings:

-Be purposeful and strategic in enhancing accountability—e.g., a mid-week text.

-Provide intentional and personal shepherding, especially for more-marginal group members.

-Add missional service and encourage relational community outside of your group gatherings.

-Discuss appropriate “next steps” for participants as they exit the group. (Corollary: make sure that you have good next steps available for them!)

How to engage the Bible Reading:

-Use whatever translation you want. If you’re relatively familiar with the Bible, I’d encourage you to try a unfamiliar translation this time.

-Say at least a brief prayer before reading: “Lord, help me understand and apply Your Word to my life.”

-Reading the Bible is different than studying it. Studying is fine, but remember that we’re reading. Likewise, questions are ok, but we’re much more interested in what God is saying to you as you read.

-Key questions to consider as you read: What does this passage tell me about God? What does it say about me and how to treat others?

-Mark up your Bible. And write in this book—both answers to the questions and key verses/phrases that the Lord uses to speak to you. There are no stupid comments.

-Ideally, you’ll read one chapter per day, but feel free to double-up as needed.

How to engage the Bible Memory:

-Each week has an easier and a more challenging option to memorize from the week’s reading. You can decide whether to choose either or both.

-The verses are on the intro page for each week. The other three pages provide opportunities to write and/or use initials to help you memorize each day.

-Spend a minute or two on this every day. Cramming is not as effective for memory—either short-term or long-term.

-Say the book/chapter/verse reference before and/or after saying the verse. (It’s useful to get a better understanding of verse locations.)

- You can use whatever translation you want. But I had to make a decision to produce supplemental resources to help with memory—and I chose NIV.
- I'm making other resources available to help you memorize new verses and review previous verses: 1.) under "The Word Diet" or "EricSchansberg" using the free App, Quizlet (https://quizlet.com/_7dtek4?x=1jqt&i=2fwm1y for the verses and https://quizlet.com/_7ksc1w?x=1jqt&i=2fwm1y for the initials); and 2.) free Word (editable) and PDF versions of verses, verse initials, and verse cards (on our website, ThoroughlyEquipped.org.)
- You can also use other memory verse resources if you prefer—e.g., BibleMemory.com.
- The leader should spend a few minutes discussing the review verses as well. Spending that much energy on a single verse will likely lead to fruit in terms of discernment and revelation.

Week 1: Intro

- Use name tags and sharpies to help with names; encourage them to learn names as soon as possible (have some fun with this—quizzes, contests, etc.).
- Put together a roster with at least name, cell phone, email.
- Use an ice-breaker or two.
- Work through aspects of the introduction to the book and aspects of the introduction to the Leaders Guide.
- Walk them through week 1, including intro, memory, and each day's reading.
- Have people share something about their "story"—faith, family, work.

A note to guinea pigs: I appreciate your help with improving this. Please send any ideas, edits, points of confusion, feedback, etc. to me at DSchansb@ius.edu.

Comments on selected days in *The Word Diet*

(if you want more—guidance, warnings, details, etc.—shoot me an email at DSchansb@ius.edu!)

Week 1, Day 2: Note 7's dust and breath (material and spiritual). Note 15's work and 18's wife—denoting vocation and relationships/family as first two institutions developed by God.

Week 1, Day 3: Larry Crabb makes the point that Adam's silence here is not "golden". When God spoke, He turned darkness and chaos into light, order, and beauty. When Adam failed to speak in 3:1-6, he turned light, order, and beauty into darkness and chaos.

Week 1, Day 5: In sum, Noah gets on the ark "men first" (7:13); God commands Noah to come off the ark with his wife before his sons (8:16), but Noah comes off the ark again "men first"—putting his sons ahead of his wife (8:18). Granted, this is obscure and something I overlooked until reading Leon Kass' great commentary, *The Beginning of Wisdom*. In a much longer discussion about God's far-greater work with Abraham (compared to Noah), Kass notes that God is trying to fix "the man's world" of post-Fall / pre-Flood Genesis 4-6 (Cain's murder and then a range of typically-male shenanigans in the passage we're skipping—from polygamy to the "heroes of renown" in the mysterious Nephilim passage). Kass sees Noah's failure here as a clue that Noah doesn't "get it" and the reader knows that God will be moving on to Plan C—which will involve Abraham.

Week 2: Consider adjustments this week, including how to address memory. If you didn't get much, maybe ask a few to do the verses using the initials—and build from there. Especially if you started in the OT, it may be more difficult to memorize and get motivated to memorize narrative.

Week 2, Day 1: Note 1's leave and go. Note 1-3's blessed in order to be a blessing.

Week 2, Day 4: Whenever the ends (seem to) justify the means—but specifically, the use of coercion, rushing God's timing, acting out of the Flesh (vs. the Spirit), etc.

Week 2, Day 6: Judah's development throughout the narrative is impressive, including 38:26's penitence. Here, in the climax of the story, Judah's willingness to take Benjamin's place in slavery is staggering—and a total reversal of the debacle in chapter 37. Judah's self-sacrificing love is amazing enough, but in the face of the depravity of selling Joseph into slavery is awe-inspiring. No wonder, then, that David and Jesus come through the line of Judah—as the "lion of Judah".

Week 3, Day 2: The third of Moses' three rescue/justice attempts works really well—and then Jethro's response to hearing about "a good man" is amusing.

Week 3, Day 5: Among other things, 16:2's reference to "community" can lead to some useful discussion about how to stop grumbling (or other negative attitudes/actions) from spreading like contagion. In 16:8 (and in other places), it's impressive that Moses does not take their complaints personally.

Week 4, Day 1: The 2nd Commandment's "generations" can lead to confusion—and did in Israel—when read too literally. See: Ezekiel 18:2-4 for a prophetic effort to correct Israel's

misperceptions. Even if read literally, note that 1000's dwarfs 3-4. The 3rd Commandment is "misuse" God's name—which is often (and inappropriately) reduced to merely certain sorts of cussing. As another example, we misuse God's name whenever we claim it and then engage in public sin. The 9th Commandment is a legal reference to giving false testimony in court, rather than lying per se. The 10th Commandment is an attitude which is relevant for everyone. Even if you think you've avoided sin in the first nine commandments, you're busted here. Jesus uses this to great effect with the "Rich Young Ruler" in Luke 18.

Week 5, Day 4: Striking the rock is disobedience—and replicates what Moses did (and was commanded to do) in Exodus 17. In *The Saving Life of Christ*, Ian Thomas draws a parallel between "striking" and crucifixion vs. "speaking" and the Holy Spirit. He sees this as re-crucifying Christ, relying on "the flesh", and failing to depend on the Spirit. Beyond that, Moses fails as a leader on many levels—and is thus prone to greater punishment (James 3:1).

Week 6: Interested readers might enjoy my book on Joshua, *Inheriting the Promised Land*. Of particular interest, God arranges for various battles to be different combinations of His provision and their participation—from the miraculous at Jericho (chapter 6) to conventional warfare at Ai (chapter 8) and then a powerful combo (chapter 10).

Week 7: Judges is as pessimistic as Joshua is optimistic. We won't read it this time, but Judges 17-21 is as dark as it gets, including the nasty parallel to Genesis 19 in Judges 19. On Samson, reviews of his early ministry (in Judges 13-15) range from looking for evil in everything he did (Walvoord and Zuck) to graciously interpreting everything he did (Matthew Henry).

Week 13, Day 4: Like Solomon, Josiah's reign has an unseemly end: after his reforms and dependence on God, it's sad to see him depend on foreign governments and military power/strategy rather than God. And it's interesting to speculate on how Judah might have continued spiritually if Josiah had lived longer.

Week 14, Day 3: Paul makes clear that "success" in God's kingdom is measured by faithfulness and obedience, not by how other people respond. This theme is echoed in the concept of "the watchman" in Ezekiel (week 18).

Week 21, Days 1-2: The timing of events and characters can be confusing for people. Note that Ezra does not appear in the book named for him until the second half of the narrative.

Week 23: This can be a depressing week of reading for some people. So, it's a good time to emphasize prayer for your people and to check with them during the week.

Week 27: For those starting in the New Testament section of *The Word Diet*, make sure that dieters are aware that they should answer questions AND/OR comment on words, phrases, and verses that strike them from the reading. (If you have the first edition of *The Word Diet*, the daily directions were not clear/sufficient this week.)

Week 27, Day 4: The temptations are all flashy and quick fixes that range from material to political, religious and social.

Week 27-28: In the first two weeks of the NT (especially if you start there), participants may be prone to asking questions (focusing on what they did *not* get from the reading) rather than talking about what God did give them this week. Some questions are fine, but generally, you'll want to gently encourage them to talk about what the Lord has shown them.

Week 28: If you started in the NT, consider changes to make in your second week, especially with respect to memory. If you didn't get as much as you wanted, consider asking a few to do the verses using the initials—and build from there.

Week 30, Day 3: Matthew 7:1 is arguably the most famous verse among non-believers. Ironically, the passage is filled with “judgments” of various sorts. So, Jesus is not talking about a lack of discernment or distinguishing between right/wrong, but an attitude of dogmatism when one doesn't know and condemnation when one does know.

Week 31, Day 2: It's important to note that those who skip the feast do so out of either malice or merely apathy. Likewise today, in addition to “evil” people, there are many “good” people (by worldly standards) who are uninterested in the things of God—who choose to avoid God, His Kingdom, and His people (22:14).

Week 31, Day 6: The muttering of the religious leaders (15:2) sets up the 3rd parable's punchline about the older son. Note also that verse 24 seems like the end of the story, before 25's “meanwhile” takes us to the climax. It also may be interesting to note that there is no response recorded at the end, inviting the hearer/reader into the parable to ask how they compare to the younger son, the older son, and the Father.

Week 35: In discussing your local church context, make sure that the conversation is constructive, rather than descending into critique (without action), gossip, etc.

Week 36, Days 4-5: Chapter 5 can be challenging for people. Among other points, it's probably worth noting that it's important for the Early Church to “get off to a good start”. Both chapters may lead to important but challenging discussions on church discipline and church administration. Again, make sure that the conversations are constructive.

Week 43: There is more potential for challenging discussion throughout this week. Of particular sensitivity, applications of the weaker/stronger can be difficult—given the potential for legalism and dogmatism in the weaker and the potential for insensitivities by the stronger. Again, be careful that all of these conversations are constructive.

Week 45, Day 2: Philemon can be a difficult book for some, so be ready. If you want my Bible study notes on it, shoot me an email.

Week 49: Days 4-6: I warn about this in the comments each day, but it is challenging to distinguish between John's thoughts here—about committing sins vs. walking in sin, etc.

Week 51: Despite my comments to set up each day's ministry, it will be tempting for you and yours to get distracted in this week's discussion. Try to keep them focused on bigger themes such as God's character, faithfulness in persecution, etc.