

COOKIES ON THE LOWER SHELF

Putting Bible Reading Within Reach

BY

PAM GILLASPIE

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Dedicated to . . .

Mom and Dad.

You taught me to love the stories and the God of the stories with my whole heart and I am forever grateful!

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my faithful friends who have studied with me over the years. We've learned that you can read or you can listen and that sometimes filling in all the blanks keeps you from wrestling with the real questions. I'm grateful for your patience in piloting this material and learning with me along the way.

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COOKIES ON THE LOWER SHELF

Putting Bible Reading Within Reach

There is nothing quite like your favorite pair of jeans. You can dress them up, you can dress them down. You can work in them, play in them, shop in them . . . live in them. They always feel right. It is my hope that the structure of this Bible study will fit you like those jeans, that it will work with your life right now, right where you are whether you're new to this whole Bible thing or whether you've been studying the Book for years!

How is this even possible? Smoke and mirrors, perhaps? The beginner mercilessly thrown into the deep end of the exegetical? The experienced given pompoms and the job of simply cheering others on? None of the above.

Flexible Bible studies are designed with options that will allow you to go as deep each week as you desire. If you're just starting out and feeling a little overwhelmed, stick with the main text and don't think a second thought about the sidebar assignments. If you're looking for a challenge, then take the sidebar prompts and go ahead and dig all the way to China! As you move along through the study, think of the sidebars and "Digging Deeper" boxes as that 2% of lycra that you find in certain jeans . . . the wiggle-room that will help them fit just right.

Beginners may find that they want to start adding in some of the optional assignments as they go along. Experts may find that when three children are throwing up for three days straight, foregoing these assignments for the week is the way to live wisely.

Life has a way of ebbing and flowing and this study is designed to ebb and flow right along with it!

Enjoy!

WEEKLY READING:

Main Reading

You'll find this text in the main column of the lesson. Read this—or listen to it—and you'll be able to follow the narrative and stay on track.

More Reading

These texts will give you more of the story. You'll typically find these located in the **One Step Further** boxes.

Even More Reading!

Finish these readings, too, and you'll read through the entire Bible by the time you finish the *Cookies* series. These readings are often in the **Digging Deeper** boxes.

How to use this study

Flexible inductive studies meet you where you are and take you as far as you want to go.

1. WEEKLY STUDY: The main text guides you through the complete topic of study for the week.

2. FYI boxes: For Your Information boxes provide bite-sized material to shed additional light on the topic.

FYI:

Reading Tip: Begin with prayer

You may have heard this a million times over and if this is a million and one, so be it. Whenever you read or study God's Word, first pray and ask His Spirit to be your Guide.

3. ONE STEP FURTHER and other sidebar boxes: Sidebar boxes give you the option to push yourself a little further. If you have extra time or are looking for an extra challenge, you can try one, all, or any number in between! These boxes give you the ultimate in flexibility.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Word Study: *torah*/law

The first of eight Hebrew key words we encounter for God's Word is *torah*, translated "law." If you're up for a challenge this week, do a word study to learn what you can about *torah*. Run a concordance search and examine where the word *torah* appears in the Old Testament and see what you can learn from the contexts.

If you decide to look for the word for "law" in the New Testament, you'll find that the primary Greek word is *nomos*.

Be sure to see what Paul says about the law in Galatians 3 and what Jesus says in Matthew 5.

4. DIGGING DEEPER boxes: If you're looking to go further, Digging Deeper sections will help you sharpen your skills as you continue to mine the truths of Scripture for yourself.

Digging Deeper

What else does God's Word say about counselors?

If you can, spend some time this week digging around for what God's Word says about counselors.

Start by considering what you already know about counsel from the Word of God and see if you can actually show where these truths are in the Bible. Make sure that the Word actually says what you think it says.

Week One

Beginnings

"For this commandment which I command you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may observe it."

—Deuteronomy 30:11, 14

God's Word was not meant to be held behind locked doors. It was not delivered to man only to be hoarded, grudgingly dispensed, or rationed by the elite to the masses. God's Words are light and life! Parents are to teach them in the morning, speak of them along the path, discuss them over lunch, and consider them at bedtime. God designed His Word to be part of the fabric of our lives, moving with us, instructing our thoughts and behaviors. Just listen to the words of God in Deuteronomy 6:4-9:

"Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

God's words were meant for common people—people just like you and me. God spoke accessible and understandable words to the fathers by the prophets and then He came nearer still when He spoke in His Son. God's Word was meant to be near people, to be understood, consumed and lived, but man's fallen history of exchanging truth for lies has included confounding the clear and removing the near. Man decided to be consumed by other things—created things. These became his life.

This study is all about showing how these sweet words are accessible cookies on the lower shelf.

THIS WEEK:

Main Reading 8.5 chapters

- Genesis 1-4: Creation
- Genesis 6-9: Noah
- Genesis 11:1-9: Tower of Babel

Additional Reading _____

More Reading 10 chapters

- Genesis 5: Genealogy
- Genesis 10: Genealogy
- Job 1-3; 38-42

Even More Reading! 36 chapters

- Complete book of Job

FYI:

Reading the Story

So often Bible consumers swing between two extremes. On one hand are the bits-and-piecers who read here and there and from time to time. (And who of us hasn't been here?) In this entirely random approach is the admission that undertaking a complete read-through of the Bible is simply too hard.

On the other extreme are the grit-my-teeth-and-start-Genesis-in-"January-ers." Often the resolve of reading the Bible through on a strict schedule melts like a Tennessee snow.

On our journey we'll look for the middle ground we can walk together. Beginners can read less as they learn the basics while walking alongside more experienced or adventurous readers! Every week you'll have the opportunity to read a little more and dig a little deeper—or back off a little—until you find the pace you can follow with joy.

CONSIDER the WAY you THINK

What successes or failures have you had in reading the Bible?

What characterizes your reading and/or studying?

Have you encountered any hang-ups along the way? If so, what kinds?

What has worked for you?

Are you bringing any fears or reservations to this study? If so, what are they?

What do you hope to gain through this study?

READING THE STORY

OBSERVE the TEXT of SCRIPTURE

READ the account of Creation in Genesis 1–4 and briefly summarize below.

RECORD key words and phrases you noticed.

DISCUSS with your GROUP or PONDER on your own . . .

How does the Bible start?

Who is the main character in the first two chapters? What did He do?

Describe God's creation briefly. What characterized it? Was it flawed in any way? Explain.

What did God create on the sixth day? What instructions did God give?

FYI:

Key Words

Key words unlock the meanings of texts. **They're** often repeated and are critical to understanding messages. As you read, watch for **important words and phrases that repeat**. If you mark **key words** along with **their** pronouns and synonyms, you'll be able to identify **them** much more quickly on the page.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Genesis 1:1, John 1:1 and John 1:14

According to John 1:1 and 1:14, who else was involved at creation? How do the opening verses of Genesis and John compare? Record your observations below.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Genesis 5: The Genealogy from Adam

If you've been knocked out of Bible reading in Genesis, chances are it was at Genesis 5, 10, 11, or 36. Why? Genealogies. Seriously, there's nothing like a list of names in the middle of a narrative to make you feel like doing something else. While genealogies aren't usually compelling reading, we can learn a lot by studying them.

If you're up for paying a little extra attention today, work your way through Genesis 5 and record your observations below. If it still sounds like a bad idea, try reading the genealogy another time. Remember, part of learning to enjoy this study will involve allowing the homework to flex to meet you.

What did God do on the seventh day?

What did God tell Adam and Eve to do? Did they have a lot of commands? Look closely and record what God told them to do and not to do.

How did the serpent deceive Eve? Look closely at the sequence.

What steps preceded Eve's sin? What did she do before she ate? Do you see places in the narrative where she could have changed her mind and stopped short of eating?

How did Adam respond when God confronted him?

What can we learn about temptation and deception from the pattern the serpent and Eve modeled?

Digging Deeper

Is Sabbath still for me?

Spend some time this week examining the concept of sabbath in the Bible and investigating how you can apply it today.

Where is sabbath first mentioned?

What is the context?

Where else do we see it in the Old Testament? In the New Testament?

Did Jesus honor sabbaths? Explain.

FYI:

A Word from a Recovering Type A

Just a gentle reminder to let this study flex! I know I've already laid out the "flex facts" but this is the exhortation to take it to heart. Think this through with me. If a study actually flexes to meet both new students and highly advanced students, reality says that most students will not finish all the homework every week. Type A personalities I'm talking to you! Learn to relax with this material. Relish the text of Scripture and find a pace that brings joy! Some weeks you may read the text of Scripture and never pick up a pencil for the workbook while other weeks you may be adding pages to the workbook for all your notes. Some weeks you may read the Bible; other weeks you can choose to listen to it. Let it flex.

If you've just had a serious "Type A reaction" (remember, it takes one to know one!) I have one additional assignment for you: Pick at least one sidebar or Digging Deeper section NOT to complete this week. Counterintuitive? Probably, but sometimes growth in grace hurts in strange ways.

FYI:

Don't Break Up the Story

Here's the deal. This is a flexible study and in flexing you're not bound to a specific amount of reading. I have one strong suggestion, though. As you work through the material during the week, try not to break up stories. In other words, read the creation account all the way through. You may need to review and answer the questions later but try to read an account in one sitting. I understand some of your life situations will make this difficult. If you can't do it like this, just do it whatever way you can. If you can, however, you'll do well to learn to read the Bible account by account and book by book. This is very different from the way we often go about it—reading three chapters a day or snippets here and there. At least give it a shot. Context is crucial and reading larger segments in single sittings helps us pay attention to context and increase attention span.

FYI:

A Buried Treasure

If you don't read the genealogies in Genesis you'll miss a buried treasure. His name is Enoch and his story is a 4-verse wonder. I could tell you about it but I'm just going to let you read it for yourself.

Genesis 5:21-24

21 Enoch lived sixty-five years, and became the father of Methuselah.

22 Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah, and he had other sons and daughters.

23 So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.

24 Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.

Enoch and Elijah are the only two people in the entire Bible who never died. Perhaps they'll show up again . . . but that, my friend, is a discussion for another day!

What application can you make in your life?

Is the sabbath still valid? Why/why not?

How can you incorporate sabbath principles into your life?

The first death in the Bible is recorded in this week's reading. Who died and who caused the death?

What promise did God make in the aftermath of Adam and Eve's sin? (Genesis 3:15)

OBSERVE the TEXT of SCRIPTURE

READ the account of Noah in Genesis 6–9 and briefly summarize below.

RECORD key words and phrases you noticed.

DISCUSS with your GROUP or PONDER on your own . . .

What characterized the moral climate between the time of Adam and Noah? During Noah's lifetime, how did God view the state of mankind?

Describe Noah. How did he differ from the rest of the people?

ONE STEP FURTHER:

The Image of God

What is "God's image"? What implications does it have for living? Explain your reasoning.

FYI:

How long will it take?

Listening to Genesis 1–10 on *The Bible Experience* MP3 will take you under 45 minutes. Pass over the genealogies and your run time will be less!

FYI:

Use Your TOC!

TOC is “book talk” for Table of Contents. While we could have given you a fancy little chart with boxes to mark where you’ve read, we decided against that because with every unmarked box a little guilt will try to creep in. My prayer for you in this study is you will walk in the Spirit and be driven by joy, not guilt. That’s one reason why you won’t see boxes to check.

The other reason is purely practical. When you’re reading through the Bible, chances are your workbook won’t always be handy. The long-term, easiest way to track your reading is penciling your TOC. As you finish reading books on our journey together, check that book in your Bible’s TOC. You may want to record the date you started reading to give yourself a loose time frame to watch then check books off as you read them. You won’t have empty boxes showing you what you haven’t done, only check marks cheering on the progress you’ve made! Can you tell I’m a glass-is-half-full kind of a girl?

Before Noah’s time, what did people eat? How did this change after the flood?

How did man’s relationship with animals change after the flood?

Describe the covenant God made. Who did He make it with? (Be careful; it’s not just Noah!)

OBSERVE the TEXT of SCRIPTURE

READ the account of The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 and briefly summarize below.

RECORD key words and phrases you noticed.

DISCUSS with your GROUP or PONDER on your own . . .

What command did God give to Adam and Eve and to Noah’s family?

What were the people doing at Babel? What did this reveal about their hearts?

How did God intervene? What happened?

Do you ever find yourself caught up in something that seems great and noble but is counter to God? If so, how do you identify it?

Digging Deeper

The first book written? Seriously?

People who pick up a chronological Bible are often surprised to find the book of Job staring at them for the first few days of their reading. While Job appears in about the middle of the traditional Christian Bible, scholars believe it was probably the first book recorded. Although it's a little difficult to read, it's an account of redemption from tragic suffering that fits the Bible's overall theme of redemption—God's plan to save His people through and out of tribulation.

Who was Job? How did God describe him?

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Genesis 10: The Genealogy from Noah

Another five chapters, another genealogy. This time we learn about the sons of Noah. If you take the time to read it now, you'll probably notice some familiar names. If you don't, they will become familiar as you continue to read! Record significant observations about Noah's sons in the space below.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Job, the Highlight Reel

If you're looking for a little extra challenge this week, read the opening and closing chapters of Job. Job 1-3 and Job 38-42 will give you a taste of this oft-alluded-to less-often-read account of a man who clung to God in good times and bad. Record your observations below.

ONE STEP FURTHER:

Genesis 11: The Genealogy of Shem

Yes, it's another genealogy. Noah's sons Ham, Shem, and Japheth are the super-great-grandfathers of everyone today. In the closing verses of Genesis 11 we read about Shem's descendants. Who are they and why are they important? Record your findings below.

What sufferings did Job endure? How did he respond to them?

How did his friends respond? How about his wife?

What did you learn about God from the book of Job?

What did you learn from Job's life that you can apply in yours?

@THE END OF THE DAY . . .

What has been your biggest takeaway this week?

Do you need to make any priority adjustments in your life to make more room for God and His Word?
If so, what?

Spend some time with God quietly reflecting on what you have learned. Record your thoughts below.

