LIVE IN THE WORD

Philip Nation
Fellowship with Believers

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PHILIP NATION

LifeWay Press®
Nashville, Tennessee
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Introducing Philip Nation

Philip Nation began following Christ at 7 years of age. After many conversations with his parents, he knelt beside the family sofa one Sunday morning to receive Christ as his Savior. Philip responded to God’s call to full-time ministry at the age of 16 and preached his first sermon soon after. During his college and seminary days, he served in several part-time positions leading youth ministries in his hometown of Birmingham, Alabama. He earned a bachelor of arts from Samford University and a master of divinity from Beeson Divinity School. During his formative years of ministry, Philip was blessed to be personally discipled by a great friend who taught him how to study God’s Word and pass along its truth to others.

Philip has participated in a variety of ministries. He served as the pastor of churches in rural and suburban settings in three states. He also served as the minister of education at First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Georgia. In 2005 Philip led an effort to plant a new missional church in north metro Atlanta. Currently, he serves as Director of Ministry Development at LifeWay Christian Resources.

Philip is the coauthor of *Compelled by Love: The Most Excellent Way to Missional Living* with Ed Stetzer (New Hope Publishers, 2008). He is also the author of the LifeWay small-group study *Compelled by Love: The Journey to Missional Living*. Additionally, he has contributed to numerous articles and other books written by friends.

Philip and his wonderful wife, Angie, make their home near Nashville, Tennessee, with their two incredible sons, Andrew and Chris.
Preface

The Bible is unlike any other book that man could ever read, write, or dream of. Its beautiful nature causes the soul to soar and the conscience to sear. Its mysterious nature boggles the mind, and its plain truth confronts the heart. The Bible is an overly gracious gift from God to humanity.

The Scriptures contain 66 books written by more than three dozen authors. It was written in three different languages and in numerous styles for its diverse audiences. The Bible’s lines were penned on three continents over a period of 1,500 years. And still it has only one main character, only one great purpose, and only one epic story.

Seeking to be a diligent student of God’s Word, I have often failed. But with God’s message of personal grace and kindness, He always welcomes me back to His Word to hear from His heart once again. Perhaps you find yourself in a position of—

• learning to study God’s Word for the first time;
• wanting to increase your understanding of God’s Word and your ability to learn from it;
• returning to God and seeking His guidance for living out your relationship with Him.

In my spiritual journey I have been in all three of those positions, and I have found that God’s voice is present every time I come to His Word. No matter what our motivation is for reading the Bible, God speaks to us through His Word and promises that the Scriptures will accomplish whatever He desires for our lives.

Growing up in the 19th century, George Müller lived immorally in his youth but was pressed into religious studies by his father to earn a decent salary through the state church. Through his study of God’s Word, he came to personal faith in Christ and was spiritually transformed by the power of the gospel.

Müller eventually moved to London to do missionary work. He and his wife began founding orphanages in the 1830s. Throughout his lifetime Müller existed solely on prayer and unsolicited donations. Each time there was a need, he studied God’s
Word and prayed. And in every circumstance God provided whatever was needed. What could have possibly so transformed an otherwise selfish man to embark on such an epic journey of care for others?

Müller explained how his spiritual transformation occurred in this way:

The vigor of our Spiritual Life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts. I solemnly state this from the experience of fifty-four years. ... The first three years after conversion I neglected the Word of God. Since I began to search it diligently the blessing has been wonderful. ... I have read the Bible through one hundred times, and always with increasing delight. Each time it seems like a new book to me. ... Great has been the blessing from consecutive, diligent, daily study. I look upon it as a lost day when I have not had a good time over the Word of God.¹

Müller’s explanation for the effectiveness of his life’s work always pointed toward the wisdom of God. His life was publicly defined by his compassion for the most powerless of society—orphans. His private life was defined by his dependency on God, as if he were an orphan himself who was cared for by the Heavenly Father.

Müller said of a Christian who does not value God’s Word: “That believer makes a fatal mistake who for any cause neglects the prayerful study of the word of God. To read God’s holy book, by it search one’s self, and turn it into prayer and so into holy living, is the one great secret of growth in grace and godliness.”²

Knowing the preciousness of the Scriptures, Müller was determined to put into practice what he learned of God’s character and the church’s mission. To that end he devoted 64 years of his life to act according to God’s Word. During that time he began seven day schools that helped a total of 81,501 children. He distributed 1,989,266 Bibles and aided 115 foreign missionaries. All in all, he took in 10,024 orphans and spent 988,829 pounds sterling on homes for them. It is said of Müller that “he believed what he found in the word of God, and by His grace sought to act accordingly, and thus again records that he was blessed abundantly and his peace and joy in the Holy Ghost increased more and more.”³

Lives like Müller’s are possible for all believers because we have access to the same God. We can witness His great kingdom arrive in power as we study and live according to His Word.
Introducing Live in the Word

Growing Disciples: Live in the Word is part of the Growing Disciples Series (see p. 110). This series of self-paced, interactive Bible studies introduces you to six disciplines illustrated by the Disciple’s Cross that was first developed and popularized by Avery Willis in MasterLife: A Biblical Process for Growing Disciples. Take a look at the diagram of the Disciple’s Cross below to see where the discipline of Live in the Word fits in the spiritual life of a follower of Jesus Christ.

Live in the Word is one of the disciplines in the vertical crossbar designating your relationship with God. As we begin a study of this discipline, let’s first take a brief look at all six.

THE SIX DISCIPLINES OF THE DISCIPLE’S CROSS

1. Abide in Christ
To abide in Christ is central to all of the disciplines. Jesus invites you to a love relationship with Himself. He wants you to know, understand, and live according to His commands so that you can experience the best life God has to offer you. His Word and prayer are the tools through which we speak to Him and
He speaks to us. By abiding in Christ, you receive all the life and vitality you need to be filled with joy and fruitfulness.

2. Live in the Word
God has revealed Himself, His purposes, and His ways in the Bible. He has given guidelines for an abundant and meaningful life. Jesus set an example for us by knowing Scripture and applying it in His daily living. You will learn to read, study, memorize, and meditate on God’s Word in order to know Him and understand His commands, His purposes, and His ways. Then you can live your life in a way that pleases Him and is abundantly full.

3. Pray in Faith
Prayer is not just a religious activity; it describes a relationship with a person. Prayer is your intimate communion with God. In prayer you experience a loving relationship, you receive God’s counsel and directions, you respond in praise and worship, you receive cleansing through confession, and you work together with God through petition for yourself and intercession for others.

4. Fellowship with Believers
When Jesus saved you, He placed you in the body of Christ with other believers. In relationships with other believers, you receive help to be all God wants you to be; and God uses you to meet the needs of the rest of the body. Together we grow strong in our faith, and we accomplish the kingdom work of Christ in the world for which He died.

5. Witness to the World
Jesus came with an assignment to seek and to save those who are lost. He went to the cross to reconcile a lost world to God the Father. He has given to us the ministry and message of reconciliation so that others can experience a saving relationship with God. We have both the privilege and the responsibility to witness about Christ to a lost and dying world around us.

6. Minister to Others
Jesus modeled a life of service for His disciples and for us. He did not come to be served but to serve others. His call for us is to a life of service to those who are needy, both in the body of Christ and in the world that has yet to believe. When we love and serve others who are needy, we show our love for Christ Himself; and God uses that service to build up the body of Christ.
The Growing Disciples Series provides a six-week study for each of the six disciplines in the Disciple’s Cross. *The Call to Follow Christ*, the first book in the series, introduces the six disciplines for new and growing believers. Though you would benefit from studying that course first, it is not a prerequisite. A person can study the individual disciplines in any order, based on interest and spiritual need. The goal of discipleship is to grow strong and balanced in each of these six disciplines. Because new believers need to understand the importance of handling and obeying the Word of God, this can be a valuable study whether it comes first or later.

**SMALL-GROUP STUDY OF *LIVE IN THE WORD***

Although you could study this book alone, finding a group of friends to join you in a journey through the study will most likely bear more fruit in your life. Interacting with the Bible is a personal journey but not a private one.

If you are the person who will lead the small-group sessions, I have included a brief leader guide for you, beginning on page 108. A guide for each small-group session is included at the end of each week’s devotionals.

**PERSONAL STUDY OF *LIVE IN THE WORD***

This book is designed as an interactive study. Each week will guide you through five daily devotionals and will offer an opportunity for you to memorize a short verse. The interactive questions are written for your benefit, so take full advantage of them. The devotionals will prepare you for the small-group study each week. Each day’s devotional can last as long as you wish to explore the lesson. I hope you will find yourself enthralled by God’s Word as He speaks to you through it, so that you want to spend more and more time in Bible study.

Although I have been blessed to be the author of this study, it is the product of countless other believers who have taught and shown me how to live in the Word. I would like to thank some of them: my wife, Angie; my sons, Andrew and Chris; Mom and Dad; Bill Overstreet; Doug Sager; Larry and Anna Lawrence; Lanny and Isabel Loe; Rush Harrison; Charles Q. Carter; Timothy George; Jeff Langley; Tim Wolfe; Ed Stetzer; Henry Blackaby; and especially Matthew Roskam. I pray that you will also find yourself surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses to the power of God’s Word as you faithfully embrace and follow its teachings.

3. Ibid., 300.
Week 1

Treasuring the Word

“How I love Your teaching!
It is my meditation
all day long.”

Psalm 119:97
Treasuring the Word

Bibliophile: a person who collects or has a great love of books.

I admit it—I am one. My home office is lined with books that are old, new, serious, fun, theological, historical, biographical, and fictional. I love great books and sometimes not-so-great ones. But none can dare compete with the beauty of God’s Word.

Through this study I hope you will learn to treasure God’s Word. This gift from our Heavenly Father serves as—
• a personal message about God’s character and kingdom;
• a public declaration of God’s goodness and desire to redeem fallen humanity and creation;
• a transformative instrument that reveals how God changes our lives and how people are to relate to one another.

God’s Word is no ordinary book on a shelf or decoration for a coffee table. It is eternal, inspired, and worth every moment of time we dedicate to it.

OVERVIEW OF WEEK 1
Day 1: Loving God’s Word
Day 2: Inspired by God
Day 3: Eternally True
Day 4: Trustworthy in Every Way
Day 5: Loving the Author

VERSE TO MEMORIZE
“How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long” (Psalm 119:97).

DISCIPLESHIP HELP FOR WEEK 1
“Outline of the Bible” (p. 94)
God’s Word for Today
“How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long.”
Psalm 119:97

Day 1 • Loving God’s Word

Read and meditate on “God’s Word for Today” (this week’s verse to memorize) in the margin. Spend a moment in prayer as you begin today’s lesson. Remove the Scripture-memory card for week 1 from the back of your book and begin committing this verse to memory.

Humans are wired to love. We naturally want to find someone or something for which we feel affection. Sometimes we focus on eternal things and sometimes on the temporary. But we always look for an object for our affection.

The primary focus of our love should be God. He is the Author of life and the only One who saves us from our sin. We should also love Him because He has chosen to speak to us. It is an awe-inspiring thought: the everlasting God has spoken truth to those He created in a temporary place so that they can receive eternal life. For that reason we should love God and all of His gifts to us, especially His Word.

*We love the Bible because God uses it to reveal Himself to us.* God has chosen to use the Scriptures as our primary source of understanding about His character and His will. Through God’s perfect words we gain insight into everyday living and eternal life. Because of what Scripture does in our lives and the One who has given it to us, we should deeply love this great gift from our Heavenly Father.

1. Read the following verses and record the aspects of God’s character that are named.

   - Psalm 7:17: _______________
   - Psalm 100:5: _______________
   - Colossians 1:11: ___________
   - 1 John 4:8: _______________

*We love the Bible because God uses it to change us.* As we study and obey God’s Word every day, it changes us. The Bible is a trustworthy guide for every decision we make about the greatest challenges, the most intense temptations, and the smallest details of life. In some measure the Word of God addresses every circumstance we face in life. The Father has graciously and clearly spoken so that we can find direction for our lives.
Psalm 119:97-104

“How I love Your teaching! It is my meditation all day long. Your command makes me wiser than my enemies, for it is always with me. I have more insight than all my teachers because Your decrees are my meditation. I understand more than the elders because I obey Your precepts. I have kept my feet from every evil path to follow Your word. I have not turned from Your judgments, for You Yourself have instructed me. How sweet Your word is to my taste—sweeter than honey to my mouth. I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every false way.”


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2. Read Psalm 119:97-104. Place a check mark beside the effects God’s Word has on us when we truly love it and spend time with it.

- A lack of direction
- Wisdom
- Understanding
- The right path
- Gullibility
- A love for truth

Our love for God’s Word should always increase as it makes a consistently larger impact on our lives. As we read, study, and obey, we are changed. The more we are changed, the more we love the Word. The more we love the Word, the more time we spend in the Word. The more time we spend in the Word, the more we are changed.

3. Read the following verses in Psalm 119 and circle each word describing an action or a reaction we are to have to the Scriptures.

“Never take the word of truth from my mouth, for I hope in Your judgments. I will always keep Your law, forever and ever. I will walk freely in an open place because I seek Your precepts. I will speak of Your decrees before kings and not be ashamed. I delight in Your commands, which I love. I will lift up my hands to Your commands, which I love, and will meditate on Your statutes” (Psalm 119:43-48).


In *The Call to Follow Christ* Claude King reflected on Psalm 19:7-11 by stating, “God’s words are trustworthy, perfect, right, radiant, pure, enduring, reliable, righteous, desirable, and sweeter than honey! They can revive you, make you wise and glad, and enlighten you. They can warn you for your own protection. When you obey them, ‘there is great reward.’ … I want to help you live in God’s Word AND live by God’s Word.”

As citizens of God’s kingdom, we are blessed to have a King who has spoken to us. As members of God’s family, we are children who have heard from our Heavenly Father. As ambassadors for Christ, we are encouraged to know that the One who offers redemption has sent us out with His words of life.

Spend time in prayer thanking God for His Word. Ask Him to increase your appreciation and understanding through this study.