

PRINCIPLE

— APPROACH —



• BIBLE STUDY METHOD •

Joshua T. Fischer, Ph.D.

The Principle Approach Bible Study Method

By

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Progressus Press
403 W 2nd Ave, Ste 106
Owasso, OK 74055
ProgressusCo.com

Forward

The idea for the Principle Approach Bible study comes from Rosalie Slater's 1965 work entitled *Teaching and Learning America's Christian History: The Principle Approach*. That particular approach has been a foundation of how many design curriculum. In essence, the primary construct of the Principle Approach is to start with a principle in the Bible and develop learning from the Bible. This goes beyond simply adding prayer and some biblical references to course materials. The Principle Approach was designed in an effort to have learners think biblically about the issues of life, critically reflecting on those issues with logic and reasoning clarified with a Biblical worldview. While this approach was designed for K-12 learners, the applications elsewhere are solid.

I've been personally using the idea of principle approach for years in my work in curriculum design and within one of my companies, InterLearn (www.InterLearnEd.com), as our team develops weekly devotionals for our curriculum. As our team of instructional designers began developing curriculum, I instructed them to use this method for developing devotionals each week of the course based on this principle. It is part of our conceptual framework for developing all of our curriculum. To date, our team has used this method in hundreds of courses and created nearly 1500 devotionals.

However, the concept of the model I'll outline really came about as I engaged with a young friend of mine in India named Moti. Moti asked about doing Bible study together. Obviously, not being in the same place or time zone, we had to make a way to discuss what was being studied asynchronously. . .or one or both of us would be up very late or very early. :-D

That process birthed what I'm about to share with you, the reader. My hope is that it will be simple enough for you to use regularly to grow in your relationship with God.

P.S. I know that "Biblical" is not technically a word that should be capitalized according to normal typography/English grammar. I personally capitalize it out of respect for God's Word.

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Outline of the Model

The Principle Approach is rooted in a deep understanding of the Bible as well as the application of its teachings to everyday life. It is a method that aims to uncover the timeless truths found in Scripture and apply them to our modern world.

At the core of the Principle Approach lies the concept of seeking foundational biblical principles that can guide and shape every aspect of our lives. These principles are not simply rules to follow, but rather profound truths that have the power to bring about transformation and renewal.

The model revolves around the notion of approaching the Bible with a spirit of humility and open-mindedness, allowing the Word to speak directly to our hearts and minds. It encourages a comprehensive exploration of the Scriptures, emphasizing the importance of context, historical background, and original languages to gain a more profound understanding of the text.

General Steps. Here are the general steps of the model with discussion to follow.

1. Select your favorite Bible version to read. A modern-day translation may be a bit easier to use (like the New Living Translation).
2. Select a book from the Bible to read.
3. Pray. Ask God to help you understand what you will be reading and for Him to help you apply what you learn in your daily walk.
4. Read a chapter from the book of the Bible.
5. Summarize what the chapter is about.
6. Think of the ideas that the chapter covered that can be summarized into a statement that could be applied to daily life.
7. Keep the document going so that you can refer back to it the next time you read the book and chapter (the Bible is not a read it once and you're done book). You can also add additional principles that stand out to you the next time you read the chapter.

Practical Application Focus. When I began working with Moti (see the forward), I knew that I needed to help him understand the context of what we were reading as best as I could and then move on to application. I had the Principle Approach in mind as I thought about the teaching and I think about Principle Approach when I think about teaching. I wanted him to understand the Bible in practice, not just theoretically.

The key verses for the rationale for looking for practical application are James 1:22 – 25:

²² But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. ²³ For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. ²⁴ You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. ²⁵ But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

Looking for the practical application helps you to “do what it says.” That is key.

Overview of the Book. With the practical application as the focus, I looked for a couple of tools to help us study the Bible together. One tool that I found was created by the Bible Project (www.BibleProject.com and www.youtube.com/@bibleproject). The Bible Project developed a graphical story telling of each of the books of the Bible. They are an excellent overview with good background information. That was a good starting point for our study.

I encourage you to seek out resources like the Bible Project to understand the context of the Book and placement in history. The historical and cultural context of each book provides valuable context for interpretation. Understanding the setting in which the text was written enhances your ability to comprehend the messages conveyed by the authors. This background information can be acquired through reputable commentaries, historical studies, and scholarly resources, serving as a guiding light in the selection process.

Bible Version. You will likely have many people that will argue the merits of a particular version of the Bible over another. I had one individual note how important the King James version of the Bible was over all others and insist that if it was important enough that we should learn how to understand it. I get his point but then why wouldn't we just learn the original languages of Hebrew and Greek to more fully understand it. But I digress.

Select the version of the Bible in your language that is easiest for you to read. Personally, I primarily read using the New Living Translation. It's more modern day and is more readily understandable. You can certainly feel free to read in multiple versions and translations. I just prefer that one.

Select a book from the Bible. When it comes to choosing which books and verses to explore, the vastness of the biblical text can seem overwhelming. However, don't fear! There are practical and meaningful ways to navigate the depths of the scriptures. One consideration is understanding the different genres represented in the Bible—narrative, poetry, prophecy, epistle, wisdom literature, and more. Each genre offers unique insights into the human experience and God's nature, allowing us to engage with the Word in multifaceted ways.

Another aspect to consider is the thematic relevance to your personal spiritual journey. Perhaps you seek guidance on faith, love, perseverance, or forgiveness. The beauty of the Bible lies in its universality—its ability to speak to our individual circumstances and offer timeless wisdom. By identifying themes that resonate with your current needs and aspirations, you can effectively steer your exploration toward passages that will deeply impact your heart and mind.

Additionally, knowing the overall narrative arc of the Bible enables thoughtful navigation. The interconnectedness of the Old and New Testaments weaves a tapestry of redemptive history, reflecting the continuous unfolding of God's plan for humanity. As such, considering the broader story while choosing specific books and verses facilitates a holistic understanding of the Bible's grand narrative.

With these considerations in mind, the process of choosing books and verses becomes an intentional and rewarding endeavor. It is an invitation to embark on a personal pilgrimage through the pages of sacred scripture, guided by curiosity, reverence, and a hunger for spiritual insight. May this journey bring profound discoveries and transformative encounters with the living Word.

The Bible is composed of 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books. Decide what book you would like to read and study. Ultimately, you should get through the whole Bible...multiple times throughout your life. However, you won't do that in one sitting most likely. (On average, it can take between 65 and 75 hours for the average person to read through it.) If you are not sure where to get started, ask God to show you where to start. Please remember, though, that there isn't a wrong way to do it.

Pray. This is an important step that I want to highlight for you. . .and for me. It can become extremely easy (at least for me) for the Principle Approach Bible Study Method to be just an academic exercise learning about history and an amorphous deity. That's the danger. The reason you are doing all of this is not just head knowledge. It is about relationship building with the Creator of everything! He created you to have a relationship with you. Don't let the process of this Bible study method steal the underlying foundation of why you study. It's all about growing closer to God.

So, before you start each time, open up with a time of praying. Spend time just talking to God. Ask Him to help you understand what you're reading and how to apply it. You may wish to spend more time in prayer before reading so you will be more attuned to what the Holy Spirit has to say to you while you're reading.

Read a Chapter. The Principle Approach to Biblical study emphasizes the importance of engaging with scripture in a thoughtful and intentional manner, allowing for personal reflection and application of the teachings found within the text. Once you're ready, open the Bible and read the chapter you've selected. It might also be good to listen to the chapter being read or to read the chapter aloud. Your brain will process it just a bit differently in each format. Personally, I'm kinesthetic first in my learning style (I learn best if I

can touch it). Secondly, I'm a visual learner so reading it is my second preference. I'm not the best at auditory processing. However, when I first listened to the Bible, it was a very unique way of understanding it and I recognized that even though it's not my strongest learning style, I did still learn some things in a way I hadn't through simply reading it.

Summarize the Chapter. Next, as we selected a particular book, I would summarize the chapter contents of each chapter of the book, doing one chapter per day. In most modern translations, there are certainly headings to help guide the reader. While those are important to consider, I'd encourage you to not just summarize by those headings. Recognize what stands out to you and what the Holy Spirit is pointing out to you as you've read the chapter. Summarize those things.

It will sometimes feel like you are just copying the whole chapter. That's okay that it feels like that. They are all important parts.

Pulling the Principles. Once you have a summary, review what was in the chapter for principles that you could apply in your life. As you delve deeper into the study of scripture, it becomes invaluable to understand how to extract principles from the text and apply them to your everyday life. The Bible is not merely a historical document or a collection of moral stories; rather, it is a living guidebook that offers timeless wisdom and guidance for navigating life's challenges and triumphs.

When extracting principles from scripture, it is important to approach the text with an open heart and mind, seeking to discern the underlying truths and lessons that can be applied to our own circumstances. This process involves careful reflection and introspection, as well as an understanding of the cultural and historical context in which the biblical passages were written.

Consider themes of the chapter and book that were highlighted in the chapter. By recognizing these patterns, we can begin to discern the overarching messages and truths that the Bible seeks to convey. For example, themes of forgiveness, compassion, and selflessness are prevalent throughout the Bible, and by recognizing these recurring

motifs, we can uncover the principles that underpin these concepts and apply them to our daily lives.

It is also important to consider the broader narrative and context surrounding specific passages when extracting principles from scripture. By examining the cultural, societal, and historical context in which biblical events unfolded, we can gain a deeper understanding of the intended lessons and moral teachings within the text. This contextual understanding allows us to extract timeless principles that resonate with our contemporary experiences and challenges.

Applying scripture to life also involves personal reflection and self-examination. It requires us to honestly assess our own behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs in light of the principles we extract from the Bible. This introspective process enables us to identify areas for personal growth and transformation, aligning our lives more closely with the teachings of scripture. When reading scripture, you should think about what it means a couple different ways:

- What did the scriptures mean to the original audience? Since the books were written to diverse people groups with varying customs, practices, at different points of history, it's important to consider how the original audience might have considered the message being shared.
- What do the scriptures mean for today's audience? Because of the different timing, people, etc., it's important to understand the original context and determine how it can be understood and applied today in our current setting.

Consider what you're going through personally and how the scriptures in the chapter apply to those things. Applying scripture to life is a dynamic and ongoing journey. It requires a willingness to engage with the text, to wrestle with its complexities, and to integrate its timeless wisdom into your daily existence. By extracting principles from scripture and applying them to your life, you embark on a transformative path towards spiritual growth, ethical living, and a deeper connection with the divine.

It's important to note as well that the principles that you pull may be different from the ones that I pull and they may be different from what you pull the next time that you read the particular passage. We can certainly gain from understanding the principles each of us pulls but the principles are your personal ones that apply to you. What stands out now may not be as highlighted in your review another time.

Ongoing Document. Recognize that this document can be an ongoing one. It should be a life-long study that allows you to refer back and add to it.

When I first thought about this as a book, I considered developing it as workbook. At first, I was thinking of just listing some blank pages in which you, the end-user, could make notes. Then I thought, one page per chapter would be good so that it is all in one place for your notes, principles, etc. However, there are 1,189 chapters in the Bible. Even if you did 1 page per chapter, that is a LOT of pages and some of the publishers I checked out wouldn't even print them that large. As a result, I went back to a short resource with directions, examples, and templates that you could use to create your own resource.

Other Resources for Study

I would certainly recommend that you spend time reading the Bible just for yourself and work at understanding it on your own and with the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I mentioned the Bible Project videos. However, there are many other resources available for you to use to understand it more deeply. Below are several that I would recommend when you want to dig deeper.

[BibleGateway.com](#). While this resource does not include as many tools as Blue Letter Bible (below), this resource is still a good one and has a couple of key pieces that will be helpful:

- Reading Plans. Models of reading through the Bible in various ways (Old/New Testament, Chronological, Historical, etc.).
- Audio Bibles. As I noted above, listening to the Bible is another way to engage your learning. There are multiple groups that they have partnered with to have available versions of the Bible in audio format. I'm particularly fond of 'The Listener's Bible with Max McLean.

[BlueLetterBible.org](#). Blue Letter Bible contains not only a parsing of each word of the Bible in its original language (Hebrew or Greek), which is invaluable, there are additional tools that are available on their website including:

- Text, Audio, and Video Commentaries. Commentaries are a source of someone doing a review of what the Bible says and providing their understanding of it.
- Encyclopedias
- Study Notes
- Charts and Outlines
- Timelines
- Maps and Images
- Free Courses (that you can turn into academic credit)
- Articles and Books
- Theological Resources
- Missions Resources

- Cult Resources
- Topical Indexes

Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods. While I have presented a straightforward method of studying the Bible in this book, it is not the only way. Rick Warren wrote a book in 2006 that contains many different methods of studying the Bible. I have the book and it is valuable for additional methods that will allow you to engage further in understanding the Bible and developing your relationship with God.

It is available for purchase here: <https://amzn.to/4bpmjru>

These resources are extremely helpful to deeper study. As I noted, however, I would also recommend your going through and simply reading it on your own without these resources first. Then go back and review with resources above.

The Study Template

As you are considering doing Principle Approach Bible Study, you have a couple of decisions to make before proceeding.

The first decision that you must make is the format in which you will record your studies: handwritten or electronic. For some, handwritten is more personal and intimate. I know of one individual who actually uses a journal to not only keep her studies but also her prayers in them. She handwrites her prayers in one color and writes in another color what she feels like God is saying back to her. You may also want it as a collection of study and journaling. Personally, I use a Contemporary Extraneous Notebook (CEN) for my business work. I have tried doing my studies in a handwritten notebook from time to time but found that it wasn't necessarily as helpful as it could be with my intentions for the study. My biggest concerns for handwritten studies are the ability to add to the material and update it and being able to easily search it. If you choose to use a journal, I'd recommend a lined one like this one: <https://amzn.to/3wM9ZT2>. This will make it easier to keep it neat.

I am guessing that more and more, people will select an electronic version of things. I started my study initially by reading on the Bible App and sending myself an email with my study information all on my phone. That took quite a bit longer to do using Swype to type on my phone sending an email which was then transferred to another source for posterity (a website). Now, I record my study straight to a website that is backed up. This works for me as it is something that I can type (on a computer keyboard instead of a phone keyboard), is saved for posterity, is searchable, and can easily have additional information added to it.

While you can certainly change your mind about this as you wish, another decision is whether or not to share the information in your study. For me, I've largely made the decision to share my studies with others for their benefit. However, you may wish to keep some or all of your studies private. That's certainly acceptable. Just as you may not wish to share everything in a relationship with another person with everyone, the same applies here. You are relationship building in your study with your Creator.

Once you've made up your mind on the format, you can decide if there is anything else that you wish to include. The basic structure for the study is:

- **Biblical Text.** List the chapter or passage you are studying.
- **Summary.** Prepare a summary in your own words of what you have read.
- **Principles.** List principles for application to your daily walk.

These are the basic inclusions for your study. However, you may wish to add a couple of other things as well:

- **Prayer.** Remember to start your study with prayer. Connect with God and ask Him to help you understand and apply what you're reading. You may wish to list the things that you're praying about to God in your study (especially if you are not sharing it with others).
- **Personal Journal.** If you are the type that likes to journal or finds personal benefit in doing that, you may wish to incorporate your journaling with the Bible study process as it may help you understand the Principles you list a bit better as they will reflect your current focus.

Sample Study

So you are able to see a simple example, here is a study that I did.

Biblical Text: Luke 9

Summary: At the start of this chapter, Jesus sends His disciples out to minister in the towns in the area to practice what they've been learning from Him. He specifically gives them power and authority to cast out demons and heal people. He tells them to take no supplies with them allowing people they meet to supply their needs. He tells them that if people reject them in a town, to leave and shake off the dust from the shoes as a sign of rejection of them.

There is a note about Herod's confusion as to who Jesus is. He was hearing about what Jesus was doing and that people were saying He was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Since he was the one who put John the Baptist to death, he was puzzled at this. Herod kept trying to see Jesus.

When the disciples returned from their travels and told Him about everything that had happened, Jesus tried to slip away quietly to get some time of rest with them. But the crowds found out where they were going and followed. So, Jesus welcomed them, taught them, and healed the sick.

Late in the day, the disciples told Jesus to let the crowds go so they could go get some food and find a place to sleep. Jesus told the disciples to feed them. The disciples responded with a statement and a question. They said they only had five loaves of bread and two fish. Then they asked or was He wanting them to go buy enough food for the 5000 men (plus the women and children there). Jesus told them to have the people sit down in groups of about 50. Jesus then looked up to heaven and blessed the loaves and fish. Then he kept breaking off pieces to hand out until everyone had been fed. When they were done eating, the disciples picked up 12 baskets of leftovers.

One day Jesus asks His disciples who the people say He is. The disciples have various answers including John the Baptist, Elijah, one of the other ancient prophets. Then Jesus asked who they said He was. Peter replied that Jesus was Messiah (the prophesied redeemer of Israel) sent from God. Jesus warned His disciples not to tell anyone who He was.

Then Jesus foretold of His death.

Then Jesus told the crowd that was there about what it would take to follow Him. He also told the crowd that some of them would see the Kingdom of God established before they died.

Eight days later, Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain to pray. The disciples fell asleep. They awoke to see Moses and Elijah there talking with Jesus and they were brightly shining. As Moses and Elijah were about to leave, Peter, a bit out of his head said, “we should build three tabernacles as memorials to the three of them.” As he was speaking though, a cloud covered them and terrified the disciples. A Voice spoke in the cloud saying that “this is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to Him.” When the Voice was done speaking, they found themselves alone. When they got down from the mountain, they didn’t tell anyone about the experience.

The next day, a large crowd met Jesus and the disciples. A man in the crowd called out for Jesus to deliver his son from an evil spirit. He said he had tried to get His disciples to do it, but they couldn’t. Jesus expressed frustration and then called the man and child over. He rebuked the evil spirit that acted out even as they came and healed the child.

Jesus again predicts His pending death. However, the disciples didn’t understand and were afraid to ask.

Later, the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest among them. Jesus knew what was going on amongst them and called a child over. He told the disciples that whoever welcomes a child on His behalf also welcomes Jesus and His Father. He also said whoever is least among them was also the greatest.

The disciples found someone that was caring out demons in the name of Jesus. They told him to stop because they weren’t part of Jesus’ disciples. Jesus told them not to stop the man because anyone not against them was with them.

Jesus becomes more focused on getting to Jerusalem and the death that lies ahead. They are headed towards Jerusalem and try to stop in a Samaritan village on their way but are rejected because of where they are going (which is a prime difference between Jews and Samaritans). James and John were upset at

the response received from the village and asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to destroy the village. Jesus rebuked them explaining that they didn't understand their own hearts and telling them that He came to save not to destroy. Then they went on to another village.

In the last section of the chapter, Jesus is getting requests to follow Him and asking others to follow Him. In each case responding with what it will take to follow Him. This seems to be giving responses to the specific needs and motivations of the person.

Principles: Allow the people you're training to practice what you're teaching them. Try to allow for rest in your personal work and the work of your team. When God is at work it's best to keep your mouth shut and listen. Being the least, prepares you to be the greatest. You are not the only worker of God's plan. Do not be quick to judge other's faults as you are worthy of judgement. Seek to save people through Jesus.

You can also see more of what I have done and shared at this address: <https://asymmetricfaith.org/pa/>.



The Principle Approach Bible Study Method

Discover a Deeper Connection with Scripture

The "Principle Approach Bible Study Method" introduces a straightforward way to study the Bible that goes beyond simple reading. Drawing from Rosalie Slater's foundational teachings, this method is designed to engage your mind and spirit through the application of biblical principles to daily life.

This book guides you through:

- A clear, step-by-step outline of the Principle Approach.
- Practical techniques for extracting life-changing principles from any biblical text.
- Examples and templates to kickstart your personal or group study sessions.

For Every Learner

Whether you're a new believer or a seasoned bible scholar, this method will enhance your study sessions and help you see God's word in a new light. Alongside this guide, you'll find references to additional resources such as the Bible Project, which can complement your study with visual and historical context.

Grow in Faith, Knowledge, and Relationship with God

As you apply the Principle Approach, you'll find yourself moving closer to God, equipped with a better understanding of His teachings and how they apply to your life. Let this book be your companion on a fulfilling journey through the Bible.