



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

## BOOK OF THE MONTH CLUB • Eric Swanson

The Bible is the one book that God has given to man to communicate His love, His plan, His values and instructions. How can we become men and women of God? How can we become men and women of the Word? Where can we find the spiritual resources to feed ourselves and others? An effective way to get a handle on the entire Bible is to study a different book of the Bible each month. The “Book of the Month Club” is a group of those who are committed to learning and applying a different book of the Bible each month. Since there are 66 books of the Bible, one can effectively study the Bible in its entirety in somewhat over five years. It is dynamic, challenging, and life-changing.

### Motivations for Book of the Month Club

We will always receive much more than we invest in Bible study. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 Paul writes, “All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable...”(NAS) “Profitable” means that the return we receive in insight, wisdom, knowledge of God, and energy, is consistently greater than the time and effort we invest. If we really believed that, we’d never allow a day to pass where we didn’t allow God, through His Word to teach us, reprove us, correct us, or train us. When we don’t have time for the Word, we’re like the farmer who says he’s too busy to plant seed this year.

- Self-discovery builds convictions. A Scriptural truth that you discover on your own is worth ten insights that someone else (or a book or a tape) gives you. You will discover principles of life that apply to every area of life and ministry.
- Self-discovery builds strong leaders. Most believers feel inadequate when it comes to understanding the Bible. Wouldn’t it be great if all of your students, after they graduate, would have the ability to begin with any book of the Bible, and have the confidence he or she could learn from it and teach others to teach themselves from it? Think of the spiritual leadership that they could provide for the church and Christian ministries. Teaching others to fish, in the long-run, is more satisfying and productive than handing a person a fish and saying, “Hey, eat this fish. It’s good for you.”
- Self-study is essential to maturity. In Hebrews 5:11-14, the author implies that “by now” these believers should have been teaching others, yet they needed “milk” because of their immaturity. What is milk? It is pre-digested food. Partaking, of the milk of the Word is simply allowing someone else to do the hard work of study and passing it on to you in a palatable form. Milk can be simple truths or complex truths, but it is always pre-digested truths. “Anyone who partakes only of milk...is a babe” (v. 13 NAS) regardless of their years in the faith or ecclesiastical position they hold.

Bill Hull, Executive Director of the Evangelical Free Church, writes, “It is not legitimate to say, ‘I am unhappy with my church because my pastor’s sermons aren’t feeding me.’ However, it is proper criticism to say, ‘My church does not teach me to feed myself.’ Christians, after being taught to study the Bible on their own, should find their daily spiritual diet in the regular reading, studying, memorizing, and meditation on God’s Word. Then the sermon



becomes the dessert—not the main course. It becomes that motivational time where the tribal leader of the congregation connects with his people.... let's release ourselves from the bondage of depending on the Sunday sermon for the primary spiritual diet."

- It is helpful in the discipling process. Jesus said to His followers in John 8.31, "If you abide in my word, then you are truly disciples of mine" (NAS). When those you are discipling are daily meeting with God in His Word, the discipling process becomes exponentially easier. God is doing the teaching, the motivating, the convicting, etc. Your job then, is simply to help transform instruction into values and action.

When you are meeting for a discipleship appointment, think how much more motivating it is to say, "This is what God taught me from the Word this morning," than "I had a quiet time this morning." The latter communicates that you are a disciplined person. The former indicates that God teaches you through the Scriptures.

- It provides the spiritual resources we need for ministry. Rather than preparing for each Bible study, each staff meeting, each student leadership meeting, each personal appointment, each message at the weekly meeting, etc., you can effectively minister from what God is presently teaching you. If those you are influencing are studying the same book that you are studying, the synergy is powerful. It is probably the single best thing you can do to deepen your understanding of God, His Word, and to minister to others.

After studying several books of the Bible, Craig Cunningham writes, "I now have a greater appreciation for studying Scripture in context, and God's Word has come alive. This has had a profound impact on my discipleship and teaching ministries. I feel like my ministry is simply an overflow of my relationship with God.... It is a viable plan that helps you to get a grasp on the "whole counsel of God." Five years from now you could have studied every book of the Bible. Study, much more than simple reading, is the foundation for meditating on the Word. What you study in the morning is what you will think about throughout the day.

- Studying a new book every month is refreshing. Howard Hendricks, in *Living by the Book*, writes, "I find that there's a rhythm to life, and for many of us, the cycle takes a month to six weeks. We can stick with something for about that long, but then we need a change of pace. In a month you can read the book through several times. You can also observe its structure, identify the key terms, investigate the central characters, do some background work with secondary sources, and decide on some practical ways to apply the truths of the book to your life.... The point is that in a month's time, you can begin to take ownership of a book of the Bible."

- It helps new believers get into the Word. If you are taking a new believer through Basic Follow-up, accompanied with a Book of the Month Bible study, the combination will be life changing. You will soon be taking notes on what God is teaching him in the Word, and you will establish a pattern for God to teach and minister to him for the rest of his life. The truth of the matter is this—it's no easier or harder for a month-old believer to begin a program of Scripture intake, than it is for one who has been in the faith for ten years.

### How to Study a Book of the Bible

1) Start with a wide-angle approach by reading through the entire book as many times as you can in a week. See if you can detect a flow in the material, a progression of events or ideas. Don't get bogged down in details. Remember, you're just getting an overview of the book.

In the margin, jot down the main points or events covered in a particular chapter or group of chapters. This will give you a concise analysis of the content of those chapter(s). Note what the text teaches about God, Jesus, or the Spirit. Mark references to time, repetitions, lists, contrasts, and any other assorted gems. Don't be afraid to write in your Bible. Your marginal notes, boxes, stars, and underlining will help you recall the lessons of the passages.

2) During the second week of study make a Book Chart. This may seem rather academic and dry but you'll be surprised how clearly you understand the book after making a book chart. You haven't grasped the content of the



book until you can express it in writing. On your chart include the theme of the book, the author, its chronological place in the Bible, setting, purpose, major characters, key verses, and ideas, etc. Record the main events or subjects of each chapter on your chart. Much of this information is available in a study Bible or Bible dictionary. A good Bible atlas is also helpful for identifying the geography and location of Biblical events.

Because you are reading the book through several times, around the fourth or fifth time you will begin to see patterns and principles you've never seen before. This is an exciting time of discovery. Don't worry if you don't understand everything or whether you have the right study techniques or not. God will meet you where you are. Your Bible study skills will improve with every book you study. The point is this—you are actually studying the Bible! Getting an overview should occupy the first half of the month. For shorter books this process will take less time.

So far you've been getting a bird's eye view of the book. Now it's time to zoom in on something that seems prominent or interesting to you. It may be a passage, paragraph, chapter, character, parable, repeated theme or phrase, or an event, etc. Because you are at a different stage of life than those around you, you may choose to explore something that no one else chooses. Character studies are particularly helpful, because they give you insights into one man or woman's relationship with God. Because you have an overview of the entire book, you will be able to relate your "part" to the "whole."

As you see patterns and repetitions, it is often helpful to make simple grid charts for the sake of comparison and contrast that may lead to insight and application. A chart helps you organize your material. For example, a study of all the parables in Matthew that begin with "the kingdom of heaven is like..." will give you insight into the different aspects of the Christian life.

As you come to the end of the month, write a summary of everything you've learned from your book study. Summarize under "Principles from the book of..." You know you have a fairly good handle on the book when you can, from memory, give the purpose, flow, and content of the book, along with the contribution that the major characters make to the book. Most importantly, you will be able to see how your study has made a difference in your values and actions.

### Studying As a Group

It is difficult to study a different book each month by yourself. You need at least one other person with whom you meet regularly to share and discuss what you are learning. Meeting with others, not only provides informal accountability, but also tremendous insight. Although Scripture has one interpretation, it has countless applications. When a small group or staff team are all reading, studying, and applying the same book of the Bible, we see God's truth filtered through each other's lives and experiences. A group can be an organized Bible study or it can be a loose-knit group of people who, when they see each other ask, "What did you learn in Judges this morning?" or "What insights did you get from the life of Abraham?"

You may want to set aside a few hours or a day in the middle of the month to get away and share with each other what God is teaching you. This gives you time to follow through on ideas others have shared that you want to investigate.

### A Suggested Order

As you begin your Book of the Month study, it is important that you begin with books that are narrative and motivational—Genesis or Mark are good places to begin. Or you might try a shorter book like Philippians or Jonah. Because the Pentateuch (Genesis through Deuteronomy) and Historical Books (Joshua through Esther) are chronological, it's helpful to study them in order because each book builds on the previous one. Generally speaking, study one gospel a year. One out of these five years you can study the book of Acts. Alternate between Old and New Testament books. You may want to reserve one month per year for studying a topic or theme of the Bible.



Study one of the “Poetic Books” (Job through Song of Solomon) each year. To finish your five-year program without having a number of Old Testament books left over, you might begin and end each year with an Old Testament book, or study the Pentateuch without interruption. You can also study “two-part” books like 1 Kings and 2 Kings in successive months. You may also want to spend six weeks on a longer book of the Old Testament, like Isaiah, followed by two weeks in a shorter book of the New Testament.

The depth of your study will depend on the length of the book and your familiarity with it. It is probably best to study certain books before others, like Daniel before Revelation, the Pentateuch before Hebrews, etc. You may want to study the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) within the context of the historical books and people they were addressed to. A Bible dictionary will help you figure out the order.

As a college student, you may want to have a strong, motivational book for August and September. Because May is a non-teaching month, it’s a good time to take on a book like Leviticus.

#### A Note on Application

Few decisions will change your life, but the decision to study and apply the Bible will. A changed life happens through application. Application is transforming intention, insight, and emotion, into action.

One of the barriers to consistent Bible study is the sense that we already know so much we are not applying. The last thing we want to do is study more and not apply that. We don’t want to feel condemned, guilty, or hypocritical about what we already know. The truth about human nature is this—change in behavior and thinking takes time. Here’s a refreshing approach to application—if you never apply the principle that you’ve discovered another day in your life, make certain you apply it today. Tomorrow, apply for that day what the Lord teaches you. In two or three weeks you will learn a lesson that will be similar to what you learned this morning. Little by little, your values, convictions, and behavior will change. You won’t change overnight, but over time your life will change.

#### Action Points

Begin your own Book of the Month Club. Make a plan of what to study, when you will meet, and discuss what you are learning.

Look for opportunities to teach what God is teaching you. “The best way to make something yours is to give it away.”

Read *Living by the Book*, by Howard Hendricks. This book contains many helpful tools for studying the Bible.

End

The Compass is the discipleship curriculum for Campus Crusade for Christ’s Campus Ministry. It was created by Centerfield Productions, the field based division of CruPress. We’d love to hear your feedback on this lesson. Please write us at [centerfield@uscm.org](mailto:centerfield@uscm.org)