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Unleashing God's Word to do God's work

The role of One to One bible reading

One to One Ministry

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INTRODUCTION

“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” Rom 10:17 [ESV]

“An overseas student who attended his local church for years was shocked when he finally sat down to read the bible with a church staff. He had never learnt how to read the bible for himself and so never read the bible regularly. He had always depended on the Christian ‘gurus’ to be the messenger between God and him.”

I am very excited that you are keen to consider how to read the bible in the context of a One to One (or possibly triplets) setting. Now before we jump into the ‘how’ of reading the bible One to One, we need to consider the ‘why’.

Now, I know I am preaching to the choir, because if you do not value reading the bible you will not even be looking at these training modules. Nevertheless, we may not always read the bible as often as we know we should. So, let us begin with a reminder of the preciousness of reading, understanding, and responding to God’s word – the bible rightly.

The importance of God’s word: Everyone needs the bible because it tells us we can be rescued from sin and death¹ by God’s grace through trusting in Jesus². Trust (faith) in Jesus comes only from hearing the message about Jesus Christ as written in the bible. Besides being the source to which we can know God and his salvation plan for us, the bible is also the source where we learn how to live rightly³ in our relationship with God and with others. Indeed, the bible tells us that we are saved from death for eternal life. We are saved from sin for a relationship⁴ with God and his people.

The importance of careful reading and intentional application: C.H. Spurgeon⁵, a renowned preacher of the 19th century, once said, “The more you read the bible, and the more you meditate upon it, the more you will be astonished with it. He who is but a casual reader of the bible, does not know the height, the depth, the length and breadth of the mighty

¹ E.g. Romans 6:23 that says “the wages of sin is death...”

² Eph 2:8-9

³ 2 Tim 3:16-17

⁴ John 17:3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. [also John 14:55, Rom 5:1-3; 8:7, 1 John 5:2-3, etc]

⁵ Sermon: Christ Our Passover, Dec 2, 1855, New Parks Street Chapel, Southwark

meanings contained in its pages... One of the most interesting points of the Scriptures is their constant tendency to display Christ.” Indeed, there is a great need to read, understand and drink deep into God’s living word.

The casual reading of the bible has the tendency to engage only at the surface – perhaps academically (head), but seldom with our affections (heart) and our actions (hands). Casual reading (or worse, not reading) the bible is a huge reason why many (including professing Christians) considers the bible dull, irrelevant or even ineffective. How many times do we hear people say, “That is what the bible says, but it is not relevant in our current situation?” Alternatively, in a more subtle way “I’ll like to read the bible, but somehow I always end up at doing something else...”

The apostle Paul when speaking to his spiritual son, Timothy, thinks otherwise. According to Paul, life and scripture are intricately connected. “Watch your life and doctrine closely [says Paul to Timothy]. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”⁶ Here’s an unpopular warning. If we only quote the bible for the sake of securing a spiritual insurance, but consider the scripture as otherwise irrelevant in our present life, we may be shocked on the final day that we never did have a relationship with God and the Lord Jesus himself⁷.

Now what have these to do with One to One bible reading? Well, One to One bible Reading, by itself is not magical, but it is an amazing complement to our Christian journey of hearing from the bible, understanding what God has said, confronting our own sinfulness and responding rightly to him regularly. It is not intended to be a replacement of the other ministries exercised within the body of Christ – namely, Congregational (e.g. Saturday/Sunday) gatherings, small group bible study or our personal bible reading. One to One bible reading would be well placed between small group and personal bible reading. There are many advantages and challenges when we consider whether we would get involved in One to One bible reading.

⁶ 1 Tim 4:16

⁷ Matthew 7:21-23 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven...”

Aim for this module

The Role of One to One Bible Reading

- Your Expectation
- The WHAT question: What is & isn't One to One bible reading?
- The challenges and benefits: The accountant "What is the co\$t?"
- The WHY question: Give some motivation!

YOUR EXPECTATION

Now your time is precious, so before we dig further, I will like you to take a minute to write down your expectations for this module. What do you hope to get out of this training?

Your Answer:

THE WHAT QUESTION: WHAT IS & ISN'T ONE TO ONE BIBLE READING?

- **What it is:** One to One bible reading is what it says it is, reading the bible with another person.
 - a. It is something two people **do together**, not something you **do for another person**. No matter how many times we have read the bible, God's word still speaks to us and we will still be challenged.
 - b. It involves the calendar, the bible, and another human being.
 - c. It involves working through the bible and applying its truths to both parties and **praying for** and **with** the other person.
- **What it is not:** It is not a pastoral meet up, counselling or TLC (Tender-loving-care) session... although in speaking God's word to each other these things may happen.

THE CHALLENGES AND BENEFITS: THE ACCOUNTANT “WHAT’S THE COST?”

Here are 3 statements you can fill up to tease out the challenges and benefits.

1. The reason(s) I find it hard to get started with One to One bible reading is/are...

Your Answer:

Some common reasons might include competency, confidence and commitment:

- **Competency** – I do not have the skill. Someone should be asking me rather than for me to initiate.
- **Confidence** – Fear of rejection, fear of transparency, fear of vulnerability. Talking is difficult; we find it hard to be relational. Perhaps you’ve said to yourself “I’m not sure how to do it.” Or “I’ve no one to read the bible with.”
- **Commitment** – Perhaps you’ve told yourself “I’m time poor.” Or “I can start but I’ll probably not finish the book we’ll be reading together.”

2. The ways to deal with my reasons are...

- **Competency** – Read or attend trainings. Read up. Start with someone you’re comfortable with.
- **Confidence** – Practice asking someone. Try saying this in front of a mirror, “Would you be interested in reading the bible with me for a few weeks?” Then try it on another person.
- **Commitment** – Would you consider lunch time meet ups? Allocate once a week for 8 weeks? Or just 4 blocks of time in your calendar?

3. Imagine what might happen to you, your friends/family and your church if One to One bible reading happens...over the next 1, 5, 10 years? Imagine what might happen if all of us in this room read the bible One to One with 2 people over the next 1 year?

Your Answer:

I can imagine...

Here are some of mine:

- I'll be growing in my personal understanding and application of the bible. I'll be having someone to regularly pray with/for me and to be my accountability partner.
- Non-Christians might come to know and believe in Jesus if we read the bible together.
- I'll be having bible conversations at the coffee table with another person... who will do that with another person⁸...
- I can bounce ideas or questions with others who are also learning the scriptures together...

** At the time of this writing, we are facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Many countries are on lock-downs, public religious meetings have been cancelled or the size of gatherings greatly reduced. This is an opportune time for us to dip into One to One bible reading⁹.*

To the pastors or leaders, let us not waste this unusual circumstance. Instead of fearing that your 10s, 100s or 1000s attendees will become isolated, encourage everyone to stay connected with one other person in bible reading and prayer. Start training a few men and women within your church and encourage them to do the same with others.

Let us pray to God that we will come out of this unusual time¹⁰ stronger!

⁸ 1 Tim 2:12

⁹ Where you can't meet another person physically, you can use the technologies available to us such as Google Hangouts, Zoom, WhatsApp, etc.

¹⁰ Whether it is a pandemic like what we face now, or natural disasters, persecution, social unrest, tragedies, or sickness, we need to pray that God will help us to exercise our living faith through (rather than in the absence of) the circumstances and grow our trust in him. Our Lord is in control, and he wants us to learn to trust Him (read Mark 9:23-25).

THE WHY QUESTION: GIVE ME SOME MOTIVATION!

It is never easy to dip your feet into ice water... the same goes with One to One bible reading.

To be convinced of the value of One to One bible reading, **we will need plenty of reasons to motivate us.** So I'll like to beef up the *Why-do-it* for us further before getting into the how. First, we need to recognise that becoming a mature Christian is not a single moment event. Neither do we naturally become mature a Christian by the virtue of age (like wine). Rather it is a journey – in fact an intentional journey of growth.

Riding on Col Marshal and Tony Pane's book, The Vine Project¹¹, I'll like to suggest 4Es that will spur us on in our Christian journey and how One to One bible reading wonderfully helps us along – the 4Es are - **Engage, Evangelise, Establish & Equip.**



Engage:

Now life is very much about relationships, and even more for Christians. Therefore, relationship building is something we should put a hand out in order to engage another person. We have already seen this in our normal rhythms of life – eating, working, sports, leisure, etc... But it would be so much better if the building blocks involves the life changing truths of God's word.

One to One bible reading really digs into a deeper level of engagement with another person.

Example: It digs deeper into each other's life, without having to take sides. When a friend shares his or her struggles and relational problems (with his/her colleagues, family, husband/wife)... you might feel obligated to take sides if the bible is not in the picture.

¹¹ The Vine Project: <https://thevineproject.com/>

Evangelise:

As Christians, we cannot get away with telling people about sin, repentance, the forgiveness of our sins and about salvation through Jesus (James 1:21, 1 Peter 1:23, Romans 10:10-14). It is not always easy to tell people the good news or to invite colleagues to church. Why not ask them if they will like to read the bible for a couple weeks and let the bible be your guide!

One to One bible reading is a wonderful way to share the gospel in an open setting, with open bibles and open lives.

Example: You do not have to be very good with Christian apologetics¹² before telling people about the good news of Jesus. Let the bible unpack what God wants us to know.

Establish:

Christians, we need to establish our minds and our lives in God's word. We do that corporately in church and privately in personal bible reading. In addition, we have our bible study groups. Now One to One bible reading establishes us in another angle where we wrestle through the bible with another person who holds us accountable when we apply the bible to our personal life!

One to One bible reading is not a project to finish, but a means to keep establishing each other in God's word – encouraging one another and building each other up (1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, Ephesians 4:29).

Example: It is one of the building blocks in a Christian life – and also an extension of the person's relationship with the church.

Equip:

Finally, One to One bible reading not only equips us to talk about Jesus, it also trains each other to potentially read the bible with yet another person! In a sense, we pass it on... (2 Timothy 2:2)

¹² A branch of Christian theology that defends Christianity against objections.

What other motivations can you think of?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Pastor Andrew Wong



Andrew is married to his best friend Linda and they are blessed with two lovely children, Joanna and Jonathan. Andrew is struck by the amazing grace and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ and wants to tell more people about Jesus. He is a slow reader, but enjoys reading. He also enjoys listening to podcasts and telling stories to his children.