



Living Word
COMMUNITY CHURCH



Bible•hack

/ bī-bəl,hak/

noun **INFORMAL**

noun: **Bible hack**

a strategy or technique adopted in order to maximize one's time, energy, and results when reading the Bible.



Bible•hack

/ bī-bəl,hak/

INTRODUCTION

So you are interested in the Bible? That's great! I've been reading the Bible for over 40 years, but I still remember the early weeks when I was new to the Bible and it was a big and strange book. Even though it was big and strange, I could not get enough of the Bible.

Before I went to college I was not a follower of Jesus. As a kid, I went to

church but never liked it. Nothing made sense to me. Nothing seemed relevant. As a teenager, I dropped out of church and had no interest in anything religious or spiritual. That all changed in college. Away from home, in a new setting with few rules and lots of options, like so many others, I started making

bad decisions and experiencing the consequences of those decisions.

One week a speaker came to my campus to give several talks about Christianity. One session that grabbed my attention was a lecture on the arrest, trial, death, and resurrection of Jesus. By the time the two-hour talk was over, I was hooked. More than hooked. I was convinced there was something important about this person Jesus.

In the Bible I would learn everything I needed to about Jesus, about life with Jesus, and about life itself.

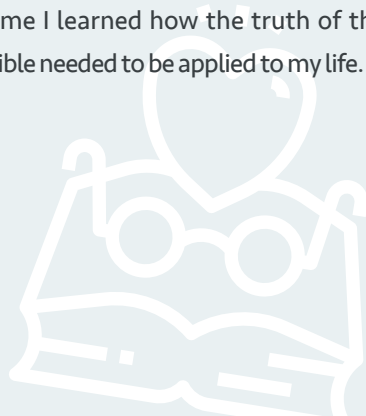
Within a week, I connected with some older students who were already Christians and they told me more about Jesus and what it means to be a Christian. They answered questions I had. Now everything made a great deal of sense and it was extremely relevant to my situation. I was ready and I became a follower of Jesus. I experienced

forgiveness, found a new freedom to live a different kind of life, and was

off and running with Jesus and the Christian faith.

Right away my new friends told me how important it was to read the Bible. In the Bible I would learn everything I needed to about Jesus, about life with Jesus, and about life itself. I would learn about God, about how Jesus is God, and how God designed life in the world to work. Right then I started reading the Bible (that was 1974) and I have never stopped reading the Bible.

But I learned the hard way how NOT to read the Bible. I made some basic mistakes and had some unnecessary struggles that could have been avoided. Slowly, I learned how to read and understand the Bible. At the same time I learned how the truth of the Bible needed to be applied to my life. ■



This little booklet is a series of **Bible Hacks** (after this I will use the abbreviation *BH*) so you can get the most out of this wonderful, life-changing book.

This booklet won't tell you everything you want to know about the Bible, but it will be a great launch into what I pray will become a lifelong adventure of learning and living the wisdom of God to us in the pages of the Bible.

Pastor Brian Rice
LEAD PASTOR



THE BIBLE IS THE WORD OF GOD

More than 500 times you will find the phrase, “the Word of God,” or “the Word of the Lord” used in the Bible to describe itself. Hundreds of other times some variation of those phrases are used. It means the Bible comes from God to us. The Bible is not simply clever words some religious teachers came up with thousands of years ago. Those religious teachers believed they had received a message from God. They were the transmitters and messengers of God, passing on what

God said to them to the world. For now, use this as a starting point perspective.

The word *revelation* means God is the source of the Bible. It has been revealed to us. The word *inspiration* is used to describe how God worked through human authors to get the word out. Read the Bible with the assumption that it is a message from the God who loves you and wants the best for you.



THE HACK:

When you read the Bible, read with wonder, awe, and excitement. It is a Word from God to you.

THE BIBLE IS A BOOK

BH 02

The word *Bible* comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which means *scroll* or *book*. When the Bible was first written, they did not have books in the form we have them today, they used scrolls.

The Bible is scripture. The word *scripture* means “sacred spiritual text.” You see the word *script* in scripture. Script means “it is written” in the Bible. Before the Bible was written, these sacred words were spoken. The ancient cultures were oral cultures. Writing was rare; speaking was the norm. Storytelling and a great

capacity to remember was common. Therefore, you will also find phrases like, “It was said,” “It was spoken,” “God spoke,” “God said,” etc. First God spoke. What God spoke was handed down orally and in writing.



THE HACK:

The Bible is how God communicates to us. Whenever you read, expect God to speak to you about something you need. Insight, comfort, challenge, encouragement, a redirect... it happens all the time when we read the Bible.

THE BIBLE IS LITERATURE

While it is a word from God, the Bible comes to us in the form of literature, and lots of genres (or types) of literature. There is history, instruction, codes, laws, poetry, proverbs, stories, prophecy, and gospel. There is suspense, drama, and plot. There are key characters

like Abraham, Moses, and King David in the Old Testament and Jesus, Mary, Peter, and Paul in the New Testament. There are artistic and literary figures of speech like parable, metaphor, simile, hyperbole, parallelism, repetition, authorial style, and more.

Because the Bible is literature, all the rules for reading literature apply. The meaning intended by the author matters. Definitions of words matter. The actual, literal meaning is the foundation for understanding the Bible. There may also be symbolic and deeper meaning, but you start by asking, “What is the plain meaning of the sentences I am reading?”



THE HACK:

Always make sure you understand the plain meaning of what is being said. Meaning matters. If you don't understand something, we'd love to help. Ask a pastor, or stop by the Welcome Center.

CONTEXT

MATTERS WHEN READING THE BIBLE

BH 04



Context means the setting of the words. There is a historical and cultural setting for every book in the Bible. The Bible was written on three continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe).

It is ancient literature and, therefore, the customs or ways of living in those times are often unfamiliar to us. Sometimes the actual words are strange. Other times the practices and lifestyles are confusing. And the worldview (way of seeing the world) in those centuries is quite different from our modern and post-modern worldviews.

- Every word is set in the context of a sentence (or verse).
- Every verse is in the context of a paragraph.
- Every paragraph is part of a chapter.
- Every chapter is part of a book.
- Each of the 66 books in the Bible is in the context of connection with all the other books. So when you read individual verses or paragraphs in the Bible, you want to understand the context or the bigger picture as you attend to the details of verses.

THE HACK:

Be patient if you don't understand something. You are probably missing some of the bigger context. You will find that the more parts of the Bible you read, the more you understand the parts you've already read. It is all connected. Over time you will see (and love) the connections.

ONE BOOK, MANY BOOKS, &

The Bible is ONE big book. The one big book of the Bible has TWO primary sections. We call these sections the Old Testament and the New Testament. A testament is a statement of belief that gives instruction and direction on what to believe and do. For example, when a person dies, they leave behind their last will and testament.

The Old Testament has to do with the religious life of the Jewish people as they became a nation under God. It has 39 different books in it. The Old Testament is about 75% of the entire Bible. It was written over a period of 1,000 years. The oldest books were written about 1450 BC and the last book in the Old Testament was written about 400 BC.

The New Testament has 27 books in it and is the remaining 25% of the Bible. It was written in a much shorter time period of 50 to 75 years. The earliest sections were written as early as 45 to 50 AD and as late as 100 to 110 AD (give or take a few years either way).

The New Testament has to do with Jesus, the Messiah-Savior the Jewish people looked forward to. Jesus did not come in the way the Jews expected or act in the ways they expected the Messiah to act. This core problem centers on the claim by Jesus to be the Son of God and, thus, to be God. While many Jews did come to believe Jesus was the Messiah/God to which the Old Testament looked, many more Jews did not believe Jesus was that person. Those Jews who did believe in Jesus became known as Christians and they took the



ONE UNIFIED MESSAGE



message of Jesus all around the Mediterranean world and to Asia and Africa as well.

The New Testament has two primary forms of literature. The first four books of the New Testament are gospels, or narratives about the life and ministry of Jesus. These gospels give a good deal of attention to the reality of Jesus as God the Son, who was crucified for the sins of the world and who rose again. Then there is a book called Acts, which describes the expansion of the church into the Mediterranean world. Then you read many letters by the original church leaders who

taught the expanding church about Jesus and life as his follower.

Christians read, believe, and live according to all of the Bible, however, the greatest focus is on Jesus. Even when we read the Old Testament, we read it in the CONTEXT of Jesus Christ, who is God, the Son of God, the Savior, and the Lord. Always come back to Jesus in anything you read in the Bible.

THE HACK:

Everything in the Bible has some connection to Jesus. Everything in the Bible is a stepping stone to Jesus. Whenever you read, keep Jesus and knowing Jesus as the goal of your reading.

The Bible was written mainly in Hebrew (the Old Testament) and *Koine* or Common Greek (the New Testament). The vast majority of us will never learn those original languages. And we don't need to, for the Bible is the most translated book of all time. The full Bible has been translated into over 500 languages. The New Testament has been translated into another 2,000+ languages.

The very first book ever published on a printing press was the Bible. It was published by Gutenberg and is known as the Gutenberg Bible. It was a Latin translation. There were 180 of them published over several years in a massive edition. Today there are 49 still remaining, but only 21 of them are the complete copy. If your great, great, great, great grandmother emigrated from Europe and kept a Gutenberg Bible safely hidden and you have it in your attic, you can plan your retirement right now because the going price for a full Gutenberg Bible is \$25 to \$35 million.

The 1611 King James Bible was, and is, one of the most famous English versions. We do not use that version at Living Word because that translation, while it has the beauty of the old English, also uses words and phrases that sound odd for us.



& ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS



Recommended at Living Word:

The New International Version (NIV) is the primary translation we use.

Other good translations are the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the English Standard Version (ESV).

We will also use a very free flowing translation called The Message.

The NIV is a more literal translation, yet readable. That is the translation we recommend you get and read. If you do an Amazon search, you can find one edition of the Bible that has both the NIV and The Message in parallel columns. This could be a great investment.

THE HACK:

Get a good translation.



BOOK, APP, KINDLE,

Over five BILLION printed copies of the Bible have been sold. To that number we can add the almost countless electronic options that are in use today.

You can get the actual Bible in book form free at Living Word. Visit our Welcome Center in the lobby and we will be glad to give you one. That copy will be a basic version of the NIV and is a great place to get started. Later, you can invest in a higher quality version with more features if you find you like the NIV. You can also get a Study Bible in many of the translations. There are many options. What each Study Bible has in common are comments and explanations on the bottom of each page. The NIV Study Bible can be very helpful if you want to spend a little more money on it.



YouVersion

Bible apps are everywhere. Just go to your App Store and search for Bible. You will find several free versions. Try one or two and see which one you like. The one I use most often is the YouVersion.

You can download the NIV on Kindle for \$9.99. I recently downloaded The Message with study notes by its famous translator, Eugene Peterson, for \$10.99.

& INTERNET VERSIONS



You can use your web browser and type in Bible Gateway. This is a very easy-to-use website that has many translations. It has a very nice search function so you can easily find any Bible reference. If you use a web browser and type in any Bible text, you will get a link taking you to Bible Gateway or Bible Hub. When you click the link you see the Bible passage immediately.

On Sunday mornings at Living Word, when we are teaching from the Bible we usually provide the words of the NIV translation on our screen so you can see the words as the passage is read.

THE HACK:

Okay, my own strong preference comes out here. Get an actual Bible. Get the hard copy. Get the book itself. Use it as much as you can. There is something about having the tangible Bible in front of you. Then, use as many supplements as you can. A good app is with you whenever you have your phone (which is probably always).

FINDING PARTICULAR

There are 66 books in the Bible. Each book has its own name. You can find a list of the books in the Table of Contents in any Bible. The Table of Contents has the books in the order of appearance. Many Bibles have a second Table of Contents that is alphabetized and is a great help to find where any book starts.

You will often need to find specific verses. For example, on a Sunday you may hear me say something like this: "In Psalm 50:4-6 we read..." and then I read that section. I just referred to a book of the Bible, Psalms, a chapter in Psalms, #50, and to a few verses in that chapter, verses four, five, and six. Turn to the Table of Contents. Look for Psalms. Turn to that book, flip the pages to find chapter 50, and then skim through the chapter to find verses 4-6. There it is.

If you use a Bible app, you find the book and open it. Then you will see all the chapters and you open the chapter. Then you scroll down to find the verse.

If you use a web browser and type in Psalm 50:4-6, you will be given links for website Bibles like Bible Gateway. If you click the link, it takes you right to Psalm 50:4-6. It is that easy.

We do this all the time at Living Word. We refer to and explain specific parts of this very big book. This is even more important if you use



VERSES IN THE BIBLE



our Sermon Resources handout. We have printed and online copies for most of the Sunday messages. Every day starts with a passage to read, shares a few ideas about that passage, and gives you suggestions to think about how it applies to your life.

First you must find the passage in the Bible. Just follow the processes described above. For week one of our *Breaking Bad, Becoming Good* series on character, the Sermon Resource had eight main passages for you to look up. After a few weeks of looking through the Bible, you will be able to find these references very quickly.

THE HACK:

Use the Table of Contents as often as you need. Use a search feature. The more you navigate the Bible, the more familiar you will become with the different books and where they are. A year from now, you will be on your way to being a pro at navigating the Bible.



LEARNING THE BIBLE

As we already said, the Bible is BIG. Sixty-six books, 1,189 chapters, 31,102 verses, and 810,000 words. If you are a good reader and read the Bible for one hour a day, it would take you a little over three months to read through the Bible. But more than size, the Bible is a BIG book in another way. It is big in its content. Big in its subject matter. Big in ideas and insights. It is big because the Bible is a book from God and about God.

In the Bible you will learn truth about God. It is an understatement to say God is a pretty BIG theme, or perhaps I should say, a pretty BIG person. The truth about God is focused on Jesus Christ and the Bible was written so that we would understand and believe that Jesus is God. That takes time. Jesus and a relationship with Jesus is something you will explore for the rest of your life.

Then, not only does the Bible teach us who God really is and what God is really like, the Bible teaches us God's will and God's way for how life is meant to be. Life is another pretty BIG theme. The Bible teaches us about relationships—you guessed it, another really BIG theme. It is not an exaggeration to say there are thousands of powerful, life-changing truths in the Bible.

Living Word is here to help you begin to explore these big, beautiful, life-changing truths about God.



AT LIVING WORD



Our primary way of helping you is the Sunday morning time we spend together. We have church services that last about 60 minutes. Of that time, we spend 30 minutes talking about a theme in the Bible and always exploring that theme in light of Jesus. Any particular Sunday message is part of a message series. The series are four to ten weeks long, which enables us to explore themes in more depth.

But we can only cover so much on a Sunday morning. Therefore, we prepare study guides for you to spend a little time each day thinking about the Sunday theme. Each day has a Bible passage for you to read. You can find that passage by using Bible Hack 08.

THE HACK:

Use the resources we provide to become more familiar with some of the most powerful parts of the Bible. This will be a highly intentional and wisely strategic approach if you are new to the Bible.

MORE LEARNING THE BIBLE AT LIVING WORD

Sunday morning is the entry place, but there are many more opportunities to learn about God. We have lots of small groups where friendships are made, the Bible is studied together, and conversations take place to help us understand and then live out the wisdom of the



Bible. We have learning communities that meet during the week. If you visit LWCCyork.com and find the link ENGAGE, under that link you will find many opportunities to grow. Every opportunity will help you go deeper and further into the Bible. You can get help on these opportunities by calling the church or by talking to any of our pastors on a Sunday or by stopping by either our Welcome Center or Next Steps Center in the church lobby. People at either location can help you get connected.

THE HACK:

Reading and discussing the meaning of the Bible and how it applies to us, with other friends, is one of the best ways to learn the Bible. When you are ready, we will get you plugged into a good group.

READ, THINK, WRITE, TALK

BH 11



The more time and energy you put into the Bible, the more you find the Bible going deeper into you. It starts with reading and thinking about what you read. We encourage you to jot down ideas. If you saw my Bible, you would see that I write in my Bible all the time. I underline parts of verses. I circle key words. I jot little notes in the margins.

I also use a small notebook to jot down ideas, next steps, and prayers. If you use the weekly sermon resources, getting a journal or notebook to jot down your thoughts will be a good step. Writing is a way of thinking on paper and you will be pleased at how it helps you learn and grow. Finally, when you can talk over your ideas with another person you learn even more. That is why small groups and mid-size communities are a great opportunity to study and discuss the Bible together with others.

THE HACK:

The more you engage and work with the Bible, the more you will learn it, the more you will see how it speaks to you, and the more likely you will put it into practice. If the secret of real estate is location, location, location, a secret of Bible reading is engage, engage, engage.

READ ONE OF THE

Everything I said previously is a great way to get your feet wet, become acquainted with the Bible, become familiar with the most important ideas, and really become comfortable navigating the pages of this big book. At some point you will want to read one of the books of the Bible in its entirety. Here is what I recommend.

THE HACK:

Do not start at the beginning of the Bible. It is a big book composed of 66 smaller books. There are better places to start. At some point your Bible reading and learning will take off when you read through one of the 66 books.

12.1 || Start with Jesus. Start with the Gospel (story of Jesus) of Matthew. Read chapters five, six, and seven, which is the famous Sermon on the Mount. This will give you a good example of the beautiful and challenging teaching of Jesus. Plus, you will find some verses that sound familiar. Many parts of the Sermon on the Mount have made their way into our culture.

After this warm up, you're ready for a whole book. Try the Gospel of Mark, it's the shortest story. Read the entire gospel. Read one chapter a day. In each chapter, be sure to learn at least one primary insight about Jesus and your relationship with Jesus.

BOOKS IN THE BIBLE

When you finish that, turn to the fourth gospel, the Gospel of John. Turn to chapters 18 through 21 and read one chapter a day about the arrest, trial, execution, and resurrection of Jesus. This is what changed my life as a freshman college student. These chapters tell the most world-changing story of human history. Pay close attention to them.

THE HACK:

12.1 || Start with Jesus. After all, Jesus is the point of the entire Bible.

12.2 || Now read a letter from the Apostle Paul.

Paul was the primary advancer of the Christian faith. He wrote 13 letters. One of them is Philippians. It has four chapters. In these four chapters you will find 11 or 12 sections. Each section has several paragraphs with many verses. Now, I don't want you to read an entire chapter. Read one paragraph per day. Read the paragraph once. Now read it a second time. When you read, ask these questions: What do I learn about Jesus? What do I learn about myself? What do I learn about life? What is the single most important idea I want to put into practice today?

THE HACK:

12.2 || Continue with the Apostle Paul. After all, Paul was the supreme interpreter and explainer of Jesus.

BH 12 CONTINUED

12.3 || Read select psalms. Psalms are songs and prayers of worship. Every psalm talks about who God is, what the need is, and how the author wrestles with God about the hard things of life. You can use the same questions suggested in BH 12.2 when you read the following songs. While they are all worth reading, start with these chapters. It is one psalm per day for a month. Read, reflect, and use the words of the psalm to offer your own prayers to God.

Psalms 1, 8, 10, 13, 19, 23, 25, 34, 40, 42, 51, 52, 63, 66, 82, 84, 90, 92, 93, 98, 107, 113, 116–117, 119, 121, 136, 139, 143, 146, 150.

THE HACK:

12.3 || A good place to start in the Old Testament is with the Book of Psalms. There are 150 of them, so here are 30 that give a spectrum of spiritual experiences. When you read the psalms, read them as prayers and use them to pray your own prayers.

12.4 || Read the Book of Proverbs. There are 31 chapters. Read a chapter a day and you will finish the book in a month. This is really practical teaching. Look for one or two best ideas for making changes for the better.

THE HACK:

12.4 || God wants to change your life through Jesus. The Bible has constant insight as to what a new life looks like. It looks different in our character, speech, behaviors, relationships, values, and priorities. Proverbs is one of the focused places in the Old Testament where you see what a different way of living looks like. Let this book be a guide to the ways Jesus wants to change you, heal you, and redirect you.

A FINAL WORD

[IN CLOSING]

As you continue with the Bible for several months, you will find your understanding growing stronger. The Bible that was big and strange is now big and familiar. As you continue on, it starts to become a friend. You enjoy reading and learning. You enjoy hearing from God as you read. You find yourself responding and adjusting your thoughts and actions to be in alignment with the Bible. When you are in tough spots, God speaks through the words of scripture to encourage you. You find

your perspectives on matters beginning to change.

Above all, you discover that your relationship with Christ is growing, your Christ-likeness is growing, and your ability to follow Jesus as one of his missional friends who makes a real difference in the world is growing as well.

I'll close with a verse from the Bible. It is part of a prayer from the Apostle Paul:

I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

—EPHESIANS 1:17-19



CONTACT US

Monday-Thursday, 8:00 am-5:00 pm | Friday, by appointment

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