

INTRODUCTION TO THE FOUR QUESTIONS

Bible study practice that helps us to read the Bible in a grace-based way by lifting our eyes to consider who God is as we ask 4 simple questions of every text.

Do you want the life of Jesus — love, joy, peace, patience, and down the list? It's available to us as a free gift by the Spirit, yet enjoying this free gift takes effort. If we want the life of Jesus, we must adopt the lifestyle of Jesus, we must adopt the practices of Jesus. Spiritual practices are rhythms of resistance that help us to be at home in the love of God. We desperately need them to follow Jesus in our City.

Jan Johnson writes: God desires to transform our souls. This transformation occurs as we recognize that God created us to live in an interactive relationship with the Trinity. Our task is not to transform ourselves but to stay connected with God *in as much of life as possible*. If you can hear God in Bible study and meditation, you'll more likely hear God in a work meeting or a conflict with a roommate or spouse. In life with God, we get good at connecting with Him throughout the day by devoting time to developing the skills needed through spiritual practices.

The techniques of Bible study are familiar to many—observing the facts of Scripture, interpreting it in light of its historical and biblical context, and thinking of ways to put it into practice. Meditation on Scripture, however, is very different. Here's a comparison.

| In Bible Study, you... | In Bible Meditation, you... |
|---|--|
| Dissect the text | Savor the text and enter into it |
| Ask questions about the text | Let the text ask questions of you |
| Read and compare the facts and new ways | Read to let God speak to you (in light of facts already established) |
| Apply the facts | |

Bible study is an excellent way of setting oneself up for meditation because through it you come to understand the main point of the Scripture. We need both study and meditation for our discipleship. While we started the year by learning a common

method of Bible meditation (Lectio Divina), this month we will consider a method of Bible study (The Four Questions).

The Four Questions help us to study the Scriptures in a grace-based way through honoring the relationship between indicatives (statement of fact) and imperatives (commands) as we ask the questions:

- Who is God?
- What has He done?
- Who are we?
- How should we live?

Rather than focusing our Bible study solely on what we should do, The Four Questions invite us to lift our eyes and consider God (Q1) and his gracious action towards us (Q2) and the new identity that he has given us in Christ (Q3). Then, from a place of resting in our grace-based identity, we respond through obedience (Q4). The four questions help us to let the indicatives (Q1 - Q3) inform the imperatives (Q4).

The gospel story offers the liberating reality that through Jesus our identity can be given, not earned. The four questions help us to experience this reality as we study the Bible:

1. WHO IS GOD?²

What does the text say about the character and nature of God? The Bible is God's story – Father, Son, Spirit- so we begin by asking about how His character and nature are revealed in what we're reading. The story is about Him! Look for specific references to His attributes: holy, eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present, unchanging, compassionate, gracious, patient, loving, kind, good, gentle, etc. In narrative portions, look for implied references to His attributes. What does the story reveal about His character and nature as Father, Son, and Spirit?

2. WHAT HAS HE DONE?

What does the text say about the work of God? God's work throughout all of human history is diverse and magnificent. All of it is worth proclaiming! However, the person and work of Jesus is revealed in every book of the Bible (Luke 24:27). He is the hero and the main character. The Spirit does not want us to miss Jesus!

Look for references to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, either through foreshadowing (saving Noah in the flood, redeeming Israel from slavery in Egypt, King David as a man after God's own heart), through prophecy (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53), or through the New Testament story of Jesus' earthly life and the establishment of

His Church. This ensures a uniquely Christian, gospel-centered answer to this question.

3. WHO ARE WE IN LIGHT OF THAT?

What does the text say about our identity? God has always been working to save “a people for His own possession.” (1 Peter 2:9) Throughout the Bible, note the things that are true of God’s people. This adds depth and richness to our understanding of who we are as New Covenant believers. For example, the Levitical priests were anointed and set apart for special service to God. Now, we are all anointed with God’s Spirit (2 Corinthians 1:21-22), and, because of Jesus, are all a part of God’s “royal priesthood,” set apart for special service to God.

4. HOW DO WE LIVE?

In light of all of this, how does it change the way we live? When reading the Bible, we almost always start with the question, “How does this apply to my life?” But rightly motivated, gospel-centered action flows out of an understanding of who God is, what He’s done, and who we are in light of God’s character and work. Rather than starting with this question, end with it.

And then, take action! Jesus warns against being merely a hearer of His Word but not a doer (Matthew 7:24-27). The gospel motivates and empowers us to live in an entirely new way.

EXAMPLE - 1 JOHN 4:19

“We love because he first loved us.”

| <i>Who is God?</i> | <i>What has He done?</i> | <i>Who are we?</i> | <i>What do we do?</i> |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Love | Loved us | Loved | Love others |

The indicative (we are loved) informs the imperative (love others). What we do flows out of who we are.

TRY IT OUT

- Read 1 Peter 1
- How does this chapter answer The Four Questions? There isn't one right answer. This chapter answers these questions in dozens of ways, some explicit and some implicit.
 - Q1: Who is God?

- Q2: What has He done?
- Q3: Who are we?
- Q4: What do we do?
- How does this chapter link the imperative (Q4 - What do we do?) to the indicative (Q1 -Q3)?

¹This first part of the reading is based on *Study & Meditation* by Jan Johnson

²The second part of the reading is quoted from *Studying the Bible* by Abe Meysenburg.