

How to Read the Bible: *Using the H.E.A.R. Method.*

Reading the Bible is easier when there is a strategy to it. Early Jesus followers developed a method called Lectio Divina, which has been practiced since the 6th Century as a way of hearing from God through the Scriptures. The H.E.A.R. method is like an updated version of Lectio Divina. H.E.A.R. stands for:

H (Highlight) a verse that speaks to you

E (Explain) as best as you can what the verse means

A (Apply) that meaning to your life

R (Respond) to what God is saying to you...some weeks that might be a prayer, others it might be something God is calling you to do

The best way to practice H.E.A.R. is to keep a H.E.A.R. journal. Think of a H.E.A.R. journal like a record of your time with God in the Bible. See the sample below as an example.

Even if you have read the Bible before, you may be new to the practice of spiritual journaling. Writing down what you hear from God not only helps you actually practice H.E.A.R., more importantly, it helps you remember what God teaches you. Just try it! You will find yourself remembering your time with God more throughout your day. You will also be able to look back and see how God worked through prayer and ways He called you to respond.

Sample H.E.A.R. Journal

Philippians 4

H - "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" -
Philippians 4:13

E - Paul was telling the church at Philippi that he has discovered the secret of contentment. No matter the situation in Paul's life, he realized that Christ was all he needed, and Christ was the one who strengthened him to persevere through difficult times.

A - In my life, I will experience many ups and downs. My contentment is not found in circumstances. Rather, it is based on my relationship with Jesus Christ. Only Jesus gives me the strength I need to be content in every circumstance of life.

R - Lord Jesus, please help me as I strive to be content in You. Through Your strength, I can make it through any situation I must face.

H.E.A.R Method:

Digging Deeper

NOTE: if you haven't practiced H.E.A.R., try it for a while before you read this guide. Get familiar with the basics before you add to them.

HIGHLIGHT - How do I know what verse to highlight?

Highlighting is about learning how to listen as you read. Here are four pieces of advice to help you slow down and listen to God as you read. First...

1. Don't overthink it

Highlighting is not about finding the "right" verse, but letting God speak to you out of what you are reading. One of the common mistakes we make in approaching the Bible is looking for an answer to a question instead of just letting the Bible speak. But as it has been said: We do not just read the Bible. The Bible reads us. Hebrews 4:12 says: "Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." That means you can have confidence that no matter what verse we choose, God has something to say to you through it. So don't overthink it! Just let the Word speak.

2. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to actually help us hear from the Word of God. So before you read, ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you through His Word. Your prayer can be as simple as that: "Holy Spirit, speak to me through Your Word today." This can also help you to slow down and prepare yourself to listen.

3. Read slowly and reflectively

Read slowly and as you read, note what phrases speak to you. As a verse jumps out, ask yourself why. In Lectio Divina, they called this “listening with the ear of your heart.” Like Hebrews 4:12, the Bible is not just speaking to our ears, it is speaking to our hearts. Sometimes you’ll know pretty quickly what verse to highlight. Other times you may need to reread a section, further slowing down and even meditating on what is being said. After you have finished, choose your verse(s) and...

4. Capture it

Write the date and the letter H down in your journal. Then write the book, chapter, verse numbers, and the verse itself next to your H. Writing the actual verse out will help you remember it, and when you read your journal later, you won’t have to look up the verse to remember what it said.

EXPLAIN - But what if I don’t know what it means?

Something that can really interfere with highlighting a verse or understanding the verse you highlighted is not understanding what that verse is saying. Don’t be discouraged. Even Peter said of some of Paul’s letters, “There are some things hard to understand in them” (2 Peter 3:16). And if the apostle Peter felt that way, you and I are probably going to as well.

That is why the E (Explain) is so important. John Stott, a British pastor and author, described understanding the Bible as building a bridge between the world of the Bible and your life and your world. E is the first half of that bridge (A, or Apply, is the second).

Here are some 4 questions you can ask to help build that bridge. Think of these like looking at the Bible as if it were a photograph. You begin by looking at the big picture and then you focus on the details.

1. Purpose = Why was this written?

Every part of the Bible has a big picture, so start there. The easiest place to start is the purpose of the whole book you’re reading. You can

find a great 5-10 minute video summary of each book of the Bible here: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/>. For example, if you were reading the book of Philippians, you might learn that Paul wrote Philippians from jail to Christians in the church at Philippi to help them hold to their faith in the midst of persecution. That was his purpose.

2. Context = How do your verses fit with the verses before and after them?

Now that you understand the big picture, focus on where your verses fit in the book. Go back and reread the verses just before and after yours and ask yourself how your verse is connected to them. Ex: Philippians 4:13 - "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" - takes on new meaning in the context of Philippians 4:12 - "I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need."

3. Comprehension = What does it say?

Before you decide what a verse means, focus on what it says. Try re-stating the verse in your own words. If there are any words or phrases you don't understand, look them up, especially if they seem important. For example, here is a paraphrase of Phil 4:12-13 above: I know how to be low and how to be high, because I have found the secret of contentment in all circumstances: knowing Jesus.

4. Interpretation = What does it mean?

What's the point? What was the author trying to say to his audience? Again, put this in your own words. This is your E (Explain), what you will actually write in your journal. So for Phil 4:12-13, I might write: knowing Jesus enabled Paul to be content no matter what his circumstance.

APPLY - What does this have to do with me?

Now that you understand what the author was saying to his audience, you're ready to build the other half of the bridge and apply it. Often when we read the Bible, we are thinking about how to apply it even before we understand. If you find yourself doing that, this is a great moment to take a step back and let God tell you what it wants to hear

through His Word.

As you look at the verses you wrote and your explanation:

- Why do you think these words resonated? What drew you to them?
- What might God be trying to say to you through this, about himself?
- What might God be trying to say about you?
- What is going on in your life that God might be trying to speak into?

As you write down your A, use this as an opportunity to talk to God. Share what's going on and how God is speaking to you. It is very natural for this to begin to flow into a time of prayer.

RESPOND - How is responding different than applying?

In the story of the house built on the rock, Jesus challenges us to be doers of the Word and not just hearers: "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24). Respond is where we move from hearing the Word to putting it into action.

Often this will involve prayer, which we will talk more about in a moment, but if you are having a hard time determining how to respond, think through these categories:

- Is There an Attribute of God to Remember?
- Is There a Promise to Claim?
- Is There a Truth to Believe?
- Is There a Sin to Confess?
- Is There a Command to Obey?
- Is There an Action to Take?

These aren't meant to be exhaustive, so don't feel constrained by them, but sometimes we get stuck in certain categories of response. One day you might need to confess a sin. Another day you might need to claim a promise. Another day you might need to act in a specific way. Let the Holy Spirit lead you in how He wants you to respond.