



First Hand Truth:
**How To Study the Bible
For Yourself**

Presenter: Rick McNally

January 24, 2026

at

Calvary Baptist Church

Battle Creek, MI 49017

First Hand Truth

¹⁰ The brothers immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to **Berea**, and when they arrived they went into the Jewish synagogue. ¹¹ Now these Jews were **more noble** than those in Thessalonica; they **received** the word with all eagerness, **examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.** ¹² Many of them **therefore believed**, with not a few Greek women of high standing as well as men.
Acts 17:10-12 ESV

Study it for Yourself

Noble / of noble birth / a willingness to learn

Received / receive readily information and regard it as true.

Eagerness / willingness, zeal, readiness

Examine / to engage in careful study of a question, to judge, to evaluate



What is First Hand Truth?

– *The Short Answer* –

Equipping people to study God's Word

– *A Little More Info* –

First Hand Truth exists to **equip** people to study God's Word. We attempt to both **encourage** greater desire to study the Word and to **educate** people to raise their confidence to study the Word for themselves.

We do this through **weekly local workshops** in Battle Creek, Michigan (called *Adventures in Bible Study*), and through speaking opportunities and workshops with individuals, families, churches, and schools both locally and distant.

Your presenter is Rick McNally, a pastor of 30 years and a person who has a deep desire to be a part of the goal of equipping God's people to study and engage with the Scriptures in a first hand manner. He has a wonderful wife and five adult children.

His latest venture is First Hand Truth

The More Important Question is **Who is Jesus?**

– *The Short Answer* –

Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament, come from God to save people from their sins and give them a new kind of life.

– *A Little More Info* –

Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, (1 Tim. 2:5–6) who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, (John 1:14, Gal. 4:4) and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, for ever. (Rom. 9:5, Luke 1:35, Col. 2:9, Heb. 7:24–25)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs

What is the Bible?

– *The Short Answer* –

The Word of God

– *A Little More Info* –

What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, (2 Tim. 3:16, Eph. 2:20) is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. (1 John 1:3–4)

The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs

We believe God's word is Inspired: Verbal Plenary Inspiration

Verbal = down to the words

Plenary = completely, fully

Inspiration = from the very breath of God

Preliminary Things

Bible Study is...

Not about knowledge acquisition

Not about finding evidence justifying your
own opinions / confirmation bias

About the Word of God / The Word of God
is God breathed / his very Words...

His Message!

It Can be Tricky...

Inspired by God / written by men / they
wrote real **words** within the context of real
languages in real **cultural contexts** in a real
history about real **things**

Your task in Bible Study is to determine as
best you can what the authors meant when
they put the pen to the paper — **what was
their intent?**

Not just, “what I get out of it”

Bible Study Can be Dangerous...

...if it is not combined with **faith**

...if it is not **empowered by the Holy Spirit**

...if it is not measured with **humility**

It has been used to put others down –
rather than build others up

It has been used as a means to control others

It should change you into a person like
Christ / not a person who acts like they
themselves are God

Our Agenda This Morning...

A / Begin with encouragement
and motivation

B / * Move into a Study of a passage of
scripture and work through a
Study Worksheet

C / Finish with some conclusions

*PS / Don't be afraid to ask questions or add
comments along our way!*

Motivation to Study

When you are Spiritually down and find something amazing in your Study of God's Word

¹⁰ Then the disciples came and said to him, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹² For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. ¹³ This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. ¹⁴ Indeed, in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says:

“ ‘ “You will indeed hear but never understand,
and you will indeed see but never perceive.”

¹⁵ For this people's heart has grown dull,
and with their ears they can barely hear,
and their eyes they have closed,
lest they should see with their eyes
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart
and turn, and I would heal them.’

¹⁶ But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷ For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

Matthew 13:10-17



Bible Study Guide MACRO

Step 1 / Define your passage of study / typically use paragraph level divisions (pericopes).

Step 2 →

Step 3 / Consider Immediate Context / what is being talked about around your passage

Previous Passage / _____
Subject of Passage:
Compliment:

Your Study Passage / _____
Subject:
Compliment:

Following Passage / _____
Subject:
Compliment:

Terminology:

Subject / a subject is the main idea that a paragraph is talking about. One or two words to describe the main topic.

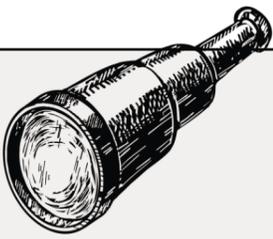
Compliment / what does the paragraph say about what is being talked about.

Example

Col 1:15-20

Subject / Jesus Christ...

Compliment / ...is first and foremost of all things.



Step 4 / Observation / “What does the passage say?” / Be the detective! / Try to write down as many things that you can about what you notice about your passage / here are some tips...



Ask Questions of the Passage:

- Who?
- What?
- Where?
- When?
- How Much?
- Why?
- How?

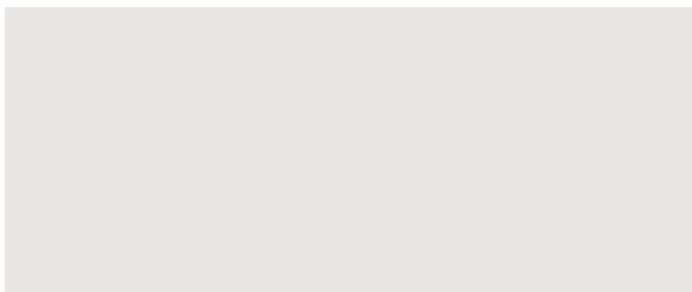
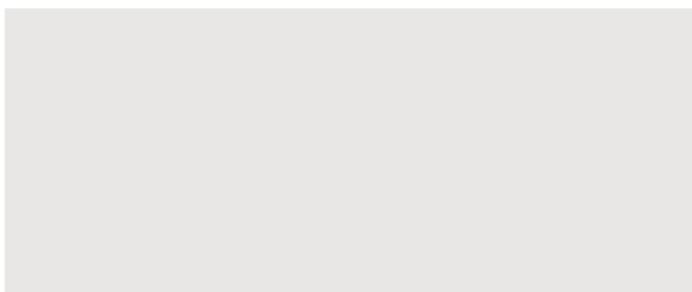
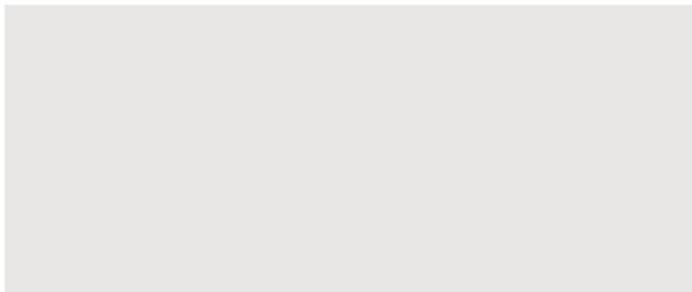
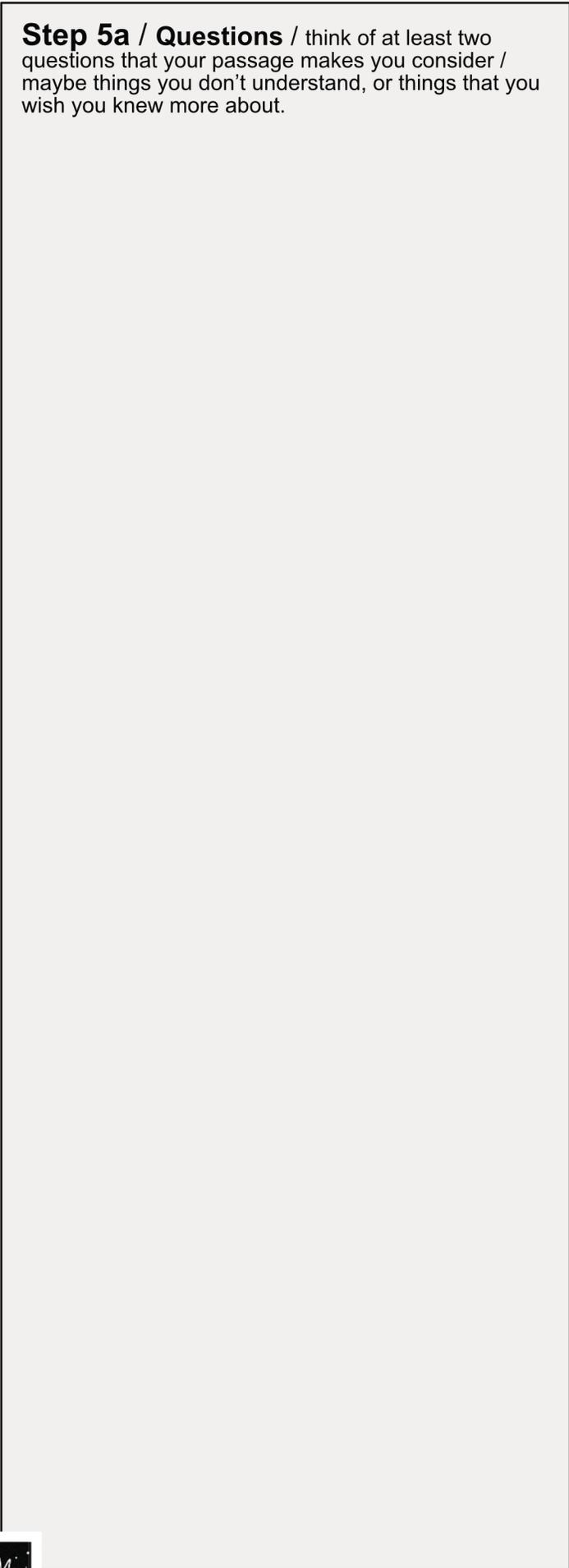
Consider...

- Significant conjunctions
- Comparisons and contrasts
- Repeating words or ideas (keys)
- Anything out of the ordinary?
- Questions you have when you read the passage

Words you want to define or research?

Step 5a / Questions / think of at least two questions that your passage makes you consider / maybe things you don't understand, or things that you wish you knew more about.

Step 5b / Cross References / use concordances or other Bible study tools to determine similar passages that might help answer questions.



Step 6 / SUBJECT / determine the subject of your passage / put some time into this!

BRAINSTORM AREA >>>>

Step 7 / COMPLEMENT / determine what your passage says about your "subject" / try to limit this to 4-8 words or so...

BRAINSTORM AREA >>>

Subject:

Compliment: 4-8 words or so...

NOTE: Finding your subject of the paragraph (or passage) and what it says about the passage keeps you honest and in context.

This step is so crucial as it keeps you from bringing outside biases into your study work, either from your opinions or things you've heard about the passage before. These things can sway your rational thinking and take you off course.

Sub Points? / Does this passage have any sub-points that are easy to spot?



Step 8 / Interpretation / what does it mean?

Write your completed subject and compliment down from step 7a and 7b.

A few basic rules of interpretation...

(1) **Continuity of the message** / greater context of Bible / scripture best interprets scripture.

(2) **Context of the material.** What is the immediate context of the verse/passage?

(3) **Customary meaning.** What is the literal meaning of what is being said, don't spiritualize or modernize scripture. If it's symbolic, it will be obvious and state such.

Richards, Lawrence O., and Gary J. Bredfeldt. *Creative Bible Teaching*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020.

Another way of expressing this is...

(1) Identify the kind of literature your text is in for insight into its meaning / historical, poetical, correspondence, etc.

(2) Consider the context...

(3) Read the text for the plain and obvious meaning.

(4) Try to discern the writers intentions when he wrote the text.

(5) Look carefully at the language of the text for what it reveals about its meaning.

(6) Notice the theological themes in the text.

(7) Always take a God-centered perspective in interpreting your text.

McDill, Wayne. *12 Essential Skills for Great Preaching: Second Edition, Revised and Expanded*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006.

* After doing your work of **observation** and after your initial thinking of **interpretation**, look up the passage in a Bible commentary to see if you are on target. Or ask a friend!





Step 9 / Application / what do I personally do about it?
How does this passage affect my thinking or my lifestyle?

All scripture is breathed out by God,
and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**,
for **correction** and for **training** in
righteousness. 2 Tim 3:16

+ Positive Things

– Corrective Things

Realm of Truth / Belief

Teaching / things
to believe, things
that are true

Reproof / things
that are not true, to
reject

Realm of Action / Lifestyle

Training / things
that I need to accept
and do in terms of
actions and lifestyle.

Correction /
things that I need to
reject in terms of
actions and
lifestyle.



Step 10 / Prayerful Application /

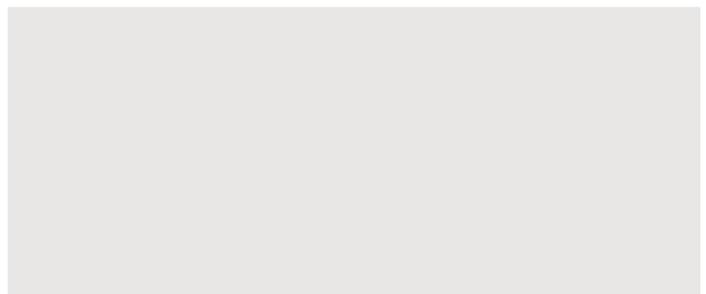
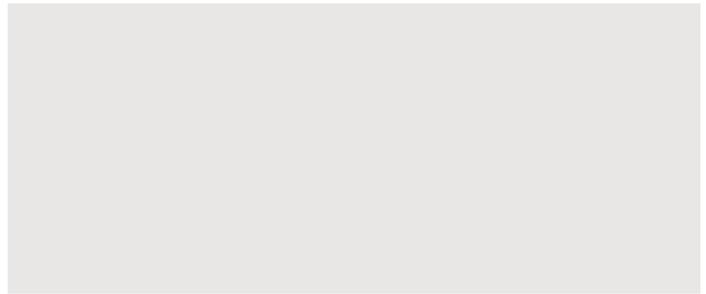
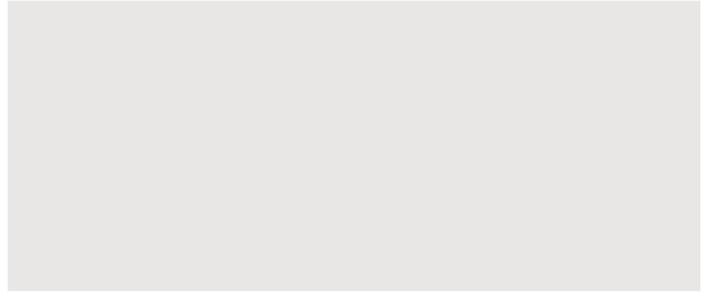
Take some time to consider how **faith** in God, the **Holy Spirit's** empowering and **humility** might make applying this passage more possible. What aspects of "trusting God" and being "teachable" might make application more possible?

Faith / Believing God More...

Holy Spirit / God's Enabling...

Humility / Trusting Self less...

Step 11 / Quotes or Illustrations / find some quotes by people from the past or other leaders that help make sense of what you are learning. This is extra, but helpful.



Addendum

180° Out of Phase

Recognizing The Effects of Living in the Flesh, of the World

	“Reality” on Earth	Reality to God	Scripture
Strength & Power	When I am Weak, When we boast our weakness Treasures in Jars of Clay Outer self wasting away *Jesus Crucified in weakness Babies and infants...	I am strong We show God’s strength show God’s power... inner self being renewed Lives by the Power of God established strength	2 Cor 10:10; 12:10, 13:9 / Heb 11:34 2 Cor 12:9 / 2 Cor 12:5 / 2 Cor 11:30 2 Cor 4:7 2 Cor 4:16 * 2 Cor 13:4 Psalm 8:2
Greatness	God opposes the proud Humble yourselves Blessed are the meek If.. thinks he is something...	Gives grace to the humble He will lift you up Inherit the earth Nothing / Deceived	James 4:6 / 1 Peter 5:5 James 4:10 / 1 Peter 5:6 Matthew 5:5 Gal 6:3
	Rulers Lord over Men Act like slaves of each other Act as Slaves of all Jesus served / Ransomed	Not so with “you” You will be Great First among you Lord of all	Mark 10:35-41 / Phil 2:1-11
	First shall be... Last... You must be last (servant)	...Last ...First ...To be first	Matthew 20:16 / Matthew 19:30 Luke 13:30 / Mark 10:31 / Mark 9:35
Wisdom & Vision	Be a fool for God Wise on earth Word of cross folly to perishing The wisdom of this age	You will find yourself wise Fool to God Power of God to others made foolish by God	1 Cor 3:18 Romans 1:22 1 Cor 1:18 1 Cor 1:20
	Those that see... blind We look not to things seen Thing seen are transient ...not by sight see through a mirror dimly Moses forsook Egypt/ endured	Those that can’t may see but things unseen Things unseen eternal Walk by faith... then face to face Seeing him who is invisible	John 9:39 / John 12:40 / John 8:12 2 Cor 4:18 2 Cor 4:18 2 Cor 5:7 1 Cor 13:12 Hebrews 11:27
Pursuits	...not on things of earth Gain the whole world Gain “the rest”	Set mind on things above... Lose your soul By Seeking God First	Col 3:2 Matthew 16:26 / Mark 8:36 Matthew 6:33 /
Maturity	Be like a Child Receive God like a child Become like a child Be born again Be infants in evil	Own Kingdom of heaven Or not enter it to enter Kingdom o Heaven to enter kingdom of heaven in your thinking mature	Mark 10:14 Mark 10:15 Matthew 18:3 John 3:3 Cor 14:20

God’s ways, being the ways of infinite wisdom, simply cannot be comprehended by our finite minds. Jerry Bridges, Trusting God

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,
declares the Lord. **Isaiah 55:8**

*How fathomless the depths of God’s resources, wisdom, and knowledge! How unsearchable His decisions, and how mysterious [untraceable] His methods! For who has ever understood the thoughts of the Lord, or has ever been His adviser?
Romans 11:33-34 (Williams Translation)*

	“Reality” on Earth	Reality to God	Scripture
<i>Riches and Poverty</i>	those who have wealth As poor... Jesus became poor ...Rich... humiliation Poor in the world I know your trib/poverty You say I am rich... Being poor on earth Do not lay up treasures on earth...	difficult entry kingdom of God Making many rich making us rich 2 Cor 8:9 Lowly brother boast... Rich in faith Yet you are rich You are wretched...poor... yet possessing everything Lay them in heaven	Mark 10:17-31 2 Cor 6:10 James 1:5 James 2:5 Rev 2:9 Rev 3:15-18 2 Cor 6:10 Matthew 6:19-24
<i>Flesh or Spirit</i>	You Judge according to flesh Natural person... ...flesh is weak ...Flesh gives birth to flesh Flesh doesn't give life Walk not according to flesh Live Flesh = set mind on flesh Set mind on flesh = death ...perfected by the flesh? Flesh is against Spirit Judge the Externals	Jesus: I judge no one does not accept the Spirit Spirit is willing... Spirit to spirit... Spirit gives life But according to Spirit Live Spirit = set mind on Spirit Set mind on Spirit = life/peace Having begun in the Spirit... Spirit is against the Flesh Not the Heart	John 8:15 1 Cor 2:14 Matthew 26:41 John 3:6 John 6:63 Romans 8:4 Romans 8:5 Romans 8:6; 8:9; 8:13 Galatians 3:3 Gal 5:17 2 Corinthians 5:12
<i>Stewardship</i>	The more we give Give... Stewardship... Cant serve money...	The more we receive And it will be given, to measure Is actually found in generosity ...and God at the same time	Acts 20:33-35 Luke 6:38 Luke 16:1-9 Luke 16:13
<i>Life and Death</i>	For me to live is Christ If we have died with him... If we have died... Carrying the death of Jesus You have died... Death is at work in you... Death in the flesh...	To die is gain we will also live with him we will live... life of Jesus manifested Your life is hidden with Christ Life in us Alive in the Spirit	Phil 1:21 2 Tim 2:11 Romans 6:8 2 Cor 4:10 Col 3:3 2 Cor 4:12 1 Peter 3:18
	Finding ones life Losing one's Life He who loves his life will lose	Losing it Finding it He who hates his life will keep	Matthew 10:39 Matthew 10:39 John 12:23-26
<i>Freedom</i>	Be slaves to God Take my yoke upon you The free one...	To be Free You will find rest ... makes himself a servant	Matthew 11:20-30 1 Cor 9:19
<i>Good and Evil</i>	...spoken as of evil Woe to those... call evil good Who justifies the wicked... ...becomes darkness	Do not let what.. good.... and good evil ... condemns the righteous Be careful lest the light in you..	Romans 14:16 Isaiah 5:20 Prov 17:15 Luke 11:35
	Jews did not come to Jesus	Gentiles came to Jesus	John 1:11 / Acts 13:46 / Rom 11:17
<i>Are You Discerning Rightly?</i>	We are treated as imposters As unknown, as dying as punished as sorrowful as poor as having nothing (Instead of judging wrongly)	Yet are true yet well known behold, we live but not killed yet rejoicing yet making many rich yet possessing everything Widen you hearts also!	2 Cor 6:8 2 Cor 6:9 2 Cor 6:10 / (see also Rom 12:12) 2 Cor 6:13

The Book of Romans

A Logical Flow

Here is a little tool put together to help us see the flow of these three chapters of Romans. I made this by trying to determine the **subject** and **compliment** for each paragraph of these chapters, then after comparing them look for the flow of the passage in general. This is fun to do and so helpful. This is a good exercise to help understand the context of a passage.

Chapter 6

Romans 6:1-4

S: Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?

C: We were not saved to sin, but to a **new life**.

Romans 6:5-11

S: Connection to sin

C: We should consider ourselves dead to sin, and alive to God, because of Christ's work.

Romans 6:12-14

S: Sin's Influence

C: Don't let sin reign in your body and obey sin's passions / you are under grace not law.

Romans 6:15-19

S: Should we keep sinning because we are under grace?

C: We are free of sin and have become slaves of righteousness, leading to sanctification.

Romans 6:20-23

S: Freedom / We are now set free, free to serve God

C: This leads to > being slaves of God > sanctification > eternal life

CC: wages of sin = death / the free gift of God is eternal life

Freedom Is Real!

Chapter 7

Romans 7:1-3

Subject: The Law

Compliment: Is binding on a person only when he is alive.

Romans 7:4-6

S: We are dead to the law

C: therefore we are free to belong to another; the new way of the Spirit

Romans 7:7-12

S: Is the law sinful?

C: The law made sin known, and caused sin to awaken, and brought death.

Romans 7:13-20

S: Did the good thing "the Law" bring death in me?

C: Sin in us produced death, sin dwells within and causes our "problems;" the Law did not do this.

Romans 7:21-25

S: Solving the problem of the dichotomy of desire to do what is right and the inability to do it.

C: The mind of man may desire to serve God, but the "flesh" (human nature) prevents this.

What Can Fix This?

The Law Can't Help

Chapter 8

Romans 8:1-2

S: No Condemnation for those in Christ Jesus

C: The "law" of the Spirit of life, set us free from the law of "sin and death"

Living in Spirit!

Romans 8:3-8

S: The gospel of Jesus' death makes the Spirit of life possible

C: > leads to life > leads to peace with God

Romans 8:9-11

S: The indwelling Spirit

C: Not of Flesh > body is dead > Spirit brings life because of righteousness > gain life in our mortal bodies.

Romans 8:12-17

S: We are debtors to the Spirit

C: ...to put to death the deeds of the body > life (living) > adoption > children of God > provided we suffer with him.

Romans 8:18-25

S: The suffering of this present time

C: Glory is coming, outweighs suffering / Suffering is universal, even creation suffers

Are we losing?

Romans 8:26-30

S: Our weak state...

C: The Spirit helps > prayer life > searches our hearts > works all things to good > God is doing things and leading things forward.

Romans 8:31-36

S: God is for us, who can be against us?

C: No charge, no condemnation > Jesus died for us, intercedes for us >

Not just "not condemn"....
But Winners!

No!

Romans 8:37-39

S: We are more than conquerors

C: Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

Information about





First Hand Truth

Study the Bible Yourself... to Know God

I have a dream. It might be from God, it might be just my own thoughts and ramblings. I would like to find out which it is. I know for a fact that there will always be a need for more people to take time to take initiative to study the Word of God for themselves, and that such a thing is not a bad goal for any of us. No matter what level of growth or knowledge, there is no end to learning about the infinite God and how he has chosen to reveal himself to us. With that knowledge, I will begin down this road and see what happens. For God. For his glory. For something bigger than myself. — Rick McNally, July 2025

A ministry dedicated to...

1. To help people become committed to **first-hand devotion and study of scripture**.¹
2. To help people recognize that **God has enabled them in the Spirit to develop this devotion**, and that they are intended for it.
3. This first-hand devotion of the word provides **vast benefits** including: increased faith, increased joy, recovery from trauma or faithlessness, and the means to grow into who they ought to be.
4. Helping people see **the dangers of personally abdicating their own responsibility** to know and study the word, or **allowing other individuals** (whether intentionally or unintentionally) to **impede their God-given responsibility** to have a direct relationship with God.
5. Helping people become **more active** in regular study and **equipped** to do so firsthand.
6. Helping local **churches** and **leaders** to be more active in **encouraging** and **equipping** people to do firsthand study of the Word.

How can this be done? Through a number of ministry focuses...

- Encouragement through the internet / posts, events, etc.
- Encouragement through direct visitation of churches / teaching, demonstrations, things to gather interest.
- Equipping people through in-person seminars (electronic and conventional methodologies).
- Equipping people through periodic online classes / mini seminars / training videos /etc.
- Equipping people through multi-day retreats.
 - Study retreats / in-person dedicated study retreats to learn to study.
 - Recovery retreats / in-person spiritual recovery focused retreats.
 - Growth retreats / in-person intentional specific growth goal focuses.

¹ Of course there are teachers, but these teachers are intended to be supplemental equippers and encouragers, not overarching mediators. This is the danger of false teachers who make "disciples after themselves."

Purpose Statement

This is a draft



First Hand Truth exists to equip people to study God's Word. We attempt to both **encourage** greater desire to study the Word and to **educate** people to raise their confidence to study the Word for themselves.

We do this through weekly local workshops in Battle Creek, MI, called Adventures in Bible study, and through **speaking** and **workshops** with individuals, families, churches, and schools both locally and distant.

Why is it important?

Studying scripture firsthand is important because...

It is listening to the most important voice we could possibly hear, not just our own opinions, or the opinions of those around us or our culture. We must learn to listen to God first. God has given his word so that we can make sense of our world.

If we give so much attention to other avenues of knowledge, why not more attention to God's very Words? We put vast effort into other areas of knowledge, why would we pay God's Word less attention than other less important things?

Scripture has many benefits for our very soul. It enables peace with God and peace with others. It provides wisdom when we are so lacking of it. It exposes our sin and helps us find the cure in Christ. It gives us joy even when we are in difficult situations. It helps us understand the purpose of life and endure its difficulties. It can bring us to the point where we learn to truly love God and then — somehow — love others as we ought. It can help us in our making of decisions, our life priorities, and our ethics as we learn to treat others with more respect. Its benefits are literally without limit (Psalm 1, Psalm 19, Psalm 119).

What is it going to do for me?

Studying scripture firsthand helps us to know God better and know truth. It helps us...

To help people fulfill their ultimate purpose / the Westminster Shorter Catechism reminds us that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We cannot enjoy someone we do not know firsthand, and study of the Word helps us meet this great goal. If we are fulfilling our purpose, we will enjoy this life more and be a better person to those around us.

To help people become Jesus' Disciples / to connect people to Jesus as their Lord and Savior, their one **authority**, their one **guide**, and their one **teacher** is the ultimate outreach of the people of God (Matthew 28:16-20); in other words, to make disciples. We should not seek disciples after ourselves or after our churches or denominations (Acts 20:30). We primarily need a **teacher-student** relationship with Jesus, not a secondary **teacher-other teacher-student** relationship.

To help people become like Jesus, to grow / to develop in people the ability and desire to move into an intimate, Spirit-empowered, Word-driven relationship with God firsthand is necessary — it is this kind of relationship that little by little conforms us to His very image (Ephesians 4:13, 2 Corinthians 3:18). God does indeed help us grow through circumstances and trials, but we can exponentially improve that growth through desiring change, seeking the Word, applying that Word — through intentional growth by attention to scripture (2 Peter 1:3-15).

To help people be more apt to recognize error / one of the benefits of growing in the knowledge of God is being able to see the patterns of theological/spiritual error or misuse, both in our own lives and in the lives around us. We must deepen our relationship with God so that we will not be "tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes" and rather "speak truth in love" and "grow up in every way into Him who is the head, Christ (Ephesians 4:15-16)."

To help people be better witnesses / the better we understand God's will and the truth, the better we can explain those things to those around us and teach them to believe and obey Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20).

Workshop Notes

<https://firsthandtruth.org/bible-study-seminar-notes/>

At the link above you can find a few things!

PDF of this booklet

Blank Bible Study Worksheet to Reproduce

PDF of the slides used

Finances and Gifts

At the link below you can find **financial information** of contributions to date, purchases for the ministry, and more.

As of this time Rick McNally is not organizationally receiving any intentional financial support. Personal gifts can be given, of course.

Here you can find a **wishlist** of educational supplies, books and hardware we are looking to purchase for participants to use while learning to study scripture.

Any contribution is greatly appreciated!

<https://firsthandtruth.org/finances/>



Give a financial gift at...



Purchase educational equipment or books...



