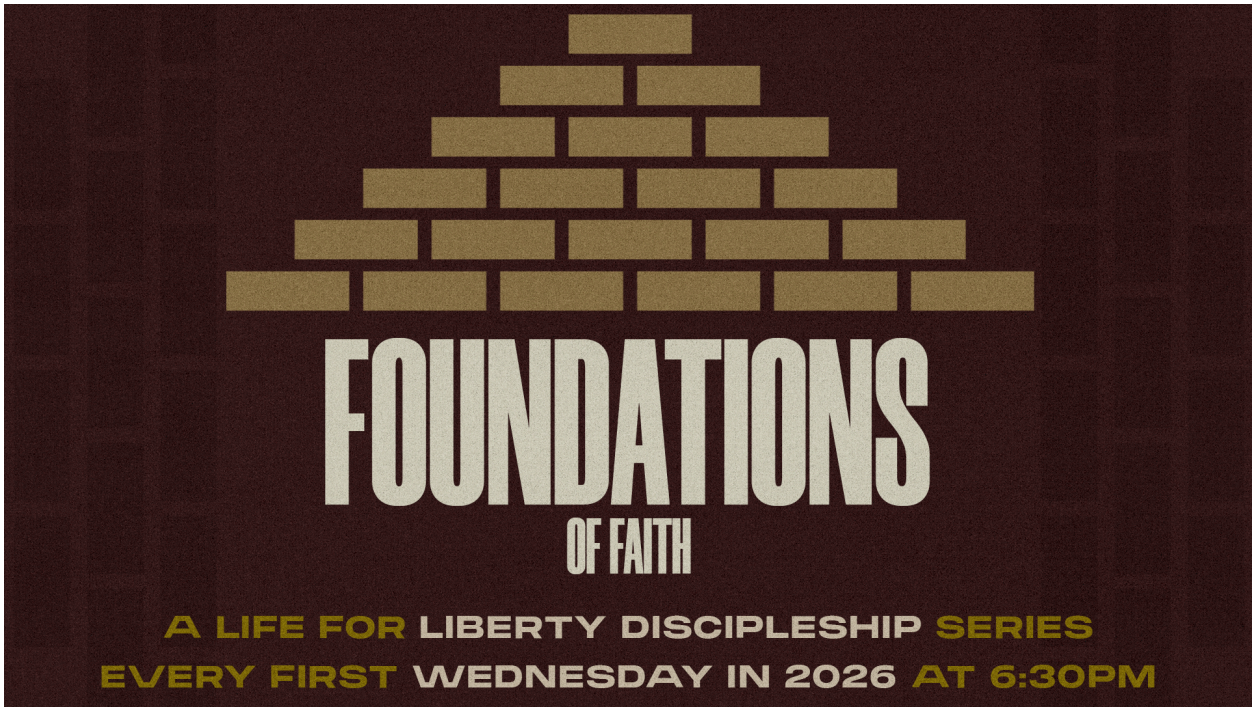

Foundations of Faith Church-Wide Discipleship

Weekly Study Guide

Foundations of Faith
A Life *for* Liberty Discipleship Series

For our 90th anniversary, the Church at Liberty Square is pairing the two essential cornerstones of any church, evangelism and discipleship, into this yearlong, church-wide study.

Jesus Himself specifically linked the two together as symbiotic within a healthy church (Matthew 28:19-20). And the early church repeatedly proved the point that evangelism and discipleship go hand-in-hand. Moreover, discipleship is often the direct fuel for church growth (e.g., Acts 2:42-47).

After the Gospels and the book of Acts, almost the entire remainder of the New Testament is an extended primer on discipleship – exhortation, encouragement, reproof, rebuke, and correction around *understanding* and *living* the Good News individually and as a church. Indeed, now, just as then, we often *share* the Good News by how we *live* it. Actions still speak louder than words.

In fact, the biblical record and pattern of evangelism seem to suggest that a small subset of everyday Christians evangelized with actual words of preaching and teaching – primarily the apostolic leadership, appointed deacons, and those whose ministry required them to "do the work of an evangelist."

But the writings of Paul, Peter, James, and John demonstrate that *all* in the early church were expected to evangelize through how they lived their everyday lives, sanctified by the blood of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. In doing so, they were true to two of Jesus's central exhortations to His church: "In the same way, *let your light shine before others*, so that *they may see your good works* and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16), and "A new commandment I give to you, that you *love one another*: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. *By this all people will know that you are my disciples*, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

This makes sense, because the New Testament spends considerable time and energy on how to actively live a Christlike life, to be like Jesus. The Bible repeatedly admonishes and teaches us to love with *action* not just with *words*. "Little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:18); "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only…" (James 1:22); "They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works" (Titus 1:16); "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21).

In short, to evangelize well – to show the world we are Christ's by how we actively love others (John 13:34-35) – we must first disciple well within our church.

This guide will help us do just that.

How to Use This Study Guide

On the first Wednesday of each month in 2026, we will teach on a monthly discipleship focus. We highly encourage each person at Liberty Square to attend these first Wednesday night lessons. They will form the backbone of our corporate discipleship for that month and, indeed, each month will build on the previous one.

But the teaching does not stop with the Wednesday lesson. Unique to this series are follow-up materials for each component of discipleship. For each week, we will provide additional scriptures and reflective readings about the monthly topic, as well as questions and points of prayer to consider in one's own devotion and study time. In addition Liberty Groups and other discipleship-oriented church groups and ministries will highlight the monthly theme.

So how does one use the guide?

First, **go at your own pace each week**. We intentionally will not provide you daily material, because we want you to take your time and linger over the weekly scriptures and questions. We would rather you repeatedly read a passage and let it sink in than superficially gloss over multiple chapters.

Second, **think practically**. For most of the series, the weekly reflections will include ways that we can internalize the monthly discipleship theme and then live it out in our lives, whether at home, at work, at church, or within the community. Remember, the overarching goal of discipleship is to make us more like Christ. This takes practice. Our salvation came freely to us by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and through our confession of His Lordship. Our sanctification, however, requires effort from us. And our submission is an invitation to the Holy Spirit to remake, reorient, and rehabituate our lives.

Third, **use this guide with others**. Use it in your families, within your Liberty Groups, in your Sunday morning class, in any ministry within Liberty Square. We sometimes over-individualize the Christian journey, neglecting that much of the book of Acts paints the picture of a church that "had all things in common," that prayed, worshipped, learned, fellowshipped, and "did life" together (Acts 2:42-47). The goal of

Foundations of Faith is to grow us both in our personal walk but also equip us for life within the body of Christ.

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Because we want the Church to deliberately move together, month-by-month, we will be sharing each month's focus and guide when we arrive there in the year. The order of the topics is purposeful, all with an eye to a more purposeful, more disciplined, more fruitful Christian life (individually, at home, and within the Church) and more robust personal evangelism.

I look forward to sharing this journey with you as we grow in Christ together "so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:14-15).

Let us "grow in the grace of knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity" (1 Peter 3:18).

Amen.

In the love of Christ,

Pastor Chris
Executive Pastor, Discipleship and Community
The Church at Liberty Square

January 2026
Studying and Reading the Bible

We will start our journey with one of the most fundamental building blocks of our apprenticeship to Christ – interacting with the living Word of God.

Recently, after a teaching on how to read and study the Bible, I had a man come up to me, tears welling in his eyes. He grabbed both of my shoulders, pierced me with his anguished expression, and then sighed deeply, "I've been a Christian for decades. I'm in my sixties. Today was the first time anyone ever taught me *how* to read the Bible"

At first, that saddened me. But then it made me angry, because it speaks volumes about how we treat our relationship with the Word. We chalk it up as a "Christian perfunctory." In fact, that is the typical discipleship advice we dispense to new Christians, old Christians, young Christians, little Christians, big Christians, all Christians: read your Bible. "Get in the Word of God," we say.

Well, yes. But to what end? And how? And why? And where do I start? And what version? And how much? And a thousand other questions.

That man's personal testimony made me do some hard reflection, which led me to this stark reality: I do not think we teach people *how* to read the Bible.

And, if you think about it, this makes no sense. Literature teachers explain to their classes how to approach a Shakespearean tragedy before assigning *Hamlet*. Trigonometry teachers assume a student's strong foundation in geometry before they draw a sine curve on the board. A basketball coach drills into his team the fundamentals of passing the ball before he ever allows them on the court.

Why do we then assume that Christians naturally know how to approach a complex book, written over 1,500 years, in three languages, on three continents, by more than 40 authors?

We should never make that assumption. Even factoring in the amazing, inexplicable supernatural discernment that can flow into our lives by the Holy Spirit ("Speak Lord, your servant is listening…"), we should never make that assumption. We are to love the Lord with everything we have, including our mind, surrendering it to diligent, earnest study to become a trustworthy "workman" of his Word (2 Timothy 2:15).

Yet many reduce their intimacy with the Word to a read-the-Bible-in-a-year reading plan. On the surface, there is nothing wrong and plenty right with those sorts of plans… until it becomes a Christian chore instead of a way to draw closer to God. "Oh, I have to read five chapters today or I'll fall behind." So, they feverishly race through those five chapters and retain absolutely none of it, as if this were some sort of forced march of faith. Reading the Word will not be void in their life, but one wonders just how much good comes from this approach?

Others take the opposite approach, choosing daily devotional readings. Again, there is nothing wrong and plenty right with that, too. But devotions are bite-sized snippets of scripture, frequently edited or taken completely out of their original context, all to prove a point that someone else is trying to make. And the point of being in the Word is that we personally receive revelation, wisdom, truth, and life directly from the Holy Spirit.

So, then, how should we approach the Bible?

First, **we should approach respectfully**, as we would anything so organic, so pulsing with vitality and life and the power that those bring. "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). Stated differently, we wrap our reading around the truth Peter uttered to Jesus in John 6:68, "Lord, where else would we go? You have the words of eternal life."

Second, **we should approach it personally**. God is speaking to you individually and us as a church – directly, powerfully, forthrightly. Yes, God speaks to us in many other ways, including sermons, teachings, devotions, other people, nature itself. But the Bible is explicitly clear that *scripture* is a profitable cornerstone in our lives for teaching, training, correction, revelation, worship, wisdom, and understanding.

Third, **we should approach it prayerfully**, inviting the Holy Spirit to "teach [us] all things" (John 14:26). Indeed, we should mimic Samuel and say, "Speak Lord," and then listen.

Fourth, **we should approach it deliberately**. Reading the Word should not be an afterthought in your day. Instead, it, along with prayer, should be the very hem stitches around any day.

Over the four weeks of January, we will learn all of these approaches together. Do not rush through the weekly readings. Instead, linger in them. Slow down. Ponder. Even wrestle. Let the Lord speak and teach you about the beauty of His Word.

Week 1 - January
Treasure the Word

Weekly Readings:

- Psalm 119
- 2 Timothy 3:14-17
- Key idea – Yes, the Word is a sword, but it must be sharpened in our lives before it can be unsheathed and wielded.

Do you open your Bible on days other than Sunday? If not, why? Is it time? Interest? Difficulty in comprehension? What stands between you and the Word?

In Scripture we are specifically urged to treasure the Bible in our hearts, to look to it frequently for training and teaching in righteousness, and to allow the Lord to speak to us through His Word. The Bible is the place where we read of the wonders of a mighty God, His covenantal promises, the stories of ordinary people being used to do extraordinary things, the good news of Jesus Christ, and the ongoing plan for our salvation and redemption.

Indeed, the Gospel contained therein is what changes our lives and our destinies.

But in order to truly explore the foundations of our faith, and be equipped to share the good news to others, we must view the Bible and its study as *essential* in and to our lives.

So, before we move onto the rest of this week, let's challenge ourselves to reflect on the place of the scriptures in our lives. Is it cherished in our hearts? Is it training us daily? Is it an integral part of who we are? Or is it something we infrequently approach, more often than not through a pastor's sermon instead of our own study?

Exercise – Explain how reading the Bible is currently situated in your life. Is it an every-day source of teaching, wisdom, growth, and inspiration? Or something different?

This week – Over the course of the week, with deliberation and purpose, read Psalm 119. (Yes, it is long, so break it into chunks. Do not rush. Linger with the Word and let it linger within you.) Observe how the writer truly relies upon – *and loves* – the Scripture.

Then, read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.

Answer these questions:

- What are these two passages speaking into your life?
- In what ways might they reshape how you value and approach Scripture?
- What new practices can you put into place to treasure the Word in your heart?

With those answers in hand, take a few minutes to define your goals related to the study of Scripture, including any new practices you want to incorporate.

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Final Thoughts – Take a few moments to consider how the writer of Psalm 119 values the word of God. Below is a place to write a reflection and prayer. Ask God to lead you to esteem the scriptures in new ways this year and beyond in your journey with Christ. Ask Him for a hunger for His precepts, ask Him for revelations that speak into your life, for His Holy Spirit to speak to you and train you up so that you may be complete, equipped for His good work to come to pass in and through your life.

Week 2 - January
The Full Counsel of Scripture, Part 1

Weekly Readings:

- Jeremiah 29:11 (then all of Jeremiah 29)
- Lamentations 3:23 (then all of Lamentations 3)
- Key idea – Yes, individual verses carry enormous weight and power, but a mature reader of the Bible will always read them in the context of the full section, chapter, and even book.

The Bible is a spiritual document, but is also a historical one, a poetic one, an apocryphal one, among many other genres. The Bible is a book of truth. It is *the* book of truth. But that does nothing to diminish the fact that it is also a book of stories, narratives of God's power and provision, of the Jewish people, of Jesus' life, of the early church, and so much more.

As readers of the Bible, we should approach the book with lots of things in mind – the authorship of a book, the historic setting in which it was written, how its message would have been read and understood by its initial and intended audience, and much more.

For instance, when one reads a prophecy in Amos or Hosea, one must ask, "To whom was this prophecy made? And has this prophecy been fulfilled?" If the prophecy has been fulfilled, we do not negate the book. We simply shift how we read the powerful words of the prophets and ask instead, "What does this passage teach us about God?"

In addition, reading one verse in isolation is like taking a single piece of a 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzle and somehow claiming that it gives us the full picture. Of course it doesn't. That seems silly. Isolating a verse can likewise give us a distorted picture of what the Word of God is actually saying. Only by reading it in context can we truly absorb its full meaning.

So, this week and next, we are going to practice reading verses and passages in their full contexts, not separated from their supporting stories, and certainly not cliched scriptural nuggets that paint incomplete pictures of spiritual truths.

This week, we will read two passages from the Old Testament. Next week, the New Testament. We will devote two weeks to this discipline because of just how critical it is.

Exercise 1 – Read Jeremiah 29:11. No doubt this is an extremely familiar passage.

What do you take away from this verse? How does it speak to you?

Now, read the whole of Jeremiah 29, the entire chapter. Write down a few observations about its context – to whom was it written, when, etc.? What was happening in that chapter that gave rise to Jeremiah's writing? And, more pointedly, taken in the whole counsel of that chapter, what new understanding do you have about the eleventh verse?

* * *

Hopefully that exercise made you think anew about reading (and even quoting/using scriptures in isolation, whether in your own life or when you hear a pastor preach). God, through Jeremiah, is telling his people to get comfortable in a foreign, unfamiliar, not-promised place. In fact, He is telling them to pray for the prosperity of those holding them in exile.

That seems far afield from how we typically proclaim Jeremiah 29:11. What should that teach us? Among other things, we should realize that the promises of God are not ineffective, but they may have terms and conditions we conveniently leave out when we do not live in that full counsel of Scripture. We may have seasons of "slow" and "grow" before we hear the word "go."

Exercise 2 – Now do the exact same thing with Lamentations 3:23. Read that verse first, and answer the exact same questions about that *single* verse.

Then read the whole of Lamentations 3, the entire chapter, and answer the same questions for that passage. (Remember, same author.) How does your perception of new mercies every morning change in light of everything else that Jeremiah wrote around that oft-quoted verse?

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Final Thoughts – What benefits are there to reading the full Biblical context of verses, instead of smaller snippets? How can you apply the reading of full Scriptural context to your personal time in the word?

Week 3 - January
The Full Counsel of Scripture, Part 2

Weekly Readings:

- John 3:16 (then John 3:1-21)
- Revelation 3:20 (then Revelation 3:14-22)
- Key idea – Yes, individual verses carry enormous weight and power, but a mature reader of the Bible will always read them in the context of the full section, chapter, and even book.

This week is a continuation of last week, but we will use two New Testament passages instead. The premise, approach, and exercise patterns are all the same.

Exercise 1 – Read John 3:16. In fact, most of us could quote it. What does that mean to you personally? What spiritual lessons and truths do you draw from it?

Now read John 3:16 and 17 together. Ask the same questions. How does your perception change after reading the two as a couplet?

Finally, read the first 21 verses of John 3 as a single unit. Think about the historic, religious, and cultural realities of that moment. See vv. 16-17 now in light of the larger narrative, and what do you discover?

Exercise 2 – Read Revelation 3:20. Again, same question. What is the imagery you see? What idea or audience does this verse conjure in your mind?

Now read the entire letter of Jesus to the church at Laodicea, Revelation 3:14-22. What changes about that verse? What jumps off the page?

By now, hopefully you see that v. 20 was not meant as an invitation to sinners, though Christians almost exclusively deploy it as such. No, Jesus was purposefully talking to Christians. To us. To the church. To his bride. What does that tell us about this passage specifically (as applied to us) and about scriptural readings generally?

* * *

Final Thoughts – Try this with other Bible passages. Find one where a single verse takes on a different light when read in the fullness of the chapter. Bring that to your group/family to share.

Week 4 - January
Meditate on the Word

Weekly Readings:

- Psalm 23
- Luke 10:38-42
- John 8:2-11
- Key idea – Slow down. Learn to meditatively read the Bible by taking your time and placing yourself in the middle of the narrative.

The Bible is fairly straightforward about the benefits of *meditating* on its truths. "But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psalm 1:2). "The Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it" (Joshua 1:8). "Oh, how I love your law! All day long it is my meditation" (Psalm 119:97).

But what is meditation? Here again, we find a word that we throw around (because it is in scripture), yet we rarely teach what it means spiritually. And, unfortunately in modern America, our vision of meditation is sitting cross-legged on a yoga mat humming a mantra.

Biblical meditation, though, is a purposeful act of pondering, of reflecting deeply on the Word, and then internalizing the truths within it. The goal is not necessarily the absorption of knowledge (which is what we do when we read a study Bible, check concordance references, etc.) Instead, the goal is to *think* upon God's Word and, in the process, transfer that wisdom and truth from our *head* to our *heart*. In meditation, we want to foster a deeper connection with God and draw our heartbeat to a rhythmic oneness with Him.

Put more bluntly, secular meditation seeks to empty the mind; biblical meditation is the active *focus of the mind* on God and his character.

But it involves us shutting our mouths and listening to what the Word is speaking back to us.

One effective way to meditate on the Word is an ancient church practice called *lectio divina*. *Lectio* involves reading, meditating on, and praying with Scripture in four distinct states: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation).

At its heart, *lectio* invites us to "listen" to Scripture and respond to God's word with intimacy. Those four stages are often relabeled as the four Rs: reading, reflecting, responding, and resting.

This week, with three passages, we will ask you to do those four stages.

The key with *lectio*, though, is that you are simply reading the passage. So, if you can, choose a Bible devoid of the clutter of study notes, cross-references, inset maps, and the like. And, by all means, <u>do not</u> use your phone. (Bible apps on your phone are terrific, but phones offer too much of a distraction for our minds, eyes, ears, and hearts. Sit them down for this exercise and use an actual Bible for these exercises.)

For each passage, do the following:

- Read it slowly. Very slowly. Even pause between phrases, certainly between verses. Let it wash over you. You are reading not for word-for-word textual comprehension so much as for spiritual growth.
- In fact, this exercise is optimal if someone else reads the passage, which you can accomplish in a group or family setting. Then you can close your eyes and truly meditate with full concentration.
- Place yourself in the narrative. That is a critical component to *lectio*. Put yourself in the action. Notice where you stand, what you see, even what you smell or hear. Are you a participant? Are you an observer?
- Then, pause after the first reading. What stuck out to you? What did you notice? Did you see something new about Jesus or another character? What were you actually doing? The Bible reminds us that it is living, so organically place yourself within it. That is not arrogance, but it is a response to its invitation to make it real and practical within our lives.
- Then, respond – pray something worshipful or as supplication in your own life based on what you just read.
- Then, wait. Rest. Contemplate what you just learned about the nature of God or His Son, Jesus. Think about what it means for your relationship with the Trinity.
- Finally, do it again. Read it a second time, following the same steps.

Since many of you will be new to this practice, we have chosen three familiar passages. All of these are quite well suited to meditative scripture reading. And all can be done individually, with your family (which we *highly* encourage), and within your groups.

The three passages are:

- Psalm 23 – This passage has become so familiar, almost to the point of rote recitation, that an exercise like this may prove spiritually profitable. Again, slow

down. Digest the words one by one. What is the Holy Spirit revealing to you? What can you actually *see* and *feel*?

- Luke 10:38-42 – The famous story of Mary and Martha. Same questions.
- John 8:2-11 – The story of the adulterous woman. Again, same questions.

* * *

Final Thoughts – Reading the Bible this way is sometimes uncomfortable. Many of us do not like to see or place ourselves in the stories. And others of us see this method as conflicting with how we were conditioned to read the Bible. But for many of us, this may open up a new way to absorb the deep and exhaustless supply of truth from its pages. In a way, it makes the Bible "come alive," which is great since scripture affirms that it actually is alive. How might you deploy meditation in your own personal devotional life? What about that of your family?