


STUDY THE WHOLE WORD WITH THE WHOLE CHURCH

BY HANNAH NATION



BibleEquipping



You're sitting across from a friend. She has questions about why she should believe in Jesus, so you pull out your Bible. Which book do you open?

I'm guessing you start with one of the gospels. Get straight to Jesus. Maybe you turn to Romans next to explain humanity's sinfulness and need for atonement.

How long would it take before you turned to the Old Testament? I know it might take a while to cross my own mind. And when it did, it would probably be Genesis 1-3, since after all, it explains who we are in the first place. But 2 Samuel? Daniel? Ruth? It's hard to imagine these books crossing our American evangelical minds in an evangelistic conversation.

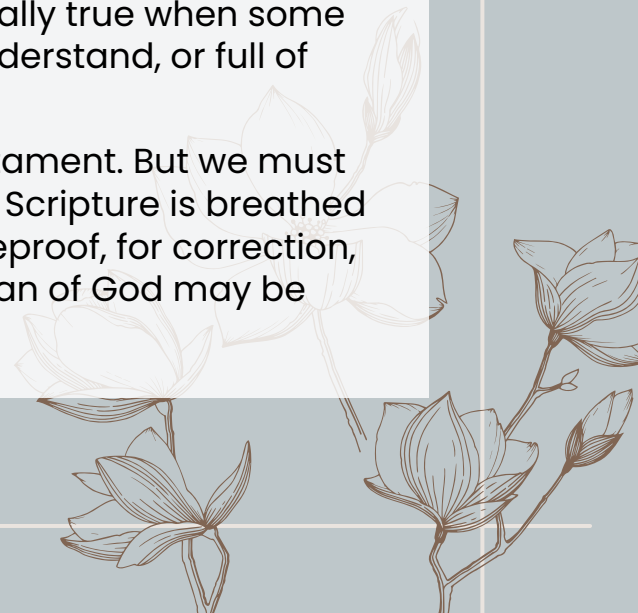
Yet, that is exactly where a group of Chinese house church pastors turned when they began holding online evangelistic meetings as the Covid-19 pandemic raged through their nation and around the world. Looking over scores of transcripts from these meetings, something immediately jumped out to me – easily a third of these evangelistic sermons relied on scripture from the Old Testament. They pointed out humanity's need and Jesus' provision from portions of scripture I had never before considered helpful for those without prior Biblical knowledge.

I found this to be deeply convicting and it taught me three important things. First, we need to study the *whole* word of God. Second, we need to study it *alongside* the global church. And third, we need to put our studies to *use* for the expansion of the kingdom.

1) Study the whole counsel of God with the expectation that it is all useful, particularly with regards to the Old Testament.

How easy it is to fall back on our favorite portions of scripture. While there is no problem with having favorite verses or books, they can become crutches in our study. This is especially true when some portions of the Bible feel obscure, hard to understand, or full of uncomfortable truths and stories.

Most often, people struggle with the Old Testament. But we must remember that 2 Timothy 3:16-17 tells us, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work."





Application assignment/questions:

- Read 2 Samuel 24:10–19.
- What do you observe in this passage?
- What would you consider to be the application, both for evangelism and discipleship?
- Read “Let us Fall Into the Hand of the Lord” by Guo Muyun. (Beginning on page 9 of this link.) How does his exposition of the passage help you see the value of the OT?

2) Let studying scripture alongside Christians around the world open your eyes to new applications.

Even if you’ve never left your hometown, you already understand something about cross-cultural engagement. What happened when you moved in with your first roommate after moving out of your childhood home for the first time? Your eyes were likely opened to a whole new way of doing things, some of which you liked and some of which you didn’t. Or if you are married, remember how much discovery the first year of marriage involved. Some things of these new discoveries you didn’t adopt – like Great Grandma Gertrude’s pickled eggs. But some things were a revelation that you couldn’t wait to include – like your in-law’s appreciation for big breakfasts.

You may find things in the global church that you don’t agree with. But you will also find many things that make you shout “Amen!” Either way, taking time to listen will always be eye-opening and thought-provoking, pushing you to a deeper and more profound understanding of scripture.

When Paul talks about the parts of the body of Christ needing each other in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27, he does not exclude our *theological* reliance on one another.

Application assignment/questions:

- Brainstorm where you can find in-person insight on the Bible from other parts of the globe (church, neighbors, local seminary or Bible school, etc.)?
- Take a moment to browse online resources such as The Gospel Coalition’s international sites (Africa, India, etc.) and Christianity Today’s global articles. What jumps out to you?



3) Remember that biblical studies and theology are not for your personal benefit alone.

Watching a group of Chinese house church pastors use the whole word of God to evangelize reminds me that the time I spend studying scripture is not simply about my personal fulfillment; rather, it equips me for the work of expanding the Kingdom of God.

God has prepared a rich feast in his word, but what is the point of feeding? Is it simply to satisfy ourselves and grow sedentary? No, we are laborers in the master's field. We eat his feast so that we may labor in his field. We are invited to feed on God's word for our own growth, but how sad it is when we won't get up from the table to go out into the field.

God desires to fuel us with his word, empowering us for the work of the harvest.

The Christians I know in China see a bountiful harvest in the fields spreading across their cities. They study God's word, both in personal quiet time and in advanced theological study, in order to be equipped for the task at hand. The goal of rigorously studying scripture is not to become the expert in the room. The goal is to bring in the harvest, and the best tool we have at hand for the work is the beautiful and powerful full counsel of God.

Application assignment/questions:

- How does the study of scripture empower you for ministry?
- How can you communicate what you are learning in scripture clearly and simply to those who are not Christians?
- How would sharing scripture with those outside of the church help you to understand it better yourself?