

A 7-SESSION STUDY

Sweeter THAN Honey

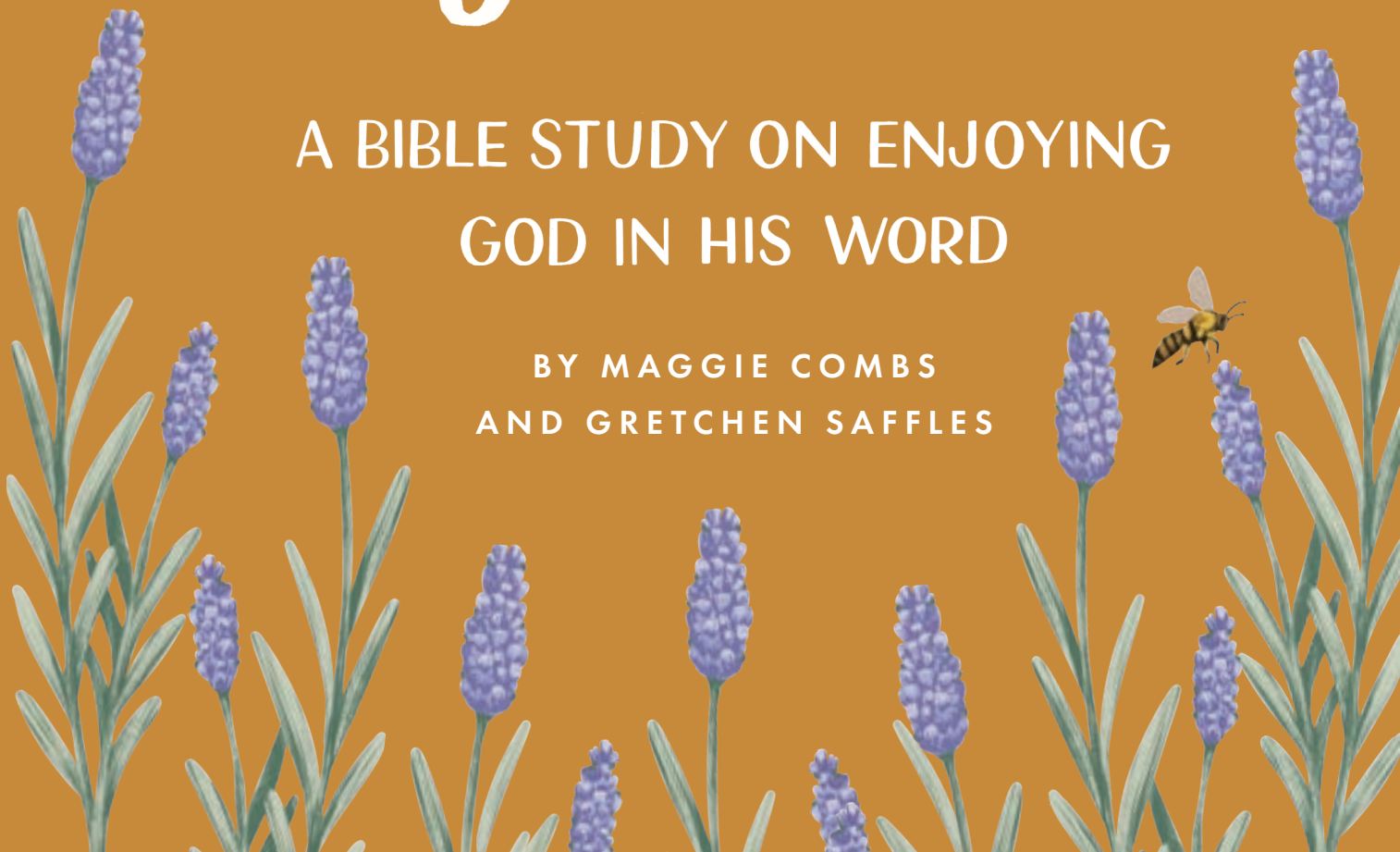
A BIBLE STUDY
ON ENJOYING GOD
IN HIS WORD

WELL-WATERED WOMEN CO.

Sweeter THAN Honey

A BIBLE STUDY ON ENJOYING
GOD IN HIS WORD

BY MAGGIE COMBS
AND GRETCHEN SAFFLES





Sweeter than Honey: A Bible Study on Enjoying God in His Word

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Table of Contents



About the Authors.....	05
Before You Begin Your Study.....	06
Introductory Session Viewer Guide.....	07
Week One Study the Word.....	08
Session One Viewer Guide.....	27
Week Two The Unchanging Word.....	28
Session Two Viewer Guide.....	47
Week Three The Good News of the Word.....	48
Session Three Viewer Guide.....	69
Week Four Transformed by the Word.....	70
Session Four Viewer Guide.....	87
Week Five The Word in Every Season.....	88
Session Five Viewer Guide.....	107
Week Six The Word in Everyday Life.....	108
Session Six Viewer Guide.....	129
Build Your Bible Study Library.....	130
Main Idea Examples.....	131



About the Authors

MAGGIE COMBS is the author of several Bible studies, *Motherhood Without All the Rules*, and *Unsupermommy*. Maggie is passionate about encouraging women to grow in holiness as they grow in relationship with God. She loves playing games with her husband and three boys, herding fainting goats on their family farm, and reading cozy mysteries. It is her joy to serve in her local church through teaching women and children about the Bible and discipling young women.



GRETCHEN SAFFLES is the founder of Well-Watered Women and the author of *Word before World: 100 Devotions to Put Jesus First*, *The Well-Watered Woman*, and several Bible studies. She is passionate about encouraging and equipping women to drink deeply from the well of God's Word and longs to see women grasp the fullness of the gospel in everyday life. Gretchen loves going on adventures with her husband and three kids, traveling to new places, baking chocolate chip cookies, reading good books, and teaching women to know and love Jesus.



Before You Begin Your Study

At Well-Watered Women, we're passionate about helping women grow their love for God and his Word through engaging and theologically-rich Bible study. You can complete this Bible study on your own, but we highly recommend gathering in fellowship with at least one other woman in your local area to dig into God's Word together. Each day begins with instruction on Bible study principles and methods, then includes Bible study practice using three principles: gather knowledge, digest the big ideas, and grow in godliness. Whether you've been studying God's Word for years or are just learning the basics, this study will equip you to use these principles as you study God's Word every day in every season.

This study also includes:

- Seven teaching sessions with Gretchen and Maggie available for purchase at TyndaleChristianResources.com
- A free leader guide available for download at TyndaleChristianResources.com
- Questions that will be clearest using the English Standard Version (ESV) translation of the Bible
- A free printable of all the Bible study questions found throughout the study available for download at wellwateredwomen.com/sweeterthanahoney

So sink into your couch or pull out a chair at your kitchen table and get ready to feast on the goodness of God's Word.



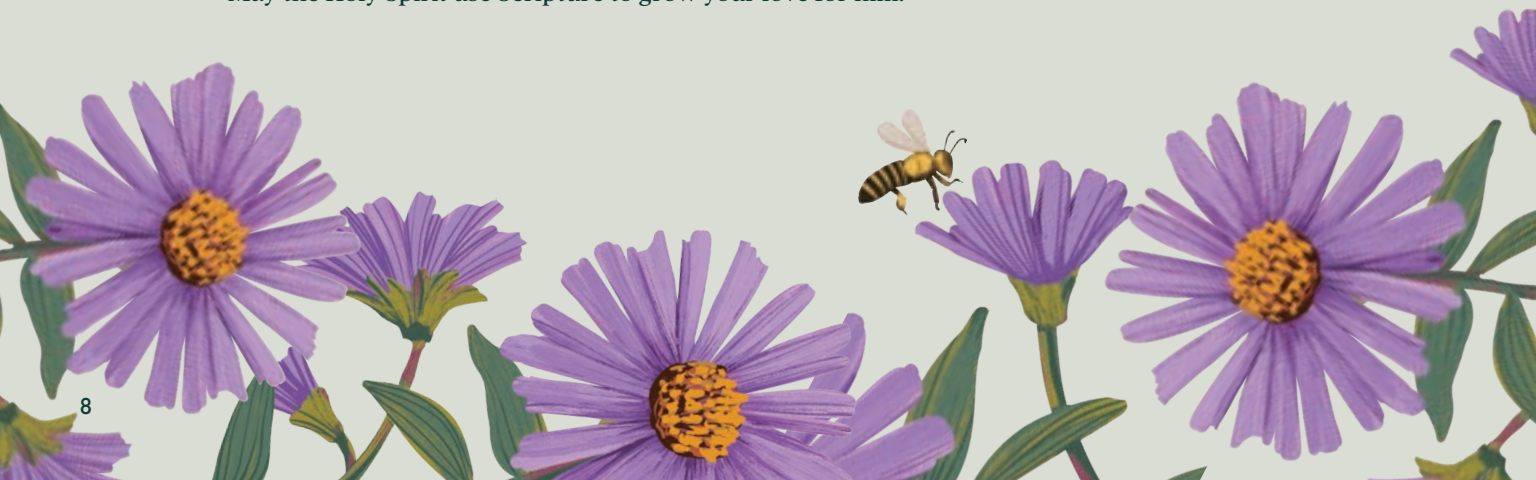
WEEK ONE

Study the Word

The advances of technology have built a nearly instantaneous life for many people in the world. From two-hour delivery of toilet paper to the dopamine hit of likes on a social media post, our desires are being trained to expect immediate attention. Yet these quick fixes leave an underlying hunger—while our material desires are momentarily satiated, our souls remain spiritually malnourished.

All over nature, we see that fruitfulness requires time, careful cultivation, and the work of a sovereign God. On the pages of Scripture, it's evident that God is not quick to alleviate people's painful circumstances. Instead, God uses suffering to transform us, cultivating holiness through his careful and kind tending. After Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, God could have immediately sent Jesus Christ, but he didn't. God took his time, drawing a people near to him, teaching them his faithfulness through suffering and rescuing and redeeming them over and over until, at the exact right time, Jesus came into the world. He lived, suffered, died, and rose again to defeat sin and death for all who would call upon his name and follow him.

So when we open our Bibles, we shouldn't expect the instant encouragement of an Instagram post or the quick fix of googled answers for all our problems. The Bible isn't an instruction manual or a self-help encyclopedia. It's the very Word of God written to his people that they may know him intimately, trust in his faithfulness, and experience his redemption. So come to your Bible not to check reading it off your list, to achieve good Christian status, or even to fix your problems with a scan of the page and a quickly chosen verse. Come to your Bible to know your God deeply and experience the slow process of becoming more like your Savior. May the Holy Spirit use Scripture to grow your love for him.



Day One | Sweeter than Honey

A NOTE FROM GRETCHEN

Every few months, I decide I'm going to become a tea drinker. I pull out all my tea supplies from the back of the cupboard: loose leaf tea canisters, sieve, teacup, and most importantly, my prized local honey. The highlight of drinking tea, in my opinion, is the honey.

On a trip to Carmel Valley Ranch in California, my husband and I saw firsthand the intricate process of how honey is made. Dressed in white beekeeping suits complete with veiled hoods, we followed our instructor to a myriad of bustling beehive boxes where we witnessed the majestic wonder of the worker bees transforming nectar into honey.

Did you know that an average worker bee will only produce $\frac{1}{12}$ of a teaspoon of honey in its short lifetime? In order for honey bees to make just one pound of honey, they must gather nectar from about two million flowers. And another mind-boggling fact: when properly preserved, honey never expires. The longest preserved pure honey is estimated to be about 5,500 years old. ¹

In Psalm 119, the psalmist likens the treasure of God's Word to the delectable taste of honey: "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" (v. 103). Honey delights our taste buds, but God's Word delights our souls. The more you taste the goodness of God in his life-giving Word, the more you'll crave it over the temporary pleasures of this world.

God faithfully preserves every promise in his Word. May we discover, like the psalmist, that his words are sweeter than honey—a gift to us from our Creator to enjoy as we delight in him.



A NOTE FROM MAGGIE

My husband has wanted to keep bees for years, but I've always resisted. We live on a small hobby farm and keep goats and cows and even a donkey, so bees aren't that far-fetched. But bees produce honey, and honey has to be collected and shared or sold, and that has always felt like just too much to deal with. The idea reminds me of when a friend shared her "easy" recipe for homemade almond milk with me—it only included eleven steps, one of which was pouring pulverized almonds through a cheesecloth and squeezing all the juice (or milk?) out. So easy, right? I'm not the kind of person who enjoys the process. Why spend all the effort caring for bees when honey—or almond milk—is so easy to buy? Just give me the results.

I can bring that same kind of attitude to God's Word. I want to essentially purchase the sweet honey of knowing God in his Word by checking off the tasks of a Bible reading plan instead of entering into the process. Bible study can feel laborious at times, and I want the fruit without the effort. It seems like some women are so good at following an eleven-step daily study routine. To them, it's as easy as making their own almond milk or keeping bees. These women seem to have discovered some secret, when they've just learned to love the process instead of obsessing over results.

I recently reconnected with an old friend who values process over results. She moved back to our home state of Minnesota, sacrificing the lovely little piece of land she lived on in Washington and losing her favorite hobby—beekeeping. When I told her about my husband's dream of keeping bees, she immediately offered to teach us everything we would need to know. Sometimes, when the process feels overwhelming or exhausting or too complicated, we really just need a friend to come alongside us and say, "Let me show you how." That's the goal of this study.

If you feel ill-equipped or overwhelmed or like you just aren't a process kind of person, we hope to simplify and demystify studying God's Word by sharing three principles to guide your study process. We pray that this study helps you grow to love studying your Bible as it grows your love for God himself. Because unlike honey or almond milk, you can't buy an intimate relationship with the God of the universe at a grocery store. It begins with salvation through Jesus Christ and matures through knowing and enjoying God in his Word.

Maggie Combs

SWEETER THAN HONEY HEART CHECK

What hobbies, activities, or social events do you enjoy?

How are these things like or unlike Bible study?

What keeps you from opening God's Word? Consider the following categories and try to list one to three obstacles in each one.

Physical environment

Physical limitations

Mental hurdles



What are you tempted to desire more than God's Word?

Read through this list of mental struggles that often keep us from reading God's Word. Check the box of any that you tell yourself.

- I'm not academic enough to study the Bible.
- I don't have time to study the Bible.
- The Old Testament is too confusing to understand.
- I know I *should* study my Bible, but I just don't feel like it.
- I don't need to study my Bible because I listen to so many Christian podcasts, sermons, or Bible teachers or read so many Christian books, emails, or social media posts.
- The Bible is so old and out of touch; it can't help me with the struggles of my daily life.
- I'm afraid of how I might feel convicted or sinful if I study the Bible.
- I'll never love the Bible the way other women do.
- There's only one right way to study my Bible, so I must be doing it wrong.
- I must come away from my Bible study encouraged or with a specific nugget of truth for my day.
- Good Christians don't struggle to read their Bible.

What difference do you hope completing *Sweeter than Honey* will make in your current experience with or attitude toward Bible study?

Review your answers to today's heart check and write a prayer asking the Holy Spirit to work in your heart and mind to transform your Bible study experience.

Day Two | Gather

It's easy to swing between two extremes when we read our Bibles—simply opening to any page and expecting God to speak directly to our lives without making an effort to understand the meaning of the passage, or looking to a rigorous process of Bible study to make sure we do it just right. If you tend to open your Bible just to search for the nearest answer to a problem in your life, you might sense that you're missing something, some bigger picture. If you've tried and failed to follow an intense and intricate Bible study process or never even had the energy to start, we hope to equip you with knowledge and confidence.

This study will teach you how to dig into God's Word, understand it, and apply it by learning three key principles of Bible study: **gather knowledge**, **digest the big ideas**, and **grow in godliness**. These principles will help you faithfully interpret Scripture while adapting the exact process to your personality, your season of life, the book of the Bible you're studying, and even your study goals. The first week of study presents an overview of these three principles. In each following week, you'll dig deeper into each one, practicing them all as you go.

The first principle of Bible study is to gather knowledge. Like a forager bee gathering nectar from flowers to produce honey, we must diligently search God's Word to gather the knowledge that will be digested into understanding. This is more than speed reading the pages of your Bible. This is slowing down, seeking to understand, and gathering only what already exists. In the same way that you might start a new relationship by asking intentional questions about a person's past, preferences, and personality, gathering knowledge through careful attention to God's Word deepens your relationship with him.

Gathering knowledge looks like thoughtfully reading the text and asking yourself, *What does this passage say?* It's easy to assume you know what the Bible says based on previous readings, sermons or podcasts you've listened to, or what that wise woman said on social media, but this principle asks you to leave behind what you think these verses mean and only gather what is actually presented.

Gathering knowledge is a commitment to considering the context of the passage. How would the original hearers of the passage have understood it as they listened to it, recited it, and sung it in their own context? How have generations of believers understood it since then based on the story of Scripture, the historical context, and the genre and literary style? Don't worry if you don't know what any of those terms mean—you'll spend the next two weeks learning and practicing how to gather that knowledge. While it's tempting to speed through this to get to big ideas and applications, gathering knowledge about the text is actually the most time-consuming portion of studying God's Word. Like a bee's relentless pursuit of nectar, studying the Bible diligently takes discipline, but over time, it produces a delight that's sweeter than honey.



Each day, you'll practice the three principles of Bible study: gather, digest, and grow. At the beginning, we'll give you helpful questions to complete each principle, but as you practice and get more comfortable, we'll slowly take off the training wheels so that by the end of this study, you're confident in using these three principles on your own.



Pray for humility and insight before you study God's Word.

GATHER KNOWLEDGE

Read Deuteronomy 6:1–15 to grasp the larger context of today's passage. Who are the original hearers of this passage (v. 3)?

Look back at Deuteronomy 5:1. Who is speaking in this passage?

Return to Deuteronomy 6 and read verses 5–9 again. What commandment is given in verse 5?

How are the Israelites instructed to interact with the commandments of God in verses 6–9? Summarize the shall statements below.

Verse 6

Verse 7

Verse 8

Verse 9

How much of a person's day is encompassed by the actions in verse 7 (sitting, walking, lying down, rising)?

GROW IN GODLINESS

How might the main idea of Deuteronomy 6:4–9 apply to your circumstances?

Circle the way you will respond to God's Word today.

Today I will... believe act repent worship pray

Use this space for your response or to plan how you will respond throughout your day.

Write the verse, attribute of God, or gospel truth you will meditate on today.



Day Three | Digest

Just as nectar doesn't immediately transform into honey when gathered by bees, the knowledge we gather in Bible study isn't immediately easy to comprehend or apply. Digestion is a process that will regularly stretch beyond the allotted thirty minutes we usually set aside for Bible study. This doesn't mean you need to spend all day studying your Bible. It means that, like the command to the Israelites that you looked at yesterday, you continue to digest what you learned as you studied your Bible as you go about your day—walking, eating meals, going to work, washing dishes, talking with family and friends, laying down at night—remembering it long after you close your Bible.

Forager bees are responsible for gathering nectar, flitting from flower to flower, searching for sweet juice to consume and store in their honey stomachs. A forager bee might have to drink from more than a thousand flowers to fill its honey stomach—that's a lot of gathering! Once the nectar enters the honey stomach, digestive enzymes start to break it down, beginning the honey-making process. Back at the hive, the forager bee passes its load off to another worker bee, who passes it off to another, and then another. The best description I've heard for this process is a game of "regurgitation telephone."² After many rounds of digestion and regurgitation, the nectar is placed in a comb and the bees beat their wings over it until it's distilled down into honey.

Like the forager bee, our process of gathering is often a slow and painstaking process of returning to God's Word over and over again. Some days, this might be the only principle you're able to complete. Later in this study, we'll share different methods for incorporating these principles in different seasons within the limitations that God has given you. For now, know that diligently returning to God's Word is necessary to build delight in God's Word. But once we've gathered, it's time to digest what we've found, rolling it around in our minds and hearts, distilling all that knowledge down into the big ideas of the passage.

The fancy theologian word for this process is *hermeneutics*. Even if you don't realize it, you're always interpreting the meaning of what you're reading. Think of a word as simple as *boot*. Depending on your circumstances and background, you might imagine a rain or snow boot, a pair of booties, a cowboy boot, a steel-toed work boot, or, if you're from across the pond, the storage section of a car. You interpret the meaning of *boot* based on the knowledge you've gathered.

In *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, professors Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart explain, "The aim of good interpretation is simple: to get at the 'plain meaning of the text.' And the most important ingredient one brings to



this task is enlightened common sense.”³ Faithful gathering enables you to digest the big ideas and interpret the meaning of a passage through the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the second principle of Bible study is to digest the big ideas. When you digest the big ideas, you’ll be looking for the plain meaning of that portion of Scripture. You’re moving from the gathering stage where you asked, *What does it say?* to the deeper question, *What does it mean?* Remember: a biblical text can’t mean what it never meant, so you need to digest the big ideas of the passage of Scripture you’re studying before moving on to applying it to your life.⁴

When we dig deeper into this principle in Week Four, we’ll show you how to identify the main idea, confirm your understanding against other passages in Scripture, and determine what the passage displays about God’s character, the story of Jesus Christ across all of Scripture, and the gospel. As you grow in your ability to digest the big ideas, the Bible’s themes will begin to emerge. Then you’ll see how all the parts of the Bible are one story written to display God’s glory to his people so we might love and worship him.



Pray for humility and insight before you study God’s Word.

GATHER KNOWLEDGE

Read Psalm 1. Look up a definition for the word *blessed*.

What does the blessed person not do?

What does the blessed person do?

Look up a definition for the word *meditate*.

How is the righteous person (the one who is blessed) described in verse 3?

GROW IN GODLINESS

How might the main idea of Psalm 1 apply to your circumstances?

Circle the way you will respond to God's Word today.

Today I will... believe act repent worship pray

Use this space for your response or to plan how you will respond throughout your day.

Write the verse, attribute of God, or gospel truth you will meditate on today.



Day Four | Grow

Honey is a treat for us, but it's life-giving sustenance for a bee. Once created, it's stored in the comb and doesn't spoil. The Bible holds unchanging truth that will never spoil either. When we have diligently gathered knowledge and digested the big ideas about a passage, we have found a drop of honey that will nourish our souls and produce growth in our lives.

Did you know that a bee's type is determined by its diet? The queen bee is fed a special substance called royal jelly her whole life, while worker bees are fed royal jelly as babies and then switch to a diet of strictly honey and pollen. What the bees consume actually dictates what they become. The same is true for us. When we consume worldly wisdom on the internet or surround ourselves with foolish friends, we will grow more obsessed with the good gifts and the sinful lures of this world. Neither will lead to godliness. But when we consume the life-changing sustenance of God's Word, we become more like our Savior. When God speaks to us through his unchanging Word, it changes us.

In *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times*, professor Mark L. Strauss says, "The Christian life involves not just knowing the Bible's teachings or obeying its commands but walking so close to and so far with God that in each new situation we can identify the heart of God (1 Cor. 2:13–16)."⁵ When we have carefully gathered knowledge about the passage we're studying and digested its big ideas, we grow our knowledge of and love for God. He chose to reveal himself through Jesus and through the Bible, so we must pay close attention to God's Word if we want to grow into wise women who can discern God's heart in whatever circumstances we face. Strauss also warns against letting our study of God's Word just be purely academic. It must intersect with our lives and impact our hearts. We start by grasping what the passage meant to the original audience in their time and place, "but listening also means hearing what God is saying to us in our time and place. This must not be just a cognitive exercise; like our love for God, it involves heart, mind, soul, and strength."⁶

God's Word is living and active. When you respond to God's Word, you will be changed by it. As you studied in Psalm 1 yesterday, you will become a strong tree, bearing fruit and standing firm. You become like the people you spend time with, so spend time with Jesus. Studying your Bible builds a relationship with God that causes you to become more like him as you walk in his glorious, perfect presence.





Pray for humility and insight before you study God's Word.

GATHER KNOWLEDGE

Read Psalm 19. Before focusing on verses 7–14, gather knowledge and identify the main idea of verses 1–6 for context. Write every word related to speech and every word related to creation.

Speech

Creation

Fill in the main idea of verses 1–6 below according to what you've read.

God _____ to people through _____ .

Now look at verses 7–9 and fill in the chart by writing the synonym for God's Word found in the verse and writing the benefit in your own words.

VERSE	SYNONYM FOR GOD'S WORD	BENEFIT OF GOD'S WORD
7		
7		
8		
8		
9*		
9		

**Many biblical scholars agree that the fear of the LORD means following the commands of God's Word in this context.*

What is the main idea of Psalm 19?*

What did you learn about God, Jesus Christ, or the gospel from today's study?

GROW IN GODLINESS

How might the main idea of Psalm 19 apply to your circumstances?

Circle the way you will respond to God's Word today.

Today I will... believe act repent worship pray

Use this space for your response or to plan how you will respond throughout your day.

Write the verse, attribute of God, or gospel truth you will meditate on today.

**An example main idea can be found on page 131.*



Day Five | Enjoy

When I (Gretchen) used to read my Bible, I made it all about myself. I had no plan. I just sat down and randomly opened to any page, hoping to land on an encouraging verse. I had never been taught a better way, never experienced the joy of discovering God through his Word.

But when I was in college, I developed an eating disorder, and in my desperation for healing, I found Jesus. I began studying the Bible to know and love God more and discovered that only God can satisfy the canyon of longing in my heart and that true joy is only found in relationship with him. Instead of opening to random pages, I started reading full books of the Bible and developing an understanding of the big redemption story.

When I started really studying the Word—even on the days I didn't feel like it—I discovered that the more I taste Jesus, the more the rest of the world loses its flavor. As I saw Jesus Christ across the entire story of Scripture, grasping the immensity of what he did for me on the cross, how undeserving I was of his mercy and grace, and the abundant love he lavished on me, I started to enjoy and even crave God's Word.

Too often we expect that delighting in God's Word should come naturally. We wonder if there's something wrong with us when we don't long to open the Scriptures as much as we long to check social media. Rather than the cheap delight of fast food French fries, God's Word offers us daily bread, meals to satisfy and strengthen us, and honey that lingers in our hearts.

We're all hungry for something or someone to delight in, to savor, to enjoy, because we were made to delight in, savor, and enjoy Jesus forever. Every other person or thing eventually disappoints, but Jesus offers us joy in him no matter our circumstances. Christ came full of grace and truth (John 1:14). He came with splendor and majesty, strength and beauty, wisdom and power. The more you gaze upon him in the Word, the more you will be filled with praise and joy.

Enjoying God begins with picking up your spiritual fork and dining at the table of his Word. So if you want to develop joy in God's Word, don't skip the hard parts. Instead, work hard to understand them. Pray for the Holy Spirit to develop your spiritual taste buds so you no longer crave the candy of this world but instead are satisfied by the honey of his Word. When you come to the Word to know God, you'll discover the unshakable joy of relationship with your Savior.





Pray for humility and insight before you study God's Word.

GATHER KNOWLEDGE

Read the following verses and summarize what they say about God's Word.

Deuteronomy 32:47

Psalm 1:1–2

Psalm 119:14–16

Psalm 119:18

Psalm 119:24

Psalm 119:40

Psalm 119:71

Psalm 119:92–93

Psalm 119:103

John 6:66–69

DIGEST THE BIG IDEAS

What themes did you notice in these verses?

Which verse would you choose as the best example of these themes?

What is the main idea of these passages on God's Word?*

What did you learn about God, Jesus Christ, or the gospel from today's study?

GROW IN GODLINESS

How might the main idea of today's reading apply to your circumstances?

Circle the way you will respond to God's Word today.

Today I will... believe act repent worship pray

Use this space for your response or to plan how you will respond throughout your day.

Write the verse, attribute of God, or gospel truth you will meditate on today.

**An example main idea can be found on page 131.*



