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STUDY GUIDE

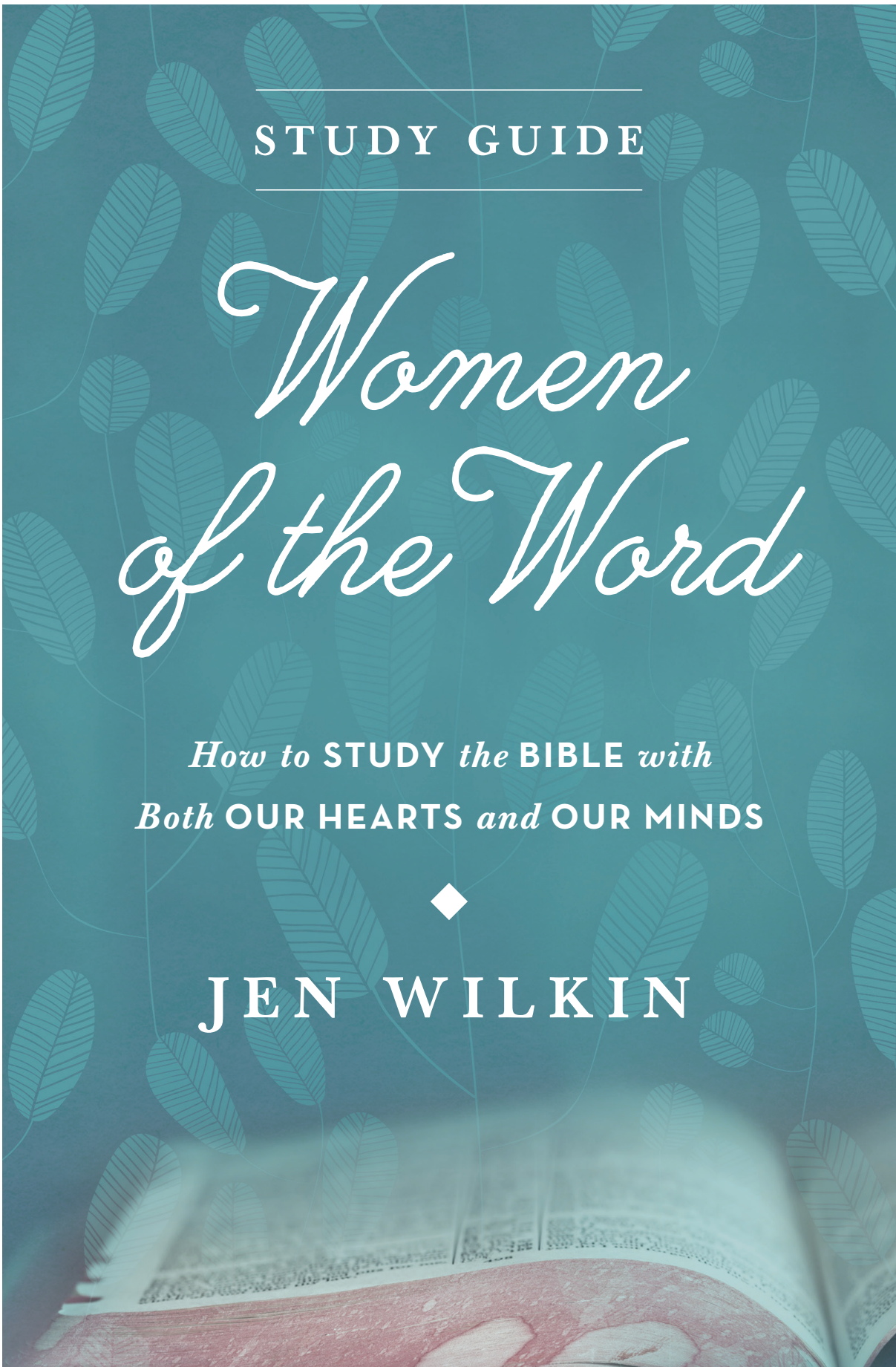
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*Women  
of the Word*

*How to STUDY the BIBLE with  
Both OUR HEARTS and OUR MINDS*



JEN WILKIN



STUDY GUIDE FOR

# Women of the Word

*How to STUDY the BIBLE with  
Both OUR HEARTS and OUR MINDS*



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Study Guide for *Women of the Word: How to Study the Bible with Both Our Hearts  
and Our Minds*

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# Introduction

Jen relates her own journey of discovering her need to become biblically literate, and her stumbling attempts to become so. She tells of a dawning, then growing passion to learn how to study the Bible on her own, inviting each of us to make the same journey.

1. Jen describes her “church pedigree” as “mixed breed.” What is your church pedigree? How has your exposure to different churches (or lack thereof) shaped the way you view Bible study?

2. Jen tells about her realization of her own biblical illiteracy. How aware are you of your own need for greater Bible literacy? What events or experiences have raised your awareness of your need to know the Bible better?

3. What experience have you had with false or poor teaching? How much of a role did ignorance of what the Bible said play into the teacher’s ability to spread error?

4. On page 18, Jen describes her study method: “It intends to teach you not merely a doctrine, concept, or story line, but a study method that will allow you to open up the Bible on your own.” How equipped do you feel to study the Bible on your own? What tools do you currently use when you study?

5. What do you think has been the greatest obstacle to your study efforts in the past? In your current life stage? What do you think could be an obstacle in the future?

6. What do you most hope to gain by reading this book?

# Turning Things Around

Jen connects how she liked to wear her tights backwards as a child with the backwards approach many of us inadvertently take to studying Scripture. We tend to ask the Bible to speak about us first and foremost, instead of about God. We seek to feed our emotions without deepening our knowledge. Jen helps us see the errors that result from such a backwards approach and challenges us to build Bible literacy by placing God before self and mind before emotions when we study.

1. What are some ways you have used the Bible as if it were a book about you? How does seeing the Bible as a book primarily about God, not you, change things? Read the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32). How does the meaning and application change when you see God, rather than yourself, as the focus of the parable?

2. On page 29, Jen says, “For some of us, the strength of our faith is gauged by how close we feel to God at any given moment.” Has this ever been true of you? What is the danger of measuring your faith in this way?

3. On page 30, Jen confesses that at times systematic study of the Bible felt mechanical to her. Have you felt this way? Or have you been more put off by an emotional type of study? Should there be a balance between the two? Explain your thoughts.

4. Many of us find it difficult to take pleasure in Bible study. Chapter 1 makes a connection between pleasure and the learning process. Describe a time when your pleasure in a relationship grew as you got to know the person better. To what extent have you seen the same connection in your relationship with God?

5. What do you think is the connection between the two backward approaches to Bible study (seeing Scripture from a “who am I?” perspective, and thinking of our relationship with God as an emotional experience)?

6. Jen says that “the heart cannot love what the mind does not know” (p. 31). Restate this idea in your own words. Why is it spiritually dangerous to claim to love God without making any effort to know him through his revealed Word?

# The Case for Bible Literacy

When it comes to “spending time in the Word,” many of us have developed some less-than-helpful habits. After offering a definition of Bible literacy, Jen asks us to examine some of these habits. She tells us that Bible literacy is worth fighting for because of the great influence women have in their homes, churches, workplaces, communities, and countries.

1. When was the last time you felt uncomfortably aware of your lack of biblical knowledge? Did these feelings lead you to take any action, and if so, what?

2. What is the hardest bad habit you’ve ever had to break? How did you break it? How long did it take you?

3. Jen describes six less-than-ideal approaches to studying the Bible: Xanax, Pinball, Magic 8 Ball, Personal Shopper, Telephone, and Jack Sprat. Which of these approaches have you practiced personally?



4. What is the connection between the six unhelpful approaches and our tendency to put self before God, heart before mind?

5. Which of these six approaches is potentially the most dangerous? Which could be used in ways that are beneficial?

6. Which of your circles of influence most needs you to grow in Bible literacy? Which of your relationships would benefit the most if you devoted yourself to loving God with your mind?

## Chapter 3

# Study with Purpose

The Bible can sometimes seem like a collection of individual stories that don't necessarily fit together into a cohesive whole. Chapter 3 examines how to find themes from the Big Story of the Bible—the metanarrative—within the individual stories of the Bible. Jen likens this to seeing a geographical area from the sky versus the ground. She invites us to view the Bible from a bird's-eye view.

1. At the bottom of page 50 Jen defines the purpose behind Bible study. What is it? How might our personal purpose in studying differ from the Bible's intended purpose for our study?

2. Based on what you learned in chapter 3, define the Big Story of the Bible in your own words.

3. Next to each of the following elements of the metanarrative, note a story or passage from Scripture that you think lends itself to telling that part of the Big Story.

Creation

Fall

Redemption

Restoration

4. Jen says on page 57, “The knowledge of God and the knowledge of self always go hand in hand.” When we look for self-knowledge without God as our reference point, to what or to whom do we compare ourselves? What is the result? How does comparing ourselves to God yield a truer knowledge of self?

5. Which genre of the Bible (Narrative, Law, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, or Prophecy) have you found especially difficult to study in the past? How might the concept of metanarrative help you study this genre in the future?

6. Which genre of the Bible (Narrative, Law, Poetry, Wisdom Literature, or Prophecy) have you found easily accessible? How might the concept of metanarrative change or deepen the way you study this genre in the future?

## Study with Perspective

Knowing the historical context of a book is essential to understanding it. Because the Bible was written long ago, we must learn how to occupy “a modern space while maintaining an ancient perspective” (p. 61). Chapter 4 equips us to dig in to what is relevant about the history behind a book of the Bible so that we can learn how to properly apply it in our modern setting. By exploring some basic questions about a text (Who wrote it? When was it written? To whom was it written? In what style was it written? Why was it written?), we can significantly increase our understanding about what the text was intended to say to its original audience, giving us a much better chance of rightly understanding how it should instruct us today.

1. What does it mean for you to have a sense of your own “small space” in history? How do we cultivate this sense? How does this perspective help us when studying Scripture?

2. How does knowing who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia add to our understanding of how it should be read? How does knowing who wrote the Gospel of Matthew add to our understanding of how it should be read? What key difference would you note between these two authors?

3. Jen says, “The message of the Bible transcends its original audience, but it cannot be severed from its original audience” (p. 67). What does this mean?

4. Which genre (pp. 68–70) does the cultural context affect the most, making it the most difficult for us, in our very different culture, to understand?

5. What is the pitfall to be found in the misapplication of Wisdom Literature (p. 69)? Have you ever found disillusionment this way? How does understanding the rules of the genre help you apply a proverb?

6. What is the difference between using a tool like a study Bible (as described in this chapter) and taking the Personal Shopper or Telephone approach (as described in the previous chapter)?

# Study with Patience

We all know that everything of value costs *something*. We all know that skills worth having take diligence and practice to acquire. We recognize that learning a subject in school takes work; gaining a certification or degree requires an investment of much time and effort. Yet we seem to think that acquiring biblical knowledge will somehow be different, that because it's of spiritual benefit it will come to us in a more mystical, magical way, instead of through the usual path of blood, sweat, and tears. This chapter provides some much needed encouragement to stick with it!

1. Think about some of the benefits of delayed gratification across multiple areas of your life. How can similar benefits be found in studying the Bible?

2. What is the difference between simply gaining new knowledge and stretching our understanding (p. 77)?

3. Do you *expect* to be frustrated when you study the Bible? If not, how could expecting to be frustrated help you study? If you do expect to be frustrated (and therefore perhaps avoid study), what kind of encouragement can you take from this chapter?

4. Had you ever thought before about how “learning aids” (like CliffsNotes) can short-circuit the learning process? Do you agree or disagree with Jen’s statement that using a shortcut is only marginally better than giving up (p. 78)? Explain your answer.

5. Jen says that the feeling of being lost or confused is one way God humbles us, and is a sign that learning is about to take place. Can you relate to this? What truth from Scripture eluded you for a long time and then suddenly became clear? How would your pride have been affected if you had understood that truth immediately?

6. “If I never fight for interpretation on my own, I might accept whatever interpretation I am given at face value” (p. 80). Why is this so dangerous?

7. Describe the difference between viewing time in the Word as a debit account versus a savings account. Which way have you been accustomed to seeing the time you spend in the Word? How can our stage of life affect which vantage point we take?

## Study with Process

This is the practical heart of the book, with specific study tools and methods outlined. This is the chapter you will turn back to over and over again as a reference point. It is chock-full of ideas and specific steps you can take to understand, interpret, and apply the Bible. There is no formula, *per se*, simply a process you can use to actually get into Bible study on your own before turning to guides written by other people. This chapter puts the tools in *your* hands. Keep it next to your Bible for easy reference.

1. What type of approach do you usually take to a project—a willy-nilly creative approach or a process-driven builder approach? How does your typical approach shape the way you think about Bible study?

2. Which of the comprehension tools Jen suggests (a printed copy of the text, repetitive reading, annotation, a dictionary, other translations, and outlining) do you think will be most helpful to you? Are there any you've already been using, or ones you'd never thought of?

3. Jen briefly discusses the difference between a translation and paraphrase of the Bible (p. 94). Why is this distinction so important?



4. What is the most practical, take-away step you found in this chapter? How are you going to implement it in your own study time?

5. Have you experienced the joy of drawing your own conclusion about the meaning of a text after studying it? Why is it important to consult commentaries only *after* seeking to find the interpretation yourself?

6. There is an idea in this chapter and throughout the book that the process of studying is valuable in and of itself—even if your paraphrase itself is bad, the exercise of crafting it increases your understanding. Are you accustomed to thinking of the process this way? Why or why not?

7. On page 100, Jen describes Bible study as a process of creating and maintaining an orderly, beautiful place within our hearts where the Lord may dwell, similar to the process of building the tabernacle. How does this description give you a new view of study? How does it encourage or inspire you?

# Study with Prayer

Pray. Why is this simple, essential practice so easy to overlook? We rush through it, do it as an afterthought, or even straight-up forget. Jen suggests that we weave prayer throughout our study time, rather than just use it as an opening or closing “nod to God.” The simple and practical prayer thoughts outlined in this chapter are both freeing and convicting. Get out your highlighter.

1. “Without prayer, our study is nothing but an intellectual pursuit. With prayer, it is a means of communing with the Lord. Prayer is what changes our study from the pursuit of knowledge to the pursuit of God himself” (p. 103). What does the absence of prayer in our study time reveal about what we really think is true about learning the Bible?

2. “Pray from a sincere desire, not from a sense of obligation to ‘do things the right way’” (p. 104). What can you do if all you have is the sense of obligation? How can you grow in sincere desire?

3. Which of the PARTs of prayer do you underutilize? Which of the prayer suggestions did you find most helpful?

4. What prayer suggestions did you find challenging and convicting? What one did you find encouraging and freeing? Did any of the specific prayer requests Jen suggested surprise you?

5. Knowing that the Holy Spirit speaks to us and convicts us through Scripture whether we ask him to or not could rob us of the motive to ask him. What do we have to gain by inviting his presence and seeking his blessing on our study?

# Pulling It All Together

This chapter walks us through the methods and ideas presented in the previous chapters, showing practically how they work with a text. It's one thing to be told how to catch a fish and quite another to be shown. Because the tools may be new to many, it's helpful to see what all these methods look like in practice.

1. Jen suggests a supply list on page 111. Did any of the supplies seem surprising or unnecessary? What would you add to the list?

2. Jen describes the archaeological questions as a means to “get into the skin” of the author and his original hearers. In the example of the book of James, how might knowing that James was the brother of Jesus affect the way you read the letter? How might knowing the fact that he was martyred affect the way that you read his words on remaining steadfast?

3. The comprehension phase will take a lot of time. How will you combat your frustration/impatience at this stage? Which method in the comprehension process do you think will be most enjoyable or rewarding? Which will test your patience the most?

4. Why do you think Jen specifies cross-references, paraphrasing, and commentary *in that order* in the interpretation stage (pp. 117–19)? What difference does the order make?

5. What other types of application, besides God-centered application, do we tend to jump to? Why do we need to start with God-centered applications?

6. “Fight for your own personal contact with the text before looking to other sources for help” (p. 123). Why is this so important when we study Scripture?

7. What are some benefits of sharing your study with a group? Which one appeals to you the most? Which do you need the most?

# Help for Teachers

Teaching Holy Scripture is a high calling, and it requires a great deal from those who would undertake it. In this chapter, Jen gives practical help for those who are wondering if they could or should pursue a potential call to teach. She balances encouragement to heed the calling with warnings against entering into teaching lightly. Whether you think you might be a teacher or not, this chapter gives a peek “behind the curtain” that is helpful to both teacher and student.

1. Jen states on pages 131–32, “The teacher is not the one with greater knowledge but with a greater natural curiosity to pursue the questions we all encounter. . . . Her enthusiasm for discovery becomes contagious among her students.” Do you think this is true? How have you experienced this as a student?

2. Jen encourages teachers to embrace the challenging questions that arise through study and teaching. Why do you think this is important? Why do teachers shy away from the hard questions? What can be gained from addressing them head-on?

3. Jen says on page 139, “Teaching a passage to those who have studied it is far more demanding than teaching one to those who have not.” Why is this the case? How does studying a passage before hearing teaching on it change the listening and learning experience for you?

4. If it is so much harder to teach an audience who has studied the passage ahead of time, what should motivate teachers to encourage their students to pre-study? Give several possible motives.

5. What stage(s) of study (comprehension, interpretation, application) should the student be encouraged to tackle before a teaching time? Ideally, what stage would a teacher want to be able to focus on in her teaching time? Why?

6. What are some of the differences between a public speaker and a teacher? Why is it important to be able to recognize the difference?

7. Jen describes seven teaching pitfalls to avoid. As a student, which of these have you known a teacher to fall into? As a teacher, which have you used or been tempted to use in teaching?

# Conclusion:

## Seek His Face

Jen closes her thoughts by reminding us of the importance of the heart with regard to Bible study. She tells us that studying the Bible should grow our love for God and conform us more to his image. She challenges us to give our attention to making a study of the God we love, even when life pulls us toward a thousand other things.

1. On page 147, Jen notes that there is a difference between being a Bible-worshipper and being a God-worshipper. Practically, what does it look like to be one versus the other? How would each act toward other people in their lives?

2. Describe a time that you tried to imitate someone else. What was it about that person that made you want to imitate her? How good were you at imitating her?

3. How have you found the principle “We become what we behold” to be true in your own life, in both positive and negative ways?



4. How should our love of the Bible help us to become “imitators of God”? How should it help us do so “as dearly loved children” (Eph. 5:1)?

5. What three things do you most want to remember and put into practice after reading this book?