

## **First Reading of John – Imagine a Month in John**

Now that we understand the purpose and benefit behind observation, we can venture into practical steps to practice it. Here our initial plan for observation:

1. *Make some sacred time.* On a Sabbath or a day with ample time in your schedule, find a quiet place. Try to set aside enough time to read the Gospel of John in one sitting. I also beg you to remove as many distractions as possible. Turn off your cell phone and all social media notifications. Consider putting your phone in another room or a drawer! Make this a sacred time with God and His Word. If you are reading John and must take a break, try to read John 1-12 and then soon re-engage with John 13-21.
1. *Make some sacred space.* If you are married and have children, the best gift your spouse can give to you is to take the kids out to create space for you to read the Gospel of John. Or maybe your spouse can stay home with the children and allow you to find a place to get alone with the Word. Remember, as a married man, the best gift I can give to my wife is not to try and “fix things” that are not going well for her but to point her to Jesus as He appears in the Word.
1. *Allow the Word to speak your language.* If you are more of a verbal learner rather than a visual learner, consider listening to the Gospel of John instead. Many Bible apps on smartphones and tablets do this for nearly every translation (and for free). Listen on the YouVersion app, Dwell, Streetlights, or <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio> on your Mac or PC. Since our culture is not the best at purely listening, I *highly recommend* that you follow the exact translation in your own printed Bible. If you only listen, your mind is likely to wander, and you will get distracted, missing significant parts of the story.

As you embark on this observational adventure, you may feel the impulse to stop along the way and to make some notes. I beg you to simply “sit” in the Word for this initial reading. You might sense the compulsion to go back after reading a chapter to examine any study notes that may be at the bottom of the page in your Bible. You have questions, and you want answers. I get it! Patience is difficult. I encourage you to mimic the posture of Mary rather than Martha. Mary “sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted” (Luke 10:38-32). In the end, Jesus said, “Mary has chosen what is better.”

Remember, this is your first encounter with John. Resist that sense of urgency to become a formal western-thinking student. That time will come. I promise. Here, you are simply practicing observation: seeing the text. Make this less about you and more about John’s agenda. Allow the text to raise the questions that appear to be on Mark’s heart and mind, so His words captivate your thoughts.

*If you are reading it yourself,*

try reading every other chapter out loud. Yes, it will slow you down. But remember, this is not a race. It will cause your entire body to become involved in the reading process. Your eyes will see the words as you scan the page, your mouth and tongue will feel the text as you pronounce the words, your ears will hear the spoken words as you lean in,

and even your fingers will touch the text as they follow along. Why not make it a total sensory event?

*If you are listening to the book,*

let the words of the one reading the sacred words wash over you. Allow the words to flow over and around you as they enter your Spirit-enabled ears as you follow along with your eyes.

Now, go and read John. I'll wait here patiently until you finish.

120 minutes later...

Once you have completed the reading or listening of John, spend a final 15-30 minutes reflecting on what you have seen, heard, noticed, and observed. Here, I encourage you to make some closing notes or general observations. I do so in my prayer journal. Make notes about what you *saw* or *heard* in the text. I do not want you to focus too much on what you *expected* to see or your past experiences. To the best of your ability, simply report what you observed in the text. I might even suggest that you begin your observations with words such as, "I observed..." or "I heard John say..." Make certain to have the text of John at the core of your observations. It is also an excellent practice to go back to John's text and double-check to see if what you thought you saw was there. Consider questions that come from your initial observations. (you can see mine below). Remember, this brief observational reflection is only your *First Reading* of John - it is far from your "final answer."