**One Year New Testament Bible Study Tips for FYL**

Sean McGever

The core content of FYL is based around reading the One Year New Testament (OYNT). There are a lot of good books out there to go through, but we want college-aged students in FYL to first and foremost experience reading the Word of God consistently for an entire year. Rather than have them read the latest new Christian book of the month/year/week, I want to ground them in the scriptures themselves. The One Year New Testament is by far the best way to do this.

The Bible study each week is a day by day discussion of the reading, followed by probing questions. We mix up the organization of how we present the questions, but effectively we discuss the entire New Testament. Below are some insights we have learned over the years.

**Students**

* Read the section for each day. If at all possible don’t get behind and try to do several in one day, this is better than nothing, but with the idea of scripture being like “food”, you will experience fullness as you get in the One Year New Testament each day.
* Read with a pen or pencil in hand, mark up your copy a lot. Make a question mark (?) next to anything you don’t understand. Underline anything that seems important to you. Write notes in the margin. Set a goal to make some sort of mark on the page of each day, there has to be something about the passage that catches your attention, if you have no marks on your page for that day then force yourself to go back a read it again.
* Realize something bigger than simply reading is at work. Before and after reading prayerfully ask yourself, “Why is God having me read this section of scripture today?” Think about what you are going through, your ups, your downs, your questions, your convictions. This is something you can write in the margins of the day too. A messy page is a good thing.

**Leaders**

* It can be helpful to provide a brief overview of the book you are reading together the week before it begins, For example, give an introduction to how Mark is different from Matthew the week before you start Mark. You don’t need to be a Bible expert, probably some personal reflection and ten minutes of research in a study Bible or similar will be plenty.
* When it comes to leading the discussion two things are very important
	+ When you move on to a new day, simply ask them one of the day-starter questions below and then stop talking. Fight the urge to teach, explain, give your own personal reflections right away. Learn to be OK with silence. With this group 30-60 seconds may be needed for them to collect or refresh their thoughts about the reading for that day. Chances are you have never waited 60 seconds for an answer to a question. You will need to get used to this.
	+ When you do speak, almost always make it a redirecting or probing question. For instance, reword the opening question for the day. The most helpful words you will say in the study will be when you ask someone more about their answer. The most powerful insights are usually 2-3 questions beyond their initial answer. Probe a bit with more questions. See probing questions below.
* For the first few weeks we open up the time and let anyone answer the day-starter questions. As-is normal for small groups, the same people will tend to answer the questions first and others won’t say much unless asked directly. So in the first few weeks we just open it up with a traditional open forum. After a month or so it is good to mix up the discussion a little. See the discussion organization below for some variations, these help a lot over the course of a year of being together.
* Keep your eye on the time. Don’t cut it short, in fact cut other things first before you cut this. But, with seven days, adding an extra 2-3 minutes per day can add another 20-25 minutes without noticing. I’ve found it better to dig in and slow down when things are pulling at heart issues and to be very selective when taking extra time to explain technicalities of the verses themselves, you can eat up a lot of time on topics that don’t matter all that much in the scheme of things (and I say this as a theology professor, I like the technicalities of the Bible and theology and have a lot I’d like to say... but don’t!)
* A few weeks into the second semester we make our own “titles” for each day. In ten words or less we write a title for each day. It can be word-for-word from a verse, or it can be something fun; it is an exercise in processing the information. If people slack on it we have a good natured penalty of doing push-ups for the number of the day, e.g. on the 15th of March you would do 15 push-ups! People rarely miss after that. This also helps keep the discussion a little shorter.

**Discussion organization**

*Since you do the same thing each week it is good to mix it up after a few weeks*

* Traditional open forum - just ask the day-starter question and let anyone answer.
	+ As-is normal for small groups, the same people will tend to answer the questions first and others won’t say much unless asked directly. We let this take its course and ask people directly as needed.
* Circle answer - Pretty simple, we just go in a circle. Sometimes I will pick how many will answer for each day. For instance, we go in a circle and three people will answer for one day, the next three people for the next day, etc.,
* Count-off - 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 and then they answer just for that day, so it is not a circle but the same idea applies.
* Youngest-to-oldest, shortest-to-tallest - Just different ways to change up the order.
* Team prep - put people in groups for each day, give them 5-10 minutes to discuss each day and then teach the group on the reading for the day.
* Spin the bottle - Just like it sounds, put a bottle or anything in the middle and spin it, the person it lands on has to answer next. If it points to the same person later then we go to the next person clockwise who has not answered yet.
* Accountability week - As FYL winds on some people will struggle to keep up with the readings; this varies a lot as in some years everyone sticks with it really well. But in this scheme you group people in small groups based on how many days they read that week. That way the people who did all the reading are together and those who read less are together. For the groups that did less reading, have them discuss what they did read and then take the rest of the time to read the other days together, perhaps aloud.
* Student led - In the second semester I usually rotate and have the students lead the discussion using the same methods and tools. It is great campaigner training. Ask them to be prepared and also stop to help them, tell the whole group explicitly, “we are doing this to help train you to lead small groups in the future.” That way it isn’t awkward to give tips. In our FYL we have several leaders, we share leading the discussion too.

**Day-starter questions**

*Remember you might need to give them 30-60 seconds to gather their thoughts*

* What did God show you in the reading for this day?
* What verse stuck out to you?
* What caught your attention on this day?
* What did you underline?
* What questions did you have?
* [Second semester] What was your title for the day?

**Probing question examples**

*Remember these are much better than beginning your mini-sermon*

* Tell me more.
* Why did you say that?
* Why do you think God brought that up to you this week?
* What does that have to do with your relationship with God right now?
* How did you feel when you read that?
* Why do you feel that way?
* How might that impact this coming week/month?
* How does this compare to what you thought/felt before you read that this week?
* What did you mean by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?
* Is there anything else you’d like to add to that?
* So you are saying \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, is that what you meant?
* \*If someone says something really off-base, such as a comment significantly in disagreement with scripture, or shows a really poor attitude, or says something heart-breaking. Stop right there to jump in. Always have your first words be full of grace, thank them for their comment, and then help unpack what was just said.

Leading a good Bible study is an art as much as a science, it takes time to learn how to do it and many people do it differently. Be yourself and hopefully some of these tips will help too.