

7-Day Plan

THE

Telos

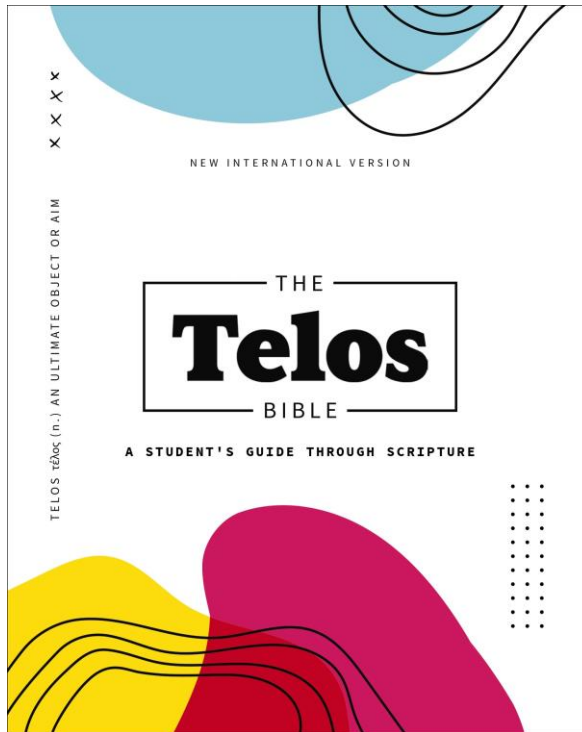
BIBLE

A STUDENT'S GUIDE THROUGH SCRIPTURE



ΤΕΛΟΣ τέλος (n.)
AN ULTIMATE
OBJECT OR AIM

The NIV Telos Bible



Created to meet the spiritual needs of high school and college students, *The NIV Telos Bible* is designed to be contextually relevant and to challenge young adults to take a meaningful look at the Bible. This 7-day plan offers new believers and those exploring the Bible for the first time readings on fundamental Biblical concepts.

Content for this plan is taken from *The NIV Telos Bible*.

Day One: What Is Sin?

Sin is loving anything more than God. It's thinking, speaking or acting in ways that are against what God wants for us.

Have you ever seen yourself in the fun house mirrors at a carnival or an amusement park? Your reflection is there, but the image is all distorted. Those mirrors may be fun, but you probably wouldn't want to use one to get ready in the morning. They don't offer a reliable picture of what you really look like.

The Bible says in Genesis 1:26 that we were created to be mirrors of God—to reflect his image. Sin is failing to live up to this purpose. That's why Paul says in Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” We all “fall short” of being the image bearers we were created to be. Instead of showing others what God is like through our words and actions, we present a distorted image to the world around us, just like one of those fun house mirrors.

The good news is that God hasn't given up on us. He still wants us to be his faithful image bearers. As we allow God's Holy Spirit to lead us, day in and day out, that's exactly what happens.

Revelation 22:3 tells us that one day when Jesus returns, the curse of sin will be undone. Jesus' followers will be transformed and made new, and we will perfectly reflect the glory of God, just as we were created to do.

Day One: What Is Sin?

Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” – *Genesis 1:26*

But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. – *Romans 3:21-23*

No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. – *Revelation 22:3*

Day Two: Who Is God?

God is the loving Creator who sustains everything. He is eternal and unchanging in his goodness, wisdom and power.

The first thing we read about God in Genesis is that he created the world and said that it was good. Day and night, water and earth, plants and animals all came into being when God spoke. He made humans in his image, giving us his very breath.

In Acts 17:28, Paul quotes a Greek poem to describe how in God “we live and move and have our being.” Whether we acknowledge God or not, he is the one who sustains us and gives us life. There is no equal to God, no one who comes before or after. God is our Creator and Sustainer, but he is also so much more. He wants a close, personal relationship with us, and he is committed to doing whatever it takes to maintain that relationship.

We see throughout the Bible that no matter how often they turn away, God rescues his children and refuses to abandon them. When the Israelites are suffering as slaves in Egypt, God hears their cry and comes to set them free. When Israel becomes a nation that turns its back on him, God unleashes judgment, but he also promises redemption. Though his people are faithless, God remains faithful, promising to restore his children.

God’s promise is fulfilled in Jesus, who died to free humanity from sin and death, and who makes us new by sending his Spirit to dwell within us. Now, as we read in Romans 8:38–39, nothing can come between us and God—no sin, no shame, no failure can separate us from his eternal love if we believe in him.

Day Two: Who Is God?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day. – *Genesis 1:1-5*

‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ – *Acts 17:28*

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,[a] neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. – *Romans 8:38-39*

Day Three: If God Is Loving, Why Do Bad Things Happen?

Every day, stories on the news tell of car crashes, fires and natural disasters. People we love suffer illness and loss that seems senseless, and we're left wondering why. If a good God loves and cares for us, why is there so much pain and suffering in the world?

It's not an easy question to answer. Some of the evil we experience is caused by sin. Moral evil, such as violence, theft and sexual abuse comes about because of human choices, and sinful choices over time can create unjust systems that inflict harm on whole people groups. But there's also natural evil, such as hurricanes or tsunamis that destroy people's lives and homes or illness that seems to strike randomly.

As we experience all types of evil here on earth, there are no simple explanations. In the Bible, Job suffers hardship upon hardship, and when he voices his complaint, God doesn't show up with any answers, but he does show up.

One thing to remember is that God is loving, and he is with us in all of our pain. God doesn't promise that we'll never experience suffering or hardship; he promises that he will never leave us or forsake us.

We can know God's love because of Jesus' death on the cross. Like Paul says in Romans 5:8, God shows his love for us by giving his own life for us while we were still sinners. There is no greater sacrifice than that. In Jesus, God became human so he could suffer alongside us and take our sins to the cross as his own. Jesus experienced the very worst evil our world had to offer when he was tortured and nailed to the cross, so we can be sure that he can sympathize with all our pain.

The Holy Spirit also teaches us of God's love. Romans 5:5 tells us it is through the Spirit that God's love is poured into our hearts. God is not just loving, but 1 John 4:8 tells us that God is love! Love is his very essence. We only know love because it comes from God.

God's love will ultimately triumph over evil. When Jesus comes again, he is coming to set all things right. He will recreate the world, restoring the goodness God intended it to be. Revelation 21 speaks of a time when there will be no more death, sorrow or pain—when God himself will wipe away our tears.

The evil we see is limited. We don't know all of history, and we can't make sense of the evil in the universe, but we can keep trusting God in the midst of it. He will never leave us, and evil will never have the final say.

Day Three: If God Is Loving, Why Do Bad Things Happen?

But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
– *Romans 5:8*

And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. – *Romans 5:5*

Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. – *1 John 4:8*

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” – *Revelation 21:1-4*

Day Four: Loving God with Your Mind

Jesus said the greatest commandment is to love God with your heart, soul, mind and strength (see Mark 12:30).

Loving God with our minds isn't just feeling affection toward him. It's meditating and engaging regularly with the Bible. We do this by reading closely, reflecting on how different parts of Scripture fit together and asking questions as we read.

Loving God with our minds isn't about head knowledge alone. We need both knowledge about God and experiential knowledge of who God is in relationship with us.

Experience comes from wrestling with questions and listening for God's answers. None of our relationships would flourish if we listened passively but never engaged in conversation. We're meant to be in conversation with God, always seeking to know and understand him more.

Asking questions and listening for answers is especially important when encountering difficult passages in the Bible. God isn't offended when we ask questions. That's how we get to know him better and learn to trust him.

We can also look to our Christian brothers and sisters who have lived before us. From the early days of the church, Christians have been wrestling with the Bible, meditating on its meaning and often writing down their own thoughts and experiences for others to follow.

As Hebrews 12:1 says, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, and we can follow the same paths others have as they walked with God before us.

The more we learn and follow God, the more we realize how much we don't know. While we'll never fully know all the Bible has to say, the more we read and study it, the more we'll grow in our love for God.

Day Four: Loving God with Your Mind

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. – *Mark 12:30*

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. – *Hebrews 12:1-2*

Day Five: Who Is The Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, equal in power and glory with the Father and the Son.

When we think of the Holy Spirit, for many of us, the miracle of Pentecost comes to mind as the moment the Spirit first appears in the Bible. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit came in like a rushing wind, and tongues of fire fell on Jesus' disciples, giving people from different lands the ability to understand their message.

But the Spirit was active long before Pentecost. He was present at creation, inspired the Old Testament prophets and empowered the ministries of John the Baptist and Jesus.

So what does a relationship with the Holy Spirit look like? The Spirit wants to lead and guide us in the way of Jesus. He is God with us, allowing us to experience his presence in our lives. We can feel his leading when we read the Bible and when we pray. And even when we do not know what to pray for, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf because he knows what we need even when we don't.

The Holy Spirit wants to develop you into someone whose life is marked by the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22–23). We acquire these traits when we follow his guidance.

If you feel like the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, ask yourself if his words are in line with Scripture. If you're unsure of what he is speaking to you, or what he's asking you to do, ask a pastor or other trusted adult in your life. They can help teach and guide you as you learn to listen to the Spirit. Learning to follow and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit doesn't come naturally, but it does get easier with practice as we follow Jesus.

Day Five: Who Is The Holy Spirit?

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. – *Acts 2:1-4*

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. – *Galatians 5:22-23*

Day Six: When Is Jesus Coming Back?

In almost every generation since Jesus walked the earth, people have used the Bible's numbers and symbols to try to figure out when to expect his second coming. Maybe you've even heard a few theories yourself. But Jesus says in Matthew 24:36 that no one knows when he'll come again, not even the angels in heaven. The Father alone knows, and that's enough. While it's not up to us to determine the day or time, Jesus does instruct us to be aware of the signs of his second coming.

The Bible is intentionally vague about the question of when but very straightforward about the question of how. How should we live as we wait? We should anticipate Jesus' return with gladness, always preparing ourselves for that glorious day.

While we are waiting, here are a few ways we can prepare and anticipate his return:

Stand firm in our faith. The Bible reveals what it looks like to live a life fully devoted to Christ at home, work, school, church and in the community. See an example of this in Matthew 25:1–13.

Avoid complacency in our spiritual lives. It's human nature to get lazy as the days continue to pass, but Jesus tells us to stay alert. Ask yourself, "What do I want him to find me doing when he returns?"

Tell others about Jesus with love and urgency. In Matthew 28:18–20, Jesus gave believers the Great Commission before he ascended to heaven, commanding us to make disciples of all nations.

Pray that Jesus would come soon. He promises to hear us.

We don't know when Jesus will return, and that's okay. The Bible calls us to lead lives of faith-filled holiness like Jesus is coming today.

Day Six: When Is Jesus Coming Back?

“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. – *Matthew 24:36*

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

“At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’

“Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. 8 The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

“‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’

“But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

“Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’

“But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. – *Matthew 25:1–13*

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” – *Matthew 28:18–20*

Day Seven: How Can We Be Saved?

We can be saved when we confess Jesus as Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead.

The Bible teaches us in Ephesians 2:5 that when we were dead in our sins, God made us alive with Jesus—it is by grace we have been saved!

We can't do anything to earn our salvation. Can a dead person make themselves alive again? Of course not. Only God can perform the miracle of raising the dead back to new life. That's exactly what Paul says has happened to us. Sin places all of us in a condition of spiritual death, and the miracle of salvation is that God makes us alive again through Jesus.

Romans 10:9 says, "If you declare . . . 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

This kind of belief is more than just a mental agreement that Jesus died for our sins and rose again. The Greek word is *pistis*, which means "trust." Trusting Jesus means placing our lives in his hands and following his commandments. It means turning away from sin, knowing we have been freed from its bondage and living as God's children.

This trust doesn't mean we'll never doubt. We all feel unsure at times, but faith means we press on with hope, following even when the way seems unclear. Even when we can't see God's saving work in our lives, we trust Jesus is faithfully bringing us home to eternal life with God.

Day Seven: How Can We Be Saved?

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. – *Ephesians 2:4-5*

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. – *Romans 10:9*