

**A COHESIVE BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM**  
**Proposal for teaching all ages based on their**  
**Spiritual maturity rather than chronological age.**

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**Submitted for review of the brethren**  
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**EXPLANATION OF COHESIVE CURRICULUM IN BIBLE STUDY:**

Inasmuch as a request for an established curriculum for Bible study (especially in the younger ages) has come before the men of this church on more than one occasion, it seems altogether fitting and proper to set before the men a written submission of a proposed curriculum, by which to grant a full and clear explanation of the term “**cohesive curriculum.**” The term “cohesive curriculum” tends to confuse many due its connotation with secular education. Nonetheless, most churches of Christ attempt an establishment of their Bible class teachings on a premise long established in conventional secular educational areas. While establishing most Bible study classes on the basis of “secular education grade levels,” the curriculum used within said Bible study classes usually fails to provide a cohesive and fluent pattern of learning for the students. Hence, “cohesive curriculum” is a collective term meaning the inclusion of each of the following:

- a. An educational program by which the students learn the Scriptures via their individual levels of comprehension of scripture, (i.e. spiritual maturity – Heb. 5:12 – 14) rather than on secular education grade levels.
- b. A program formulated to systematically take students through the Scriptures no less than three times in a span of twelve years or less.
- c. A program that completes the student’s acquaintance with Bible characters, Bible times and places and their effect on the overall plan of God for the salvation of mankind: i.e. a plan by which there is no omission of introduction to every book of the Holy Scriptures, with appropriate direction of said information established on the level of comprehension and understanding of the individual student.

Stated simply, a “cohesive curriculum” assures the SPIRITUAL growth and maturity of each student, doing so through their own SPIRITUAL age rather than abiding strictly to the customary chronological age and/or the expectations of teachers and/or parents of said student based upon chronological age instead of spiritual maturity.

## SUGGESTED CURRICULUM:

The following is a suggested pattern for this curriculum. Each “level” can be reduced or advanced as needed to compliment and challenge the student’s understanding and comprehension. It must be remembered such a program as suggested herein is NOT established in accordance with chronological age, but instead, with the idea of maturing the SPIRITUAL mind in a consistent and profitable fashion. The details of each level should be fashioned by the teacher or teachers of the student or students in such a way as to challenge them without discouraging them. God’s “levels of spiritual maturity” are described thusly: “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which *be* the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk *is* unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, *even* those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” This shows no “chronological” aging in the Scriptures, but a required maturation of each soul from their birth in Christ Jesus (John 3:7) through their life’s devoted service to Him (2 Peter 1:3 – 11; Revelation 14:13).

Four areas of understanding are crucial to the spiritual well being of all souls. They are:

Level One: WHO’S WHO IN THE BIBLE

Level Two: EVENTS AND THEIR PURPOSE IN GOD’S SCHEME OF REDEMPTION

Level Three: THE GOSPEL OF JESUS CHRIST – FROM BIRTH TO ASCENSION

Level Four: THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

These areas God established through His providence in the establishment of the Bible as we read its content. While the more one reads and studies from beginning to end, one obviously enriches his/her understanding of the Scriptures to deeper depths of knowledge and comprehension. No two individuals will be precisely the same; thus, the Spirit instructed Paul to teach Timothy, “Study to show thyself approved unto God.” Still, the course of that gained knowledge follows the above mentioned pattern: learning the characters of God’s Word, learning the events and their purpose in God’s scheme of redemption, learning the gospel of Christ, and learning the concept and function of the eternal structure of the church of Christ.

Obviously, an array of subjects exists within these levels and the careful teacher will appropriately adjust the material according to the student’s several abilities. For the very young, using the names of chief characters of the Bible in story form simply to acquaint them with who they are proves important. Mrs. Lee’s Stories About God’s First People and Mrs. Lee’s Stories About Jesus are helpful materials at this age.<sup>1</sup> To those of

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<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Irvin Lee was the wife of the late Irvin Lee, preacher of the gospel for decades. Her affection for young children led to her writing of these books. They include very accurate stories and very accurate depictions in drawings, appropriate to ages 2 years through elementary ages. Questions follow each story and again can be adjusted accordingly to the student’s needs.

adolescent and/or teen years, a deeper investigation of these important characters can be introduced and discussed for not only who they are, but specifically what they did and why they did these things, in the scheme of God's plan. Obviously, the more mature the student proves him/herself, the more advanced the material becomes in order to challenge the student, rather than discourage and leave him/her void of necessary knowledge of Bible facts. **THE PURPOSE IS TO INCREASE LEARNING.**

Each subsequent level requires the same adjustments as per the student(s) involved. The teacher must recognize the necessary pace established by the student; and from that established pace either increase or decrease the diligence of the level; and in the appropriate time, advancing to the next level of study. This pattern is easily recorded through anecdotal records (see sample following). Such will permit an open discussion of progress (or the lack thereof) with the student, and his/her parents.

It should be understood that the number of students in a class is NOT important! Even one student has the right to learn! In fact, the greater progress often exists when a "one-on-one" relationship exists in such study. The idea in such a cohesive curriculum is not to establish how many students assemble in each class and how quickly they seem to grasp Spiritual truth, but rather how **well each soul** learns God's Word and **how to make righteous application to their soul!**

## **TIME SCHEDULE OF THE COHESIVE CURRICULUM**

Based on a schedule of one year per level, the teacher should easily find a maximum of fifty-two lessons per level.<sup>2</sup> It is NOT necessary to find 104 (when including Wednesday night Bible study with the same level<sup>3</sup>) but only fifty-two or less as the consistency of such studies will prove meritorious. Further, such consistency assures the complete understanding and recognition of each lesson by each student. Thus again, one notes the value of an anecdotal record, in that each student advances on his/her own proven ability rather than a required advancement due to age (chronological) change. As well, such a system provides for unplanned absences and/or the planned events of gospel meetings, etc. Further, such a system provides for the regular "testing" of the student's remembrance of these lessons so as to assure comprehension, purpose and application in future development of his/her spiritual maturity.

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<sup>2</sup> Where such a systematic approach has been used, it has proven MOST effective if the number of lessons per level does not exceed 30. That amount tends to assure greater understanding, interest and diligence to the study and does not overwhelm the student. If the student shows the desire and interest toward additional studies in a given level, then certainly accommodate that desire with increased lessons. Or, if proven ready, the teacher may find it beneficial to the student to advance to the next level.

<sup>3</sup> Two levels can be taught simultaneously if desired, but should be concurrent levels. For example, LEVEL ONE can be taught on Sunday morning and LEVEL TWO on Wednesday night, or levels two and three, or three and four. NEVER should extremes between levels coincide for the individual student (ex. one and four, or two and four) as the cohesiveness of learning would be removed from the consistency of this pattern.

Following is a “sample anecdotal record”. Once studied, its use and value is self-explanatory.<sup>4</sup>

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**STUDENT’S NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**Level of study:** 1 2 3 4 (It will **not** be necessary to record the student’s chronological age as this system involves only the SPIRITUAL maturity of each student. Thus, the “level” is by its name only and depth of proposed material within that addressed level is established on:

- a. present expressed understanding of the Scriptures
- b. established goal for the student according to the level of study
- c. individual advancement through the course of study)

**Lesson plan:** (List the planned subjects of each level, the starting date and the projected date of accomplishment. Grafting such progress may show a clearer encouragement.)

**Test results:** (List the manner of testing and the date of said test regarding the understanding of the student and how well the student accomplished this testing. Such assures the progression of learning and understanding. Be sure to review material every six weeks.)

**Review with parent/student:** (Record the comments of discussion regarding the student’s progress. Such reviews should be dated and notes recorded no less than every two months.)

**Goal:** (Record the goal established at the beginning of each level and remind the student of this goal and their advancement toward accomplishing same. Note privately those expressed attitudes toward achievement of these goals, ideas of challenging the student to greater diligence, etc.)

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While sometimes considered “too much paperwork” for the teacher, such an anecdotal record will nonetheless prove quite profitable through the series of studies and prove the progression desired. Obviously, some students will accomplish their work and understanding much faster than other students. This program of “cohesive curriculum” avoids all stigmas that may be associated with “peer pressure” as each works at their own pace to accomplish their FULL understanding of the material. The goal is to complete one level per year, so that in theory, each student completes three journeys through the Scriptures within twelve years. Obviously, some will work faster than others and should not be discouraged from such progress. Simultaneously, no student should be “forced onward” when they simply are not ready for advancement!

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<sup>4</sup> Anecdotal records should be kept as private information for the use of the teacher, the student and the parents. It is NOT for comparative standards between students! It is merely to chart and record the progress of each individual student.

## **BENEFITS OF THIS COHESIVE CURRICULUM:**

1. The greatest benefit of such a system of teaching God's Word is the expected maturity of each student, made in progression of his/her individual level of comprehension.
2. It avoids "gaps" in their knowledge of Bible facts as they mature.
3. It avoids the dangers of "choking" souls with meat, who instead need milk; or starving the more advanced and proven minds when they merit the meat.
4. It relieves the expectations of the "teacher" and/or the parent, placing the responsibility of spiritual maturity squarely on the shoulders of the individual student! (2 Timothy 2:15; Philippians 2:12, et al)
5. If administered consistently, each student will prove his/her own abilities and understanding and therefore the "**peer pressure**" is banished. The individual student will express the desire of obedience to the Gospel via his/her own volition alone!
6. It avoids the "hodge-podge" approach to Bible study and systematically, reveals the **entirety** of God's Word to each learner in no more than four years (and in most cases in less than three years.) Both teacher and student know what to expect in way of study and can therefore properly prepare and study.
7. This systematic approach can be fluent without the oversight of an eldership (as is our present case) because it employs the Scriptures themselves in God's established order for the learning of each student.<sup>5</sup>
8. This systematic approach supplies the desires of the youth (and in many cases the adults as well) regarding their interest in Bible facts not yet discussed in the present approach of Bible study.<sup>6</sup>
9. This systematic approach encourages parental participation as well as individual study which collectively results in an enriched class discussion and/or individual review of the material.<sup>7</sup>
10. Last, the spiritual age of each student (young or old) is addressed rather than competing in "chronological" age groups. Thus, those students of God's word who may be older chronologically, but less acquainted with the basics of God's Word, are not expected to know these basics until taught these basics; and by their own speed of advancement in spiritual maturation, come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4) as God intended.

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<sup>5</sup> Nothing can replace God's order of government within the church. However, God did establish His Word and His church in such a fashion as to permits the individual soul to learn His truth at their own pace! This system assuredly establishes that fact and in course of study strengthens the soul to the point of acquired ability to serve God in whatever righteous capacity the student aspires to reach.

<sup>6</sup> Though often not expressed to the teachers, many of the younger students have expressed to their parents these desires, and in turn these have been expressed to others, including myself.

<sup>7</sup> No one disputes the requirement of parents instructing their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (Eph. 6:4). However, if this is the limitation of such investigation of Bible truth, then why have Bible study classes at all?

## POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES OF THIS COHESIVE CURRICULUM

1. In order to PROPERLY assure the success of such a system, more teachers may need to accept the challenge of teaching! Rotation of teachers (one year teaching, one year learning) will also enhance further development for all souls in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18).
2. It may require the establishment of a “New Convert’s” class. Babes in Christ (regardless of chronological age) are often void of “basic knowledge” of the Scriptures. Important lessons such as the journeys of Israel; the judges; the kings; the division of Israel and Judah; the captivities; the use of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes etc. as one matures in Christ; the use of the major and minor prophets; the establishment of Godly morals as opposed to the challenges of “socially acceptable conduct;” etc. must be addressed to the babe in Christ: especially those souls who have not known the truth from their youth up (2 Timothy 3:15).<sup>8</sup>
3. Some adults (chronologically) often feel “too old for such a system of learning.” Since years of being “fashioned in the custom” of verse by verse discussions, many adults are NOT prone to completing “work books” or other means of helpful tools toward their gaining of righteous information. Such does NOT negate their NEED for knowing these things, but the reality of their “established pattern” often does stifle the advancement of the younger ones due the example portrayed by these seniors.<sup>9</sup>

## CONCLUSION:

If such a program of curriculum were engaged properly, each individual student would advance at his/her own ability and seemingly would be persuaded to participate in such study at home as well as during assembled Bible study times. Such scheduled times (i.e. Sunday morning and Wednesday evenings) could be better used as DISCUSSION of these studied matters and explanation of confused details, rather than a mere “checking of homework” or “verse by verse” study of the Scriptures. Such a curriculum provides for a REQUIRED READING AND STUDY OF THE SCRIPTURES, either by parents to their children (when very young) or by the students themselves as they mature. In any regard, such a system usually creates an increase in FAMILY discussion of the Scriptures.

Therefore, while but a skeletal outline of the curriculum, this written proposal should answer the questions expressed regarding the stability of our Bible teaching in

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<sup>8</sup> While these are well within the lessons contained per appropriate level, they are often missing from the understanding of those not previously taught in truth and righteousness. A “New Convert’s” class would appropriately provide these needful lessons to any chronological age, inasmuch as we are interested in the growth of this new BABE in Christ to become a mature SERVANT of Christ. In order to stabilize the soul’s faith in the truth of New Testament, it is important to have an understanding of why God brought these things into being (Romans 15:4, Galatians 3:25 – 25).

<sup>9</sup> In recent months, (at least here in this local work) we have pleasantly seen the opposite in attitude from the majority of our seniors. They appreciate the notes, charts and required participation in study materials for the following discussions. They have expressed a fervent desire for such handouts and helps in the study!

classes other than the adults. In point of fact, there are adults (speaking chronologically) who would greatly benefit from such a systematic arrangement of Bible study. Some adults have never studied the judges, the kings, the division of Israel, the books of Hebrew Poetry, etc. which are the very quotations found frequently in the New Testament! Such a systematic approach would simply enhance the studious soul's thirst and hunger after righteousness (Matthew 5:6) and would assist greatly in refreshing and/or educating the minds of those who have decreased knowledge of these needful facts of God's Word. The same can be said of "levels" three and four: The life of Jesus Christ – from birth to ascension, and the Church of Christ.

If desired, and/or needed, I would gladly compose outlines of study for each level of this curriculum, based on a four year program per student which would journey through the scriptures no less than three times in twelve years. Additionally, there are materials already existent which follow this curriculum. However, the cost of such written materials may be prohibitive.

It is NOT necessary to have "the entire congregation studying the same theme at the same time," as many congregations employ. While beneficial in "keeping everyone on the same page," it is more important to see every INDIVIDUAL mature spiritually according as their several ability permits. Each teacher, via the keeping of anecdotal records, can and should tract the progression of each student. Therefore, this system has been designed with the "youth" in mind, as opposed to the adults. However, it can and will work with equal effectiveness upon any truly interested student of God's Word, regardless of their chronological age.

**POST SCRIPT:**

If you desire further discussion and/or examples of this proposal, please contact me for either private or public discussion of this plan.

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