

# READ THE BIBLE FOR LIFE

## Union's Guthrie launches BIBLICAL LITERACY PROJECT

by Tim Ellsworth



With legs dangling as he sits on a table in front of his class, George Guthrie poses the question that will serve as the topic for the final classroom discussion of the semester.

"What have you gotten out of this class?" Guthrie asks.

The students in his "Bible Study and Interpretation" class munch on potato chips, cookies and other snacks in their final meeting together as they ponder Guthrie's question.

One student tells about how she grew up in a Christian home with parents who established her on a firm biblical footing.

Though her family read the Bible, she wasn't really taught how to study it.

"This course has laid a foundation for the rest of my life in Bible study," Samantha Adams says.

Other students tell similar stories. About how the class reminded them of the beauty of God's Word. About how they learned that every text primarily is about God, not about themselves. About how they can now appreciate and understand the Bible's different kinds of literature.

Classes such as this served as the catalyst for Guthrie's latest project, *Read the Bible for Life: Your Guide to Understanding and Living God's Word*, published by B&H Publishing Group. The book, now available, contains 16 conversations based on interviews Guthrie did with other experts on the Bible. The interviews focus on how to read the Bible well.

Guthrie's *Read the Bible for Life* book is part of a national-level biblical literacy initiative (also called *Read the Bible for Life*) being conducted by LifeWay Christian Resources in partnership with Union's R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies. In addition to the book, the initiative will include other resources, including a nine-session, small-group video curriculum, to be used by churches in training their people to read the Bible more effectively.

For Guthrie, the Benjamin W. Perry

Professor of Bible at Union, the project came about because of the alarming biblical illiteracy he has seen among both Christians and non-Christians alike.

"For several years I have been conducting brief biblical literacy exams at the beginning of my New Testament Survey course," Guthrie writes in the book's introduction. "The questions on the exam are straightforward, multiple-choice queries such as: Which of these books is from the New Testament? Whom did Pontius Pilate release during Jesus' trial? How many temptations did Jesus experience in the wilderness? Where would you look in the Bible to find the Sermon on the Mount?"

The results were startling, with the average score coming in at 57 percent.

"The averages from the classes over the past few years have ranged between 50 percent and 70 percent, but most of the time the average is closer to 50 percent," Guthrie writes. "This is not unique to my students but is consistent with what other professors are finding at top Christian universities all over the United States. Our students, even those coming out of the church, simply are no longer grounded in the basics of the Bible's story."

Guthrie cited other statistics as well. About 84 percent of church members don't read the Bible daily. About 68 percent of them don't read it once a week. Only 37

percent say the Bible has made a significant difference in the way they live their lives.

"Since we as Christians should be 'people of the Book,' something is wrong with this picture," Guthrie writes. "We should know the Bible well, but we really don't. All of the polls show that those who claim to be evangelical Christians only do marginally better than their nonbelieving neighbors when asked questions about the content of the Bible, and a biblical view of the world is not making inroads into how we think about and live our lives."

Guthrie's book seeks to address these deficiencies by providing a simple, readable guide on how the Bible should be read and interpreted. Through conversations with various individuals, including his wife, pastors, a musician and several scholars, Guthrie addresses such topics as reading the Bible in context, reading the Old Testament stories, laws and prophets, reading the New Testament stories and letters, reading Revelation and the teachings of Jesus, reading the Bible for personal devotion, with the church and with the family, among others.

Union University's R.C. Ryan Center for Biblical Studies will hold a "Read the Bible for Life" conference April 15-16 with Guthrie, David Platt and Michael Card. More information about the conference is available at [www.uu.edu/events/ReadTheBibleForLife](http://www.uu.edu/events/ReadTheBibleForLife). ■



### More information about the book,

as well as other resources about the **READ THE BIBLE FOR LIFE** project, including links to videos, podcasts and Guthrie's blog, is available at [www.readthebibleforlife.com](http://www.readthebibleforlife.com). The **READ THE BIBLE FOR LIFE** book is available for purchase at LifeWay and Amazon.com.