

...ust of death
me
doers encircles me
hands and feet—
me—
ver me
ents among them
g they cast lots
ot be far off!
me quickly to my
the sword
om the power of
mouth of the lion!
from the horns of
e to my brothers
congregation I will
o praise him!
Jacob glorify him
him, all you
I
d or abhorred
afflicted
his face from him
e he cried to him
rise in the great
orm before those
and be satisfied
shall praise the
forever!
n shall remember

Lord!
May your hearts live forever!
All the ends of the earth shall remember
even the one who could not keep
himself alive
30 Posterity shall serve him,
it shall be told of the Lord to the
coming generation
31 they shall come and proclaim his
righteousness to a people yet
unborn
that he has done it.

THE A BOOK BIBLE

MORE THAN

I can count all my bone
they stare and gloat over me,
they divide my garments among them.

The Lord Is My Shepherd

23 A PSALM OF DAVID
The LORD is my shepherd, I shall
not want.
2 He makes me lie down in green
pastures
He leads me beside still waters
3 He restores my soul.
He leads me in paths of righteousness
for his name's sake

4 How good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell together in unity!

THE / A BOOK
MORE THAN BIBLE

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PREFACE

What is the Bible? At its most basic level, the Bible is a collection of 66 books that chronicles the history of the people of God. But to describe it merely as a historical document would be to miss its profound significance. The Bible is much more than a book; it tells an epic story of how God interacts with humanity, starting by working through the nation of Israel to bring order and beauty out of the chaos of our broken world. Throughout each page is the story of God wooing people back to Himself. This divine narrative reaches its climax in the coming of Jesus Christ, God’s Son, whose life, death, and resurrection fulfill God’s redemptive plan.

However, the story doesn’t end there—Christ has empowered us as believers to continue to live out God’s redemptive plan until Christ returns. The evidence of this plan is found in the testimonies of Jesus’ earliest followers and the birth of the early church, that complete this remarkable collection, divided into the Old Testament (before Jesus was born on earth) and the New Testament (the story of Jesus and His followers).

“The Bible is not a collection of stories, fables, myths, or merely human ideas about God. It is not a human book. Through the Holy Spirit, God revealed his person and plan to certain believers, who wrote down his message for his people. This process is known as inspiration. The writers wrote from their own personal, historical, and cultural contexts. Although they used their own minds, talents, language, and style, they wrote what God wanted them to write. Scripture is completely trustworthy because God was in control of its writing.”¹

God’s Word describes itself as “alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword” (**Hebrews 4:12**). This living nature means the Bible has the ability to speak into our daily lives with remarkable relevance, offering wisdom for decisions, comfort in difficulties, and

¹ *Life Application Study Bible*, Zondervan, 2015. 2072

guidance for relationships.² It reveals God’s character and purposes while helping us understand our own identity and worth. Beyond its historical accounts and moral wisdom, the Bible serves as a connection to God’s heart—an encounter with the mysterious, sacred, and supernatural presence of God³—weaving our lives into His unfolding story.

This is why we’ve titled this series “More Than a Book.” The Bible transcends the boundaries of ordinary literature. It’s a living text that speaks timeless, yet fresh, truth to each generation, with a transformative power that continues to change lives and communities. Over the next four weeks, we’ll explore how this absolutely unique and extraordinary collection of writings remains a source of life and is intended to bring us into deeper relationship with God.

² Proverbs 3:5-6; James 1:5; Psalm 34:18; Isaiah 41:10; 2 Corinthians 1:3-4; Ephesians 4:2-3; Colossians 3:13-14; Proverbs 17:17

³ 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

HOW THE BIBLE CAME TO BE

Lesson 1



Intro

What is your earliest memory of encountering the Bible?



Read and Respond

Read **2 Timothy 3:16-17** and **2 Peter 1:20-21** and answer the questions that follow.¹

2 Timothy 3:16-17

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:20-21

20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. 21 For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.



In your own words, how would you describe what it means for Scripture to be “God-breathed”?



The Timothy passage lists four specific uses of Scripture: teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Which of these have you experienced most recently as you have engaged with Scripture?



How does Peter’s description of prophecy² being “carried along by the Holy Spirit” (**2 Peter 1:20-21**) relate to Paul’s concept of Scripture being “God-breathed” (**2 Timothy 3:16**)?

² While the most well-known definition of prophecy is foretelling the future, it can also mean speaking forth from God. This passage is talking about all of the inspired writings of Scripture. **4**



What's the significance of Peter emphasizing that prophecy did not come from "the prophet's own interpretation" or "human will"? (2 Peter 1:20-21)



What implications do these passages have for how we should approach reading and studying the Bible?



Things to Know

"At least forty human authors composed the Bible over the span of more than 1,000 years, but this doesn't mean that the Bible is fragmented or haphazard. The 66 books of Scripture intertwine to tell a single glorious story—the story of God's creation, humanity's sin, and God's provision for the redemption of his people through Jesus Christ."³

The Bible began as an oral history—a story told verbally from one generation of Israelites to another. The stories, laws, rituals, prophecies, Psalms, and wisdom sayings were memorized, sung, and repeated over and over so they would live on in the lives and hearts of each new generation.

Eventually all of it was written down. The written form of the Torah (the first 5 books of the Old Testament) emerged around 500–450 BC.⁴

³Ward, Timothy. *Words of Life*. InterVarsity, 2009. 52–56

⁴These dates refer to the Torah's composition, not the dating of the historical events it records.

The process of recording the Hebrew Bible⁵—the historical, prophetic, and wisdom books—was completed around 400 BC.

For the New Testament, Jesus' teachings and actions were shared orally first and written down within the first generation of disciples. The early church carefully preserved eyewitness accounts like those of Matthew, Peter, and John by repetition and in written form. Paul's letters, and other letters written to the early church, which make up the majority of the New Testament, were read aloud. The earliest texts of the New Testament were written around AD 50 and Revelation, which concludes the New Testament, was written down around AD 95.

We believe that the original manuscript in its final form—called the autograph—is without error.⁶ “But the earliest copies of Scripture—the ‘autographs’—decayed into dust thousands of years ago. ... Every ancient edition of the Old and New Testament that survives today is a copy. [So,] how accurately did these many generations of not-so-inspired copyists preserve the inspired Scriptures? Early in the history of Israel, clans of professional copyists emerged to preserve the sacred writings of their people. ... Over time, Jewish copyists developed detailed practices for copying and counting letters to keep every syllable of the text pure. Near the end of the fifth century AD, a group of Jewish scholars known as the Masoretes standardized and sharpened these ancient practices.”⁷

But how did the ancient Jews decide which books made up the canon⁸ and are still a part of the Bible, the living Word of God, today? “No later than the second century BC, the Jewish people had already

⁵ The Old Testament

⁶ “The Old and New Testaments, inerrant as originally given, were verbally inspired by God and are a complete revelation of His will for the salvation of men and women.” Christian and Missionary Alliance Statement of Faith

⁷ Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 39

⁸ Canon comes from the Greek word for a reed plant that grows alongside the Nile River, *kanon*. “But how did this word for a tubular reed come to describe the books that are authoritative for God's people? It started when the Greeks began to cut these reeds—*kanones*—into specific lengths and use them as measuring sticks. A *kanon* became a tool that set standards and measured limits. That's how the word *kanon* came to imply an infallible standard. In the New Testament, Paul used this term to signify the all-sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice as God's standard—God's *kanon*—for life and faith (**Galatians 6:16**). By the fourth century AD, the meaning of the word ‘canon’ had expanded to describe the list of writings recognized as the infallible standard for God's people.” Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 51-52

identified which texts belonged in their canon, [those that were received from God and recognized as authoritative] and these texts were arranged in a deliberate order.”⁹ This canon is known as the Hebrew Bible or the TaNaK, which stands for Torah (Law), Neviim (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings), and while we have all the same books in our Old Testament, they are arranged in a different order.¹⁰

As for the New Testament, “This canon was breathed out by God as Christ-commissioned eyewitnesses and their close associates authored the books of the New Testament. A unanimous consensus emerged no later than the second century regarding the four Gospels, Acts, the letters of Paul, and at least the first letter from John. By the end of the fourth century, Christians had concluded that twenty-seven texts—the same texts still found in your New Testament today—could be traced back to apostolic eyewitnesses and their associates.”¹¹

While the original texts (autographs) were written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, we now have these texts accessible to us in multiple languages. In English, there are an abundance of different translations. Translators have carefully studied the original languages and, guided by the Holy Spirit, have made God’s Word understandable in our language. When choosing a translation, it is important to realize that while some try to stay close to the original by creating a word-for-word translation, others try to stay close to the original by creating a phrase by phrase equivalent. In addition, there are paraphrase versions available. But it is important to note that these paraphrases are not strict translations and include more personal interpretation. The key is to find a translation that helps you understand the biblical text’s original message and meaning.

⁹Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 54

¹⁰“When the Old Testament was translated into Greek, the editors of the Septuagint rearranged the texts in roughly chronological order and clustered them according to the genre of literature... Our Old Testament texts may not stand in precisely the same sequence as the scrolls that Jesus studied—but our Old Testament contains the same content that his Bible contained. This content is no less trustworthy simply because it is arranged in a different order.” Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 56

7 ¹¹Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 94



Application

How does understanding the Bible's formation strengthen or challenge your faith?

How might this knowledge change the way you approach reading the Bible?



Prayer

Write out a prayer of thanksgiving, thanking God for preserving His Word through generations and asking for wisdom in understanding it.

“Scripture is the fire that cleanses; it is the fire that refines. It is not enough simply to read it, but one must meditate upon it and keep it in the heart, like a treasure to which no thief has access.”
- St. Ephrem the Syrian



Memorization

Memorizing Scripture puts God's Word into our mind, soul, and spirit and allows us to have 24/7 access to the words and images that should be shaping us. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media and noise of the world is turned off. In addition, memorizing God's Word lets us access divinely inspired thoughts and wisdom, even when we aren't aware of it.

This week, memorize **2 Timothy 3:16-17** and/or **2 Peter 1:20-21**.

Here are a few techniques that you could use to help with memorization:

1. Write the passage on a card you can tape to a mirror, a window, or even the shower wall. Every day read the verse or passage, rehearsing it in your mind and heart. On a daily basis remind yourself of this Scripture until you know it by heart.
2. Make your own fill in the blank. Write out the verse or passage and leave key words out, which will allow you to fill in the words as you begin to commit them to memory. Consider adding more blank spaces each day you memorize so you can eventually say it all without prompts.

3. Write out the first letter of each word in the verse or passage. Then keep that with you throughout the week and use it as a way to remember what the verse says. For example **2 Timothy 3:16-17** in the NLT would look like this:
ASIIBGAIUTTUWITATMURWIWIOL. ICUWWAWATUTDWIR.
GUITPAEHPTDEGW.
4. Use the passage as a prayer to God. Praying Scripture can be a powerful way to both communicate with God and commit it to memory.
5. Use a free Scripture memorization app such as VerseLocker.



Meditation¹²

Christian meditation is about listening to God's voice through Scripture, which partners well with memorization. This practice slows us down and allows God to bring the Scripture we are memorizing to life in us.

Prepare: Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place.

- Arrange your space and your body for both comfort and attention.
- Place yourself in the presence of God.
- Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord.
- Ask Him to open your heart to His Word.

Meditate: Read the Scripture passage 2-3 times. Consider reading it quietly and out loud. Allow the words and images of this passage to remain in your thoughts as you continue to ask God to "give you spiritual wisdom and insight so you might grow in your knowledge of God." (**Ephesians 1:17**)

Invite: Invite God's Word to come alive in you.

¹² Christian meditation is about asking the Holy Spirit to fill us, unlike other forms of meditation which often ask you to empty yourself.

Prayer Requests

Sermon Notes

IS THE BIBLE RELIABLE?

Lesson 2

“Error-prone human beings put the Scriptures together, but God was at work among these inspired authors and editors, preventing them from introducing any errors into his written revelation. That’s why we can trust that ‘when the facts are known, the Scriptures ... properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything they affirm.’ Inerrancy does not require Scripture to be scientifically precise, and inerrancy certainly doesn’t rule out figurative language or numeric estimates in the Bible. ‘Scripture is inerrant, not in the sense of being absolutely precise by modern standards, but in the sense of making good its claims and achieving that measure of focused truth at which its authors aimed.’ ... God revealed his message through human authors who recorded truthful testimony in different genres and styles of writing. To whatever extent precision was necessary to express God’s truth, Scripture tells the truth with precision.”¹



Intro

What questions do you have about the Bible’s reliability? What questions have you heard other people ask about the Bible’s reliability?²

How might you respond to these questions?

¹Jones, Timothy P. *How We Got the Bible*. Rose Publishing, 2017. 14

13 ²For further reading on the Bible’s reliability see the resources at the end of this study guide.



Read and Respond

Read **Isaiah 40:8**; **Matthew 24:35**; **John 17:13-17**; and **Revelation 22:6**, and answer the following questions.

Isaiah 40:8

*The grass withers and the flowers fade,
but the word of our God stands forever."*

Matthew 24:35

35 [Jesus said] Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.

John 17:13-17

[Jesus, while praying to His Father, said] 13 "Now I am coming to you. I told them many things while I was with them in this world so they would be filled with my joy. 14 I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. 15 I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. 16 They do not belong to this world any more than I do. 17 Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth."

Revelation 22:6

6 Then the angel said to me, "Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon"



How do these passages collectively describe the nature and permanence of God's Word?



What does it mean for God's Word to "stand forever" in our rapidly changing world?



How does this truth about God's Word bring peace and reassurance to you personally?



What evidence have you seen in your own life of God's Word proving trustworthy and reliable?



Things to Know

The manuscript evidence for biblical reliability is remarkably strong for both the Old and New Testaments. For the Old Testament, the Dead Sea Scrolls represent the most significant discovery, containing portions of every Old Testament book except Esther and dating from 250 BC to AD 68. This discovery predated the previous oldest known manuscripts by 1,000 years and demonstrated remarkable consistency

with later Masoretic texts.³

The preservation work of the Masoretes (Jewish scholars from AD 500-1000) was incredibly detailed, and included counting letters, words, and verses, noting textual variations, and developing a sophisticated vowel pointing system with margin notes for accuracy.⁴

Additional Old Testament manuscripts include the Septuagint (Greek translation from 250-100 BC widely used by early Christians and quoted in the New Testament), the Samaritan Pentateuch (preserving ancient readings), and the Latin Vulgate (translated by Jerome around AD 400). These multiple manuscripts provide important cross-referencing opportunities for scholars to show incredible consistency and reliability throughout multiple generations.⁵

The New Testament manuscript evidence is even more extensive, far exceeding other ancient texts in both quantity and quality. While classical works like Caesar's Gallic War (9-10 manuscripts), Tacitus's Histories and Annals (2 manuscripts preserving 14.5 of 30 books), and Livy's Annals of the Roman People (35 surviving books from 142) have relatively sparse authentication,⁶ the New Testament boasts over 5,000 full or partial surviving Greek manuscripts.⁷ This extraordinary volume of textual evidence makes the New Testament one of the best-preserved works of antiquity. "Furthermore, the works of many an ancient author has been preserved only in manuscripts which date from the Middle Ages (sometimes the late Middle Ages), far removed from the time at which he lived and wrote. On the contrary, the time

³ These texts were the work of Jewish scholars, the Masorites.

⁴ "Masoretic Text." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., www.britannica.com/topic/Masoretic-text. Accessed 2 Dec. 2024.; Metzger, Bruce M., and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford University Press, 2005. 172-173

⁵ Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2004. 185-200

⁶ Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2004. 235

⁷ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Inc., 21 Nov. 2024, www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/Critical-methods;

"Biblical Manuscripts." *Houston Christian University*, 14 Oct. 2019, hc.edu/museums/dunham-bible-museum/tour-of-the-museum/past-exhibits/biblical-manuscripts/;

Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2004. 235

between the composition of the books of the New Testament and the earliest extant copies is relatively brief. Instead of a lapse of a millennium or more, as is the case of not a few classical authors, several papyrus manuscripts of portions of the New Testament are extant which were copied within a century or so after the composition of the original documents.”⁸

The Bible’s textual transmission over the centuries is remarkably accurate. Old and New Testament manuscripts show incredible agreement in their wording, with any variations typically affecting just minor things like spelling or grammar rather than the actual meaning and doctrine.⁹

Manuscript reliability is further strengthened by ongoing archaeological discoveries and scholarly research. Each new find continues to confirm the careful preservation of biblical texts across centuries and cultures. The meticulous work of ancient scribes, combined with modern scholarly analysis, provides a solid foundation for trusting the reliability of both the Old and New Testament texts we have today.¹⁰

In addition, the internal consistency of the Bible is also extraordinarily strong. The Bible was composed over 1,500 years by about 40 authors from diverse backgrounds, but it has a unified and consistent message.

⁸ Metzger, Bruce M., and Bart D. Ehrman. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. Oxford University Press, 2005. 35

⁹ Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2004. 186, 215

¹⁰ Bruce, Frederick Fyvie, and N T. Wright. *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009. 94–101; Wegner, Paul D. *The Journey from Texts to Translations:*

17 *The Origin and Development of the Bible*. Baker Academic, 2004. 207, 172–173



Application

? How does the evidence for biblical reliability affect your relationship with God?

? How does the trustworthiness of Scripture impact:
Your daily decisions?

Your view of the future?

Your response to your culture and to cultural changes?

? How can you share this information with others who have doubts?



How can we help others understand the reliability of Scripture without being argumentative?



Now that you have learned about what the Bible is, how it came to be, and how reliable it is, how does faith (**Hebrews 11:1**)¹¹ play a role in your interaction with the Word of God?



Prayer

Write out a prayer of thanksgiving to God for preserving His Word and providing evidence of its reliability.

¹¹Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see.



Memorization

Memorizing Scripture puts God's Word into our mind, soul, and spirit and allows us to have 24/7 access to the words and images that should be shaping us. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media and noise of the world is turned off. In addition, memorizing God's Word lets us access divinely inspired thoughts and wisdom, even when we aren't aware of it.

This week choose one or more of the following passages to memorize:

Isaiah 40:8; Matthew 24:35; John 17:13-17; and/or Revelation 22:6

Here are a few techniques you could use to help with memorization:

1. Write the passage on a card you can tape to a mirror, a window, or even the shower wall. Every day read the verse or passage, rehearsing it in your mind and heart. On a daily basis remind yourself of this Scripture until you know it by heart.
2. Make your own fill in the blank. Write out the verse or passage and leave key words out, which will allow you to fill in the words as you begin to commit them to memory. Consider adding more blank spaces each day you memorize so you can eventually say it all without prompts.
3. Write out the first letter of each word in the verse or passage. Then keep that with you throughout the week and use it as a way to remember what the verse says.
4. Use the passage as a prayer to God. Praying Scripture can be a powerful way to both communicate with God and commit it to memory.
5. Use a free Scripture memorization app such as VerseLocker.



Meditation

Christian meditation is about listening to God's voice through Scripture, which partners well with memorization. This practice slows us down and allows God to bring the Scripture we are memorizing to life in us.

Prepare: Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place.

- Arrange your space and your body for both comfort and attention.
- Place yourself in the presence of God.
- Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord.
- Ask Him to open your heart to His Word.

Meditate: Read the Scripture passage 2-3 times. Consider reading it quietly and out loud. Allow the words and images of this passage to remain in your thoughts as you continue to ask God to "give you spiritual wisdom and insight so you might grow in your knowledge of God." (**Ephesians 1:17**)

Invite: Invite God's Word to come alive in you.

Prayer Requests

Sermon Notes

THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE

Lesson 3



Intro

What's your favorite type of literature to read? (i.e. mystery, suspense, poetry, fiction, nonfiction, etc.)

Which parts of the Bible do you find easiest/hardest to understand?



Read and Respond

Read **Psalm 19:7-10** and **Luke 24:44-45** and answer the questions that follow.

Psalm 19:7-10

*7 The instructions of the LORD are perfect,
reviving the soul.*

*The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.*

*8 The commandments of the LORD are right,
bringing joy to the heart.*

*The commands of the LORD are clear,
giving insight for living.*


*9 Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever.
The laws of the LORD are true;
each one is fair.*


*10 They are more desirable than gold,
even the finest gold.*


*They are sweeter than honey,
even honey dripping from the comb.*

Luke 24:44-45 (After Jesus' resurrection)

44 Then [Jesus] said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

 How have you personally experienced the benefits mentioned in **Psalm 19:7-10** in your own interactions with Scripture?

 In **Luke 24:44-45**, it says Jesus "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." What does this suggest about our need for divine help in understanding God's Word? How might this shape your approach to studying the Bible?

 How does **Luke 24:44** illuminate the unity of Scripture, with Jesus showing how the Law, Prophets, and Psalms all point to Him? What implications does this have for how we read the Old Testament?



Things to Know

Although the Bible is inspired by God through His Holy Spirit, “In some ways [the Bible] is just like any other book—it is written communication from an author to an intended audience, expressing ideas and values through a text. An important but easily overlooked consequence of this fact is that we should therefore read it in the same ways that we read other literature.”¹

The Bible contains diverse literary genres (narrative, poetry, wisdom, prophecy, and letters, etc.) that require different approaches for proper interpretation and understanding. Each genre serves a unique purpose in conveying God’s message. While the Bible is composed of multiple books and genres, it is important to keep in mind that it still tells one unified story. Each book is intended to be read, and interpreted, in the light of the whole.

Narrative texts, found in the historical books of the Old Testament and in the Gospels and Acts, tell stories of God’s interaction with humanity through historical accounts, biographies, and parables. These should be read with attention to plot development, character arcs, and historical context, while recognizing that ancient historical writing differs from modern historical writing. For instance, although John in his Gospel account was writing about actual historical events, he wasn’t as concerned about the timeline of occurrence, as he was about the meaning of Jesus’ words and actions.

Poetry and Wisdom Literature represent more artistic and reflective genres. Biblical poetry, found in books like Psalms and Song of Solomon, uses parallelism, metaphor, and emotional expression to convey spiritual truths and human experiences. Wisdom Literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, etc.) provides practical guidance and philosophical reflection on life’s meaning. These genres require readers to appreciate figurative language and avoid overly literal interpretations.


¹ Lubeck, Ray. *Read the Bible for a Change: Understanding and Responding to God’s Word*. Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010. 9


Prophetic Literature combines historical proclamation with future prediction, often using highly symbolic language. Books like Isaiah and Revelation require understanding of prophetic conventions, symbolic imagery, and the historical context of both the prophet and his audience.

Letters, particularly Paul’s Epistles, address specific situations in early churches while establishing theological foundations. These should be read with attention to the original recipients’ circumstances while extracting universal principles.

When approaching different biblical genres, common interpretation mistakes include:

- Reading poetry as literal history
- Treating prophecy like newspaper headlines
- Ignoring the original context of letters
- Missing literary devices in narratives
- Applying wisdom sayings as absolute promises

 How have you seen these mistakes being made by yourself or others as you have studied Scripture?

 How might we continue to learn how to avoid these interpretation mistakes in the future?²

27 ²For example, use a trusted commentary or study Bible or check out a Bible Project video.

To bridge the cultural gap between ancient texts and modern application, readers can:

- Study the historical and cultural context.
- Identify the original meaning and purpose.
 - For example, the Gospel of Mark emphasizes action and immediacy, while John’s Gospel focuses more on theological reflection through narrative.
- Extract timeless principles.
- Apply these principles to contemporary situations.
- Read it in community as it was originally intended (having more than one voice often helps with interpretation).

The key to reading the Bible effectively is recognizing how each genre communicates truth differently while working together to reveal God’s message. Good interpretation maintains the balance between understanding the text in its original context and finding relevant applications for readers today.³

The good news is that today there is no lack of resources from trusted scholars that have devoted countless hours to understanding the Bible in this way. We can lean heavily on both those who have gone before us and on the Holy Spirit to help us in understanding how this great work of literature is “alive and active” (**Hebrews 4:12**) in our lives today.

³ See the “For Further Study” page at the end of this study guide for a good place to start.



Application



Did this information surprise or challenge you? Perhaps you felt a sense of relief, or maybe your curiosity was sparked. Reflect on what rose up in you and write down some thoughts.



How might understanding the different genres used in the Bible affect your Bible reading?



Which genres do you gravitate toward? Which do you tend to skip past?



What steps can you take to better understand unfamiliar genres?



Prayer

Write out a prayer asking God for ongoing wisdom in understanding His Word in its various genres.



Memorization

Memorizing Scripture puts God's Word into our mind, soul, and spirit and allows us to have 24/7 access to the words and images that should be shaping us. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media and noise of the world is turned off. In addition, memorizing God's Word lets us access divinely inspired thoughts and wisdom, even when we aren't aware of it.

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2. Make your own fill in the blank. Write out the verse or passage and leave key words out, which will allow you to fill in the words as you begin to commit them to memory. Consider adding more blank spaces each day you memorize so you can eventually say it all without prompts.
3. Write out the first letter of each word in the verse or passage. Then keep that with you throughout the week and use it as a way to remember what the verse says.
4. Use the passage as a prayer to God. Praying Scripture can be a powerful way to both communicate with God and commit it to memory.
5. Use a free Scripture memorization app such as VerseLocker.



Meditation

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- Arrange your space and your body for both comfort and attention.
- Place yourself in the presence of God.
- Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord.
- Ask Him to open your heart to His Word.

Meditate: Read the Scripture passage 2-3 times. Consider reading it quietly and out loud. Allow the words and images of this passage to remain in your thoughts as you continue to ask God to "give you spiritual wisdom and insight so you might grow in your knowledge of God." (**Ephesians 1:17**)

Invite: Invite God's Word to come alive in you.

Prayer Requests

Sermon Notes

LIVING BY THE BOOK

Lesson 4



Intro

Share a time when Scripture directly impacted a decision you made.

What challenges do you face in applying the Bible to your daily life?



Read and Respond

Read **James 1:22-25**; **Hebrews 4:12**; and **Psalms 119:105** and answer the questions that follow.

James 1:22-25

22 But don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. 23 For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. 24 You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. 25 But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.

Hebrews 4:12

12 For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

Psalm 119:105

*Your word is a lamp to guide my feet
and a light for my path.*




What common themes do you see running through all three of these passages about God's Word?





How would you describe the difference between listening to God's Word and doing what it says?



What obstacles might prevent us from moving from just "hearing" to actually "doing" God's Word?

 **Hebrews 4:12** describes God’s Word as “alive and powerful.” How have you experienced the living, active, and powerful nature of Scripture in your own life?

 In these passages the Word of God is described as a mirror, a sword, and a lamp. How has Scripture shown itself to be each one of these things for you?

 What are some other illustrations, pictures, metaphors, or descriptions you would use to describe God’s Word and what it means to you?



Things to Know

“Some passages are there to obey. But surprisingly, a large amount of the Bible isn’t telling me to do anything in particular. For example, how does a willing Bible reader obey the information about the materials and dimensions of the tabernacle (**Exodus 35-40**)? The killing of Sisera by Jael (**Judges 4**)? The genealogy and list of musicians in **1 Chronicles 6**? The description of universal sinfulness in **Psalms 53**? The trumpet judgments of **Revelation 8-9**? One of the shortcomings of focusing on ‘applying’ the Bible is that it tends to create an expectation that the Bible’s main (sole) purpose is to reform my actions. But there is an inward dimension to responding faithfully to God’s Word as well. The author’s intended purpose of some biblical passages is to offer comfort, or to instill hope, or to pronounce blessing, or to demonstrate God’s character through telling us about his actions in the past, or to offer us promises. In each of these cases, the author wants to involve his readers. We are urged to respond, although the appropriate response will not take the form of a sequence of steps or an action plan. ... Perhaps another way of thinking about [applying the Bible] is to imagine ourselves as being the ideal conversation partner. We not only pay full attention to what the speaker is saying, but we pick up on all the cues and clues, and we cooperate fully by affirming what is said, voicing enthusiastically and passionately our agreement, embracing every suggestion, and complying with every request or command.”¹



Has your view of “applying Scripture” been too narrow? In what ways might you broaden your understanding of biblical application?

? When you read passages that don't have obvious action steps (like genealogies or historical accounts), what is your typical response? How might you engage with these passages more meaningfully?

? What could it mean for you to be an "ideal conversation partner" with Scripture? How could this change your engagement with the Bible?

The journey from being merely hearers to becoming doers of God's Word is an essential part of the Christian walk (**James 1:22-25**). Many believers face a gap between biblical knowledge and the practical application or living it out—often struggling with obstacles like cultural pressures, personal comfort, or uncertainty about how to apply it (**Romans 12:2**). The key to bridging this gap lies in developing intentional strategies for response or application, such as setting specific action steps, finding ways to reflect and respond, and creating accountability systems (**Hebrews 10:24-25**). Applying Scripture is always contextual. Although Scripture's truth and spiritual realities transcend culture, its application should incarnate our current time and space. The beauty of this is that we get to rely on the Holy Spirit to help us on this journey (**John 14:26; Romans 8:26**) and we are blessed to do this within community—the Body of Christ (**1 Corinthians 12:27**).


In addition, the Bible is a living and active guide for daily decision-making and for navigating modern challenges (**Hebrews 4:12**). This involves carefully examining biblical principles and thoughtfully applying them to contemporary situations, while balancing context, original intent, and universal truth (**2 Timothy 3:16-17; Psalm 119:105**). Often this takes interaction and discussion with others. And again, the Holy Spirit is the one illuminating truth and empowering believers to live it out—we don't do this alone (**John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:10-13**). Personal growth and transformation—becoming more like Jesus—is the natural outcome of not just knowing but living out God's Word (**2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 1:6**).





Application

? How are you currently relying on the Holy Spirit in your Bible reading? What could it look like to be more dependent on His guidance?

? How does your church community help you understand and respond to Scripture? Are there ways you could engage more deeply with others in this process?

 In a world where people can disagree about passages of Scripture, and yet still love Jesus, how could we encourage people to go about discussions in a loving and person-honoring way?

 How has your understanding of “being a doer of the Word” expanded after considering these perspectives?²

 What specific passage of Scripture has recently shaped your understanding of God’s character? How has this impacted your faith journey?

² See also **Galatians 5:22-23** and **John 13:35**



Prayer

Write out a prayer asking God for strength and wisdom to live out His Word daily.



Memorization

Memorizing Scripture puts God's Word into our mind, soul, and spirit and allows us to have 24/7 access to the words and images that should be shaping us. It gives the mind somewhere to go when all the media and noise of the world is turned off. In addition, memorizing God's Word lets us access divinely inspired thoughts and wisdom, even when we aren't aware of it.

This week choose one or all of the following passages to memorize: **James 1:22-25**; **Hebrews 4:12**; and/or **Psalms 119:105**

Here are a few techniques you could use to help with memorization:

1. Write the passage on a card you can tape to a mirror, a window, or even the shower wall. Every day read the verse or passage, rehearsing it in your mind and heart. On a daily basis remind yourself of this Scripture until you know it by heart.

2. Make your own fill in the blank. Write out the verse or passage and leave key words out, which will allow you to fill in the words as you begin to commit them to memory. Consider adding more blank spaces each day you memorize so you can eventually say it all without prompts.
3. Write out the first letter of each word in the verse or passage. Then keep that with you throughout the week and use it as a way to remember what the verse says.
4. Use the passage as a prayer to God. Praying Scripture can be a powerful way to both communicate with God and commit it to memory.
5. Use a free Scripture memorization app such as VerseLocker.



Meditation

Christian meditation is about listening to God's voice through Scripture, which partners well with memorization. This practice slows us down and allows God to bring the Scripture we are memorizing to life in us.

Prepare: Prepare yourself to meditate on Scripture by choosing a comfortable and quiet place.

- Arrange your space and your body for both comfort and attention.
- Place yourself in the presence of God.
- Release your anxieties and to-do list to the Lord.
- Ask Him to open your heart to His Word.

Meditate: Read the Scripture passage 2-3 times. Consider reading it quietly and out loud. Allow the words and images of this passage to remain in your thoughts as you continue to ask God to "give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God." (**Ephesians 1:17**)

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Prayer Requests

Sermon Notes

FOR FURTHER STUDY

How to Read the Bible Book by Book

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