

bethel
making disciples



Core Discipleship Curriculum

Module 1: God's Word

What is the Bible and how do I use it?

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October 2008

God's Word

LESSON 1

The Bible is God's Word.

Objective:

Each participant:

- recognizes the authority of the Bible and desires its input in his/her life.
- becomes familiar with Bible contents and physical layout.

Verses:

- *2 Timothy 3:14-17*
- *2 Peter 1:19-21*
- *Psalms 19*

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, look up the five scripture verses (in bold) and answer questions 1-8. The reading has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1 What is the Bible and what does it say about itself?

God communicates with mankind through His divinely inspired Word. In the past, God's primary mode of communication was to speak directly to people like Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. God then spoke through the person of Jesus and the writings of the apostles. Some of these revelations God set apart to be preserved. The Bible is a collection of the preserved revelations of God.

We could not have known with any certainty Who God is or what He has done without His divine revelation. We could not have known what our response ought to be in belief and actions unless He has imparted it through His Word. The Bible is the written Word of God to human beings.

Also God gives life and strength to His people through the Bible. As essential as food and drink are for physical growth, so is the Bible absolutely essential for spiritual growth.

Read **Matthew 4:4** and **Deuteronomy 8:3**.

1. During the week, how often do you read the Bible (number of days/length of time)? How is it helping you grow spiritually?

The Bible itself claims to be inspired by God. Read **2 Timothy 3:14-17** and **2 Peter 1:19-21**.

2. If the Bible were the words of wise men, how would you use it in setting your life direction and making decisions?

3. Since the Bible is God's Word, how should you use it in setting your life direction and making decisions?

Some ways the Bible describes itself are listed below. The Bible is:

- All we need to know God *Luke 16:29,31*
- Faith-building *Romans 10:17*
- Flawless *Proverbs 30:5*
- For everyone *Romans 16:26*
- Life-changing *Hebrews 4:12*
- To be obeyed *Luke 8:21; James 1:22*
- True *Psalms 119:160, John 17:17*

The Bible gives many pictures of itself to convey particular aspects of the truth. Some symbols of the Bible are listed below. A more complete list can be found in the supplemental reading.

- **Water:** it is life-giving, refreshing, and a cleansing agent.
Psalm 119:5,9; John 15:3, 17:17; Ephesians 5:26
- **Bread:** it is the nourishment, ever fresh, and meant for daily consumption
Exodus 16 along with John 1:1 and 6:48-50; Deuteronomy 8:3; Matthew 4:4
- **Fire:** it burns, cleanses, and purges all that is contrary to its holy standard.
Jeremiah 23:29
- **Gold:** it is of priceless value; it can withstand the test of fire.
Job 28; Psalm 19:7-10, 119:72,127; Proverbs 8:10

Read Psalm 19:7-11

4. 4. What are some benefits of reading God's Word? Which is the most meaningful to you? Explain.

Section 2 What did Jesus say about the Bible?

Jesus is the central focus of the entire Bible. Therefore, after reflecting on what the Bible has to say about itself, it is important to consider how Jesus viewed and used the Bible.

Jesus' Treatment of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is the Bible that Jesus used. He accepted the Old Testament canon without any modifications¹ and submitted to its authority². He considered it authoritative in matters of controversy³. Jesus said that He came to fulfill the Scriptures, and that all Scriptures were indeed fulfilled in Him⁴. Jesus also claimed that the purpose of the Old Testament was to reveal Himself⁵.

Jesus treated Old Testament narratives as straightforward facts, as illustrated by the following list:

Old Testament Text	Jesus referring to the Old Testament
Genesis 1 and 2	Matthew 19:4-5; Mark 10:6-8
Abel	Luke 11:51
Noah	Matthew 24:37-39; Luke 17:26-27
Abraham	John 8:56
Sodom and Gomorrah	Matthew 10:15, 11:23-24; Luke 10:12
Lot	Luke 17:28-32
Isaac and Jacob	Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28
The burning bush	Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37
The manna	John 6:31, 49, 58
The wilderness serpent	John 3:14
Moses as lawgiver	Matthew 8:4, 19:8; Mark 1:44, 7:10, 10:5; Luke 5:14; John 5:46, 7:19
Elijah and Elisha	Luke 4:24-27
David	Luke 6:3-4
Solomon	Matthew 6:29, 12:42
False prophets	Luke 6:26
Jonah	Matthew 12:40-41

Jesus quoted the Bible to battle the temptation of the devil⁶, to show how He was fulfilling prophecy⁷, and to foretell prophesied events that are yet to come⁸. Jesus taught that the Bible was unbreakable⁹. Jesus accepted without controversy the authorship of Moses¹⁰, Isaiah¹¹, David¹², and Daniel¹³.

Jesus' Treatment of the New Testament

In Mars Hill Church's booklet "Gospel Class," Jesus view of the New Testament is summarized:

"Jesus promised that the Holy spirit would inspire the writing of the [New Testament] gospels and epistles¹⁴. Jesus also said that His people would recognize His teaching¹⁵. This is possible because the Holy spirit who inspired the writing of scripture also teaches it to God's people in whom He dwells¹⁶."

5. Jesus accepted the Old Testament as true, without error, and authoritative. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Section 3 What's in the Bible?

The Bible contains 66 books, written by 40 authors, in three languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic), over a period of about 1,600 years. These books together make up a cohesive Book which reveals God's plan of salvation from sin and judgment through Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Timothy 3:15-17 again.

6. Prior to listing several useful aspects of the Bible, Paul appears to state its overall purpose in verse 15. What is this overall purpose?

The Bible is made up of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word testament means a covenant, or “promises made to humanity by God, as revealed in Scripture.”¹⁷ Though there are many covenants in the Bible, there are two that tend to be central: the Covenant of Law (the Old Testament) and the Covenant of Grace (the New Testament).

Old Testament

The books of the Old Testament can be divided into:

Law	History	Poetry	Prophecy (Major)	Prophecy (Minor)
Genesis	Joshua	Job	Isaiah	Hosea
Exodus	Judges	Psalms	Jeremiah	Joel
Leviticus	Ruth	Proverbs	Lamentations	Amos
Nimbers	1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Ezekiel	Obadiah
Deuteronomy	2 Samuel	Song of Solomon	Daniel	Jonah
	1 Kings			Micah
	2 Kings			Nahum
	1 Chronicles			Habakkuk
	2 Chronicles			Zephaniah
	Ezra			Haggai
	Nehemiah			Zechariah
	Esther			Malachi

Much of the Old Testament is the history of God's interactions with humans, and specifically with His chosen people Israel. The Old Testament was written primarily in Hebrew over a long period of time, from approximately 1200 B.C to 400 B.C.

New Testament

The books of the New Testament can be divided into:

History	Letters (Epistles) from Paul	General Letters (Epistles)
Matthew	Romans	Hebrews
Mark	1 Corinthians	James
Luke	2 Corinthians	1 Peter
John	Galatians	2 Peter
Acts	Ephesians	1 John
	Phillipians	2 John
	Colossians	3 John
	1 Thessalonians	Jude
	2 Thessalonians	Revelation
	1 Timothy	
	2 Timothy	
	Titus	
	Philemon	

The gospels are the first four books of the New Testament which give account of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. The book of Acts gives the history of Jesus' disciples following his return to heaven. The epistles are letters from apostles or church leaders to Christian churches unfolding doctrine and Christian living, often to combat a heresy. The New Testament was written primarily in Greek over a hundred-year period from about A.D. 45 to A.D. 140.

7. If you have not yet memorized the order of the books of the Bible, consider doing so with your small group. Ask your leader for suggestions.

Section 4 What does Bethel believe about the Bible?

Bethel's Statement of Faith presents Bethel's doctrinal beliefs. A complete statement of faith can be found on Bethel's website and in the Bethel Basic Training booklet. The following excerpt explains Bethel's beliefs about the Scriptures:

"We believe the Bible and only the Bible to be God's infallible word and the Christian's supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice. We affirm our belief in the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scripture in their original autographs. (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:20-21; 1 Peter 1:25)"

What is inspiration?

Inspiration describes the process by which Divine revelation was recorded. An older version of Webster's defines inspiration in relation to the Scriptures as "the supernatural influence of the Spirit of God on the human mind, by which the prophets and apostles and sacred writers were qualified to set forth Divine truth without any mixture of error."¹⁸

What do "verbal" and "plenary" mean?

The terms verbal and plenary inspiration refer to the mode of inspiration. How did it happen that God's Spirit influenced the prophets, apostles, and sacred writers? There are many views on how this process occurred. The view Bethel holds is verbal and plenary.

In reference to inspiration, the term verbal means "by means of words." This means that not only were the main thoughts or ideas inspired, but the very words which conveyed them. The term plenary means "complete in every part, full." Verbal and plenary together mean that God inspired even the words, and there is no word in the Bible that was not inspired by God.

There are two key elements to keep in mind for a Biblical perspective of inspiration: God wrote the Bible, and men wrote the Bible. God could have written the Bible himself, as He did the original Ten Commandments (Exodus 32-34) or on Belshazzar's wall (Daniel 5). But, as Kevin J. Conner writes in *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine*¹⁹,

"[God] chose to include the goal of the book in its production, that is the uniting of God and man. The reason God is revealing Himself to mankind is to bring them into union with Himself. Thus He produced this written revelation by uniting divine and human faculties in a unique way. It is God's word clothed with humanity."

What is Infallibility?

There are several important truths about the Bible that follow from its Divine inspiration. Two are highlighted in Bethel's Beliefs and will be discussed here: its infallibility, and its supreme authority in all matters of faith and practice.

Infallibility can be defined as “incapable of error”²⁰ or “absolutely trustworthy or sure.”²¹ Because it is the Word of God, we can trust absolutely in the truth and certainty of the Bible.

What do we mean by Authority?

The authority of the Bible rises from its infallibility. As Conner puts it, “If the Scriptures are inspired and infallible, then they must become the supreme authority for all Christians concerning their faith and morals.”²² The Bible is the final court of appeals for doctrine and practice for all believers.

8. If you have concerns about Bethel's statement of belief concerning the Scriptures, please feel free to discuss them with your leader.

Optional Small Group Questions

1. How did you perceive the Bible before beginning this study? Has your perception changed?
2. Share which description or picture of the Bible was most compelling to you and why.
3. How does knowing the way Jesus viewed the Bible affect your own view of it?
4. If you read something by an author you trust that contradicted something you know is in the Bible, how would you respond?
5. If you had held a personal opinion about something for a long time, and then discovered something in the Bible contradicting that opinion, how would you respond?
6. Practically, has the Bible been the final authority in your life? Give an example.

References

1. Matthew 5:17-19
2. See the following groups: Matthew 8:4, Mark 1:44, and Leviticus 13:49; Matthew 15:3-6, Luke 2:51, John 19: 26-27, Exodus 20:12, and Deuteronomy 5:16; Matthew 26:52-56 and Isaiah 53:7-8
3. Matthew 19:3-8; Mark 12:26; John 7:19, 10:34-36
4. Matthew 5:17-20; Luke 24:25-47
5. John 5:39, 46
6. Matthew 4; Luke 4
7. Mark 14:27, see also Zechariah 13:7
8. Mark 14:62, see also Psalm 110:1 and Daniel 7:13
9. Matthew 5:18; Luke 16:17; John 10:35
10. Mark 7:10
11. Matthew 13:14; Mark 7:6
12. Mark 12:36
13. Matthew 24:15
14. John 14:25-26;16:13
15. John 10:4, 27, 18:37
16. 1 Corinthians 2:12-14
17. Dictionary.com, “covenant,” accessed 8/11/08
18. Conner, Kevin J., *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine: A Practical Guide to Christian Belief*. (Portland, OR: City Bible Publishing, 1980), p.25
19. Conner, p.28
20. Merriam-Webster.com, “infallibility,” accessed 8/11/08
21. Dictionary.com, “infallibility,” accessed 8/11/08
22. Conner, p.39

God's Word

LESSON 2

How did we get the Bible?

Objective:

Each participant:

- has confidence in the accuracy and authority of the Bible,
- understands the differences between translations enough to choose a primary version, and
- is beginning to love the Bible as God's Word

Verses:

Deut 17:18-20

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the scripture verses (in bold) and answer questions 1-7. The reading has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1 How did we get our English Bible?

The sheer existence of the Bible is a miracle. The process that has occurred to bring the Bible into being is fascinating and wondrous. Many books have been written describing this process, but to keep it simple and brief, we will describe a five-step process explained by Mars Hill Church in their booklet, *Gospel Class*.¹

God ► Revelation/Inspiration ► Transmission ►
Translation ► Interpretation ► Application ► Your Life

Revelation is God's miraculous communication of Himself and His truth to humans. Inspiration is the process by which revelation was recorded. Revelation and inspiration are combined here because they often took place simultaneously as the Bible was written. This original copy of the Scripture is called the autographa or, as in Bethel's Statement of Belief, the "original autographs."

Transmission happened as trained scribes carefully copied the original Scriptures by hand. While these handwritten copies occasionally had minor errors (such as spelling and punctuation), there were no major changes. They were accepted as accurate and authoritative by God's people.² Jesus Himself,³ as well as the apostles⁴ and many of the prophets, taught from copies of these books and treated them as authoritative and trustworthy.

1. Read Deuteronomy 17:19-20. Although this command was given directly to kings of Israel, you can see the relevance to the subject of transmission. What are some of the benefits of daily reading the Bible, even after transmission, listed in these verses?

Translations are created so that people can read the Bible in non-original languages. The very first translation of the Bible was of the Old Testament into Greek, known as the Septuagint, in 250 B.C.⁵ It was widely used among ancient Hellenistic Jews, and later became the main text of the Old Testament in the early church. This was the version the apostles used almost exclusively in quoting the Old Testament in their writings.⁶ John Wycliffe is credited with the first complete English translation of the Bible, which he began and John Purvey completed in AD 1388.

Interpretation happens when a person reads the Bible in a language he can understand and determines its meaning. Jesus promised us the Holy Spirit to help us correctly understand God's Word.⁷ It is important to remember that there is only one true interpretation of each text of the Bible. We must be careful to read the truth out of the Bible rather than reading our own ideas into it.

A common question about interpretation is: should the Bible be interpreted literally? The answer is : yes. This is where it is helpful to understand the types of literature in the Bible, which you can learn about in the supplemental reading from Lesson One. Both literal and figurative sections of Scripture have a literal meaning. The Bible often uses figures of speech, poetry or poetic images to communicate literal truth. For example, in Isaiah 40:31 it says "those who wait for the LORD will ...mount up with wings like eagles." This does not mean that those people will literally sprout wings and fly like eagles. It is still communicating the literal truth that those who wait on the LORD will rise above challenges with ease.

2. What is the key to Bible interpretation? Read the following verses: Matthew 5:17, Luke 24:27, Luke 24:44-45, John 5:39, and write your answer below.

Application is how we use truth in our lives. We learn the principles in the Bible, then make changes in our thoughts and actions by God's empowering grace so that our lives begin to match up with the Bible. Though there is only one true interpretation of each text, the applications can be endless.

3. Read Matthew 22:39. The interpretation is quickly apparent. List some applications of this verse for your life and challenge yourself to do one this week.

Mars Hill Church sums up this five-step process

(Revelation►Transmission►Translation►Interpretation►Application) in this way:

*"In this five-step process, we see how God speaks to us and cares deeply about our lives. We also see how the chasm between God and us is graciously filled by God's revelation which is more accurate and true than our human speculation (e.g. religion and philosophy). While the first step (Revelation/Inspiration of the autographa) is the only one that is guaranteed to be perfect, the other steps are indeed accurate. We must be increasingly careful as we move through the steps, however, because the opportunity for error increases at each step."*⁸

Section 2: How was it decided which books are God's revelation?

The Canon

The word "canon" is from the Latin, meaning "ruler, standard."⁹ It is now often used to refer to the books of the Bible, which have been measured by a standard and have been recognized as inspired by God.

The books of the Old Testament are accepted with little, if any, dispute. It has been suggested that Ezra the scribe gathered the Old Testament books into the accepted canon after the close of the Babylonian Captivity.¹⁰

Almost all the New Testament books were accepted by the end of the second century.^{11,12} The canon was finalized by the end of the fourth century. The books which were commonly in use as Scripture were confirmed and officially declared part of the biblical canon in the West at the Damatine Council of Rome (A.D. 382) and the Council of Carthage (A.D. 397).¹² There were no widespread debates on the canonization of any of the books until the Catholic Council of Trent in 1546.¹³

Henry C. Thiessen, in his "Introduction to the New Testament"¹⁴ states four broad principles used to test the books of the New Testament:

1. **As to Apostolicity:** was the book written by an apostle, or, if not, did the author of the book sustain such a relation to an apostle as to raise his book to the level of the apostolic books?
2. **As to Contents:** were the contents of a given book of such a spiritual character as to entitle it to this rank?
3. **As to Universality:** was the book universally received in the church?
4. **As to Inspiration:** did the book give evidence of being divinely inspired? This was the ultimate test: everything finally had to give way to it.

George Salmon, in "A Historical Introduction to the Study of the Books of the New Testament",¹⁵ emphasizes the hand of God in the formation of the New Testament canon:

"It is a remarkable fact that we have no early interference of church authority in the making of a canon; no council discussed this subject; no formal decisions were made. The canon seems to have shaped itself ... Let us remember that this non-interference of authority is a valuable topic of evidence to the genuineness of our Gospels; for it thus appears that it was owing to no ... [outside] authority, but by their own weight, that they crushed all rivals out of existence."

4. The above quote observes that the Biblical canon shaped itself. Read Isaiah 55:10-11. What characteristic of God's Word is described that fits this observation?

Section 3: How can I trust that the Bible is accurate?

Returning to the five-step process described in Section 1, we will look a little more closely at the “Transmission” step. Some people have difficulty believing that the early copies of the Bible (from which our versions are directly translated) are trustworthy.

There are three forms of evidence we will look at briefly here. A more detailed examination can be found in the supplemental reading. Military historian C. Sanders lists and explains three basic principles for determining historical reliability of ancient texts.¹⁶ These three tests are used for determining the historicity of any ancient text: the *bibliographical test* (number and quality of manuscripts), the *internal evidence test* (checking for contradictions within the text), and the *external evidence test* (the accuracy of the text in relation to other works of history and archaeological findings from that period).

The Bibliographical Test: Evidence of reliability from ancient manuscripts

This test seeks to determine the historicity of an ancient document by analyzing the quantity and quality of copied manuscripts, as well as how far removed they are from the time of the originals. Among ancient Western literature, the New Testament manuscripts are unparalleled in quantity, quality, and proximity to the original. There are more than five thousand Greek manuscripts, about eight thousand Latin manuscripts, and another thousand manuscripts in other languages, the earliest from less than 100 years after the original autographs.¹⁷

These 14,000 manuscripts agree with one another to 99.5% accuracy.¹⁷ The variations are almost completely grammar, spelling, punctuation, and accidental omissions or duplications of words or phrases. Only about four hundred variations have any significant bearing on the meaning of a passage, and most are footnoted in modern English translations. No Christian doctrine is founded solely or even primarily on textually disputed passages.¹⁸

Not only are the manuscripts of the New Testament of high quality, great quantity, and astounding accuracy, but the manuscripts of the Old Testament are trustworthy as well. Before the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls from 1947-1956, the oldest Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament were from the 9th century A.D.¹⁹ (there are some Greek manuscripts dating from the 4th century A.D.²⁰). The biblical manuscripts found in those caves pushed the date back more than a thousand years to the 2nd century B.C.²¹ While there are some differences in a few of the manuscripts, most have little to no variation.²¹ This provides confidence in the transmission of the Old Testament manuscripts over the centuries.

The Internal Test: Evidence of reliability from fulfilled prophecy and harmony throughout the Bible

There are many books written on the unity of the Bible. This is an important issue for, just as in a courtroom a witness' testimony would not be trusted if he contradicted himself, so God's Word can only be trusted if He consistently speaks the truth. Here we will look at three major examples of the internal unity of the Bible. The supplemental reading and especially the recommended resources at the end of the module provide more detail.

• **Fulfilled Prophecy:**

The Bible is filled with prophecies of concrete historical events that came to pass and were later recorded in the same Bible. At the time of its writing, more than one quarter of the Bible was prophetic in nature. Since then, many of those prophecies have been fulfilled.

The following are some examples of fulfilled prophecies:

- The prophecy of judgment on Egypt and its fulfillment. (Genesis 15, Exodus 4-12, Ezekiel 29-30)
- Israel's history and dispersion is a fulfillment of the prophecy in Deuteronomy 28.
- The fall of Babylon under the Medes and Persians was clearly foretold over 100 years before it took place (Isaiah 44:28-45:1; Isaiah 47-48 with Jeremiah 50-51 and Daniel 1-5)
- Daniel's prophecies of the rise and fall of Gentile kingdoms were fulfilled in detail. (Daniel chapters 2, 7, 8, 11).

The greatest possible example of prophecy and fulfillment is centered on Jesus Christ. Explicit details of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection were given in the Old Testament. These were foretold by thirty different persons over a period of 4000 years before Jesus was born. There were around 330 Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled in the first coming of Jesus Christ. A few are listed below. More can be found in the supplemental reading.

Prophecy	Old Testament	New Testament Fulfillment
Seed of the Woman	Genesis 3:15	Galatians 4:4
Of the house of David	2 Samuel 7:12-14	Matthew 1:6
Born in Bethlehem	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-8
Out of Egypt	Hosea 11:1	Matthew 2:12-15
483 years after Daniel	Daniel 9:25	Mark 1:15
Ministry for 3 ½ years	Daniel 9:24-27	The Four Gospels
To be 30 years of age	Numbers 4:3	Luke 3:23
Sold for 30 pieces of silver	Zechariah 11:13	Matthew 26: 14-16; 27:3-4
Hands and feet pierced	Psalms 22:16; Zechariah 13:6	John 19:18,37; 20:27
Body not see corruption	Psalms 16:10	Acts 2:24-32; 13:33

- **Harmony of Themes through the Bible**

The Bible is unified not only in its primary message about Jesus Christ, but also in its major themes. Kevin J. Conner, in his book *The Foundations of Christian Doctrine*, says these themes are “like streams of truth that begin in Genesis, flow progressively through the books of the Bible and then empty into Revelation, the sea of fulfillment.”²² The following is a list of just a few of these themes:

The Creator	Colossians 1:16
The Beginning	Revelation 1:8
The Seed of the Woman	Matthew 1:23
The Ark of Salvation	Luke 2:30
Isaac, Only Begotten Son	John 3:16
Joseph, Beloved Son	Matthew 3:17

5. Pick one theme from above or by a recommendation from your small group leader and use a commentary or online Bible search engine to find at least five references to that theme throughout the Bible.

- **Harmony between the Old and the New Testaments**

The two major divisions of the Bible are the Old and New Testaments, each of which have a unique emphasis and perspective. However, they are also each incomplete without the other, and each perfectly complements the other. There are about 6,600 cross-references between them.²² Conner²² again explains the harmony between the testaments this way:

“The New is in the Old contained,
The Old is in the New explained;
The New is in the Old enfolded,
The Old is in the New unfolded;
The New is in the Old concealed,
The Old is in the New revealed.”

The External Test: Evidences of reliability from history and archaeology

Although it is impossible to confirm every story recorded in the Bible, history and archaeology again and again confirm biblical records of persons, places, and events. Because of its religious nature, the historical veracity of the Bible has often been questioned by skeptics. But in the last 150 years, as archaeology has been developed as a science, the plausibility and reliability of the Bible narrative are being verified by modern finds. A few examples²³ are:

- The Genesis record of the Patriarchs was questioned until the Ebla archive was discovered in northern Syria in the 1970s. These clay tablet documents dated from 2300 B.C. contain many personal and place names as well as vocabulary confirming the chronistic reliability of the Patriarch record.
- The biblical enemy of the Israelites, the Hittites, were once thought to be legend. Their existence was confirmed by the discovery of their capital city and records in Bogazky, Turkey. The ancient Hittite Kingdom is now the pride of Turkish cultural history, given in detail on the Turkish Embassy website.²⁴
- The Assyrian king Sargon, who invaded the northern kingdom of Israel was previously unknown outside the biblical record until his palace was discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq. The capture of Ashdod, mentioned in Isaiah 20, was engraved on the palace walls. Fragments of a stela commemorating the victory were also found at Ashdod itself.
- King Belshazzar of Babylon, recorded in Daniel 5, was in doubt because the last king of Babylon according to recorded history was Nabonidus. Tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus' son and co-regent with him. That would make his offer to Daniel to be "third highest ruler in the kingdom" (Daniel 5:16) the highest position available.

Recorded history also confirms the biblical record, especially of the New Testament. The historical record of Jesus and the events surrounding his life are verified by contemporary historians such as Flavius Josephus, Mara BarSerapion, Cornelius Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, and the Jewish Talmud. These external historical sources confirm historical facts recorded in the New Testament such as rulers, nations, people groups, political events, and the existence of Jesus.²⁵

Werner Keller, in his book "The Bible as History"²⁶ enthusiastically describes the significance of these historical and archaeological discoveries:

"Many events which had previously passed for 'pious tales' must now be judged to be historical. Often the results of investigation correspond in detail with the Biblical narratives. They do not only confirm them, but also illumine the historical situations out of which the Old Testament and the Gospels grew.

... In view of the overwhelming mass of authentic and well-attested evidence now available, as I thought of the sceptical (ibid) criticism which from the eighteenth century onwards would fain have demolished the Bible altogether, there kept hammering on my brain this one sentence: 'The Bible is right after all!'"

6. If the Bible were filled with mostly myth, fable, or allegory, it could still be relevant to your life in some way. How does the Bible impact your life since it is filled with historical facts?

Section 4: Why are there different English Bible translations?

In translating the Bible into another language, there are four general categories of translation: word-for-word, thought-for-thought, paraphrases, and corruptions.

Word-for-word

Also known as literal translations, word-for-word translations are exactly what they sound like. The translators make a special effort to carefully interpret each word from the original language into English. This philosophy of translation emphasizes God, the Divine Author, over the human reader of Scripture. Just as you would expect in other important documents such as contracts or marriage vows, the word-for-word translations strive for precision in translation. These are generally written at a high school reading level.

Some of the best word-for-word translations available are the English Standard Version (ESV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and the New King James Version (NKJV). The King James Version (KJV) is also word-for-word, but the old English makes it difficult to understand. Until the arrival of the ESV, many saw the NASB as the most scholarly word-for-word translation. However, the NASB has remained unpopular due to tight copyright restrictions and the sometimes stiff translation of poetry that lost some of the beauty of the original writings. Fortunately, the ESV now offers the same accuracy and precision of the NASB with greater fluidity and readability, especially in poetic sections.

The word-for-word philosophy of translation guided all English translations until the middle of the twentieth century, when thought-for-thought translations became popular.

Thought-for-thought

Thought-for-thought translations are also known as dynamic equivalence or functional equivalence translations. These attempt to convey the full nuance of the passage by interpreting the Scripture's entire meaning, not just the individual words. They may include words that were not in the original text in an effort to give the same meaning that the reader of the original languages would have had.

The best and most widely read thought-for-thought translation is the New International Version (NIV), which is the primary version used from the pulpit at Bethel Church. Other thought-for-thought translations include Today's New International Version (TNIV), New Living Translation (NLT), Contemporary English Version (CEV), and the Good News Bible (GNB). The benefit of thought-for-thought translations, and the NIV in particular, is that they make the Bible accessible to a broad range of people.

One caution in using thought-for-thought translations for study is that it can be tempting to latch onto a particular word in a passage and assume it has intrinsic importance without knowing whether it was in the original text or not. We recommend that you use a good commentary, concordance, or second translation to determine the importance and meaning of each word as you study before you put too much emphasis on a single word from a thought-for-thought translation.

Paraphrases

Paraphrases go one step further than thought-for-thought translations, combining Scripture and interpretive commentary into the translation method. The goal is to capture the poetic or narrative essence of a passage. For this reason, and because some passages in paraphrase cannot be divided into the same thought sections as the original, many paraphrased translations do not even have verse divisions in them. Some paraphrase translations include The Message (TM), The Living Bible (TLB), and The Amplified Bible (TAB).

Corruptions

The term “translation” is used loosely for this type of work. Corruptions masquerade as translations of the Bible, but clearly seek to undermine the true teaching of Scripture. These “translations” should not be used for study. Corruptions include the Jehovah’s Witness translation, called the New World Translation, which was written in large part to eliminate the deity of Jesus Christ. Another corruption used by the Community of Christ (formerly the Reorganized Church of the Latter Day Saints), is the Joseph Smith Translation (JST). Joseph Smith claimed to be inspired to “restore truths to the Bible text that had become lost or changed since the original words were written.”²⁷

The place of different translations

Each translation has its own strengths and weaknesses. The student of God’s Word benefits from enjoying multiple translations. We praise God for every good English translation of the Bible and trust the Holy Spirit to use each one to transform lives.

We encourage you to choose a word-for-word translation as your primary study tool, while utilizing other translations as secondary sources. This is not in any way to discourage you from using multiple good translations. For the purposes of theological accuracy in study, a word-for-word translation is best while other translations are helpful and good.

Your own Bible

While purchasing a study Bible can be expensive, it is crucial that every serious student of the Bible has at least one quality Bible with helps (e.g. footnotes, cross-references, etc.) and room for their notes. A good rule of thumb is that the more money you spend, the better quality of paper, binding, and cover you get. Because your primary Bible will be filled with notes and become so familiar to you, it is wise to invest in a good Bible that will last. That way, you will be able to spend considerable time for years to come reading it, studying it, memorizing it, meditating on it as God the Holy Spirit reveals to you the person and work of Jesus on every page.

7. Spend some time looking at different translations of the Bible. You can compare translations online at www.biblegateway.com, or go to a Christian bookstore and see the different options that are available in terms of style, helps, footnotes, etc. Consider which translation and which type of Bible you prefer as your own primary Bible.

Optional Discussion Questions

1. Can you explain the difference between interpretation and application of the Bible?
2. How is God's power demonstrated in the formation of the Bible?
3. How do the Old Testament and the New Testament relate to each other?
4. Of all that you read this week, what gives you the greatest confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible? (i.e. textual evidence, fulfilled prophecy, unity of the Bible, archaeological and historical evidence, etc.)
5. What translation of the Bible do you use primarily? Does the material in this lesson change your thinking about the Bible you have?

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God's Word

LESSON 3

Hearing and Reading God's Word

Objective:

Each participant:

- hears the Word taught and learns from at least one sermon per week
- begins to read the Bible on his own three to four times per week with a good and honest heart.

Verses:

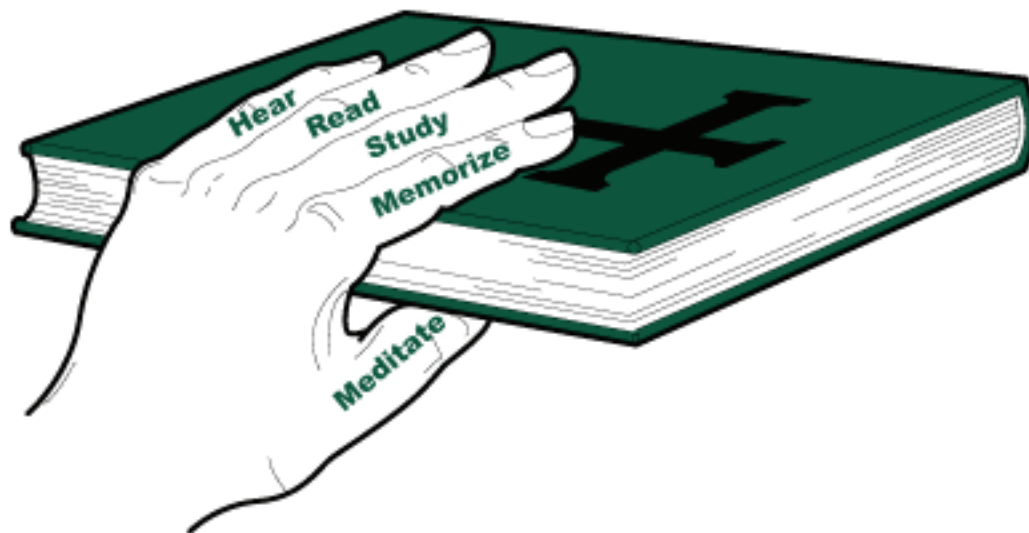
Luke 8:15

Revelation 1:3

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the scripture verses (in bold) and answer questions 1-6. The reading has been divided into four sections that may be read all in one sitting or on four different days.

Section 1 The Word Hand



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Now that we've covered much of the "what" and the "why" of the Bible, we turn our attention to the "how." How do you learn and apply God's Word? In the next three lessons, we will look at five ways to make the Bible yours. The Navigators have developed a popular picture of these five methods of learning God's Word. Liken the five methods to the five fingers of your hand. When you hold the Bible with only one or two fingers, it's easy to lose your grip. As you use more fingers, your grasp of the Bible becomes stronger.

The same is true spiritually. When you hear, read, study, memorize and meditate on the Word of God, your grasp of it becomes firm and part of your life. Just as the thumb is necessary in combination with any finger to complete your hold, meditation combined with hearing, reading, studying, and memorizing is essential for a full grasp of God's Word. The following summary of the five methods is from *The Personal Growth Series* by the Navigators and used by permission:¹

The “Word Hand” shows five very important methods of learning from the Bible.

HEARING Romans 10:17

Hearing the Word from godly pastors and teachers provides insight into others’ study of the Scriptures as well as stimulating your own appetite for the Word.

READING Revelation 1:3

Reading the Bible gives an overall picture of God’s Word. Many people find it helpful to use a daily reading program which takes them systematically through the Bible.

STUDYING Acts 17:11

Studying the Scriptures leads to personal discoveries of God’s truths. Writing down these discoveries helps you organize and remember them.

MEMORIZING Psalm 119:9, 11

Memorizing God’s Word enables use of the Sword of the Spirit to overcome Satan and temptations... to have it readily available for witnessing or helping others with a “word in season.”

MEDITATING Psalm 1:2, 3

Meditation is the thumb of the Word Hand, for it is used in conjunction with each of the other methods. Only as you meditate on God’s Word—thinking of its meaning and application in your life—will you discover its transforming power at work within you.

Notice that in the illustration, the bigger the finger, the harder the corresponding activity is. It’s harder to read than to hear, harder to study than to read, and harder to memorize than to study. It is also true that the bigger the finger, the more effective the activity is. So it is wise to give special attention to the more effective studies.

1. Read the verses that go along with each of the five methods. Which do you practice regularly? In which do you need to improve?

Section 2 Hearing and reading the Word

Regular attendance on Sunday mornings is where the journey to Biblical understanding begins. Hearing the Word preached is also as easy as subscribing to a podcast or going to a website. Many sound, biblical preachers make their sermons available for free on the internet. There are some recommendations of preachers to listen to in the recommended reading.

As Jesus warns in Luke 8:18, we must “take care how [we] listen.” Many hear God’s Word but do not understand or persistently obey.

2. Read Luke 8:15. Jesus is talking about the kind of people who hear the Word of God, grow to maturity, and bear much fruit. What kind of heart do these people have? What do they do with the Word?

3. How is your heart when reading?

A benefit of hearing God’s Word preached is that the preacher can explain and help the hearers understand the meaning, as the priests and Levites did in Nehemiah 8:8. It is important to retain the information you have heard. Taking notes on the Scriptures used and on the main points of the sermon will aid you in conserving what you hear.

Benefits of Reading the Word

In Lesson 2, question 1, we already listed some benefits of daily Bible reading from Deuteronomy 17:19. Go back and review those benefits. Your list probably looks something like this:

Daily Bible reading...

- teaches the fear of God
- teaches how to obey God and gives the power to do it
- keeps us from pride and arrogance
- keeps us on the right path
- gives blessings for generations

There are many benefits of reading God's Word. Christopher B. Adsit compiled this list in his book, *Personal Disciplemaking*²:

- Makes us prosper; gives us success Joshua 1:8
- Restores our soul; makes wise the simple Psalm 19:7
- Rejoices the heart Psalm 19:8
- Provides warnings; provides rewards Psalm 19:11
- Keeps us from "slipping" Psalm 37:31
- Keeps our way pure; keeps us from sin Psalm 119:9,11
- Provides delight; provides counsel Psalm 119:24
- Gives comfort in affliction Psalm 119:50
- Makes us wise Psalm 119:98, 2 Timothy 3:15
- Guides us, watches over us in unguarded moments Proverbs 6:22
- Provides spiritual nourishment Matthew 4:4
- Sanctifies us John 15:3; 17:17
- Helps our faith John 20:30,31
- Gives us hope for the future Romans 15:4
- Teaches, rebukes, corrects, trains in righteousness, thoroughly equips 2 Timothy 3:16,17
- Makes us grow to spiritual maturity 1 Peter 2:2

4. Look carefully at the list above. Though this is not a complete list of benefits, it is a good place to start. Are there any items on this list you do not understand? Make a note of which ones and bring them up during the discussion time. Are any of these benefits particularly useful to you?

Section 3 How to approach Bible reading

We looked at the kind of heart that gets the most out of hearing God's Word. The same goes for reading God's Word. That kind of heart was described as "honest and good" (Luke 8:15). What exactly does that mean?

In the Greek, the terms translated as "honest and good" are similar words, sometimes used interchangeably. Used together, they were an idiom for a person who is "pious and righteous, wise and understanding, and moderate and virtuous in his actions."³ In the New Testament, they signified a life marked by repentance⁴ and good works done out of love.⁵

An honest and good heart is one which makes a habit of turning from evil and doing good. Doing good consists in loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:37-40; Romans 7:12).

5. Luke 8:4-15 records a parable and its meaning. When reading the Bible, what four heart conditions are possible according to Jesus? What are the corresponding results?

A word about prayer

Jesus makes the distinction between men and God, saying that no one is good but God (Matthew 19:17). Paul follows this up by saying "nothing good dwells in me" (Romans 7:18). So how can we approach the Bible with a good heart? That is where prayer comes in.

Prayer is a significant topic, and we will be spending a whole module discussing it later. But it is important to remember that the best way to learn to pray is not to study it, but to practice it. Don't wait for a formal study on prayer before you begin making it a habitual part of your life. Prayer is especially important as you read your Bible. It is the way you ask the Holy Spirit to illumine God's Word so you can understand it; and it is the way that you can approach God's Word with an honest and good heart so you can receive and apply it.

Begin your Bible reading with prayer. Confess your sins and repent; ask God to give you an honest and good heart to love Him and love others; ask the Holy Spirit to guide you into all the truth (John 16:13-15).

Section 4 Daily Bible reading plans

It is necessary to plan which part of the Bible you will read each day. Without a plan in place, your reading will be sporadic and scattered. It is not necessary for you to use someone else's plan, although there are many good, orderly plans available. You could simply pick a book of the Bible and read a chapter or two a day. Adsit⁶ lists some good places to start and gives his reasoning:

The Gospel of John:

- Presents Jesus in His deity.
- Provides more proof texts for Jesus as the unique Son of God than any other Gospel.
- Jesus is presented very personally.
- We see considerable detail concerning His personal life, His relationships with His disciples and His relationship with His Father.
- The word *believe* (and its different forms) is found ninety-seven times in this book.
- Will give the reader a good sense of the centrality of faith in the Christian life.

The Gospel of Mark:

- The shortest of the four Gospels but the fastest-moving and most action-packed. It's like listening to the six o'clock news on TV.
- Focuses more on what Jesus did than what He said.
- Descriptions of Jesus' miracles abound in this book. As J. Sidlow Baxter said, 'Mark is the camera-man of the four Gospel writers, giving us shot after shot of unforgettable scenes.'

The Gospel of Matthew:

- The longest Gospel.
- Recommended [as a starting point] for those who seem to be the studious sort, the type who think nothing of spending an hour at a time reading.
- Starts with great descriptions of the birth of Christ, John the Baptist, the temptation of Jesus and the calling of the first disciples, all narratives that should easily catch [your] attention.
- Addresses the Sermon on the Mount, an excellent introduction for the new Christian regarding how radical the Christian lifestyle is meant to be.
- Written by a Jew, for Jewish readers, and strongly presents Jesus as the Messiah. There are 130 quotes from the Old Testament in this book.

The Gospel of Luke:

- Another long Gospel, but it starts out with the most extensive narrative of Jesus' birth and childhood days.
- Great for young people and those who are already somewhat familiar with Christianity.
- The Christmas narrative will probably bring back many pleasant memories for them. It could be compared to watching a motion picture documentary, with a heavy emphasis on factual reporting of historical events.
- Originally intended to be read by the intellectual, logical Greeks.

Visit bibleplan.org to customize your personal reading plan.

What's my plan?

The Navigators, in their book *One-to-One Discipling*,⁷ use a chart for each of the five methods of Bible learning to help you analyze your habits for making the Bible yours. We have broken up the chart into the pieces relevant to each lesson (i.e. hearing and reading in this lesson, studying in the next lesson, and memorizing and meditating in the final lesson). Pray about what new goals you need to set as you fill it in.

Method of Intake	My Present Weekly Program	New Goals and Plans
Hearing the Word		
Reading the Word		

6. Pick which book of the Bible or Bible reading plan you are going to start with and set your goals using the chart above.

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God's Word

LESSON 4

Studying the Word

Objective:

Each participant:

- has a basic understanding of what resources are available for Bible study and
- has begun to study on his/her own three to four times per week with a view to know and love God more.

Verses:

- *Philippians 1:9-10*
- *Proverbs 2:1-5*

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the scripture verses (in bold) and answer questions 1-4. The reading for this lesson is relatively short. It is recommended that the reading be done early in the week so that you can begin studying your Bible two or three days this week.

Section 1: The point of studying God's Word

Remember the Word Hand we discussed last week. The third "finger" is studying the Bible. As you study the Word of God, you will begin to discover God's truth for yourself. This can be an exciting and delightful time, but sometimes study can become dry or frustrating. Especially for those with an intellectual bent, Bible study can be attractive but can quickly turn into simply an academic exercise. The key to healthy, enjoyable study of God's Word is to know the purpose of this study.

Read Matthew 22:37-38, which gives Jesus' answer to the question, "Which is the greatest commandment?" This would also be an appropriate answer to our question now, "What is the purpose of Bible study?" The answer: to love God more. This is the purpose of our lives as Christians. Knowing Him more leads to loving Him more; and not only in our hearts and minds but in our actions as we become more like Him.

When we study as a means of loving God and as an impetus to love Him more, study of His Word becomes a rich, rewarding experience. When we study to simply increase our knowledge, to be able to win a debate, or to show off our intelligence, it becomes a selfish pursuit of emptiness. J.I. Packer, in his classic *Knowing God*, emphasizes this point:

"If you look at Psalm 119, you will see that the psalmist's concern to get knowledge about God was not a theoretical, but a practical concern. His supreme desire was to know and enjoy God Himself, and he values knowledge about God simply as a means to this end."

Remember the difficulty-effectiveness correlation we discussed last week. The bigger the finger, the harder the activity, but also the more effective and rewarding. Study takes work; it takes concentration and thought. It also yields greater and deeper benefits than reading itself. So even when you have the right purpose, study takes effort.

1. **Read Philippians 1:9-11.** How does Paul say that love grows (v.9)? What does he say is the purpose of love growing (v.10)?
2. **Read Proverbs 2:1-5.** How does it say we should study God's Word? What is the result of this type of study?

Starting your study

Studying God's Word is more than just reading it carefully. It involves writing down what you discover to help you think and remember. There are many methods of studying the Bible. If you do not already have a favorite, we suggest you begin with one of the following method.

Get a spiral notebook or three-ring binder, allowing at least half a page for each day's entries. After each day's reading, think about and answer one of these sets of questions:

1. The thing that amazes me most in this section:
2. The verse I liked most:
3. Something I need to do in response to reading this section:
4. Questions that came to my mind as I read it:

OR

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
 2. Is there a sin to avoid?
 3. Is there a promise to claim?
 4. Is there a prayer to repeat?
 5. Is there a command to obey?
 6. Is there a condition to meet?
 7. Is there a verse to memorize?
 8. Is there an error in my thinking/behavior to note?
 9. Is there a challenge to face?
3. Use one of the sets of questions above at least two or three times this week during your daily Bible reading time. The bulk of your small group discussion time will be sharing what you have learned with one another.

Types of study helps and recommendations

There are many types of study helps available to you as you begin your study of the Bible. Here we will list several types of books and recommend some to start with. The first four are basic needs for every student of the Bible.

The Basics of Study Helps

Bible Handbook. A Bible handbook gives an overview of each book of the Bible, along with some history, background, key figures, and themes. This is an excellent place to start in your study of the Bible. Some good Bible handbooks are:

- Halley's Bible Handbook (Zondervan Press) and
- *What the Bible is All About* by Henrietta C. Mears (Regal Books from Gospel Light)

Bible Dictionary. A Bible dictionary gives the meaning and background of the words in the Bible. It examines the people, places, and events mentioned in the Bible and explores important doctrinal, historical and theological topics. Some good Bible dictionaries are:

- Unger's Bible Dictionary (Moody Press) and
- Wycliffe Bible Dictionary (Hendrickson Publishers)

Bible Commentary. A Bible commentary offers a scholar's perspective on the Scriptures and sometimes on particular words. These may be brief and cover several books of the Bible, or they may be very detailed. Some good Bible commentaries are

- Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Moody Press)
- Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co)

Some recommended authors are: Spiros Zodhiates, W.E. Vines, H.A. Ironside, John F. Walvoord, and D.A. Carson.

Concordance to the Bible. A concordance to the Bible documents each place a word appears in the Bible. It shows the original Greek or Hebrew word, often with the literal meaning and pronunciation of each. Some good concordances are:

- Young's (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) or
- Strong's Concordance (Royal Publishers).

In-Depth Study Helps

For those with a more scholarly bent, some of the following books may be useful:

Introductions. These are introductions to books of the Bible, and the the Old and New Testaments. These give some history, background, theology, and useful information. For introductions to the New Testament, see:

- *An Introduction to the New Testament* by D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo,
- *New Testament Theology* by Leon Morris, and
- *Introduction to the New Testament* by Henry C. Thiessen

For introductions to the Old Testament, see

- *An Introduction to the Old Testament* by Tremper Longman, and
- *Toward a Theology of the Old Testament* by Walter Kaiser.

History. Some good history books on the Bible are:

- *The Bible as History* by Werner Keller,
- *Survey of Israel's History* by Leon Wood, and
- *New Testament History* by F.F. Bruce

Doctrine. Books on doctrine lay out the foundations of our faith as Christians. Some good doctrine books include:

- *Concise Theology* by J.I. Packer,
- *Christian Theology* by Millard Erickson,
- *Foundations of Christian Doctrine* by Kevin J. Conner.

Word Study Books. Word study books give an in-depth analysis of the words in the Bible from a theological perspective. Some good word study books include:

- Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible (AMG Publishers, available in several versions),
- The Complete Word Study Old Testament (AMG Publishers), and
- The Complete Word Study New Testament (AMG Publishers).

Study Books. These books give you methods and approaches to studying the Bible. Some recommendations are:

- *How to Study Your Bible* by Kay Arthur,
- *Talk Thru the Bible* by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa,
- *Where to Find it in the Bible...the Ultimate A to Z Resource* by Ken Anderson,
- *Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods*, and
- *Independent Bible Study* by Irving L. Jensen.

What's my plan?

As with hearing and reading the Bible, study of the Bible must be planned. The next piece of the chart from the Navigators, in their book *One-to-One Discipling* is below. Pray about what new goals you need to set as you fill it in.

Method of Intake	My Present Weekly Program	New Goals and Plans
Studying the Word		

4. Evaluate your current study habits and set your goals using the chart above. Keep one another accountable in your small groups on each goal as it is set (hearing, reading, and studying so far).

God's Word

LESSON 5

Memorizing and Meditating on the Word

Objective:

Each participant:

- is beginning to love God's Word and has begun to memorize a verse or section every one to two weeks,
- has a basic understanding of meditation and
- has begun to practice it daily.

Verses:

- *Psalm 119:9,11;*
- *Psalm 1:1-3*

Preparation for Group Discussion

To be prepared for group discussion, at a minimum look up the scripture verses (in bold) and answer questions 1-7. Again, this reading is relatively short. Aim to do it at the beginning of the week and begin memorizing and meditating.

Why you should memorize

Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, said this about memorization: "I know of no form of intake of the Word which pays greater dividends for the time invested than Scripture memory." It has been said¹ that after 24 hours you may accurately remember 5% of what you hear, 15% of what you read, 35% of what you study, 57% of what you see and hear, but you can remember 100% of what you memorize.

Beyond memory and knowledge, memorizing Scripture is a way like no other to get God's Words into your heart and mind. Jesus said "out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). When God's Words are in your heart, they come out of your mouth. Paul exhorted the Romans to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12:2). When God's Words are in your mind, your mind begins to be renewed and your life begins to be transformed.

The following reasons to memorize Scripture are taken from Bethel's Joy in the Morning booklet for 2008-2009:

- **To keep us from sin:** It's more difficult to go ahead with temptation when a key Bible verse stares us in the face.
- **To reinforce Bible truths:** We are studying the Bible, looking for a key truth. Suddenly a verse flashes before us. We memorized it long ago. It brings to a burning focus the truth we need.
- **To help us delight in the wonders of God's world:** The wonders of God's world around us come alive with rich new meaning with verses stored in our heart.
- **To help us worship God:** When we are reaching out to God to worship Him, a verse may come to mind. We think of Him...we worship Him.
- **To comfort us in times of trouble:** When trouble comes, we have no time to look up verses. But a verse we learned may come to mind to comfort ours or another's fearful heart.
- **To show us what God wants:** What does God want us to do at the crossroads...key decision. A verse comes to mind and God helps us.
- **To help others:** With a Bible verse from our heart, we can help a friend or neighbor through a tough problem when words seem so shallow.
- **To witness to others:** When someone asks why we do what we do, it's an opportunity to share Jesus, and the verse that comes to mind can be wise to share.

- **To help us to pray:** When we are concerned about someone or something, we pray right then; verses come to mind and God’s Word helps us to pray as we should.
 - **To help us teach:** We all teach in some way. Memorized verses enrich our teaching and ring forth great truths!
 - **To reinforce great hymns and worship songs:** A verse enriches that praise song or hymn and highlights our time of worship.
1. **Read Deuteronomy 11:18a and Proverbs 7:3b.** What does God want us to do with His Word?

 2. **Read Psalm 119:9,11 and Matthew 4:4,7,10.** Why does God want us to memorize His Word? What Scriptures can you memorize to battle your top three temptations? (If you need help finding applicable verses, see the examples in Appendix A.)

Memory plans

Just as there are Bible reading plans available, there are also many Bible memorization plans. The Navigators have a Topical Memory System² in two editions: Basic and Life Issues. Desiring God has a Bible memory program called Fighter Verses.³ Each of these systems come with verse cards and teaches you how to begin memorizing and reviewing so that the verses stick with you.

The ESV Bible offers many RSS feeds, including a weekly memory plan with daily reminders called Treasuring God’s Truth in Your Heart.⁴ This plan takes you through 52 verses on key topics of theology, giving you a wonderful overview of the Christian faith.

You can also develop your own plan. You can keep a record of the verses you would like to memorize as you come across them in their Bible reading or study. Then you can memorize them one at a time, being sure to review as you go along so that you don’t forget them.

If you want to go further, download and read Dr. Andrew Davis’ booklet entitled “An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture.”⁵

3. **Read Psalm 40:8.** Does this verse express your desire? How do you need to respond?

Getting started memorizing

Many people are wary of Bible memorization. It seems daunting and even impossible to some. You may be telling yourself that you cannot do this. You may have tried before and failed. Let me offer the encouragement of John Piper:⁶

“You may doubt that you can do this, especially if you are older. But ask yourself this question, If I offered you \$1,000 for every verse you memorized in the next week, how many do you think you could memorize? Yet God says of his word in Psalm 19:10-11, “They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them Thy servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.” The real value of the word is far greater than \$1,000 a verse. The question is, Do you believe this? Believing this will be the crucial motivation you need.”

After motivation and commitment, you need a method. Decide on a memory plan and then follow it. Learning is improved as more senses are involved. As Al and Lorraine Broom say in *One-to-One Discipling*,⁷ “Expression makes impression.” So as you memorize, follow these suggestions from the Brooms:⁷

1. Repeat it.
2. Explain it.
3. Put it into your own words (personalize it).
4. Discuss and understand its meaning.
5. Review silently and aloud, over and over, looking for correct emphasis and pertinent meaning.
6. Review with another person. Test each other.

Another helpful hint is to say the verse reference at the beginning and the end of the verse every time you practice it. For example, say “1 Thessalonians 5:16. Rejoice always. 1 Thessalonians 5:16.” It can be frustrating when you’ve memorized a verse but have no idea where in the Bible to find it or show to others. This method will help you remember the “address” of the verse you are memorizing.

4. Begin memorizing one of the verses you chose in Question 2.

What is meditation?

Psalm 1:2 tells us of a happy man whose “delight is in the law of the Lord, and on His law he meditates day and night.” Biblical meditation is filling your mind with Scripture, considering it, thinking about it, understanding its meaning, relating it to other truths. Note that this is opposite from the meditation of Eastern religions and cults, which encourage the emptying of the mind.

Meditation and memorization go hand-in-hand. It is possible and recommended for you to meditate on what you hear, read, and study; that is the way to get the firmest grasp on God’s Word. But it is most natural to meditate on what you memorize. You can take a verse or two and ruminate on it for a day or several days. You will discover and delight in greater truths than you saw at first glance. You will begin to see very practical applications of that Scripture to your life. In this way, your mind will truly be renewed and your life transformed.

John Piper⁸ further describes meditation:

“And meditation is not just intellectual. It is emotional. Meditation is cherishing the gold and savoring the honey. If you don’t feel this cherishing and savoring, ask the Lord to waken the spiritual taste buds of your soul. He won’t do it apart from the word. The word is part of what creates the taste for the word. Put it on the tongue of your soul. He wakens your heart to taste Christ in his word. So take the honey of the word into your mind and ask him to create a taste for it.”

5. **Read Psalm 1:1-3.** What are some of the blessings of the man who loves God’s Word and meditates on it?

Delighting in God's Word

The above two quotes from John Piper talk about delighting in God's Word. He mentioned cherishing and savoring it. But what does that look like practically in a person's life? Below is a compilation of characteristics of a person who delights in God's Word from Psalms 1, 19, and 119. This is not an exhaustive list, but can give you a picture of what it means, practically, to delight in God's Word.

A person who delights in God's Word...

Thinks:	Feels:	Does:	Receives:
God's Word is perfect	God's Word is more valuable than money	obey God's Word consistently	fruitfulness
God's Word is sure	God's Word is sweeter than honey	obey God's Word quickly	prosperity
God's Word is right	awe for God's Word	meditate on God's Word day and night	restoration
God's Word is pure	desperate to obey God's Word	memorize God's Word	wisdom
God's Word is clean	hatred for sin	study God's Word	happiness
God's Word endures forever	reverence for God	honor God's Word	enlightenment
God's Word is true	love for fellow believers	sing about God's Word; use it in song	warning
God's Word is righteous	trust in God's Word	praise God for His Word throughout the day	reward
	hope in God's Word	accept discipline	forgiveness
		get up early to pray and read God's Word	strength
		stay up late to meditate on God's Word	reverence for God
		seek salvation from God alone	comfort
		endure persecution for the sake of God's Word	life
			compassion
			joy
			peace
			kept from stumbling
			kept from sinning

6. **Read Psalm 19:10-11.** Do you delight in God's Word? If so, what does it look like in your life? If not, what do you need to do? Pray that God will increase your love for His Word.

7. **Meditate on Psalm 19** three times this week by reading it aloud. Note the results. Do you delight in God and His Word more?

What's my plan?

Memorizing and meditating on the Bible must be planned. The next piece of the chart from the Navigators, in their book *One-to-One Discipling* is below. Pray about what new goals you need to set as you fill it in.

Intake Method	My Present Weekly Program	New Goals and Plans
Memorizing the Word		
Meditating on the Word		

8. Evaluate your current memorization and meditation habits and set your goals using the chart above. Keep one another accountable in your small groups on each goal you have made.

Appendix A: Sample verses to battle specific sins

- Anger: James 1:19-20
- Bitterness: Ephesians 4:31
- Balancing work and rest: Hebrews 4:9-11; Matthew 11:29
- Consistency in disciplining children: Proverbs 13:24
- Critical spirit: Philippians 2:3
- Disrespect: 1 Peter 2:13a,15; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13
- Envy: Galatians 5:26
- Fear of men: Proverbs 29:25
- Gluttony: Philippians 3:18-19
- Honor from men, not God: Matthew 6:1,6
- Idolatry: 1 Corinthians 10:13-14, esp. verse 14
- Jealousy: James 3:16
- Laziness: Hebrew 6:12
- Lust: 1 Timothy 5:1b-2 (can be adapted to “men as brothers” for women)
- Lying: Proverbs 12:19, 22
- Pride: James 4:6-7
- Profanity: James 3:9-10
- Quiet about your relationship with God: Psalm 22:22
- Racism: Ephesians 2:14; Colossians 3:11
- Revenge: Leviticus 19:18
- Self-Absorption: Philippians 2:4
- Self-Indulgence: Titus 2:11-13
- Timidity: 2 Timothy 1:7
- Tongue: Ephesians 4:29
- Unforgivingness: Ephesians 4:32
- Vanity: 1 Peter 3:3-4

References

1. Al and Lorraine Broom, *One-to-One Discipling* (Vista, CA: Multiplication Ministries, 1983), p. 24.
2. Navigators Topical Memory System: <http://www.navigators.org/us/resources/illustrations/items/Topical%20Memory%20System>
3. Desiring God's Fighter Verses Memory System: http://www.desiringgod.org/Store/OtherMerchandise/ByTopic/162/698_Fighter_Verse_Pack_ESV/
4. ESV Bible Treasuring God's Truth in Your Heart: <http://www.gnpcb.org/esv/share/rss2.0/>
5. Dr. Andrew Davis, *An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*. http://www.lhc-pa.org/_files/Scripturememorybooklet.pdf
6. John Piper, quoted by Justin Taylor (May 26, 2005) in the weblog *Between Two Worlds*. Retrieved September 22, 2008 from <http://theologica.blogspot.com/2005/05/new-scripture-memory-system.html>
7. Al and Lorraine Broom, *One-to-One Discipling* (Vista, CA: Multiplication Ministries, 1983), p. 25.
8. John Piper, *How to Receive the Word of Man as the Word of God*. Preached January 5, 2003. From the Desiring God Website. Retrieved September 22, 2008 from http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Sermons/ByDate/2003/119_How_to_Receive_the_Word_of_Man_as_the_Word_of_God/

God's Word

Recommended Reading

Discipleship

Personal Disciple-making, by Christopher Adsit, is a step-by-step guide for leading new Christians from new birth to maturity.

One-to-One Discipling, by Al and Lorraine Broom, is a 9-lesson study to be used by one person to disciple another.

The Lost Art of Disciple Making, by Leroy Eims, examines the growth process in the life of a Christian and considers what nurture and guidance it takes to develop spiritually qualified workers in the church.

Doctrine

Systematic Theology, by Henry C. Thiessen, is a good overview of biblical doctrines.

The Foundations of Christian Doctrine, by Kevin J. Conner, is a practical guide to the beliefs of Christianity. Could be used as a small group study for those theologically inclined.

Concise Theology by J.I. Packer.

Christian Theology by Millard Erickson.

Authority of the Bible

The Origin of the Bible, edited by Philip Comfort, is a good introduction to the authority and perfection of Scripture from a team of good theologians.

Christ and the Bible, by John Wenhan, is a helpful survey of how Jesus Christ viewed the Old Testament.

How we got the Bible

From Ancient Text to Modern Translations, by David Ewart, is a helpful and thorough book surveying how the Bible went from the hands of the original authors to the Bible we hold in our hand today.

The Canon of Scripture, by F.F. Bruce, is a thorough book on how the sixty-six books of the Protestant canon came to be.

A General Introduction to the Bible, by Norman Geisler, is a comprehensive, scholarly work covering the inspiration, canonization, transmission, and translation of the Bible.

The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?, by F.F. Bruce, is a survey of the accuracy and credibility of the New Testament.

The New Testament: Why to Trust It, How to Read It, and Tips for Studying It, by Mark Driscoll (available online at www.marshillchurch.org).

The Old Testament: An Introduction and Survey, by Mark Driscoll (available online at www.marshillchurch.org).

How We Got the Bible, by John Sailhamer, is a brief, easy-to-read reference about the history of biblical text.

The Indestructible Book, by Ken Connolly, is a fascinating historical look at how the Scriptures have been both opposed and adored over the ages.

Translations of the Bible

The Word of God in English, by Leland Ryken, explains Bible translations and suggests criteria for Bible translation and choosing a Bible.

Choosing a Bible, by Leland Ryken, is a concise book that deals with Bible translations.

The Bible in Translation, by Bruce Metzger, outlines the development of biblical translation and analyzes over fifty versions of the Bible.

Studying the Bible

Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind, by Tremper Longman, is a guide for not only studying Scripture but also being transformed by Scripture.

Getting the Message, by Daniel Doriani, provides insight, guidance, and practical wisdom for studying the Scriptures.

What the Bible is All About, by Henrietta C. Mears, is a good book-by-book overview of the Bible.

How to Study Your Bible by Kay Arthur.

Talk Thru the Bible by Bruce Wilkinson and Kenneth Boa.

Where to Find it in the Bible...the Ultimate A to Z Resource by Ken Anderson.

Bible Study Methods, by Rick Warren.

Independent Bible Study by Irving L. Jensen.

Living by the Book, Howard & William Hendricks

Study Helps

Halley's Bible Handbook (Zondervan Press).

Unger's Bible Dictionary (Moody Press).

The Wycliffe Bible Dictionary (Hendrickson Publishers).

The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Moody Press).

Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).

For the Love of God, by D.A. Carson, is a companion to your daily Bible reading to help you see the riches of God's Word (includes a one-year reading plan).

Young's Concordance (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company).

Strong's Concordance (Royal Publishers).

An Introduction to the New Testament by D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo.

New Testament Theology by Leon Morris.

Introduction to the New Testament by Henry C. Thiessen.

An Introduction to the Old Testament by Tremper Longman.

Toward a Theology of the Old Testament by Walter Kaiser.

The Bible as History by Werner Keller.

Survey of Israel's History by Leon Wood.

New Testament History by F.F. Bruce.

The Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible (AMG Publishers, available in several versions).

Apologetics of the Bible

When Critics Ask, by Normal Geisler, addresses the most debated and controversial “contradictions” in the Bible.

Online Sermons

Dave Bechtel of Bethel Church in Richland: www.bethel-church.org or iTunes.

Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle: www.marshillchurch.org or iTunes.

John Piper of Desiring God and Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis: www.desiringgod.org or iTunes.

Art Azurdia of Western Seminary: www.spiritempoweredpreaching.com