

HOW TO STUDY AND TEACH THE BIBLE

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LESSON 01:

BECOMING MORE THAN A CASUAL BIBLE READER

God has given His people a tremendous gift: His Word. The God of all creation wants you to know Him, so He inspired men to write sixty-six books that make up our Bible. These sixty-six books tell us the story of God that culminates in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. We believe God speaks to us through the Bible, drawing us into His story so that we might believe Him and live our lives conformed to His will.

If you come from a church background like me, your church probably encouraged you to have a daily “quiet time” or “daily devotions.” For many, a daily quiet time consists of getting a good devotional book like Oswald Chambers’ *Utmost for His Highest*, reading the devotion for the day along with the accompanying Scripture verses, saying a short prayer, and getting on with your day.

Or, if you’re an advanced Christian, you select a Bible plan and read through the entire Bible over a year. That’s a huge accomplishment. Every Christian should read through the whole Bible. However, on those days you were reading through Leviticus or Ezekiel, you were probably powering through. It may be that you didn’t understand some of what you read, but because you were trying to get through the entire Bible in a year, you didn’t take the time to understand what you were reading.

Most followers of Jesus read the Bible casually. We spend a few minutes reading a devotional book with a snippet of Scripture sprinkled in, or we power through a Bible reading plan, but we never take the time to understand and study the Bible.

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Perhaps you attend a church with a rather gifted preacher who “goes deep” every Sunday. As you listen to your preacher explain the Bible, you think, “That’s amazing, but I can never understand the Bible as he does.” Or you sit in a small group Bible study, and there’s someone in your group who seems to know the Bible backward and forwards, and you think to yourself, “I can never have that kind of Bible knowledge.”

If you feel like you struggle to understand the Bible, even though you read it regularly, I have good news for you. You can learn how to study the Bible. You can be a better student of the Word of God. You can learn the skills that will help you study the Bible well, and if you are a follower of Jesus, you have the Spirit of God living inside of you who will help you grow in your understanding of the Scripture. You have every resource available to you to become a better student of the Bible. When you become a better student of the Bible, you will grow in your knowledge of God and your desire to obey Him.

Not only can you be a better student of the Bible, but you can also teach the Bible! You might never serve as a pastor of a church, and maybe the thought of leading a small group terrifies you. However, God wants you to study His Word so that you might grow in your relationship with Him and so you might help others grow in their relationship with Him. Learning to study the Bible well is essential for you and those that God gives you to influence!

Why do followers of Jesus struggle to study the Bible regularly?

- We’ve been taught the Bible, but we’ve never been taught HOW to study the Bible.
- We don’t want to devote the time to studying the Bible.
- Parts of the Bible seem boring.
- We’re not sure if the Bible applies to the lives of people in the twenty-first century.
- We’re not sure if the Bible can be trusted.
- Bible study is for pastors and Bible scholars, not for the average believer.

Why do I need to learn how to study the Bible?

- Because of what the Bible claims. (2 Timothy 3:15-17)
- The Bible claims to be the Word of God.
- The Bible claims to be true.
- The Bible claims to be sufficient.
- Because of what the Bible reveals.
- The Bible reveals who God is. (Hebrews 1:1-4)
- The Bible reveals who I am. (Romans 2:10-12, 3:23)
- The Bible reveals how I can have a relationship with God.
- Because of what the Bible does.
- The Bible convicts. (Hebrews 4:12-13)
- The Bible instructs. (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Psalm 119:129-130)
- The Bible equips. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- The Bible makes me wise. (Psalm 119:97-98)

What are the common mistakes people make when reading the Bible?

- Seeing the Bible as just an instruction book instead of seeing the Bible as a book that is primarily about God and His plan of redemption.
- Taking the Bible out of context.
- Using the Bible to support my views/theology rather than letting the Bible inform my views/theology.
- Studying the Bible isolated from the local church instead of studying the Bible with believers in the local church.
- Studying the Bible to grow in biblical knowledge instead of studying the Bible with a desire to be changed by God.

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Beware of the dangerous ways to study the Bible:

- The emotional approach: What feels right to me?
- The spiritual approach: What deep, hidden meaning is there for me?
- The pragmatic approach: What works best for me?
- The superficial approach: What does this mean to me?

What do I need to study the Bible well?

- You need the Spirit of God! (John 15:25-26, 1 Corinthians 2:9-14)
- You need the local church. (Acts 2:42-27; 8:26-40; 17:10-15; 18:24-28)
- You need a prayerful attitude. (Ephesians 3:14-20)
- You need a submissive heart. (Psalm 139:23-24)
- You need a good Bible translation.

How do I choose a Bible translation?

- Choose a translation that YOU will read.
- Know the difference between formal-equivalence (word-for-word) translations and functional-equivalence (thought-for-thought) translations.
- A formal-equivalence translation seeks to approximate word-for-word correspondence with the Hebrew or Greek text.
- A functional-equivalence translation seeks to capture the sense of the author's intended meaning in highly readable language.
- If you are unfamiliar with Hebrew and Greek, use multiple translations to help aid your study.

HOMEWORK

Read Chapters 1-2 of *How to Study the Bible for All It's Worth* by Fee and Stuart. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing what big takeaways you have from each chapter. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 02:

THE BIBLE IS A SINGULAR STORY

Are you familiar with the acronym “BIBLE?” Some take the letters “BIBLE” to form the acronym “Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth.” In some ways, that acronym is helpful. The Bible is full of instructions from God Himself. If we live by God’s instructions, our lives will be fruitful and purposeful.

While the acronym “BIBLE” can be helpful, it is also problematic because that acronym reduces the Bible down to an instruction manual – like an instruction manual you get when you open the box of those IKEA shelves that you have to put together. If you follow the instruction manual, you’ll be able to put the shelves together, but if you don’t follow the instruction manual, you’ll have a particle board mess!

We’ve tried to use the Bible as an instruction manual, and the result isn’t what we thought it would be. You might read the Bible every morning when you wake up, but after months and years of daily Bible reading, you might not feel like your Christian life is put together. Like when you open the box of your Ikea furniture, you may feel like your life is a particle board mess!

I want you to know that the Bible’s goal is not to help you put your life together as you try to follow the instructions. Instead, the goal of the Bible is to point you to Jesus, the only ONE whose life was really put together. Jesus is the only One who kept all of the instructions of the Bible. You see, Jesus followed the instructions perfectly FOR YOU because you couldn’t keep the instructions.

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The Bible isn't an instruction manual. The Bible is a storybook. More specifically, the Bible is the singular story of Jesus, who has come to rescue us from eternal death by following God's instructions for us and then dying the death we deserve. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead to defeat sin and death for us so that Jesus might apply the atoning work of His perfect life to our sinful life. While the Bible is full of instructions, we need to learn to see it as the story of God's plan to rescue His people and give them life.

The Bible is the singular story of Jesus. However, there are many stories in the Bible. There's the story of Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, and many others. We tend not only to see the Bible as an instruction book, but we also tend to see the Bible as a collection of many stories that teach us something about morality. We read the Bible something like this: Think of the sordid story of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38). Judah didn't follow God's instructions. He's a bad example. Don't be like him. Or, think about Joseph (Genesis 39). When he was in Potiphar's house, Potiphar's wife seduced Joseph, and instead of giving in to sexual temptation, Joseph fled. He's a good example. Be like Joseph. Joseph followed God's instructions.

If we're not careful, we reduce the stories of the Bible down to fables about morality, but the stories of the Bible are far from fables about morality. The individual stories of the Bible help us to understand the singular story of God's desire to redeem His people through the death and resurrection of His Son. You will be a much better student and teacher of the Bible as you learn to see the Bible as a single story. We call this approach to understanding the Bible "biblical theology." In this lesson, you will learn the basics of biblical theology to understand how the Bible works and to have a better understanding of the Bible.

What is Biblical Theology?

Simply put, biblical theology is a framework for reading the Bible that traces the storyline of the Bible, seeing how each part of the Bible integrates as the story unfolds and climaxes in Jesus Christ. As you look at the Bible through the lens of biblical theology, you will see how individual stories connect to other books of the Bible as those stories point you to Jesus.

What is the storyline of the Bible?

Creation

In the beginning, our perfect God created a perfect world by the sound of His voice. Everything God made was good. God created man and woman in His image – to reflect His glory and rule with God by taking dominion over the earth as they were fruitful and multiplied. From the beginning, God’s good plan for His creation was that His people would reflect His image.

Fall

God placed the first two people in a beautiful garden where they enjoyed its fruit and perfect fellowship with God. God gave Adam and Eve specific instructions not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve rebelled against God, and the punishment for their sin was death. God banished Adam and Eve from the garden, and every person born since Adam and Eve has also followed in their footsteps by sinning against God.

Redemption

While God justly punished Adam and Eve from the garden by banishing them from the garden of Eden, where Adam and Eve enjoyed perfect fellowship with God, God longs for people to enjoy His presence. When Adam and Eve sinned, God initiated a plan of redemption to bring His people back into fellowship with Him. God made a series of promises (covenants) at different times in Israel’s history, giving people hope for future redemption.

- Promise to Adam and Eve that one would come from the serpent’s seed (Gen. 3:15).
- Promise to Noah that God would not destroy the earth again through a flood (Gen. 9:8-17)
- Promise to Abraham that God would build a great nation through Abraham’s descendants and this nation would be a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3).
- Promise to Israel (through Moses) that Israel would be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. This covenant included blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (Ex. 19-20).
- Promise to David that one would come from his lineage and reign as King forever (2 Sam. 7:14).
- Promise to the church (New Testament) that we are forever God’s people because of what

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Jesus accomplished on behalf of His church. All the promises of the Old Testament ultimately point to Jesus. Jesus is the seed of the woman who crushed the head of the serpent. Jesus crushed the head of the serpent by suffering the judgment of God on our behalf. Jesus is the blessing of God born of the nation promised to Abraham. Jesus is the King from the lineage of David, who sits on His throne forever.

Restoration

- God longs to be with His people in perfect fellowship like He was in perfect fellowship with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden before they rebelled against Him. God redeemed His people through the death and resurrection of His Son, and now God's people are waiting for the return of Jesus.
- While we await the return of Jesus, we live on mission, empowered by the Spirit of God, sharing the Gospel so that others may know of God's grace and mercy.
- When Jesus returns, He will call His people to be with Him once and for all in a new heaven and earth unstained by sin. His people will be glorified and never experience the effects of sin again. We will be in perfect fellowship with God like He intended in the garden.

Reading the Bible with the Storyline in Mind.

- As you read the Bible, where are you in the story?
- Let the biblical context help you determine the interpretation of the text you are studying.
- Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees. All of Scripture is ultimately about Jesus!
- When you read the Old Testament, know that what you read finds fulfillment in Jesus. "Each genre and part of the Old Testament looks toward Christ and informs us about who he is in some way that others do not" (Tim Keller, *Preaching*, 45).
- When you read the New Testament, read the New Testament in light of the reality that the Promised King has come to redeem His people.

Themes that Help Us to Understand the Story of the Bible

- When you studied the Connecting Faith to Life discipleship curriculum, you studied different themes in the Bible that helped you understand the storyline of the Bible. As you study individual books of the Bible or individual passages of Scripture, determine if a theme is present and how that theme connects you to the storyline of the Bible.
- **Kingdom:** We were created to serve our King and live in His Kingdom.
- **Covenant:** We were made for a relationship with God. Through covenants, the Bible answers the question, "How can God be holy and still remain faithful to His people?" from God. The story of the Bible explains how God will bring us home through Jesus Christ.
- **Home and Exile:** Since the fall of Adam and Eve, humanity has been exiled from God. The story of the Bible explains how God will bring us home through Jesus Christ.
- **Temple/Presence of God:** God longs for His people to experience His presence. How can sinful people come close to God and enjoy His presence?
- **Rest/Sabbath:** God wants His people to rest in Him. The only way to find rest is through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Every major figure in the Bible helps us to understand the story of Jesus.

- When you read the different stories of individuals in the Bible that help to tell the story of the Bible, remember that Jesus is the "True and Better." In other words, it's essential to understand that Jesus does what the former things (Adam, the temple, Israel) couldn't do perfectly, and He's reversing the effects of sin brought about because of Adam.
- Jesus is the true and better Adam. Jesus passed the test in the garden whereas Adam failed. Adam brought sin into the world; Jesus brought life into the world (Romans 5:12-21).
- Jesus is the true and better Abel. Like Abel, Jesus' blood was innocently slain. Unlike Abel, Jesus' blood was slain for our acquittal, not our condemnation (Hebrews 12:24).
- Jesus is the true and better Abraham. Jesus answered the call of God to leave the comfort of what was familiar (heaven) to step into the void of humanity (earth), so He might create a new people.

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- Jesus is the true and better Isaac, who His Father offered up as a sacrifice, yet Jesus was the sacrifice for all.
- Jesus is the true and better Jacob. Jesus wrestled with God and won by losing His life so we might gain life.
- Jesus is the true and better Joseph who forgives those who betrayed Him, and Jesus uses His power to save the ones who betrayed Him.
- Jesus is the true and better Moses, who serves as our eternal mediator of a new covenant.
- Jesus is the true and better David. He is the true King of Israel who leads us to true victory.
- Jesus is the true and better Jonah. Jesus was cast out into the storm so we could be brought in from the storm.



*My friend and Old Testament professor Tremper Longman once told me that reading the Bible is somewhat like watching the movie *The Sixth Sense*. That movie has a startling ending that forces you to go back and reinterpret everything you saw before. The second time through, you can't not think of the ending as you watch the beginning and middle of the movie. The ending sheds unignorable light on everything that went before. In the same way, once you know all the lines of all the stories and all the climaxes of all the themes converge on Christ, you simply can't not see that every text is ultimately about Jesus"*

(Keller, Preaching, 60).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think it is important to understand the entire storyline of the Bible when studying a single passage of Scripture in the Bible?

2. How has understanding biblical theology helped shape the how you read the Bible?

3. In your group, take turns telling the story of the Bible in a few minutes each.

4. How do you think knowing the storyline of the Bible helps you share the Gospel more effectively?

HOMEWORK

Watch the following video on YouTube and write a paragraph or two explaining what you learned from the video.

Jim Hamilton on Biblical Theology | Bible Study Magazine Podcast 3.1
by Logos Bible Software

LESSON 03:

THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF BIBLE STUDY

You've probably been there. You committed to having a consistent time of Bible reading every day. Maybe you selected a Bible reading plan on your Bible app to help you read through the New Testament in 90 days, or if you were ambitious, you chose a plan to help you read through the Bible over a year. Then, you did it. You got up early in the morning, got your cup of coffee, sat at the kitchen table, and started your journey of reading the Bible intentionally.

How did it go? You may have made it through Genesis and Exodus but gave up in Leviticus. Maybe you read through the New Testament but didn't understand what you read. You disciplined yourself to read, but perhaps you can't say that you grew in understanding the Bible because of your reading. What happened? Why didn't you grow?

Don't be overly discouraged! God will honor your persistence as you continue to discipline yourself to study the Bible, but we want to help you understand what you read. The good news is that you CAN understand the Bible. You don't have to go to seminary or be a pastor to understand the Bible. You already have everything you need to understand the Bible.

You have the Holy Spirit. Before Jesus' death on the cross, He told His disciples, "I have spoken these things to you while I remain with you. But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have told you" (John 14:25-26).

You have the people of God. The beauty of the church is that the church helps you to understand

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and apply the Bible. You also have the church to help keep you from misinterpreting the Bible. Misinterpreting the Bible can lead you not to understand what God wants for your life; worse, misinterpreting the Bible can lead you to heresy. That's why it's so vital that you are involved in a church that teaches the Bible carefully.

You have resources. You have a class like this to help you learn how to study the Bible well. You have access to Bible scholars and past theologians to lean on. In other words, God has provided you with all you need to grow in your understanding of the Bible. You need to learn how to put in the work to study the Bible well.

The Connecting Faith to Life curriculum introduced you to a methodology of studying the Bible that followers of Jesus have used for years. You learned to observe the text, interpret the text, and apply the text. This lesson of our study will review what you learned in the Connecting Faith to Life curriculum and hopefully give you a few more helpful tools as you learn how to study and teach the Bible.

1. Observation

- When observing the text, you answer the question, "What do I see?"
 - Before you dive into the text, answer some preliminary questions:
 - Who wrote the book you are studying?
 - Why did the author write the book?
 - What is the genre of the passage you are studying? Is it poetry, narrative, or discourse? Why is this important?
 - The book introductions in a good study Bible (e.g., ESV Study Bible or CSB Study Bible) are invaluable resources to help you with some of these background questions.

- Before diving into the text, consider the passage's context. Consider the following:
 - **Literary Context:** How does the passage relate to what comes before it and what comes after it? How does the passage relate to the argument/structure of the entire book?
 - **Historical Context:** Who was the author? When was the book written? What were the circumstances that caused the author to write? What was happening in the book's historical setting that might inform your understanding of the text? What about the historical context helps you understand the passage?
 - **Biblical Context:** How does your passage relate to the entire Bible? Where does this passage fit in the grand redemptive narrative of Scripture?
- As you read the text, ask these kinds of questions:
 - What seems to be the subject that the author is mentioning in the passage? Why does the author bring this subject up?
 - Is there a sentence or verse in the passage that seems to summarize the subject?
 - What theological truths or biblical themes do you see in this passage?
 - What words are repeated? Why?
 - If poetry, what literary elements are being used? Repetition, parallelism, metaphor, simile, etc.
 - If you're reading a narrative, who are the characters? What's the climax of the story?
 - How does this passage point you to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

2. Interpretation

- After you have spent sufficient time observing the text, you are ready to answer the question, "What does this passage of Scripture mean?"
- The goal of interpretation is to be able to understand the intended meaning of the author. A question you never ask of a Bible text is, "What does this passage mean to me?" There is a place for application, but before you can make the proper application, you must understand what the author intended for his original audience to understand.

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- Get in the habit of summarizing the meaning of a passage of Scripture in a 15-18 word past tense sentence.
 - Here are ten general rules for interpreting the Bible:
 1. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative.
 2. Interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages. Let Scripture interpret Scripture.
 3. Interpret personal experience in light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience.
 4. Remember that Scripture has only one meaning but many applications.
 5. Interpret words and passages in harmony with their meaning in the time of the author; interpret them within their context! We must understand what the Scripture meant to its original audience, and what it means for us today.
 6. Interpret Scripture in light of its progressive revelation.
 7. Remember, you must understand the Bible grammatically (Observation) before you can understand it theologically (Interpretation).
 8. A doctrine cannot be considered biblical unless it includes all that the scriptures say about it. Do not practice "selective citation" or "proof-texting."
 9. Determine the genre of a book or passage. Is it narrative, prophecy, apocalyptic, etc.?
 10. When two doctrines taught in the Bible appear to be contradictory, accept both as scriptural, continue to work toward resolution, and accept that we cannot "figure-out" all there is to know about God and His Word.
 - The most significant rule of interpretation is to practice humility. Bible study is best done in the community of faith.
 - Check your conclusions using reliable commentaries, but don't use commentaries until you have studied the Bible passage yourself.
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3. Application

- We study the Bible for life change! We want to grow as much as possible in our Bible knowledge. We also want to grow in applying the Bible to our lives. We want God to transform us as His Spirit works while we study His Word.
- The Bible wasn't given to us to make us more intelligent sinners but holy saints.
- When applying a passage of Scripture, try to answer three primary questions:
 1. In light of this passage, how should I think?
 2. In light of this passage, what should I do?
 3. In light of this passage, how should I pray?
- The following questions will help you to answer the three primary questions of application:
 - Is this passage teaching me something about the character of God that I need to believe?
 - Is there a sin to avoid/confess?
 - Is there a promise to claim?
 - Is there a prayer to repeat?
 - Is there a command to obey?
 - Is there a command to obey?
 - Is there a condition to meet?
 - Is there a verse to memorize?
 - Is there an error to avoid?
 - Is there a challenge to face?
 - Is there a principle to apply?
 - Is there a habit to change, start, or stop?
 - Is there an attitude to correct? Is there a truth to believe?

Remember, there is one meaning of a text but many possible applications. Make sure your applications are drawn from the text you are studying at the time.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What have you been studying in the Bible lately? What has been your method of study?

2. When you come across a difficult text, how do you usually try to determine the meaning of that difficult text?

3. How could using Observation, Interpretation, and Application help the way you study the Bible?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Joshua 1:1-9 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 3 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one paragraph response to each chapter describing what big takeaways you have from Chapter 3. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 04:

STUDYING THE EPISTLES

You are probably aware that the Bible contains different genres of literature. If you're like me, you love the stories of the Bible. We all love a good story, and the Bible has many engaging and powerful stories. While the Bible is the singular story of God's redemptive work, the Bible contains more than just stories. God communicates through various genres, such as poetry, wisdom literature, prophecy, apocalyptic literature, and epistles (letters). God speaks to our emotions through poetry. God warns us through the prophets. God teaches us to live wisely in wisdom books like Proverbs. God calls us to look for the return of His Son through apocalyptic literature.

In the epistles, God teaches us about our great salvation and how we are to live out our great salvation. During your time in this course, we will be looking at the different genres of literature used in the Bible, and we will learn how to study each genre.

In this lesson, we're going to be discussing the epistles. Why would we start with these letters in the back of your Bible? Simply put, the epistles are the most straightforward literature in the Bible for us to understand. That's not to say the content within the epistles is easy to understand. If you've read Romans 9, you know that the content within the epistles can be quite difficult for us to understand.

The form and structure of the epistles are relatively easy for us to understand because this genre is familiar to us. While we don't send letters as often as previous generations sent letters, you have probably written a letter at some point in your life. You have probably composed an email if you have never written a letter.

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Think about why you write a letter or send an email. More often than not, you have a reason for writing. There's a purpose behind your message. After the salutation of your letter and opening pleasantries, you start to get to the point of why you're writing. You could write a letter to check in with someone or write about a pressing issue you must resolve. After stating your reason for writing and discussing that reason, you usually end the letter with a few other thoughts that may be on your mind, and you conclude the letter with a closing salutation.

While the New Testament letters aren't exactly like our modern letters, there are some similarities, making this genre of Scripture feel familiar to us. In addition to the epistles being like our modern letters, the epistles are deductive or logical. The authors state their main points in the New Testament epistles and then explain and argue them. In our western world, we love deductive reasoning. We want people to get to the point and explain their points well. The New Testament authors write their epistles this way, making them a good starting place for our study of the different genres of literature in the Bible. Let's think about some ways we can study and teach the epistles.

Some things to consider when studying the Epistles:

- Most of the New Testament is epistles (Twenty-one books out of twenty-seven are epistles.)
- Your New Testament comprises two categories of epistles: Pauline and General. Notice that the order of books is by length, not importance. The epistles written by Paul precede the general epistles. Various authors write the general epistles.
- Letters are occasional documents written to a specific audience at a particular time. It's helpful to understand that Paul or other New Testament authors were not writing letters to just teach doctrine. They were writing letters to actual churches that were struggling with various issues.

- Letters address a specific situation. It is your job as a Bible student to determine why the author wrote the letter. What was the major issue(s) the author wanted to address in the letter? Some letters correct behaviors. Some correct doctrine. Some clarify misunderstandings. Some letters are written to encourage.
- While the New Testament letters are full of rich theology, letters are not theological treatises. Again, letters are situational documents. The authors help their audience think theologically through issues they are facing in their local churches.
- When reading the epistles, get to know the author and the audience. You can get an idea of the authorial intent and what the audience is going through simply by reading the letter. (A study Bible can also give you this information but try to reconstruct it yourself.)
- It is most helpful to read an epistle in one sitting to get the flow of the letter. (After all, you read a letter you receive in the mail or an email in one sitting.) When beginning a study of an epistle, read through the epistle several times so you can understand the flow of the letter. Once you have a general idea of the flow of the letter, go back and start working through the letter chapter by chapter.
- As you read an epistle, or any passage of Scripture, remember that a text cannot mean what it could never have meant to its author or his readers.
- Consider the typical structure of a New Testament letter:
 - Identification of the author
 - Identification of the audience
 - Greeting
 - Prayer or Thanksgiving
 - Body
 - Conclusion with final greeting or farewell and other various elements.

In the *Connecting Faith to Life* discipleship curriculum, you learned to interpret passages of Scripture by observing the text, interpreting the text, and applying the text. Let's practice a passage from an epistle to sharpen our skills in Bible interpretation.

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Let's Practice: 1 Corinthians 8:1-13

Always begin your time of Bible study with prayer, and ask the Holy Spirit to teach you and change you as you study.

Observation: What do I see?

(Write down important notes concerning who, what, where, when, why, and how. What sticks out to you? What words are repeated? What do you have questions about? Is there any imagery? Metaphors? Comparisons? Contrasts? Record your observations.)

- There is a disagreement about the kind of meat a Christian can eat; specifically, some are arguing that Christians cannot eat meat sacrificed to idols.
 - The word knowledge is used several times. What does Paul mean by knowledge in this context? What does Paul mean when Paul says, "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"?
 - Idols- Note Paul's opinion of them – "for us, there is one God" – How should Paul's opinion about idols shape the way Christians think about food offered to idols?
 - What does Paul mean when he calls some believers "weak"?
 - It's easy to be a stumbling block to believers who have not matured in their faith. (vs. 9) How?
 - Corinth is not the only church to struggle with this issue. (Romans 14. Check your cross references. Also, cross-references will probably help you when you are stuck on a verse and can't seem to make sense of it.)
 - Food will not commend us to God (vs. 8) – What we eat is not a big deal to God. From this passage, what is God most concerned with?
 - How can eating something amoral cause a Christian brother to sin?
 - Paul doesn't want to do anything to cause a brother in Christ to stumble. Therefore, regardless of how he feels about meat sacrificed to idols, he's not going to eat it for the sake of weak people.
 - How should love inform our actions?
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Interpretation: What does it mean?

(Considering the genre of Scripture, the historical and cultural background, and the theological contexts, in one or two sentences, what is the primary meaning of the text for its original readers?)

Paul told the Corinthian believers it was not sinful to eat meat sacrificed to idols since idols are not gods. However, Christians should care far more about showing love to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ than they care about exercising their liberties. If eating meat sacrificed to idols caused a younger or weaker believer to stumble in their faith (by seemingly committing idolatry), it was better for a mature believer not to eat meat sacrificed to idols.

After this point, you may want to consult a commentary or the study notes of your study Bible to check your work and gain additional insights about the cultural context. However, as you can see, you can often discover the meaning of the text simply by asking and answering the right questions.

As you think about the interpretation of the passage of Scripture, how does the interpretation of the passage relate to a modern audience? Can you summarize in a sentence or two the timeless principles from this passage that help you to understand how this passage relates to you?

- Mature believers should be sensitive to the spiritual needs of younger believers and encourage them in their faith by being an example of godliness rather than discouraging believers by doing things that may be questionable.

Application: What do I do?

(Make specific application by using the following questions.)

Who should I be?

I want to be a mature follower of Christ who demonstrates love to younger believers by encouraging them in their growth. Therefore, I need to be careful of my actions, attitudes, and words in the presence of other believers.

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How should I think?

I should think of the needs of others before I think of my freedoms or what I want.

What should I do?

I should be intentional in my relationships, helping others grow by teaching them the truth. I should be an example of godliness.

How do I do it?

I need to form better mentoring relationships with some younger believers so I can be an encouragement to them.

How do I pray?

- For help to be an example of godliness and grace to others.
- For forgiveness when I've put my preferences above someone else's spiritual needs.
- For opportunities to be intentional in my relationships.
- For God to help me protect the unity of the body by not putting preferences above relationships.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is context so important when studying the epistles? How can you be a better student of context?

2. While the epistles are not theological treatises, they play a massive role in forming our theology. How do the epistles inform our theology?

3. What challenges might arise when studying the epistles? Why can it sometimes be difficult to study the epistles?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Hebrews 12:1-3 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 4 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing what big takeaways you have from Chapter 4. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 05:

STUDYING AND TEACHING THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

One of my favorite old hymns begins like this: “I love to tell the story, of unseen things above, of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love. I love to tell the story because I know it’s true; it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.”

There’s nothing quite like the story of Jesus. The story of Jesus is the story of how we can have a relationship with the God who created us and loves us. Thankfully, our Bible has four books that tell the story of Jesus, and each of these four books is unique. You and I are privileged to have four Gospels, written by four different authors from four different perspectives, that tell us the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. Think about that for a moment. While there are some differences between the four Gospels, the four Gospels tell us the same story, validating the reality that Jesus was the Messiah who came, lived, died, and rose again for us!

While the Gospels present a biographical sketch of Jesus’ life and ministry, the Gospels are not a biography like you might pick up at your local bookstore. The Gospels are theological biographies. In other words, the Gospels are not given to us to provide us with just historical facts about Jesus. While the Gospels certainly give us an accurate portrayal of Jesus’ life, the Gospel writers want us to know and believe that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. The Gospels show us how Jesus is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament promises. The Gospels show us that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

What makes the Gospels unique is within the Gospels, you find several different genres of

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literature. The Gospels mostly contain narrative literature, stories about Jesus. The Gospels also contain poetry (think Mary's song) and discourse (think the teachings of Jesus.) Finally, the Gospels contain parables. We could do a whole session on understanding the parables. The parables play a vital role in the teaching ministry of Jesus as Jesus uses these stories that draw from experiences of everyday life to teach us realities about the Kingdom of God.

Because of the variety of genres found in the Gospels, you might find the Gospels more challenging to interpret. However, the same basic rules of interpretation apply to understanding the Gospels even as the other books of the Bible, even though the Gospels are unique. The more you observe the text and ask the right questions about the passage you're studying, the more likely you will understand what the passage means in its original context and the more likely you will be able to apply the text well.

Finally, when studying the Gospels, pay close attention to context. You need to be aware of the literary context. As the Gospels record the story of Jesus, what is each Gospel writer trying to accomplish within their Gospel? For example, Luke devotes more space to Jesus' journey to Jerusalem than any other Gospel writer. Why?

Think about biblical context. The Gospels show us that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Notice how many times the Gospel writers quote from the Old Testament, especially Matthew! What are the Gospel writers showing us about Jesus from their frequent use of the Old Testament?

Finally, historical context is something to pay close attention to in the Gospels. Jesus lived in a specific time and a specific place. Jesus was born in a Jewish nation dominated by the Roman empire. The Jews longed to be free from Roman oppression. How does this unique historical time contribute to our understanding of Jesus as our Messiah? A good study Bible or commentary comes in handy to help you better grasp the historical context. Everett Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* is helpful when trying to learn the Gospels' historical context.

The Gospel writer Luke also wrote the Book of Acts. The Book of Acts is the story of the birth of the church and the spread of the Gospel after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Many of the same principles to studying the Gospels also apply to the Book of Acts, especially when you consider the Book of Acts is the second volume of Luke's two volume work, Luke-Acts. However, when reading the Book of Acts it's important to remember that what Luke writes is descriptive and not prescriptive. In other words, everything that happens in the Book of Acts is not normative for today's church. However, the Book of Acts lays the foundation for the church, and we can learn much about how the modern church should function from the Book of Acts. (For example, see Acts 2:42-47.)

Some things to consider when studying the Gospels and Acts:

- The Gospels contain stories about Jesus and the teachings of Jesus written from the account of four different authors. Each Gospel author writes to a different community for a different purpose. Keep this in mind when reading the Gospels.
- Matthew, Mark, and Luke are interdependent. (We call these synoptic Gospels. Synoptic means to see together.) Most likely, Mark is the earliest Gospel, and Matthew and Luke borrowed from his material. John is an independent Gospel.
 - Matthew was written to a Jewish audience. The emphasis is on Jesus as the Son of God, the King of the Jews. Also, Matthew emphasizes that the Gospel is for all people, not just Jews.
 - Mark is most likely Peter's teachings relayed to Mark. Most likely, the recipient of this Gospel was the church in Rome. The church in Rome would have been unfamiliar with Jewish customs. Mark tells the story of Jesus as the fulfillment of the story of Israel.
 - Luke was written to a gentile audience. Luke's goal was to write an orderly account of the life and teachings of Jesus to convince others of the truth of Christ. (1:1-3)
 - John was written with an evangelistic purpose (John 20:30-31). This Gospel is much more theological than the other three.

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- The Gospels are not necessarily chronological. Each writer adapts the stories of Jesus to accomplish his purpose. Therefore, it is helpful to think vertically and horizontally. In other words, how does each Gospel represent Jesus, and how does each Gospel relate to the other Gospels?
- Take note of the different methods of Jesus' teachings. He used parables, purposeful overstatements, similes and metaphors, poetry, questions, irony, and other methods.
- Take note of the stories of Jesus' life and ministry. These are not merely stories with a moral for us to emulate. The stories demonstrate that Jesus is God, the all-powerful Messiah Israel has longed for.
- Take note of how often the Kingdom of God is mentioned in the Gospels. The Kingdom of God was one of Jesus' favorite things to discuss during His earthly ministry. The Kingdom of God is the reign and rule of God on earth. His Kingdom exists wherever people surrender to Him. The Kingdom is present and future.
- Think context. How does the material you are reading relate to the material around it?
- When studying the Book of Acts, apply the same principles as you do for reading other narrative Scripture. However, keep in mind that much in the Book of Acts is descriptive and not prescriptive.

Let's practice: Mark 4:35-41

Observation: What do I see?

- Notice the context. This story comes after several parables about the Kingdom of God expanding on the earth. This story also comes right before Jesus miraculously healing a man possessed by demons.
 - Notice Jesus says, "Let us go to the other side." Jesus undoubtedly knew He was leading His disciples into a storm, and He knew they would make it to the other side.
 - Notice the disciples' fear. The storm must have been like they had never experienced, or
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it came up very unexpectedly. Regardless, it caught these experienced sailors entirely off guard.

- Jesus sleeps. Why? Was He that tired?
- Jesus rebuked the wind and waves, and they immediately stopped.
- Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith? – Apparently, the disciples failed to realize who was in the boat with them. Indeed, it was not God’s plan for the Messiah to die in a fishing boat. They could trust that Jesus was in control.
- Who, then, is this? Rhetorical question – It was clear who this was. Jesus was the Messiah who would expand the Kingdom of God. Jesus was the One who could cast out demons on the other side of the sea. When confronted with the demon-possessed man in Mark 5, the disciples would remember what Christ had while they were in the boat with Him.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Jesus has power over death, disease, demons, and nature. Nothing is too difficult for Jesus. We can trust Him in every situation of life.

How does it relate?

We can trust Jesus in any situation, knowing He controls everything. There’s no need to fear as a child of God, knowing that He protects us.

Application: Who should I be?

I want to be a believer confident in the power of Christ and not confident in my ability. I should be completely trusting. I am too confident in my own strength and too untrusting in the power of God.

How should I think?

I should think of God for who He is. God is not “the big man upstairs” who is uninterested in the daily details of my life. He is all-powerful and in control of everything.

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What should I do?

I should repent of my lack of trust in God. I should walk by faith since nothing is impossible for God. I can trust God with my finances. I can trust God to give me wisdom in my relationships. I can trust God to accomplish in my life whatever He desires. I need to look to Him more and to myself less.

How do I do it?

Right now, I need to pray and ask God to forgive me of my lack of trust. This week, whenever I feel anxious, I will pray before I panic. This week, when I have decisions to make, I will pray and ask God for wisdom before I make decisions.

How do I pray?

- For forgiveness for not trusting in the power of God.
- For help to trust God in specific situations where I haven't been trusting Him.
- For opportunities to share with others the message of a powerful God.
- For my family, friends, and church to understand the power of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to understand context when studying the Gospels? What resources can you use to grow your understanding of the context of a particular passage of Scripture?

2. How do the Gospels form our theology? How do the epistles complement the Gospels?

3. What challenges do you think might arise when studying the Gospels? Why can it sometimes be difficult to study the Gospels?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Matthew 7:7-11 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapters 6-7 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapters 6- 7. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 06:

STUDYING AND TEACHING THE OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVES

The Old Testament is full of amazing stories. If you grew up in church, you probably remember learning the stories of the Old Testament in Sunday School. Maybe in your home, your parents read to you every night from an illustrated Bible storybook. I remember the Bible storybook my mom read to me when I was a young child. I begged her to read me those stories so often that she decided to record herself reading the stories from that Bible storybook on cassette tape so that I could listen as often as I wanted to.

As a child, I remember being enraptured by those great stories. The stories of Noah and the Ark, David and Goliath, and Daniel in the Lion's Den absolutely amazed me. I bet you probably have some favorite Old Testament Bible stories. You could easily retell the story of Moses and the burning bush or the story of Samson. These ancient stories stick with us because they are powerful stories of people who had immense faith and accomplished great things for God.

As I've grown older, my love for the stories of the Old Testament has only deepened. My passion for the Old Testament stories has deepened because I have a much better understanding of what the Bible writers were accomplishing as they recorded these stories. I had the same understanding of Old Testament narratives for much of my life as most people do. First, I thought of the Old Testament stories in much the same way I thought of fables. I never doubted the veracity of the Old Testament stories, but I treated them as stories that had a moral that I was supposed to emulate. When reading a fable, you ask, "What's the moral of the story?" Often, when reading Bible stories, we ask the same question. If you read Old Testament narratives this way, you might walk away from the book of Job, saying, "The moral of the story is I need to be patient like Job." Or, you walk away from Joshua's story, saying, "I need to be bold and

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courageous like Joshua.” While Job is an example of patience, and Joshua is an example of courage, God did not give us the story of Job and Joshua just to provide us with examples to follow.

Second, I used to read the Old Testament stories as individual, stand-alone stories. For example, you have the story of Noah and the Flood, Jacob and Esau, and on and on. It was almost as if the Old Testament was a collection of random stories that were helpful to read, but I couldn’t see how all the stories fit together.

The Old Testament narratives are not fables given to us so we might ask, “What’s the moral of the story.” The Old Testament narratives are also not individual, stand-alone stories. The Old Testament narratives tell us the story of God’s story of redemption that begins to unfold in the story of Israel and culminates in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The stories of the Old Testament point us to the Gospel. As you learn to read the Old Testament narratives, you will learn to read the stories of the Old Testament with your eyes on the Gospel.

Reading Old Testament Narratives

Some things to Consider:

- Many principles that apply to reading Old Testament narratives can be applied to reading the narratives in the gospels or the Book of Acts in the New Testament.
- Over 40% of the Old Testament is Narrative.
- All narratives have three basic parts: characters, plot, and plot resolution.
- Avoid the following dangers:
 - Do not read the Old Testament narratives allegorically looking for hidden meanings.
 - Do not read the narratives to learn a moral lesson. (e.g., If you are like David, you can overcome your giants.)
 - Do not read the narratives as man-centered. These narratives are not about you. God is the hero of every story.

- The Old Testament Narratives:
 - Have a specific purpose.
 - Tell us what happened and not what should have happened.
 - Are selective and incomplete.
- Read the narratives on three levels:
 - Level one – Individual narratives that tell specific, stand-alone stories.
 - Level two – How does the story relate to the larger story of Israel?
 - Level three – How does the story relate to the overarching story of the Bible?

Let's Practice: 1 Samuel 17

Observation: What do I see?

- The author describes Goliath with great detail. The author wants us to be intimidated by his stature.
- Notice the fear of Saul (1 Sam. 17:11). By this time, the kingdom had been taken away from Saul, even though he was still king (1 Sam. 15). Samuel anointed David as the king who would take the throne after Saul's death. It's unlikely that Saul knew that Samuel anointed David as king.
- The standoff lasted 40 days (1 Sam. 17:16). Every day, Goliath intimidated the Israelites, and the Israelites had no one to fight him. Think about the tension: Israel desperately needed a hero!
- Note that David's courage came from God (1 Sam. 17:37).
- Note that Goliath's mockery of the Israelites angered David. "...for he has defied the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:36).
- Note David's confidence in the victory that he is convinced God will give him and the Israelites. "This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand..." (1 Sam. 17:46)

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Israel needed a hero, and God provided an unlikely hero to defeat their enemy.

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How does it relate?

- Think of biblical theology when you are studying the Old Testament narratives. How does this story relate to the New Testament, and how does it relate to our modern context? Thinking through the three levels of the story is helpful. In this story, God is raising a king (David) who would rule over the nation like no other king. Ultimately, God would raise another King (Jesus) who rules over His people perfectly.
- Because we are like Israel, we need a hero. We cannot save ourselves from our greatest enemies: sin and death. God provides a hero for us: Jesus Christ.

Application:**Who should I be?**

I should be confident in the only one who is able to defeat my enemies. Because of Christ I do not have to feel defeated, nor do I have to try to defeat my enemies on my own. I can be fully confident in the power of Christ. Does my life demonstrate that I have confidence in Christ or am I like the Israelites, fearful that I am going to be defeated?

How should I think?

I should not think that I am the hero of my life, nor should I look to anyone else to be the hero of my life. The moment I look to another hero, I have committed idolatry. God does not call me to do anything in my power. Rather, He calls me to trust in the power of Christ. Because of the work of Christ, I do not have to worry. Rather, I can rest knowing that He is able to handle anything I might face.

How should I pray?

- Repent of trusting my own strength rather than the power of Christ.
- For help to trust Christ and His power.
- With thanksgiving that I do not have to save myself.
- For others who are struggling with knowing the power of Christ. Pray that I might encourage them in their walk with the Lord.

What should I do?

I should not be self-sufficient. I cannot save myself, nor can I accomplish God's work apart from God's help. I should be careful not to depend on anyone or anything more than I depend on God.

How do I do it?

I need to examine my heart to see if I am overly self-sufficient. I also need to examine my heart for idols. Who or what am I depending on to be the savior of my life other than God Himself?

How should I pray?

- Repent of trusting my strength rather than the power of Christ.
- For help to trust Christ and His power.
- With thanksgiving that I do not have to save myself.
- For others who are struggling with knowing the power of Christ. Pray that I might encourage them in their walk with the Lord.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is an understanding of the entire story of the Bible helpful when interpreting Old Testament narratives?

2. Why is it easy to fall into the trap of interpreting Old Testament stories as stories with a moral to emulate or a person to follow as an example rather than interpreting Old Testament narratives in the context of God's redemptive story?

3. What challenges might arise when studying Old Testament narratives? Why can it sometimes be difficult to study Old Testament narratives?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Numbers 21:4-9 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 5 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapter 5. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 07:

HOW TO STUDY AND TEACH THE OLD TESTAMENT LAW

We tend to have a love/hate relationship with rules. Something within us craves boundaries. We want to know what we can and can't do. We want to know what's right and what's wrong. We love rules, and most of us like the feeling we get deep inside of us when we've kept the rules or when we've done everything just right.

We love rules, but we also hate rules. Rules are good until they get in the way of what we want. When the rules get in the way of what we want, we'll complain about how restrictive or oppressive the rules are. We'll look for loopholes to try to get around the rules. We'll talk about how the rules don't apply to us. Or we'll outright rebel against the rules and break every rule that stands in the way of what we want. We like rules until we don't like rules.

God gave the nation of Israel rules. The first five books of the Old Testament are known as the Law. What's interesting is that when you read the first five books of the Old Testament, there's more narrative than law. There aren't any real laws for Israel to follow until Exodus 20. However, the laws found in the first five books of the Old Testament form the foundation of God's covenant relationship with the nation of Israel.

When you think about the word law, you likely think of civil legal codes as we have in the United States, but the Hebrew word torah that we translate as law in our English Bibles is much broader than a civil legal code. While we translate the word torah as law in our English Bibles, the word torah is much more comprehensive and means to instruct, teach, or guide. The law that God gave to Israel showed Israel the ideals that He desired for His people.

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You are familiar with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-12). While you are most familiar with the Ten Commandments, there are far more than ten commands in the Old Testament Law. According to Jewish tradition, the Old Testament Law contains 613 commands! Most of us cannot recite the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-12 much less the other 603 commands! The commands served to guide and instruct Israel in God's ideals so that the nation of Israel could live as a people who were set apart for God's glory so that they could be a blessing to the nations.

When you read the Old Testament Law, remember that these commands aren't arbitrary commands given to the nation of Israel so that they might be in an orderly society protected by laws and regulations. The commands are given in the context of a covenant. God chose Israel as a covenant people. Israel is God's unique people set apart by Him for His specific purpose. The commands were the stipulations of God's covenant with His people. In His covenant with Israel, God promised to bless Israel, and God expected Israel to obey His commands faithfully as part of the covenant agreement.

The Old Testament Law can be difficult to read because the Laws were not given to us but to the ancient nation of Israel. While the Ten Commandments are timeless and easy to understand, many commands are more challenging for us to understand. Having a good study Bible or a good set of Bible commentaries will provide you with background information that will help you to understand the historical context in which God gave these laws.

When reading the Old Testament Law remember that God gave these laws to Israel, not you. That does not mean that the Law does not apply to your life, but it's not your Law! Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law for you. You are under the New Covenant, not the Old Covenant. Through faith in Christ, you are obligated to the Law of Christ (Galatians 6:2, James 2:8). When reading the Law, ask yourself, "What's at the heart of this law?" In other words, what is the ideal that the law you're reading points you to? For example, reading laws regarding the Sabbath points you to God's ideal for your life. God's ideal for your life is that you find rest in Him.

Some things to Consider:

- The first five books of the Old Testament are called the “Pentateuch,” the “Torah,” or the Law of Moses.
- The Pentateuch contains over 600 specific commandments.
- The Old Testament Law is a covenant. God expects His people to be loyal to their covenant agreement with Him. Despite the people’s inability to keep the Law, God remained faithful. When reading the Old Testament Law, keep the whole story of the Bible in mind. The Law is not separate from the story of Israel. The Law is part of Israel’s story.
- The Old Testament Law is a gift to God’s people that established how they were to live in community with one another and faithfulness to God. God did not intend for the Old Testament Law to be a system of salvation. Since the beginning, the only way to be justified before God is through faith (Genesis 15:6).
- The Old Testament is not our Testament. We are under the New Covenant through faith in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we should assume that none of the laws of the Old Testament are binding on us. However, while the Old Testament Law is not binding on us, we should desire to live in obedience to Christ if we are in Christ. (Think the Sermon on the Mount.)

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace. What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? (Romans 6:14-15)

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes (Romans 10:4).

- One way Bible scholars have distinguished the Old Testament law has been by classifying the Old Testament Law into three categories: moral law, civil law, and ritual law. Moral laws seem more immediately applicable to us because the moral law contains timeless principles. (e.g., Honor your father and mother.) The civil laws are those laws specific to the nation of Israel and how the Hebrew people interacted within Israel (e.g., Exodus 21:12-36). The ritual laws pertain to Israel’s religious life (e.g., the feasts and the sacrificial system). While it’s difficult to classify the Old Testament Law neatly, and while the Bible itself does not classify the Law in these three categories, this does help you to see how God’s Law governed every facet of the life of ancient Israel.

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- While the Old Testament Law may not be our covenant, it is still the Word of God and applicable. When studying the Old Testament laws, what timeless truths and principles are conveyed that can apply to your life? What do the civil and ritual laws teach us about the character of God and His worship?
- When reading the Law do not forget that ultimately Israel could not keep the law in their power. They could only fulfill the Law by looking to God in faith, which they did not do (Deuteronomy 30:11-20). For the New Testament believer, we look to Christ, who has fulfilled the Law and empowers us to live in obedience by His Spirit (Matthew 5:17-20).
- When studying the Law take note of the two types of laws presented: apodictic and casuistic. Apodictic laws are straightforward and begin with words like "do" or "do not." Casuistic laws are case-by-case given to help the Israelites know how to obey God in specific situations.

Let's Practice: Deuteronomy 15:12-17

Observation: What do I see?

- Deuteronomy 15:12-17 is casuistic law. Specifically, these verses address an Israelite slave owner.
- Slavery was a temporary institution. God commanded that enslaved people go free after six years of service.
- Notice that the law doesn't necessarily approve of slavery but rather makes provisions for slavery.
- Notice the kind of care that a slave owner was to give to his slave. He was to furnish him liberally and bless the slave as the Lord had blessed him. (Deut. 15:14). If a slave owner was not able to provide for the livelihood of his slave after his release, he couldn't have owned any slaves. This kind of command greatly limited slavery.
- Notice that God called the Hebrews to remember their slavery. The institution of slavery among the Hebrews was nothing like what they experienced among the Egyptians.
- Notice that an enslaved person might not want to leave his master. Why do you think this would be the case?
- If a slave didn't want to leave his master, the master would continue caring for him.

Interpretation

What does it mean?

Israelite slave owners were to treat their slaves with the same kind of grace and compassion with which God had treated them.

How does it relate?

- While the institution of slavery has been abolished, this passage teaches us the timeless truths of compassion, mercy, and generosity.
- This passage also helps us think about relationships with people under our authority or care. We do not have ultimate authority over anyone. God has ultimate authority, and God demands that we treat others with fairness, kindness, love, etc. (Consider the New Covenant expectations for how we are to treat others.)

Application

Who should I be?

If God places me in authority over others, I should treat those I am over as God has treated me. If God places me under the authority of others, I should submit willingly and gladly.

How should I think?

I should think with the mind and character of God. I should always think of myself as one under authority, whether over others or not. I am a servant of Christ and must treat others as He commanded.

What should I do?

I should examine my relationships. Who has God placed under me that I am having difficulty treating with fairness, compassion, and grace? Who has God placed over me to whom I am not willingly and gladly submitting?

How do I do it?

This week I will go out of my way to show compassion and care to someone under my authority. I will pray that God will soften my heart to those He has placed under my care.

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How should I pray?

- Repent of thinking more highly of myself than I ought.
- For help to lead others with the same compassion with which Christ leads me.
- For help to joyfully submit to those God has placed over me that through my joyful submission I might have opportunity to share Christ.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the point of the Law? Why did God give Israel the Law?

2. Why was it so difficult for Israel to keep the Law?

3. How did Jesus fulfill the Law?

4. Why is the Old Testament Law not for New Testament believer? How do we apply the Law today?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Leviticus 5:1-6 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 9 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing what big takeaways you have from Chapter 9. Be prepared to discuss during our next session.

LESSON 08:

STUDYING AND TEACHING THE PROPHETS

Much of your Old Testament contains prophetic books. I can't think of a section of Scripture that's more difficult to read than the Prophets. Reading through Jeremiah or Ezekiel can be challenging because their message seems strange. As you read through the prophetic books, it seems like the prophets are saying the same thing repeatedly, and in many ways, they are.

When you hear the word prophet, what comes to mind? We tend to think of prophets as ancient future-tellers. For example, think of some of the great messianic prophecies of the Old Testament that foretold the birth of Jesus. One of the most powerful chapters in all the prophetic books is Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 boldly predicts the crucifixion of Jesus, and the crucifixion of Jesus happened just as Isaiah described it. Isaiah 53 is breathtaking.

However, the primary role of the prophets was not to tell the future but to represent God to the people. The prophets spoke on God's behalf to the people and called God's people to faithfulness to the covenant. When reading the prophets, it's helpful to remember that they are writing to a divided kingdom. After the reign of Solomon, the Kingdom of Israel was divided into the northern kingdom (Israel) and the southern kingdom (Judah). Most of the prophetic books address either the northern kingdom or the southern kingdom. Sometimes, a prophetic book will address both the northern and southern kingdoms.

Generally speaking, the prophets have a three-fold message. First, the prophets accuse God's people of sin. The prophets are serious about God's people keeping God's Law, and it's evident from the prophets that the people had difficulty obeying God's Law. Sometimes the prophets will use vivid imagery to point out the sinfulness of God's people, but the prophets want the

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people to know how they have broken God's Law.

Second, the prophets call God's people to repent of their sins. If they refused to repent, they would experience judgment. Israel indeed experienced judgment. God judged the Northern Kingdom through the Assyrians. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians wiped out the Northern Kingdom. God judged the Southern Kingdom through the Babylonians. In 586 B.C., the Babylonians took the Southern Kingdom of Judah captive for 70 years.

Finally, the prophets give hope. The prophets promised better days for God's people. A future day of restoration was coming for God's people. For example, the prophets pointed to a day when the southern kingdom would come out of exile, and the Messiah would come and reign over His people. Ultimately, the prophets point to a future day where God will make all things new. If you remember this three-fold message of the prophets, it will help you when you read through the prophetic books.

What also makes reading the prophets challenging is that you must know the historical context to grasp each prophetic book better. The prophets write at different times. Some prophets write before the exile. Some write during the exile, and yet others write after the exile. Some prophets write to the northern kingdom of Israel, and others write to the southern kingdom of Judah. Nahum writes about the destruction of Nineveh. Obadiah writes about the destruction of the Edomites. Keeping in mind that the prophets write at different times to different audiences will help you as you read through the prophetic books.

Also, understanding that the prophets use a variety of literary genres helps you as you read through the prophetic books. Primarily, prophetic books are poetic. The prophetic books employ much poetic language and symbolism. However, prophetic books also contain narratives. For example, the Book of Jonah is almost entirely narrative. Sections of Daniel and Ezekiel are apocalyptic. Apocalyptic literature is unique to the Jewish people at this time. Apocalyptic literature is highly symbolic.

While it can be challenging to read the prophets, these prophetic books are God's Word to us, and we need to study these books to hear what God is saying to us through their message. I promise it is worth your time and effort to study these ancient books as you allow the Spirit of God to apply the prophetic books to your walk with the Lord.

Some things to consider when studying the Old Testament prophets:

- In your Bible, the prophetic books are divided into major and minor prophets. The major prophets are not more important; these prophetic books are simply longer than the minor prophets.
- The prophets are difficult to read because we don't have a comparative genre in contemporary literature.
- Historical context is critical in understanding the prophets. If you have a study Bible, read the introduction section to a prophetic book to understand the historical context.
- Generally, the prophets cover the time of 760-400 B.C. These years were characterized by political, military, economic, and social upheaval. Religious unfaithfulness and law-breaking also characterize these tumultuous years in Israel's history.
- The primary purpose of the prophets was to enforce and mediate the old covenant.
- The prophet's message is unoriginal.
- The prophet's message is confrontational.
- The prophets were not as much foretellers as they were forth tellers.
- The prophet's message is completed (about 99%).
- The prophets were God's direct representatives.
- The prophets have a three-fold message.
 - "Israel, you have sinned!"
 - "Israel, you must repent, or you will experience judgment!"
 - "Israel, there's hope and future restoration for you!"
- When reading the prophetic books, think oracles (much like you would think paragraphs when reading the New Testament epistles). An oracle is a divine revelation communicated through God's spokesperson. Many oracles make up the prophetic books, and sometimes these oracles are broken up by sections of narrative history. Sometimes the oracles run

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together, making it difficult to discern the intended meaning.

- When reading the prophets, look for these types of prophetic utterances:
 - The Lawsuit – contains a summons, a charge, evidence, and a verdict. (e.g., Isaiah 3: full lawsuit (13-14a), indictment (14b-16), judgment sentence (17-26).
 - The Woe – contains three elements: an announcement of distress (the woe), the reason for the distress, and a prediction of doom.

Shall not all these take up their taunt against him, with scoffing and riddles for him, and say, "Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own— for how long?— and loads himself with pledges!" Will not your debtors suddenly arise, and those awake who will make you tremble? Then you will be spoil for them. Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you, for the blood of man and violence to the earth... (Habakkuk 2:6-8)

- The Promise – includes a reference to the future, mention of radical change, and promise of a blessing.

"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name," declares the Lord who does this. "Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them," says the Lord your God (Amos 9:11-15).

- The Enactment Prophecy – God accompanies His Word with symbolic actions.

Then the Lord said, "As my servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot for three years as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush, so shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptian

captives and the Cushite exiles, both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered, the nakedness of Egypt (Isaiah 20:3-4).

- The Messenger Speech – “Thus says the Lord.” The messenger speech is the most common form in prophetic books.

Let’s Practice: Isaiah 9:1-7

Observation: What do I see?

- These verses are a promise and a song of praise for what God will do among His people.
- According to the ESV Study Bible, chapters 1-39 were written in the eighth century B.C. The Assyrians threatened Israel and eventually overtook their nation. God’s people craved worldly security, and God was purifying a remnant of His people through judgment and giving them hope for future blessings.
- Notice Isaiah 8:22. As a result of disobedience and rebellion, God’s people were in a time of gloom and darkness, but chapter nine gives a promise of great light.
- The word joy is repeated. Why?
- God is going to end all oppression (Isaiah 9:4). Notice the mention of Midian. Why the mention of Midian? (Hint: Judges 7:19-25, 8:10-21)
- Notice the promise of a child (Isaiah 9:6). Look back to Isaiah 7:14. Who is this child? What was the immediate fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14? What is the greater fulfillment of this prophecy?
- Notice the names given to this child. What is the significance of each name
- Notice the throne the child will sit on. Why David’s throne?
- Notice the focus on the eternity of the peace God will bring through this child.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

The Israelites would experience judgment for their rebellion against God, but God would ultimately be faithful to His people. He would raise a King who would establish God’s eternal kingdom on the earth once and for all.

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How does it relate?

We live in a world where there is no peace, but we know that a Messiah has come who has brought us peace. However, the peace that He has brought is far greater than the peace the Israelites anticipated. Through faith in the Messiah, we have peace with God, who will establish an eternal Kingdom and all who believe will be a part of that eternal kingdom.

Application:**Who should I be?**

I should be a person who places all my hope and trust in God to fulfill His Kingdom instead of looking to earthly kingdoms to give me security.

How should I think?

I should think wisely and biblically. The temptation is to place my hope in earthly Kingdoms. I must constantly remind myself that there is one King and one Kingdom that is certain.

What should I do?

I should examine my allegiance. Is my heart divided, or am I devoted to God's Kingdom? What evidence demonstrates that my hope is in God's Kingdom rather than the kingdoms of man?

How do I do it?

This week, I will ask God to reveal to me what divides my heart, and I will repent.

How should I pray?

- Repent of seeking the wrong kingdoms.
- For help to live in submission to the King.
- For help to be an ambassador of the Kingdom of God.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience studying the prophets? What has helped you in your studies to understand their message?

2. Why do you think the prophet's message is essential for us?

3. How would you explain the prophet's role to someone who does not understand the prophetic books?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Malachi 1 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 10 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapter 10. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 09:

STUDYING AND TEACHING THE PSALMS

The Book of Psalms is one of the most beloved books of the Bible. If you think about it, reading the Book of Psalms is like reading a journal. You get to read poems written by various authors as they lived through good and bad times. You get to read as they pray to God in many different seasons of life. In some psalms, the authors give thanks and praise to God. In other psalms, the authors voice their frustrations and sorrow over the circumstances of their lives. There's probably not a book in the Bible that is as personal and intimate as the Book of Psalms. Throughout the centuries, followers of Jesus have loved the Book of Psalms because of the intimacy of the psalms.

While the psalms are beautiful, they can be challenging to read. David, the most significant King in ancient Israel's history, wrote many psalms. However, David is not the only author of the psalms. There are many other authors of the psalms. There's even a psalm by Moses (Psalm 90)! It can be challenging to understand the psalms because they are written at various times by various authors. It can seem like the psalms are randomly put together in a collection of psalms. However, the Book of Psalms is not a random collection of 150 poems. The Book of Psalms tells the story of Israel through the various authors of the psalms, and ultimately, the Book of Psalms points to Jesus, the Messiah, who will reign on the throne of David forever.

In the Bible, the Book of Psalms is divided into five different books, and each book has a different theme. Psalm 1-2 serves as the introduction to the psalms, and these two psalms, meant to be read together, point us to Jesus, the ultimate Blessed Man. After the introduction, the five books of the Psalms tell us the story of Israel from the time of King David through the return of the Jewish people from Babylonian captivity. The themes of each book can be summarized in this way:

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- Book 1 (Psalms 3-41): God rescues His King from his enemies.
- Book 2 (Psalms 42-72): God rescues His people from their enemies through His King.
- Book 3 (Psalms 73-89): How long will God abandon His King and His people?
- Book 4 (Psalms 90-106): God is still King and is on His throne.
- Book 5 (Psalms 107-150): God will fulfill His promise to Israel to establish His Kingdom forever.

Keeping these themes in mind as you read through the Book of Psalms will help you as you read the individual psalms. Also, when reading the psalms, it's helpful to take note of the superscriptions. Not all the psalms have superscriptions, but many do. In your Bible, the superscriptions are printed under the psalm number and record the psalm's author. Sometimes the superscriptions record the historical context of the psalm (e.g., Psalm 3). The superscription will point you back to a Scripture reference you can read to understand the context from which that particular psalm was written.

The Book of Psalms is a beautiful book of the Bible because this book helps us to know how we can approach God in every season of life. No wonder the Book of Psalms has been the church's songbook for centuries.

Some things to consider when studying the Psalms:

- We believe the Bible is God's Word, yet the Psalms contain not only God's Word to us but our words to God. Yet, the words of the psalms are still God's Word. How do these words spoken to God function as God's Word to us?
- The psalms are addressed to the mind through the heart. Much of the language is intentionally emotional.
- The psalms are musical. For example, you cannot read the psalms the same way as an epistle.
 - Letters appeal to logic; poetry appeals to emotion.
 - In letters, rational arguments are central. In poetry, images are central.
 - In letters, syntax and grammar are critical. In poetry, figures of speech are critical.

- The psalms are full of literary elements that you probably learned in high school literature classes, such as analogies, metaphors, parallelism, exaggeration, contrasts, acrostics, etc.
- There is much variety in the psalms. Notice the different types of psalms:
 - Laments (Individual – 3, 22, 31, 39, 42, 57, 71, 88, 120, 139, 142)
 - Corporate – 12, 44, 80, 94, 137)
 - Thanksgiving Psalms (18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 65-67, 75, 92, 107, 116, 118)
 - Hymns of Praise (8, 19, 33, 103, 104, 145-150)
 - Salvation-History Psalms (78, 105-106, 135-136)
 - Psalms of Celebration and Affirmation (2, 18, 20-21, 24, 29, 45-48, 81, 84, 93, 101, 110)
 - Wisdom Psalms (36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 127, 128, 133)
 - Songs of Trust (11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 63, 91, 121, 125, 131)
- The Psalms are a great benefit to the Christian life because:
 - They serve as a guide to worship.
 - They demonstrate how we can honestly relate to God.
 - They demonstrate the importance of reflection and meditation on things God has done for us.

Let's Practice: Psalm 3

Observation: What do I see?

- A psalm of lament.
- The superscription informs that this was written when David fled Absalom (See 2 Sam. 15).
- Notice how David addresses God (Lord).
- Notice David's complaint (Psalm 3:2).
- Notice David's trust (Psalm 3:3).
- Notice David's confidence in God. (God, you are my glory, lifter of my head, you sustain me, I will not be afraid, etc.)
- Notice David's plea for help (Psalm 3:7).
- Notice David's desire for vindication (Psalm 3:7). What about turning the other cheek?
- Notice how the psalm ends in praise (Psalm 3:8).

Interpretation: What does it mean?

David experienced distress and hardship in his life that caused him to pour out his heart to God

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with honesty, and David ultimately knew that he could trust the Lord in his distress.

How does it relate?

We will experience days of distress and difficulty, much like David. In those times, it is acceptable to cry out to God with honesty, but in our complaints, we cannot lose sight of the reality that God is always in control.

Application:**Who should I be?**

I should be honest – with my disappointments, fears, struggles, and anxieties. I should confess my frustrations to God. I should be trusting and confident. While I can voice my concerns to God, I cannot lose sight of the reality that He is in control and knows how to sustain me through my frustrations.

How should I think?

I should think rightly about myself. I am emotional, and those emotions are a gift from God. I should not suppress my emotions but honestly express my feelings to God. I should think rightly about God. While I can express my emotions to God, it is sinful to express them in a way that belittles His greatness or demonstrates a lack of trust in His ability to care for me.

What should I do?

I should pray with honesty. I should trust God's perfect will. I should walk in confidence regardless of my circumstances.

How do I do it?

This week, I will ask God to help me deal with my emotions. I will spend more time in His presence so I might build confidence in Him.

How should I pray?

- Repent of allowing emotions to control me rather than the Spirit of God.
- Expressing how I feel to God and asking Him to help me to trust Him.
- Pray with thanksgiving that God can take care of all my needs.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What psalms have been meaningful to you over the years? Why are these psalms so meaningful to you?

2. Why are the psalms challenging to study? What has helped you to study the psalms over the years?

3. How can the psalms help us to worship God?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Psalm 139 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 11 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapter 11. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 10:

HOW TO STUDY AND TEACH WISDOM LITERATURE

We all need wisdom, and God gives us much wisdom in His Word. Most Christians love the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. The Book of Job reminds us that God is sovereign over His people and is at work, even in the worst times of life, to accomplish His purpose. Song of Songs helps us to celebrate God's design for marriage, and the intimacy shared between a husband and wife. The Book of Ecclesiastes allows us to ponder the meaninglessness of life apart from God. The Book of Proverbs helps us to live wisely in every life situation.

To understand wisdom literature, you need to understand wisdom. Wisdom is not merely having a knowledge of God. Wisdom is putting the knowledge of God into practice, but you cannot obtain wisdom without first fearing the Lord. Solomon writes, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding" (Proverbs 9:10). When Solomon writes these words, he's writing to his son. One day, his son will ascend the throne and rule over Israel. Solomon wants his son to lead with wisdom, and his son will not rule with wisdom if he does not first fear the Lord.

You've likely heard someone describe the fear of the Lord as showing God the reverence that He is due. Reverence is not showing up for church on Sundays and singing a few worship songs. Reverence for God is living a life of obedience before God because you are fully aware of what God has done to save you from your sins.

To fear God is to stand in reverential awe of God so that you know that He knows everything about you. Since you know He knows everything about you, in reverence, you want to live your life to honor Him because you know you can't hide anything from Him. You can be hypocritical before others, but you can't be hypocritical before God! The author of Hebrews writes,

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For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. No creature is hidden from him, but all things are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give an account (Hebrews 4:12-13).

What a fearful thought! God knows everything you think, say, or do. God knows if you are living your life for him or just faking it. Just as a reminder, if you are a follower of Jesus, you don't fear God in the sense that you fear God will judge you or condemn you. The judgment for your sin was taken care of at the cross when Jesus sacrificed His life for your life as He died the death you deserve. We don't fear judgment from God. However, we let the fear of God motivate us to live right before God because we know that even as believers, God disciplines His children that He loves (Hebrews 12:5-11). He will allow you to experience the consequences of your sins in His effort to draw you back to Him. A wise person is aware that God knows every detail of his life, and a wise person strives to honor the God that knows all and sees all. As you study wisdom literature, pay attention to how wisdom literature teaches you how to walk in fear of the Lord.

Some things to consider as you study wisdom literature:

- Wisdom literature includes Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.
- The goal of wisdom literature is to apply God's Word to practical living.
- The wisdom books are not a collection of universal promises but insights and guidelines for developing godly character.
- Avoid the temptation to read these books in bits and pieces. You must study wisdom literature within its context, or you will misapply wisdom literature.
- Wisdom in Proverbs:
 - The proverbs are intensely practical, not theoretically theological. (This does NOT mean that the Proverbs are not theological. Just don't expect Solomon and the authors of Proverbs to explain doctrine like the Apostle Paul. The goal of Proverbs is to APPLY theology.)
 - Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not technically precise.

- Proverbs are not designed to support selfish behavior but selfless behavior.
- Proverbs are not guarantees from God but poetic guidelines for godly behavior.
- Proverbs use exaggeration or various literary techniques to make their point.
- Proverbs give good advice for wise approaches to certain aspects of life but are not exhaustive in their coverage.
- When used rightly, proverbs provide practical advice for daily living.
- Wisdom in Job:
 - While Job's comforters try to convince Job that what happens to one in life directly results from whether that person has pleased God or not, the book's goal is to show the reader that God's knowledge and ways are superior. He can work in the lives of His people in anyway He desires.
 - The book shows the difference between worldly wisdom (what is logical) vs. godly wisdom (He is sovereign and righteous).
- Wisdom in Ecclesiastes:
 - God is an indisputable reality.
 - God's ways are not always understandable.
 - The great equalizer is death. Therefore, life is vanity.
- Wisdom in Song of Songs:
 - Song of Songs celebrates heterosexual marriage as the proper context for marital intimacy.
 - Song of Songs is counter to our culture. Our culture advocates self-indulgence, whereas Song of Songs promotes fulfilling your spouse's needs.

Let's Practice: Proverbs 1:1-19

Observation: What do I see?

- Wisdom is intellectual (Proverbs 1:5-6).
- Wisdom is practical. Wisdom gives us instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, equity, prudence, etc.
- True wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord (honor, reverence, recognizing who He is, etc.)

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- Fools despise wisdom (Proverbs 1:7).
- Part of wisdom is heeding the instruction of those God has placed over you. They have more experience than you and much to teach you. (Proverbs 1:8)
- Notice the nature of temptation: it is enticing and provides satisfaction (Proverbs 1:10-13).
- Temptation is deadly (Proverbs 1:17-18).

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Temptation is inevitable, but you can overcome temptation when you walk in wisdom. All godly wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord.

How does it relate?

We are not exempt from temptation. In our day and age, we face great temptations. We need wisdom just like Solomon's son needed wisdom.

Application:**Who should I be?**

I should be open to instruction. How often do I close myself to criticism or think I know better than those who have more wisdom than me? Am I teachable, or am I resistant to what others say to me?

How should I think?

I should think humbly. I need instruction. I need others to help me grow. I should think rightly about God. My fear of God will motivate me to make the right choices. I should think wisely. God has placed His Spirit within me, given me His Word, and given me wise counselors. I have no excuse for not making wise decisions.

What should I do?

I should seek out mentors. I should fill my heart with the wisdom of God. I should ask God for wisdom (James 1:5). I should learn from my mistakes and the mistakes of others (especially biblical characters).

How do I do it?

I will ask God to help me identify areas of folly in my life and repent. I will ask God to help me find a mentor that I can learn from. I will approach that potential mentor.

How should I pray?

- Repent of unwise choices I have made recently.
- Pray for wisdom.
- Pray for a teachable spirit.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think makes the Book of Proverbs so beloved? What are some ways we can misread the Book of Proverbs?

2. What are some ways that you can be a better student of wisdom literature?

3. In what ways does the wisdom literature point you to the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

HOMEWORK

For next week, study Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 12 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapter 12. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 11:

HOW TO STUDY AND TEACH REVELATION

Revelation is a unique book of the Bible that has fascinated and confused Jesus' followers for centuries. The Book of Revelation fascinates us because of its rich imagery and focus on our future hope in Jesus Christ. The book confuses many because of how Christians have interpreted Revelation over the years. Different ways of understanding the Book of Revelation have even divided some churches.

As we think about the Book of Revelation, I want you to know that God did not give us this powerful book of the Bible to confuse or divide us. God gave us this book to encourage us! Revelation is an amazing book of the victory we have in Jesus. Revelation encourages us to keep our eyes on the coming, eternal victory we have in Jesus as we walk through difficult seasons in this life.

This lesson is going to be different than our previous lessons. In this lesson, I want to give you a brief overview of Revelation to help you study and teach Revelation well.

Introduction to Revelation:

- Written by John the Apostle in exile on the island of Patmos.
- Revelation was written shortly after 90 A.D. during the reign of Domitian. During this time, imperial worship was prevalent. Judaism enjoyed certain freedoms under Roman law, and thus they were not forced to participate in imperial worship. Christianity, on the other hand, did not enjoy the same freedoms. Therefore, the Christian community experienced increased persecution during the time of Domitian, and John warns that persecution would only get worse in the days ahead.

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Uniqueness of Revelation:

- Revelation is the most misunderstood and hotly debated book of the Bible. However, God did not give us Revelation to confuse us but rather to clarify His work in the world. The very word revelation means to uncover or unveil.
- Revelation is unique because it combines several different types of literature. A basic understanding of these types of literature will help us see why Revelation can be so difficult. Understanding these types of literature will also help us make sense of Revelation.

1. Apocalyptic

- This was a popular form of literature from 200 B.C. to 200 A.D. Most apocalyptic literature was written by Jews and not Christians.
- The goal of apocalyptic literature was to give oppressed and persecuted people hope by providing a picture of coming judgment and salvation. The primary concern of apocalyptic literature was not God's activity within history, but rather the goal of apocalyptic literature was to look forward to the time when God would bring a radical end to history by allowing good to triumph and evil to be finally judged.
- Apocalyptic literature was presented in visions and dreams, and its language is highly symbolic.
- Images in apocalyptic language belong to fantasy rather than reality. (e.g., a beast with seven heads and ten horns, a woman clothed with the sun, locusts with scorpions' tails and human heads, etc.)
- In apocalyptic literature, numbers appear for their symbolic power. Thus, numbers in Revelation are literal, but they are typically not referential.
- Apocalyptic literature is innovative. Compare Daniel 7 and Revelation 13.

2. Prophecy

- John tells us the book of Revelation is prophecy (vs. 3).
 - Apocalyptic literature is concerned with future judgment, whereas prophecy is concerned with the present. Specifically, prophecy is concerned with present obedience. Think about the goal of the Old Testament prophets. Their message was to repent and obey or experience judgment.
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- John intends for Revelation not to be simply a book to show us future events. This book is prophetic; for the here and now. The message of Revelation is for God's church, and this book is a call to obey Christ despite the strong temptation to fall from the faith because of intense persecution.

3. Epistle

- The combination of apocalyptic and prophetic elements is put in a letter (Revelation 1:4-7).
- Revelation is a circular letter.
- Letters are occasional documents. The book addresses specific people with a particular situation in mind.
- To understand Revelation, we cannot lose sight of the original audience. John wrote Revelation to give suffering believers who were a part of the church in Asia Minor hope and encouragement during their suffering. John reminded his readers that the imperial cult would not prevail. Rather, Jesus Christ would always prevail, and they would prevail with Jesus if they held on to their faith.
- Heresy was also present in the churches of Asia Minor. John wrote Revelation to encourage suffering believers and put them on guard against heresies infiltrating the church.
- Tribulation was a part of what the church was enduring and was yet to endure. God's would pour out His wrath on those who afflicted His people. It is clear from Revelation that God's people will not endure God's wrath when His wrath is poured out on their enemies, but it is also clear that they will suffer at the hands of their enemies.

Four Schools of Interpretation:

1. The Preterist View

- Preterist refers to the past. Therefore, this view holds that Revelation is a prophecy of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Preterists teach that everything in the book has already been fulfilled.

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- This view is unlikely because it is more likely that Revelation was written in the 90s A.D. rather than before 70 A.D.
- Another problem is that this view needs to explain how the universal end-times judgment of all nations fits within the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.

2. The Historicist View

- This view suggests that the seals, trumpets, and bowls paint a picture of the successive ages of the church.
- This view sees the symbolism of Revelation as referring to a series of specific historical events such as the collapse of the Roman empire, the corruption of the papacy, and the reformation of the church.
- This view was popular during the Reformation and held by Reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin.

3. The Futurist View

- This view is the most popular today, especially in the western church.
- This view claims that the entire book, apart from the letters to the churches in Revelation 1-3, prophesies events that surround the return of Christ at the end of history.
- Classic dispensationalism (made famous by the Scofield Reference Bible) is the dominant futurist view held by people such as John Hagee, Tim LaHaye, Dallas Theological Seminary, and many Southern Baptists. This view holds to a rapture of the church, a seven-year tribulation, a reign of the antichrist, and the nations gathering to war against Jerusalem.
- Modified futurism concedes that many of the visions of Revelation concern future events. However, many modified futurist views disregard a pretribulation rapture, a seven-year tribulation, and other elements of classic dispensationalism.

4. The Idealist View

- The idealist view sees the entire book as a symbolic presentation of the battle between good and evil throughout human history. According to the idealist, the prophecies are always fulfilled.
- However, this view does not typically consider the clear futuristic elements of the Book of Revelation.
- Another problem with this view is evil is never resolved, and God never decisively wins.

Each of these viewpoints has strengths and challenges. We can learn from each of these viewpoints.

Three approaches to the millennium (Revelation 20):

1. Premillennialism

- The view takes a literal reading of the 1,000 years in Revelation 20.
- After the Great Tribulation, Christ will return and reign for a thousand years on this earth. After Jesus' 1,000-year reign, Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit and join forces with many unbelievers who will rebel against Christ in a final battle. Christ will decisively defeat His enemies, and all will stand before Christ for final judgment. There are two varieties of premillennialism:
 - Historic premillennialism – no secret rapture of the church. The church will endure tribulation until the return of Christ.
 - Pretribulation premillennialism – A secret rapture of the church will occur before seven years of great tribulation, the rise of the antichrist, ingathering of Jews, etc. then Christ will return with his saints to reign for 1,000 years.

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2. Postmillennialism

- This view grew out of the colonization of America.
- According to this view, Christ returns after the millennium.
- According to this view, the Gospel will progress, and the church will grow significantly so that a large proportion of the world's population will be Christians. Christians will have a significant influence on society, and in general, society will become better, not worse.
- This view does not take the 1,000-year millennial reign literally, but simply as a long period of time. At the end of this period, Christ will return, and the final judgment will occur.

3. Amillennialism

- According to this view, Revelation 20:1-10 describes the present church age.
- Satan's influence has been dramatically reduced so the Gospel can be preached to the whole world.
- Those who are reigning with Christ are Christians who have died and are reigning with Christ presently in heaven.
- Christ's millennial reign, therefore, is not a bodily reign here on earth but a heavenly reign.
- Amillennial means no millennium. However, amillennialists do not believe in no millennium; they believe the millennium is occurring now.

Considering the vast interpretive history of Revelation, how should we approach this book?

We should approach this book with humility realizing that we are not going to figure out all the mysteries this book presents. We should approach this book with confidence, knowing that this book gives us a clear picture of our exalted Lord, who is victorious over the kingdom of darkness. We should approach this book with expectancy, knowing that this book will give us hope and encouragement to live out our faith in a world that is radically opposed to Christ and His followers. While there are futuristic elements in the book, our primary concern is not to use this book to figure out the future but to study this book to be challenged in our faith to become more like Christ even when life gets challenging.

With all this background information in mind, study the Book of Revelation using the same methodology we used to study the rest of the Bible: observation, interpretation, and application. But, as you study the Book of Revelation, keep the background information we have discussed in mind. More importantly, keep the context of Revelation in mind. It will serve you well to think about historical, literary, and biblical context in mind as you study the Book of Revelation.

Let's Practice: Revelation 1:1-8

Observation: What do I see?

- This is the Revelation of God. Revelation means to unveil. God is revealing to John the final victory that the church will have in Jesus Christ.
- God sent an angel to John (Revelation 1:2). Angels are messengers of God. John is receiving this vision from an angel.
- This vision is prophetic. As you study Revelation, how is the Book of Revelation like the Old Testament prophets?
- Notice that John addresses Revelation to seven churches (Revelation 1:4). Revelation contains a message to the church. Jesus will speak prophetically to these seven churches in Revelation 2. However, notice that John addresses the book to seven churches. Revelation contains lots of numbers. Why is the number seven significant?
- Notice seven spirits (Revelation 1:4). We know there is one Holy Spirit. Why does John refer to the seven spirits before the throne of God?
- Why is it significant that Jesus is called the firstborn of the dead?
- Notice that Revelation 1:7 is a quote from Daniel 7:13. What is the connection between Daniel 7:13 and Revelation 1:7?
- God refers to Himself as the Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8). Why would that designation be significant for John's audience?

Interpretation: What does it mean?

John wants his suffering readers to know that the message he has received is from God, who is in complete control of the world and their lives.

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How does it relate?

We will suffer for our faith. Sometimes we will suffer immensely. However, we need to know God is at work even in our suffering. He controls everything, and we can take comfort in His sovereign control over the universe.

Application:**Who should I be?**

I should be a worshipper of God even when life is hard because I know that God loves me and will bring me safely home to be with Him.

How should I think?

When life gets tough, I should think of Christ on His throne, who is ruling and reigning over this world. I can trust Him.

What do I do?

I should trust God in every situation of life.

How do I do it?

If I want to grow in my trust of God, I need to put myself around people who model what it looks like to trust God. I need to continue to grow in the spiritual disciplines that will help me to have confidence in God's work in my life.

How do I pray?

- Pray for God to remind me of His faithfulness.
- Ask God to help me not to fear when I suffer for my faith.
- Ask God to forgive me when I fail to trust Him.
- Ask God to help me identify people who can help me grow in my walk with Him.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What has been your experience with the Book of Revelation? Why do you think this book can be challenging for Christians to read?

2. Reflect on the different viewpoints presented in this lesson. Why further questions do you have? What did you find helpful in this lesson?

3. If you were to explain the purpose of the Book of Revelation to someone in a few sentences, how would you explain it?

HOMEWORK

For next week, Revelation 1:9-20 using Observation, Interpretation, and Application. Come to our next session ready to discuss this passage.

Read Chapter 13 of How to Study the Bible for All Its Worth. Write a one-paragraph response to each chapter describing your big takeaways from Chapter 13. Be prepared to discuss your response during our next session.

LESSON 12:

CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You made it to the end of our course! Hopefully, you have grown in your ability to study the Bible over the last few months. I hope you can more confidently read and study the Bible. However, I am sure you know that studying the Bible is a lifelong journey. The more you study and the more you are around people like you who want to understand the Bible, the more you will continue to grow in your ability to study the Bible.

While it's wonderful to study the Bible for your personal growth and edification, God wants you to teach others what He has taught you. Paul writes to Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

You might not ever stand on a stage and preach, but if you are going to be a part of God's plan to make disciples, then you will be a teacher to someone. As a part of our discipleship process at Northwood Baptist, we expect you to disciple a group of believers if you have already been disciplined. A disciple maker is a teacher and a mentor. Indeed, we could discuss all kinds of tips that could help you be a good Bible teacher, whether you're leading a discipleship group or teaching in a larger setting. However, I want to focus on the basics of teaching the Bible and help you be as effective as possible as you strive to help others understand the Bible and how it applies to their lives. Let me give you seven principles to consider as you seek to teach the Bible:

1. Be a model of what you teach.

Paul wrote, "Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1)." Was Paul a bit arrogant when he wrote these words? Absolutely not. While Paul was not a perfect man, he was a growing man. He was learning to imitate Jesus, and he wanted others to follow the same path he was

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on.

Can you say to others, “Imitate me?” “Imitate the way I study the Bible. Imitate the way I pray. Imitate the way I interact with my spouse and children. Imitate the way I interact with others on the job or at school. Imitate me in the way that I share the Gospel.”

As disciple-makers, we’re not striving simply to transfer knowledge into the brains of the people we’re discipling. We’re seeking to see lives changed by the power of the Gospel. If people’s lives are going to be changed, they need to see changed lives. They need to see you living out your faith through the power of the Holy Spirit. Your first calling as a disciple-maker is to walk with Jesus so that others can learn how to walk with Jesus by watching you.

2. Aim for the heart through the head.

We’re not making disciples so the people we teach can win Bible trivia contests. Now, please don’t misunderstand me. I want people to have a deep knowledge of God’s Word. Biblical literacy is a problem that has plagued the church for several generations. I have the opportunity to teach Bible survey classes at our local university. While I have students in my classes that do not come from a Christian background, I have many students that grew up in the church. It always amazes me how little my students who grew up in the church know about the Bible. The church must do a better job of teaching people the Bible!

However, it is possible to have a tremendous knowledge of the Bible and yet not walk with Jesus. The Pharisees, scribes, and religious leaders in Jesus’ day were great Bible students, but they completely missed that Jesus was the Messiah!

In our Bible teaching, we’re aiming for the heart. We want people to grow in their knowledge of God, but we want their growth of the knowledge of God to lead them to grow in the character of Christ. In my discipleship groups, I want to see the men I disciple grow in the fruit of the Spirit.

Bible application is so important. When teaching the Bible, we want to talk about what the text

means, but we also want to talk about why the text matters for us today. We need to be able to ask the questions, “So what?” and “Now what?”

3. Teach your group how to study the Bible.

Over my years in ministry, I’ve learned that people want to “be fed,” but resist learning how to “self-feed.” In other words, many believers will listen to a preacher or Bible teacher, but they are slow to learn for themselves how to study the Bible. I want your teaching to model for your students how to study the Bible.

Your role as a disciple-maker is to help your students grow in their ability to study the Bible. Your time with your group is not a time to show off your Bible knowledge. Instead, it is a time to instruct and model.

4. Think discussion, not lecture.

I love preaching, and I am so glad I get the opportunity each week to stand before God’s people and explain and apply the Word of God. I love to preach, and I love listening to preaching. I’ve learned much from many great preachers over the years.

The preacher I learned the most from was my pastor at the church I attended in college. I heard him preach weekly and learned much from what he taught in the pulpit. However, I learned more from him in the many discussions I had about God’s Word than I did from the lectures he gave on Sunday mornings.

Let me be clear. Preaching is vital in the life of the church. I firmly believe that preaching sets the direction of the local church, and I firmly believe that God works in powerful ways through the preaching event. However, we seem to learn best when we have the opportunity to discuss the Bible. There’s something about being able to ask questions and dialogue about a text that is extremely helpful for your spiritual growth.

Most of your teaching opportunities will be in small group settings. Maybe you’re leading a

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discipleship group or a small group Bible study at your workplace. What an opportunity you have to lead a discussion through a book of the Bible in your small group! Leading a discussion does not mean listening to what others say and never teaching. Instead, you teach by asking good questions of your group members that cause them to think and dig deep into the text. You teach by showing your group members the answers to those questions. In your group setting, fight the temptation to lecture! Your students will learn much more as you engage them in a discussion about the passage of Scripture you are studying.

5. Affirm thoughtful responses.

If you teach by leading discussions through Scripture passages, make sure to let your group members know that their input is valuable when they contribute to the conversation. Remember, the members of your group are learning. They do not have all the answers, and neither do you!

It's likely that you are further ahead in your understanding of the Bible than your group members. You likely have more Bible knowledge because you've devoted the time to studying God's Word. It's also likely that your group members will sometimes respond to questions you might ask with answers that miss entirely what the Bible is trying to tell us. Don't discourage your group members by pointing out how wrong they are. Instead, direct them to the correct answer.

When a group member gives a thoughtful response, affirm that group member. Let that group member know that you see them growing in their understanding of the word. Strive to be a humble teacher. A humble teacher does not want to point out their students' mistakes. A humble teacher wants to build up his students by affirming them and helping them think well about the Word of God.

6. Don't try to be the expert.

While you might have the opportunity to teach the Bible, don't forget that you're still a student yourself. You're still learning! In your group, don't pretend like you have all the answers. Don't

be afraid to admit that you have a lot to learn. Be a humble teacher. Be willing to learn from others in your group. Your group members might not yet have the Bible knowledge that you have, but you'll be surprised at the insights they share as they are learning God's Word. They will be able to teach you a few things. Be humble enough to learn from the members of your group.

7. Help your group stay on course.

Someone in your group is inevitably going to get the discussion off-course. They may ask a question that has nothing to do with the text or take the group down a rabbit hole by talking about politics or some other issue unrelated to the text you are studying. Don't be afraid to say, "Let's get back to our text." Or, "That's an interesting discussion, but it's not related to our discussion. Maybe we can discuss what you want to discuss after our study time." If you let someone derail your group time, they will continue to derail your group time until you are willing to confront it. Part of being a good teacher is keeping your group on course.

You have a tremendous responsibility as a teacher and disciple-maker. I know you do not take your responsibility lightly, and I know that you will make the most of every opportunity God gives you to teach His Word.

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What excites you about teaching God's Word? What do you think are the biggest challenges when it comes to teaching the Bible?

2. What do you need to do to grow in your teaching ability?

3. What steps can you take to grow as a teacher/disciple-maker?