



What's so amazing about scripture?

28 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

WHAT'S SO AMAZING ABOUT SCRIPTURE?



Complete Devo Study
(all 30 of them) related to
the Personal Video Journey

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TAKE NOTE

When logged in to your Video Journey on www.terranwilliams.com, with access to your 30 videos, there is, next to each video, a Devo Study.

This document is the “complete” compilation of all those Devo Studies. Though it may be cumbersome long it has the advantage of all 30 of those Devo Studies being in one document.

You choose if you prefer to work with this one long document, or 30 short ones.

Each Devo Study in here consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video.
- Remember—Reflect—Redirect pointers and questions.
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based.

Under the Remember-Reflect-Redirect section, notice that:

- you can type into the boxes in this document.
- the questions posed at the end of each video are included, but there are also additional questions added for your reflection and application.

Click on the number of the Table of Contents to get to your specific Devo Study. Also, note that on Microsoft Word, to maintain usage of your Table of Contents, the Remember-Reflect-Redirect must, as it now does, spill over onto a second page.

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1. THE BIBLE'S IMPACT

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

THE BIBLE IS A WORLD-CHANGING BOOK

It's phrases are on our lips, even if we have never read the Bible – peace maker, glad tidings, scape goat, hope against hope, hold out an olive branch, the eleventh hour, to wash one's hands of, a good Samaritan, a cross to bear, a labour of love, a sign of the times, a thorn in the flesh, a wolf in sheep's clothing.

With the Bible came the idea, for the first time, that every human being is, without gradations, an equally valuable image-bearer worthy of fair treatment.

THE BIBLE IS A LIFE-CHANGING BOOK

It Points You To Jesus

"Scripture is the cradle in which Christ lays," says Martin Luther.

It Reads You As You Read It

This peerless book has the unparalleled power to awaken you, to startle you to life.

It Promises to Fortify You

When life's calamities and complexities come crushing down upon you, when society's clashing viewpoints and clamouring demands churn around you, the Bible promises to be an unchanging true North, to give

you a spiritual spine to stand upright and an anchor to keep you from shipwrecking.

It Invites You Into the Greatest Story

Though written by authors on varying continents in different centuries, it moves forward, each stage building upon the one before – creation, collapse, covenant, Christ, cross, church, consummation. As we read the story, we find ourselves swept into that river. Starting out as spectators, we become participants, each of us one more actor, one more tributary, one more small story that discovers a new energy, dignity and direction in that larger Story, which is still being written.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The Bible's historical impact is unparalleled, yet its potential to personally impact is just as great.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. In what ways have you experienced the Bible impacting you personally?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. When and where will you find the time and place to go through this journey? Are there other people you can invite to take this journey with you?



If you're not yet a believer, perhaps try reading it—start with John's or Luke's Gospel. You might want to pray this: "God, if you're real, if this Bible is your book, then as I read give me eyes to see."

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Since I was 15-years-old, I have had only one hobby. Surfing. Though I live by the sea, this year because of the Covid-19 lockdown, I did not get to gaze upon the azure ocean for months. The more I longed to see it and paddle out into its waves, the more I also grasped just how much I had taken it for granted before. In the months before lockdown, I had passed by numerous opportunities to enjoy it, telling myself, “It’s there and I’ll get around to it... tomorrow.” Come to think of it, I have done the same with Scripture too many days of my life; becoming overfamiliar with the treasure in my possession. “It’s there and I’ll get around it to... tomorrow.”

—page 20-21 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



2. METAPHORS OF THE BIBLE

God said to me, “Son of Man, eat this scroll I am giving you. Fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey.

Ezekiel 3:3

The Bible is a revitalizing river

As we delight in and ponder its words, we are “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.” (Ps 1:3)

The Bible is a guiding light

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” (Ps 119:105)

The Bible is holistic medicine

“Pay attention to what I say; turn your ear to my words. Do not let them out of your sight, keep them within your heart; for they are life to those who find them and health to one’s whole body.” (Prov 4:20-22)

The Bible is a sharp blade

“For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Heb 4:12)

The Bible is seed and rain

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire

and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isa 55:9-11)

The Bible is food for your soul

It is bread (Matt 4:4)—substantial, sustaining, satisfying – without which, we cannot fulfill our purpose. It is milk, meat and honey (1 Pet 2:2, 1 Cor 3:2, Ps 119:103, Ezek 3:3)—a three-course meal; containing the ideal nourishment for every stage of your spiritual development.

“God fed you on manna so that you might know that people shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from God’s mouth.” (Deut 8:3)

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The Bible is loaded with a range of profound metaphors of itself.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which metaphor speaks most to you?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. If God's Word is manna which must be intentionally and regularly gathered and taken in, are there any lifestyle changes or new habits you might want to begin to make room for more of it in your life? When and where will you find the time and place to go through this journey?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Today's spiritual famine is the insanity of having a nearby storehouse filled with grain, a Bible or a church where the Bible is preached, yet we choose to look anywhere and everywhere else for food. Amos says Scripture-starved people *zig* this way and *zag* that way, staggering like a drunk person, kept distracted and disorientated throughout their entire quest, only to come up still empty and lost at the end. If we truly desire spiritual health and vitality, feeding daily on God's Word is as beneficial and necessary as food is for our physical health.

—page 26 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



3. THE DIVINE BOOK

All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.

2 Timothy 3:16

The Scriptures, says Jesus, are God’s words

Jesus, speaking about Scripture, said, “People shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from God’s mouth.” (Matt 4:4)

Most of Scripture was not divinely dictated and yet it is saturated with samples of the very words of God. Expressions like “the Lord said” or “The word of the Lord came to...” occur some 3000 times in the Old Testament.

“Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.” (2 Pet 1:20-21)

The Scriptures, says Jesus, are human words

Jesus, speaking about Scripture, said, “David, speaking by the Spirit...” (Matt 22:42) Jesus’s view is that the human and divine meeting together in the creation of Scripture.

Yet one heavenly conductor guides 35 human authors in a harmonized unity. One Artist working through many artists, each of whom participate actively in their offering, each doing so distinctively, yet collectively creating something so wondrous and momentous that only a cosmic composer could have conceived of in the first place.

Apparently, God likes to speak to us through his own words, but also through others’ too – through historical accounts, poems, prayers, sto-

ries and more. God has something to say to us in every part—from the parts where an author says, “Not I but the Lord give this command” right through to the parts which say, “To the rest, not the Lord but I say...” (1 Cor 7:10,12)

SINCE THE BIBLE IS DIVINE...

It is not ours to claim.

We may possess a copy of the Bible, but when we read it rightly, God takes possession of *us*, not the other way around.

It has supernatural power.

God speaks a creative word and the world exists; he speaks a word of judgment and life withers; he speaks a word of redemption and faith is born; he speaks a word of forgiveness and sinners are absolved; he speaks a word of new life and the dead are raised.

It carries divine authority.

We will be tempted to interpret reality or choose a path based on *anything but* God’s inspired revelation as found in the Scriptures. Of course we can learn from reason, experience, culture and tradition, but they are small conversation partners in dialogue with God’s Word, which has the final say.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The Bible is not a mix of God's words here and human words there. In a sense, all the words are God's words spoken through human words.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. How does the fact of Scripture's divine inspiration change how you will approach it?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. In your experience of the Bible to date, has there been a time when God spoke through it to you a word of judgment and something withered? promise and faith was born? forgiveness and sin was absolved? new life and something came to life? As you do, yield your

life anew to be the soil in which his Word continues to be sown.

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BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

We do not merely navigate by the commands God has given us. We live by the compass he has revealed. Accurately interpreted, the Bible is the one, true story, or compass of reality with four sequential points that act as our coordinates: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Creation is the answer to the question of why we exist. The fall is the answer to what is wrong with the world. Redemption is God's solution to the problem. Restoration is the promised future we redirect our lives towards. This four-point story of God at work in history serves as the compass points by which we can navigate all ethical decisions as well as critique the ways various cultures orientate to whatever false magnetic north that has taken them captive. As Ellen Davies says, "Scripture's story is not a part of some larger narrative; it is itself the larger narrative of which all other true narratives are parts."

—page 41-42 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



4. THE HUMAN BOOK

Waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples woke him... he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm. The amazed men asked, "What kind of man is this?"

Matthew 8:24-27

One moment we may uncover an ancient culture or story that feels so oddly out of step with our own, the next God is speaking to us through it and we ask, "What kind of book is this?" For here is a book that is clearly human, but apparently also divine.

An early heresy called Docetism claimed that Jesus was too divine to truly take on human flesh. He only appeared to be human, hovering above the ground as a spirit-being, so to speak. This heresy has spilled over at times into the church's perception of the Bible. It is tempting to underline only its divine elements, and bleach out (in our reading of it) its human elements. The human side does not destroy the concept of the Bible's divine inspiration. Rather, it beautifully enriches and nuances it in six ways:

1. Inspiration showcases human diversity.

God's love for variety is shown in his visual creation – the red-lipped batfish, the thorny devil lizard, the spider crab. It is just like God, then, to employ all manner of writers to co-craft his book – Joshua a military general, Daniel a prime minister, Amos a shepherd, Luke a doctor and Nehemiah a king's cupbearer.

2. Inspiration may have been hidden from the biblical writers.

As David reflected on his shepherding days and wrote his song-prayer about the Lord as his shepherd, did he know that he was writing Scripture?

3. Inspiration does not require polished writing.

That the Bible's writers and scribes did not perfect their writing or affect their speech points not only to their authenticity, but to God's commitment to human instrumentality despite all of our limitations.

4. Inspiration records it all – the good, the bad and the horrid.

Far from a collection of sugar-coated stories, the Bible does more than tell us how the world should be. It tells and shows us how twisted and broken the world is; why it needs the very redemption it also speaks of.

5. Inspiration does not require worthy recipients.

Much of the Bible is written to people who are getting it horribly wrong. Just as well, perhaps much of the New Testament would not have been written.

6. Inspiration does not require morally perfect writers.

Moses cowers and vents. David takes another man's wife, then life. Jonah rebels and hides. Peter denies and flees. There's no propaganda here. Therein lies the Bible's power. God makes it clear that the Bible's real hero is Jesus, its only sinless person, the hero who rescues everyone else, writers and readers alike.

HOW TO NAVIGATE THE HUMAN ELEMENTS

Refuse a simplistic understanding of inspiration.

Many believers have gone through needless crises of faith, by adopting a simplistic idea about what inspiration is, then when they stumble upon these human elements, they doubt whether God really inspired the Bible. God's condescending to speak to us through other people, not via angels or dictation, does not negate the Bible's divine inspiration. Rather it enlarges it.

Do not to treat every passage as a direct utterance from God.

How can we read the words of the devil or a pagan king and say, 'God says'? Depending on the part of the Bible we're referring to, the term, 'The Bible says' does not always mean, 'God says.'

Ask why God included each part in the Bible.

God weaves each part of the Bible into his megastory. So we ask, “What might God be teaching us by including this particular passage in the Bible, especially by considering its place in the Bible’s unfolding drama of redemption?”

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

It is tempting to underline only the Bible's divine elements, and bleach out (in our reading of it) its human elements.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the six ways the human side of Scripture enriches the concept of divine inspiration surprises you most?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Next time you come upon a part of the Bible that perplexes you, ask: "What might God be teaching us by including this in the Bible, especially as we consider its place in the Bible's unfolding drama of redemption?"



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

I personally had no interest in the Bible until a friend of mine introduced me to Jesus. Smitten by Jesus, I wanted to know everything I could about him. The Bible seemed to be the best way. For most of us who come to trust the Bible's divine inspiration, we do not trust in Jesus because we first trust the Bible. Rather, we trust in the Bible because we *first trust in Jesus* who, as we see in the Gospels, most definitely trusted the Scriptures written before his coming.

—page 27 of What's So Amazing About Scripture?



5. GOD'S SELF-REVELATION *PT 1*

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

Hebrews 1:1-2

How can we know God? Sure, God's Word plays a critically important part. But let's step back for a moment and appreciate how Scripture is only one aspect of God's self-revelation.

GOD'S SELF-REVELATION TO ALL

Thankfully, God has chosen to reveal himself. "He who forms the mountains, who creates the wind and treads on the heights of the earth..." also "reveals his thoughts to humankind." (Amos 4:13)

God's reveals something of himself to all people, in three ways:

- Behind creation, a Creator.
- Behind goodness, a good God.
- Behind our moral sense, a moral God.

All good so far, but there's a problem: the fallen human race, says Paul, does not come to the knowledge of God happily. Instead, we resist the reality, authority and even the goodness of God: "By their unrighteousness they suppress the truth... although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." (Rom 1:18). Instead of thanking and worshiping God, we become entitled and worship created things. Yet, we are "without excuse." (Rom 1:20) Un-

less God finds a way to open our eyes, we cannot see.

GOD'S SELF-REVLATION TO SOME

There are six lights of special revelation, all related to Scripture in some way, that pierce the darkness. The first five are covered in this session (the final one in the next):

1. God revealed himself by speaking and acting in history.

The Christian faith is not based on someone having a breakthrough insight about God while sitting on a holy mountain. No, it is based on God's actions and words into a time-space world – the open sea of the Exodus, the open tomb of Easter, and the open heaven of Pentecost.

2. God revealed himself by sending his Son

When the apostle John tries to describe God's greatest act of revelation, he does not write that the Word became a book. Rather he says, "The Word became flesh." (John 1:14) God's main gift to the human race is not a book, but a Person.

3. God revealed himself by calling prophets and apostles to witness to and interpret these acts of God.

Jesus commissioned the apostles to teach others what he had taught them and to impart the defining interpretation of his identity, death and resurrection. Just like the prophets of old, they saw beneath the historical events and were given eyes to perceive their deeper significance; preaching that the cross was not merely an unjust political execution, but a God-ordained sacrifice that would make it possible for slaves of sin and death to become sons and daughters of God.

4. God revealed himself in the writing of Scripture.

For forty years, manna daily fell in the ancient wilderness, disappearing like mist within a day. Yet God selected a sample of manna which apparently was divinely preserved in the golden arc of the covenant. In the same way, not all prophets and apostles wrote Scripture. Enough of the prophets and apostles writings have been preserved so that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with

Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” (Eph 2:20) The Bible is God’s *choice* words – kept for all generations like manna in the ark.

5. God continues to reveal himself by sending anointed preachers and teachers.

God’s plan was never merely to publish a book. The early church delivered to the world not only the words of Scripture, but the words of preachers and teachers. Throughout history, people have mainly first discovered the Bible to be God’s Word not initially by reading it, but by hearing someone else who had read it preach its central message with God’s accompanying power.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

God has revealed himself through creation, but this is not enough revelation to lead us to redemption. For this, he has provided the lights of special revelation.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the five lights of God's special self-revelation has impacted you most? 1. God speaks and acts in history. 2. God sends his Son. 3. 3. God calls prophets and apostles to interpret these events. 4. The writing of Scripture. 5. God sends anointed preachers and teachers.

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. The fourth and fifth aspects of God's revelation – God's gift of Scripture and messengers invite your participation. You can read or give a Bible to someone. Or you can preach the Bible's gospel to someone. Is there anyone you can minister to in one of these ways?

5. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

It is not only our upbringing and culture that etch a sense of right and wrong into us—the divine hand has inscribed not the entirety but at least something of God’s own valuing of truth, justice and beauty upon the hearts of each image-bearer. This gives some explanation as to why almost all people, regardless of their faith or lack thereof, still value morality and ethics.

—footnote on page 47 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



6. GOD'S SELF-REVELATION *PT 2*

The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29

This Devo Study consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video
- Remember—reflect—redirect
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based

DIVINE ILLUMINATION

Following on from the previous video, the sixth and final way God specially reveals himself to otherwise spiritually blind people is by opening the hearts and minds of people who hear and read the Gospel and the Scriptures.

Take Jesus as an example. He's the incarnate Living Word. Yet he was hidden in plain sight to most people. Yet God did open the eyes of many to see who he truly is, both while he lived on earth (John 1:12) and as the Gospel has been preached ever since. (2 Cor 4:4) It's the same with the Bible. It's the inspired written word regardless of our recognition of it being so. For many it is truth hidden in plain sight. Nonetheless, revelation reaches its goal only when people recognize it as such. Only God's Spirit can give us this recognition.

Let's pull this lights of God's self-revelation together around the Scriptures. We learn that: 1. The Bible records revelation. 2. The Bible is a revelation. 3. The Bible needs revelation.

WHAT THIS TELLS US ABOUT THE BIBLE

1. The Bible is not humanity reaching up to God, but God reaching down to us.

The authors of Scripture were not intellectual giants, enquiring philosophers or spiritual sages. The prophets and apostles were mostly rebels and ordinary people going about their lives when God called them.

2. The Bible is not the product of human reason, but God's revelation.

Without revelation, if we are honest, the best we can do is follow what some Athenians did in the first century—they worshiped at an altar enscribed “to an unknown God.” Indeed, if God does not reveal himself, we can have no real idea of what God is like.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The Bible records revelation. The Bible is a revelation. The Bible needs revelation.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the two clarifications about what the Bible is not most fascinates or helps you, and why? 1. The Bible is not humanity reaching up to God, but God reaching down to us. 2. The Bible is not the product of human reason, but God's revelation.

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. Love relationships are based on people's commitment to reveal themselves to each other, based on the desire to be known by someone who also wants to be known. God wants to be known – what about you? How much do you want to know him? And which of the six lights of God's self-revelation should you give more attention to? Revelation 1) in history, 2) in the Son, 3) by prophets and apostles, 4) in Scripture, 5) through preachers and 6) by the Spirit.

5. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

As wonderful and noble as scientific discovery and exploration is, it has its limits. Limited to the physical realm, we cannot use the scientific method to verify anything that is metaphysical—the existence of God for example, or a spiritual realm, or the after-life, as well as the mind of God and the meaning of our lives and the universe.

—page 55 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



7. THE BIBLE JESUS READ PT 1

Let this be written for the generations to come, that a people not yet created may praise the LORD.

Psalm 102:18

This Devo Study consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video
- Remember—reflect—redirect
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based

There are seven stages in this story in the Old Testament. We deal with the first five in this session:

Stage One: Creation and Fall (Pre-2000 BC)

Found in Genesis 1-11, take note of three biblical themes that emerge:

- In *Creation* God makes a good world, which he plans to bring to its full potential.
- *Presence* refers to God's original plan, in which heaven and earth are the same place. Eden is not only where people dwell, but where God dwells.
- *Salvation* means that though our corruption calls forth God's condemnation, and there's a curse upon creation, he promises that one day he will reverse the curse, and rescue those who trust in the serpent-crushing seed of Eve.

Stage Two: The Patriarchs (2000-1700 BC)

Found in Genesis 12-50, take note of three biblical themes that emerge:

- *Gracious calling* – By this I mean that, as Abraham discovers, we do not initiate or deserve any kind of relationship with God; he graciously calls us.
- *International blessing* – local as God’s dealings may be, he promises Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he will bless the entire world through their descendants.
- *God’s sovereignty* – as Joseph learns, God can overrule and use even the terrible, unjust things that come upon his people to move his purposes forward.

Stage Three: Exodus and Desert Journey (1480-1400 BC)

Found in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, take note of four biblical themes that emerge:

- *Redemption* – by the blood of the lamb and by the powerful destruction of their enemies, God makes powerless slaves his free people.
- *The temple* – like in the garden of Eden, this is a place where heaven and earth fuse; a place where God’s manifest presence dwells.
- *The sacrificial system* – priests mediate between an ungodly people and a holy God by offering sacrifices.
- *Law-code* – God expects his people to live and abide by a set of laws that will make them distinct from the surrounding nations. ‘Be holy because I am holy,’ says the Lord.

Stage Four: The Promised Land (1400-1050BC)

Found in Joshua, Judges and Ruth, take note of three biblical themes that emerge:

- *Inheritance* – though God’s deliverance is entirely the work of God, he vouches to his people a promised land, something they will only enter as they actively partner with God.
- *Faithful worship* – echoing Israel’s earlier worship of the golden calf, God’s people have a tendency to worship the idols of the surrounding people, idols which bring needless pain into their lives.
- *Deliverance* – Again and again, God sends unlikely deliverers

or saviours in a weakened state to rescue his people from their oppressors.

Stage Five: The Monarchy (1050-930 BC)

Found in 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11 and 1 Chronicles, take note of two biblical themes that emerge:

- *Jerusalem* – God’s plan is not only to put his people in a garden, but in a city, which speaks not only of a new humanity but a new society.
- *King* – God’s plan is to provide a king in David’s lineage who will eternally reign over his people for their blessing and the good of the whole world.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

There are seven stages in the Old Testament story. The only way to understand each of the 39 books is to know the bigger story line and to place each book in its correct stage.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Of the total 15 biblical themes that have emerged so far, which most speaks to you presently?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What difference may this theme make to the way you see God or live your life?

5. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

“The Bible is not, for a start, a list of rules, though it contains many commandments of various sorts and in various contexts. Nor is it a compendium of true doctrines, though of course many parts of the Bible declare great truths about God, Jesus, the world and ourselves ... Most of its constituent parts, and all of it when put together can best be described as *story*.” (N.T. Wright)

—footnote on page 57 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



8. THE BIBLE JESUS READ PT 2

For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.

Romans 15:4

In this chapter, we cover the final two stages in the story of the Old Testament, but first we take a look at five important books which we didn't cover in the last video that were mostly written during stage five:

The Wisdom / Poetry Books

These are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs.

Three major biblical themes evident in these wisdom books:

- *Creativity* – as image-bearers of the Creator God, we utilize our imaginations not only our rationality as we worship, reflect, communicate and create.
- *Faithful suffering* – there's Job's suffering and over half of the Psalms are prayers of lament, giving voice to heartache.
- *Holistic wisdom* – God is interested in every aspect of life and how we live it... how we wrestle with suffering (Job), pray to God in desperation, trust or joy (the Psalms), guide our children and leaders to live wisely (Proverbs), grapple with life's absurdity (Ecclesiastes) and indulge in sensual love (Song of Songs).

Stage six: The Division and Exile (930-586 BC)

1 Kings 12-22, 2 Kings and *2 Chronicles* tell this most complicated stage of Israel's history. It starts with a civil war that occurs when Solomon dies, splitting the nation in two: the Northern kingdom, with Samaria as its capital, consisting of 10 tribes, henceforth called Israel, and the Southern kingdom, with Jerusalem as its chief city, consisting of only

two tribes, now called Judah. This stage spans 19 kings of Israel, all of which are corrupt, and 20 kings of Judah, only 8 of which turn to God.

During this time God sends prophets in the mould of Moses to both the North and the South. In the North, the prophetic words of the authors *Hosea* and *Amos* and the wonder-working Elijah and Elisha fall on deaf ears. In the South, the preaching and writing of the prophets *Isaiah*, *Micah*, *Habbakuk*, *Zephaniah* and *Nahum* are more respected and received. The prophets warn that if people enmasse continue in their idolatry, injustice and immorality, God will send an invading nation and take them into exile.

Horror of horrors, Assyria conquers the Northern kingdom in 722 BC, leaving only Judah. All the exiled people of Israel are scattered throughout the Assyrian kingdom, never to return, making them 'the 10 lost tribes of Israel.' The Southern kingdom hangs in there for over a century, but its deep corruption means that it eventually succumbs to a prolonged invasion by the latest superpower, Babylon finally drags the Judeans into captivity in 586 BC.

Jeremiah's ministry and writing overlaps the years before and after the Babylonian invasion. He watches God's people ignore his pleadings and pay for it. He is called 'the weeping prophet'. His book, *Lamentations* expresses the depth of his sorrow.

Both the prophets *Daniel* and *Ezekiel*, dragged as teens from their homeland, reach adulthood in Babylon and are called to prophetic ministries in the heart of darkness. *Ezekiel's* ministry is to the Jewish exiles, *Daniel's* is to a succession of pagan kings as their trusted advisor and administrator.

In this stage five more themes crystalize during:

- *Unity* – God's people are the strongest when they unite under God's self-revelation, and weakest when they are divided by carnality.
- *Exile* – echoing Adam and Eve's ejection from the garden, God's people learn that unfaithfulness to God can cause the loss of their God-given place in his world.
- *Mission* – the Jewish exiles in Babylon are called to live in and influence corrupt pagan societies, by serving the common good while staying true to God.

- *Prophets* – these people speak for God in the power of the Spirit, denouncing rebellion against God and the strong exploiting the weak, warning about the coming invasion and also catching glimpses of a future hope.
- *The most important theme, Kingdom* – especially the prophet Isaiah sees a coming invasion, not by Babylon but by God himself who will bring about a new exodus, a new kingdom and a new creation.

Stage Seven: The Return (538-410 BC)

The books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* tell the story of those exiled Jews who return to their homeland. Many prophetic messages by *Haggai*, *Zechariah*, *Joel* and *Malachi* are written down. Many Jews, however, do not return—the story of *Esther* tells of God’s continued care of them. Take note of two themes in this stage:

- *The Spirit* – echoing earlier prophets, Joel tells of a future lavish outpouring of God’s immediate presence that gives speed to the nations calling on God for salvation: “I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy ... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” (Joel 2:28-30)
- *Disappointment* – Israel’s grand hopes do not amount to much. When the smaller temple is unveiled, many who had seen the former temple burst out in tears. Nehemiah’s final three prayers effectively amount to, “God, you know I tried with these people!” The last prophet Malachi, in 410 BC accuses the city’s rebuilders of disobedience, arrogance, defrauding labourers, and stinginess, but ends with a strange promise of “the sun of righteousness rising with healing” and a prophet like Elijah to come before the Great Day of the Lord.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

There are seven stages in the story of the Hebrew Bible: 1. Creation and fall. 2. The patriarchs. 3. The exodus and desert journey. 4. The promised land. 5. The monarchy. 6. The division and captivity. 7. The return.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the 10 themes we explored in this session speak most to your current walk with God or season of life?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What difference may that theme make to the way you see God or live your life?

5. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

The promise of the prophets is that one day God will eclipse the present evil age with the coming kingdom age. Injustice and war will be eclipsed by justice, peace, and love of neighbour; the dark ignorance about God replaced by the shining light of God being known; oppression by salvation; guilt by forgiveness; sickness and brokenness by healing and wholeness; and distress and despair by comfort and joy. The nations will no longer oppress God's people but now flood in to pay tribute to their God and king. Death will be swallowed up, resurrection bodies will be given to all, and fallen creation will be revived and renewed.

—page 66 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



9. JESUS AND THE FIRST CHURCH

Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. You put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead. God

Acts 2:22, 24

IN JESUS' TIME

The Old Testament canon was already in place.

The Hebrew Bible was also called the TaNaK = Torah + Neviim + Ktuvim. *The Apocrypha* which was written *after* the last books of the TaNaK, included the historical accounts of the Maccabees, the poetic Wisdom of Solomon, and more.

Hopes for the promised kingdom of God had reached fever pitch.

Long oppressed by occupying superpowers, the Palesitnian Jews desperately yearned for the Messianic kingdom (as they imagined it to be) to vanquish all pagan occupiers., and turn Jerusalem and its cleansed temple into the God-magnifying, nations-magnetizing, planet-renewing and history-rebooting seat of God's presence the prophets said it would one day be. Then along comes Jesus.

THE STAGES OF THE NEW TESTAMENT STORY

Stage 1: Jesus from birth to early 30s (6 BC–AD 27)

Matthew 1-2 and Luke 1-2 tell the story.

Stage 2: Jesus' public ministry until death (AD 28-30)

The four Gospel writers record this time as the lion's share of their biographies about Jesus. Like four artists interpreting the same subject from different viewpoints and with different styles, the Gospel writers render their distinctive take on the same striking Jesus of history.

Throughout this stage, Jesus' primary message, especially in his parables, is the arrival of God's kingdom. He demonstrates this new creation, new exodus and new community in his exorcisms and healings, his storm-taming miracles and Moses-like feeding of the 1000s, his interactions with all kinds of people and inclusion of society's outcasts at his table, and his taking up our sins and taking on the dark powers on the cross. In all this, he opens up a new world, a door never to be closed, in the midst of the old one.

Despite their high Messianic hopes and Jesus' miracles, most Jews reject Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah. Besides who had ever imagined the Messiah would be crucified?

Stage 3: Jesus' resurrection until ascension (AD 30)

The final chapters in the Gospels, and Acts 1, tell the story.

Stage 4: The early years of the first church (AD 30-33)

Recorded by Luke alone in his sequel to his Gospel, in the book of Acts 2-7, we read of the birth and ministry of the first-ever church in Jerusalem.

Stage 5: The gospel spreads into Judea and Samaria (AD 33-37)

This short transitional stage, recorded in Acts 8-12, prepares for the next stage, which we deal with in the next session.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Into a people longing for the promised kingdom, Jesus was born, but he was not at all what they expected.

1. What one thing that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Into a people longing for the promised kingdom, Jesus was born, but he was not at all what they expected.

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Jesus puts the kingdom first and calls us to do the same. “Seek first my kingdom.” How may your life and ministry be re-ignited and re-organized around this priority?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Jewish scholar Joseph Klausner, writing in the 1920s, noted that in the centuries following their return to Judea, the devastated Jews failed to see the prophet's promises come to pass: they experienced "slavery to foreign governments, wars, tumults and torrents of blood. Instead of all nations being subject to Judah, Judah was subject to the nations. Instead of the 'riches of the Gentiles,' godless Rome exacted taxes and tribute ... Instead of the Gentiles 'bowing down with their faces to the ground' and 'licking the dust of their feet,' comes a petty Roman official with unlimited power over Judea. Instead of Messiah the son of David, comes Herod."

—page 70 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



10. PAUL'S MISSION AND LETTERS

For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

1 Corinthians 15:9-10s

In the last session, we witnessed the gospel go from Jerusalem out to Judea and Samaria, and also Paul's conversion. In this next stage, we will see Paul lead the charge "to the ends of the earth."

Stage 6: Paul the missionary and letter writer (AD 46-64)

In Acts 13-28, Peter moves off-stage and Paul takes centre-stage in Luke's account. Under his lead, the church rapidly progresses from the Jewish sect it once was to a Gentile-majority network of faith communities that rapidly spread further and further outward from its original starting point in Jerusalem. While travelling or in prison, Paul writes many letters to various faith communities. Of these, 13 of them are still preserved, constituting the bulk of the 21 letters in the New Testament.

THE FIVE WORLDS OF PAUL

Paul wove together five worlds in an unrepeatably way throughout his 18 years of ministry in Asia Minor and Europe:

1. Jewish by upbringing

He describes himself as "a Hebrew of Hebrews; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless." (Phil 3:3)

2. An apostle by calling

His encounter with Jesus and the Spirit caused him to radically reformat his understanding of the kingdom. He now realized God had kept his promises to send the saving king, but had done so in a way no one could have imagined. God had launched his reign and new creation not at the *end* of the evil age, but in the *midst* of it, where it would flower from within until this king would return to consummate it. Driven on by a singular passion “to preach Christ where he is not known” Paul went out to summon the world to Jesus’ reign and salvation.

3. Roman by citizenship

Paul understood well the inflated imperial claim that Caesar the Emperor was Saviour of the world, and its idolatrous demand that all would bow their knee and declare “Caesar is Lord.” Against this backdrop, he subversively opted to use the term, ‘Jesus is Lord’ rather than merely ‘Jesus is king.’ He knew well the target every Christ follower would draw on their back if they declared the same.

4. Greek by culture

Paul was competent at relating to people who knew nothing of the Hebrew Bible. Unlike the Jews in all-Jewish towns, he had grown up with them as his neighbours. He was adept at interacting with their Greek-influenced philosophy and culture, skillfully entering their minds and hearts by using their language, metaphors and foundational ways of thinking as a starting point.

4. A pastor by passion

Paul did not only preach the gospel, hoping for a convert here and there. Rather, in each location, his goal was to call a diverse *community* into existence who heralded Jesus as their Lord. He poured his life into these communities, teaching them, raising up leaders, keeping in contact with them, and helping them draw on the resources of the gospel to deal with the numerous problems they faced.

PAUL'S MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

The book of Acts (13-28) detail Paul's three missionary journeys: The first one in Asia Minor is AD 47-48. His second, taking him into Europe, is in AD 49-52 during time which he writes his first two letters to churches he had planted: 1 and 2 Thessalonians. During his third, in AD 52-55, he writes Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Romans. Returning to Jerusalem he is arrested and imprisoned for two years. He is sent as a prisoner to Rome in AD 60 where he writes Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philemon during house arrest. In AD 62 he is released, and, knowing his time is short, writes baton-passing letters to his trainees and delegates, *1 and 2 Timothy* and *Titus*, before returning being beheaded in Rome on false charges by the mad tyrant emperor Nero.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Paul's pioneer work helped the church rapidly progress from the Jewish sect it once was to a Gentile-majority network of faith communities the world over.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Paul was uniquely poised for his missionary and theological contribution because he lived in five worlds. Which of these five worlds most fascinates you?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Paul wrote, "By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect." What effect might the unique grace of God on *your* life have through you to *others*?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Yet still we must not overstate Paul's contribution. It's common to hear preachers say, "Paul wrote most of the New Testament." Additionally, since the Reformation, Protestant theologians are in danger of seeing Paul, not Jesus, as their main source of theology. The truth is that if we count all the words, Paul wrote 23% of the New Testament. Luke, who authored two massive works, a Gospel and Acts, wrote even more, 25% to be exact. That said, next to Jesus, Paul is the most written about follower of Jesus—a quarter of Luke's words (in Acts 13–28) have to do with the ministry of Paul. If we add everything said about Paul and by Paul, it's no wonder the high esteem the Bible-reading church gives to his example and theology. Yet even here we must be careful to keep Jesus central as we encounter him in the Gospels. The theology and example of Jesus and his kingdom ministry in the Gospels is the interpretive lens we use to make sense of Paul's example and theology, not the other way around. In a Christ-centered theology and practice, we do not come to Jesus via Paul. Rather we come to Paul via Jesus.

—*footnote on page 76 of What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



11. THE FINAL LETTERS AND THE CANON

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll.

Revelations 22:18

We come now to the final stage of the story of the New Testament.

Stage Seven: Others write letters and the Revelation (AD 60-95)

In our Bible's there are Paul's 13 letters. Then come eight more letters, written by five other people. Unlike Paul's letters, which most often can be correlated to the narrative of Paul's travels in the book of Acts, we know very little about the story behind most of these letters, though we know that two were penned by Jesus' own brothers, and the other six were written by two of his very first followers. Other than James, which is possibly the first New Testament letter to be written (AD 45) the other seven are all written between AD 60-95. Between AD 60-70, *Hebrews* is written by someone in Paul's circle to encourage a Jewish-majority church who were worn down by decades of persecution and were thus tempted to revert back to Judaism. Peter, having relocated to Rome in the 50s writes *1 Peter* in AD 62 to help churches endure persecution faithfully. Two years later, *Jude* (another brother of Jesus) writes his short letter, and Peter writes a kind of farewell speech (*2 Peter*), the same year Paul writes his last letter to Timothy. Later that year, both Peter and Paul are martyred. Soon after, the last remaining apostle, John migrates to Ephesus, taking Jesus' aged mother with him. John, Between 85-95 AD, now an old man, writes three letters (*1, 2 and 3 John*), his Gospel, and *the Revelation*, which likens Roman tyranny to

Babylon, and concludes the biblical canon in spectacular fashion. John, imprisoned on an island, writes down his series of visions in which the whole biblical story comes together in powerful symbolism and imagery. Jesus is portrayed as a slaughtered lamb who is exalted as the divine king of the world, leading his people out of slavery and exile from “Babylon”, a symbol of Rome. As his people resist Babylon's influence, they may have to suffer alongside their slain leader. Ultimately, not even death can prevent the dawn of the New Creation which is here depicted as a New Jerusalem garden temple, the true home of humanity after its long, long exile.

THE ORIGINS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT CANON

By AD 95, all the apostles had died. So what did the churches do? They carefully collected, copied and shared these writings with other churches. For those early churches, not just the Hebrew Bible but now also the Gospels and letters were treated as Scripture.

Jesus had commissioned the apostles who wrote many of these, and the apostles commissioned the people who wrote the rest. But even when they were still alive, Peter referred to a small collection of Paul's writings as Scripture. (2 Peter 3:16) And Paul, for example, recognized Luke's writing on a par with the Old Testament. (In 1 Timothy 5:18 Paul quotes both Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7 and refers to *both* texts as “the Scripture says”.) The church fathers treated these documents as Scripture: Ignatius in AD 110 wrote to a church, “Be eager, therefore, to be firmly grounded in the precepts of the Lord and the apostles.” (Magnesians 13:1)

With the apostles deceased, the later church fathers still wrote more letters, like the Didache. People began to wonder if they were Scripture too. What's more, a teacher called Marcion chose a list that he deemed as canon which excluded most of the Hebrew Bible and anything that sounded Jewish in the more recent writings. Church leaders responded in AD 170 by listing books to be safely used in teaching and preaching – the vast majority found in our New Testament. Only by the fourth century was there a prominent and final church-wide recognition of a New Testament canon as now have it. They employed three tests:

- **The test of apostolicity** asks, “Is the author an apostle or do they have a connection with an apostle?”
- **The test of content** asks, “Does the book reflect consistency of moral values and doctrine with what had been accepted as orthodox teaching?”
- **The test of acceptance** asks, “Was the book accepted by the church at large?” Notice that the early church was not selecting or authorizing its Scripture. It was merely seeking to recognize the Scripture that God had given, and the writings through which God continued to speak through long after they were written. This is also the reason that it required time to settle upon a final list.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

If the Hebrew Bible is the story of God, ancient Israel and the surrounding world, then the New Testament is the story of Jesus, the early church and the world at large.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Reflect on how the big story of Scripture (spread over both the Old and New Testament) begin and end in a similar place – Eden as first creation and the Garden-City as new creation, God’s people as vessels of God’s reign over creation.

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. How might you pray differently next time your life is difficult or your faith creates additional challenges for you? Clue: go back to stage 7 of

the New Testament, and let the faith and endurance of those long past give rise to greater endurance and faith in you.



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Jesus indirectly authorized the four gospels. Matthew and John were apostles commissioned by Jesus, along with the Twelve and later Paul, to take the message of the kingdom and his teachings about discipleship to the world. Mark likely wrote under Peter's authority, and Luke wrote under Paul's authority. This is also why no books written after John's death were accepted. Contrary to modern conspiracy theories, the only Gospels the church ever accepted were Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, all written while eyewitnesses were still alive. Unnamed Gnostics penned the so-called 'Lost Gospels' of Thomas, Philip, Mary, and others, during the second and third century, attempting to reinvent Jesus as a teacher of their own religion. None were even considered for the canon.

—page 88 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



12. COPYISTS, COLLECTORS, TEXT-CRITICS AND TRANSLATORS

Jesus... went into the synagogue. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place...

Luke 4:16-17

The Bible comes to us through a wonderful four-phase story, that tells of many people we should be forever grateful for:

COPYISTS MADE COPIES

The Jewish and early Christian scribes exercised great precision in hand-copying the biblical texts, following detailed systems for counting letters and having multiple correctors read through their copies to check for errors. This accounts for the striking accuracy and consistency seen in most ancient copies of our Old and New Testaments. Still, there are *variants* or differences in the 1000s of ancient copies we have. About 95% of these discrepancies were mistakes of sight, hearing and writing, or poor judgment. The remaining 5% resulted from intentional changes, where scribes revised grammar or spelling, or tried to harmonize similar passages, or conflated the text.

ANCIENT COPIES ARE COLLECTED

As is the case for *every ancient* document of religious or historical significance, we do not have the original biblical manuscripts. They

have perished or been lost to antiquity. They have perished or been lost to antiquity. Thankfully we have *thousands* of ancient copies – 24,000 for the New Testament alone. This is a truly staggering amount when compared to the 10 ancient copies of Caesar’s Gallic Wars or the 20 copies of Tacitus written shortly before and after the New Testament, and yet relied upon as major sources of historical record. Unlike the vast time gap of over 900 years between the original and the oldest copies we have of Caesar’s Gallic Wars, Tacitus and even the first Buddhist texts, we have copies for the entire New Testament written within 350 years, and a fragment from John’s Gospel within 130 years, of the original.

TEXT-CRITICS DECIDE BETWEEN VARIANTS

Though scholarly debate continues on the numerous variants found in these copies, most scholars agree that textual criticism has served to confirm the reliable transmission of the Old and New Testament manuscripts. FJ Hort, one of the most respected textual critics, concluded, “The text of the New Testament, in the variety and fullness of the evidence on which it rests, stands absolutely and unapproachably alone among ancient prose writings.” Most importantly, most unsolved textual issues have little to no doctrinal significance.

TRANSLATORS INTRODUCE NEW VERSIONS.

Driven on by the apostle John’s vision of all tribes and tongues worshipping God, missionaries and teachers have continued to translate parts or all of the Bible into over 3,000 languages (and counting). In major languages, there are multiple translations. In English alone, there are over 450 different translations of the Bible.

Which translations should one use? For the sake of absorbing and memorizing Scripture, it is good to use only one translation over many years. Choose a highly credible one created by a large body of scholars – I suggest the middle-of-the-spectrum NIV or CSB. To get a fresh reading of texts that one may have become overfamiliar with, read the NLT or MSG from time to time. For the sake of study, use not one but many different versions, including those on the left like NRSV or ESV,

but I would suggest you don't use the King James Version (KJV) and its update (NJKV) which has not benefitted from the more recent textual scholarship and the uncovering of the oldest copies. Thankfully, all these and other versions are free on www.biblehub.com, a web portal that also has the original Greek and Hebrew language for study – which, in the final analysis, is the only truly inspired text.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

We should thank God for millenia of copyists, collectors, textual critics and translators whom God called to make it possible for us to have our Bible.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. When you study a passage, why is it important to use more than one translation?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Will you change or continue your present translation of choice? Why or why not?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

“Most of the variations between ancient copies in the biblical text are not significant and some common alterations include the deletion, rearrangement, repetition, or replacement of one or more words when the copyist's eye returns to a similar word in the wrong location of the original text. If their eye skips to an earlier word, they may create a repetition. If their eye skips to a later word, they may create an omission. They may resort to performing a rearranging of words to retain the overall meaning without compromising the context ... Spellings occasionally change. Synonyms may be substituted. A pronoun may be changed into a proper noun (such as "he said" becoming "Jesus said").”

—*footnote quote on page 84-85 of What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



13. FINDING THE ANCIENT MEANING

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth

2 Timothy 2:15

More often than we realize, we may *think* we have read something and assume a particular understanding of a passage when it is in fact not saying that at all.

We may distort the meaning.

Being such a large book comprised of so many smaller books, themes and sub-plots, the Bible is bound to have a passage somewhere that can be twisted and taken out of context to support almost any idea.

We may deny the meaning.

Postmodern readers often see the text not as a window to reality, but as a mirror of fantasy. We are so subjective, they say, that we can never know the original meaning of a text. We are unable, they say, to separate our own reflection from what we think we see in the text. Meaning, they say, is something each of us uniquely must find for ourselves. But are all interpretations equally wrong and equally right all at the same time? With this view, no one can make assertions about anything – except the assertion that no one can make assertions about anything (which is a good example of a theory that disproves itself as soon as it is stated).

ANCIENT MEANING, THEN TIMELESS MESSAGE

We must answer two questions of each passage:

1. *What did the human author say to the original audience?* That's the ancient meaning, what it meant to them.
2. *What is God saying to us here and now through these words of Scripture?* That's the timeless message, what it means for us.

The wonderful thing about God's Word is not only that God spoke through it to people long ago, but that he still speaks through it, to us and to generations to come.

Start big then move to the small. When we dive right into a verse without any consideration of its placing in the book or Testament it is in, or the genre of book it is, we end up not being able to tell the wood from the trees. Rather, first pan out and see the forest, then zoom in on the tree and then particular branches.

Ask the right questions, in the right order. In this and the next three sessions, we will run through these.

QUESTION 1: ITS PLACE IN THE STORY

Ask of each text: Where does the book that this text is in fit into the 14 stages of the Bible's larger story?

Joining the seven stages of the Old Testament with the new leads to this list:

Stage 1: Creation and the Fall

Stage 2: The Patriarchs

Stage 3: The Exodus and Desert Journey

Stage 4: The Promised Land

Stage 5: The Monarchy

Stage 6: The Division and Exile

Stage 7: The Return

Stage 8: Jesus from birth to early 30s

- Stage 9: Jesus' public ministry until death*
Stage 10: Jesus' resurrection until ascension
Stage 11: The early years of the first church
Stage 12: The gospel in Judea and Samaria
Stage 13: Paul's ministry and letters
Stage 14: General letters and the Revelation

The Psalms and the laws of Moses make no sense, for instance, if we think they were written *before* the Exodus. Likewise, most of the 16 Prophetic books make no sense if we think they were written *before* the division of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms. Or Jesus' commands to his disciples to preach only in Israel, or to leave our offering at the Jerusalem temple in order to reconcile to our brother do not make sense after stage 12, when the church spreads beyond Palestine and Jerusalem. And the Revelation makes little sense if we place it *before* the martyrdom of Peter and Paul, when persecution against Christians first became state-sponsored.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

With every text, we must try to answer two questions: 1. *What did the human author say to the original audience?* That's the ancient meaning, what it meant to them. 2. *What is God saying to us here and now?* That's the timeless message, what it means for us.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Think of a book of the Bible you recently read or heard preached. Which of the 14 stages is it in?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Our driving passion may be knowing what God says to us, but the only way to hear it is to learn to decipher what he was really saying to

the text's original recipients. How can God's love for you and your love for him better motivate you to do the work of learning this ancient language and world of Scripture?

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

I need to clarify the difference between a “stage” in the biblical story and an “age” in God’s redemptive work. Though I have divided the New Testament story into seven stages, when it comes to the way God relates to us, the last four stages seven are in fact all the same “age” as each other, the age in which we live too. Together with the first churches in the first century, we are in *the age of the church*, the time between *Pentecost* (the coming of the Spirit) and the *Parousia* (the second coming of Jesus). Though there may be all kinds of cultural and situational distance between our church and any of the first century churches, the fact we are all in the same age means that God’s Word to each of those churches (i.e. the epistles of the New Testament) more naturally applies to us now than God’s Word to all God’s people before the coming of Jesus.

—page 106 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



14. THE KINDS OF GENRE

Blessed is the one... whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on his law day and night. They are a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither.

Psalm 1:1-3

Beautiful words in Psalm 1, but a person who ponders the Bible is, of course, not literally a tree. This is figurative language. We know this because the Psalms are poetic in genre. That's why, to understand any passage of Scripture, we must ask a second question:

QUESTION 2: ITS GENRE TYPE

Next, we ask of each text: What genre of literature is this?

In the modern world, there are different kinds of writing. There are suspense, adventure, romance and science fiction genres to name a few. We know we need to read these very differently. The Bible, likewise, consists of different kinds of genres, most of which were popular in their time: there's historical narrative, legal code, fables, wisdom poetry, prayer-and-song poetry, prophetic poetry, parables, letter-writing, teachings and apocalyptic literature. We must read and interpret each differently. As a sample, let's consider five genres:

Narrative

- A common error is to read Old Testament stories as allegories filled with hidden meanings.
- Another error is to assume every Old Testament story has a moral lesson.

- Enjoy them first, analyze them next. They are great stories. Like all good stories, they have beginnings where the characters are introduced, middles where there is plot tension and endings when things resolve.
- The biblical narrators recounted the stories with a particular concern to get across what God was showing his people through these stories.

Poetry

- Job, Proverbs, Psalms, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and most of the Prophetic writings use the genre of poetic parallelism: two connected lines, then another two connected lines and so on.
- A pitfall to avoid is reading figurative parts of the Bible in a literal way

Song Poetry (The Psalms)

- Unlike the prophets, the songwriters do not mainly speak on behalf of God but to God. Even here we must be careful how we read them. They particularly guide us to relate honestly to God whatever season we find ourselves in.
- By recognizing what kind of Psalm we are reading, we will be able to interpret it and apply it more accurately.

Wisdom Poetry (The Proverbs)

- Proverbs are a collection of tried-and-tested, abridged wisdom to guide us in daily living, teaching us to live a life that does not cut against the grain of God's moral universe.
- They are not to be taken as commands, nor as promises.
- They are also not to be taken alone. Each proverb usually has many other proverbs on the same topic, each highlighting a different nuance.

Apocalyptic (The Revelation, and parts of Ezekiel and Daniel)

- No book has been more misunderstood because its basic genre is so unfamiliar to us.
- The book is awash with Old Testament references, apart from which so much does not make sense.
- Clear symbols aside, we should view the series of visions as a whole and not press every detail to mean something.
- Instead of trying to read into every detail in the book, we do better to hear its central, clear message: Hang in there, for no matter what terrible things unfold on the earth and against the church, God is in control and in the end the Lamb wins!

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Read the various genres of the Bible differently. Be especially careful to not read figurative parts of the Bible literally.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Why should the Proverb, “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” be taken as a general principle not an absolute promise?

3. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Next time something happens in the world or your life that leaves you reeling, do what Revelation says ... *Hang in there—God is in control and in the end the Lamb wins!* Perhaps, write a prayer of

endurance here:

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

There are three kinds of parallelism used in the Old Testament poetry and prophetic books—being aware of this gives us an interpretive advantage:

1) In *synonymous parallelism*, both lines say more or less the same thing:

‘I have swept away your offenses like a cloud,
your sins like the morning mist.’

2) In *antithetical parallelism*, the second line (usually beginning with ‘but’) reinforces the first idea by contrasting it:

‘Hatred stirs up conflict,
but love covers over all wrongs.’

3) In *synthetic parallelism*, the second line adds completely new information to the first line:

‘Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau.
And the kingdom will be the LORD’s.’

Read any Psalm or chapter in Isaiah, for example, and see if you can spot what kind of parallelism is used in every couplet.

—*footnote on page 109 of What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



15. THE AUTHOR'S INTENT

There are some things in (Paul's letters) that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:16

QUESTION 3: THE BOOK'S PURPOSE

Next we ask: *Why was this particular book even written?*

To understand a verse properly, it's important to understand the purpose of the whole book. The various authors wrote to specific people for specific reasons. When it comes to the epistles, it is especially crucial to ask, "Who wrote it, and to whom was this written, and why was it written?" Though most times the addressed problems are clearly stated in Paul's letters, there are times when we are not immediately sure what they are. Much like listening to one end of a telephone conversation, we try to figure out what the unseen party is saying.

QUESTION 4: THE FLOW OF THOUGHT

Next we ask: *Based on the section before and after, what is the author trying to say in this passage?*

If the previous questions surface the *situational context*, this one attends to the *literary context*. See, we usually cannot understand a verse without first looking at the flow of thought presented by the larger passage. As much as we want to mine into a verse, or a word in a verse, we must first try to trace the author's train of thought in the entire passage.

QUESTION 5: WORD AND SENTENCE STUDY

Next we ask: *What do the words, phrases, and their grammatical relationship to each other mean?*

- Ask about the words themselves, always in the light of the sentence.
- Ask about phrases.
- Ask about connecting words.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The whole Bible is the context for each of its books. The book is the context for each of its sections. The section is the context for each of its paragraphs. The paragraph is the context for each of its sentences. The sentence is the context for each of its words. Take any ‘text’ out of its ‘context’ and you just might create a ‘con’.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Can you remember taking a passage out of context? Perhaps take some time to reflect on how your underlying belief and worldview made you more susceptible to do this.

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Start practicing Gordon Fee’s advice as you read the Bible: “The most

important contextual question you will ever ask—and it must be asked over and over of every sentence and every paragraph—is, ‘What’s the point?’”

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Allow me to labour the point: only once we discover the ancient meaning to the readers in their ancient situation can we begin to discern the timeless message which we then can, with the help of the Spirit, *re-apply* into the very different situations and contexts we find ourselves in.

—page 118 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



16. THE TIMELESS MESSAGE

The devil took Jesus to... the highest point of the temple. "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: 'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands.'"... Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

Matthew 4:5-7

See the verse above: the devil is the master of biblical misinterpretation – but Jesus will have none of it!

QUESTION 6: ITS TIMELESS MESSAGE

The final question we ask is, *What is the timeless message in this text that we must re-apply to our situation?*

A longer way of asking the same question is this: *Is there some wisdom to learn, instruction to obey, example to follow, warning to heed, principle to apply, promise to believe or doctrine to grasp?*

But how to find this timeless message in each passage? Here are the seven most important guidelines for more accurately drawing out the timeless truth from Scripture:

1. Explore references to earlier Scriptures.

About one in ten verses in the New Testament cite or allude to something in the Old Testament. The New Testament writers see Christ as the fulfilment, not the contradiction, of what went before. The earlier writings throw light on the later writings.

There is something called progressive revelation. Across the many stages of God's people, God shines more and more light on subjects that slowly unveil. The later bits don't contradict the earlier bits, any more than a building's fifth floor contradicts the foundation it's built upon. But, across the Bible's time span, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, there's no doubt that God adds new levels of meaning and revelation to almost every doctrine, topic or theme

2. Read the Old Testament laws in the light of Jesus.

Not only do we interpret the newer parts in light of the older, we do so the other way around too. Here's a big one: *how do we interpret the 613 laws of Moses*, with their ceremonial, civil and (far fewer) moral aspects? *The ceremonial laws* have to do with the tabernacle structure, the priests' responsibilities, the sorts of animals to be sacrificed. Hebrews teaches us that these are all fulfilled, made obsolete, in Jesus' high-priestly ministry and once-for-all sacrifice on the cross. *The civil laws* detail penalties for various crimes, some major and some minor, for which one might be arrested and tried in Israel. Since the people of God are no longer an ethnic tribe, they no longer apply to God's people. You can easily argue that the *moral laws*, like most of the 10 commandments, do apply to believers, because they are repeated in different forms in the New Testament. But even here Jesus claims to lead us into a new command of Christ-like love that not only incorporates but *outstrips* what Moses calls for. Jesus would say about these preceding moral laws, "You have heard it say... but I tell you..."¹ Being under Jesus' leadership is something higher and more dynamic, than being under Moses' law.

3. Read Scripture in the light of Scripture.

Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. Especially when a passage's meaning is unclear, read it in light of other things said by the same author, as well as the rest of Scripture on the same topic.

4. Distinguish between particular and universal commands.

Commands to individuals in the story of Scripture or to churches in particular circumstances do not always apply to every Christian and

¹ For example, Matt 5:21-22

every church.

5. Distinguish between the timeless principle and the ancient cultural application of it.

For example, when Jesus tells his disciples to wash the weary traveller's feet, we may apply the principle of humble service differently – getting out of our comfort zones, and serving people of seemingly low position practically.

6. Distinguish between what is clear and cloudy.

A cloudy text is one heavily debated by scholars – Hebrews 6:4-6 has at least 18 lines of interpretation, and 1 Timothy 2:12 has 12. The general rule is that cloudy texts must be interpreted in light of clearer texts.

7. Distinguish between what the Bible describes and prescribes.

For example, Gideon put out a fleece to confirm God's will. Do we do the same? Not at all, especially because the narrator shows God using Gideon not because of his faith, but despite his lack of it.

Triple certainty

As for what practices all churches in all cultures *must* do, the clearest indication is a positive answer to three questions:

Did Jesus do it and command it in the Gospels?

Did the first churches practice it in Acts and the epistles?

Did the apostles command it of all churches in Acts and the epistles?

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Before laying a command upon all believers and churches, we must be especially sure it is God's Word for all people at all times.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which two or three of the seven principles for drawing out a passage's timeless truth have you most neglected in your previous Bible reading?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Let the final question in your reading and study be, "Is there some wisdom to learn, instruction to obey, example to follow, warning to heed, principle to apply, promise to believe or doctrine to grasp?"

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

The writer to the Hebrews says God spoke in many ways in the past days via many prophets (Hebrews 1:1). Scot McKnight, in his book *The Blue Parakeet*, rephrases this as God speaking in “those days” in “those ways.” So God spoke in Moses’ days in Moses’ ways. He also spoke in David’s days in David’s ways, in Jeremiah’s days in Jeremiah’s ways, in Jesus’ days in Jesus’ ways, in John’s days in John’s ways. The task before us then is to hear God speak once again, this time to us in our days and in our ways, through the very words that he once spoke to others in their days and their ways.

—page 123 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



17. CLEAN YOUR LENSES

The time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2 Timothy 4:3

This Devo Study consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video
- Remember—reflect—redirect
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based

None of us are neutral when we come to the Scriptures. We tend to hear what we *want to hear*. Bible scholars speak of the difference between *exegetis* and *eisogesis*. *Exegetis* is understanding what *is* there in the text, uncovering its ancient meaning, discovering its timeless truth. *Eisogesis* is reading into the text something that is *not* there. A common kind of *eisogesis* is *proof-texting* in which we find verses to support our prior belief. A book as large as the Bible is vulnerable to being twisted to support any number of these beliefs. Here are three ways to clean your lenses:

READ THE BIBLE WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER CULTURES.

We tend to read the Scriptures through the lens of our culture, rather than read our culture through the lens of Scripture. Each culture has its own blindspots—we have a bias to notice and emphasize some texts,

and miss or underplay others.

REVISIT EVEN YOUR MOST QUOTED VERSES.

Here are some common examples of unexamined popular verses:

- *“Do not judge, or you too will be judged.”*
- *“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”*
- *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*
- *“When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself.”*
- *“Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before... for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves.”*

DON'T ASSUME YOU'RE THE INNOCENT ONE IN EVERY STORY.

What happens if we lose sight of the prophetically subversive vantage point of the Bible? What happens if those on top – ancient Egyptians, comfortable Babylonians, Romans in a villa, and many of us today, with our high levels of privilege and power—read *ourselves* into the story, not as the dominant but as the underdogs and victims? That's when you get the bizarre phenomenon of the elite and entitled using the Bible to endorse their dominance as God's will.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

We tend to read the Scriptures through the lens of our culture, rather than read our culture through the lens of Scripture.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the list of commonly misquoted passages have you been guilty of?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Since understanding Scripture correctly is essentially about understanding God's heart correctly, why not ask him to share more of his heart with you for the abused, overlooked and downtrodden? Write

your prayer here...

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

“Using the text to confirm our presuppositions is sinful; it is an act of resistance against God’s fresh speaking to us, an effective denial that the Bible is the word of the living God. The only alternative to proof-texting is reading with a view to what the New Testament calls metanoia, repentance — literally, ‘change of mind’.”

—quote on page 146 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



18. A TRUSTWORTHY BOOK

We also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

Can we really trust the Bible? If we are going to receive its gospel as the Thessalonians did, then the words in our Bible must be reliable, trustworthy and true. We answer that in this session and the next two.

WHO SAYS GOD'S WORD IS TRUSTWORTHY?

1. Jesus declared God's Word to be trustworthy.

First and foremost, we don't believe the Bible is inspired and true because the Bible itself says so, but because we believe Jesus is right about who he says he is, and therefore right about everything else, including what he said about the Word.

2. The Bible itself claims to be trustworthy.

The testimony of God's Word to itself is that it is an authentic and authoritative account of everything it declares to have happened, to be, or will yet take place. God speaks to reality as it was, as it is, and as it yet will be.

3. Person after person attests to its trustworthiness.

According to Jesus, sophisticated people might come to the Scriptures with a jaded cynicism or an arrogant intellectualism that blinds them to the whisper of the Spirit, but even little children may discern its source

and authority.

4. God's Spirit witnesses to its trustworthiness.

All other evidence, from apologetics or historical theology, though having a valid place, is secondary to the work of the Holy Spirit in authoring and authenticating Scripture.

IN WHAT SENSE IS GOD'S WORD TRUE?

1. God's Word is true in what it says about the gospel.

What is the message of the Bible? It tells us what we need to know about God (who is great yet good, one yet three, just yet merciful), the world (which is created yet corrupted, God-magnifying yet redemption-longing), humanity (who are dignified yet depraved, beautiful yet broken), Jesus (who is divine yet human, king yet servant, crucified yet risen, ascended yet soon-to-return), salvation (which is costly yet free, cosmic yet personal, faith-received yet works-effecting), and about how to live (in a way that is confident yet humble, liberated yet surrendered). This core message is mainly what the Bible affirms as true.

2. God's Word is true in all that God means for it to say to us.

One reason I created the journey is to help us be more sure that the Bible *really* says what we *think* it says. Only what it *really* says is the truth which God means to say.

WHAT WE DO NOT MEAN BY THE BIBLE BEING TRUE?

1. The Bible's truthfulness does *not* mean that ancient copyists and textual critics are without fault.

The original documents in their original language were the inspired Word of God. However there may be several mistakes along the way—copyists made mistakes, and textual critics, studying these variants in

the multiple copies, may have reached wrong conclusions about which variant was correct.

2. The Bible's truthfulness does not mean that our interpretations and translations are without error.

The Bible is without error, but our translations and interpretations may be wrong. This is why we should the kind of humility that acknowledges we might be wrong as well as expressing itself in a generous spirit to those who interpret these and other passages differently, yet at the same continue to converse with each other to overcome our blindspots and more definitively discover their true meaning.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Jesus, the Bible itself, the experience of the Bible's power and the Spirit witness that Scripture is true and trustworthy.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. If God's Word is true in all it says about the gospel and all God means to say to us through it, why is the correct interpretation of Scripture so important?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Develop greater confidence in the infallibility of God's Word, even while you develop greater humility due to your (and the church's) fallible interpretation of it.

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

“How can you trust a book with so many mistakes in it? And if you can’t trust the book then how can you trust its message about Jesus?” I first heard these words from a friend as I tried to explain to him my newfound faith. My answer was a question, “What mistakes?”

Lucky for me, he couldn’t think of any. But as the years ticked on, I have encountered all kinds of claims about mistakes in the Bible—clashes with science, contradictions, historical errors and more. I even have an uncle who stopped believing in Jesus because of some of them. Having grappled with these claims, I have found that merely asserting that the Bible has no mistakes has not helped sincere seekers or doubting believers (of which I have been one). This chapter’s contents shows how I have remained convinced that the Bible is trustworthy *by properly fine-tuning my understanding of what it means that it is true.*

—quote on page 155 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



19. A TRUTHFUL BOOK

Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.

The Scriptures are true. If we cannot trust them as true, then how can we take shield in the One whom they speak of? Yet skeptics continue to challenge its truthfulness. However, most of the lines of ‘attack’ are based on strawman arguments. In other words, they misunderstand what the Bible’s ‘infallibility’ means in the first place, then refute their own misrepresentation. This is why we need a proper understanding of the Bible’s trustworthiness. We continue to explore what this does *not* mean in this session:

3. The Bible’s truthfulness does *not* mean the authors were supernaturally given knowledge about all things.

Like a kindergarden teacher teaching kids by starting where they are in their limited knowledge, so God *condescended* again and again to reveal things to and through these ancient authors that started with their level of understanding, and prioritized the things of primary importance.

4. The Bible’s truthfulness does not assume we currently have the tools to see what some texts are saying.

Like the biblical authors, we are not omniscient. In many passages, we may not understand all that the authors were intending to say.

5. The Bible’s truthfulness does not mean the authors had a modern-day journalistic devotion to precision reporting.

We simply must not impose onto the Bible’s historical narratives the precisionist, like-for-like notion of truth, which is rooted in our modernistic period of history. For example, when we read that Jesus

was in the tomb for three days, we assume he was there for 72 hours. Yet if we follow the account carefully he was in the tomb for half of that time, not for three full days, but *over three subsequent days*—Friday sunset to Sunday sunrise.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

The so-called ‘contradictions’ in the Gospels do not undermine their historical credibility as much as they support it – it shows independent affirmations of the story with no forced collusion.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Based on what you have learnt in this session, how would you respond to a person who claims that the Bible contradicts scientific discoveries?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Follow Augustine’s humble example: “If in these writings I am perplexed by anything which appears to me opposed to truth I do not hesitate to assume that... I myself may have failed to understand.”

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

As we look to the future of biblical scholarship, we know that some more light will probably come, because as we look back, we see that much more light has already come through the diligent efforts of biblical and historical scholars. Though we steadily march away from the first century in time, these scholars get closer and closer to the original texts and their context in understanding. As N.T. Wright says, “Biblical scholarship is a great gift of God to the church, aiding it in its task of going *ever deeper* into the meaning of scripture and so being refreshed and energized for the tasks to which we are called in and for the world.”

—quote on page 165 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



20. DOUBT YOUR DOUBTS

Consult God's teaching and testimony. If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no light of dawn.

Isaiah 8:20

Many thoughtful readers still have questions that make them doubt the Bible's truthfulness. Let's face four common objections head on:

IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE, WHY ARE THERE COMMANDS TO KILL CANAANITES?

Most importantly, consider the limit of the command. This instruction only came to those in stage 4 of the Old Testament story. This was God's dealing with people at a very particular moment in their story, bringing his justice on human evil and giving previously enslaved Israel a place in the world. Neither before nor in later stages does God ever command it. Later, for example, God deems David unworthy to build a temple because of the blood of war on his hands. Jesus has the final and lasting say on the matter: "Love your enemies." God's people are no longer a geopolitical nation, we are servants of the gospel and the common good in every nation. Like Jesus, we should rather pray and die for than prey upon and kill our enemies.

IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE, WHY DOES IT (SEEM TO) ENDORSE SLAVERY?

No where does the New Testament encourage slave-keeping, and in one place, it condemns slave-traders. At the same time, and this is

tricky for us modern readers, it does not *outrightly* denounce slave-keeping, but rather encourages Christian slaves to obey their masters, and Christian masters to treat their slaves “as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.” Rather than calling for an instant revolution, Scripture’s approach was to sow the seeds of an equalizing revolution by preaching a gospel in which “there is neither slave nor free.” Given enough time, those gospel values would grow to so influence and shape society that they could then be instrumental in overthrowing the sinful structure itself.

**IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE, WHY IS ITS SEX ETHIC SO
(SEEMINGLY) OUTDATED AND OPPRESSIVE?**

To assume we just happen to live in the one and only culture and time period in history that has finally got everything right is the height of arrogance. Why is it that *our* cultural sensibilities, the one’s we have absorbed in *our* time and place, should overrule everybody else’s on every point? After all, one day even our grandkids will shake their heads when they consider things our culture now believes and teaches. The fact that God’s Word clashes with various parts of each and every culture, ours included, is not proof that it is not true. It is rather exactly what one would expect of any book that claimed to be God’s Word for all people, in all places at all times. For all of us living in a sex-saturated world, the fact that the person at the epicentre of our faith is a single person, who never had sex and yet lived the fullest life there is, should be a huge encouragement to us.

**IF THE BIBLE IS TRUE WHY DOES IT CLAIM SO MANY
MIRACLES IN HISTORY?**

Since the enlightenment, large portions of the academic elite have rejected the supernatural realm as a pre-scientific and un-scientific idea. But hang on! This anti-supernatural bias is not itself scientific either. Surely a God who can say, “Let there be light!” and a billion suns are born, is also the God who can say the words “See!”, “Hear!”, “Walk!”, “Live!” and wonders unfold—not only in the biblical narratives, but in our own world today.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Though many reasons for trusting the Bible can be amassed, thoughtful readers may still doubt its truthfulness because of certain aspects of its teaching.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the four doubt-creating questions have you or someone you know struggled with most?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Doubt your doubts about the Bible's truthfulness.

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

This is not the first time culture has responded with shock to the Judeo-Christian understandings of sex. As Christianity first spread into the Greco-Roman world, the surrounding culture was perplexed by it too. One ancient observer commented with amazement: ‘Here is a strange group of people who are financially generous and sexually stingy. They do the exact opposite of everyone else: they share their money with all, and their bed with none.’ Many a believer has found from a lifetime of experience that following Jesus’ sex ethic is not only right, but also best. One Psalmist writes, “I run in the path of your commands for you have set my heart free.” (Ps 119:32) None of God’s ethical imperatives related to money, sex or power are arbitrary. They are manifestations of his love and wisdom.

—quote on page 174-175 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



21. CONSIDER HOW YOU LISTEN

Jesus said, “Consider carefully how you listen. Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they think they have will be taken from them.”

Luke 8:18

How you choose to approach someone significantly determines the outcome. Our attitude as we enter a job interview, or meet potential in-laws, or interact with a teacher, or even talk with a friend, makes a difference in the quality of experience both parties have. It’s the same with how we come to Scripture.

Jesus’ point in the parable of the seed is that *what* God says is not the only important thing – *how* we come to it is almost as important. God’s Word itself is good seed, but it needs a receptive heart to produce a harvest.

1. COME WITH HUMILITY.

Since God’s word is life-giving seed, we should eagerly open up the fields of our life and heart to whatever the Sower might sow into them, “humbly accepting the word planted in us, which can save us.” (James 1:21)

2. COME WITH THIRST AND HUNGER.

“It is common for us to give up the reading of the Bible... when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use to read the Scriptures when we do not enjoy them. The truth is that in order to enjoy the Word, we

ought to continue to read it. The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it.” (George Muller)

3. COME READY TO YIELD.

Jesus said, “Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.” (John 7:17) In other words, if we determine beforehand that our lives will not change, then we will not discern the power of God in the Word. Hard hearts are unyielding and undiscerning hearts.

4. COME WITH EXPECTANCY.

Scriptural engagement can never *merely* be a discipline or a duty. Although there may not be fireworks every time, a meeting with the universe’s Creator and Redeemer can never be just another meeting.

Cast away your fear. If the thought of approaching God terrifies you, then think of Jesus saying “fear not” to calm your heart. Cast away your unworthiness. If the prospect of drawing closer to God leaves you feeling condemned or unworthy, then remind yourself that you have confident access to God not because of your righteousness, but by his grace alone.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

What God says through his Word is not the only important thing – *how* we come to it is just as important. God’s Word itself is good seed, but it needs a receptive heart to produce a harvest.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which aspect of a receptive heart do you most need to cultivate when you engage Scripture? Humility? Hunger and thirst? Yieldedness? Expectancy?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Ponder Jesus’ words and pray them over your own life: “The seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.” What strikes you as you do?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

I have hoped that this chapter will motivate you to come to God's Word with this frame of mind and state of heart. If however, it has had the opposite effect, *demotivating* you with how little of this you have, despair not: like the little boy with few fishes and loaves, bring what you have, however meager it may seem. Bring your 'little' hunger, your little faith, your small expectations to God and his Word. Do it again and again and again, every time you approach the Scriptures. And just watch what he does with it...

—quote on page 187 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



22. LISTEN TO IT READ AND PREACHED

Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, and to preaching and teaching.

1 Timothy 4:3

Although our present individualistic age tends to skew our general approach to the Bible, Christianity is not a solitary faith, but a communal one. God's plan is that engaging God's Word *together* provides the riverbanks for engaging it *alone*.

1. EVERY WEEK, SIT UNDER THE READING OF GOD'S WORD

The church father Tertullian in the 200s wrote, "We assemble to read our sacred writings. With these sacred words we nourish our faith, we animate our hope, we make our confidence more steadfast; and we confirm our good habits."

2. EVERY WEEK, SIT UNDER THE PREACHING OF GOD'S WORD

The preached word created the church. In the book of Acts, the apostles preach the gospel, and churches spring up in its wake.

The preached word sustains the church. Jesus told Peter to "feed his sheep." A church with substanceless preaching is a malnourished

one.

The preached word sends the church. As we sit under good preaching, we are inspired and equipped to pass the message of good news on to others.

How to listen to a sermon.

- Get your heart right.
- Don't compare preachers
- Listen to preachers who love you.
- Write it down and share it with others.

How to feed God's people.

- Every two or so years, tell the church everything they most need to know.
- Speak to the lives, challenges and questions of the people.
- Learn to hold the hearer's attention.
- Keep the main thing the main thing—Jesus, God's grace, the kingdom.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Every week, sit under the reading and preaching of God's Word, along with a community created, sustained and guided by that Word.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the four tips for hearing sermons do you most need to cultivate?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Based on the tips shared on reading Scripture aloud in the video, try reading any chapter near the end of the four Gospels aloud on your own – give it a go.

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

“The church must be constantly retelling the story of Scripture, never losing sight of the landmark events, never losing touch with the main lines of meaning in Scripture, always remaining open to the never exhausted potential of the texts in their resonances with contemporary life.”

—*quote on page 195 of What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



23. READ IT AND STUDY IT *PT 1*

When he takes his throne, the king is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law. It is to be with him, and he is to read it every day of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD.

Deuteronomy 17:18-19

READ THE WHOLE BIBLE

Contrary to popular opinion though, reading the Bible *is* do-able. In fact, one can read the Bible through in 365 days if you allocate just 12 minutes a day. It takes about 70 hours to read the entire Bible out aloud. The Old Testament requires 52 hours, and the New Testament 18.

Some people try read the whole Bible once a year. This may be just what the (heavenly) Doctor ordered. Then again it may not work for you. There's no need to sprint through the Bible—whether you go through the whole Bible in 5 months or 5 years is not as important as whether the whole Bible goes through you. Having said that, there are several possible methods used to read through the Bible:

- Read select Scriptures
- Listen to an audio Bible.
- Binge read sometimes.
- Have a Bible reading plan.

One idea is to read a book of the Old Testament, then a book of the New, and so on. Another idea is the *Three Bookmarks* method. Put one in Genesis 1, one in Psalms 1, and one in Matthew 1, then read a chapter of each and move the bookmarks along. If you are trying to go through the whole Bible in a year, you can read all three chapters in one

go.

STUDY PARTS OF THE BIBLE

“I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. I search the whole Bible, shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb – I study it book by book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, studying the paragraphs, sentences, words and their meanings.” (Martin Luther) How do we shake those branches and twigs? Try these five ways:

- Slow down
- Study a variety of things.
- Ask the right questions.
- Write down what you learn.
- Summarize or paraphrase the passage.
- Study in community.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Cultivate the habits of daily Bible-reading, and the skill of studying many of its passages.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. What is your current habit with regards to reading the Bible? Can you improve it? How?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. Which one or two of the tips for studying passages will you start to apply?

5. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Though mornings have not always worked for me (especially during the heart of winter and when my kids were very small) my reflection is that there is something unmatched about letting God's Word be *the first word* we listen to every day—tuning into heaven's frequency, before all the other earthly voices come hankering for our attention.

—quote on page 200 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



24. READ IT AND STUDY IT *PT 2*

Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

Acts 17:11

Some excellent tools:

- How To Read The Bible Book By Book
- NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible
- www.biblehub.com
- www.blueletterbible.com
- www.bestcommentaries.com

FOUR TIPS FOR READING AND STUDYING THE BIBLE

1. Don't notice chapter and verse numbers.

The system of chapters was only introduced in AD 1238 by Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro for monks who read and meditated a manageable portion each day. Verse notations were only added in 1551 by Robertus Stephanus, after the advent of printing. Especially as you read through entire books of the Bible, it is best to try not see the chapter and verse numbers at all. They very often break up the author's flow of thought in all sorts of strange places.

2. Notice descriptive language which is meant to evoke specific emotion.

Reading evocative passages analytically, with our intellects alone, is to

be tone-deaf to so much of what the author is trying to convey.

3. Notice repeating words and ideas which emphasize the main idea.

Sometimes an author will try to emphasize something through repetition.

4. Notice connecting words which clarify the author's line of logic.

Connecting words, also known as conjunctions, reveal *the line of logic or the train of thought*. In 2 Corinthians 5 alone, Paul uses 14 connecting words: “for we” (4 times), “because we” (3 times), “therefore we” (3 times), “since we” (2 times) and “so we” (2 times). The words ‘therefore’ or ‘so’ tell us to read it in a 1-2 order, in which the foundational idea (1) is that I am sick, while the result is that I can’t sprint (2). But when the word ‘for/because/since’ reverses the logical flow to a 2-1 order, I first tell you the result, then I tell you the reason.

Whenever you read in the New Testament a command with the word ‘therefore’ in front of it, always ask what it’s there for. It often points back to wonderful gospel-theology, which motivate and enable us to live in a certain way. However, when we only focus on the ethical commands and forget to steep ourselves in the gospel *theology* for them, we can be easily crushed under their weight, rather than empowered by the gospel to obey them.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Be a good Berean who eagerly examines the Scriptures every day. There are many tools to help us do so – books and websites.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the four tips that help us read and study Scripture well do you want to give special attention to?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. In the last three tips, we touched on many aspects of the gospel – the reality of judgment, Jesus’ death on our behalf, the gift of the Spirit, the promises of God. Take a minute to rejoice in God’s goodness. Write your prayer here:



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

As we study the meaning of an original Greek or Hebrew word it often reveals a greater depth and richness to our understanding of the text. Often enough, we find out that the Greek or Hebrew word we are examining into has a landscape of meaning that the English translation has not, or could not capture. Take for example the word *compassion*. In English, it is derived from *com* (with) and *passio* (suffer). As rich a word as that is, it hardly does justice to the Hebrew word *rakhum* that is translated as compassion. The Hebrew word is closely related to the word for womb—suggesting the depth of God’s compassion for us, as well as his ability to carry us in his tender, nurturing care. Likewise, the Greek word *splagchnizomai*, translated as compassion, means the stirring of the inward parts, literally the twisting of the intestines. My point is that there is no English word that can seize upon *the depth* of emotion in the original words. When we consider that 80% of all biblical uses of the word compassion are about God’s or Jesus’ compassion, we realize how a simple word study can lead us into a better understanding of God.

—quote on page 210 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



25. MEMORIZE AND REFLECT ON IT

My son, keep my words and store up my commands within you. Keep my commands and you will live; guard my teachings as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

Proverbs 7:1-3

This Devo Study consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video
- Remember—reflect—redirect
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based

MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE.

There are three great benefits to memorizing Scripture:

- It enables you to feed on God's Word anytime, anywhere.
- God can speak to and through you more readily.
- It arms you for battle.

How to memorize Scripture:

- *Keep it accessible.* Write it down or store it on your phone so you can carry it with you and read it throughout the day.
- *Learn a verse at a time.* The more you verbally repeat it, the more it will stick.
- *Try remember verse references,* but if that's too complicated, try to at least remember the book and chapter so you can easily find it in

the future.

- *Memorize the first few words especially well* and you will find the rest of the verse easier to call to mind.
- *Regularly review previously learnt verses.* In fact, review them your whole life through. It's good to record in a single document your memorized Scriptures.
- *Use it or lose it.* The more you use memorized Scripture in your prayers and in ministry to others, the more it becomes internalized in you.
- *Try to memorize lengthier passages too.* The more you remember, the more spiritual arsenal you will have at your disposal.

REFLECT ON SCRIPTURE

Reflect on what I am saying, and the Lord will give you insight into it. (2 Timothy 2:7) That's the goal of reflection – not just information, but *insight*. While God wants to give us deeper insight into whatever passage is at hand, according to this verse, we need to apply our minds for this to happen.

How to reflect on Scripture:

- *Choose a verse or a portion of a verse*, usually one that sticks out to you in your reading.
- *Read it repeatedly and slowly to yourself.* Before you swallow actual foods, you're meant to chew close on 40 times. Similarly, to draw out energy from this verse, you might need to read it again and again and again. A useful method is, each time you repeat it, to emphasize a different word, from the first to the last. So you might say to yourself, in your head, but even better aloud, "I am a new creation in Christ." Then "I 'AM' a new creation in Christ." Then "I am a NEW creation in Christ." And so on. Each repetition potentially releases something new into your mind and spirit.
- *Rely on the Holy Spirit* to give you insight as well as to apply its truth to you and your current situation.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Regularly memorize and reflect on small portions of Scripture.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Why is taking in small portions of Scripture so effective?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

Choose a Scripture you'd like to commit to memory right now.

Meditate on it over the next day. Perhaps this one:

*I have hidden your word in my heart so that I might not sin against you.
(Ps 119:11)*

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

People often raise a question about the claim of “hearing God’s Spirit” through Scriptural meditation. Surely, people say, we are meant to find out the ancient meaning and the timeless message then assume we have heard God. In this sense, God will say the same thing to all people through whatever text as long as they understand it rightly.

I agree in part, but more can be said. Engaging our minds in Scriptural reflection is crucial but insufficient: we need to also depend on the Spirit for insight. We simply must not underplay the Spirit’s role in our reflection on and engagement with Scripture.

In *Appendix 7* at the back of this book I make the argument that the Spirit may re-apply a text’s timeless message to us in our situation in a fresh, timeous and even unique way. This is part of what makes it so exciting and helpful to read the Living Word in the presence of the Living God.

—quote on page 219 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



26. EXPERIENCE SCRIPTURE

Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart.

Jeremiah 15:16

We are to intellectually immerse ourselves in the Bible, but we are also to find ways to let the Bible bypass our analytical approach to things, and let it touch and feed our hearts. Memorizing and reflecting on Scripture are two ways to do this. In this session we will discover five more ways to do that:

READ THE BIBLE ALOUD.

The *silent* reading of books and the Bible is a recent trend in history. God's words were written to be read and heard aloud. There's a rhythm and energy to them that makes them go deeper in when heard or declared.

PRAY SCRIPTURE.

- Read prayerfully—asking God to give you eyes to see and ears to hear what is in his Word.
- Make the Bible's prayers your own. There are 222 prayers recorded in the Bible. Take what prayers apply to you and pray them back to God, perhaps putting them in your own words.
- Pray in response to what you have read. Reading the Bible first, and *then* praying allows the Scriptures to guide or even provide a template for our praying. Start your prayer with words like,

“God, thank you for showing me that...” then tell him what the verses we have read today have meant for us, and what we might still need from him related to what he has just shown us.

- Pray Scripture with others. Group prayer and prayer meetings are often richer and more powerful when Scripture is read aloud and prayed through.

SING SCRIPTURE.

- Singing truth is an excellent and central teaching device. Songs make words stick in our memory.
- Worship leaders and songwriters in churches should give priority to songs that are infused with Scripture or articulate the main themes of Scripture.
- We can sing “songs from the Spirit” – which likely refers to something more impromptu.

JOURNAL SCRIPTURE.

A *Scripture-centered* journal aims not only at mental health but spiritual health too. Here is a simple guideline to what to write.

The VIP method. Write out a:

- Verse that most sticks out to you
- Insight that comes to you as you ponder the verse
- Prayer related to the verse or insight

This practice forces us to not merely skim over a chunk of Scripture and be on our way, but to also hear something God may be saying in it to us, as well as carrying that insight with us into the day as something to reflect on. It also provides a record of our daily interaction with God.

IMAGINE SCRIPTURE

A half-millennium ago, St Ignatius pioneered the method of experiencing Jesus afresh by placing ourselves in any of the Gospel stories about him. This is not a good way to accurately draw doctrine out of a passage, but it is an effective way to experience the story, perhaps allowing the Spirit to open up the story and its insight to you in a fresh way.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

As important as it is to study and analyze the Bible, it is equally important to experience it. This means that we should find ways to let the Bible bypass our analytical approach to things, and let it speak right to our hearts.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which of the five ways to experience Scripture are you most eager to try?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

If you don't have one yet, why not start a Scripture journal? Will you prefer to keep it as an actual book, an accessible document, or as a Journal app?

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

There are four questions we can ask of each passage that very naturally lead into four kinds of prayer: 1) Praise: What does it show me about God for which I should praise him? 2) Confess: What does it show me about my sin that I should confess and repent of, or any false attitudes, behavior, emotions, or idols come alive in me whenever I forget this truth? 3) Ask: What does it show me about a need that I have, or what I need to do or become in light of this? 4) Rejoice: How is Jesus Christ or the grace that I have in him crucial to helping me overcome the sin I have confessed or to answering the need I have?

—*footnote of quote on page 220 of What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



27. PASS THE BATON

Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.

This session is for parents, grandparents and those who one day might be parents, in fact anyone who knows and cares for other people's children. The baton of faith is to be passed on from seasoned to new Christians, from parents to children.

By biblical command, the primary and foundational discipling of our children cannot be outsourced. The Hebrew Bible says this explicitly: "These words that I command you today are to be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children." (Deut 6:6) A passage in the New Testament repeats this imperative: "Parents, bring your children up in the training and teaching of the Lord." (Eph 6:4)

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN LOVE THE SCRIPTURES

- Talk about what God's Word says as occasions arise.
- Read the Bible *in front* of your kids.
- Read the Bible *with* your kids. *Read with them not to them. Find the time in the day that works for you.*
- Show interest in what they learn at church.
- Watch good movies about Bible stories.
- Equip your child to read the Bible on their own.
- Pray that God reveals himself to your child.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

Every new generation is invited to love, live on and live by the Scriptures. The generation that comes before is meant to do that inviting.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. If you are or will be a parent, which of the seven tips will you apply in your parenting?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Spend some time praying for your child's salvation and hunger for God's Word (or for any children you know). Write your prayer here:



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Give your child their own Bible during a special ‘ceremony.’ Choose an age when you will give your children their own Bible. If the story of the boy Jesus stepping up his independent engagement with Scripture is anything to go by, then age 12 or 13 seems good. In the months before, take them through this book (or the 30 short videos based on this book on www.terranwilliams.com) or something like it as a preparation for having their own Bible. A nice analogy is to compare their own Bible to their own car, and this preparation as getting their Driver’s License. As for the Bible-giving ceremony, perhaps a month after their 12th birthday, invite many of the Christian people they know, both adults in your extended family as well as some of their Christian friends, to an informal Bible-receiving ceremony. Ask a few people to come ready to read their favourite verse (which can all be highlighted in the child’s Bible) as well as what the Bible has meant to them in their life and faith. Gift the child with the Bible, then together pray God’s blessing over their lifetime adventure in God’s Word.

—*from Appendix 8 at the back of What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



28. THE SPIRIT AND THE WORD

They asked each other, “Were not our hearts burning within us as he opened the Scriptures to us?” They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem.

Luke 24:32-33

The context of the above verses is that it’s the day Jesus rose from the dead, and two oblivious, heart-broken believers have fled Jerusalem in fear and disappointment. Then Jesus approach them. They are unable to recognize him at first. He teaches them the Word. One thing leads to another and they are given eyes to see. Jesus then disappears, and they ask each other the question above. Notice how *their eyes are opened, their hearts are burning and, after that, their feet get moving* – they immediately change direction and head back to Jerusalem. None

ASK THE SPIRIT TO OPEN YOUR EYES.

We are all in desperate need of the Spirit who inspired Scripture in the first place to illuminate this same Scripture and open the eyes of our hearts to it.

ASK THE SPIRIT TO IGNITE A FLAME IN YOUR HEART

“His word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.” (Jer 20:9) Fire here is a symbol of energy and life. The God who spoke the universe into being by his Spirit is the same God who can make things come alive in us by his Spirit-energized words. Says Jesus, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of

the Spirit and life.” (John 6:63)

ASK THE SPIRIT TO REDIRECT YOUR LIFE IN OBEDIENCE

The true goal of engaging Scripture is not more *information*, but more *transformation*. He wants our eyes opened and our hearts burning *so that* our feet will get moving along his paths of wisdom and godliness. This affects how we should come to Scripture...

- Let the Bible ask you questions.
- Let the Bible be your leader.
- Let the Bible into every aspect of your life.
- Let the Bible stabilize you in hardships.
- Let the Bible empower you for ministry.

Three very practical ways:

- In small groups, discuss how to apply what you are learning together.
- Do not treat the Bible’s commands as an impersonal law-code.
- Expect results, slowly as they might come.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

God's truth may shine brightly in itself, but apart from the Spirit's light, we are dull and apathetic to the things of God.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which ministry of the Spirit through the Word are you in most need of at the moment – do you need your eyes opened, your heart burning or your feet moving in a new path of obedience?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. What of the third point can you apply so that you experience Scripture not only as a source of *information* but *transformation*?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

Jesus does not merely reveal himself through Scripture to one disciple on the road to Emmaus, but two—and the moment they see more clearly, they seek out the rest of God’s people. Because God’s Word is first a gift to God’s people, not to individuals within God’s people, it becomes much more clear and vivid as we read it and interpret it *together*. Says Ellen Davis, “Scripture is like a musical score that must be played or sung in order to be understood; therefore, the church interprets Scripture by forming communities of prayer, service, and faithful witness.” Richard Hays concurs: “Faithful interpretation of Scripture invites and presupposes participation in the community.”

—quote on page 231 of *What’s So Amazing About Scripture?*



29. GLIMPSES OF THE KING

And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, Jesus explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:27

What is most striking in the story of Jesus and the disciples of the road to Emmaus is what he wanted them to see *first*. We would have expected him to highlight to them that he was alive. Yet he doesn't say this. Apparently, that critically important revelation can wait for the moment. As important as knowing that Jesus *is alive* is knowing Jesus *in Scripture*.

In the New Testament, Jesus' centrality and presence is obvious in every part and page. For example, 23 out of the 27 books mention Jesus by name *in their very first verse*. As we read through the New Testament, we would do well to keep this question front and centre: "What aspect of Jesus does the Spirit want me to see in this text?"

But I'd like to spend the rest of this session showing you how Jesus is on every page of the Old Testament too.

Early in our journey we we did a fly-over of the Hebrew Bible. Do you remember? And we examined the 7 stages of its story, and you might remember that we noticed at least 22 emerging themes or threads. In the video I show how each of them converges upon Jesus, finding its fulfilment in him:

- Creation
- Promise
- International blessing
- Sovereignty
- Redemption

- The temple
- The sacrificial system
- Inheritance
- Deliverance
- Jerusalem
- King
- Wisdom
- Exile
- Mission
- Kingdom
- The Spirit
- Disappointment

TO MISS JESUS IS TO MISS THE POINT

- Jesus is the centre of Scripture.
- Jesus is the hero of the story.
- Jesus is the face on the puzzle.
- Jesus is the One to whom all roads lead.
- Jesus is the King in his palace.

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

In the Old Testament, every story and page whispers Jesus' name. What joins the Old and the New is not mainly a plan or promise, but a Person.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Which one or two of the Old Testament themes that converge in Jesus move you most?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. Whenever you read the Bible, first ask, "How does this passage help

me to see Jesus?” then, only after that, ask, “How does this passage call me to obey?”

BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

The New Testament, with its climax in Jesus, was always God's intended final chapter on the end of the Old Testament. Or as Richard Bauckham puts it: "The long, ramshackle narrative of Israel with its promising starts and unexpected twists, with its ecstasies and its betrayals, its laws, its learning, its wisdom, its martyred prophets—this long narrative is retold and reevaluated in the light of the concluding chapter God has written in Jesus Christ."

—quote on page 241 of *What's So Amazing About Scripture?*



30. SPREAD THE WORD

Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.

Acts 8:4

This Devo Study consists of:

- An outline with some excerpts from video
- Remember—reflect—redirect
- A bonus excerpt from the book on which the video is based

On this journey we have learnt three things:

- Let Scripture amaze you.
- Read it right.
- Tap into its life-changing power.

TAKE IT TO YOUR NEAR AND DEAR.

Scripture-saturated people are more ready to mention something they have recently pondered in God's Word to their families, friends, neighbors, *Whatsapp* groups, colleagues and connections – whether they are fellow-believers or not-yet-believers. In your conversations:

- Use social media wisely.
- Encourage individuals with Scripture.
- Tell stories.

TAKE IT FAR AND WIDE.

Play your part in spreading God's Word to God's whole world. In the book of Acts, not only by sending his Spirit and sending out apostles, but also by sending his Word, Jesus drives the church and its mission forward—bringing more and more people into his family, strengthening believers and churches, and equipping them for fruitful, world-changing ministry.

BENEDICTION

“In the name of the God who uttered a word and everything that is came to be, may you be motivated and equiped by the Spirit to spend the rest of your life exploring the vast and intricate world revealed in the Bible’s pages. May you let its wild, wonderful and still-unfolding story intersect with and transform your own, sending you out with the good news of Jesus the Living Word who has not only etched himself into the Written Word, but is ready to write himself into the stories of countless people near and dear, far and wide. Amen.”

REMEMBER—REFLECT—REDIRECT

Remember

If the Word of God is a major driving force of God's saving action in the world, then we do well to give our lives to see God's whole Word spread out into God's whole world.

1. What one thing in this session that interested or helped you do you not want to forget?

Reflect

2. Who introduced you to God's Word? What holds you back from bringing more Scripture into your daily conversations?

3. What question(s), if any, do you now have?

Redirect

4. What one (small or big) way will you engage the Bible, God, your life or the world differently?

5. What unique opportunities might God be giving you to spread God's Word? What person or church might you want to recommend this journey to? What is your next journey into Scripture?



BONUS EXCERPT FROM BOOK

I have tearfully (with happy tears) watched videos of a group of people jubilantly receiving, for the first time, the Bible in their own language. The moment they do, they are gifted with the realization that this book is God's gift not only to other cultures or nations but also to their own. They are, for the first time, truly able to hear God speak to them in their own heart language. Have you ever read a Bible in a second language? I have—even the passages that mean the most to me, seem to leave me cold. Or, when I think of praying with friends whose second language is English and their first is Xhosa, German or Afrikaans. As they pour out their heart to God, they often slip into their home language. When we hear or read God's Word in our home language, our mother tongue—it speaks to our hearts.

—*quote on page 252 of What's So Amazing About Scripture?*