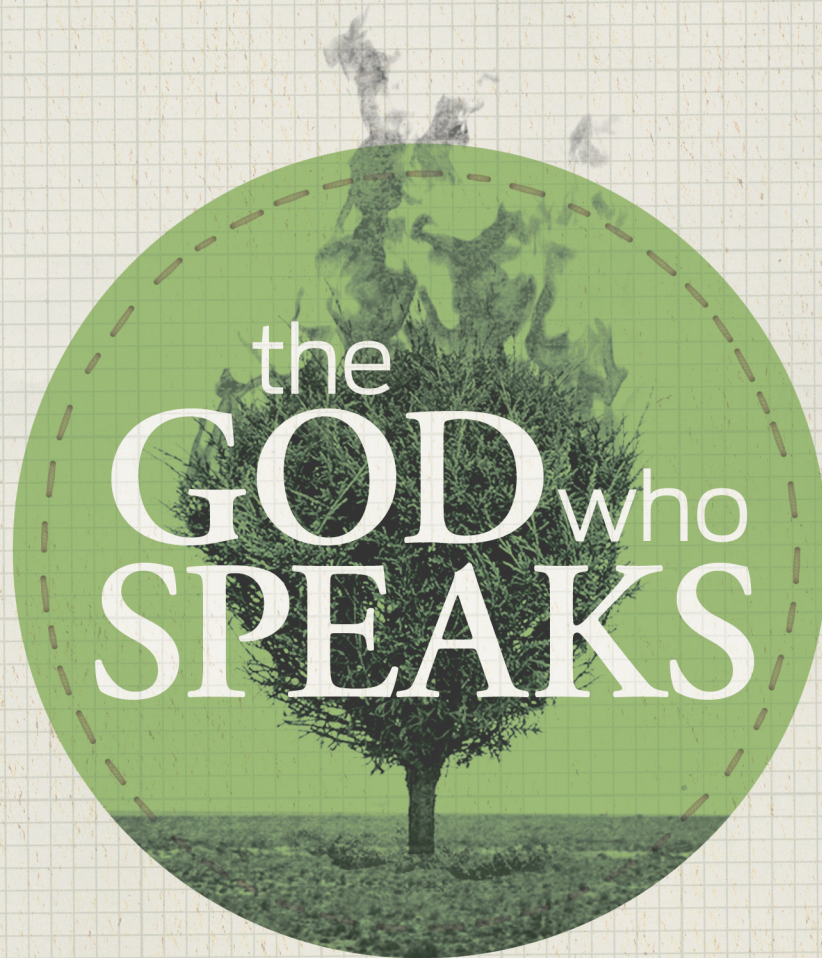


THE  
**GOSPEL**  
PROJECT  
FOR ADULTS



FALL 2012: LEADER GUIDE

**Ed Stetzer** General Editor  
**Trevin Wax** Managing Editor

LifeWay | Adults

## Ed Stetzer

General Editor—*The Gospel Project*  
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Theology is “the study of God.” But unlike academic disciplines where the acquiring of knowledge is viewed as a good thing in and of itself, studying truth about God has a specific purpose—that we might know the God who has shown us grace in the person of Jesus Christ and that we might make Him known. Theology, in the Christian sense, is knowledge about God that leads us into deeper knowledge of God. The gospel is what makes possible this knowledge, and a life of mission is to be the outcome.

*The Gospel Project* is a curriculum now three years in the making. Churches have expressed their desire for a theologically driven curriculum that is biblical and accessible. The development of this new curriculum has taken place with the input from an advisory council (see names on page 4) and insights offered from churches willing to test the material. I am excited to see a new curriculum that will assist small communities within the church to include a solid theological and missional focus in their discipleship process.

Theology, gospel, and mission. Our goal has been to incorporate each of these important elements in *The Gospel Project*. As we learn more about the grand narrative that the Scriptures tell, we see Christ’s death and resurrection as the focal point of the story line. The good news of Jesus then empowers us—God’s people—to live on mission, representing Christ to those around us and proclaiming His name to the world.

## Trevin Wax

Managing Editor—*The Gospel Project*  
Author of *Counterfeit Gospels* and *Holy Subversion*



Contemporary society is a clamor of competing voices. From the TV to the Internet to the social media that floods our cellular devices, we are awash in information. But in the midst of all the noise, God still speaks. He has revealed Himself in the world around us, in His written Word, and most fully in the Living Word—the Person of Jesus Christ.

In this quarter we look in detail at the truth that the God who made us has chosen to reveal Himself to us. Along the way, we’ll learn about how we have rebelled and continue to resist God’s revelation. Then we’ll see how Jesus—God’s Word in flesh and blood—has come to obey God perfectly and to suffer the consequences of our disobedience. As God’s redeemed people, we are now enabled to take a posture of humble submission to the authoritative, inspired, and perfect Word of God, even as we open this Word to the world.

Our prayer is that the words in these lessons will draw you deeper into the inspired Word of God that continues to speak to us today. May you hear the voice of Christ and faithfully follow the King!

*The Gospel Project*  
Adult Leader Guide  
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We believe that the Bible has God for its author; salvation for its end; and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter and that all Scripture is totally true and trustworthy. For our doctrinal statement, visit [www.sbc.net/bfm](http://www.sbc.net/bfm).

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### Tips from Trevin on how to best use this Leader Guide

From one leader to another...

Welcome to *The Gospel Project*! Think about the awesome responsibility we have every week—to guide people through Bible study so that they have an encounter with the living Christ. I hope that *The Gospel Project* will provide you with the tools and resources you need as you prayerfully seek to apply the truth of the gospel to the people God has placed in your group.

Here are some things to remember that will help you maximize the usefulness of this Leader Guide:

**Pray.** Pray for your group. Don't lead in your own strength.

**Adapt.** You know the style of your group. If your group is more discussion-based, then encourage participants to read the lesson ahead of time. Make good use of the “For Further Discussion” questions provided in the Teaching Plan so you can facilitate discussion that stays grounded in the lesson. If you take a more master-teacher approach, then spend a little time each day over the course of the week mastering the Expanded Lesson Content. Select the questions that make the most strategic sense for moving the lesson along.

**Cut.** If it seems to you that the lessons for *The Gospel Project* provide too much material for one session, you're right. We chose to deliver more than you need and to include the bulk of the lesson in the Personal Study Guide so that you don't feel pressed to get all the content delivered in the session time itself. Refer your group members to the Personal Study Guide.

**Personalize.** Take the truths expressed in *The Gospel Project* and enhance them. Add personal stories. Ask penetrating questions that go to the heart of the people you know and love.

**Encourage Preparation.** The Personal Study Guide includes three devotionals, two that prepare the participant for the group time and one that follows up and reinforces the lesson. Challenge your group to work through the lesson and devotionals each week on their own.

**Resource Yourself.** Make good use of the additional resources suggested at the end of every lesson. Download a podcast. Read a blog post or a chapter in a book. Check *The Gospel Project* blog for weekly updates for teaching tips and further thoughts from our writers.

**Overflow.** Remember...*The Gospel Project* is not just a curriculum. WE are the project. The gospel is working on us. Don't let your preparation time be simply about the content you're going to deliver. Let the truths of God's Word soak in as you study. A great leader is not a dispenser of information but an overflowing river of gospel passion. Let God work on your heart first, and then pray that He will change the hearts of the people He has entrusted to your care.

# The God Who Speaks

## Summary and Goal

This week's lesson looks at three truths that flow from the reality of God as Speaker. The goal of this lesson is that we will appreciate the goodness of God as seen in His revelation to us and that we will be motivated to spread the news that He has spoken by aligning our lives with His will and telling others of His grace.

### ***Steps to Prepare***

- 1. Read the main passages for this week's lesson:**
  - Genesis 1:1-3
  - Exodus 3:2-6
  - Genesis 1:27-30
- 2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 10-17).**
  - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
  - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
- 3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 8-9).**
  - Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
  - Adjust the plan if necessary.
- 4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.**

### ***Lesson Outline***

- 1. The God who speaks has authority (Gen. 1:1-3).**
- 2. The God who speaks is merciful to reveal Himself to us (Ex. 3:2-6).**
- 3. The God who speaks gives us tasks (Gen. 1:27-30).**

## Teaching Plan

# The God Who Speaks

## Session 1

### Introduce the Lesson

Present a summary of the story of Helen Keller (leader guide p. 10; personal study guide p. 10). Emphasize the value of and need for communication (leader p. 11).



Why do you think God designed humans with an innate need to communicate? What does this design communicate about the nature and desire of God?

### Transition

Introduce the concept that God speaks. Highlight general and special revelation, and announce the goal of this lesson (leader pp. 11-12).

### 1. The God who speaks has authority.

Read Genesis 1:1-3. Use “Further Commentary” if needed (leader p. 12). Emphasize the truth that the words of God have authority because it is God who has spoken them. Ask the question below (leader p. 12; personal study p. 11):



In what ways does the impact of a word of encouragement or criticism change depending upon the source?

### Highlight

Call attention to the paragraph about God against idols (leader p. 13; personal study pp. 11-12). Emphasize the uniqueness of God seen through His revelation to us. Ask the following question (leader p. 13; personal study p. 12):



How does our belief that God has spoken affect our view of Scripture? The world we live in? Our day-to-day behavior?

### 2. The God who speaks is merciful to reveal Himself to us.

Before reading Exodus 3:2-6, encourage your group to notice who takes the initiative in this narrative. Use “Further Commentary” as needed (leader p. 14). Characterize God’s speaking as an act of mercy that points us to the gospel of grace. Ask the following question (leader p. 14):

### More Scriptures about the power and significance of the spoken word:

Proverbs 18:21

Matthew 12:36-37

James 3:1-12

### ? For Further Discussion

What one example of communication, either positive or negative, has dramatically influenced your life? What does your ability to remember those words infer about the power of words?


 If you were to hold to a Deist view of God's revelation, how would that affect your life? How would it affect your view of the Bible?

### Highlight

Emphasize the parallel between physical blindness/deafness and spiritual blindness/deafness. Help learners understand that God's revelation through Jesus makes possible our salvation (leader p. 15; personal study p. 13).

### 3. The God who speaks gives us tasks.

Before reading Genesis 1:27-30, ask your group to watch carefully for the order of events, particularly what God does and says in this passage. Use "Further Commentary" as needed (leader p. 16). Emphasize the progression that leads from authority to blessing to mission. Ask the question below (leader p. 16; personal study p. 14):

 Why do you think it is important that we understand this progression? What might happen if we seek to understand the task apart from God's blessing?

### Highlight

Share the quote by Tim Keller in the sidebar (leader p. 17; personal study p. 15) as a springboard to further discussion on the nature of grace and works.

### Conclusion

Conclude this lesson by tying it back to the opening illustration about Helen Keller. Challenge learners to ponder privately the application questions below (leader p. 17; personal study p. 15).

*Has God spoken to you through His Word in the past few months?  
What Scripture passages has God used to speak to you?*

*What blessings have you received from God in the past few months?*

*What tasks has God presented to you as a result of these blessings?*

Consider closing with the Puritan prayer of response (leader p. 17; personal study p. 15).

### ? For Further Discussion

Do you think most church members really believe that God speaks? Why or why not? How would our lives be different if we fully believed in a communicating God?

### ? For Further Discussion

How do we reverse the order of this progression: authority to blessing to mission? Why do you think we are tempted to begin with our obedience to then be rewarded by God's blessing?

# The God Who Speaks

## Session 1



**God speaks.** From the beginning of time and in the pages of Scripture, God reveals Himself as a God who speaks. His speech is a demonstration of His power, grace, and authority. Because of this truth, there is nothing more important in life than hearing from God and obeying His voice.

### Opening Illustration on the Value of Communication

Helen Keller was only 19 months old when a childhood illness left her deaf and blind, a prisoner to a world of incomprehensible sensations and inexpressible thoughts. “Have you ever been at sea in a dense fog, when it seemed as if a tangible white darkness shut you in?” she would later write. “‘Light! give me light!’ was the wordless cry of my soul.”

Years later, Helen Keller’s parents hired a teacher, Anne Sullivan, who sought to break into the six-year-old’s world of silent darkness. Sullivan’s breakthrough came when she taught Helen how to sign the word “water.” Helen described the moment she first realized that her teacher was communicating with her:

*Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten—a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.<sup>1</sup>*

The story of Helen Keller reminds us of the power of communication. In our wired world of iPhones and iPads, Facebook and Skype, we take for granted the ease of communication. We've grown accustomed to receiving a constant stream of information. The privilege of being personally addressed is overshadowed by the commonness of constant communication with family and friends.

Communication is common in the way that breathing and sleeping are common. Communicating is an important aspect of human existence, so much so that we consider it to be particularly harrowing to suffer from a disease that takes away a person's ability to communicate, especially when the mind is left intact.

Some people view human interaction as so vital to human flourishing that they protest the practice of placing prisoners in solitary confinement for an extended period of time. Opponents of solitary confinement believe complete solitude destroys the mental and relational capacities of an individual.

Regardless of one's view of the legitimacy of solitary confinement, it's fascinating that this kind of debate would even take place. The discussion itself demonstrates the importance of verbal interaction for human flourishing. We are relational beings. We were made for words—for hearing and for speaking.

No wonder the first chapter of the Bible focuses on the God who speaks. The first inspired words God spoke to us in the Bible are about Him speaking! This emphasis that God placed on communication should remind us of our need to hear from God. Without God choosing to reveal Himself to us, we would be like Helen Keller—deaf and blind to the reality of the world we live in. Without God's revelation, we would be unaware of His expectations for us and of His provision for salvation.

 Why do you think God designed humans with an innate need to communicate? What does this design communicate about the nature and desire of God?

In the upcoming weeks, we will examine the ways God reveals Himself. Theologians have divided the methods of God's revelation into two categories: **general revelation** and **special revelation**. General revelation refers to that which comes to all people everywhere (through creation, for example), whereas special revelation refers to that which is available to specific people at specific times and in specific places (through God's covenant with Israel or the sacred Scriptures). We will look at these categories in more detail in future weeks. For now, we will ponder the truth that God makes Himself known.

In today's lesson, we will look at three truths that flow from the reality of God as Speaker. The goal of our lesson is to appreciate the

## Voices from Church History

"If God has made us to be communicators on the basis of verbalization, and given the possibility of propositional, factual communication with each other, why should we think He would not communicate to us on the basis of verbalization and propositions?"<sup>2</sup>

—Francis Schaeffer  
(1912-1984)

## Further Commentary

The opening verse of the Bible, seven words in Hebrew, establishes seven key truths upon which the rest of the Bible is based:

God exists. The essential first step in pleasing God is recognizing His existence (Heb. 11:6).

God existed before there was a universe and will exist after the universe perishes (Heb. 1:10-12).

God is the main character in the Bible. He is the subject of the first verb in the Bible (in fact, He is the subject of more verbs than any other character) and performs a wider variety of activities than any other being in the Bible.

As Creator God, He has done what no human being could ever do; in its active form the Hebrew verb *bara'*, meaning "to create," never has a human subject. Thus *bara'* signifies a work that is uniquely God's.

God is mysterious; though the Hebrew word for God is plural, the verb form of which "God" is the subject is singular. This is perhaps a subtle allusion to God's Trinitarian nature: He is three divine persons in one divine essence.

God is the Creator of heaven and earth. He doesn't just modify pre-existing matter but calls matter into being out of nothing (Ps. 33:6,9; Heb. 11:3).

God is not dependent on the universe, but the universe is totally dependent on God (Heb. 1:3).

"A foundational teaching of the Bible is that God speaks and does so with universe-changing authority. The command in verse 3 is just two words in Hebrew."<sup>3</sup>

Robert D. Bergen,  
*HCSB Study Bible*

goodness of God as seen in His revelation to us and then to spread the news that He has spoken by aligning our lives with His will and telling others of His grace.

### 1. The God who speaks has authority (Gen. 1:1-3).

Let's begin by looking at the first verses of the Bible, Genesis 1:1-3.

<sup>1</sup> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*

<sup>2</sup> *Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.* <sup>3</sup> *Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.*

Notice the power of God's word in this passage. There was nothing but nothingness until God made His intentions known. With just two words spoken by God, light came into existence. God created by speaking. He spoke the world into existence. And the result of His speaking demonstrates how powerful His speech is.



In what ways does the impact of a word of encouragement or criticism change depending upon the source?

Words change things. When a pastor stands next to a gushing groom and a beaming bride and says, "I now pronounce you husband and wife," their status changes. They become united before God and God's people. They are ushered into the union of holy matrimony. The spoken word changed them forever because it was spoken with authority.

But words have no authority in themselves. Words are only powerful when spoken by someone with power.

The reality TV show *The Apprentice* is a 13-week-long job interview where participants compete for the opportunity to become an apprentice to billionaire Donald Trump. At the end of each episode, Donald takes into consideration the performance of each team and each individual. Then with dramatic flair, he looks one of the candidates in the eye and says, "You're fired." End of discussion. Once these words are uttered, the room falls silent, and the candidate leaves the room. In every episode, "You're fired" changes the dynamic of the show—not because there is anything authoritative in these words but because Donald Trump has the authority to make the decision.

If the words of a man who owns millions of dollars worth of property are powerful, how much more powerful are the words of God who owns everything in the universe! The Word of God is powerful and authoritative because it is God who has spoken.

Responding to the powerful nature of God's speech, the psalmist praised God for His creative authority: "Praise Him, sun and moon;

praise Him, all you shining stars. Praise Him, highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for He commanded, and they were created” (Ps. 148:3-5). Notice the progression: God commanded, and the universe was created.

The power of God exercised through His word elicited this reaction from the writer of Hebrews: “For the word of God is living and effective and sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating as far as the separation of soul and spirit, joins and marrow. It is able to judge the ideas and thoughts of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Words matter. Words carry weight. And the weightiest words are those uttered by the most glorious (the weightiest) Being in the universe. His words matter because of who He is.

The truth that God speaks is what separates Him from all idols. In the Old Testament, we see frequent showdowns between the true God of Israel and the false gods of pagan peoples. Whether it be the plagues God sent on Egypt (corresponding with the Egyptian gods; Ex. 7–12) or Elijah calling down fire on Mount Carmel (after the prophets of Baal cried out in vain; 1 Kings 18), the writers of the Bible delight in showing the power of God over against idolatry. In Psalm 115:3-5, we read: “Our God is in heaven and does whatever He pleases. Their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.” The contrast is clear. God is Spirit. He has no physical mouth, and yet He speaks. The idols, on the other hand, are physical. They have mouths but are silent. God alone has authority. God is the God who speaks.



How does our belief that God has spoken affect our view of Scripture? The world we live in? Our day-to-day behavior?

## 2. The God who speaks is merciful to reveal Himself to us (Ex. 3:2-6).

In Exodus 3:2-6, we are given a glimpse of how God revealed Himself to Moses in the form of a burning bush.

*<sup>2</sup> Then the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire within a bush. As Moses looked, he saw that the bush was on fire but was not consumed. <sup>3</sup> So Moses thought: I must go over and look at this remarkable sight. Why isn't the bush burning up?*

*<sup>4</sup> When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called out to him from the bush, “Moses, Moses!”*

*“Here I am,” he answered.*

*<sup>5</sup> “Do not come closer,” He said. “Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” <sup>6</sup> Then He continued, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Moses hid his face because he was afraid to look at God.*



### Voices from Church History

“Just as at the beginning God called things into being by His word, so by His word He will in the course of the ages bring into being the new heaven and the new earth, in which the tabernacle of God shall be among men.”<sup>4</sup>

—Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)



### Voices from the Church

“The God of the Bible in the very first chapter is not some abstract ‘unmoved mover,’ some spirit impossible to define, some ground of all beings, some mystical experience. He has personality and dares to disclose himself in words that human beings understand. Right through the whole Bible, that picture of God constantly recurs. However great or transcendent he is, he is a talking God.”<sup>5</sup>

—D. A. Carson

## Further Commentary

“The possibility of danger implicit in human contact with God is reflected throughout Scripture. This place was holy, not because of any quality intrinsic to it, but because of God’s presence and activity. To stay at a distance and remove footwear was then and is now in many cultures a sign of respect and humility. The Lord’s self-identification, which began, ‘I am the God of your father,’ connected this event with the past both by naming the patriarchs and by the wording of the statement. It also had the ring of a formal pronouncement by a king.”

“I AM WHO I AM—‘*Ehyeh asher ehyeh* is God’s statement as He revealed His preferred form of address to be Yahweh (Ex. 3:14–16). ‘*Ehyeh* is the first person form of the Hebrew verb meaning ‘to be.’ Yahweh seems to be an ancient form of the third person form of ‘to be.’ The third person may have been most suitable for Israelites considering their God. Some scholars interpret Yahweh as a causative form like ‘He Causes To Be,’ but ‘*ehyeh asher ehyeh* favors a meaning like ‘He Is.’ Such a translation agrees with the New Testament portrayal of Christ as the eternally present One (John 8:58). *I AM WHO I AM* suggests God’s sovereign freedom to be what He chooses to be.”<sup>6</sup>

Robert D. Bergen,  
*HCSB Study Bible*

This account shows us that mercy is at the heart of God’s revelation to us. Notice who initiated the conversation. God is the One who came to Moses. He mercifully revealed Himself and then identified Himself as the God of Moses’ forefathers.

Humans have no right to demand an audience with God. God is not accountable to us; we are accountable to Him. God would have been fully just and righteous to create this world and leave it to natural processes, never to intervene, never to communicate with His human creatures, and never to involve Himself with our human plight. There is nothing about our existence that forces God to be a God who reveals Himself.

And yet God speaks. The very fact that we are created is a result of God’s grace.

God was under no obligation to speak the world into existence. God does not need creation, as if He were lonely and longing to be praised. No, the God of the Bible is perfect in His Three-in-One nature. The Father overflows with love for His Son through the Holy Spirit. God’s grace is the source of our creation. He created us to fellowship with Him, to join in the love song the three Persons of the Trinity sing to one another. Out of grace—not necessity—God has created this world. He has spoken, and therefore, we exist.

It is also an act of grace that God would reveal Himself to us personally. God was under no obligation to pull back the curtain and let us see aspects of His character and evidences of His power. He could have spoken the world into existence and then never spoken again, leaving us in ignorance about our Creator and our purpose.

In fact, some people hold to a worldview that imagines this very scenario. (And some Christians who don’t believe this way still live this way!) Deism teaches that God created the world much like a clockmaker puts together a clock. But then the Deist god no longer intervenes in our affairs. Deists believe that God cares very little about what happens in this world. He lets the clock begin to tick, and then he steps back and becomes uninvolved.



If you were to hold to a Deist view of God’s revelation, how would that affect your life? How would it affect your view of the Bible?

The Deist view of God is certainly plausible. But is it true? Not according to the Bible. Scripture is God’s revealed truth to us, and according to this revelation, God has revealed Himself personally. His revelation is an act of mercy and grace.

In Deuteronomy 4:33, Moses reminded the Israelites of the great privilege they had received in hearing the voice of God. He asked, “Has a people heard God’s voice speaking from the fire as you have, and

lived?” The rhetorical effect of Moses’ question demonstrated the mercy that comes from hearing God speak. The fact that God would choose to reveal Himself, and to do so in such a way as to allow us to live, is an act of mercy.

Here we see the good news of the gospel! The gospel is the story of a God who issues a call to helpless sinners. In our blindness and deafness, we are imprisoned by our own sinfulness. We cannot see the goodness of God until He gives us new eyes. We cannot hear the voice of God until He opens our ears. Like Helen Keller, we struggle to make sense of the world around us—why we are here and where we are going.

But God—out of sheer grace—chose to enter our world of darkness through the Person of Jesus Christ. John 1 says, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (v. 1). And then, “The Word became flesh and took up residence among us” (v. 14). Jesus is God’s Word to us, breaking through our dark, silent prison and saying, “Let there be light!” (“Life was in Him, and that life was the light of men. That light shines in the darkness, yet the darkness did not overcome it” [vv. 4-5].) In His perfect life and sacrificial death, Jesus revealed God to us. He showed us God’s character. He demonstrated the love at the heart of the Father’s authority.

God created us out of mercy. He has spoken to us out of mercy. He became one of us out of His mercy. And He calls us to Himself out of His mercy. Just as Anne Sullivan broke through to Helen, the Holy Spirit opens the eyes of our heart so we can see His goodness and His glory and respond with gratitude.

Thinking about “the God who speaks” is not merely an intellectual exercise. Revelation is more than a doctrine about the inspiration of the Scriptures. It is more than a doctrine about the beauty of God’s creation. Revelation is at the very heart of what God has done on our behalf to bring Himself glory. As New Testament scholar Klyne Snodgrass has said, “Revelation does not merely bring the gospel: the gospel *is* revelation.”<sup>7</sup>

If it is true that God’s revelation demonstrates His authority and His mercy, what should be our response to others? What else do we learn about this God who has spoken?

### 3. The God who speaks gives us tasks (Gen. 1:27-30).

If it is true that God has spoken, then there is nothing greater we can do than listen to what our Creator has said.



What might be some of the reasons people don’t want to believe that God has spoken?



#### Voices from Church History

“When you come to knowing God, the initiative lies on His side. If He does not show Himself, nothing you can do will enable you to find Him.”<sup>8</sup>

—C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)



#### Voices from Church History

“You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.”<sup>9</sup>

—Augustine (354-430)



#### Voices from Church History

“No real faith was ever wrought in man by his own thoughts and imaginations; he must receive the gospel as a revelation from God, or he cannot receive it at all.”<sup>10</sup>

—Charles Spurgeon  
(1834-1892)

## Further Commentary

“The creation of humanity is the crowning event of Genesis 1, as shown by the fact that ‘created’ is repeated three times. The verb ‘created’ (Hebrew *bara’*) is the same one used in 1:1, referring to a kind of creative activity that only God can do. The term ‘man’ (Hebrew *’adam*) is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to refer to humanity in general, not just males (7:21); all people, both male and female, are created in the image of God. People are the only beings that are created in the image of God. The Bible never lumps people into the category of animals. Instead, it separates the creation of people from all other beings and attributes the most privileged roles in creation to humans alone.”

“In this the longest of the five blessings found in the account of creation, God gave humanity five different commands. Implicit in the first three commands is God’s blessing on the institutions of marriage and the family. The final two commands, to subdue the earth and rule the animal kingdom, express God’s blessing on the use of the planet’s renewable and nonrenewable natural resources. Of course, only the wise use of these resources permits people to fulfill God’s command to fill the earth.”<sup>11</sup>

Robert D. Bergen,  
*HCSB Study Bible*

Once we recognize the authority of the God who speaks and the mercy from which He speaks, we are then responsible to lovingly obey God’s commands. The command has been issued. What will our response be?

In Genesis 1:27-30, God told the first humans, Adam and Eve, what He expected of them.

*27 So God created man in His own image;  
He created him in the image of God;  
He created them male and female.*

*28 God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth.”<sup>29</sup> God also said, “Look, I have given you every seed-bearing plant on the surface of the entire earth and every tree whose fruit contains seed. This food will be for you,<sup>30</sup> for all the wildlife of the earth, for every bird of the sky, and for every creature that crawls on the earth—everything having the breath of life in it. I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.*

Notice the progression again: God created (authority); then He blessed (mercy). Finally, He gave tasks. Out of His authority, God created Adam and Eve. Out of His mercy, He blessed them. Then God’s mercy led to His tasking Adam and Eve with cultivating His good creation.



Why do you think it is important that we understand this progression? What might happen if we seek to understand the task apart from God’s blessing?

Too many times, we get the order backwards. We begin with the tasks of the Christian life and seek to receive God’s blessing as a result of our obedience. But the gospel turns these expectations upside down. God first blesses His children. Only then does He task them with ruling wisely over the earth.

This pattern is seen in other places in Scripture as well. God first delivered the children of Israel from their slavery in Egypt. Then He gave them the law on Mount Sinai. In the New Testament, Christ died for our sins and rose again to new life, saving us from our sins. Then He reminded us of His authority as He commissioned us to take the gospel to all nations.

When we begin with the task rather than the blessing, we cut ourselves off from the very power that is necessary to fulfill the tasks God has given us. The blessing of the gospel—the gift of undeserved grace—should motivate and drive our obedience. As we embrace the gospel, the gospel then empowers our love for God and for our neighbor.

When we begin with our obedience instead of God's blessing, we invert the gospel. We begin to think that we can somehow put God in our debt. If we only do enough good works, maybe God will bless us. This is humanity's futile attempt at keeping control. We'd rather think that God owes us. As long as we think someone owes us, we maintain a sense of control.

Grace—in contrast—is scary! When we come to understand that accomplishing our task is made possible only because of God's initial blessing of grace, then there is nothing God can't ask of us. There is nothing He owes us. We owe Him everything—our very lives.

## Conclusion

After Anne Sullivan was able to communicate with Helen Keller, she began to teach her how to communicate with others. Anne did not speak to Helen in order to become merely a companion to her. Anne saw Helen's potential for communication. Helen Keller became an author and activist in later years. The power of that initial moment of communication led to places no one would have imagined.

So it is with us. God does not speak to us so that we might keep Him company or that we might merely be friends. He speaks to us and lavishes the grace of His salvation upon us so that we might then get to work accomplishing all that He has called us to do. The God who speaks is the God who gives tasks. God communicates His commands, and then He breathes His Spirit into our hearts, enabling us to learn, live, and love.

*Has God spoken to you through His Word in the past few months?  
What Scripture passages has God used to speak to you?*

*What blessings have you received from God in the past few months?*

*What tasks has God presented to you as a result of these blessings?*

## Prayer of Response

*"Lord Jesus Christ, Fill me with your Spirit, that I may be full of His presence. I am blind—send Him to make me see; dark—let Him say, "Let there be light!" May His comforts cheer me in my sorrows, His strength sustain me in my trials, His blessings revive me in my weariness, His presence render me a fruitful tree of holiness, His might establish me in peace and joy, His incitements make me ceaseless in prayer, His animation kindle in me undying devotion."<sup>12</sup>*

—Puritan prayer

## Voices from the Church

"Religion operates on the principle of 'I obey—therefore I am accepted by God.' The basic operating principle of the gospel is 'I am accepted by God through the work of Jesus Christ—therefore I obey.'"<sup>13</sup>

—Tim Keller

## References

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3. Robert D. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), 7, n. 1:1; n. 1:3.
4. Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956), 24.
5. D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 20.
6. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible*, 102, n. 3:6; sidebar.
7. Kyle Snodgrass, *The Gospel in Romans: A Theology of Revelation* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), quoted in *The Revelation of God* by Peter Jensen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 31.
8. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1980), 144.
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10. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. XXV (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1880), 269.
11. Bergen, *HCSB Study Bible*, 8-9, n. 1:27, n. 1:28.
12. Arthur Bennett, ed., *The Valley of Vision* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 30.
13. Timothy Keller, *The Prodigal God* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 114.

## Additional Resources

# The God Who Speaks

### Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.

### Study Material

- “He Has Spoken”—Chapter 3 from *The Faith* by Charles Colson and Harold Fickett
- “The God Who Made Everything”—Chapter 1 from *The God Who Is There* by D. A. Carson
- “God Makes Himself Known”—Chapter 2 from *According to Plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy
- “Moses’ Early Life and Call”—Article by Philip Swanson on *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM); order at [www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator)

### Sermon Podcasts

John Lennox: “The Word of God in Creation” (Parts 1-2)—Guest Speaker on *Let My People Think* (Ravi Zacharias), January 21,28, 2012

Matt Carter: “In the Beginning Was Jesus”—The Austin Stone Community Church

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)

## Tip of the Week

### Arrive Early

It’s always a good idea to arrive early—not just to prepare the room before the first member or guest arrives but to pray. Picture a leader standing in an empty room, arranged for people who have yet to arrive, asking God to provide direction for leading the group experience. The leader envisions the faces of the men or women who will be engaged in Bible study and prays about the needs they will carry into that room. The teacher also asks for clarity and the ability to communicate in a way that honors God. People can easily be impressed when we present a thoughtful lesson. But those same people can be transformed when we teach through the power of prayer.

# God Is Not Hiding

*The God Who Reveals Himself Through Creation*

## Summary and Goal

This lesson will help participants see that God has created the world for our good and His glory. By observing God's handiwork in creation, we gain awareness of His existence, His attributes, and His benevolent intentions. Our response to God's general revelation should be celebration of His kindness in giving us creation as a signpost that points us back to Him, the source of lasting joy.

### ***Steps to Prepare***

**1. Read the main passages for this week's lesson, recording your insights and questions:**

- Psalm 19:1-6
- Romans 1:20
- Acts 14:15-17

**2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 22-29).**

- Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
- Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.

**3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 20-21).**

- Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
- Adjust the plan if necessary.

**4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.**

### ***Lesson Outline***

1. God reveals His existence through creation (Ps. 19:1-6).
2. God reveals His attributes through creation (Rom. 1:20).
3. God reveals His intentions through creation (Acts 14:15-17).

## Teaching Plan

# God Is Not Hiding

## Session 2

### Introduce the Lesson

Begin with the illustration from *The Truman Show* (leader guide p. 22; personal study guide p. 19). Emphasize the idea that the world is giving us clues that tell us something about God (leader p. 23).

- What are some of the hints and clues we see in creation that point us to the existence of a Creator? Conversely, what are some of the aspects of creation that cause some people to believe that no Creator exists?

As you reinforce the concept that God speaks through nature, introduce the term “general revelation,” and announce the goal of this lesson (leader p. 23).

### 1. God reveals His existence through creation.

Read Psalm 19:1-6. Emphasize the continual proclamation of creation that there is a God. Elaborate on the two possible interpretations for Psalm 19:3:

1. People ignore the communication of creation.
2. The communication of creation is not audible.

Ask the following question related to the first interpretation (leader p. 24; personal study p. 21):

- Think about the ways people attempt to guard themselves from God’s revelation. What are some of the most common ways we try to hide from God’s voice? What are some of the common ways we try to drown it out?

General revelation goes further than just telling us that God exists. It also tells us what kind of God exists (leader p. 25).

### 2. God reveals His attributes through creation.

Begin with the story of the long-lost brother and what his belongings would communicate about him (leader p. 25; personal study pp. 21-22). Then ask the following question (leader p. 26; personal study p. 22):

- What knowledge of God’s character do we gain by looking at creation?

### ? For Further Discussion

Describe a time when an experience in nature communicated something in particular to you about God. Maybe a mountain hike impressed you with His power, or watching a mother bird with her babies reminded you of His fatherly care, etc.

As you read Romans 1:20, encourage your group to look for what God's general revelation *can* and *cannot* do. Emphasize the truth this verse teaches about responsibility. General revelation is sufficient to hold us accountable for our sin but not able to save us.

Highlight the attributes of God that are seen in all humanity—sense of fairness, longing for justice, compulsion to create, etc. (leader p. 27; personal study p. 23). Consider asking the following questions:

- ❓ Name some of God's attributes revealed in the Bible. How might some of these be communicated in the visible world? Where and how do we see them proclaimed in nature, including in general human experience?

### 3. God reveals His intentions through creation.

As you read Acts 14:15-17, encourage your group to look for what the apostles say about themselves and what they say about God. Emphasize the way the apostles wanted the pagans to understand that God was far more generous and benevolent than their idols. Ask the question below (leader p. 28; personal study p. 23):

- ❓ What does the description of Paul and Barnabas' actions in Acts 14:11-18 tell us about evangelistic motives, demeanor, strategy, and message?

Using the Acts 14 story and the view of creation in Romans 8, articulate the imprint of the gospel message, particularly the truth that God's good gifts point toward the Giver (leader p. 28).

### Conclusion

Conclude this lesson with the story from C. S. Lewis (leader p. 29). Reiterate the truth that general revelation is good but not saving. Point ahead to next week's lesson on special revelation. Challenge learners to ponder the application questions below (leader p. 29; personal study p. 24).

*What are some other general revelation "signposts" we find in creation that illustrate the gospel of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?*

*Why is it wrong to think that "experiencing God" in nature is enough?*

*How will the truth of general revelation help or otherwise affect your mission to be a witness to the gospel of Jesus?*

### ❓ For Further Discussion

What about those who have never heard? What do you think about the theoretical natives on the unreached island? What do Psalm 19:1-6 and Romans 1:20 say about their responsibility? What do Matthew 28:19 and Romans 10:14 say about our responsibility?

### ❓ For Further Discussion

If God is revealing Himself through creation and created things, what might the implications of this be on our own creativity?

## Expanded Lesson Content

# God Is Not Hiding

## Session 2



### Opening Illustration and Discussion Starter

In the 1998 film *The Truman Show*, Jim Carrey plays Truman Burbank, a generally cheerful insurance adjuster in a cozy island town whose days run like clockwork—until the day a stage light falls out of the heavens and crashes near his car. Though the news on the radio says an airplane has been

shedding parts, Truman begins to develop a suspicious awareness that everything is not as it seems:


- A technical difficulty on his car stereo broadcasts the very route he is driving.
- A homeless man calling his name on the street looks very much like the father he thought was dead.
- An elevator in an office building opens to reveal what looks like a backstage area.
- The traffic in Truman's neighborhood appears to run on a "loop."

As Truman begins paying attention to the world around him, he discovers little by little that he is the unwitting star of a reality television show. Everyone in his life is an actor; all the people he sees throughout the day are extras; and the island town he lives in is actually a gigantic set enclosed by a heavenly bubble and overseen by a television director with a God complex. As Truman begins looking back through his life and at the world around him, he realizes the clues to reality were there all along.

*The Truman Show* is just a movie, of course (although its human-in-a-bubble premise doesn't seem so strange in these days of strange reality television shows!), but it is nevertheless a good metaphor for how billions of people live their lives in this world every day. They wake up, go about their routines, and go to bed, only to start the ritual all over again. Sometimes they suspect the world around them is trying to tell them something about itself and what's outside of it, but they fail over and over

again to put those clues together. They are like a person who finds a watch on the sidewalk and assumes it is the natural result of millions of years of sand, wind, and sun.

The movie is also a good metaphor for how billions of other people live their lives: seeing the signs in daily life (the sun's rising, the sea's swelling, the changing of the seasons, the clockwork of the solar system, the intricacies of DNA) as if they are falling lights and telltale radio broadcasts and peeks behind the stage. We find that watch on the sidewalk and know it didn't arrive there accidentally. It was dropped, it was owned, and before all that, it was made. The world is telling us something; we just know it! It's telling us something about itself, about us, and about what's behind it all. But what? What is it saying?

 What are some of the hints and clues we see in creation that point us to the existence of a Creator? Conversely, what are some of the aspects of creation that cause some people to believe that no Creator exists?

According to the Bible, the world around us is testifying to all within it that there is a Creator. Furthermore, the world around us is telling us what the Creator is like, and it is telling us something of His plans. We call this reality **general revelation** because it refers to the general way God reveals Himself to people everywhere.

### Lesson Summary

In this lesson, we will see that God has created the world for our good and His glory. By observing God's handiwork in creation, we gain awareness of His existence, His attributes, and His benevolent intentions. Our response to God's general revelation should be celebration of His kindness in giving us creation as a signpost that points us back to Him, the source of lasting joy.

## 1. God reveals His existence through creation (Ps. 19:1-6).

One of the most direct references to general revelation we find in the Scriptures is Psalm 19:1-6.

<sup>1</sup> *The heavens declare the glory of God,  
and the sky proclaims the work of His hands.*

<sup>2</sup> *Day after day they pour out speech;  
night after night they communicate knowledge.*

<sup>3</sup> *There is no speech; there are no words;  
their voice is not heard.*

<sup>4</sup> *Their message has gone out to all the earth,  
and their words to the ends of the world.*

### Voices from Church History

"The voices of visible creation...are equally clear to everyone... giving everyone the one message, that they were made by someone and do not exist of themselves."<sup>1</sup>

—Diodore of Tarsus  
(ca. A.D. 380)

Science's second law of thermodynamics testifies against accidental and gradual order. The law states that as energy is expended, the result is disorganization and disorder. In other words, the idea that things become more orderly through random natural processes violates the very law of nature.



## Voices from Church History

“The heavens show forth the glory of God’ not by speaking in a voice audible to sensible ears but by manifesting to us through their own greatness the power of the Creator, and when we make comments about their beauty, we give glory to their Maker.”<sup>2</sup>

—John of Damascus  
(ca. 650-750)

*In the heavens He has pitched a tent for the sun.*

<sup>5</sup> *It is like a groom coming from the bridal chamber; it rejoices like an athlete running a course.*

<sup>6</sup> *It rises from one end of the heavens and circles to their other end; nothing is hidden from its heat.*

According to this passage, the created world is constantly saying something about its Creator—or more accurately, the Creator is constantly saying something about Himself through His created world. The picture we receive from the psalmist is of a world that acts as a loudspeaker, a stage, and an art gallery—all pointing to God’s glory. The sky proclaims that all this work has a Designer’s hands behind it.

Just like the presence of a watch on a sidewalk indicates a watchmaker, our finely tuned bodies living in this finely tuned world hanging in this finely tuned cosmos point to the logical existence of a Creator. Nobody looks at a Mercedes Benz, for example, and assumes there was an explosion at a junkyard. According to the direct revelation of Psalm 19:1-6, the heavens (and the sky) are every day “pouring out speech” and every night “communicating knowledge” that God exists.

The sense we receive in verses 1-2 is of continual revelation. Creation never presses “pause” on its proclaiming that it is an effect, not a cause, and that it has an Originator. Verse 3 can be difficult to sort out, but the context of the passage gives us two most likely interpretations.

The first is that despite the nonstop speech and communication, some people simply ignore it as if it doesn’t exist; the voice is not heard. Nevertheless, they cannot say they were not told, only that they did not listen. It is for a similar reason that Jesus, borrowing from Isaiah 6:9-10, says this in Matthew 13:15 of those people hardened to His message: “For this people’s heart has grown callous; their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn back—and I would cure them.”



Think about the ways people attempt to guard themselves from God’s revelation. What are some of the most common ways we try to hide from God’s voice? What are some of the common ways we try to drown it out?

The second possible interpretation of Psalm 19:3 is simply that David is noting the nature of general revelation, which is to say, it is not a speech that comes in an audible voice or literal words. The communication and knowledge is proclaimed, but not in the way direct, special revelation is. A watch tells us it has a watchmaker, but not in the same way as does shaking the watchmaker’s hand and hearing his voice say, “I made that.”

Both of these senses are true of Psalm 19:3. It is true that creation is proclaiming its Creator, but many either don't hear it or they hear it but reject it. It is also true that the way creation proclaims its Creator is not as direct as the way the Creator proclaims Himself.

In any event, verse 4 tells us that the "message has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world." In other words, no place is absent general revelation. Nature's "music" points us to look for the Conductor. Nature's beauty points us to look for the Artist. The vastness of the Sahara Desert and the Arctic tundra and the mighty oceans, in making us feel small and vulnerable, point us to God, the strong Tower.

But the general revelation in the created order of the universe doesn't just tell us that there is a God, it tells us something about that God. To borrow a phrase from C. S. Lewis, general revelation doesn't merely tell us *a* God exists, it tells us *this* God exists.

Psalm 19:1 tells us "The heavens declare the glory of God," not merely the presence of God. The word "glory" has the sense of "weightiness" or "worth." God's glory is the sum impression of all that God is.

What we learn first about God from His general revelation is that God will not settle for being acknowledged. He wants to be known! So there is something about the heavens—their vastness, their beauty, their complexity, their power, their impression upon little ol' us—that tells us something about Him.

## 2. God reveals His attributes through creation (Rom. 1:20).

Suppose you came home one day to find a package with this note attached: "These are the personal effects of your twin brother Joe, recently deceased." Once you got over the initial shock of discovering you had a twin brother you never knew about, you'd open the package and look at the contents, hoping they might tell you something about this brother.

If the package contained a leather jacket, a set of brass knuckles, and some cigarettes, that wouldn't tell you everything about your brother, but it would certainly give you a general impression, wouldn't it? And if the package contained instead a set of watercolor paints, a beret, and a tin of organic breath mints, that might give you an entirely different impression, wouldn't it? The package's existence would tell you that you had a brother, but the package's *contents* would tell you a bit about him.

In the same way, the created world tells us we have a God, and what we see in the created world tells us some general things about Him. By seeing the general revelation of "the heavens" and the rest of the world, we can get a sense of God's glory, the sum of His attributes.



What knowledge of God's character do we gain by looking at creation?

## Further Commentary

We have to keep this distinction between general revelation and special revelation in mind when thinking about God's revelation of Himself through the created world so that we may avoid these dangerous errors:

- Treating a subjective experience of "hearing God" in nature as equal or even superior to the objective, primary way we hear God—reading His words in Scripture.
- Neglecting to read the Bible or to gather for regular worship with our church or for Bible study with other believers because we think we can hear God just as well through nature.
- Inadvertently believing in pantheism, the idolatrous and evil spiritual belief that God is "in" everything and therefore everything is God.

## Voices from Church History

"God's speech in nature is not to be confused with the notion of a talking cosmos, as by those who insist that nature speaks, and that we must therefore hear what nature says as if nature were the voice of God. 'Hear God!' is the biblical message, not 'Listen to nature!' Nature is God's created order, and in nature God presents himself."<sup>3</sup>

—Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003)

In Romans 1:20, Paul writes:

*<sup>20</sup> For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.*

What Paul is getting at is that nobody can rightfully say, “I never heard the gospel message contained in the Bible, so I am not responsible for my own sin,” because there is enough evidence of God’s sovereign rule (over both people and their sin) in general revelation that nobody can say they weren’t directed to seek Him out in special revelation.

Again, we should repeat that general revelation does not tell us all there is to know about God, nor can we hear the specific gospel message of salvation in the declarations of the heavens. Still, enough is communicated that “people are without excuse.” Paul says the visible world reveals God’s invisible attributes, namely, His “eternal power and divine nature.”

God’s “eternal power” can have two meanings. The first is that God’s power is without end or limit. This is an affirmation of His omnipotence.

The other sense “eternal power” can have is that the power to sustain everything for all time belongs to God. In the first sense we are told what God’s power is like; in the second sense we are told what God’s power does. He upholds eternity.

How is this invisible attribute reflected in visible creation? We see God’s eternal power revealed through the vastness of the cosmos and through the mighty forces at work in nature. The expanse of space or the unfathomable depths of the ocean ought to humble mankind. The same is true of an eruption of a volcano or the strength of a tsunami. These shows of power give us an otherworldly and overwhelming sense of being in the presence of the divine Being. As Matt Chandler has said, “Nobody stands at the base of the Rocky Mountains and says, ‘Remember that time I benched 300 pounds in high school?’”

We see that God’s power upholds eternity when we really begin to ponder the clocklike order of the universe. The planets are precisely aligned for earth’s specialness. The conditions on earth are precisely balanced for life. The chemicals in human life are precisely proportioned for growth, intelligence, and creativity. Also, despite the destructive forces of tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, lightning, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, and asteroids falling from the sky, this place keeps on keeping on. If we cannot see the sustaining power of God’s providential care in creation’s endurance, we likely will not see it in the pages of Scripture.



What does the complexity and variety of nature tell us about God?

## Voices from Church History

“In all things visible, clear reminders of the Benefactor grip us.”<sup>4</sup>


—Basil of Caesarea (ca. 330–379)

## Further Commentary


In Rudolf Otto’s book *The Idea of the Holy*, he divided the experience of “the numinous” into two primary categories. The *mysterium tremendum* is characterized by fear and trembling. This might be seen, for instance, in Isaiah’s response to the glory of God filling the temple in Isaiah 6. The *mysterium fascinans* is characterized by fascination and being awe-struck.<sup>5</sup>

How is God's "divine nature" revealed through what we see? One of the clearest imprints is not just in the way we search for objects to worship but is right here inside, in the way we think and act. We read in Genesis 1:27: "So God created man in His own image; He created him in the image of God; He created them male and female."

Because we are creatures made in God's image, we have innate senses and compulsions that point to the reality of God's divine nature. Of course, we are not divine ourselves, and after the fall of mankind, the image of God in us is obscured and broken. Still, we can nevertheless see that mankind's generally innate sense of justice and fairness, compulsion to create, ability to express and experience love, and frequent appeals to conscience all point away from our being the evolved result of a random electric current in a primordial goop.

 If God is revealing Himself through creation and created things, what might the implications of this be on our own creativity?

If you listen to children playing long enough, you will eventually hear the recurring cry, "That's not fair!" While we all have a moral compass that's skewed in the wiring due to sin, we still have an innate sense of right and wrong, just and unjust, fair and unfair. Apart from the Spirit's discipline, it is impossible for us to apply these impulses in selfless ways, but the presence of them to begin with indicates an ultimate right and an ultimate justice. Thanks to special revelation, we know that this is found in our perfectly holy and just God.

 Name some of God's attributes revealed in the Bible. How might some of these be communicated in the visible world? Where and how do we see them proclaimed in nature, including in general human experience?

There is yet a third message we receive in general revelation. The visible world tells us that there is a God as well as something about what God is like, but the visible world still further tells something about God's plans.

### 3. God reveals His intentions through creation (Acts 14:15-17).

In Acts 14, Barnabas and Paul are in Lystra when a priest of Zeus begins to lead a crowd in making sacrifices to them. Barnabas and Paul, in dramatic fashion, interrupt the proceedings, tear their clothes, and proclaim to the crowd:

*15 "Men! Why are you doing these things? We are men also, with the same nature as you, and we are proclaiming good news to you, that you should*

#### Voices from the Church

"One effect of a persisting objective revelation is an uneasiness with our state, a longing and groping. We are restless with our condition, 'knowing' we are made for more, in a quest for 'transcendence,' and engaged in speculation about human homelessness in the philosophies of our own time."<sup>6</sup>

—Gabriel Fackre

Fackre is saying that the fact that humans formulate myths, participate in religions (including false ones), devise philosophies, and create transcendent art is itself evidence of the reality of the God alien to ourselves (and evidence of His desire to be known).

## Voices from Church History

“He is not silent. The reason we have the answer is because the infinite-personal God, the full trinitarian God, has not been silent. He has told us who he is. Couch your concept of inspiration and revelation in these terms, and you will see how it cuts down into the warp and woof of modern thinking. He is not silent. That is the reason we know. It is because he has spoken.”<sup>7</sup>

—Francis Schaeffer  
(1912-1984)

## Voices from the Church

“The created realm (creation) is a spectacular theater that serves as the cosmic matrix in which God’s saving and judging glory can be revealed. God’s glory is so grand that no less a stage than the universe—all that is or was and will be, across space and through time—is necessary for the unfolding of this all-encompassing drama.”<sup>8</sup>

—James M. Hamilton Jr.

*turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. <sup>16</sup> In past generations He allowed all the nations to go their own way, <sup>17</sup> although He did not leave Himself without a witness, since He did what is good by giving you rain from heaven and fruitful seasons and satisfying your hearts with food and happiness.”*

What did Barnabas and Paul want the people of Lystra to know? As the pagan demand for more sacrifices to a dead god continued, Barnabas and Paul desperately wanted these people to know the good news that Jesus has made the sacrifice to end all sacrifices, and He did so to honor the will of a Heavenly Father who had been far better to the unsaved people of Lystra than Zeus had been. The missionaries pointed to the evidence: “You have a witness that this is true!” they cried. “He has given you rain and harvest and good food and happiness.”



What does the description of Paul and Barnabas’ actions in Acts 14:11-18 tell us about evangelistic motives, demeanor, strategy, and message?

In Romans 8:22, Paul writes, “For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.” The image is that of the earth giving birth, but the focus is on the earth going through pain as it gives way to newness. What we look forward to is the return of Christ and the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth (2 Pet. 3:13). The brokenness we see in “the whole creation,” then, is signaling to us that (a) something is wrong and (b) there is something better.

In this way, when natural disasters occur and when societies undergo discord, we are pushed to hope for something better, which is in itself an arrow pointing toward the “something better” God intends to do.

Acts 14:17 and Romans 8:22 give us the imprint of the gospel story! Looking at the world around us, we recognize that this place is broken but there is pleasure to be had. This is the concept of “common grace,” which we also see in Matthew 5:45: “For He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” The benevolent heart of God is made visible through common grace.

God intends for the happiness we experience in marriage, parenting, and His other good gifts to point us back to Him. The gifts everyone enjoys in this life lead to the Giver. Yet not everyone has eyes to see.

I think of this truth every time Thanksgiving rolls around and families who do not acknowledge God sit around the holiday table and share something they are thankful for. I always want to know: To whom are you thankful? To whom are you giving thanks for a healthy family? Yourself? The very impulse to “be thankful” points to a Giver who is due our thanksgiving.

The general revelation we receive in the created world evinces the Giver's fingerprints everywhere, and these prints tell us something of His intentions. We cannot receive the gospel message in general revelation, but we can certainly see its echoes. Things like the metamorphosis of the butterfly can help us illustrate Christ's death, burial, and resurrection—and ours in response. Even the cycle of the seasons—from the death of winter to the newness of spring—helps us see the imprint of the gospel.

## Conclusion

The Reformers thought of the world as a grand theater in which God showcases His glory. One thing we must say about this theater, of course, is that it is not itself the story but the stage for it. Like a good stage set, it tells us something of the story before the players even enter and begin reciting their lines. But it is the script that really reveals.

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis tells of the time an old Air Force officer interrupted his talk on religion to say: "I'm a religious man too. I *know* there's a God. I've *felt* Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!"

Lewis goes on to honor the man's experience of "feeling God's presence" out in the wilderness of nature, but he denies the sufficiency of that sort of experience. He writes: "You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere. There is nothing to do about it. In fact, that is just why a vague religion—all about feeling God in nature, and so on—is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work; like watching the waves from the beach. But you will not get to Newfoundland by studying the Atlantic that way, and you will not get eternal life by simply feeling the presence of God in flowers or music."<sup>9</sup>

Thankfully, while God does communicate His presence, His attributes, and His intentions through the gift of general revelation, He wants to be even clearer than that.

*What are some other general revelation "signposts" we find in creation that illustrate the gospel of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?*

*Why is it wrong to think that "experiencing God" in nature is enough?*

*How will the truth of general revelation help or otherwise affect your mission to be a witness to the gospel of Jesus?*

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3. Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. 2: *God Who Speaks and Shows* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999), 98.
4. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily One, Creation of the Heavens and Earth*, 1.6, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, ed. R. J. Deferrari, 46.11, quoted in *Romans*, ed. Gerald Bray, vol. 6 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 39.
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6. Gabriel Fackre, *The Doctrine of Revelation: A Narrative Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 51.
7. Francis A. Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1972), 18.
8. James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 53.
9. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Westwood, NJ: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1952), 131-132.

## Additional Resources

# God Is Not Hiding

### Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.

### Study Material

- “Natural Revelation”—Chapter 2 by Russell D. Moore from *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin
- “Not Separate, But Unequal”—Blog post by Kevin DeYoung on the relationship between general and special revelation; find a link to this blog post at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)
- “Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe”—Book 1 from *Mere Christianity* by C. S. Lewis
- “Creation in Ancient Near Eastern Thought”—Article by Van McClain on *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM); order at [www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator)

### Sermon Podcasts

Andy Davis: “Glory to God, the Creator”—  
First Baptist Church, Durham, NC

John Piper: “The Pleasure of God in His Creation”—  
Bethlehem Baptist Church

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)

## Tip of the Week

### Provide Resources for Guests

An inexpensive way to make first-time guests feel welcome is to provide them copies of your Bible study materials. Based on past experience, make your best guess about how many first-time guests you can expect each quarter, and order that number of learner or study guides (or request them from your leaders). What about people who have not yet visited your group? You can encourage them to visit by providing copies of your learner or study guides.

# God Is Not Mute

*The God Who Reveals Himself Through His Word*

## Summary and Goal

God has not only revealed Himself through creation, He has also spoken to us through the written Word. In His Word, God specifies His intentions for humanity and His expectations of us. He shows us how the glory of Christ is the purpose of world history. We are to respond to God's special revelation by aligning our lives with His expressed will.

### ***Steps to Prepare***

- 1. Read the main passages for this week's lesson, recording your insights and questions:**
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17
  - Psalm 19:7-11
  - Luke 24:25-27
- 2. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 34-41).**
  - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
  - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
- 3. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 32-33).**
  - Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
  - Adjust the plan if necessary.
- 4. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.**

### ***Lesson Outline***

- 1. God is the Author of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17).**
- 2. God clearly reveals His expectations for humanity (Ps. 19:7-11).**
- 3. God reveals His plan for redeeming the world and bringing glory to Christ (Luke 24:25-27).**

## Teaching Plan

# God Is Not Mute

## Session 3

### Introduce the Lesson

Review last week's teaching on general revelation, emphasizing that creation tells us only so much about the Creator. Then introduce the concept of special revelation (leader guide p. 35; personal study guide p. 28).

### 1. God is the Author of Scripture.

As you read 2 Timothy 3:16-17, encourage your group to discern what kind of inspiration is in view as well as the purpose of inspiration. Use "Further Commentary" if needed (leader p. 35). Explain the concept of *inspiration* (leader p. 35; personal study p. 29).

- What does the truth that God chose not to override the personalities of the Bible's authors say about our own personalities? In what ways can God use our circumstances and personalities in our proclamation of His truth?

Mention also that the Bible's divine authorship means it has authority over us. Emphasize the truth that Scripture is all we need (leader p. 36; personal study p. 29).

- In what ways might Christians be tempted to supplement the Bible's authority with something else? How can we demonstrate our belief that the Bible is sufficient to guide our lives?

Using the illustration of books recounting near-death experiences, highlight the fact that many of us display a lack of confidence in the Scriptures by looking elsewhere for authentication (leader p. 36; personal study p. 30).

### Transition

Point out one of the drawbacks of leaning on something other than Scripture: the storyteller is often the hero. Make the point that the Bible is *for* us but *about* God (leader p. 37; personal study p. 30).

- Do you agree with the statement "In all God does, His first aim is to glorify Himself"? Why or why not? What are some ways that God's glorifying Himself is a benefit to us?

### ? For Further Discussion

Read the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Why does the rich man think "someone from the dead" will convince his family to believe in Jesus? Why does Jesus offer instead the testimony of "Moses and the prophets"? What are the implications of this parable, specifically verse 31, for accounts of near-death experiences?

## 2. God clearly reveals His expectations for humanity.

As you read Psalm 19:7-11, encourage your group to look specifically for the psalmist's description of the Word and its purpose. Make the point that Scripture is intended to make us wise (leader p. 38).

- ❓ In what ways can God's instructions make the heart glad? In what ways can God's commandments make our eyes light up?

Use the illustration of Plato's cave to demonstrate the difference between general and special revelation (leader pp. 38-39; personal study p. 31).

- ❓ Reread Psalm 19:11. How is there great reward in keeping God's commandments? How does your answer to the above question relate to the truth that we are saved by faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9)?

## 3. God reveals His plan for redeeming the world and bringing glory to Christ.

Introduce the idea that the way we move from a sense of obligation to a sense of delight in reading Scripture is by deepening our understanding of the gospel (leader p. 39; personal study p. 32). Use "Further Commentary" if necessary (leader p. 39).

Read Luke 24:25-27. Explain what this passage means for our Bible reading.

- ❓ Reflecting on Jesus' revelation to His traveling companions in Luke 24:25-27, what might have been some of "the things concerning Himself" He showed them from the Old Testament?

### Highlight

Make the case for seeing the footprints of Jesus throughout the sand of the Old Testament. The gospel announcement fuels our obedience so that we obey God's law with delight instead of drudgery (leader p. 40; personal study p. 33).

Contrast a few wrong ways of reading the Scriptures with the way Jesus presented the Scriptures on the road to Emmaus (leader p. 40).

### Conclusion

Recommend additional resources for studying the Scriptures (leader p. 41; personal study p. 33). Ask the class to reflect on the questions at the end of this lesson (leader p. 41; personal study p. 33).

Consider closing with a reading or singing of the hymn of response (leader p. 41).

### ❓ For Further Discussion

Read Hebrews 10:1. Thinking of the allegory of Plato's cave, what "actual form" of reality does the shadow of the law reflect? What does "perfect the worshipers"?

## Expanded Lesson Content

# God Is Not Mute

## Session 3



### Opening Illustration and Review

Last week we considered **general revelation**—the way in which God reveals Himself to us through His creation. Imagine you are walking along a sidewalk and discover a wristwatch on the ground. When you pick it up to examine it, would you deduce that it was the random result

of an explosion in a metal and glass factory? Would you assume from its design and precision that it had come into being purely by accident, the fortuitous result of some minor cataclysm? Perhaps you know a little about science, and while some scientists argue that highly developed organization does result from disorganized material “naturally,” you know that the second law of thermodynamics states that natural things actually are constantly breaking down. So that wristwatch could not have assembled itself out of dust, and if you left that wristwatch on the ground for a billion years, it would not turn into Big Ben but to dirt. What do you assume then?

You assume the watch was made on purpose. Some outside, intelligent force used the means at its disposal to gather or manufacture the materials, to design the internal mechanism and the external display, and to put it all together so that—voilà!—the watch was made. To the logical mind, the watch reveals the existence of a watchmaker.

As in the general revelation of God’s glory in creation, the watch may reveal some things about its maker, that he has a keen eye, that he has an expert hand, and the like. These characteristics are clearly evident. They tell us things we ought to know about the maker’s existence and his character. But all of the things the watch tells us about its maker have to be deduced. And they don’t tell us some of the most critical things about the watchmaker—his name, for instance.

### Voices from Church History

B. B. Warfield (1851-1921) explains the difference between general revelation and special revelation in the sense that the former is natural—nature speaking for God to “man as man”—and that the latter is *supernatural*—God speaking for Himself to “man as sinner.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in the special revelation of Scripture, God speaks directly and specifically.

## Lesson Summary

Thankfully, God has not left us to deduce all we need to know from His general revelation in creation alone. He also gets straight to the point by providing what we call **special revelation**. Special revelation is different from general revelation because it refers to the way God reveals specific things about Himself and His plan for the created world—including us—in His written Word. The general revelation of creation is reflecting God’s glory, but in the special revelation of the Bible, God is proclaiming His glory Himself.

## 1. God is the Author of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Though the Bible has approximately forty different authors, runs the gamut of history to law, prophecy to poetry, and includes 66 books written over the span of 1,600 years, it has one Author who made every word sure and every truth proclaimed.

Paul reminds Timothy of this vital truth in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

*<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.*

This short passage reveals to us a few things about itself and every other verse in the Bible. First, it tells us that every word of Scripture comes from God Himself, that they are “inspired” by the Holy Spirit. But what does this sort of inspiration mean?

That God inspired the Scriptures does not mean that men wrote the words of the Bible completely of their own devices merely as an act of honor to God. Certainly their work in writing the books of the Bible was an act of honor to God, but it was not *merely* that. So when we say God inspired men to write the Bible, we don’t mean it in the same way that a man may write a poem because he was inspired by a beautiful woman or a waterfall. The inspiration that the Holy Spirit provided in revealing the Word of God was direct, not indirect.

On the other hand, the inspiration that the Spirit provided in the revelation of the Word of God did not turn the human authors into automatic dictation machines. They weren’t possessed—at least not in the sense of losing control over their own faculties. God used men to write the Bible, but He did so without overriding their personalities.



What does the truth that God chose not to override the personalities of the Bible’s authors say about our own personalities? In what ways can God use our circumstances and personalities in our proclamation of His truth?

## Further Commentary

It is important to remember that in the Bible God speaks directly to us, even as we acknowledge the numerous human agents God inspired to write the various books in His Word. Although the books of the Bible reveal different genres, different writing styles, different personalities, and different perspectives, the Bible was written by men divinely inspired. Because the words they wrote were directly inspired by God, we can say with confidence that fallible men do not compromise the infallibility of God’s Word. It has been revealed just as He wants it.

“First of all, you should know this,” we read in 2 Peter 1:20-21, “no prophecy of Scripture comes from one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the will of man; instead, men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” What this means is that while God employed human writers to draft the story of His glory, it was not their story made up from their own minds that they were drafting but God’s story straight from His revealing Spirit.

## Further Commentary

How do we know that God is the hero of the Bible? Here are examples of God acting for His own renown:

- For the sake of his name, God did not destroy Israel in the desert (Ezek. 20:5-9).
- Pharaoh's heart was hardened for the glory of God (Ex. 14:4,18).
- The beginning of the Israeli monarch was about the glory of God (1 Sam. 12:19-23).
- Solomon dedicated the temple for the glory of God (1 Kings 8).
- Israel became great and powerful among the nations because God was "making himself a name" (2 Sam. 7:23).
- God did not destroy Israel when it deserved to be destroyed, because he did not want his name blasphemed among the nations (Isa. 48:9-11).
- God decided to destroy the Israelites because they would not lay it in their heart to give glory to his name (Mal. 2:2).
- Jesus's life and ministry was about the glory of God (John 7:18; 17:4).
- The cross of Jesus is about the glory of God (John 12:27-28).
- You and I are saved to the praise of his glorious grace (Eph. 1:3-6).
- The Christian life is about the reflection of the glory of God off of our lives into the universe (Matt. 5:16; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 4:11).
- The second coming is about the consummation of the glory of God (2 Thess. 1:9-10).

When Paul taught that his biblical words were inspired by God, he meant that God took whatever care determined necessary to make sure that what Paul and all the other biblical writers said was what God wanted said.

God may have used a variety of means to inspire the human authors of the Bible, but He determined that the final result was His own supreme authorship.

Second Timothy 3:16-17 also tells us something else. Because all Scripture is authored by God, all Scripture has authority over us. This is implicitly evident in the acknowledgment that through the Bible the sovereign God of the universe is declaring and commanding. But it is explicitly evident in the way Paul tells Timothy that the Word of God contains all that we need to be "complete" and "equipped for every good work."

The words "complete" and "every" mean there is nothing necessary for us to know that the Bible lacks to show. And since the Bible's help for us in these areas is comprehensive and exclusive, it is therefore authoritative. We should neither need nor want to look outside of the Bible to find out what God deems as "need to know" knowledge. And because the Bible is authoritative in this way, we don't need experiential wisdom to authenticate it or supplement it.



In what ways might Christians be tempted to supplement the Bible's authority with something else? How can we demonstrate our belief that the Bible is sufficient to guide our lives?

In recent years, we've seen a number of books chronicling near-death experiences and visits to heaven and back. Depending on your perspective, these recollections are delightfully encouraging or dubious and discard-worthy.

But we can observe in the popularity of "visiting heaven books" a troubling sentiment about the Bible. Setting aside for the moment whether the stories in the book actually happened and the extra-biblical innovation some of them reveal (people who go to heaven get wings, according to some), it appears that for many Christians the book "proves" the truth of the Scriptures. "See?" many say, "the Bible is true after all! This person went to heaven and back."

But we don't need people outside the Bible to tell us that. The words inside the Bible tell us that quite plainly. Similarly, the excitement generated by these books, as if they somehow authenticate the Christian worldview and the narrative of the gospel, can reveal a lack of confidence in the Bible itself, which is authenticated and authoritative all on its own.

The Bible doesn't need our fantastic experiences to verify it. It is the very Word of God from the very breath of God.

One complication we often miss in the modern fantastic tales of heavenly adventure is that the hero tends to be the teller of the story. It is not always wrong to celebrate human achievement, of course, but as it pertains to spiritual things, it is clear that the hero of the Bible's story is not man but God Himself. God is the major Actor in the grand, biblical epic. Even the mightiest and cleverest of men in the Bible are revealed to be sinful, broken servants to our glorious God. And everything God reveals in the Bible is meant to amplify His own glory.

This means that while the Bible is a message *for* us, it is ultimately a message *about* God. All that God does in the great history of redemption He does chiefly for His own renown.



Do you agree with the statement "In all God does, His first aim is to glorify Himself"? Why or why not? What are some ways that God's glorifying Himself is a benefit to us?

## 2. God clearly reveals His expectations for humanity (Ps. 19:7-11).

In the general revelation of creation, we can discern God's existence and the shape of some of His attributes. These leave us without excuse in our responsibility to seek God and obey Him. But even though we see the imprint of the gospel in general revelation, we do not receive His specific word to us regarding what He expects from His relationship with man. In fact, while general revelation reveals there is a God to know, special revelation reveals that God *wants* to be known personally.

In our last session on general revelation, we surveyed Psalm 19:1-6 and discovered that "the heavens declare the glory of God," that creation reveals that God is speaking. Continuing on in verses 7-11, we see what David indicates God is actually saying in special revelation.

*<sup>7</sup> The instruction of the LORD is perfect,  
renewing one's life;*

*the testimony of the LORD is trustworthy,  
making the inexperienced wise.*

*<sup>8</sup> The precepts of the LORD are right,  
making the heart glad;*

*the command of the LORD is radiant,  
making the eyes light up.*

*<sup>9</sup> The fear of the LORD is pure,  
enduring forever;*

*the ordinances of the LORD are reliable  
and altogether righteous.*

*<sup>10</sup> They are more desirable than gold—*

• The consummation of all things is that God might be praised (Rev. 21:23)...

The Bible screams it from every hilltop and rooftop and into every crook and crevice! The glory of God is God's vision and his plan for seeing it fulfilled. Habakkuk 2:14 promises that "the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea." The supremacy of God's glory is everywhere in the Bible because God's plan is for it to be supreme everywhere in the world.<sup>2</sup>

## Voices from Church History

"Each sacred writer was by God specially formed, endowed, educated, providentially conditioned, and then supplied with knowledge naturally, supernaturally, or spiritually conveyed, so that he, and he alone, could, and freely would, produce his allotted part."<sup>3</sup>

—Archibald A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield (19<sup>th</sup> century)

*than an abundance of pure gold;  
and sweeter than honey,  
which comes from the honeycomb.*

*<sup>11</sup> In addition, Your servant is warned by them;  
there is great reward in keeping them.*

**Because God is the Author of Scripture, we can be sure that it is:**

1. Inerrant—In all that it affirms and denies, it is without error.
2. Infallible—It is entirely trustworthy and reliable.
3. Sufficient—It tells us all that God has decided we ought to know.
4. Powerful—The words of the Bible create order and save lives.
5. Perspicuous—On matters of eternal life or death importance, it is abundantly clear and easy to comprehend.

Just like any author wants to be interpreted correctly, God expects His people to desire His Word and to properly interpret it by putting into practice all He commands. In Psalm 19:7-11, David reminds us of what we learn in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, namely, that God’s special revelation is perfect and trustworthy. Where Paul tells Timothy that Scripture makes God’s children complete and equipped, David sums it up by saying that Scripture makes God’s children wise.

We do not worship the deist’s god, who leaves clues about himself scattered about the universe but then goes hands-off and leaves us to our own deductive devices. No, we worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. We worship the God who interrupts us when we’re trying to mind our own business, and He tells us His name, His plan, and His complete set of instructions on what to do with them. The great I AM is not content to be discerned; He wants to be known.

God does not want us to fumble around in the shadows, trying to figure out the meaning of life. He tells us where we stand in relation to Him (sinners deserving wrath), how we got there (through Adam’s sin, which we both inherit and embrace), and best of all, how we get out of it into a right standing with Him (through Christ’s sinlessness, culminating in His sacrificial death and glorious resurrection). Thanks be to God that He does not expect us to piece these expectations together solely through the changing of the seasons or the pervasive injustice in the world or the metamorphosis of a butterfly! He tells us straight out.

But David goes further. He not only speaks of the reality of God’s expectations in His declarations, he speaks of the *quality* of these expectations. God’s revelation is good for “renewing one’s life” (v. 7), “making the heart glad” (v. 8), and “making the eyes light up.” They are “more desirable than gold” and “sweeter than honey” (v. 10).



In what ways can God’s instructions make the heart glad? In what ways can God’s commandments make our eyes light up?

A popular allegory often used to illustrate how mankind “knows” things is Plato’s cave. Plato reasoned that life for us is like living in a cave for one’s whole life, mistaking the shadows on the wall cast by a fire as reality. We simply grasp at and scrutinize the forms of reality (the shadows), remaining largely blind to true reality (the fire and life outside

the cave). This sounds somewhat similar to Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see indistinctly, as in a mirror..."

Without the special revelation of Scripture, then, we are like the "inexperienced" of Psalm 19:7 fumbling about in Plato's cave. We see the shadows in general revelation, which are proof enough of a greater reality. But thanks to God's special revelation, we are turned to the fire and our "eyes light up." We are moved from indistinct vision to the radiance of God's commandment, which ultimately reveals to us the Light of the world, Jesus Christ.



Reread Psalm 19:11. How is there great reward in keeping God's commandments? How does your answer to the above question relate to the truth that we are saved by faith, not by works (Eph. 2:8-9)?

### 3. God reveals His plan for redeeming the world and bringing glory to Christ (Luke 24:25-27).

Many of us are not used to thinking of God's commandments—and Scripture in general—as "sweeter than honey," something that is delicious. Even if we can reckon with the idea of loving God's law, we may have trouble figuring out how not to think of it in the context of a religious duty or a "chore chart" (something followed but not particularly enjoyed in my home!). But the Psalms speak of God's children delighting in God's law. How in the world do we get to that perspective?

The way we find God's commands delightful and His instruction tasty like honey is by moving beyond what God requires of us and seeing what He has accomplished Himself. As we learned before, God Himself is the Hero of God's story, and as it pertains to His desire to be known, He Himself bridges the communication gap we are unable to span ourselves. He does this first by speaking into the shadows of general revelation in the special revelation of Scripture. He does this savingly by speaking in the special revelation of Scripture the great announcement of the gospel of Jesus.

The point of special revelation, then, is to reveal the gospel. God's written Word points to Jesus, the Living Word. Don't take my word for it, however. Listen to Jesus Himself:

*<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How unwise and slow you are to believe in your hearts all that the prophets have spoken!" <sup>26</sup> Didn't the Messiah have to suffer these things and enter into His glory?" <sup>27</sup> Then beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted for them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.*



### Voices from Church History

"The Word of God is always alive, fresh, and pertinent; it addresses itself to our present hour."<sup>4</sup>

—W. A. Criswell  
(1909-2002)



### Further Commentary

The truth is, despite all the evidence of God's presence and His attributes, despite the heavens 24/7 pouring out speech of His glory, "there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God" (Rom. 3:11). God gives us His commands, tells us what He expects from us—obedience to Him despite our sin—and try as we may, we cannot measure up. Only God measures up to God. So before time began, God formulated His plan. The story God tells in the special revelation of Scripture is not just about His holiness and our sinfulness but about how God restores this broken relationship between us for His own glory and our eternal delight.

## Wrong Ways of Reading the Bible

Because the point of the special revelation of the Bible is to illuminate God's plan for redemption of the world and to glorify Christ, this means there are ways we ought not to read the Bible.

Here are some bad ways of reading the Scriptures:

- Treating its stories as morality tales, where we rush to apply the chronicles of God's people to ourselves as if we were the heroes in God's story of redemption, not Jesus.
- Taking parts of the Bible out of their narrative contexts.
- Reducing the epic story of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a disjointed list of aphorisms or practical tips.
- Treating the Bible like it is *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, or worse, a bag of fortune cookies.

Also, because the point of the Bible is to glorify Jesus and to capture our hearts in worship of Him, we need to be careful we don't worship the Bible itself. We are to honor God's Word, trust God's Word, treasure God's Word, and believe God's Word, but we are called to worship God. This means the only Word we ought to worship is Jesus the Word.

After Jesus was raised from the dead, He caught up with a couple of disciples making a trek to Emmaus. He sidled up alongside them and preached the greatest Christ-centered, expository sermon from the Old Testament ever preached in the history of the world. "The point of all that," Jesus essentially said, pointing to the varied wonders of what we call the Old Testament, "is Me."

As Jesus claimed implicitly and explicitly throughout His earthly ministry that He is the true Messiah long awaited by the people of God, He was asserting Himself as the culmination of human history.



Reflecting on Jesus' revelation to His traveling companions in Luke 24:25-27, what might have been some of "the things concerning Himself" He showed them from the Old Testament?

## Reading the Scriptures with Christ at the Center

We can see the light of Christ in the shadow of the "first gospel" in one of the Bible's earliest stories, when God curses the serpent in Genesis 3:15. Here is a foreshadow of the saving cross of Christ, where Jesus' heel was simultaneously struck in crucifixion and He was victorious over sin and death, crushing the head of evil with His pierced feet.

We see the light of Christ in the shadow of the Old Testament's "last gospel," when Malachi 4 predicts the Day of the Lord. Who brings both wrath and redemption? Who is elsewhere referred to as the sun (Rev. 21:23)? Who is said to arrive on this Day of the Lord (Acts 2:17-24; 1 Thess. 5:1-10)? Who alone can do a supernatural work of reconciliation?

The answer is ever and always Jesus. His footprints are throughout the sand of the Old Testament. And the further light of the New Testament helps us see Him most clearly, from His incarnation to His glorification. All of the stories the Bible tells tell the unified story of how God glorifies Himself through the redemption of sinners who are made right with Him through the saving work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

None of this means that the Bible doesn't give us what we call "propositional truth." The Bible is not a story in the same way a novel is a story. It is a story in the sense that throughout all its genres and revelations, the overarching theme or message being communicated is that God saves sinners through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Coming back to Psalm 19 and the delicious honey we find in God's commands, knowing the "big story" running through and connecting all the words of the Bible, we can see how we might move from duty to delight. When we receive the illumination of Jesus Christ, our eyes light up with the grace of God found in Him who is the radiance of the Father's glory (Heb. 1:3). When we receive Jesus as the Bread of life, we will taste and see that God is good. And when we are set free from our sins and the

curse of the law's demands, we are finally free to obey God with joy and gratitude, delighting in His law rather than buckling under its weight.

Psalm 19:11 tells us there is "great reward" in keeping God's commands. We can't do that. But Jesus can and did. And there is great reward in Christ's righteousness for all who will repent of their sin, trust in His work, and thereby receive His goodness credited to their account.

## Conclusion

Through His Word, God specifies His intentions for humanity and His expectations of us. He shows us how the glory of Christ is the purpose of world history. We are to respond to God's special revelation by aligning ourselves with God's expressed will.

*What part of your life is working counter to God's intentions?*

*Does God's voice have a presence in your life? Are you instructed, rebuked, and corrected by the Word?*

*Is it possible to revere the Word and not read it? How might one discipline oneself to spend unhurried time in God's Word?*

## Hymn of Response

*"Break Thou the bread of life, Dear Lord, to me,  
As Thou didst break the loaves Beside the sea;  
Beyond the sacred page I seek Thee, Lord;  
My spirit pants for Thee, O living Word.  
Bless Thou the truth, dear Lord, To me, to me,  
As Thou didst bless the bread By Galilee;  
Then shall all bondage cease, All fetters fall;  
And I shall find my peace, My all in all.  
Thou art the bread of life, O Lord, to me,  
Thy holy Word the truth That saveth me;  
Give me to eat and live With Thee above;  
Teach me to love Thy truth, For Thou art love.  
O send Thy Spirit, Lord, Now unto me,  
That He may touch mine eyes, And make me see:  
Show me the truth concealed Within Thy Word,  
And in Thy Book revealed I see Thee, Lord."  
—Mary A. Lathbury and Alexander Groves*

## Voices from Church History

"The Old Testament sounds the messianic hope. The Gospels record Christ's incarnation; Acts relates his continuing work through the Holy Spirit; the Epistles interpret his person and work; Revelation proclaims his final triumph and glory."<sup>5</sup>

—Herschel H. Hobbs (1907-1995)

## Resources to help you study the Bible in a more gospel-centered way:

*How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart

*For the Love of God*, two volumes by D. A. Carson

*The Jesus Storybook Bible* by Sally Lloyd-Jones

*Read the Bible for Life* by George Guthrie

## References

1. Benjamin B. Warfield, *Revelation and Inspiration*, vol. 1 in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 3-36.
2. Matt Chandler and Jared Wilson, *The Explicit Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 34-35.
3. A. A. Hodge and Benjamin B. Warfield, "Inspiration" in *The Christian Treasury* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, & Co., 1881), 267.
4. W. A. Criswell, *Great Doctrines of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 76-77, quoted in "W. A. Criswell" by Paige Patterson in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, eds. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 241.
5. Herschel H. Hobbs, *The Baptist Faith and Message* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1971), 39.

## Additional Resources

# God Is Not Mute

### Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.

### Study Material

- “Special Revelation”—Chapter 3 by David S. Dockery and David P. Nelson from *A Theology for the Church*, edited by Daniel L. Akin
- “Introduction”—From *God’s Big Picture* by Vaughan Roberts
- “Billy Graham and the Rest of the Los Angeles Story”—Blog post by Collin Hansen; find a link to this blog post at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)
- “Our English Bible”—Article by William Warren on *Biblical Illustrator Plus* (CD-ROM); order at [www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator](http://www.lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator)

### Sermon Podcasts

Mark Dever: “Understanding the Storyline of the Bible”—Capitol Hill Baptist Church

W. A. Criswell: “The Witness of the Word to Itself”—First Baptist Church, Dallas

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)

## Tip of the Week

### A Missional Attitude

A small group or Sunday School class seeking to be missional and an international missionary have something in common: an assignment to reach a “people group.” What people group is the mission of your class? Senior adult men? Empty-nest married couples? Forty-something single adults? Nearly-weds and newlyweds? Parents? College students? High school boys? Middle school girls? Preteens? First through third graders? Preschoolers? Babies? A group with a missionary mentality thinks like a missionary, asking the question, “What can we do to serve and reach those in our community?” What can you do to help your class have an attitude...a missional attitude?

# In God We Trust?

*God's Perfect Word and His Imperfect People*

## Summary and Goal

In previous weeks we learned that God speaks to us through general revelation and special revelation. In this lesson we see how our fallen nature came from and results in mishandling God's special revelation—His Word. Our goal is to believe the trustworthiness of God and His Word so that we might grow in worship and obedience through learning to handle God's Word faithfully.

### ***Steps to Prepare***

- 1. Read the main passage for this week's lesson:**
  - Genesis 3:1-6
- 2. Read Genesis 1–2 as background material that is relevant to this lesson.**
- 3. Study the Expanded Lesson Content (pp. 46-51).**
  - Determine what elements of this lesson are most applicable to your particular group.
  - Consider ways to personalize the lesson content for you and your class.
- 4. Review the Teaching Plan (pp. 44-45).**
  - Refine the lesson plan based on your group's particular needs.
  - Adjust the plan if necessary.
- 5. Pray for the Lord's guidance as you lead your group through this material.**

### ***Lesson Outline***

- 1. God's Word is trustworthy, but we question it (Gen. 3:1-2).**
- 2. God's Word is true, but we belittle it (Gen. 3:2-5).**
- 3. God's Word is authoritative, but we disobey it (Gen. 3:6).**

## Teaching Plan

# In God We Trust?

## Session 4

### Introduce the Lesson

Present a summary of the provided brief history of the phrase “In God We Trust.” Then facilitate a brief discussion using the questions below (leader p. 46; personal study p. 38):

- ? What do the words “In God We Trust” mean to you? Do those words accurately reflect the way you live? Why or why not?

### Transition

Remind the group of the previous lessons about general and special revelation. Introduce the concept that God’s Word is based upon God’s good character and can therefore be trusted. Announce the summary and goal of the lesson (leader p. 47; personal study pp. 38-39).

### 1. God’s Word is trustworthy, but we question it.

Read Genesis 3:1-2. Use “Further Commentary” if needed (leader p. 47). Emphasize that when we approach God’s Word, we should first ask what it tells us about God (leader p. 47; personal study p. 39). Point out the twisted characteristics of Satan.

- ? What are some examples of how man has taken things that God made “good” and used them for evil purposes? What are some virtues that Satan twists into vices?

Highlight the truth that in questioning God’s Word, we are questioning God Himself: “Did *God* really say?” Use the illustration of the children on the playground (leader p. 48; personal study p. 40).

- ? What are some reasons people deny the truth that God inspired the Scriptures? Is it possible that some of us deny God’s authorship of Scripture because we do not want Scripture to have authority in our lives?

### 2. God’s Word is true, but we belittle it.

As you read Genesis 3:2-5, encourage your group to observe how Satan subtracts and Eve adds to God’s Word. Describe how both subtracting from

### ? For Further Discussion

What are some examples of things that have hindered your ability to hear what God is saying to you through His Word? Have you ever experienced a time when you found yourself questioning God’s Word? Share your experience.

### ? For Further Discussion

Give an example of a time in your life when you viewed God’s prohibition of something as unfair but later came to understand He was protecting you for your good.

and adding to God's Word places us in the dangerous seat of judgment over God's Word (leader p. 50; personal study p. 41).

- ❓ In what ways has our culture's obsession with "being true to ourselves" or "being independent" affected our view of God and His Word?

Using the example of debate Web sites, make the point that truth is not decided by public opinion but revealed by Almighty God (leader p. 50; personal study p. 42).

- ❓ How might both public opinion and personal preference negatively shape your understanding of God and His Word?
- ❓ In what way is questioning God's Word different from asking questions of God's Word?

### **3. God's Word is authoritative, but we disobey it.**

Read Genesis 3:6. Emphasize how the way we approach God's Word affects our behavioral response (leader p. 51; personal study p. 43).

Emphasize the truth that worship is at stake in how we approach the Word of God. How we handle and respond to God's Word shows whom we worship.

- ❓ What are some examples of times in your life when you were forced to answer the question "Did God really say?" How did you respond to the temptation to distrust God?

### **Conclusion**

Point to Jesus as the One who undoes the sin of Adam by trusting in God's Word in our place. Consider asking the following reflection questions (personal study p. 43).

*Whom are you trusting in today? Self? Public opinion? Jesus?*

*How does the fall into sin affect the mission that God tasked Adam and Eve with? How does our sin keep us as Christians from carrying out the responsibilities God has entrusted to us?*

*How do you plan to apply what you have learned in your daily approach to God's Word?*

## Expanded Lesson Content

# In God We Trust?

## Session 4




### Opening Illustration and Discussion Starter

“In God We Trust.” We see these words on American currency. We hear these words in patriotic songs such as “The Star-Spangled Banner.” The phrase was adopted as the national motto of the United States of America in 1956.

Trust is a serious matter. America’s national motto

implies both that we are dependent and that God is trustworthy. But do we really trust God?

In the fall of 2008, the unthinkable happened: the “almighty dollar” (as many have dubbed it) was weakened through a series of economic trends that brought the U.S. economy to the brink of disaster. Ironically, as the value of the dollar shrunk, it became apparent that many people had been trusting in *it* rather than God. The motto turned out to be mere words with very little truth behind them.

-  What do the words “In God We Trust” mean to you? Do those words accurately reflect the way you live? Why or why not?

The issue of trust goes to the heart of what it means to be human. As we have seen in previous lessons, God has revealed Himself through what He has created as well as through His Word. God is not silent. He has spoken to us and recorded His words in the Bible. But are we listening? And when we encounter His Word, do we really trust Him?

The Bible teaches that God spoke into being all that exists. The pinnacle of creation is mankind—made in His own image (Gen. 1:27). Then God proclaimed all that He created to be “very good” (v. 31), thus affirming that all of creation was fulfilling His intended purposes.

### Voices from Church History

“The Bible is the inevitable outcome of God’s continuous speech. It is the infallible declaration of His mind for us put into our familiar human words.”<sup>1</sup>

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)

Because God created by His words and because all that He created was “very good,” we know that *God’s words are the source of all that is good. Therefore, God’s words can and must be trusted.* Initially, God’s image-bearers, Adam and Eve, enjoyed a relationship with God as obedient worshipers trusting His good words. “In God We Trust” would have been an appropriate motto for those early days in the garden of Eden.

In this lesson we see how our fallen nature came from and results in mishandling God’s special revelation—His Word. Our goal is to believe the trustworthiness of God and His Word so that we might grow in worship and obedience through learning to handle God’s Word faithfully.

So let’s look at Genesis 3:1-6 and see how Adam and Eve’s misdirected worship was rooted in the way they handled God’s spoken word. By looking at the actions of Adam and Eve, we can see our own propensity to rebel against God’s written Word by putting our trust in ourselves rather than in God. Can we really say that we trust, worship, and obey God when we question, belittle, and disobey God’s Word?

## 1. God’s Word is trustworthy, but we question it (Gen. 3:1-2).

<sup>1</sup> *Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You can’t eat from any tree in the garden?’”*

<sup>2</sup> *The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden.”*

Early in the biblical narrative, we find Adam and Eve facing temptation from a crafty and deceitful serpent in the garden of Eden. Many people have missed the point of this historical encounter by focusing on where the serpent came from, what type of fruit he was offering, and whose fault the whole debacle really was. While those questions may be interesting, they are not ones that God deemed crucial to our fulfilling our purpose of living as worshipers in obedience to His Word.

Whenever we approach Scripture, our primary question should be “What does this text say about God?” This particular passage makes clear that the serpent was among the creatures that God made. We know from Genesis 1–2 that God made everything “good,” meaning that everything originally functioned according to His purposes.

But this serpent entered the garden in order to disrupt the peace of God’s creation. At this point, the Bible does not tell us where the serpent came from or who he is. What we do know is that the serpent is crafty. Theologian D. A. Carson notes that the word “crafty” entails “sneakiness...[or] someone who is wise and prudent.” Part of the “goodness” God bestowed on the being later identified as Satan (literally, “the accuser”) is wisdom or prudence. Carson expands: “The serpent,



### Voices from Church History

“Our thought habits [regarding God’s Word] are those of the scientist, not those of the worshipper. We are more likely to explain than to adore.”<sup>2</sup>

—A. W. Tozer (1897-1963)



### Further Commentary

“Nowhere are we told why Satan became evil or why the snake should represent him in the Garden of Eden. However, the Bible does not allow a dualism of good and evil in which the forces of good have been eternally in conflict with the forces of evil...it is important to recognize that if God is the creator of everything, he is also the source of all truth. There is no truth apart from his truth, which he communicates to us by his Word. God is the final and absolute authority and, since he has chosen to communicate by his Word, his Word has absolute and final authority. The religious question has great potential for evil because it casts doubt on the authority of God’s Word.”<sup>3</sup>

—Graeme Goldsworthy

Satan, was crowned with more prudence than all the other creatures, but in his rebelling the prudence became craftiness; the very same virtue that was such a strength became twisted into a vice.”<sup>4</sup>



What are some examples of how man has taken things that God made “good” and used them for evil purposes? What are some virtues that Satan twists into vices?

The serpent displayed his twisted wisdom by subtly attacking God’s word and maligning God’s character. The serpent spoke: “Did God really say?” The irony of this scene is heavy. The Bible began with God speaking all things into existence—including the serpent. And now the serpent that was created by the word of God has questioned the authority of the One whose word created him! With this subtle question, he usurped the clearly communicated word of God.

“Did *God* really say?” the serpent asked. Some people do not obey God’s Word because they do not believe it to be *God’s* Word. They reject the Word because they see no authority behind it.

Imagine this scene. A group of schoolchildren are enjoying recess time on the playground. The teacher sits quietly on the bench near the swing set. When it’s time to go back to class, she tells one of the students to call the others inside. If the children are having a wonderful time, some of them will question the source of their classmate’s message. “Who said we have to go in now?” they ask. “The teacher said so!” comes the reply. “Did the teacher really say we have to leave now? How do we know?” they persist. Their desire to stay on the playground will cause them to question the authority of the messenger.

In a similar manner, the serpent planted a seed of doubt in Eve’s mind regarding the source of authority: “Did *God* really say that?” He knew that if she doubted the source of the command, she would disregard it.



What are some reasons people deny the truth that God inspired the Scriptures? Is it possible that some of us deny God’s authorship of Scripture because we do not want Scripture to have authority in our lives?

“Did God really say?” the serpent asked. Eve responded rightly: “YES! He did.” In Genesis 2:16-17, God explicitly commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent’s question undermined the holy authority of God and maligned the loving character of God.

God’s word had not restricted Adam and Eve uncaringly; rather, His command offered amazingly abundant choices. In the garden, the man and woman had endless opportunities for obeying God by eating the fruit from any of the other trees. There was only one solitary possibility

for disobedience. But it was at the point of the restriction that the serpent made his crafty attack. Eve's response was at least initially hopeful, for she recognized the serpent's subtle error and corrected him. She also maintained the source of the command as being from God. However, in her correction we learn something about ourselves.

## 2. God's Word is true, but we belittle it (Gen. 3:2-5).

<sup>2</sup> *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. <sup>3</sup> But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'*"

<sup>4</sup> *"No! You will not die," the serpent said to the woman. <sup>5</sup> "In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*

As this conversation unfolded, Eve's own doubts emerged in the form of her adding a harsh exaggeration to God's word: "But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, God said, 'You must not eat it *or touch it*, or you will die'" (v. 3). Eve belittled God's word by adding to it. Her addition to the word of God misrepresented God as a harsh taskmaster.

Some skeptics belittle God's Word by *subtracting* from it. The third president of the United States of America, Thomas Jefferson, created his own "Bible." He described the process: "We must reduce our volume to the simple evangelists, select, even from them, the very words only of Jesus...I have performed this operation for my own use, by cutting verse by verse out of the printed book, and arranging the matter...as diamonds in a dunghill."<sup>5</sup>

Others reduce God's Word by *adding* to it. Joseph Smith, the founder of Mormonism, added to God's Word by claiming that an angel had given him *The Book of Mormon*.

These are extreme examples, but the error of both is the same as that of Eve. Her posture toward the word of God demonstrated her desire for independence. D. A. Carson writes: "A lot of people think that 'sin' is: just breaking a rule. What is at stake here is something deeper, bigger, sadder, uglier, more heinous. It is a revolution. It makes me god and thus de-gods God."<sup>6</sup>



In what ways has our culture's obsession with "being true to ourselves" or "being independent" affected our view of God and His Word?

When Satan can't get us to undermine God's Word through outright unbelief, he will try to get us to undermine it through misplaced trust.

## Voices from Church History

"God gives the man and the woman all creation to enjoy, with but one exception—everything they have and see is from Him—and even the one prohibition is explained by means of the penalty attached to it. But Satan suggests that God is essentially prohibitive, that He is not good, that He does not wish the very best of all worlds for His creatures."<sup>7</sup>

—James Montgomery Boice (1938-2000)

## Further Commentary

“Eating the forbidden fruit did indeed mean that the humans came to know good and evil (Gen. 3:22). But the process by which they achieved that involved a rebellion against truth and its source. Instead of knowing good and evil by rejecting evil and remaining good, they chose rather to reject good and become evil... [Satan] does not suggest that the humans transfer their allegiance from God to himself, but only that they themselves should consider and evaluate God’s claim to truth.”<sup>8</sup>

—Graeme Goldsworthy

Leonardo da Vinci once said: “The greatest deception men suffer is from their own opinions.”

“The true hypocrite is the one who ceases to perceive his deception, the one who lies with sincerity.”<sup>9</sup>



—André Gide

That’s why Eve began to speak authoritative words herself—words that painted God in a negative light. From this account we learn that one of the great dangers we face when handling the Word of God is the temptation to place ourselves in the seat of authority over it.

The encounter between the serpent and Eve continued as the serpent then openly defied God’s word: “No! You will not die,” the serpent said to the woman. “In fact, God knows that when you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (vv. 4-5).

Satan has now shown his cards. What started as subtle skepticism has become outright rebellion. Satan has implied that God is a liar. Furthermore, he has undermined the character of God by leading Adam and Eve to believe that God was withholding goodness from them.

Our postmodern infatuation with entertainment and social media highlights our desire to make our own truth claims. Facebook has the “Like” button. Twitter has a “Retweet” button. Both are geared toward receiving the praise of men through their affirmation of one’s fleeting expression—whether truthful or not. Today there is even a site that uses public opinion through voting to settle personal disputes about truth claims. The site boasts, “Have a disagreement with someone? Settle it here!” “Everything’s Debatable.” “Just upload your 30 second argument and let the viewers decide who’s right.” Just imagine for a moment how crazy things might be if God’s Word came to us with this kind of Web site as its medium! But then again, whenever we allow either personal preference or public opinion to shape our understanding of truth, we are standing in judgment over God in much the same way.

-  How might both public opinion and personal preference negatively shape your understanding of God and His Word?
-  In what way is questioning God’s Word different from asking questions of God’s Word?

### 3. God’s Word is authoritative, but we disobey it (Gen. 3:6).

*<sup>6</sup> Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

God had spoken very plainly to Adam in Genesis 2:17 regarding this prohibited tree. Often men will begin to play the “blame game”—“It was Eve’s fault!” We see this unfold in Genesis 3:12. Adam blamed Eve, and in some sense he also blamed God: “The woman *You* gave to be with me...” In 1 Timothy 2:14, it seems that Paul affirmed that it was Eve who was deceived. But Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 11:3

that man is the head, or steward, over the woman. God had given the commandment to Adam—*before* Eve was taken from his side. It was Adam’s responsibility to teach and protect Eve. But we find Adam standing nearby—silent and complicit.

The point of this story is not about the type of fruit, as if the fruit juices would poison the minds of Adam and Eve. No, the poison of sin coursed through their veins before the fruit entered their mouths. “It was not the nature of the tree that made it dangerous, the bearer of covenant curse and death, but what it stood for: obedience to the word of God.”<sup>10</sup>

We know that the serpent, Adam, and Eve all transgressed God’s command. Each of them was guilty of disobeying God’s word, as are we. And every time we choose to disobey, we are proclaiming to God that we are wiser than He is. We are “crafty” and we deserve condemnation.

What happened in the garden is replayed in our own lives every single day. Often when we are tempted, we wonder, *Did God really say?* Our answer to that question is illustrative of whom we really trust and whom we really worship. When Adam and Eve questioned, belittled, and disobeyed God’s word, they went from being awe-struck worshipers of God to being brazen idolaters worshiping themselves.

Worship is at stake in how we approach the Word of God. How we handle and respond to God’s Word will show whom we worship.



What are some examples of times in your life when you were forced to answer the question “Did God really say?” How did you respond to the temptation to distrust God?

## Conclusion

There is only one person who lived a life that demonstrated without reservation the truth of this statement: “In God I trust.” He too was put to the test like Adam and Eve.

God placed Adam into a lush garden with endless possibilities to worship and obey and only one prohibition. God drove Jesus into the wilderness where He had no food, water, or shelter. And there Jesus came face to face with that crafty serpent who used the same game plan—to get Jesus to question, belittle, and disobey God’s Word.

How did Jesus respond? By affirming His trust in God’s Word. By uplifting the true intent of God’s Word. By obeying God’s Word. There in the wilderness, Jesus succeeded where Adam and Eve had failed. Jesus perfectly fulfilled God’s purpose *for us*—He worshiped and obeyed the Father by trusting His Word. And when Jesus laid down His life as an atoning sacrifice for us on the cross, His perfect worship and obedience were made available to us.

## References

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2008), 54.
2. *Ibid.*, 52.
3. Graeme Goldsworthy, *According to Plan* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 102-103.
4. Carson, *The God Who Is There*, 30-31.
5. Thomas Jefferson, *The Jefferson Bible* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1904), 17.
6. Carson, *The God Who Is There*, 33.
7. James Montgomery Boice, *Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 135.
8. Goldsworthy, *According to Plan*, 104.
9. André Gide, *The Counterfeiters*, trans. Dorothy Bussy (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 427.
10. Michael D. Williams, *Far as the Curse Is Found* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 67.

## Additional Resources

# In God We Trust?

### Devotional Material

Encourage your group to read the three devotional readings included in the personal study guide.

### Study Material

- “The Fall”—Chapter 10 from *According to Plan* by Graeme Goldsworthy
- “The God Who Does Not Wipe Out Rebels”—Chapter 2 from *The God Who Is There* by D. A. Carson
- “The Promise of a King and a Kingdom”—Chapter 4 from *From Creation to New Creation: Making Sense of the Whole Bible Story* by Tim Chester

### Sermon Podcasts

David Landrith: “The Gospel According to Genesis”—  
Long Hollow Baptist Church

Ben Mandrell: “The Story: The God Who Does Not Give Up on Us”—  
Englewood Baptist Church

Find links to these at [gospelproject.com/additionalresources](http://gospelproject.com/additionalresources)

## Tip of the Week

### Staying Fresh as a Teacher

If we’re going to teach well, we must continue to learn well. If we fail to continue to learn, our message will become stagnate and old. When we stop learning, we stop growing, and when we stop growing, we stop teaching in a way that changes lives. We teach what we learn. If you want to be a great teacher—a transformational teacher—think of yourself as a learner first. Read something that challenges you. Try to read at least one book a month. Make it a habit of regularly reading a newspaper (all sections) from a major city (the Internet makes this so much easier than it was 30 years ago). Attend a seminar on a subject you have interest in but have not mastered. Keep learning so you can keep teaching well.

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### Unit 1: The God Who Speaks

**Trevin Wax** is managing editor for *The Gospel Project* and the author of *Counterfeit Gospels* (Moody) and *Holy Subversion* (Crossway). He has served in pastoral roles in churches in the United States and Romania. He and his wife, Corina, reside in Middle Tennessee with their two children.

**Jared Wilson** is pastor of Middletown Springs Community Church and the author of *Gospel Wakefulness* (Crossway), *Seven Daily Sins*, and *Abide* (both LifeWay's Threads). He and his wife, Becky, reside in Vermont with their two children.

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### Unit 2: Our Fallen Response to God's Word

**George Robinson** is assistant professor of evangelism and missions at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and the author of *Striking the Match*. He has served as a church planter in Pakistan and as a director for church planting equipping in numerous countries. He and his wife, Catherine, reside in Wake Forest, NC, with their three children.

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### Unit 3: Christ's Perfect Response to God's Word

**Juan Sanchez** is pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, TX, where he lives with his wife, Jeanine, and their five daughters. Juan has served local churches in Florida, Georgia, and Indiana.

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### Unit 4: Our Redeemed Response to God's Word

**Christian George** earned his PhD from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, where he studied his favorite Baptist hero, Charles Spurgeon. He is the author of *Sex, Sushi, & Salvation*, *Godology*, and *Sacred Travels* and currently serves as assistant professor of biblical and theological studies at Oklahoma Baptist University. Christian enjoys preaching, teaching, leading youth camps, and challenging his students to ping-pong tournaments. You can visit him online at [www.restlesspilgrim.com](http://www.restlesspilgrim.com).

**1. DEEP, BUT NOT DRY.**

We believe it's best to expect a lot out of those who attend a small group or Sunday School class. We don't need to go only as deep as the least knowledgeable person in the group. When a child is still on baby food, a family doesn't stop eating steak and potatoes. As leaders, we want to provide a feast and let people draw the sustenance they need. We may have to "cut up the meat" for new believers and make sure the truth is accessible. But the key is to put the biblical ingredients together and provide the meal. The important thing is that everyone has been fed and is sufficiently nourished when we finish.

**2. CHRIST-CENTERED.**

We don't want a week to go by without Jesus being present in our lessons. God is the primary Actor in the grand narrative of Scripture, and the gospel of Jesus Christ is the climax of this story. We hope to approach the Old Testament in a way that follows the model of Jesus on the road to Emmaus: all the Scriptures testify to Christ. We will approach New Testament ethics and commands by seeing them as implications that flow from the gospel announcement of Christ crucified and raised.

**3. STORY-FOCUSED.**

Being Christ-centered naturally brings our focus to the overarching story that the Bible tells in four parts: Creation / Fall / Redemption / Restoration. By focusing on the grand narrative of Scripture, we hope that this curriculum will help us connect the dots and think as Christians formed by the great story that tells the truth about our world. We also believe this approach will provide a hope-filled outlook on our world because of the future God has promised.

**4. MISSION-DRIVEN.**

Telling the story of the Bible is impossible without leading to mission, as the gospel reveals the heart of our missionary God and His desire to save people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. The goal is not to fill our heads with theological truth but to fuel our hearts with passion to join God on His mission to bring people to Himself. Keeping a focus on how the gospel leads us to mission is a crucial aspect of how we apply the Bible to our lives.

**GOAL**

To provide biblical theology within a systematic framework over the course of three years through frequent retellings of the overarching story line of Scripture (in two formats: God-Man-Christ-Response / Creation-Fall-Redemption-Restoration).

**PLAN OVERVIEW****Year 1*****Fall 2012***

The God Who Speaks (Doctrine of Revelation Through the Gospel Grid)

**Coming Next Quarter: *Winter 2012-13***

God's Story (Part 1): The Old Testament (Christ-Centered Bible Overview)

***Spring 2013***

God's Story (Part 2): The New Testament (Christ-Centered Bible Overview)

***Summer 2013***

The God Who Is (Doctrine of God Viewed Through His Triune Work for Us)

**Year 2*****Fall 2013***

Living in Light of God's Story (Doctrine of Humanity Through the Gospel Grid)

***Winter 2013-14***

Making Your Case (Worldview and Apologetics)

***Spring 2014***

Atonement Thread (Tracing the Bible's Story Through the Lens of Atonement)

***Summer 2014***

God's Way (A Journey Through the Ten Commandments)

**Year 3*****Fall 2014***

The Story of God's Kingdom (Bible Overview Through the Lens of Kingdom)

***Winter 2014-15***

Bowing Before the Idol-Conqueror (Sin and Salvation Through the Gospel Grid)

***Spring 2015***

On Mission with and for Our Missionary God (Doctrine of Church)

***Summer 2015***

Spiritual Disciplines for the Gospel-Centered Life