

“Put a God Word In”

John 1:1-18

Series: Cliff Notes on the Bible Week 1. Introduction

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I am married to a professor. In fact, Lisa is a Full Professor of Physical Therapy at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia. I am incredibly proud of her. She worked long and hard to achieve this goal which she deeply believes is a calling from God. Her students tell her what I always knew: that she is an exceptional teacher. One thing I've learned is how hard it is to get tenure. Tenure is that coveted state in which a teacher or professor is guaranteed a position on staff. To get Tenure you must “Publish or Perish.” As a sign of how impossible it is to achieve tenure, Lisa once shared with me the top Reasons why God cannot get tenure at her University.

- His office hours were infrequent and usually held on a mountaintop.
- It may be true that he created the world, but what has he done since then?
- The scientific community has had a hard time replicating his results.
- He never applied to the Ethics Board for permission to use human subjects.
- He had his Son teach the class.
- Although there were only ten requirements, his students failed his tests.
- He only had one major publication.

These days, God has a hard time getting into Universities. That's ironic when you consider Harvard, Yale and Princeton were originally founded by ministers for the purpose of training ministers to preach and teach the Word of God. I know God doesn't hold it against them. There is, however, a surprising increase in Bible reading. The Barna Research Group, which surveys trends about faith and Christianity, reports weekly Bible reading among U.S. adults has climbed to 42 percent, up 12 points since a 15-year low in 2024. It's also amazing that young adults lead the way. Bible reading among Gen Z and Millennials has surged since 2024, with nearly half now engaging Scripture weekly. When I asked some of you what topics you'd like us to cover in sermons the issue which ignited the most questions was the Bible. Here's just a sample:

How much of the Bible is real vs. allegorical?
How true are the stories in the Bible?
Is the Bible the word of God, written by God's hand?
Is the Bible absolute or is there “wobble” room?
Are more books of the Bible buried beneath the Vatican?

During our new series “Cliff Notes” we will take a tour of the whole Bible – from Genesis to Revelation. On Christmas Eve we gave out hundreds of bookmarks listing in order the books of the Bible and, on the other side, Discovery Questions. These questions can be used with every passage of the Bible. They are also a great way to study a chapter in your Growth Group.

Discover H.O.P.E.

Hear from God - Read the passage

Observe

What stands out to you?

What does this tell us about God, Jesus and his plan?

What does this tell us about people?

Put into Practice

How can we live out what God is showing us in this text?

Take time to think about and create a personal "I Will" statement of how you will live out what God is showing you in this passage.

Encourage Others

Who can we share HOPE with by sharing what we learned in this passage?

Now is the best time to get into a Growth Group. Many will be doing this study and the best way to get God's Word into your life is with other disciples.

We will give you a free booklet which covers each of the 66 books. It contains a summary of each book and reflection questions. In your daily Bible reading you'll read the first two chapters of each book of the Bible. On Sundays, we'll look at a passage which represents a major period, theme or turning point in the overall story of Scripture. During the first weeks of the year, we'll explore the Old Testament. In Lent, we review the ministry of Jesus. Following Easter, we'll dive into the New Testament and wrap it all up with Revelation just before June. I encourage you to memorize the order of the books. By the end of this series you will have read a sample of all 66 books. You'll have a firmer grasp on God's Word and be able to dive deeper into Scripture. I will cover some of the questions you asked. But I must make a confession up front: I do not know what's buried beneath the Vatican. For that you'll have to ask his holiness: Dan Brown.

Today we explore: "Where did the Bible come from?" As far as Christians are concerned, the simple answer is God. The Bible is the Word of God. But believers who say this mean widely different things. Let me share two extremes I hope you will avoid.

The Bible is All God and a little bit human. This is usually the position of fundamentalists. Very conservative Christians consider every word in the Bible exactly the way God wants it. Some say He dictated it to the writers. Others claim the Lord worked through their personalities to get it to come out word perfect. So when internal contradictions, conflicts with science or clashes with culture arise, they must be explained away. If even one word is doubted, all of Scripture collapses like a house of cards. The weakness of this view is it turns the Bible into God, or to use a better term, an idol. The Lord never wanted us to worship the Scriptures.

The Bible is All Human and a little bit of God. This is what might be called the liberal position and, unfortunately, it's what's being taught by some at our seminaries. Great leaders, prophets and mystics from Bible times were only a little more inspired than Shakespeare. Some Christians even say, they're no more inspired than Mohammed or Buddha. Sure their writings are worth reading but God is also speaking through nature or other authors or even through you. The weakness of this view is that everything, good or evil, can be the word of God – even his holiness: Dan Brown. This view creates another idol – you. Ultimately, what you worship is whatever you think is right.

How do we avoid drifting toward these two extremes? Should we compromise and say the Bible is half God and half human? No. To discover the true key to the Bible we must go back to a time before it was written, back to a time before God created the universe, back before there was time.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. John 1:1-2

The Word of God is a Person. The purpose of the Bible, the written Word of God, is to lead us to a Person, the Word of God, Jesus Christ. We neither worship the Bible nor worship our thoughts about God. The only one we worship is the God revealed in Jesus. He is not just a spiritual being. No according to John He also became physical:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John 1:14

The Father “put a God Word in” to our world. The point of the Bible is not to spark arguments about how the world was created, how Noah stuffed animals into his floating zoo or how Moses parted the Red Sea as easily as he parts his hair. The Father gives us the written Word of God so we can have a relationship with His Son, the Word of God.

To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1: 12

Through the Son we become children of God the Father. I believe it was Martin Luther who once said the Bible is like the manger for the Baby Jesus. We don't worship the manger. But if you want to find and worship the Baby Jesus the only place to look is in the manger. Then how much of the Bible is God and how much of it is human?

Just as Jesus, the Word of God, was fully God and fully human, the Bible, the written Word of God, is **All God and All Human.** Over a period of 1,500 years God used many human beings – prophets and poets, saints and sinners, kings and common folk to bring His Word to the world. Take for example John the Baptist.

There came a man who was sent from God; his name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all men might believe.

He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. John 1:6-8

Notice that God sends John the Baptist. His job is to point to the Light, Jesus Christ. We are not supposed to focus on John but on the One he points to. John is not the Word, he's a witness that points to the Word – Jesus. God uses John the Baptist, David, Esther, Mark, Ruth, Paul and lots of other anonymous people as witnesses who point to Jesus the Word. These people were fallible, imperfect human beings. God didn't dictate to them. He used them, warts, weaknesses and all, as witnesses to the Light of God, to the Word of God, to Jesus Christ. Don't be surprised if you find different points of view and perspectives, conflicts and contradictions. That's what happens whenever you get humans together. The authors who wrote the Bible were all human.

But at the same time, the Scriptures are all God. It's not that God spoke long ago and He's done. God *is still speaking* His Word today through this book. Jesus said,

It is written, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that *comes* from the mouth of God." Matthew 4:4

The verb "comes" is present tense. The words are still coming out of God's mouth to us. How is this possible when the Bible was finished 1900 years ago? When you read the Scriptures the Holy Spirit takes the unchanging Word of God and applies them directly to your changing world. The Light of the World shines in your darkness. The Word of God becomes flesh and dwells in you. The Good Shepherd calls your name.

From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. John 1:16,18

Read this book and you won't just know about God, you will know God.

I would like to give you a challenge for the New Year. From now until May, I invite you to join me in reading one chapter of the Bible a day – the first two chapters of each book of the Bible. Stick this insert in your Bible. After you read the opening chapter, you can also take a moment to check out the introduction to the book. Learn about its author, time period, outline and message. Memorize the order of the books of the Bible. Become familiar with God's Word. Let Him speak to you through the Holy Spirit. You never know when you'll need to "Put a God Word in."

A disciple at Woodside gave me permission to share this with you.

I had a particularly important career milestone. I was in a mock interview (set up by my company, to help get me ready for a real interview within the organization, for a major career advancement). On my rather voluminous "candidate proposal document", I listed my involvement here at Woodside, as well as my previous church. Bear in mind, this was maybe 4 lines on probably 6 pages of small print. Toward the end of the mock interview, the interviewer asked me what my favorite scripture passage was. I was at a loss. I couldn't believe he asked me this! My

mind was blank. The mock interviewer let me off the hook, but told me to expect this type of "off-beat" question in the interview.

Over the next day or so I came across I Thessalonians 5:11 "Encourage one another, and build each other up..." It really hit me! I thought "what a great message for life", but also "what a great message for an organization to have for its professionals". Weeks passed and I kept thinking about this passage, over and over and over. Though I was initially very nervous about the upcoming "interview", I became much more relaxed. I put the results in God's hands.

I later learned that the guy who interviewed me is on the Leadership Board of the Greater Philadelphia Fellowship of Christian Athletes! I do believe that, on some level, God reached through this guy (a leader in our organization) down to me, to put my head in the right place. Let go, let God.

Your Father wants to speak with you. He's waiting to "Put a God Word in" you. Will you listen? Will you let Him?