

Lesson 4: Understanding The Bible

Opening Discussion

The Bible can be intimidating. It's a brick of a book—more than a thousand pages of names you can't pronounce and places you've never been.

But it's also a powerful gift from God, one way God makes Himself known to you.

Come to the Bible not because it's good for you (it is) but because it's a chance to grow in your friendship with Jesus.

The Bible's not a textbook to study for the Big Test. When you stand before God in heaven, He won't ask you to recite verses. He'll ask you if you know His Son. He'll ask you if you're a Jesus-follower.

Read: Romans 12:2 "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

Discussion: What comes to mind when you think about reading the Bible? Is it intimidating, boring, confusing, or something else?

Why the Bible Matters

Most people think of the Bible as spiritual broccoli. They know it's good for them, but they don't go out of their way to read it. They may be exposed to Scripture, but they don't experience it. They never encounter a moment when it helps transform them.

Yet, to hear the Bible describe itself, it's powerful and potent. It's the living Word of God.

Read these three passages:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

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

James 1:21 "Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you."

Discussion: Have you ever experienced the Bible as "active" or "powerful" in your life? If so, when?

What the Bible Claims to Be

Inspired (God-Breathed)

When Paul wrote that "all Scripture is God-breathed" he meant that literally. The Bible is the work of God, filtered through human authors whose writing was directed by God.

The Bible originates with God and is His story, revealing His nature. It tells the story of our separation from God because of sin and His desire for a restored relationship through Jesus. Much of it was written directly to disciples—Jesus-followers like you—so it's instruction about how to live.

Discussion: What does it mean that the Bible is "God-breathed"? How does that change the way you approach it?

Complete

Read: Revelation 22:18 "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll."

The Bible, as you have it, is everything you need. Cults often claim other books have equal authority or offer altered "translations." Don't be fooled. The Bible stands alone—and it's complete.

Essential for Knowing God

Read: Ephesians 1:13 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit."

You're in a relationship with God, not a transactional business arrangement. To know and be known requires time spent exploring, probing, questioning, listening. The Bible is a perfect place to do all of that.

Discussion: How might regular Bible reading deepen your relationship with God?

Three Reasons to Believe the Bible

Reason 1: Because the Authors Agree

The Bible was written over 1,600 years by over 40 authors—kings, paupers, Gentiles, Jews—in multiple languages and styles. Yet they agree and assemble a complete, compelling story. That speaks to a divine hand managing the project.

Discussion: What does it mean that 40+ authors over 1,600 years could write one unified story?

Reason 2: Because of Fulfilled Prophecy

More than 300 promises about Jesus recorded in the Old Testament were fulfilled by Jesus. Here are just a few:

- Born at Bethlehem (Micah 5:2 / Matthew 2:1)
- Betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12 / Matthew 26:15)
- Hands and feet pierced (Psalm 22:16 / Luke 24:38-40)

That all these prophecies came true boosts confidence that the Bible is to be believed. If God is faithful to keep all His promises about the Messiah, He'll be just as faithful keeping His promises to you.

Discussion: Does fulfilled prophecy strengthen your faith in the Bible? Why or why not?

Reason 3: Because of Testimony from Others

"The vigor of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts." —George Müller

"The Bible isn't magic, but it is corrective; it isn't an answer book, it is a living book; it isn't a fix-it book, it is relationship book." —Mike Yaconelli

Discussion: What impact would you like the Bible to have on your life?

How to Read the Bible

Reading the Bible isn't like reading other books. It's the Word of God and God is out to transform you—to capture your heart in relationship, to restore you, and to enlist you as a follower of Jesus.

Three Keys to Engaging the Bible

Key 1: Ask God to Give You a Desire for the Bible

Ask God to give you a heart for hearing from Him through the Bible. Ask that God spark your interest, that what you read be relevant, and that the words come alive for you.

Read: Psalm 34:8 "Taste and see that the Lord is good."

If you come to the Bible seeking God, you'll hear Him speaking to you—but only if you come expectantly and desiring relationship.

Discussion: When you open the Bible, what are you usually looking for? How might your approach change if you came seeking relationship with God?

Key 2: Commit to Reading the Bible

You don't soak anything up from the Bible by osmosis—you have to be in it. Read it when you're fresh and attentive. When you're ready to listen and learn. When you're eager for relationship.

If you received a letter from someone you love, you'd sit and read it carefully, perhaps several times. You'd savor the words. That's the attitude to have when you open the Bible.

Discussion: What would it look like practically for you to commit to reading the Bible regularly? What time of day? What location?

Key 3: Commit Key Passages to Memory

When Jesus was tempted by Satan (Matthew 4:2-11), He stood strong in part by quoting Scripture He'd committed to memory. The Word of God is a powerful weapon against temptation.

Discussion: Have you ever memorized Scripture? If so, has it helped you in moments of temptation or difficulty?

Simple Ways to Start Reading

The Power of Four Days

Research shows that reading the Bible for just four consecutive days begins to change you. You don't need to read for hours—even a few minutes a day makes a difference. The key is consistency.

Start With Mark

If you're new to the Bible, start with the Gospel of Mark. It's the shortest Gospel and moves quickly through Jesus' life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Read one section at a time—don't worry about how much. Just read consistently.

This week's challenge: Read Mark chapter 1 over the next four days. See what God shows you.

For the Ambitious Beginner

If you're ready for more, try reading one chapter a day from the New Testament. Start with Matthew and work your way through. A chapter a day is manageable, and you'll finish the entire New Testament in less than a year.

Discussion: Which approach feels right for you right now—reading Mark in small sections, or committing to a chapter a day from the New Testament?

The Discovery Bible Study Method

This simple approach helps you not just read the Bible, but discover what God is saying to you through it. You can use this method alone or with others.

The Five Steps

1. **Read the passage** (read it aloud if possible)
2. **Retell the story** in your own words—what happened? What did you notice?
3. **Ask discovery questions:**
 - What does this passage teach us about God?
 - What does this passage teach us about people?
 - What is God saying to me personally through this passage?
 - If I believe this is from God, what needs to change in my life?
 - Who can I share this with this week?
4. **Commit to action** based on what you discovered
5. **Pray** about what you learned and your commitment

Try It Now

Read: Mark 1:14-20 (Jesus calls His first disciples)

Now work through the five questions together:

- What does this teach us about God?
- What does this teach us about people?
- What is God saying to you personally?
- What needs to change in your life?
- Who can you share this with?

Discussion: How was this different from the way you usually read the Bible?

Life Issues and Life Verses

All Jesus-followers encounter areas of temptation that are especially troublesome. It's important to focus your attention on that area and use Scripture to defend yourself.

Read: 1 John 2:16 "For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Three Categories of Life Issues

Lust of the Flesh: Sensuality, addiction, inability to control appetites. Pornography, substance abuse, gluttony, lustful thoughts.

Lust of the Eyes: Materialism, anxiety, jealousy, greed. Financial trouble, "I want it so I deserve it" mentality, resentment of others.

Pride of Life: Desire for recognition and fame, anger that life isn't giving you what you think you deserve, urge to control situations and people around you.

Discussion: Which of these three life issues feels most familiar to you?

Important Truths

- **God doesn't reveal all your life issues at once.** Start with the one that feels most familiar.
- **Some life issues are generational.** Be open to having blind spots revealed.
- **Life issues can become addictive.** Sin is pleasure for a moment but can have consequences that last a lifetime.
- **You can't overcome life issues on your own.** You need God's help through His Word.

Life Verses by Category

Lust of the Flesh:

- Lustful thoughts → Psalm 19:14
- Sensuality → Romans 13:14
- Addiction → James 1:21, Galatians 5:1
- Inability to control appetite → 1 John 1:9

Lust of the Eyes:

- Materialism → Matthew 16:26
- Anxiety → Philippians 4:6-7
- Jealousy → James 3:16
- Financial problems → Matthew 6:31-33

Pride of Life:

- Desire for fame → John 5:44
- Anger → James 1:20
- Bitterness → Hebrews 12:15
- Control issues → Romans 12:1-2
- Insecurity → Ephesians 2:10

Important: Only memorize 3 to 5 verses. Go over them often. They are your life verses and will give you victory over your life issues.

Discussion: What verses could you memorize to help you resist temptation in your primary area of struggle?

Closing

Memory Verse to Consider

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Romans 12:2).

This Week's Action

Choose one:

- Start the four-day challenge: Read Mark chapter 1 for four consecutive days
- Use the Discovery Bible Study method on one passage this week
- Identify your primary life issue and memorize 3-5 "life verses"

- If ambitious, commit to one chapter a day in the New Testament

Final Prayer

How can I pray for you?

Pray for each other about developing a hunger for God's Word, overcoming obstacles to regular Bible reading, and using Scripture to resist temptation.