

LESSON ONE  
*Bible Study*

**FOCAL TEXTS**

Psalm 119:9–16, Acts 17:10–12; 2 Timothy 3:14–17

**BACKGROUND**

Psalm 119:9–16; Acts 17:10–12; 2 Timothy 3:14–17

**MAIN IDEA**

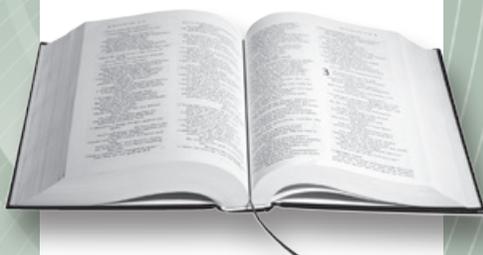
Disciples read, study, memorize, and live out God’s word.

**QUESTION TO EXPLORE**

How can I grow in my knowledge and application of God’s magnificent word?

**TEACHING AIM**

To lead adults to develop a plan to increase the depth, quality, and consistency of their study and application of biblical truth



## BIBLE COMMENTS

### Understanding the Context

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The Bible bears within itself teachings that point to a calling and stewardship for studying Scripture. The three passages in this lesson form wonderful starting places for understanding the what, why, and how of Bible study.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible but falls only one chapter away from the shortest chapter, Psalm 117. Psalm 119's content is outlined by the Hebrew alphabet, and is an example of an acrostic. Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is given an eight-line stanza. Every stanza line opens with a word beginning with the respective Hebrew alphabet letter. For example, each line in the first stanza in the psalm (119:1–8) begins with *aleph*, the letter “a” in the Hebrew alphabet. Undoubtedly, the structure was used as a teaching tool with Hebrew children.

The psalm becomes an expanded meditation upon the substance and significance of the Law of God. Synonyms for the “Law of God” appear throughout the psalm: decrees, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments, word, and ordinances, for example. This pattern, arranged in a creative fashion, becomes the most extensive discussion of the *word* of God in Christian Scripture. Psalm 119:9–16, with eight lines beginning with *bet*, “b,” is an excellent microcosm for discovering the riches of Psalm 119.

Acts 17:1–15 provides the larger context for Acts 17:10–12. Luke (who also wrote the Gospel bearing his name) compiled a series of short stories commonly called the “Acts of the Apostles.” Acts 17:1–15 forms one of the narratives, or acts, of the book. These narratives have all the elements of a well-written story: characters, setting, mood, action—rise, fall, anticlimax, climax, and resolution (a problem solved with rationale for others to model.) This particular story describes Paul and Silas' encounter with the Bereans and highlights their diligent study of the Scriptures. Our study of the characters found in Scripture can provide help for us in facing similar contemporary events.

2 Timothy 3:14–17 speaks of the inspiration of the Scriptures and offers practical information on the benefits of Bible study. Scripture joins with the experience of Christians who have taught us spiritual

truth and leads us to discovering and utilizing its wisdom for living the Christian life.

## Interpreting the Scriptures

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### Innocence Maintained (Psalm 119:9–10)

Psalm 119 fits the genre of wisdom literature. In poetic form, the Psalms may mask the “wisdom” aspect of their content. But, metaphors, similes, and other literary constructions expand the possibilities of personal application.

The writer of Psalm 119 perhaps remembered more innocently lived years. Or, the writer may have discovered character flaws erupting with new power because consistent study of Scripture had been avoided. Either interpretation can find resonance with us.

**119:9.** The psalmist prompts an additional question: “How can a person of any age keep her or his way pure?” The question of “How can my life be better?” can come any time. The psalmist’s solution is to maintain a guarded, disciplined adherence to God’s word.

**119:10.** An intriguing consistency resides in the psalmist’s comment with the Apostle Paul’s statement in Philippians 2:12–13. One is to cultivate a pure lifestyle as if that cultivation all depends on one’s self, while recognizing the reality that all depends on God’s grace working in us. It is God working in us that provides both our motivation and strength to serve him.

### Taking Scripture to Heart (Psalm 119:11–12)

**119:11.** Perhaps you have heard this directive: “Learn your part by heart”; or, “Memorize the lines until you can recite them without thinking.” Memorization in and of itself, though, is one of the lowest levels of learning. The psalmist continued beyond memorization, however. “Treasure” speaks of holding God’s truths in highest esteem, while the words “so that I may not sin” portray a sense of actively living out Scripture’s teachings.

**119:12.** The statement “Blessed are you” can be puzzling. We think of God blessing us. This verse is one of many in the Psalms, however, where a person extends blessing to God. See Psalm 16:7, Psalm 103:1, and Psalm 104:1, for example. Read these verses with “thanksgiving,” “praise,” or “worship” in the place of blessing. Indeed, a person can “bless” God.

### Profession of the Value of Scripture (Psalm 119:13–14)

**119:13.** Generally, our actions carry more weight than our words. Saying what we believe, professing our commitment to God, ranks highly among things we can do. People judge us on our body language, our involvements, our investments of energy, and where we put our money. People do listen to what we say, and trust may or may not follow based on those words.

The psalmist testifies to the transforming power of God’s word. This transformation can be perceived by our hearers. People are persuaded and transformed by the passion and conviction they hear from us, implicit and explicit in the word.

**119:14.** What can be the source of delight for us? What gives us “the peace that passes understanding” no matter what is happening in life? Satisfaction, fulfillment, gratification, and delight, came for the psalmist through God’s word.

In our culture, significance is often sought by purchasing the next new item. Quantity is the ruling dynamic. The psalmist’s delight comes not from a quantifiable source necessarily; but rather from the “quality” of God’s decrees—the power of ideas shaping how we remember and how we hope. This comes as we engage God’s word, and it answers the questions we raise about living this life.

### Shaping Attitudes to Shape Actions (Psalm 119:15–16)

**119:15.** Most of us join the frenetic pace our culture imposes on us. Thus, we have to begin at square one to practice the discipline of being still and quiet. The ancient wisdom of “meditating and fixing one’s eyes on God’s ways, or paths” combats freneticism and fastens us to a more solid foundation for living.

The psalmist's guidance predates *lectio divina* (divine reading). This practice began in Western culture in the 3rd Century A.D. For those Christians, *lectio divina* meant reading, meditating on, praying over, and contemplating Scripture. A friend related to me years ago: "Reading Scripture meditatively asks not how much of the Scripture you go through, but how much of the Scripture gets through to you."

**119:16.** Hebrew parallelism, another literary device, appears here. The construction is that of similar ideas appearing repetitively. Parallelism appears throughout Psalm 119.

Word repetition strikes the ears of those in Western culture strangely. Parallelism was a method for the Hebrews to amplify an idea with repetition. With amplification in mind, a contemporary reader should pause with verses 14 and 16 and consider the delight the Hebrew writer had in mind whenever thinking on God's word. With such an intentional consideration the writer did not, and would not, forget God's word.

### Reception and Examination of Scripture (Acts 17:10–12)

**17:10.** Paul and Silas had encountered trouble with the people in Philippi and Thessalonica. Luke is careful to identify the troublesome personalities. Jealousy was at work against Paul's and Silas's message and prevented it from receiving a positive response. The Thessalonians who became Christians demonstrated a wonderful contrast of behavior, though.

**17:11.** The Thessalonian friends protected Paul and Silas for further missionary work. The mutual caring between Paul and the Thessalonian believers finds further expression in the two epistles that Paul wrote to them (1 & 2 Thessalonians.)

No epistle to or from the Bereans exists. We might be able to construct one, however, around these few lines from Luke. The Bereans' sense of hospitality is exemplary for 21st Century Christians. The Bereans were not tainted by xenophobia (fear of the different) related to Paul's teaching and preaching. Their daily examination of Scripture contributed to their implementation of the directive to "love your neighbor."

**17:12.** “Many of” the Bereans found Christ through their study of Scripture. How much more could we benefit from a daily study of Scripture to guide our learning and living of the Christian life?

### Remember Your Teachers and the Source of Their Information (2 Timothy 3:14–15)

**3:14.** Maybe Timothy voiced concern to Paul about his ability to steward and implement the gospel. Perhaps Paul understood Timothy so well he knew encouragement was needed. Paul alluded to those he had named in 2 Timothy 1:5—Timothy’s grandmother, Lois, and his mother, Eunice. These nurturers not only reared Timothy well, but had cultivated in him a passion for practicing the gospel. Many of us have parents, grandparents, siblings, other family members, and friends who have taught us and shaped our faith. Remembering their influence can encourage and sustain us.

**3:15.** Timothy’s good family tradition urged him, at an early age, to read and understand Scripture. The Hebrew Scriptures had pointed Timothy in the direction of seeing Christ as the fulfillment of those Scriptures. Paul’s intent, of course, was to assist Timothy in seeing not only the past value of Scripture study in his life, but also the continuing value as he matured in his faith.

### A Divinely Inspired Reference Point for Life (2 Timothy 3:16–17)

**3:16.** What are the purposes of the Scriptures? They educate us about God’s desires for humanity, they provide a means for teaching others in the ways of God, they establish boundaries for behavior, and they embody what it means to be a master teacher—one who not only points out students’ mistakes, but also demonstrates ways those mistakes can be corrected into right actions. All of these purposes are present in Scripture because all of Scripture is inspired by God (“God-breathed.”)

**3:17.** The thought concludes (from verse 16’s phrase “is useful”) with. . . “so that everyone”. . . can become more proficient, efficient, effective, and shaped so as to live fully for God. Disciples bear witness as they demonstrate the gospel with lips and lives guided by God’s word.

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## Focusing on the Meaning

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Surveys over the last few years have indicated a decline in the reading and study of the Bible by those involved in congregational life. Before we cast blame on “cultural dynamics opposing Scripture” as the cause for this decline, we need to look at our own congregational practices related to Scripture. How is Bible study integrated into your congregation’s life? Are you involved in a Bible study group? Do you have a personal plan of action for Bible study? Have you ever engaged in a “Reading the Bible Through in a Year” plan? Or, reading through the New Testament in a month?

Such exercises certainly can increase our information about the Bible. They can also be the spark which ignites a lifelong love affair with Scripture. To honestly call ourselves a student of Scripture, we should be moving beyond the mere identification and description of facts, ideas, principles, and themes to being able to analyze the depths of Scripture. In addition, we should be able to interpret the Scripture beyond its original historical-cultural context into our own time. Finally, the real mark of being a student of Scripture is that we apply whatever we discover in the riches of Scripture to our own lives.

We have Scripture not as an end in itself, which can lead to a bibliolatry. Rather, we discover early on that God’s living word can inform and form each one of us, and that it carries expectations for information and formation beyond each of us to everyone in the world.

## TEACHING PLANS

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### Teaching Plan—Varied Learning Activities

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#### Connect with Life

1. Before the session enlist two or three members to be on an interview panel to answer questions about their profession. Alert each one to the questions you will ask: *What is your profession? Why did*

*you choose this type of work? How did you prepare for your specific role in this profession? What does it take to be highly effective in this line of work?* Interview the panel in front of the class. Probe for answers to the last question for training, habits, networking, and disciplines that lead to improved performance. Briefly review the introduction to the unit in the *Study Guide* and remind members that the spiritual habits to be discussed in the coming sessions are essential to becoming highly effective disciples.

2. Make the transition to today's subject by indicating the importance of developing a plan to increase the depth, quality, and consistency of our Bible study and our application of biblical truth.

### Guide Bible Study

3. Read Psalm 119:9. Invite members to individually select three characteristics from verses 10–16 that give practical application to the psalmist's answer, "By living according to your word." After a couple of minutes, go around the group and invite each member to share one of their responses. Summarize the truth of this passage by encouraging members to know God's word in order to apply it to life.
4. Read Acts 17:10–12. Ask members to identify the attitude the Bereans had toward the message from the Scriptures Paul and Silas taught them. Discuss the significance of verse 12 as a record of the results of their passion and commitment to increasing the depth, quality, and consistency of their Bible study and then living it out.
5. Ask volunteers to briefly share about someone who has been an encourager or mentor in their lives. Mention that Paul was that kind of person in Timothy's life. Read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Emphasize the richness of these verses in describing the nature and role of Scripture in a believer's spiritual growth. Assign each member one of the four words/phrases in verse 16 that lists the practical nature of Scripture: "teaching," "rebuking," "correcting," and "training in righteousness." Invite members to give a contemporary example of each one of these functions and benefits of the Bible.

## Encourage Application

6. Instruct members to share with one other person what they enjoy doing in their leisure time. Allow enough time for each person to talk. Then invite members to describe the level of passion with which their partner shared about their activities. Ask, *What seemed to be their motivation and attitude for being involved in what they shared?* Suggest to the class that if we can get so passionate about hobbies and leisure-time activities, how much more should we be passionate about Bible study? Review the sidebar in the *Study Guide* on “Helpful Attitudes for Bible Study.” Invite volunteers to share which attitude best describes their approach to Bible study. Discuss ways to improve a believer’s attitude in regards to their study and application of the Scriptures.
7. Invite members to create a list of practical things a believer can do to increase the depth, quality, and consistency of their personal Bible study. Challenge members to think beyond traditional personal elements such as establishing a regular time and place, memorization, and meditation. While these are important, today’s technology offers ready access to various avenues of study in commentaries, blogs, training, and networking with other believers. Also discuss the importance of being an active member of a church and the resources provided through pastoral teaching, printed resources, and classes such as this one.
8. In closing, invite members to quietly reflect on their attitude and practice of Bible study and how it impacts the way they live as disciples of Christ. Close with prayer.

## Teaching Plan—Lecture and Questions

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### Connect with Life

1. Greet members and ask if they enjoy regular physical check-ups. Remind them that these check-ups may not always be enjoyable but are necessary to ensure a healthy life. The same can be said about a person’s spiritual life. Review the information in “Studying

These Lessons” in the introduction of the unit in the *Study Guide*. Challenge members to take this study as serious as they do when they receive a physical check-up and to be prepared to adjust their lives according to any instructions received from God, the Great Physician.

2. Transition to the subject of this session by displaying a poster containing the question, *How can I grow in my knowledge and application of God’s magnificent word?* Remind the class of the story of the pastor and deacon-farmer (from the introduction to this lesson in the *Study Guide*) and the point that if we are to grow in our knowledge and application of God’s word we must “meet him halfway.”

### Guide Bible Study

3. Ask a volunteer to read Psalm 119:9–16. Ask the class, *What do we learn from Psalm 119 about the role God’s word can play in our lives?* Highlight the joy the psalmist finds in following God’s commands.
4. Lecture briefly on Paul and Silas and their visit to Berea using information from the *Study Guide*. Read Acts 17:10–12. Explain the significance and evidence of Luke saying the Bereans were “of more noble character” than the Thessalonians. Ask, *How can we demonstrate openness to God’s truth today as the Bereans did in Paul’s day?*
5. Briefly lecture on Paul’s relationship with Timothy using information from the *Study Guide*. Create four small posters with one of the following words/phrases on each.
  - a. Teaching
  - b. Rebuking
  - c. Correcting
  - d. Training in righteousness

Ask a volunteer to read 2 Timothy 3:14–17. Explain the significance of Scripture being “God-breathed.” Then display each poster and define each term or phrase using information from the *Study Guide*.

After each is presented, ask members to explain why that element is useful “so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

### Encourage Application

6. Refer members to application questions 3–5 in the *Study Guide*. Encourage members to respond to each question in light of the Scriptures studied in this lesson.
7. Refer to the sidebar in the *Study Guide* on “Helpful Habits for Good Bible Students.” Invite members to select one or two of the ideas they can implement.
8. Close the session by inviting members to evaluate their practice of this habit of highly effective disciples. As a part of their spiritual check-up, challenge members to commit to practical steps to increase the depth, quality, and consistency of their personal Bible study. End with prayer.