

WHAT IS THE BIBLE?



CROSSROADS
PRISON MINISTRIES

ANSWER KEY

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INTRODUCTION

In this course, students will learn about the Bible. Though most people think of it as one book, students will learn that it is actually a collection of books written over the course of about 1,500 to 2,000 years. They will learn how the Bible was written. They will discover that the Bible contains different types of writing. They will see how God used different writers to write one complete story through many books that all point us to Jesus.

STUDY TOOLS

Throughout this course, students will be provided with the tools listed below to assist them in their studies. These tools provide ways that you can interact with your students.



CONVERSATION BOXES: We have We have included some spaces throughout the print versions of lessons that we call **conversation boxes**. Students can share questions or thoughts about the lesson or life. Students completing digital lessons can use the comment box at the end of the lesson for the same purpose. You may respond in any open space.



ACTION STEPS: At the end of each lesson, we have included a challenge called an **action step**. It asks the student to apply what they have learned. If they feel that they need help or encouragement to complete it, they may simply write down what they plan to do. You can follow up with the student by asking if they have completed it.

Glossary of Terms

Each lesson contains Bible names, terms, and ideas that may be new to students. We will do our best to provide definitions that are easy to understand. The list below includes all of the terms found in this course. In each lesson, we have included an asterisk (*) the first time each term appears.

Apostle — A follower of Jesus chosen to spread the message of the Gospel.

Church — A building used for worship or the name for all Christian believers as a group. When the second definition is used, the word is often capitalized ("Church").

Circumcision — Removal of the male foreskin as a religious act. For Abraham and his household, it was a sign of the covenant God made with them.

Commandment — A teaching, law, or rule from God that must be obeyed. Christians follow God's commandments because they love Him.

Covenant — An agreement or contract between two people or groups of people.

Crucifixion — The act of putting someone to death by nailing or tying their wrists or hands and feet to a cross.

Disobedience — The act of failing or refusing to follow rules, standards, or laws. The Bible tells us that disobedience to God happens when we follow our own will and desires instead of following God's will.

Epistle — A formal letter that is written to instruct.

Exile — A period of time when a person is forced to leave his or her own country or community.

Firsthand — Coming from someone who directly saw or experienced something.

Generation — A group of people born and living during the same period of time or the members of a family born and living during the same period of time.

Gospel — The good news about Jesus Christ found in the Bible. The word can also be used to describe the first four books of the New Testament, which are written about Jesus' life and ministry.

Holy Spirit — One of the three persons of the Trinity of God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in Christians, guides them, and gives them new life.

Humanity — All human beings; also called "the human race" or "humankind."

Meditate — To focus the mind on something, such as the words in the Bible.

New Testament — The second part of the Christian Bible. It was originally written in the Greek language. It records Jesus' teachings and the stories of His life while He was here on earth. It includes the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (also called the Gospels), the book of Acts, twenty-one epistles (letters to the early faith communities), and the book of Revelation.

Observation — The act of carefully watching or listening to someone or something in order to get information.

Offspring — A person's child or a child born later in the same family line.

Old Testament — The first part of the Christian Bible. Its thirty-nine books come from the original Hebrew Bible, which Jews still follow. It was originally written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. It includes the law, history, prophecy, and wisdom literature of the ancient people of Israel.

Persecuted — Treated cruelly or unfairly, especially because of race, religious beliefs, or political beliefs. The early Christians were persecuted by the Romans because of their faith in Jesus.

Prophecy — A statement about something that will happen in the future. The prophecies that God gave to the prophets to give to His people always came true and will always come true.

Prophet — Someone who brought messages from God to His people. Many books of the Bible were written by prophets (for example, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Hosea). These books contain many promises God made to His people that came true years later.

Proverb — A short, well-known saying that contains wise thoughts and is easy to understand and remember.

Redeem — To make up for something, to win something or buy it back, or to free someone from sin.

Redemption — The act or process of freeing people from their sins.

Resurrection — The act of coming back to life after death.

Sinful — Being full of sin. Continually doing, thinking, or saying things that break God's laws and go against God's divine plan.

Testimony — A spoken or written statement that confirms a truth.

The Fall — The event in the Bible when Adam and Eve sinned and disobeyed God. Because of the Fall, humans are born sinful, and death and pain exist in the world.

LESSON 1: The Story of the Bible

Lesson Focus:

The Bible tells one perfect and true story of God's love for us.

The Bible is one of the most important books in human history. It explores the big questions about why we exist. It has inspired many people to do amazing things. It has also confused many people.

The Bible is a very long book. That is because it is actually sixty-six different books put together. Those books are divided into two main parts: the Old Testament* and the New Testament.* Together, the books cover more than 4,000 years of God's history with His people.

Because the Bible is such a big book that contains so many different parts, it can be hard to see how it all fits together. However, through all its books, the Bible tells one true story about God. It is a testimony* of God's love for His people and the world He created.

1. Which statement below best describes how familiar you are with the Bible? Put a check mark next to that statement.

☐ I am just starting to read the Bible.

☐ I have read most of the Bible's main stories.

☐ I have read the whole Bible at least once.

☐ Other (please explain):

The student's response will give you insight into their previous experience with the Bible. Keep this in mind as you review the rest of their answers.

The Beginning

The Bible begins by telling its readers about God through a poem that celebrates who God is. The first sentence in the Bible says, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1). Then it describes God's creation of everything in the world. It celebrates God's power to create something out of nothing. He made the heavens, the earth, and all of the plants and animals. He brought order and beauty out of nothingness.

Read **Genesis 1:1–26**.

2. This passage tells us that after God had created each new thing, He "saw that it was good." What do you think this means?

Answers will vary. Students may respond with any or all of the following: When God created the universe and everything in it, it was exactly how He desired it to be. His creation reflected His nature and character. Everything functioned the way He

designed it to. Adam and Eve lived in paradise with nothing standing in the way of their communication with God.

There aren't necessarily right or wrong answers. The student may answer in a way that reflects what they view as good in the world today. Affirm the student, but also provide a biblical example of why God called His original creation good.

After God had created everything else, He made humans. He placed them in a garden called Eden. God created them to rule over His beautiful world as partners with Him. Their job was to care for the world and create even more beauty and order.

Read **Genesis 1:27–31**.

3. According to this passage, how are humans different from the rest of God's creation (see verses 27–28)?

The most important difference is that God created humans in His image or likeness. Students may also give the following answers: God blessed them; God told them to produce children and fill the earth; God made them rulers over the plants and animals.

God gave humans the ability to think. He gave them the ability to experience the same emotions that He experiences. He allowed them to make choices, and they felt the impact of their choices and actions. God gave them the ability to love and care for one another, just like He loved and cared for them. They lived in a relationship of perfect love with God. They walked and talked with Him every day in the garden. Everything was good.

But the humans faced an important choice. There was one tree in the Garden of Eden whose fruit God had told them not to eat. If they ate it, they would know the difference between good and evil, which only God knew. This knowledge would let them define what was good and what was evil without God's help. God warned them that eating the fruit from this tree would also kill them.

One day, the humans heard the voice of a serpent. The creature encouraged them to eat the fruit from this tree so they could gain its knowledge and power. Despite God's warning, they gave in to temptation and ate the fruit.

This act of disobedience* caused sin to enter the world. Because of their actions, all of humanity* would be born sinful* and would be unable to follow God perfectly. Their actions destroyed not only their close relationship with God but also all of humanity's relationship with God.

4. Have you experienced a time when you felt that your relationship with God was broken? Why did you feel that way?

The answer to this question should give you a glimpse into the student's heart. Many students will share very personal thoughts and feelings. Be sensitive as you read between

the lines and pray about how best to share words of comfort and healing. If you are comfortable doing so, you can encourage the student with a similar story from your life.

God Chooses a Family

The first humans had children, and their children had children, and so on. Humanity became increasingly selfish and cruel. The people did not have a relationship with God. Without knowledge of God, most of them made their own decisions about what was right or wrong. They decided evil things were good. So God decided to separate humanity. He confused their languages so people couldn't speak to each other or understand each other. Through that act, God scattered the people all over the earth.

But God did not give up on His plan to save humanity. He chose two people, Abram and Sarai, to be His people, and He made a covenant* with them. He gave them new names—Abraham and Sarah—and a new future.

God promised He would be their God and bless their family. They also promised to keep their part of the covenant. Out of His great love, God told them that He would make them into a new nation, giving humanity another chance to follow Him in obedience.

Read **Genesis 17:1–27**.

5. List the specific promises God made to Abraham and Sarah and their family.

Students should list most or all of the following:

- **Abram will be the father of many nations**
- **Abram will have a new name: Abraham**
- **God will greatly increase the number of his descendants**
- **Nations and kings will come from his family line**
- **The covenant will be everlasting**
- **God will be their God and the God of all their descendants**
- **God will give their family the whole land of Canaan**
- **Sarai will have a new name: Sarah**
- **Sarah will have a son and become the mother of nations**
- **God's covenant will be established through Abraham and Sarah's son, Isaac**

6. What promises did God ask them to make in return?

God told Abraham that he and his descendants must keep His covenant by circumcising all males, including male babies when they reached eight days old.

The rest of the book of Genesis is about God's relationship with Abraham and Sarah's family. Things did not always go well for them. The family grew into a nation called Israel, and its people were called Israelites. But each new generation* gave in to the temptation to define good and evil in their own way. They ignored God again and again.

Eventually, God chose leaders to rule over the people of Israel. But even when the best leaders were in charge, the people were not always faithful to God. The leaders who loved God and used the wisdom God had given them still struggled to obey Him.

Each passage below is about a leader of God's people who tried to follow Him but didn't always get it right because of their personal failures. Choose one to read. Put a check mark next to it after you have read it.

___ **Numbers 20:2–12** — Moses led God's people out of slavery in Egypt. But he disobeyed God along the way.

___ **1 Kings 11:1–10** — King Solomon was the third king of Israel. God gave Solomon incredible wisdom, but Solomon still made big mistakes.

___ **2 Chronicles 16:1–14** — King Asa ruled much later in Israel's history. He struggled to trust God.

7. In the passage you read, how did the leader fail to follow God or His laws?

Students should have answered the question about one of the following three men:

- **Moses said that “we” (meaning he and Aaron) must bring water out of the rock, not crediting God as the one doing the miracle. By striking the rock twice instead of speaking to it as God had commanded, Moses made it seem that it was his human effort and power that produced the miracle. He showed a lack of trust in God.**
- **Solomon married women from other nations, even though God had forbidden it. Solomon had temples built to honor the foreign gods of his wives. Eventually, Solomon strayed from the Lord and worshiped false gods.**
- **Asa didn't trust God to protect the nation. He used gold and silver from God's temple to make a treaty with a foreign king for protection. Asa also oppressed his own people.**

Even though they were often unfaithful to God, God still cared for His people. He sent many prophets* (PRAH-fehts) to warn the people that their choices would lead to their ruin. The prophets shared God's words, warning the people that Israel would be destroyed by their enemies and that they would live as prisoners in exile.* And that is exactly what happened. Since the people did not change the way they were living, they ended up becoming prisoners in the nation of Babylon (BAB-ih-luhn).

8. Why do you think it was so hard for God's people to follow Him?

Students may say that God's people had trouble following Him because of their sinfulness or because they didn't fully trust or understand God. A student's answer may reflect their own struggles with following God. This is a good chance to affirm what God's Word says about His trustworthiness and the fulfillment that can only be found when we follow Him.

God Keeps His Promise

The prophets told God's people that He would not give up on them. God still loved them. He promised to send a new leader to save them. This leader would pay for their sins and failures. He would transform their hearts and minds so they could make the right choices and follow God. But God's people had to wait for that leader to come. In fact, the story of God's relationship with His people in the Old Testament ended before the promise came true.

God's people waited nearly 500 years before He sent the new leader to earth. The New Testament describes how God's promise finally came true. It begins by introducing Jesus. He was the leader and King that God had promised would arrive. He was part of Abraham and Sarah's family and the family of Israel's kings. Satan tried to tempt Jesus to take power and define good and evil on His own terms. But, unlike the leaders before Him, Jesus resisted the temptation.

Jesus showed people how to follow God. He traveled throughout Israel and taught people God's true definition of good and evil. He said that real power could be found in and through Him. He told them that people who loved their enemies and the poor would be blessed by God. He was able to do all this because He was a different kind of leader. He was God's own Son.

Read **John 13:34–35**.

9. What would your church or faith community look like if Christians truly followed this command?

The word for “love” used in the passage is the Greek word *agape*. This love is not selfish. It cares for others. It portrays all the fruits of God's Spirit. If Christians followed this command, more people would want to follow God. God would be better represented by His people, giving a more accurate view of God's nature. People would get along better. We would better care for those around us, resulting in a healthier, happier community.

Jesus did more than simply teach people how to live. He came to give all of humanity the gift of salvation and heal their relationship with God. Because Jesus was God's Son, born as a human, His life, death, and resurrection offered humanity new life.

God's people were given a choice: they could continue in their old, sinful ways, or they could follow Jesus. If they accepted God's gift of salvation through Jesus, they would experience God's forgiveness and be able to live the way Jesus taught them to live. They could have a new relationship with God.

Those who decided to follow Jesus found a connection to God through His Holy Spirit and experienced God's love. This made it possible for them to love and forgive others in return.

Read **Acts 2:42–47**.

10. What happened when people began to follow Jesus?

Students should list most or all of the following:

- **They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship**
- **They saw the apostles perform miracles**
- **They shared everything they had with each other**
- **They met together to eat, pray, and worship God**
- **They were respected by others**
- **Even more people believed in God and were saved**

The Bible tells us that new communities of people who followed Jesus spread around the world. But Jesus' early followers faced many problems. They were persecuted* from the outside. People in power arrested them, beat them, and killed them. They faced struggles from the inside too. They often fought and argued with each other as they tried to figure out their new faith. Following Jesus wasn't easy.

The leaders of Jesus' first followers wrote letters to comfort and challenge these new communities. They encouraged them to stay faithful to the way Jesus taught them to live.

Read **Philippians 2:1–13**.

11. What encouragement did the writer give to the faith community in Philippi?

The general summary of Paul's encouragement to the Philippian church in this passage is that God is working through the believers to accomplish His will in their lives. The student's answer should reflect that the believers could trust God because He was working to fulfill His purpose through the lives of the believers; it wasn't from their own effort.

12. What encouragement did you find in this passage?

Answers may vary, but we hope students will find encouragement in the fact that God is also working in them to accomplish His will.

The Story Continues with Us

The last book of the Bible, Revelation, ends with a prophecy,* promising that Jesus will return and make all wrong things right. Evil will be destroyed. Humanity will once again perfectly partner with God to create beauty and order in God's new creation. They will once again have a perfect relationship with God.

But the Bible tells us we can begin to see that promise coming true right now. Through faith in Jesus, we can begin to live our new life in a new relationship with God. We can do this by obeying God's first and greatest command to love God and others. The Bible and the Holy Spirit teach us and remind us how to do that.

The whole story of the Bible is about God's love. Out of love, God created the world. Out of love, God gave His Son to die for humanity and restore humanity's relationship with Him. Out of love, God promises that everything wrong will be made right again.

13. Where do you see yourself in the story of God and His love for His creation?

This is another question that can help you understand the student and where they are on their spiritual journey. The student may answer in a way that reflects how close they feel to God or how they believe God views them. Some students may have trouble seeing themselves in light of God's love. Take this opportunity to provide encouragement and good pastoral care with sensitivity.

Action Step

Through faith in Jesus, we can have the same close relationship with God that Adam and Eve had. We can walk and talk with Him. Pray for one person you know who is far from God. Ask God to show you how you can reach out to that person and be an example of God's love to them. Write down what you did:

LESSON 2: The Old Testament

Lesson Focus:

The Old Testament tells the history of God's faithfulness to Israel.

The Bible is one book, but it is better to think of it as a library of books. There are sixty-six books in the Bible. The books were written by many different people over the course of about 1,500 to 2,000 years.

The first writers of the Bible began writing just after the people of Israel left Egypt. The last writers started writing about seventy years after Jesus died. It took a long time for the whole Bible to come together as one complete book.

The books of the Bible contain different writing styles. Each writing style helps us understand God in a different way. Each book teaches us something new about God.

1. Why are you studying the Bible? What do you hope to learn?

Answers, of course, will vary. Some students will share goals of growing in their faith, gaining biblical knowledge, or learning how to share their faith with others. Other students may be just starting to explore Christianity and its beliefs. Some may write a specific question that they hope to have answered in their studies. Look for ways to encourage and guide the student based on their answer to the question.

Writing the Bible

The Bible was written by people who were chosen by God, including prophets* (PRAH-fehts) and apostles* (uh-PAH-suhls). God directed them to record the history, laws, poetry, and stories of the people of Israel and the ministry of Jesus and His disciples. The writers understood that the story of Israel and its people was a central part of what God was doing for all of humanity.* They wrote what God's Holy Spirit* guided them to write.

God used these writings to speak to His people throughout history. He used the laws and histories to help His people know Him. The people learned how He watched over them. They learned that He was "slow to get angry . . . faithful and full of love" for them (Exodus 34:6). The writings also taught His people how to love and follow Him and how to understand what was important to Him. God still uses the books in the Bible to speak to His people today.

Although the Bible was written by humans, the words in it came directly from God. That is why the Bible is also called **God's Word**.

2. Why is it important to know that the writers of the Bible only wrote what God wanted them to write?

Knowing this means we can have confidence that the Bible is indeed God's Word. Although humans wrote the words, the words came directly from God. This speaks to the Bible's authority in the life of believers.

The Main Parts of the Bible

The Bible is divided into two main parts called **testaments**. The word "testament" has two meanings. First, it can mean a set of facts used to prove that something is true. Second, it can mean a statement of what someone believes. Both of these meanings apply to the two testaments in the Bible. They include facts about God and His people that teach us the truth about God. They also show what it means to believe in God and follow Him by giving us examples of people who have lived before us.

The first thirty-nine books of the Bible are called the Old Testament. This collection of books includes the history, wisdom, and beliefs of the people of Israel. It starts at the creation of the world and ends about 400 years before Jesus was born.

The last twenty-seven books of the Bible are called the New Testament. The New Testament includes the stories of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection and the ministry of His apostles.

The Old and New Testaments explore the big questions we have about life, death, and what it means to be a human being. The books are filled with exciting stories and beautiful poetry. They teach us about God's love and His definition of justice. They help us understand what it means to follow Him. Christians read both testaments to know who God is and learn how to love and obey Him.

3. Do you believe that what you read in the Bible is true? Why or why not?

Students will share a wide variety of beliefs about the Bible and whether they think the Bible is true and trustworthy. Remember, some students may not be Christians. We welcome students that are exploring the Christian faith but have not yet decided what they believe about the Bible. Use this as an opportunity to provide some pastoral encouragement; consider sharing your own experience with coming to faith and confidence in God's Word.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament tells the story of God and His people. It includes God's laws for His people and the histories of His people. It describes how the world became broken and how God worked through His people to repair it. God promised that He would come to earth and make everything perfect again. But the Old Testament ends with God's people still waiting for that promise to come true.

There are three types of books found in the Old Testament. They are called the **law**, the **prophets**, and the **writings**. Although each type of book is written in a different style, they all contain information that God wants us to know about Him.

Historical Note

The Old Testament originally comes from the Jewish faith. Jews call the collection of books in the Old Testament the **TaNaK** (tah-NAHK). It's a word made from the Hebrew letters for "T" and "N" and "K."

The "T" stands for Torah (TOHR-uh), which means "**law**." The books in this category are:

Genesis	Exodus	Leviticus
Numbers	Deuteronomy	

The "N" stands for Nevi'im (neh-vee-EEM), which means "**prophets**." The books in this category are:

Joshua	Judges	1 Samuel
2 Samuel	1 Kings	2 Kings
Isaiah	Jeremiah	Ezekiel
Hosea	Joel	Amos
Obadiah	Jonah	Micah
Nahum	Habakkuk	Zephaniah
Haggai	Zechariah	Malachi

The "K" stands for Ketuvim (kuh-too-VEEM), which means "**writings**." The books in this category are:

Ruth	1 Chronicles	2 Chronicles
Ezra	Nehemiah	Esther
Job	Psalms	Proverbs
Ecclesiastes	Song of Songs	Lamentations
Daniel		

The first five books of the Bible are known as the **law**. These books contain the beginning of the story about God and His people. They start with the stories of creation and the Fall.* They explain how sin entered the world and how evil, death, and destruction became part of life on earth. They show how God began to bring order and beauty into the world again. They tell the story of how God chose a man named Abraham and his family to become the nation of Israel.

God promised to use Abraham's family to bless and save the whole world. Eventually, through Moses, God gave them laws and commandments* to follow so everyone would know they were His people.

Read **Exodus 20:1–17**.

4. What laws did God give to His people? Write them in your own words if you can.

Students may list all ten commandments or some of the ten. Answers may vary slightly, depending on the Bible translation used. Make sure the answers are consistent with the meaning of the biblical text.

5. What do these laws tell you about what is important to God?

These laws tell us that honoring and obeying God, treating others with respect, and striving for holiness are important to God.

The second category of books in the Old Testament is called the **prophets**. The twenty-one books in this category are scattered throughout the Old Testament.

These books are histories of God's people. They include stories about how God formed His people into the nation of Israel. They describe how Israel continually failed to follow God.

These books also contain warnings and words of encouragement from God, which gave direction to His people throughout their history. The writers reminded the people about what God had done for them in the past, and they wrote down the promises God made for the future. Those promises showed the ways God cared for His people—and they remind us that God will care for us too.

Read **Jeremiah 23:5–8**.

6. What promises did God make to the Israelites?

God promised to raise up a righteous King who would reign wisely. Judah would be saved, and Israel would live in safety. The King would be called the Lord Our Righteous Savior. The descendants of Israel would live in their own land. Many students will identify this King as Jesus.

7. How do these promises show that God cares about His people?

These promises show that God loves His people and will not abandon them. God had a plan for His people from the foundation of the earth. He was aware of their hardships and struggles. He promised to save them not only physically but also spiritually through the coming King, Jesus.

The last category of Old Testament books is the **writings**. There are thirteen books in this category, and they include poems, songs, proverbs,* and stories about God's people.

These books contain godly wisdom, hope, and encouragement. The teachings in them help us understand how to listen and talk to God. They also provide guidance and examples of how to live.

Read **Proverbs 3:1–6**.

8. The writer was talking about God's Word (the Bible). According to this passage, how can following God's Word help us?

God's Word will prolong our life and bring peace and prosperity. When we apply the Word of God to our lives and live those words out, we will win favor with God and men. As we trust in God and submit to everything He teaches us in His Word, He will make our paths straight.

9. Why do people sometimes find it challenging to follow God's Word?

A student's answer will probably reflect their own experience of trying to follow God's Word. This is an excellent place to offer encouragement and share your own experience of learning to follow God and obey His Word.

10. When have you found it challenging to follow God's Word?

Students may share about a time when they were not following God or they were going through a difficult situation. Answers will likely be very personal and give you more insight into your student's life and background.

The Old Testament tells us that God's people struggled to obey His laws. They tried to follow Him, but they kept failing over and over. But God did not give up. He continued to watch over His people. He sent prophets to remind them to follow Him. He gave them messages of hope for the future. God still had a plan for His people.

Read **Jeremiah 29:10–14**

11. What did God promise the people?

He promised to prosper them, not harm them, and to give them hope and a future. He promised to listen to them when they called on His name and that they would find Him when they sought Him with all their hearts. He promised to bring them back from captivity after the seventy years were over.

God kept that promise. The New Testament, which you will study in the next lesson, teaches that Jesus came to keep and complete all of God's promises. He was the promised King who came to save and redeem* God's people and give them "hope for the years to come" (Jeremiah 29:11).

If we are following Jesus, that promise is for us too. God will work in and through our lives to make that promise come true. And just like the people of Israel, God has given us His Word so that we can know Him, follow Him, and trust Him for the future.

Read **Jeremiah 29:10–14** again.

12. Do you believe you can trust God for your future? Why or why not?

Keep in mind that every student is in a different place in their walk, ranging from unbeliever to mature Christian. Encourage them that we are always called to trust God more fully, regardless of where we are in our journey. If a student says they don't trust God, consider providing a story that illustrates how you learned to trust God.

Reading the Bible can teach us a lot about what it means to trust God. The Bible contains hundreds of examples of the ways that God has kept His promises to His people. The Old Testament is full of stories about God watching over and providing for His people. He led the writers of the Bible to record all these stories so that His people could read them for years to come. Reading His words helps us learn from those examples and strengthen our faith in Him.

13. What things keep you from reading or studying God's Word?

Students may list reasons like, "I don't have enough time," "It's too noisy in my living unit," "I'm not a good reader," "My cellmate distracts me," etc. Acknowledge their struggles and offer suggestions that may help them: headphones to cut out noise (if they have access to them), setting a specific time each day, finding a study partner, etc. Encourage the student to persevere and overcome the obstacles.

14. How can you make reading the Bible a more important part of your life?

Affirm the student's response and share specific strategies you have utilized to make the Bible an important part of your life.

Action Step

Which Bible passage from this lesson stood out to you the most? Read that passage a few more times. Write it down and then read it again every day this week. Why do you think this passage was meaningful to you? What is something you can do this week to apply this passage to your life?

LESSON 3: The New Testament

Lesson Focus:

The New Testament reveals how God's promises came true through Jesus.

The Old Testament points to a promise that a King would come to earth someday. This King would be the Savior of the world. But at the end of the Old Testament, the King had not yet come.

The New Testament picks up the story of God's people where it ended in the Old Testament. It begins with the story of Jesus' birth, which took place about 400 years after the last story in the Old Testament. It explains that Jesus was the King that God had promised would come to earth.

The New Testament records the life and teachings of Jesus and the ministry of His disciples. It reveals that Jesus was the answer to God's promises in the Old Testament. It explains how Jesus brought spiritual freedom and hope to the entire world. It also shows Jesus' followers how to live a new life as they wait for Jesus to return.

1. What parts of the New Testament are the most familiar to you?

Answers will vary. A student's answer may give you some insight into their spiritual development and Christian experience. Consider sharing how the New Testament passages they mentioned have impacted your life.

The Writers of the New Testament

God spoke through the New Testament writers just as He spoke through the Old Testament writers. The writers were people who knew Jesus' story and were chosen by God to spread the good news about it. Some of the writers were Jesus' original disciples. Others learned about Jesus from the disciples. Some wrote firsthand* accounts of Jesus' life and stories about how people began believing in Him. Some wrote letters to help the new believers learn how to follow Jesus. Those letters traveled all around the ancient world and eventually became books of the Bible.

The New Testament writers often included direct quotations from the Old Testament. The writers explained how God's promises in the Old Testament came true through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.* God helped the writers understand how Jesus was central to God's plan to save the entire world.

Parts of the New Testament

The New Testament contains four main sections: the **Gospels***, the **book of Acts**, the **Epistles*** (ih-PIH-sulz), and the **book of Revelation** (reh-veh-LAY-shuhn).

The first four books of the New Testament are the **Gospels**. The word “gospel” means “good news.” The Gospels tell the good news about Jesus.

Three of Jesus’ early followers each wrote one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and John. They recorded what they saw and learned during the time they spent with Jesus. The fourth Gospel, written by Luke, is different. Luke never met Jesus. Luke collected stories from people who had been with Jesus and knew about His life.

However, all the Gospels tell the same story. They all paint a picture of who Jesus was when He was on earth. They all end with the crucifixion* and resurrection of Jesus. And they all share the true hope of the Gospel: that anyone who believes in Jesus will have eternal life through Him.

Read **John 20:11–31**.

2. What did John say was the reason God directed him to write down the stories in his Gospel (see verses 30–31)?

John said he wrote his Gospel so that those who read it would believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and so that they would have life in Jesus’ name.

The second section of the New Testament is the **book of Acts**. The book of Acts records the actions of Jesus’ apostles.* It shows how God used the apostles to spread the Gospel message. It also describes how the early Church* grew to understand that Jesus’ message of hope and love was for anyone who would listen and believe in Him.

Read **Acts 2:1–41**.

3. What did Peter tell the crowd about Jesus (see verses 22–24 and 32–36)?

The key point of Peter’s message was that God had sent Jesus to be both Lord and Messiah of the people of Israel.

4. How did the people respond to Peter’s message (see verses 37–41)?

They were deeply impacted by Peter’s message. Three thousand people responded to Peter’s call to repent, were baptized, and became believers as a result.

The third section of the New Testament is the **Epistles**, or letters. Most of these letters were written to specific churches, addressing things that had happened in those churches. But much of the instruction they contained was helpful to all believers. So, the letters were copied and passed around to groups of believers in other churches all over the Roman Empire. They helped instruct, correct, and encourage the believers. They provided practical guidance about how to truly follow God. Reading these Epistles can help us figure out what it means to follow Jesus today.

Read **Philippians 2:1–4**.

5. What did the writer encourage the people reading this letter to do?

The writer, Paul, encouraged them to love one another, to be one in spirit in the way they think and act, to be selfless and humble, to value others more than themselves, and to look out for the good of others.

6. How can this passage help Christians today as we try to follow Jesus? How can you apply it to your life?

Students should answer in a way that reflects their answer to question 5. Some students may give a specific application to a situation they are currently dealing with. If they have not done so, challenge the student to make a list of concrete ways they can apply Paul's direction to their life.

New Testament Books

GOSPELS

The Gospels contain accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John

BOOK OF ACTS

The book of Acts describes the actions of the apostles and the growth of the early Church.

Acts

EPISTLES

The Epistles are letters written to encourage and guide the early Church.

Romans	1 Thessalonians	James
1 Corinthians	2 Thessalonians	1 Peter
2 Corinthians	1 Timothy	2 Peter
Galatians	<u>2 Timothy</u>	1 John
<u>Ephesians</u>	Titus	2 John
<u>Philippians</u>	<u>Philemon</u>	3 John
<u>Colossians</u>	Hebrews	Jude

BOOK OF REVELATION

The book of Revelation contains a message about the future that God gave to the apostle John.

Revelation

The underlined books were written by people who were incarcerated. The writers were Christ-followers who encouraged other believers and built up the Church from inside prison.

Message of Hope

The final book in the New Testament is called **Revelation**. Revelation was written by an apostle of Jesus named John. God sent an angel to give John a message about His plans for the future of His Kingdom.

The book of Revelation can be hard to understand because it uses language and religious images (mostly from the Jewish religion) that would have been familiar to the people of John's day but are not familiar to most readers today. The original readers were also familiar with the seven churches John addressed. The churches were in cities in the region where John was incarcerated on the island of Patmos.

Revelation was written about seventy years after Jesus' death. At that time, Christians had been suffering under the mistreatment of the Roman government for at least thirty years. John's letter to the churches was an encouragement not to give up because God was going to win in the end. In the last chapter of Revelation, John recorded these words from Jesus: "Look! I am coming soon! I bring my rewards with me. I will reward each person for what they have done" (Revelation 22:12).

The message of Revelation is that we can have hope because Jesus will return to judge the world and save His people. This message is as important to us today as it was to the Christians of the early Church. Over the last 2,000 years, since Jesus' death and resurrection, Christians have always tried to apply the words of Revelation to their time and circumstances. Many people today believe that Jesus will return soon. As we look at our world today, we can still be hopeful of Jesus' return, whenever that may happen. While we are waiting for that day, we can apply to our lives the reminders found in Revelation: repent from sin, look to Jesus, and don't give up.

Read **Revelation 21:1–5**.

7. What specific promise for the future did God make in this passage? Write it in your own words.

God will create a new heaven and earth. God will make His home with His people. He will wipe away their tears. There will be no more death, sadness, or pain. God will make everything new.

If a student has simply copied the verses from the Bible, encourage them to try rewriting it in their own words.

8. What hope does this promise give to you?

Hopefully, the student will express confidence that God will be their God, wipe away their tears, and take away their pain. Ensure that the student understands that these promises are for them if they are a Christian.

A Book Written for Us

The writers of the Bible wrote what the Holy Spirit directed them to write. They told the story of God and His people. They recorded the laws and instructions God provided so that people could follow Him. They shared God's promise to send Jesus to die for the sins of the whole world and then return one day to rule as King forever.

When we read the New Testament, we see that all God's promises recorded in the Old Testament came true. As God promised, Jesus was born to a virgin in Bethlehem and became part of King David's family. As God promised, Jesus died and came back to life, defeating death and sin once and for all. As God promised, Jesus' actions would make it possible for anyone who believed in Him to be saved, no matter who they were or what they had done. As God promised, He sent His Holy Spirit to lead and guide His people so they could follow Him. All the books of the Bible together tell this one story of redemption* (rih-DEMP-shuhn) and hope. The Bible is God's way of showing us who He is, telling us how to follow Him, and reminding us that He cares for us. Although it was written many years ago, its messages and promises still apply to us today.

9. What does it mean to you that God keeps all His promises?

Hopefully, students will say that God can be trusted and that they can be assured that the promises of the Bible are for them if they put their trust in God. If a student expresses distrust in God's faithfulness, offer appropriate encouragement.

10. Do you think God can speak to you through the Bible? Why or why not?

As believers, we understand that God uses the Bible to speak to us. Some students may not have experienced this; some may have trouble understanding the concept. Consider this an opportunity to help the student strengthen their faith. Give some examples of how God has spoken to you through the Bible.

Action Step

Choose one of the passages you read during this lesson and read it again. Write down which passage you chose and answer this question: If you believe what the passage says is true, how do you need to change the way you live?

LESSON 4: Spending Time in God's Word

Lesson Focus:

**Reading the Bible helps us grow closer to God
as we apply its teachings to our lives.**

God's people have been reading His Word for more than 2,000 years. The Bible is not meant to be read once and then placed back on the shelf. Reading the Bible is a lifelong journey for each follower of Jesus.

The Bible was inspired by God, which means that He communicated His thoughts directly to the writers. Because of this, everything written in the Bible is very important. We shouldn't read it quickly or read only the parts we like.

As God's children, we can grow in our faith by reading His Word. When we set aside time to read the Bible carefully and meditate* on its words, we learn how to understand God and what He wants for us. God uses His Word to change our hearts and make us more like Him.

1. How has reading the Bible changed you or someone that you know?

Some students may be able to describe changes in their own thinking and behavior as a result of reading the Bible. Others may share a story about someone they know whose life was changed through faith in Christ and studying God's Word. Consider sharing an example of how reading the Bible has changed you.

Spiritual Guidance

When someone first becomes a Christian, he or she receives the gift of God's Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit lives within that person and guides him or her. The Holy Spirit also helps believers hear God when He speaks to them through His Word.

As we read and meditate on the Bible, we can invite the Holy Spirit to teach and guide us. In his letter to the church in Corinth, the apostle Paul wrote that God shows His wisdom to believers through His Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10).

When we pray for understanding and wisdom as we read God's Word, the Holy Spirit teaches us who God is and shows us what God wants for our lives.

Read **1 Corinthians 2:12–16**.

2. What does the Holy Spirit help us do?

The Holy Spirit helps us to know and understand God and His Word. The Spirit reveals the spiritual realities of God's wisdom.

3. What is one thing in the Bible that God has helped you understand through His Spirit?

Answers, of course, will vary. You may see answers such as, "God loves me," "God has a plan for my life," "I am sinful and need a Savior," "God can forgive my sins," "I can trust God with my life."

Meditating on God's Word

Because the Bible was written to the ancient Jewish people (the Old Testament) and the earliest followers of Jesus (the New Testament), it is important to understand what meditating on God's Word meant to them.

They did not view meditating as simply emptying their minds of thoughts, as some other religions do. To people in biblical times, meditating on Scripture meant reading it slowly or listening to someone read it out loud. As they read or listened, they would consider what God might be telling them through those words. They tried to appreciate every word and sentence being communicated—kind of like slowly eating and enjoying delicious food.

We can meditate on the Bible the same way today. It is important to read the words slowly and carefully and to read each passage many times. Reading the Bible this way can help us understand what the Holy Spirit wants to teach us.

As we read, we can pray that God will open our hearts and our minds so that we can understand what we are reading and apply it to our lives.

Read **Psalm 1:1–6**.

4. Think about the image of a tree drawing strength from water. What does it mean for us to draw strength from God's Word?

God gives us life and spiritual nutrition through His Word. When we are strong and healthy, we can prosper spiritually and grow in maturity. Without nourishment from God's Word, we will wither and be unable to bear fruit.

5. How can you create a habit of reading and meditating on God's Word regularly?

Students should outline some specific strategies that they can use to create a habit of reading the Bible and meditating on its words. Encourage the student to follow through with their strategies. Remind them that creating lasting habits takes time. If a student had trouble listing ideas, share some ways you have used to develop a healthy Bible-reading habit. Some students may say they already have a strong habit of reading God's Word regularly; encourage them to continue.

Trusting God for Answers

The writing style used by people in biblical times is different from the writing styles that people use today. The writers of the Bible did not provide the same number of details that we are used to reading in books today. Because of this, it is easy to see why people have a lot of questions when they read the Bible.

For example, the story of creation in Genesis 1–2 might cause readers to ask many questions. *Did anything exist before God created the earth? Why did God put the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the garden if He didn't want anyone to eat its fruit? Why did God take one of the man's ribs to create the woman?*

Read **Genesis 3:1–24**.

6. What are some questions you have about this story?

Any number of questions may arise as students read Genesis 3. Students may write questions about the identity and nature of the serpent, the tree, the responsibility of Adam and Eve for the Fall, God's response, etc.

We encourage you to answer the student's questions if you can. You can also provide references to relevant passages that would help the student find answers to their questions.

Scripture does not always give us all the details we think it should, but every detail that *is* provided is important. For example, God told the serpent (Satan) that Adam and Eve's offspring* (a son from a future generation) would crush his head. Christians today understand that God was talking about Jesus, who would come to earth to defeat Satan. But at the time, God's people were still waiting for this promise to come true.

The question of who this offspring would be can be found throughout the Bible. Many passages in the Bible point to someone who will come to lead God's people and save them. God's people continued asking, "Who is it?" until God finally provided an answer through Jesus.

Because the Bible was written this way, we will naturally have questions as we read it. But that just means we need to keep reading. Each new idea we learn helps us understand other parts of the Bible and see how it all fits together. If we still have questions, we pray to God for understanding, and we learn to trust God with the things we do not know.

It is important to trust God for the answers because we, as humans, don't know everything. If we try to come up with our own answers, we may start believing things that are not true about God or His Word. This is why we need to read Scripture carefully and thoughtfully, opening our hearts to learn the truth instead of thinking we have everything figured out. When we trust God, we will find that the Bible is an invitation from God to get to know Him and build a relationship with Him.

7. If you could ask God one question, what would that question be?

A student's response may reveal something they have struggled with in their life. Their question may not be answerable. Offer appropriate encouragement.

Why We Read the Bible

There are two reasons why every Christian needs to read the Bible. First, we read the Bible so that we can grow in our relationship with God. As we read Scripture, we learn about God—who He is, what He has done, and what He wants for us and for the world. Second, we read the Bible to learn how God wants us to live. As we open our hearts to God's love, we allow Him to shape and mold us so that our lives honor Him.

Read **Hebrews 4:12–13**.

8. How does this passage describe God's Word?

God's Word is alive and active. It is sharper than a double-edged sword. It can judge our thoughts and the attitudes of our hearts.

If we are following God, His Spirit is alive within us. He knows everything about us, including all our thoughts and desires. God wants what is best for us, but without His help, it is impossible for us to know or obey His will.

9. Why do you think it's important to remember that God knows our thoughts and desires?

We cannot hide from God. God knows our thoughts, yet He still loves us. God is aware of our struggles, weaknesses, and secret sins, but He still chooses to offer us grace and forgiveness.

When we meditate on God's Word and pray to Him for understanding, He helps us see the world the way that He sees it. Then we can start to live in a way that shows how much we love Him.

In order to begin that process, we need to learn how to apply Scripture to our lives. We need to let the truths we read in the Bible change our thoughts and actions. Some changes may be easy. Others will require time and patience as we keep trying to live the way God wants us to live.

10. What is a truth from Scripture that you feel God is calling you to apply to your life today?

The student's answer should reflect a truth found in the Bible and an understanding of how to put it into action.

A Method for Meditation

We know that God wants us to spend time in His Word, but it can be difficult to know the best way to do that. There are many different ways to practice meditating and listening to God while reading the Bible.

Some people read each passage multiple times in a row. Some people rewrite passages in their own words to help them understand the meaning. Another great method for meditation is following these four steps: **Scripture**, **Observation**,* **Application**, and **Prayer**.

Scripture: Choose a passage and read it. Write down a verse or set of verses that stood out to you. If you have questions about what the passage means, read the sections that come directly before and after your chosen passage.

Observation: Write down any thoughts you had as you read the passage. What words or phrases stood out to you? What questions came to mind? Where does this passage fit in the larger story of the Bible or within the book of the Bible you are reading? What did you learn from the passage?

Application: Think about ways you can apply the Scripture to your life. What does the passage say about how you might need to change the way you are living? How has it encouraged you or helped you?

Prayer: Pray that God will use this Scripture to guide you. Ask Him to help you apply it to your life and share the truth with others. Praise Him for His direction in your life.

11. Practice this meditation method.

Scripture: Read Matthew 28.

Observation: Write down what you learned and any questions you have.

Application: How can you apply the things you learned to your life?

Prayer: Write a prayer to God based on this Scripture.

Responses will vary greatly. Provide encouragement and guidance based on the insights they received from God through their meditation.

As you continue to spend time in the Bible, remember that it is a lifelong process. It might take some time to understand what God's Word means for you. Be patient with yourself as you meditate and study. Ask God to guide your understanding and show you His will for your life.

12. What is one thing you learned about God from this lesson or course that you did not know before? How did this change you?

Affirm and reinforce the truth that the student learned. Encourage the student to continue studying the Bible and pursuing spiritual growth.

Action Step

Choose one of the following passages to meditate on: Matthew 11:25–30; Mark 8:1–13; Luke 8:40–56; John 6:16–24.

Scripture:

Observation:

Application:

Prayer:



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