

INTRO TO THE BIBLE – WHAT IS THE BIBLE? AND WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

Instructions for Leaders in RED.

Leader's Notes: *In preparation for this lesson you may want to read the excerpts given regarding knowledge of God, the Bible, as well as the first three questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The Leader's notes can be found at the end of this lesson. They are included to stoke your interest and passion for the lesson you are teaching, not so much to provide material you will use.*

Lesson Outcomes:

- 1) Students will understand the Bible is God's written instrument to reveal himself to people.
- 2) Students will understand that ultimately the Bible is all about Christ.

OPENER:

Give students handout for this study and have them silently fill out the opening question(s). Give them a couple minutes for this, once it seems like most of them are done, move on to discussion.

ASK: So let's talk a little bit about the questions you just answered, what is your favorite book? Or what is the best book you have ever read? (If they get huffy about not being "a reader" **ask:** *what is your favorite story? Either from a movie, show, play, etc.*).

ASK: Why do you like it? What is it about it that makes it your favorite?

INTRODUCTION:

Read over this ahead of time. Feel free to use these words or your own. Well tonight's study is a bit of an introduction to everything we will study – *ever* – in small group. (And also in Youth Group).

You may have noticed growing up in the church that we use this particular book [**hold up your Bible**] all the time. And being very perceptive and yet curious, you may have asked yourself: *why that book, why the Bible, why not Harry Potter, why not Shakespeare or something else, why?*

The short and simple answer is because this book tells a story that is way better and way more important than any other story in the whole universe ever.

ASK: Imagine a friend walks up to you and asks you, "What is the Bible? I mean, what is it about?" **How would you respond?**

- You will probably get answers like: God's word, the scriptures, OT is about Israel, NT is about Jesus.
- Take answers, but keep in mind the scope of this lesson and the following lessons: you don't want to let discussion go too far into what you will be talking about in the following weeks.

Those are great answers; well as you may have guessed, tonight we are going to talk about the Bible. In fact, over the next three small groups we are going to talk about the Bible. Tonight, is a bit of an introduction.

So we asked earlier, “what is the Bible and what is it about?”, but to answer that I think we need to step back a little bit more.

WHAT WE BELIEVE:

In 1640, some really smart guys in England came up with a series of questions and answers that could be used to remind Christians of what the Bible teaches and what we believe. This series was called the Westminster Shorter Catechism. The questions and answers basically work through everything we believe from the most basic level to more complex beliefs.

The first question was: “*What is the chief end of man?*” or in other words “what is our ultimate purpose in life?”

ASK: Have any of you heard this before? What do you think the answer is?

The answer in this catechism is: [have them write this on their handout]

The chief end of man [our ultimate purpose] is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

ASK: So we know there is this big ol’ God out there, but how are we supposed to get to know him, how are we supposed to know what he is like, how we are supposed to glorify him and how we are supposed to enjoy him?? If/when someone answers, “the Bible” then move on...

Yeah, the second question asks: “*What rule [or guide] has God given us to direct how we may glorify and enjoy Him?*” or in other words, “if we are supposed to glorify God and enjoy him forever, how are we supposed to know how to do that?”

And the answer is: *the Bible*. Or to use the answer from the Catechism “*The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.*”

TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK:

Okay so we still haven’t really answered our original question, “What is the Bible and what is it about?” To answer this we are going to take a really fast tour of the Bible. Are you ready?

*What follows is supposed to be a fast paced run through the Bible. For this to work you need to keep moving fast; even if you think some are falling behind, that is okay, the point is for them to hear over and over again that this book is about God. **WARNING:** this could take all of your time if you don’t pace it correctly. Hit the key points BUT do not spend so much time here that you don’t finish the lesson.*

Okay open to the Table of Contents and stick your finger there.

Now **TURN** to Gen 1:1 – **ASK**: What are the first four words? – *In the beginning God...*

- So the Bible right from the beginning tells us that this book is about ... whom?
 - o It is about God!
- Alright, **TURN** back to your table of contents and look at it with me. We are going to really quickly go over the Old Testament, ready?
 - o The first 5 books – Gen, Ex, Lev, Num, Deut – are about God creating the world, creating people, those people reject God, so God chooses to call a people – a nation – to himself so that they will worship God and tell the world about God.
 - [OPTIONAL – if you can talk fast]:
 - These books include stories about Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Joseph, Moses and how all of them interact with...? God!
 - You may remember God uses Moses to take the people out of Egypt, they wander in the wilderness and God gives them the Laws about how to live and worship God.
 - o The next 12 books are the history of God’s people – Israel.
 - [OPTIONAL – if you can talk fast]:
 - These books tell about how God’s people go into the land, they have some judges, some kings, they stop following God and so God kicks them out of the land – this is called the Exile – and then God brings them back *from exile* into the Land again.
 - o The next 6 books are a collection of writings about God.
 - They are wise sayings, songs, prayers, proverbs and a love song – all about God.
 - o The next 17 books are about the prophets of God.
 - These guys were called by God → to speak the words of God → to God’s people.
 - [OPTIONAL – if you can talk fast]:
 - They did this before they were kicked out of the land, when they were kicked out of the land, and after they were kicked out of the land.
 - They also looked forward to the Messiah, God’s chosen one, who would come and make everything right, rule God’s people, and make God’s world the way God intended it to be.

ASK: PHEW!!! So if you were to summarize the Old Testament, what would you say it is about?

Ans: *God (it talks about his people, his world, his law, his writings, but its all about him).*

Okay are you ready for a tour of the New Testament??

- **TURN** to Matthew 1:1 – **ASK**: Based on verse 1, what do you think the first book of the NT is about? [Jesus]

- **TURN** to John 1:1 – **ASK**: What are the first six words of the book? *In the beginning was the Word...* Do they look familiar? **READ** all of verse 1 and then verse 14. **ASK**: What is this saying or who are they talking about? *The Word [aka Jesus] is God.*

We will come back to that...

- **TURN** to Acts 1:1 **ASK**: Who is it about? [Jesus]
- **TURN** to Romans 1:1 **ASK**: Whose name comes up again? [Jesus]

If you go through the rest of the New Testament, you will find that it's all about Jesus, who as John 1:1 said, was with God and was God in the beginning. [If someone asks about the Trinity tell them that will come in a few weeks.. ;) ...]

So let's recap what we have so far.

- **ASK**: The Old Testament is all about whom? God
- **ASK**: The New Testament is all about whom? Jesus. But as we read in John, if Jesus is the Son of God, and was with God in the beginning and *IS* God, then the New Testament is also all about God. Right?

Through the Bible we get to know about God. The reason we will use this in Small Group, in Youth Group, in Church, is because this - more clearly than anything else – tells us about God.

Okay last verse, **TURN** to Luke 24:27 [and v.44 if you want].

- **ASK**: What is this verse saying?
 - o Jesus is saying that even the Old Testament is all about him!!
- **ASK**: What do you think he means by that?
 - o Get answers and let them discuss it.
 - o Eventually reign it in and say something to the effect of: "Yeah, God's law, the history of God's people, God's prophets, they all pointed to Christ. This is awesome. And as we study the Bible together over the next couple of years we're going to hopefully understand the story of the Bible more and more, that it is all about God and it all points to Christ!!"

So let's try to answer those questions on your sheet

- **ASK**: First question, What is the Bible?
 - o Let them try to answer this, if necessary say something like:
 - o The Bible is God's written instrument to reveal himself – *its all about him!*
- **ASK**: Second question, What is it about?
 - o Ultimately, its all about Christ!

REFLECTION: Psalm 119

Have them use their handout for this reflection time. Give them about 5 minutes or so (or until they all finish) to complete this. It says:

Turn in your Bibles to Psalm 119. This is the longest Psalm, and the longest chapter in the whole Bible and it is a song/prayer to God about the Bible. It uses different words to talk about the Bible (e.g. "Your Law", "Your statutes", "Your commandments", "Your word", etc.).

Look at verses 14-16, 35, 47-48, 72, 77, 97, 103 ... they all talk about how much the writer of the Psalm loves or delights in God's Word.

Have you ever experienced this in your own life? Why or why not?

Feel free to scan the rest of the Psalm and ponder some of the stuff the writer of the Psalm says about God's Word. Take some time to journal or write a prayer to God about His Word.

When everyone is done, we will pray and ask God that we can learn this year through the Bible more about Him, and how we can glorify and enjoy him forever!

PRAY:

OPTIONAL: If you have time, feel free to discuss the first question about whether or not they have experienced delight in God's Word and why they think that is.

As a group, pray - asking God to help you this year to learn through the Bible more about Him, and how we can glorify and enjoy him forever.

LEADERS NOTES:

From *Westminster Shorter Catechism*:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, [Psalm 86; Isa 60:21; Rom 11:36; 1 Cor 6:20; 10:31; Rev 4:11] and to enjoy him forever. [Psa 16:5-11; Psa 144:15; Isa 12:2; Luk 2:10; Phil 4:4; Rev 21:3-4]

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, [Matt 19:4-5 with Gen 2:24; Luk 24:27, 44; 1 Cor 2:13; 14:37; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 3:2, 15-16] is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him. [Deut 4:2. Psa 19:7-11; Isa 8:20; John 15:11; 20:30-31; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 3:15-17; 1 John 1:4]

Q. 3. What do the Scriptures principally teach? The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, [Gen 1:1; John 5:39; 20:31; Rom 10:17; 2 Tim 3:15] and what duty God requires of man. [Deut 10:12-13; Josh 1:8; Psa 119:105; Mic 6:8; 2 Tim 3:16-17]

From Eugene Peterson's *"Answering God"*:

The canon (the two testaments of sixty-six books that are authoritative for the Christian faith) is a corral, fencing in all the literary creatures conceived and born out of a common inspiration and that serve a common purpose. (The common inspiration is the Holy Spirit; the common purpose salvation). Many of these creatures bear little or no resemblance to each other. Some of them we don't like at all. Others we become fond of and develop close friendships. But the canonical decision was that our preferences are not determinative in these matters: all the creatures are related in some way or other to all the others, and each in its own way serves the common purpose. Each is necessary, but none is complete in itself. Each must be used (interpreted) in the light of all the others. It is not permitted to take one of the creatures out of the corral, leaving all the others behind, and ride out across the prairies sentimentally into the sunset, searching for conditions congenial to sublimity. There is no gate in the corral fence.

From John Stott's *The Living Church*:

First, true worship is *biblical* worship, that is to say, it is a response to the biblical revelation... The truth is that it is impossible to worship an unknown god. For if we do not know him, we cannot worship him, and our so-called worship is bound to degenerate into idolatry.

From John Piper's *"When I don't Desire God How to Fight for Joy"* (italics are his):

The Word of God is essential to joy in God [because] God reveals *himself* mainly by his Word. And seeing this revelation of God is the foundation of our joy. As it was in the days of Samuel, so it is today: "The LORD *appeared* ... at Shiloh, for the LORD *revealed himself* to Samuel at Shiloh *by the word of the LORD*" (1 Sam. 3:21). When it says, "The LORD *appeared*," it says something amazing. God was seen not with the eyes of the head, but with the eyes of the heart, for God is "the King of ages, immortal, *invisible*, the only God" (1 Tim 1:17). And though it may seem strange, this seeing at Shiloh happened "*by the word* of the LORD." As the Word was heard, the Lord was seen. In the hearing was the seeing. The spiritual hearing of God's Word becomes the spiritual seeing of God's glory.

So it is in the gospel today. Paul says that becoming a Christian means "Seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4). The gospel is news about the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Cor 15:1-4). It is a word to be heard. And in this hearing there is something to be seen: "The light ... of the glory of Christ." In the hearing is the seeing. The Lord opens the eyes of the heart to see the glory of Christ in the Word. God has chosen in this age to reveal himself to the world mainly through the incarnate Word, Jesus Christ, by means of the written Word, the Bible.

The reason this is so crucial ... is that God himself is the ultimate object of our enjoyment. But God "reveals himself ... *by the word*." Oh, how precious is the Bible! Here is where we see God most clearly and most surely. The Holy Spirit opens our eyes and grants us to see the beauty of Christ (Matt 16:17; Acts 16:14). If there were no Bible, there would be no lasting joy.

From *Christianity for Modern Pagans* (Pascal's *Pensées* and some explanation by Peter Kreeft):

P: *An artisan speaking of riches, a lawyer speaking of war, or kingship, etc., but the rich man can well speak of riches, ... and God can speak well of God.*

K: Authority is based on experience. When you want the authoritative word about a novel, listen to the author. Thus, the rich man, not the artisan, is the authority on riches; the soldier, not the lawyer, is the authority on war; and God, not man, is the authority on God.

This is an argument for the necessity of revelation. A three-year-old's guesses about a thirty-year-old's life are found to be ridiculously off the mark, unless the thirty-year-old *tells* the three-year-old. Even less hope is there for our understanding of God unless he takes the initiative and tells us, that is, reveals himself.

When we want to know something much less than ourselves – for example, a rock – it is easy. All the activity is ours; the rock cannot hide. When we want to know an animal, it's harder. It's active. It can run away. It can hide. We have to win its confidence. Yet most of the activity is on our side. When it comes to knowing another human being, the activity is shared fifty-fifty. Unless both parties open up, there is no communication. When it comes to knowing God, all the activity is his. There must be revelation.

From Calvin's "*Institutes*":

I.VI.1 - God bestows the actual knowledge of himself upon us only in the Scriptures.

That brightness which is borne in upon the eyes of all men both in heaven and on earth is more than enough to withdraw all support from men's ingratitude, to involve the human race in the same guilt, sets forth to all without exception his presence portrayed in his creatures. Despite this, it is needful that another and better help be added to direct us aright to the very Creator of the universe. It is not in vain, then, that he added the light of his Word by which to become known unto salvation, and he regarded as worthy of this privilege those whom he pleased to gather more closely and intimately to himself.... Not only does he teach the elect to look upon a god, but also shows himself as the God upon whom they are to look. He has from the beginning maintained this plan for his church, so that besides these common proofs [creation] he also put forth his Word, which is a more direct and more certain mark whereby he is to be recognized.

From Thomas Watson's "*A Body of Divinity*":

Question: *Why are the Scriptures called canonical?* **Answer:** Because the Word is a rule of faith, a canon to direct our lives. The Word is the judge of controversies, the rock of infallibility. Only that which agrees with Scripture is to be received for truth. All maxims in divinity are to be brought to the touchstone of Scripture, as all measures are brought to the standard.

Q: *What is the main scope and end of Scripture?* **Ans:** To reveal a way of salvation [2 Tim 3:15]. It makes a clear discovery of Christ (See John 20:31). The design of the Word is to be a test whereby our grace is to be tried; a sea-mark to show us what rocks are to be avoided. The Word is to sublimate and quicken our affections; it is to be our directory and consolatory; it is to waft us over to the land of promise.

Q: *How should we search the Scriptures to find life?* **Ans:** [I blocked this out into outline form]

1. Read the Bible with reverence.
 - a. Think in every line you read that God is speaking to you... Read with seriousness...
 - b. Read the Word with affection... Read the Scripture, not only as a history, but as a love letter sent you from God, which may affect your hearts.
2. Be exhorted to prize the written word.
 - a. David valued the Word more than gold...
 - b. The Word is the field where Christ the pearl of price is hid. In this sacred mine we dig, not for a wedge of gold, but for a weight of glory...
 - c. The Scriptures teach a man to know himself...
3. If the Scripture is of divine inspiration, believe it.
 - a. But people are in part atheists, they give but little credit to the Word, therefore they are so impious, and draw such dark shadows in their lives...

- b. Some think, if God should send an angel from heaven, and declare his mind, they would believe him... *[but God has given us His Word!!]*
 - c. God is wise, and he thinks the fittest way to make his mind known to us is by writing. The belief of Scripture is of high importance.
- 4. Love the Word written.
 - a. There is that in Scripture which may breed delight.
 - b. David counted the Word “sweeter than honey and the honeycomb” Psalm 19:10.
- 5. Conform to Scripture
 - a. Let us lead Scripture lives. Oh that the Bible might be seen printed on our lives! Do what the Word commands. Obedience is an excellent way of commenting on the Bible...
- 6. Contend for Scripture
 - a. ... This jewel is too precious to be parted with...
- 7. Be thankful to God for the Scriptures.
 - a. What a mercy is it that God has not only acquainted us with what his will is, but that he has made it known by writing!!
- 8. Adore God’s distinguishing grace.
 - a. ... Christian, bless God that he has not only given thee his Word to be a rule of holiness, but his grace to be a principle of holiness!!