



harvest Groups

“Unchanging Truths
in a Changing Culture”

**TIME
LESS**



“Unchanging Truths
in a Changing Culture”

TIME LESS

Timeless: Unchanging Truths in a Changing Culture

© 2023 by Harvest Christian Fellowship. All rights reserved.

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this publication are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, a Division of Tyndale House Ministries, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version, copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Portions of this resource have been taken from the following by permission:

- Greg Laurie Sermon Manuscripts
- *New Believer's Bible*. Tyndale Publishers, Carol Stream, IL, 2010.
- *Essentials*. Kerygma Publishing—Allen David Books, Dana Point, CA, 2011.
- *Essentials Bible Study*. NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2013.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission from the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America.

Harvest Ministries, PO Box 4000, Riverside, CA 92514.

CONTENTS

How to Use This Study Guide	4
Introduction	5
God Is Three in One.	6
Bible Study Methods	53
Tools for Bible Study	54
Harvest Resources	55

ONE The Real God	7
TWO Jesus Christ: God with Us	17
THREE The Holy Spirit: Power Beyond Ourselves	25
FOUR The Truth About Heaven and Hell	34
FIVE The Bible: Our User Manual for Life	44
Reflection Questions	52

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This study is designed to walk through some of the foundational truths of the Christian faith. While the study can be done individually, we strongly encourage you to join a Harvest Group where you will have the opportunity to discuss what you are learning in each week's lesson with other believers. You will need your Bible or a Bible app to read the passages as you work through the study.

GETTING STARTED

This section includes an introduction to the lesson's topic along with a question to get the conversation started in your group time. There is also a memory verse included here relating to the topic in each week's lesson. Memorizing Scripture is important, so try to memorize the verse each week.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The main part of each lesson breaks the primary topic down into sections with specific questions to help you understand what the Bible teaches about the topic and practically apply it to your life. Some complete these questions in one sitting, while others spread it out over a few days. There is no right or wrong way of doing this—the most important part is that you are taking the time to dig into God's Word. Make it your aim to complete these questions ahead of your group time to be ready to share what you learned. We all know that some weeks are busier than others, so if you aren't able to complete your lesson, still meet with your group with what you have.

PRAYER POINT

Each lesson closes with a chance for you to write out a specific prayer based on the week's study. This can help guide your closing prayer time as a group.

INTRODUCTION

We are about to start a five-week study covering some of the foundational truths of the Christian faith. I like to call it “Theology 101.” In each lesson, we’ll explore a new topic, which will include God’s attributes and character, the Person of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, Heaven and Hell, and the Bible.

You might be thinking, “Why spend five weeks studying theology? I just want to love Jesus and go about my business.” The study of God has never been more important, and our world has never needed it more. I find there is great biblical illiteracy among many Christians today. They say they believe certain things but can’t tell you why they believe them. And more importantly, they can’t tell you where those things are in the Bible.

Why is this a problem?

As Christians, we need to know not only what we believe but *why* we believe. In other words, we need to think carefully. We need to study God and the changeless principles and precepts in His Word. This type of study has a name. It’s called *theology*. And whether we like that word or not, we neglect theology at our own peril. Because experience is never to be the basis for theology. It’s the other way around: sound theology should be the basis for our experience. C. S. Lewis gave this warning years ago in *Mere Christianity*: “If you do not listen to Theology, that will not mean you have no ideas about God. It will mean you have a lot of wrong ones.”

In this study, we will talk about theology without apology and break it down in an understandable way, giving you takeaway truths you can apply in your own life. We’ll take time to strengthen the foundations of our knowledge about God—or perhaps to build that foundation for the first time.

Let’s get started!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Stephen', written in a cursive style.

GOD IS THREE IN ONE

A Biblical Sketch of God's Nature

GOD IS	FATHER	SON	HOLY SPIRIT
ETERNAL	Psalm 90:2	Revelation 1:8; Colossians 1:15, 17; John 1:2	Hebrews 9:14
CREATOR	Isaiah 64:8; 1 Corinthians 8:6	John 1:3-4; Colossians 1:16-17	Genesis 1:1-2; Job 26:13; Job 33:4
TRUTH	2 Samuel 7:28; Isaiah 65:16	John 14:6	John 16:13

LESSON 1

THE REAL GOD

GETTING STARTED

Who is God? That's a big question that requires wrapping our finite minds around an infinite God. Most people will say they believe in God or a "higher power." But what they have in mind is a customized god that adapts to the changing culture and to our own ideas and inclinations.

What we know and believe about God matters because it determines how we will live. So, if we want to know the true God, we must look to Scripture. In this lesson, we're going to look at what the Bible has to say about the attributes and character of God the Father.

- How is God portrayed or discussed in our culture today?

MEMORY VERSE

Jeremiah 9:24 (ESV):

"Let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

To have a thriving relationship with God, we must maintain an accurate understanding of who He is. While you will never see a photograph of God, there are sketches of Him throughout Scripture. Because He is loving and wants to be known, God gives us a clear description of who He is. The Bible reveals some characteristics that can only be attributed to God. These are essential qualities that He alone possesses. God is gloriously incomprehensible—but knowing these attributes deepens our faith and stirs us to worship Him.

For each attribute, contemplate the Scriptures and what it means for us in practical ways; then finish the sentence with what stands out to you.

NO ONE BUT GOD IS . . .

Eternal (Self-Existent). Unlike us, God is infinite. As believers, we look forward to eternity, but God has always existed. He inhabits eternity past, present, and future.

Psalm 90:1–2

Revelation 1:8

- Because God is eternal, there will never be a time when . . .

Immutable. Simply put, this means that God is unchangeable in His essence, nature, and ways. He has no need to grow or develop further. He does not age, weaken, or wear out.

Psalm 102:25–27

Psalm 33:11

James 1:17

- Because God never changes, I can be certain that . . .

Omniscient (All-Knowing). God has perfect knowledge and understanding. He does not need to learn new things or have anything explained. He sees everything—past, present, and future.

Hebrews 4:13

Proverbs 15:3

Psalms 139:1–4

- Because God knows and understands everything, and nothing escapes His notice . . .

Omnipresent. God is present everywhere at all times. He is not restricted to being in one place at a time.

Psalms 139:5–12

Psalms 33:13–15

Jeremiah 23:23–24

- Because God is present everywhere . . .

Omnipotent. God has unlimited skill, strength, and ability to do all that He desires to do. No challenge is too difficult, no circumstance is out of control, and no problem is beyond His ability to solve.

Jeremiah 32:17, 27

Matthew 19:26

Ephesians 3:20

- Because God is all-powerful . . .

- Which of these attributes most speaks to you in this season of life? In what way?

- Did the Scriptures raise questions or reveal any inconsistencies in your thoughts about God? If so, in what way?

We may, at times, unintentionally pick up thoughts or ideas about God that are inaccurate. This is why it is vital to make reading the Bible part of our daily lives. When we come across something in the Bible that contradicts our thinking, we need to realign our thoughts with what Scripture reveals to be true.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD

Now that we've looked at some essential qualities that God alone possesses, consider some characteristics that He gives us the capacity for also. Jesus said, "You are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). But let's be clear. First, because God is inherently perfect, He will always be infinitely more than we can imagine or hope to be. We can become wise, but God will always be infinitely wiser. Second, these qualities can only be formed in us through the power of God's Holy Spirit working in us (see 2 Corinthians 3:18). The Holy Spirit will instruct, transform, and enable us to actively live out what we learn.

GOD IS . . .

Holy. God is "set apart" from all that is evil, depraved, or impure (see Habakkuk 1:13). God's holiness is the standard of purity in all things and the pattern for all His people to emulate.

1 Samuel 2:2

Isaiah 57:15

1 Peter 1:15–16

- As a believer, you are set apart by God to be holy. According to Romans 12:1–2, what does that look like in practice, and how do we cooperate with the Holy Spirit through this process?

Righteous and **Just.** Because God is holy, He hates sin. Because He is righteous and just, He is fair in all His dealings with humanity (see Deuteronomy 32:4). God's holy standard does not change, despite the changing culture we live in. At times, we struggle with the reality that life isn't fair; some may even mistake the longsuffering grace of God to mean that He is soft on sin. But ultimately God will not allow sin to go unpunished. We can be thankful that we serve a righteous and just God who wants to demonstrate His righteousness through us.

Representing a holy God and declaring His truth in a dark world is not a task to be taken lightly. We need to have a wholesome dread of displeasing God and never trade reverence for relevance.

Micah 6:8

1 John 3:7–9

James 1:21–25

- Reverence for God and His Word is the most culturally important thing about us. In what ways do you most feel cultural pressure to compromise your beliefs or behavior in order to be relevant? What steps can you take in order to stand strong?

Loving. God's love is unconditional; there is nothing we can do to earn or lose God's love. In spite of our unlovable condition (see Romans 5:7–8), God chose to love us, and He compels us to demonstrate His love to others. Jesus said, "You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matthew 22:37–39). How we love others says a lot about how we love God.

Jeremiah 31:3

1 John 4:11–12

John 13:34–35

- In what ways or in what circumstances do you find it easiest to demonstrate God's love to others?

- When is it most difficult for you to love others? Describe how God is stretching your capacity to love others in this respect.

Merciful. God is the master of mercy. He is compassionate toward those who suffer, whether from circumstances out of our control or self-imposed misery brought on by our sinfulness. In mercy, God pardons our sins when we repent and ask for forgiveness. God wants to demonstrate His mercy through us to others. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declared, “God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy” (Matthew 5:7). A simple description of mercy is *humility in action*. We demonstrate mercy in two general ways.

First, we seek to meet the physical or spiritual needs of others, as the Good Samaritan did in Jesus’ parable (see Luke 10:30–37) and Peter and John did with the lame man (see Acts 3:1–8).

- What practical opportunities can you think of to show mercy in this way?

The second way we demonstrate mercy is by forgiving others. The cost of God forgiving us is immeasurable: the death of His Son on the cross paid for our sins. We extend mercy because we have received mercy from God (see Matthew 18:33). The hurts that necessitate forgiveness don’t usually go away easily. But there’s a difference between forgetting and choosing not to remember. God says, “I—yes, I alone—will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again” (Isaiah 43:25).

- In this sense, are you willing to let God demonstrate mercy through you? Why or why not?

It's been said that we are never more like God than when we forgive. Forgiving means choosing to forgive the offense and never bring it up again, even to ourselves.

Faithful. Faithfulness is at the heart of all that God is and all that He does. Because He is faithful and true to His Word, we can be certain He will always do as He has promised (see Numbers 23:19).

Deuteronomy 31:6

Psalms 33:4

1 Corinthians 10:13

- Think of an opportunity you've had in the past few weeks to consciously depend on God's faithfulness for a specific need or situation. How has God been faithful to you?

- Faithfulness is an essential characteristic of being a Christian. What does that look like in practical, everyday life? (See Matthew 5:16; Luke 16:10; Titus 2:11–13; Hebrews 10:23–24.)

- Think of someone you would describe as being an example of faithfulness. Share what stands out to you about this person.

APPLICATION

- What specifics of God's attributes and characteristics stood out most to you in this study? What new insights did you gain?

- Did this week's study reveal that you have beliefs about God that don't align with Scripture? If so, what are they and how can you correct them?

- Is there an area in your life where you need to be mindful of one of God's specific attributes or characteristics? If so, explain.

PRAYER POINT

It is God's will for us to know Him and be intimately familiar with His attributes and His defining characteristics. Write down everything you know to be true about God the Father. Spend time in prayer, giving thanks and praising Him for who He is. Thank Him for the privilege of knowing Him. Ask Him to give you an even deeper understanding of who He is in ever-increasing measures.

LESSON 2

JESUS CHRIST: GOD WITH US

GETTING STARTED

Everybody seems to have an opinion about Jesus. Some think He was a wise spiritual teacher. Some say He was a revolutionary who championed the poor against Rome and elite Jewish leaders who exploited them. Some make Jesus into a sentimental hero. And others dismiss Him. Sadly, even some Christians struggle with what they know—or, more accurately, what they *don't* know—about Jesus. Who is Jesus really? That's what we'll explore in this session.

- In a few words, how would you describe Jesus to someone who had no knowledge of Him?

MEMORY VERSE

John 14:6:

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

JESUS WAS—AND IS—FULLY GOD

If you want to know what God is like, take a long look at Jesus—because Jesus is God in human form. When Jesus walked this earth, He wasn't a mere representative for God; He was God Himself, walking among us. He was not a glorified man; He was God in human form. Jesus embodied all the attributes and characteristics of God that we looked at in the previous lesson. And yet, Jesus was also a man who walked this earth, breathed our air, and felt our pain.

- Read the following passages. What statements convey that Jesus is fully God?

John 1:1–5

Luke 5:17–26

Colossians 1:15–20

- Why is it necessary to recognize that Jesus is fully God? What would be the implication if He weren't?

There was never a point in time when Jesus became God. He always was God. He was God before He came to earth as a baby, and He did not cease to be God when He became a man.

JESUS—WHO WAS GOD—ALSO BECAME A MAN

The prophet Isaiah looked hundreds of years into the future when he wrote about the birth of Jesus. It wasn't only the story of an arrival on earth; it was also a departure from Heaven. From earth's perspective we say, "Unto us a Child is born." But from Heaven's perspective "a Son [was] given" (Isaiah 9:6–7 NKJV). The Lord's Virgin Birth was a claim to His deity.

Through the years, some have struggled with believing this defining miracle. Joseph struggled at first, and God sent a messenger to confirm that what the prophet said in Isaiah 7:14 was, indeed true: "Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means 'God is with us'" (Matthew 1:23). Christ was God, but not because He was virgin-born. Rather, He was virgin-born because He was God.

At an appointed time in history, Jesus became fully human. But while Jesus *identified* with us, He did not become *identical* with us. That's an important distinction to make. Jesus became human without ceasing to be God. Jesus did not exchange deity for humanity—He was deity *in* humanity.

- Read Philippians 2:5–11. What insight do these verses give us about Jesus?

- Jesus did not cease to be fully God, but He did lay aside the privileges of His deity. How does Jesus taking on human form influence your thoughts about Him? In what ways does it make it easier for us to relate with Him?

When Jesus lived on earth, He walked until He was tired. He got physically hungry and thirsty. He felt anger and sorrow. He bled real blood, and He experienced real human agony. Finally, He died as a man, in that His body ceased to function. He didn't just *appear* to be a man; He *was* a man.

- According to Hebrews 4:15–16, how does Jesus' experience as a human affect the way He views and treats us?

- What weaknesses do you experience that you're glad Jesus understands?

JESUS' MISSION

Jesus took on flesh and came to earth with a specific mission that only He could accomplish. The Gospel of Luke describes Jesus' mission this way: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save those who are lost" (Luke 19:10).

- Take time to contemplate the following verses and how they shed light on Jesus' mission. What personally resonates with you?

John 10:11–13

John 3:16–17

Acts 4:11–12

There were many men who died on Roman crosses two thousand years ago, and one of them happened to be named Jesus. But there was only one Man who died on a cross who was God in human form, atoned for the sin of the world, and then rose again from the dead.

- From Isaiah 53:3–9, describe what Jesus endured for us in order to fulfill His mission.

- What does Colossians 1:20–22 say Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross?

The most crucial truth of the Christian faith is that Jesus Christ, though He came to earth as a human being, is in fact God. And the entire reason for Jesus' coming was so He could restore people to a right relationship with God through His death on the cross.

JESUS WILL RETURN AND REIGN FOREVER

While no one knows the day or time of Christ's return, Jesus tells us to be ready. As believers, we can look forward to Jesus' imminent return with confidence because the Bible says it will happen. All the prophecies concerning the first coming of Jesus (more than one hundred) were fulfilled exactly as foretold. There is no legitimate reason, then, to question whether the prophecies of the Lord's second coming will also happen as predicted.

- Jesus makes it clear in Revelation 3:11 that He is coming soon. How does that reality make you feel? Excited? Nervous? Relieved? Explain why you feel this way.

- Read Revelation 19:11–14. What can we learn about the Second Coming from these verses? How is Jesus described? How will it be different from the way He came the first time, two thousand years ago?

Jesus' second coming will be seen by everyone. He will wear many crowns because He is Lord over all the universe. His robe will be spattered with blood to remind us of the death He suffered when He came the first time. And He will reign victorious when He comes again.

APPLICATION

- Why does it matter what I (we) believe about Jesus? Answer this for yourself first. How would you respond to someone else who asks this question?

- Are there aspects of Christ's identity that you struggle with? What steps will you take to continue working through those questions? List them here.

- In what ways has studying this topic drawn you closer to Jesus or changed your perspective of who He is?

PRAYER POINT

Spend some time in prayer telling Jesus all the things you know to be true about Him. Give Him thanks and praise for revealing His identity and character in the Scriptures. Acknowledge any areas you struggle to understand; trust Him to increase your faith and help you continue to grow in your relationship with Him.

LESSON 3

THE HOLY SPIRIT: POWER BEYOND OURSELVES

GETTING STARTED

Throughout church history, there has been much confusion about the identity and role of the Holy Spirit. When the Bible speaks of the Holy Spirit, some imagine an impersonal force generated by the universe or by God, something we can tap into and control if we learn to practice the right techniques. But that is not remotely what the biblical writers had in mind. In this session, we'll examine who the Holy Spirit really is.

- List a few things you believe to be true about the Holy Spirit.

MEMORY VERSE

John 14:26 (ESV):

“But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.”

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS GOD

Jesus told the disciples that when He returned to the Father, He would send “another Helper, to be with [them] forever” (John 14:16 ESV). In Greek, the word for “another” means “of the same kind.” Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, who is distinct from, yet equal to, Jesus and His Father. We’re not talking about modes or manifestations of the same Person; rather, we are talking about three Persons who are all simultaneously active. In other words, the Father is not the same Person as the Son. And the Son is not the same Person as the Holy Spirit. There is one God, and this true God exists in three distinct, coequal, coeternal Persons. Not three Gods, but one Being in perfect harmony.

- Read Matthew 3:13–17. Where do you see God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit distinctly active in this scene? What does each do?

Many struggle to wrap their minds around the truth of a triune God—this is something we will never fully grasp this side of Heaven. One common misconception is thinking of the Holy Spirit as “it” rather than “He.” This might be due, in part, to biblical comparisons of the Holy Spirit such as Him being like the wind or when He descended from Heaven like a dove. But these unique descriptions attributed to the Holy Spirit are simply metaphors and are not meant to imply that He is merely a force or power. Jesus consistently refers to the Spirit as “He” (see John 14:16–17; 16:8).

- Read John 14:15–17. How does Jesus describe the Holy Spirit and what He does?

- When have you experienced comfort and counsel from the Holy Spirit? Give an example.

- How does knowing the Holy Spirit as a Person rather than an impersonal force influence the way you respond to Him?

The Holy Spirit has a distinct personality and specific work that He wants to do in our lives as followers of Jesus Christ. He is the Spirit of truth; He guides believers into spiritual truth and reveals who Jesus is.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IN OUR LIVES

The Holy Spirit is promised to every believer, and His presence within us is an identifying mark of ownership that shows we belong to God (see Romans 8:16). When you believed in Christ, you were “sealed with the Holy Spirit” (Ephesians 1:13 NKJV). His presence with you is a promise fulfilled (see John 14:16) and a guarantee of the spiritual inheritance that God has prepared for you (see Ephesians 1:13–14).

Let’s consider some of the ways that God’s Spirit is present and active in our world and in the lives of believers today.

The Holy Spirit's work in the world. Without the convicting power of the Spirit, we would never repent of our sins and come to Jesus (see John 16:8–10). The Holy Spirit shows us the message of Jesus' death and resurrection is true and convinces us that we need to turn to God.

- What events led up to the time when you became a Christ follower? Do you recall being convicted of sin and your need for a Savior? Briefly share how the Holy Spirit compelled you to come to Jesus.

- If the Holy Spirit is the One who convinces people that they are sinners in need of salvation, what role do we have in drawing people to Jesus? Discuss the impact that our lives and prayers can have. (See Matthew 5:16; 1 Peter 3:15–16; Colossians 4:2–6.)

- Can you think of someone whose witness, whether by their life or words, has made an impression on you? How so?

The Holy Spirit's power at work through us. One of the greatest things the Holy Spirit does in the lives of believers is to empower our witness. This requires power beyond us, and this is what Jesus promised in Acts 1:8 when He said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you" (emphasis added).

"Power" is translated from the Greek word *dunamis* from which we get the words *dynamite*, *dynamic*, and *dynamo*. This power Jesus spoke of is not an impersonal force. *Dunamis* is God's

Holy Spirit exercising His power in our lives to give us an element of boldness and persuasive power that we would not have otherwise.

- Do you desire more of God’s *dunamis* power in your life? In what way?

WHY CHRISTIANS NEED THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit transforms us from the inside out so we can live fruitful lives that are pleasing to God—which is impossible for us to do on our own. Walking in the Spirit means we recognize that, apart from relying on and obeying Him, we are powerless to change our ways. But when we cooperate with the Holy Spirit, He will help us conquer our sinful nature and produce these godly qualities in our lives.

- According to Galatians 5:16–21, what characterizes a life dominated by a sinful nature?

- What characterizes a life guided by the Spirit?

- According to Galatians 5:22–26, what does the Holy Spirit produce in our lives?

- How can we tell if we are walking in the Spirit or in the flesh?

When we are walking in the Spirit, it will be evidenced in our lives by the outflowing of this spiritual fruit. Fruit, of course, doesn't grow overnight. And cultivating fruit isn't a passive activity. Bearing spiritual fruit needs consistent maintenance and seasonal pruning. In the same way, the Holy Spirit requires our yielded cooperation in order to produce spiritual fruit in us.

Abide in Jesus. Jesus illustrates this same process in another way for us in John 15:1–8. Keep in mind that we do not produce the fruit—our part is to stay attached to the vine and deeply sink our roots into Him (see Colossians 2:6–7).

Read John 15:1–8 and share your thoughts on the following:

- Jesus says, “Abide in Me” (verse 4 NKJV). In practical terms, what does that look like in daily life? In what ways is this the same as walking in the Spirit?

- When a branch does not bear fruit, it is cut away. And a fruitful branch is pruned so that it will bear even more fruit. Can you recall a time when you experienced spiritual pruning? Briefly share how it encouraged new growth and bore fruit in your life.

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the dynamic, active, ever-present God who dwells in us and compels us to faith and action. The Holy Spirit of God is about living, loving, comforting, instructing, enlightening, empowering, supporting, disciplining, and causing spiritual growth.

In Ephesians 5:18, we are told to “be filled with the Holy Spirit.” In Greek, the word for “be filled” denotes a *continuous action*. In other words, *keep being filled* with the Holy Spirit. As believers seeking to glorify God and serve Him to the utmost capacity, we need to ask the Lord daily to fill us with His Holy Spirit. Without the power of the Holy Spirit, we can’t effectively serve the Lord for one day any more than we can expect to hold our breath for one hour! And to receive this filling, all we need to do is ask Him (see Luke 11:13). We don’t have to plead. We don’t have to beg. Just ask.

APPLICATION

- How mindful are you of the Holy Spirit's presence in you? In what ways has this lesson made you more aware of—and sensitive to—the Spirit's presence and power?

- What would it look like for you to be “continually refilled” with the Holy Spirit? Why is this a vitally crucial part of a thriving relationship with God?

- In this season of life, to what degree are you walking in the Spirit? Identify any areas (i.e., spiritual fruit) you consistently find to be in short supply or lacking. What will you do to walk in step with the Holy Spirit?

PRAYER POINT

Spend time thanking the Holy Spirit for the various roles He fulfills and the impact He has on your life. Ask God to refill you with His Holy Spirit. Commit yourself to yield, and the Holy Spirit will help you to abide in Christ and bear fruit.

LESSON 4

THE TRUTH ABOUT HEAVEN AND HELL

GETTING STARTED

A recent survey reveals some confusion about the afterlife, even among Christians. Some said that people who don't believe in God can still go to Heaven, and roughly 20 percent thought that practicing a non-Christian religion can lead to eternal life. Among all US adults, younger Americans (ages 18–29) are less likely than their elders to believe that Heaven and Hell are real. In this lesson, we are going to take a look at what the Bible teaches about Heaven and Hell.

- What do you imagine Heaven and Hell are like? What has shaped those images for you?

MEMORY VERSE

John 5:24 (ESV):

“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”

HEAVEN IS AN ACTUAL PLACE

The Bible gives us wonderful, vivid descriptions of Heaven. But even with all this detail, it is difficult for us to grasp the absolute perfection and glory of Heaven. While we may not have all our questions about Heaven answered here on earth, the Bible does answer some of our most probing questions.

- What can we learn about Heaven from the following passages? List everything you observe.

Revelation 21:10–27

Revelation 22:1–5

- What aspects of these descriptions are you most drawn to, and why?

WHO WILL ENTER HEAVEN?

Hollywood has depicted the gates of Heaven as the place where you plead your case in order to gain entrance. But no one has ever talked their way into Heaven. Heaven is God’s dwelling place, and no one can enter based on their own merit.

- People often say there are many paths to God, but is that true? From the following verses (often referred to as the Romans Road to Salvation), how do people get to Heaven?

Romans 3:10

Romans 3:23

Romans 6:23

Romans 5:8

Romans 10:9–10

Romans 10:13

Romans 5:1–2

- Will being a nice person and doing good things make a difference in getting to Heaven? Why or why not? Read Ephesians 2:8–9 for help with your answer.

LIFE IN HEAVEN

What will Heaven be like? We know it will be a place of tremendous diversity, with people from every nation, ethnicity, and language. We know that “all nations will come and worship before [the Lord], for [His] righteous deeds have been revealed” (Revelation 15:4).

- Scripture gives us a peek at some of the activities, sights, and scenes we will experience in Heaven. What do we know about life in Heaven from these passages?

Revelation 21:3–7

Psalms 16:10–11

Revelation 7:9–17

Revelation 19:5–9

The Bible promises that these bodies of ours will be resurrected and will, in some ways, be the same as our old bodies but with wonderful differences. Without question, they will be radically improved.

- What will our new bodies be like? (See 1 Corinthians 15:42–44, 53; 2 Corinthians 5:1–4; Philippians 3:21.)

- As you wait in anticipation for Heaven, what are you looking forward to the most?

- What changes do you look forward to in a glorified body?

THE REALITY OF HELL

Most people believe in some kind of Heaven and think they will go there. Fewer people, even among Christians, believe that Hell is a real place. But Jesus spoke more about Hell than all the other prophets and preachers of the Bible combined. No doubt that's because He knows it is a very real place and doesn't want anyone to end up there.

- Why is the reality of Hell as an actual place hard for some to believe?

- What specific warnings did Jesus give us about the reality of Hell? (See Matthew 7:13–14; 10:28.)

AN ETERNAL PERSPECTIVE

The Bible says, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27 NKJV). That will be a very different experience for believers than it will be for those who reject Jesus Christ and His forgiveness.

The Great White Throne. This will be the dreadful moment when every person who has rejected salvation through Jesus will have to stand before God and give an account of their life.

Read Revelation 20:11–15 and consider the following points:

- No one is sent to Hell for being a bad person, and no one is welcomed into Heaven for being a good person. What is the one and only reason for every soul who will face this judgment? How would you explain it to someone who needs to hear this?

- Sadly, many people will unwittingly choose Hell. They do so not because they want to spend eternity in agony but because they just go with the flow. Sometimes we don't warn people about Hell because we don't want to offend them. How have you seen these truths play out in your experience?

The judgment seat of Christ. Believers won't appear at the Great White Throne, but we, too, will be called to judgment (see 2 Corinthians 5:10). This won't be to drag up our sins—all of that is forgiven and washed away by the blood of Christ. This will be a life review, and the Lord will ask us how we invested what He gave us. At that time, crowns will be given out as rewards for faithful service.

One day we will stand before Jesus, and we will want to hear Him say, “Well done, my good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21). Speaking about this, Paul urges believers to seriously consider how we spend our lives today through the lens of eternity (see 1 Corinthians 3:11–15). In many ways, there are good, earthly reasons for cultivating an eternal perspective.

- When it comes to daily life, responsibilities, and relationships, how can a heavenly focus make all the difference? Read the verses below and share your insights.

Ephesians 5:15–16

Colossians 3:1–10

- How can you cultivate an eternal perspective? What helps you to do that consistently?

The fact is good people don't go to Heaven—forgiven people do. Because apart from the gift of righteousness in Jesus, no one is good enough. The Bible clearly states that Heaven and Hell are real and every person will end up in one of the two destinations. Knowing this should motivate how we live and compel us to share the gospel.

If you have yet to meet Jesus Christ in a personal way, let Him come and be Lord of your life. Let Him fill the loneliness in your heart. Let Him give you the hope of eternal life! You can do this now by praying this simple prayer:

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I have broken Your commandments and fallen short of Your standards. Right now, I turn from that sin and ask You to come into my life. Be my Lord, my Savior, my friend, and God. I put my faith in Jesus Christ. I put my trust in Him alone to save me from my sins. Thank You for loving me and calling me. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.

If you prayed that prayer to receive Christ as your Savior, please tell your group leader or pastor of your commitment.

APPLICATION

- In what ways are you inspired to live differently because of what God says in His Word about eternity? Are there any changes you need to make?

- Does the hope of Heaven affect your perspective on suffering? When has this hope helped you personally?

- It's not for us to judge the state of someone's heart or suppose they are beyond hope, even if they have outwardly rejected the gospel. Think of someone who has outwardly rejected the gospel. How can this group join you in praying for that person?

PRAYER POINT

Give thanks to God for the truths He has revealed about the afterlife in the pages of Scripture. Give Him praise for offering a way of salvation through the finished work of Christ. Ask God to help you to live with eternity in mind and share the gospel with nonbelievers.

LESSON 5

THE BIBLE: OUR USER MANUAL FOR LIFE

GETTING STARTED

We are finishing our series on the essentials of Christian theology with the Bible. In a culture where so-called truth is constantly changing, we need solid biblical ground to stand on. Everything we need to know about God and living a life that pleases Him is found in the pages of the Bible.

Success or failure in the Christian life is determined by how much of the Bible we get into our hearts and minds, and how obedient we are to the principles and teachings found within it. We need to study the Bible to grow and flourish spiritually—and yet, living in a world of real-time technology and *instant information* has us looking for the shortcuts. Discipline and obedience come as a result of searching out and applying ourselves to practice the truth of God’s Word, even if it means that some of us need to change our way of thinking.

In this last lesson, we’ll discuss the Bible and some practical ways to incorporate personal Bible study into our everyday lives.

- What is your current relationship with the Bible? Do you have a personal habit of reading it? Why or why not? If so, what does your routine look like?

MEMORY VERSE

Joshua 1:8:

“Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.”

THE BIBLE IS . . .

A series of 66 books written by approximately 40 authors over a period of about 1,500 years. Yet the Bible stands as one book, unified by the theme of God and His relationship to man. In the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament, we see the Lord working in and through a nation, Israel. In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, we see the Lord working in and through the Man, Jesus Christ.

God's revelation to His people. The word *revelation* means "unveiling." In Scripture, God has revealed divine truth. The Bible tells us all we need to know about who God is and what He requires of us. The Bible is a record of God's dealing with sinful humanity and His redeeming work to deliver individuals from sin. The dominant theme in the Bible is the Lord Jesus Christ, God's promised Savior.

The inspired Word of God. Theologian B. B. Warfield said, "The Bible is the Word of God in such a way that when the Bible speaks, God speaks." God gave the message of the Bible to the writers and prophets who, through human means, collected, recorded, accepted, authenticated, and handed down the Scriptures. Second Peter 1:21 says, "Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit" (NKJV). The word "moved" is the same word used to describe the way a ship sails along under the power of a blowing wind. The biblical writers were moved by God to write what He wanted them to write (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Accurately passed down. The Law of Moses, or Pentateuch, was carefully maintained in the Hebrew community throughout the early centuries of its existence. As books continued to be written, they were safeguarded by priests and scribes. Ezra the scribe was instrumental in compiling many of the manuscripts that eventually came to be known as the Old Testament.

Trained scribes painstakingly copied the texts by hand. No word, letter, or mark could be written from memory. The scribe had to look directly at the original scroll for every stroke. Every letter, word, and verse of every book was counted and compared to the original. The New Testament books were copied and shared by local Christian communities for several decades before being collected into the New Testament canon. The New Testament canon was identified by the early church and compiled by very strict and authentic criteria.

Verifiable as authentic. Fragments of the Old Testament, numbering in the tens of thousands, date back as far as the third century BC. The Dead Sea Scrolls give us further evidence that the Old Testament was accurately maintained. New Testament manuscripts, numbering in the thousands, remain intact. No other writings of antiquity can be as carefully authenticated as the Bible.

THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

God is the Author of Scripture. While the manuscripts were compiled by more than forty human writers, God chose to speak through them, much like an artist uses different brushes to paint on a canvas. Each wrote in his own unique style, but they all conveyed the message inspired by God.

- How should the fact that this is God's inspired word impact the way we approach the Bible?

- What do you recall about God's character and attributes from the first lesson? How does this reinforce your belief that the Bible is trustworthy?

- According to 2 Timothy 3:16–17, what is Scripture useful for? List each specific way we can benefit from Scripture.

- When you come across a portion of Scripture you don't understand, how do you respond?

Even with all the facts and evidence, God’s Word must be accepted by faith. Your belief in and practice of the truths in this book will make the most profound impact on your life—now, and for all eternity. Some people have the idea that the Bible is just an old book filled with moral fables and endless lists of dos and don’ts. But the Bible has as much relevance today as it did when it was first being penned. God’s Word will always have something eye-opening and life-changing to show you.

- Read Hebrews 4:12–13. How does this passage describe the Word of God?

- What does it mean that the Bible is “alive and powerful?” How have you experienced this in your life?

Imagine God’s Word as a surgeon’s scalpel that probes our thoughts and intentions and sheds light into our hearts and souls. Scripture has the ability to make us uncomfortable because it penetrates to the heart of the matter and shows us our sin. But it doesn’t leave us there. Scripture points us to saving faith in Jesus Christ where we find redemption and reconciliation with God.

WHY STUDY THE BIBLE?

Do you like to eat? The Bible is food for your soul, and there is no substitute for consistently feeding on God’s Word—like Job, who treasured God’s Word “more than daily food” (Job 23:12), or David, who found God’s Word to be “sweeter than honey” (Psalm 19:10).

Read Psalm 19:7–11. God’s Word is *perfect* (flawless; complete). In simple terms, this means that the instructions of the Lord are sufficient for all our needs and following them will transform and change us.

Consider some of David’s descriptions of God’s Word and finish each sentence below. You can follow each statement with an example of this from your own experience.

- Verse 7: Because God’s Word is *trustworthy* (nurturing; stabilizing), it makes me . . .

- Verse 8: Because God’s Word is *right* (the path to follow), it will . . .

- Verse 8: Because God’s Word is *clear* (radiant; enlightening), it gives me . . .

STUDYING GOD’S WORD

As with any worthwhile pursuit, studying the Bible requires commitment and a practical strategy. In Proverbs, we get a glimpse of what pleases God.

- According to Proverbs 8:34–35, what are three helpful habits we should cultivate? What will be the result if we do?

To **listen** means “to give undivided listening attention; to hear spiritually.” This emphasizes the need to set aside time and space to read the Bible, think, and pray without distraction. To **watch** daily conveys the thought of being consistent and committed. Of all the necessary

activities that fill our day, none is more vital than time spent with God in His Word, worship, and prayer. The word translated as **waiting** conveys the act of thinking through how you will follow through. It means paying careful attention in order to obey.

- Which of these do you find most challenging? In what way? What practical steps can you take to overcome this challenge?

One of the best ways to keep God's Word in our hearts is to store it in our minds. When you memorize portions of Scripture, the Holy Spirit will bring God's Word to mind at just the right time.

- What truth from God's Word do you need to memorize right now? Record the verse(s) on a note card or on your phone and spend a few minutes each day committing it to memory. Share this with your group.

Studying the Scriptures takes time and commitment, but as we do it, we'll find that there is nothing more gratifying than knowing God through the study of His Word!

At the end of this study guide, you will find helpful information on different Bible study methods and a list of study tools you might find useful. Be sure to check it out!

APPLICATION

- How satisfied are you with your current interest in and habits of studying God's Word? Where would you most like to see progress, and what would that require?

- Can you identify any area in your life that you need to allow the Bible to have more authority over? What needs to be yielded and changed?

- What decision are you currently facing where you need God's guidance? What steps can you take this week to position yourself to hear from the Lord?

PRAYER POINT

Give thanks to God for His Word. Ask Him to increase your love for and understanding of Scripture. Pick a familiar portion of Scripture and pray the words and phrases back to God, telling Him what you love about it. Ask Him to reveal Himself in ever-increasing measure through His Word.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What was the most encouraging verse, biblical truth, or lesson from this study?
2. What was the most challenging?
3. What obstacles have you had to overcome through the study?
4. What lessons do you need to apply to your life? How are you going to do that?

BIBLE STUDY METHODS

DIRECTED LEARNING

Directed learning (deductive method) guides an individual or group into understanding God's Word and relates it to the needs and concerns of life. In a directed Bible study, information is provided by a teacher and/or a written lesson that opens the Scriptures, lays out specific biblical principles, offers food for thought, and encourages spiritual growth through applying God's Word to daily life. When the Word of God is taught in a message or podcast, this is a form of directed Bible study.

DISCOVERY LEARNING

Discovery learning (inductive method) encourages believers to explore God's Word. In Psalm 119 the psalmist wrote, "I rejoice in your word like one who discovers a great treasure" (verse 162). God's Word is an inexhaustible supply of truth and wisdom for living. Have you learned to joyfully excavate those riches for yourself? Inductive study allows believers to use and develop three basic skills:

1. Start with observation. What does it say? Get involved in what you're reading by asking who, what, when, and where types of questions. Gathering information doesn't need to be monotonous or boring. Let your natural curiosity and desire to learn set the pace. Imagine the people, places, and events you read about. Don't use your imagination to create imaginary facts; use it to bring the biblical facts to life.
2. Interpretation looks for meaning without misunderstanding. It helps to know what the writer wanted his original readers to hear. Then we ask how it relates to life today. Here are some helpful questions to ask when studying a passage in Scripture: What does this teach about God? What does it say about people? Is there a command to obey? Is there a promise to claim? Is there a warning to heed? Is there an example to follow or avoid? The Bible is filled with principles—the building blocks that form the foundation of what we believe and how we behave toward God and others. Simply put, a principle is a spiritual lesson.
3. Application isn't just the last step—it's the *next* step toward spiritual growth. How does this apply to me? Application calls for a response. How will you cooperate with God in living what you have learned? The only way to move truth off the pages of your Bible and into your life is to take steps to put it into action.

TOOLS FOR BIBLE STUDY

1. **Study Bibles.** These Bibles include helpful information such as book introductions, notes, maps, timelines, a partial concordance, and cross-references. Some study Bibles offer more extensive resources, such as historical/cultural background, word studies, topical indexes, and more.

Note: Be sure the main Bible you use for study is a **translation** rather than a **paraphrase**. A translation comes from the original language; a paraphrase has been reworded from a translation. A word-for-word translation uses the most accurate English word to translate the original word meaning and structure. A thought-for-thought translation uses the most accurate English word to translate the original thought. Popular translations include the English Standard Version (ESV), the New Living Translation (NLT), the New King James Version (NKJV), the Berean Standard Bible (BSB), and the New International Version (NIV). Paraphrased Bibles include *The Message* (MSG), *The Living Bible* (TLB), and the *New Testament in Modern English* by J. B. Phillips.

2. **Concordances.** A concordance is an exhaustive index, in alphabetical order, of every word in the Bible. It gives each reference where a certain word is used. This is useful for locating particular Scriptures or doing a general word study. A concordance with a Greek/Hebrew dictionary also gives a brief definition of each word in the Bible by referencing the original Hebrew and Greek.
3. **Word Study Books.** Since most people are not literate in the Bible's original languages, scholars have compiled references to help the average student understand what a specific biblical word means. Some word studies are laid out in the same format as the Bible, so you can have the original word and definition readily available as you read. Some are laid out in alphabetical order to be used like a dictionary.
4. **Bible Dictionaries and Encyclopedias.** These are in alphabetical order and give detail on words, customs, people, and traditions in the Bible. They offer historical, geographical, cultural, biographical, and archaeological information.
5. **Atlases.** These include Bible maps, pictures, and diagrams that give a better understanding of the biblical world. An atlas is useful for tracking the events and lives of Bible characters and the changing face of Bible lands through the centuries.
6. **Commentaries.** A commentary is a scholarly interpretation of the Bible. Its purpose is to explain, interpret, and sometimes apply the meaning of the biblical message by analyzing the text. Commentaries come in single or double volumes that cover the whole Bible, as well as individual books that cover one book or passage of the Bible. Some commentaries cover every verse (expository), some read like a sermon (devotional), and some deal with the text in full outline form (homiletical).

HARVEST RESOURCES

For more resources, including Pastor Greg Laurie's sermons and devotions, visit our website at **harvest.org**.

Listen to the Harvest Men's and Women's Podcasts, which follow along with the sessions of our Harvest Groups studies. These weekly podcasts share thoughts to reinforce our Bible study and discussion as we collaborate with Pastor Greg's weekly teaching through the Bible.

Men: Harvest Men Podcast

(harvest.church/men)

Women: The Virtue Podcast

(harvest.church/women)



Because Discipleship Happens Together

harvest.church/groups

"Unchanging Truths
in a Changing Culture"



TIME LESS