



RESOURCES
FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION
AND GROUP DISCUSSION

Chapter One: Isn't the Bible Only Human?

- Have you ever experienced the combativeness of insecure Christians who disagreed with you? What effect did that experience have on you?
- How does my explanation of the Cain's wife conundrum (Genesis 1-4 are not eyewitness reports, it's not important whom Cain married, all that matters is God's love for Cain) sit with you? How do you think Christians should respond when faced with a question like, "Whom did Cain marry?"
- Do the moral deficiencies of the Bible characters add to your trust in Scripture, or take away from it? Why?
- How did Jesus come to correct what Cain got wrong?
- How is the gospel of Jesus distinct from the negative problem-solving that is so commonly found in religions?

Bible Study Tip 1: Context

Read Psalm 51:1-17. King David wrote this psalm after committing a series of truly awful sins (2 Samuel 11). First, he commanded a woman who was not his wife to have sex with him. Then, after learning that she was pregnant, he arranged for her husband to be killed. After that, David pretended to be a benevolent hero by taking the poor widow into his own home.

How does knowing the backstory help you to better understand Psalm 51?

Chapter Two: Is the Bible Fact or Fiction?

- Does the fact that flawed human beings wrote the Bible diminish your respect or appreciation for Scripture? Why or why not?
- How does learning about the “oral tradition” affect your confidence in the Bible? Why?
- How does understanding the Bible as one big story help you make sense of hard-to-read passages?
- How much does it matter to you that the Bible is so well-substantiated compared to other ancient texts? Explain.

Bible Study Tip 2: Genre

Whether you’re reading a book, a website, or Twitter, it’s always important to keep in mind the genre of the text in front of you. We have been trained to read serious news reports, steamy romantic novels, emails from friends, and history books through very different lenses.

The Bible is comprised of at least nine different literary genres: History, Law, Poetry, Narrative, Wisdom, Prophecy, Biography, Correspondence, and Apocalyptic Literature. Learning to read the Bible means discerning which genre you’re reading at any given time, so you can apply the correct interpretive lens to the text in question. Here are a few tips to keep in mind:

- Whenever entire blocks of text are indented, such as in the Psalms, you’re reading poetry or songs meant for worship and prayer.

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- Everything in the New Testament from Romans through Jude is correspondence; you're literally reading someone else's mail. It's helpful to remember that you're seeing only one side of a two-way conversation.
- Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are good examples of Wisdom Literature: collections of wise sayings that are meant to shape their readers' moral and ethical lives.
- Genesis 1–11—the stories of Creation, the Flood, and the Tower of Babel—are probably best understood as Narrative Literature: stories that are likely based on historical events but are primarily intended to teach theology, not history.
- The books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve “Minor Prophets” (Hosea through Malachi) are Prophetic Literature, which means they offer scathing pronouncements of God's judgment, as well as comforting words of grace, as they share visions from God about Israel's future.

Chapter Three: Are the Gospels Reliable?

- What's the difference between *facts* and *truth*, and why does that distinction matter when thinking about the Bible?
- Do you agree with the premise that the legitimacy of Christianity rests on the actual, physical resurrection of Jesus from the dead? Why or why not?
- Where do you find yourself in Peter's story?
- Which of the four Gospels resonates with you the most and why?
- If the Gospel of John was written so much later than the other three, why do you think it should be valued as highly as Matthew, Mark, and Luke?

Bible Study Tip 3: Know Your Gospels

In this chapter, we explored the particular angles and agendas of each of the four Gospel writers. Can you sum up the distinct approaches that Matthew, Mark (Peter), Luke, and John took when telling the story of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection? What was their particular purpose in writing a Gospel?

- Mark (Peter)
- Matthew
- Luke
- John

Chapter Four: What Is the Bible About?

- Why do you think so few people today believe the Bible is a love story?
- Do you agree with my assessment that love is the one common thematic thread that runs throughout all of Scripture? Why or why not?
- What did you think of how Richard Dawkins explained love to his daughter?
- Why is the phrase “God is love” the most extraordinary claim in all the Bible?
- Have you, like Leah, ever settled for lesser forms of love? How did that work out for you?

Bible Study Tip 4: Expect Love on Every Page

People can find just about anything they're looking for in the Bible. If you open the Bible in search of reasons to close it and walk away, that's what you'll find. If you read the Bible looking for crazy verses that you can quote to make Christians feel stupid, you'll probably find some.

Part of trusting Jesus means opening your Bible and expecting to find real love on every page. When you look for love in Scripture, you'll find it, and it will blow your mind. Once you see God's love in the Bible, you can't unsee it. And then you'll begin to see how immature you were when you made fun of the Bible based on a few strange, cherry-picked passages. Even when you come across something that seems impossible to reconcile with a God who is love, keep searching, asking questions, and praying for God's Spirit to give you eyes to see his love on every page.

Chapter Five: Why Is the Bible So Messy?

- “Many of the stories and laws in the Bible fall painfully short of the moral perfection we might expect from a book that claims to be inspired by the one true God.” How did this line sit with you? How have the stories that contain blatant immorality (genocide, sexism, slavery, and so forth) impacted your view of the Bible?
- What does it say about God that he saw a woman like Tamar, that he sided with her in the conflict with Judah, and that he blessed her doubly in the end?
- What do you think about the image of the Bible as impressionist art? Have you ever been discouraged or confused when reading the Bible because you “zoomed in” too close on a few small parts? What happened when you stepped back to see the fuller picture?
- What were some of the running themes throughout the Bible stories covered in this chapter (Tamar and Judah, the Levite and the Concubine, and Jesus and the bleeding woman)?
- How were Virgie’s cream-taters symbolic of God’s grace in Jesus Christ?

Bible Study Tip 5: Pray the Scriptures

Oftentimes, the same people who struggle to understand the Bible also struggle with prayer. One obvious solution is to learn how to pray the scriptures. Here’s how it works:

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- Choose a passage to pray. The Psalms are a good place to start, but so are the Proverbs, portions of Paul's letters (for example, Romans 5:2-5, Galatians 3:28, or Romans 12:1-2), or the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
- Read the passage (out loud, preferably).
- Either let that passage be your prayer to God, or offer a simple prayer based on that passage (such as, "Lord, help me to learn from this passage today by _____.")

Chapter Six: Is the Bible Racist?

- Have you ever had an experience like the one I had in Korea—one that opened your eyes and stretched your horizons? What did that experience teach you about God and Truth?
- How can we be sure that diversity was always important to God in the Bible?
- How might *scattering*—being forced to venture outside of our comfort zones—be good for us?
- What does the story of Simeon the eunuch say about the scope of Jesus’s mission?
- What can Christians do to combat the sin of racism?

Bible Study Tip 6: Allow Scripture to Change Your Mind

One way that many people hit a proverbial wall when reading scripture is by bringing all our preconceived beliefs, core values, and political views to the Bible, fully expecting the Bible to fit like a glove inside our worldview. This leads to all kinds of existential angst because the ideals presented in scripture leave no one unscathed. No matter whether you’re a Republican or a Democrat, conservative or liberal, wealthy or poor, the Bible will challenge and convict you by setting a higher standard. One important step in the believer’s journey is learning to allow the Bible to shape our values and politics, instead of trying to reshape what the Bible says *through* our values and politics.

One simple example of this is found in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus addressed the adulterers in his audience. He said,

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“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matthew 5:27-28).

Almost everyone agrees that adultery is bad, and that adulterers should be ashamed. But consider Jesus’s message here, and how it reshapes the concept of adultery. How should this change the way we think about sin in general?

Name one or two ways in which the Bible has changed your mind about something.

Chapter Seven: Can We Talk about Leviticus?

- Name a few things you commonly heard or assumed about Leviticus before reading this chapter. Did this chapter change the way you see Leviticus? How?
- Why is context so important when interpreting a book like Leviticus? What was the context in which Leviticus was written?
- Why do you think so few people take Leviticus seriously?
- The Bible obviously has a reputation for being sex-negative. How would you describe the Bible's general position on human sexuality?
- Do you agree with my premise that, at its best, the church is the closest thing to Jubilee the world has ever known? Why or why not?

Bible Study Tip 7: Read the Bible in Community

The Bible was written by community, in community, and for community. Most of it was written during times when very few people were literate, so it was meant to be read aloud in groups. While there's certainly nothing wrong with reading the Bible alone, the real magic happens when you engage the scriptures with others. If you don't have that kind of community in your life, I encourage you to seek it out. If you have trouble finding a group that works for you, email me (office@erichuffman.org) and we'll connect you to one of our online Bible classes.

Chapter Eight: Why Is the Bible So Backward?

- What contemporary social issues are most important to you, and why? Do you see the Bible as a friend or foe in relation to these issues?
- How would you respond to the three questions I like to pose to skeptics like Michael?
 - » Have you ever really studied the Bible?
 - » Have you taken the time to analyze what the scriptures actually say?
 - » Have you honestly examined these writings in context, or have you merely adopted the popular, presumptuous, and pervasive anti-Bible narrative in our culture without doing your intellectual due diligence?
- What are some of the “issues” near to your heart that you struggle to reconcile with the Bible? How have those issues kept you from engaging more fully with scripture?
- How were the life and death of Jesus “backward” from this world’s perspective? What does that tell you about how our social norms compare with the holiness of God?

Bible Study Tip 8: Memorize a Bible Verse Every Week

When we were kids, adults made us memorize stuff all the time, because they knew memorization skills are an important way that we learn. For some reason, when we grow up, we stop memorizing important things. This has been especially true since the dawn of the iPhone era. Our devices, along with Google, now remember everything for us.

That's why, now more than ever, memorization can be a powerful tool when reading the Bible. I recommend that, every Sunday night, you choose a verse or two of scripture to memorize, and repeat that verse as much as possible throughout the week. The better you get at memorizing Bible passages, the longer or more challenging your memory verses can become. As a bonus, you'll be surprised how many of your memory verses will come in handy when talking about life with the people God puts in your path.