

THE
DISCIPLESHIP
PLACE

How to Study the Bible



SESSION 1

The Goal

NOTICE TO CLT PARTICIPANTS AND EDUCATORS

This is a contract. By using these materials you accept all the terms and conditions of this Agreement. This Agreement covers all Leader's Guides, Student Guides, and instructional resources included in the Continuing Lay Training (CLT) website.

Upon your acceptance of this Agreement, Continuing Lay Training grants to you a nonexclusive license to use these curricular materials provided that you agree to the following:

1. USE OF THE MODULES.

- You may distribute educational materials in electronic form to students or other educational providers.
- You may make and distribute electronic or paper copies to students for the purpose of instruction, as long as each copy contains this Agreement and the same copyright and other proprietary notices pertaining to the Module. If you download the educational materials from the Internet or similar online source, you must include the CLT notice for the Module with any online distribution and on any media you distribute that includes the educational content.
- You may translate, adapt, and/or modify the examples and instructional resources for the purpose of making the instruction culturally relevant to your students. However, you must agree that you will not sell these modified materials without express, written permission from CLT.

2. COPYRIGHT.

The material is owned by CLT and is protected by United States Copyright Law and International Treaty provisions. Except as stated above, this Agreement does not grant you any intellectual property rights in the Module.

3. RESTRICTIONS.

- You may not sell copies of these educational materials in any form except to recover the minimum reproduction cost of electronic media or photocopy expense.
- You may not modify the wording or original intent of the educational material for commercial use.

THANK YOU

Continuing Lay Training would like to thank Clergy Development for granting permission to modify and adapt their course of study materials for our educational purposes. Their willingness to partner with us is sincerely appreciated.

The Goal: An Overview

SESSION OVERVIEW

Studying the Bible as Ancient Texts

Studying the Bible as Scripture

Two Dangers in Bible Study

Conclusion

Application

Exam – Session 1

Discussion Guide for Mentor and Participant

LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, you should be able to:

- identify several reasons why people might study Scripture
- describe the value of these different reasons for studying Scripture
- decide what will be your primary goal for studying Scripture

The Goal: An Overview

INTRODUCTION



Before we begin studying the Bible, we should ask ourselves why we want to study it. What we seek to accomplish will determine how we go about our study and what we find.

Studying the Bible can be compared to digging a hole in the ground. An archaeologist will dig to find remains of human occupation from years past, while a plumber might dig to uncover a leaking pipe or a builder to locate rock on which to lay a solid foundation. Each digs for a different purpose and, therefore, goes about their task in different ways. The plumber or builder might uncover remains from centuries of human habitation but never notice because they are focused on their goals of finding a leaking pipe or rock for a foundation.

Many people begin studying the Bible without thinking too much about why they are doing it. They have been told it is a good thing to do; and when they do it, they recognize its benefits. But what are we really after? Let's take a moment to think about it.

STUDYING THE BIBLE AS ANCIENT TEXTS



NOTES

People study the Bible for many different reasons. Some study it to uncover ancient history or simply to enjoy its well-written literature. They view the Bible as texts about and from ancient people. So they examine it as a history book or as an example of great literature from the past.

Those who study the Bible as a history book want to learn more about ancient Israelites and early Christians. The Bible records or alludes to events from the beginning of human history until the end of the first century A.D. in the Middle East. It relates key characters and moments in the formation of the religion of Judaism and then shifts to tell the story of early Christianity. Thus, the Bible provides a wealth of information on political developments, social customs, and beliefs of these ancient people. It is a primary source for studying the history of religious thought as well as social and political history of ancient people.

Those who examine the Bible as great literature recognize the literary artistry of Biblical writers and revel in their skills. The Bible contains some of the best-told stories of all time from the lives of Abraham, Job, Ruth, David, Esther, and Jesus. These employ masterful character development as well as elements of well-crafted plots. Jesus himself models exceptional abilities in His use of parables. Of course, the beautiful poetry of the Psalms, Proverbs, and the prophets provides the literary critic with much to admire and ponder.

Both of these approaches to studying the Bible produce worthwhile results. Much is learned from its history as well as its literature. Yet the Bible offers more to those who would study with a different goal, because it is more than interesting history and great literature.

STUDYING THE BIBLE AS SCRIPTURE



NOTES

Many people study the Bible as Scripture. By taking this approach they understand the Bible to be the primary authority for what Christians believe and practice. So as they examine the Bible, they look for what it teaches about God as well as how they should live. With this as their goal for studying the Bible, they discover great riches.

The reason the Bible is authoritative for most Christians is that they believe it is inspired revelation. By this they mean that the Bible not only tells us about God, but it also comes from God. The Bible reveals what God thinks about things, not just what people think. While we might appreciate what Moses, David, or Paul thought God was like, it seems far more important to know what God tells us about himself.

When we study the Bible as Scripture, we begin to get to know God personally. If indeed God reveals who He is and what He thinks through the words of the Bible, then we experience the very heart of God when we study those words. Eugene Peterson, the translator of the Bible translation entitled *The Message*, has observed, “The Scriptures, read and prayed, are our primary and normative access to God as he reveals himself to us” (*Eat This Book*, p. 104). The Bible is our main pathway toward building our relationship with God.

Several years ago my wife and I, along with our two little girls, moved 9,000 miles away from home to the Philippines. At such a distance we wondered about how to keep connected with family and friends. These were the days before Internet, and telephone service proved very expensive and unreliable. So we resorted to writing letters and discovered something very special about that. In letters people can reveal themselves in ways they may not in person. I will never forget the first time I read the words “I love you” at the end of a short note from my father. In person, those words were very difficult for him to say. I knew it to be true. But to see that sentiment in writing carried an impact I will never forget. My father was able to communicate his heart in written words.

In a sense, the Bible is a treasure of words that express the heart of God. Through them we can know better who God really is, what He cares about, what He thinks of our sin, how He chooses to respond to us, and what His dreams for us might be. In the Bible we find a very passionate yet patient God. He is extremely creative and powerful, yet He desires to involve humans in His plans. He can crush mountains with the brush of His hand, yet gently care for the down trodden and broken hearted. This, and more, is the amazing God we discover in the pages of the Bible. So surely the most important goal we can have for studying the Bible is to come to know this God more intimately.

TWO DANGERS IN BIBLE STUDY



NOTES

Studying the Bible as Scripture, however, has led to two approaches that could cause a person to miss out on its main messages as well as knowing God better. At times people study the Bible in order to find verses that support what they believe about God. They seek a faith grounded in the Bible and not based only on human traditions or philosophical reasoning. So they look for passages in the Bible that validate what they have come to understand about God and Christian living. They strengthen their beliefs by finding Bible passages that confirm the doctrines of the Church. This is sometimes called proof-texting.

Such a goal for studying the Bible can be very beneficial. Yet it also can be dangerous. If we come to the Bible thinking we already know what we believe, we may not hear what it has to say about what we should believe. We could miss what God wanted to say through His words. In the end then, our beliefs may not be based upon the Bible at all. They may be based on what we think the Bible says.

Another approach to studying the Bible as Scripture that could be dangerous is simply looking for insights into how to become better people. Those who have this goal explore the Bible to find ways for living a productive and meaningful life today. Bible stories like those about Abraham challenge people to risk trusting God and being generous with other people. Such narratives often convey helpful moral lessons and give guidance for making important life decisions. Laws and proverbs of the Old Testament also teach lessons. They instruct us in how to respect God and treat other people well. The exhortations of Paul in his letters provide similar guidance.

The search for self-improvement through Scripture is not altogether bad. But it can keep us from hearing the primary message of Scripture, which is to tell us about God. If we are constantly looking for what the Bible has to say about us, we may miss what it has to say about God. Therefore, the first question we should ask of a Bible passage is, "What does this tell me about God?"

CONCLUSION



NOTES

While each of the above reasons for studying the Bible has value, focusing upon the goal of knowing God better through our study is undoubtedly the most important. This, after all, is the first purpose of the Bible. Above all else, the Bible intends to tell us about the most remarkable Being in the universe and invites its readers to know Him personally. As we will discover, this goal carries eternal rewards. Our relationship to God shapes how we live today as well as where we will live forever.

With our focus upon knowing God through our study of the Bible, we will also undoubtedly satisfy our curiosity about the history of an ancient people and find joy in the beauty of its literature. In addition, during that process we will discover biblical support for our beliefs and become better people. As we come to know Our Creator by studying His words, we will grow into the people God created us to be.

APPLICATION

**NOTES**

1. Look at the learner objectives for this session. Can you:
 - describe several reasons why people might study the Bible?
 - explain the value of these different reasons for studying the Bible?
 - decide what will be your primary goal for studying the Bible?
2. Read through the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:1-17, and ask yourself what these laws tell you about God.
3. Read through the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1:1-17, and ask yourself what this tells you about God.
4. Answer the following question for yourself: Why do I want to study the Bible?

EXAM - SESSION 1



NOTES

1. Historians like to study the Bible because it contains information about _____.
 - A. political history of the ancient Middle East
 - B. social customs in ancient Israel
 - C. religious beliefs of ancient people
 - D. all of the above
2. Many people consider the Bible great literature because it employs _____.
 - A. well-told stories
 - B. excellent poetry
 - C. effective parables
 - D. all of the above
3. When we call the Bible Scripture, we mean that it is _____.
 - A. a record of interesting history
 - B. the primary authority for what Christians believe and practice
 - C. a collection of beautiful writings
 - D. all of the above
4. When a person seeks to support their faith by finding Bible verses to confirm what they believe, this is called studying the Bible as _____.
 - A. history
 - B. literature
 - C. proof-text
 - D. self-help
5. The Bible can help us become better people when we commit to living by its _____.
 - A. laws
 - B. proverbs
 - C. exhortations
 - D. all of the above
6. The problem with studying the Bible only to confirm my faith is that _____.
 - A. we may impose our beliefs on the Bible
 - B. we may not hear what the Bible is actually saying
 - C. we may not get to know who God truly is
 - D. all of the above

 **NOTES**

7. According to the writer of this session, the most important goal a person might have for studying the Bible is to _____.
 - A. learn about ancient history
 - B. appreciate the beauty of the literature of the Bible
 - C. become a better person
 - D. know God personally

8. The main reason the Bible enables people to know God better is because its pages tell us _____.
 - A. what people like Moses and David thought God was like
 - B. what God wanted us to know about Himself
 - C. who we are
 - D. all of these

9. What things might we discover about God through Bible study?
 - A. What God cares about
 - B. How creative God is
 - C. What God thinks about sin
 - D. all of these

10. The first question we should ask of a Bible passage is, “_____”
 - A. What does it tell me about myself?
 - B. What does it tell me about God?
 - C. What do I learn about the history of the Biblical world?
 - D. How does this help to confirm what I believe about God?

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR MENTOR AND PARTICIPANT

**NOTES**

Be prepared to discuss the following with your mentor:

1. Why is the Bible such a rich resource for historians?
2. Why do people who love good literature enjoy reading the Bible?
3. Why is the Bible the primary authority for what Christians believe and practice?
4. How can the Bible help confirm my faith?
5. Why would people use the Bible to improve themselves?
6. How does the Bible help me to know God?