



A JOURNEY OF FAITH
SESSION FOUR

4 Is the Bible Relevant for Today?

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“Is the Bible Relevant for Today?”
Session Four of Ten Sessions from the book:
A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry:
Bible Answers to Life’s Toughest Questions

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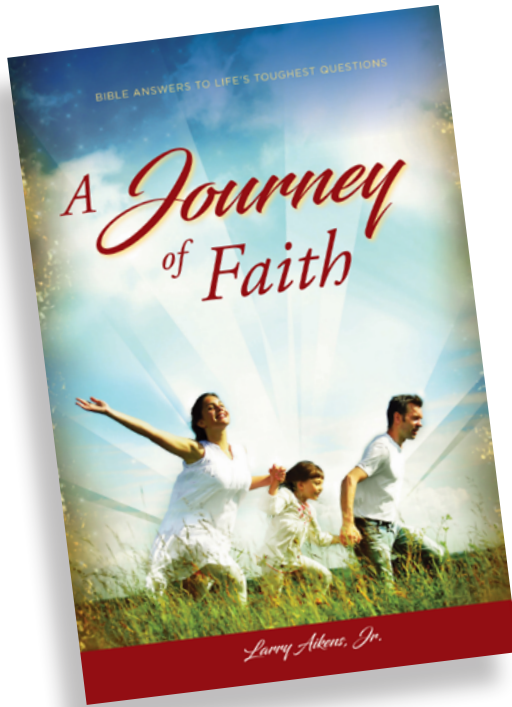
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SESSION **FOUR** FROM

A Journey of Faith

BIBLE ANSWERS TO
LIFE'S TOUGHEST QUESTIONS



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A SPECIAL INVITATION

As a pastor since 1992, I have realized that many people have questions on their mind about God and the Bible. Sometimes they tell me that they aren't sure they should ask, but they wonder, "Why *do* bad things happen in this world—especially to good people? Doesn't God love us, can't God protect us? Why doesn't God answer *my* prayers?"

So many people have said to me, "Pastor, I have been trying to read the Bible, but I just don't understand it. And besides, where did all these different versions of the Bible come from. Which one should I use? It's just so confusing!"

And the questions keep on coming: "How can I know for sure that I will be in Heaven when I die? Has my life really mattered? Is there any help in the Bible for my personal finances? How can I make better decisions? Do you believe in speaking in tongues? Can a person recover from addictions?" And on they go...

All of these are good and fair questions—completely necessary—and they have caused me to really pray for guidance of the Holy Spirit as I have studied God's Word to try to find answers for what I consider to be *the toughest questions about life*. This book is the product of that research and experience—trying to get at answers that will help you understand God better.

I am quick to admit that I can't answer all of the toughest questions completely—some of life's mysteries God just hasn't fully explained—but I have tried to provide sessions in *A Journey of Faith Discipleship Ministry* to at least engage with these questions fairly.

These sessions provide a framework to process these mysteries through a biblical understanding of what God has explained to us and really wants us to know. You might be surprised at just how much can be uncovered if you are willing to do a little bit of discovery in a guided setting. So many people with the toughest questions have told me that this study has helped them immensely.

I want to thank these folks who have *journeyed* with us up to this point. Each sincere person has deepened my faith, and has in some way been an encourager to produce the resource that you hold in your hand. I feel indebted to all who have spoken into my *Journey of Faith*, and especially to the Holy

Spirit who has guided each of us, and has revealed the truth of God's Word to our hearts as we have diligently pursued a relationship with God through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior.

It is my sincere hope that you will also travel with us and take the time to study these provided materials carefully. This *Journey* very well could be a wise investment in your relationship with Almighty God. My prayer is that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you may emerge from this series of studies a more informed and dedicated follower of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Your fellow Journeyer,

Larry

Psalm 40:1-3

WELCOME TO THE JOURNEY!

We are delighted that you have joined us for *A Journey of Faith*. We know that this is a wise investment you are making in your life, and it is our sincere desire that you will understand more of God's love for you and how you fit into God's plan of grace. We would like to introduce you to a few practical ideas:

- ✓ When you watch or attend the sessions, be sure to have a Bible, this resource, and a way to take notes. We will be studying the Bible, using the *New Living Translation*. While it is not required, it might be helpful for you to purchase this translation. We suggest the *NLT Illustrated Study Bible*.
- ✓ Before each session, please read carefully the material you have received. We believe that *Truth Discovered Is Truth Retained!* Please come to the sessions prepared.
- ✓ We offer this *Journey* with appreciation to those whose questions, together with our own, have challenged us to dig deep into God's Word for answers. It is because of their curiosity that this discipleship ministry has been developed. As you study, we realize that you also may have questions of your own. Please feel free to ask your questions during our discussion time, or contact your facilitator throughout the week. We are always happy to talk with you about your *Journey*.
- ✓ After the session, please complete the Discussion Questions and Abiding Principles on our website. Submit these for extra credit!
- ✓ If you are enjoying *A Journey of Faith*, please refer a friend to Journey with us. Visit www.onlyJesus4me.com to discover how to become a Licensed Facilitator and offer this life-changing resource to others. It is easy and rewarding!
- ✓ Before our study each week, we will say this prayer together:
“Dear heavenly Father, I ask that you open my heart to receive the Scripture for today's lesson. I also ask for the Holy Spirit to give me courage to take the steps of a true disciple in following Jesus, as truth is revealed to me through this *Journey of Faith*. Thank you for your grace at work in my life to draw me closer to your awesome love. I pray in Jesus' holy name, Amen.”

THEME VERSES

2 Peter 1:3a, 5a

³By his *Divine Power*,
God has given us
Everything we need
for living a *Godly Life*.

⁵In view of all this, make
every effort to *Respond*
to God's *Promises*.
Supplement [or add to]
Your Faith.



ABIDING PRINCIPLES

2 TIMOTHY 3:16

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.

PSALM 119:105

Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.

HEBREWS 4:12

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires.

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION FOUR

At the outset of this study, I want to be very vulnerable, and I hope you won't judge me too harshly for what I am about to share. I grew up around the Bible and would have told you that it was very important to me. However, I had never read it for myself—at least not all the way through. That may not be surprising at face value; yet when you consider that I had grown up in a missionary home, read books like a book-worm, had been saved, baptized, and answered a call to the gospel ministry in my early teens... I wish I could tell you otherwise.

My problem? I just couldn't "get into it." I would start at Genesis, and by Leviticus I was totally bored. I just had no idea why all of that information was relevant to me. I felt guilty and ashamed—that I had let the Lord down—but I just couldn't stay with it.

I went to church and listened to the Pastor preach. I went to Sunday School and listened intently to my teachers, and my mom and dad were faithful to read the Bible to us in family devotions. But still, I had not read the Bible for myself. I would sometimes read an occasional passage, or memorize a section when required, but I just couldn't seem to get into a routine of regularly and consistently studying the Scriptures.

I had already entered the ministry full-time as a music and youth director *when something happened that changed my life*. Some missionaries visited our church. They challenged my heart to begin a consistent Bible reading routine and provided for me a Bible-reading guide to read through the Bible in ninety (90) days.

I took them up on their challenge and tried their Bible-reading guide. For the first time, I was intrigued by the routine, and the variety of Scriptures kept my attention. It seemed like I was getting a panoramic view of the Scriptures, and some of those difficult passages starting "fitting in" with the rest of God's message.

I did not complete the Bible in ninety (90) days. I probably never will read that fast. Nevertheless, I stuck with the idea and worked with it until I could find a schedule that worked for me. I did complete the entire Bible for the first

time in about a year. Now, some twenty-six (26) years later, I am still using a similar routine, though moving more slowly—probably reading through every two years.

It doesn't really matter to me how quickly I go. I enjoy reading the Bible and try to consider God's message to me and how it applies to my life. The more I read through the Bible, the better those difficult passages make sense. Even so, I am willing to admit that there are still passages of Scripture I can't understand. But I will tell you this: every day that I read the Bible, I find something—without fail—that speaks to my life or my challenges. *It works!*

I hope this session will answer many questions you have about the Bible. Questions like: "Where did the Bible come from? Why are there so many English translations? How do I understand the Bible better? Is the Bible trustworthy?" View-points vary—even among sincere Christian scholars—and it is not my intent to discuss all viewpoints in this session. Your questions are very important, though, so I will try my best to share my understanding of these topics and where my faith has led me. Your facilitator may add his or her ideas alongside mine.

Most importantly, I hope this session will inspire you to value the Bible above any other source of information, and bring you to a fresh realization that the Bible is God's message to you and the entire world

*The Bible is God's Personal
Message to you and the world.*

TEXT: PSALM 19:7-14

⁷ The instructions of the LORD are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

⁸ The commandments of the LORD are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are clear, giving insight for living.

⁹ Reverence for the LORD is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the LORD are true; each one is fair.

¹⁰ They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb.

¹¹ They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them.

¹² How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin.

¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.



SESSION 4: IS THE BIBLE RELEVANT FOR TODAY?

Many people today have come to the conclusion that the Bible is an outdated book that no longer has relevance to a post-modern society. Is that true?

Does the Bible still have a message for today? Is the Bible God's Word? Is it worth my time to read, study, and commit the Bible to memory? Should our church still be focused on preaching the Bible? To these questions, I would say a resounding, "Yes!"

But, what do you believe?

Does the Bible still have a message for your life?

I hope this session will guide you to a belief that the Bible is relevant in your everyday life and you will look forward to spending time reading and pursuing its message! For me, I have found in the Bible the secrets to a happy and fulfilling life, antidotes to burn-out, and empowerment to overcome the hindrances of evil. My time spent with God in the Bible is very relevant to me, and it is changing my life. May I share with you some things that have brought this understanding to my heart?

I. The relevance of the Bible (vss. 7-9).

- A. The Bible could be thought of as an “Owner’s Manual” for humankind (vs. 7).
1. God’s underlying purpose in designing humankind was to bring honor and glory to God as Creator.
Colossians 1:16-17 – ¹⁶For through him [Christ] God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. ¹⁷He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.
 2. The basic message of the Bible instructs how we should live our lives to accomplish this purpose.
- B. The Bible is a fascinating record of history, which in reality is God’s story (vs. 7).
1. The Bible gives humankind information about the Person of God and how God functions.
 2. This knowledge provides humankind the wisdom for making decisions that will accomplish our basic purpose, that of glorifying God.
Acts 17:24-28 – ²⁴“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, ²⁵and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. ²⁶From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries. ²⁷His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. ²⁸For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”
- C. The Bible was written to give us guidance (vs. 8).
1. Reading the Bible gives us insight from God about the boundaries God has put in place.

2. These boundaries cannot be violated without serious consequences.
Proverbs 3:1-2 – ¹My child, never forget the things I have taught you. Store my commands in your heart. ²If you do this, you will live many years, and your life will be satisfying.
- D. The Bible has something to say about every area of life (vs. 8).
1. God has left clear instructions for humankind and how we are to live our lives each day.
 2. These clear instructions are often referred to as the “revealed will of God.”
 3. Knowing and obeying these instructions are the first steps toward living a life of good success.
Deuteronomy 29:29 – The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us, so that we may obey all the terms of these instructions.
- E. Spending time in the Bible teaches us to respect God, or grow in our reverential fear of God’s authority (vs. 9).
1. Walking in true humility before the Lord is the cornerstone of true wisdom.
Psalm 111:10 – Fear of the LORD is the foundation of true wisdom. All who obey his commandments will grow in wisdom. Praise him forever!
 2. The root of all sin that we struggle with in our personal lives is a lack of respect, or lack of fear before God (for further study, read Romans 1:21-32).
Psalm 14:1-2 – ¹Only fools say in their hearts, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their actions are evil; not one of them does good! ²The LORD looks down from heaven on the entire human race; he looks to see if anyone is truly wise, if anyone seeks God.
 3. Learning to respect God more and learning to walk in humility before God are the secrets to breaking sin’s bondage in our lives.
- F. The Bible has a message for people of all walks of life in every generation (vs. 9).

1. The Bible's message will always be relevant because of its divine authorship.

2 Peter 1:20-21 – ²⁰Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, ²¹or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God.

*God's Word is Always
Reliable and Trustworthy.*

ILLUSTRATION

Dr. Bavinck, a Dutch Theologian, shared that “the whole Scripture, although it was historically wrought, is, as Augustine said, a letter sent by God out of heaven to his church on earth.”^{1,2}



2. The Bible's message is being preserved by God. Jesus said in Matthew 24:35, “Heaven and earth will disappear, but my words will never disappear.”
1 Peter 1:25 – But the word of the Lord remains forever. And that word is the Good News that was preached to you.
- G. The message of God's Word is always reliable and trustworthy (vs. 9).
1. The Bible is the inspired Word of God.
2 Timothy 3:16-17 – ¹⁶All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. ¹⁷God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do

every good work.

- a. The word *inspired* in this text literally means “God-breathed.”³
 - b. God guided the writers of the sacred text to communicate a divine message in words able to be understood by their original audiences.
 - 1) This required diligent research on the part of the Bible writers. Many of the authors quote other sources throughout their writings to support their message—some extensively.
 - 2) God allowed the writers of the sacred text to bring their unique personalities into their written communication, yet superintended their writings to be certain that the divine message was clearly communicated.⁴
 - c. Throughout the years, translators have diligently worked to transmit God’s original message to audiences in other languages and cultural settings.
 - 1) The original wording, as heard within the cultural setting of the primary audience of the Scripture, does not usually transfer rigidly to another time, language, and entirely different cultural setting.⁵ Therefore, all translation work involves diligent effort to extract the message and present it in a meaningful way to a different audience. Simply put, translation requires the work of interpretation.⁶
 - 2) Some meaning may be lost in this interpretive work of translation, so it is wise to consult various Bible translations to get a better understanding of the full meaning of Scripture passages.⁷ The more modern translations will often alert you to these types of interpretive issues.
2. This message of God’s Word is inerrant and infallible. Erickson wrote: “The Bible is a sure source of guidance. For when correctly interpreted, it can be fully relied on in all it teaches. It is a sure, dependable, and trust-worthy authority.”⁸
- a. An area of theology that has sparked a raging debate in Christian

circles is that of Textual Criticism.

- 1) At first glance, it seems that scholars are attacking the credibility of the Bible.
 - 2) While this may be true in some institutions, there is a legitimate purpose for such criticism, or scholarly critique, into the issues surrounding the text. Scholars are trying to rediscover the original wording and meaning of the ancient manuscripts.^{9, 10}
- b. There are some 5,746 ancient Greek manuscripts (partial or complete) of the New Testament that have been carefully compared.¹¹
- 1) These contain some 300,000 variants that have been carefully catalogued, but most of these variants are insignificant.¹²
 - 2) The more significant textual variants explain some of the differences between the English translations that we have. For instance, some translations do not contain Mark 16:9-20 or 1 John 5:7.
 - 3) Variants in manuscripts are likely the result of the ancient and tedious process of hand-copying and the passing down of information from century to century with archaic methods.¹³
 - a) There may have been honest mistakes made by the humans who hand-copied the Scriptures.
 - b) There also may have been editorial work (known as “glosses”) that intentionally or unintentionally became part of a manuscript.
 - c) There are no “original autographs” available to scholars in order to decisively settle these debates.
 - d) Even so, “there is more abundant and accurate evidence for the New Testament than for any other book from the ancient world.”¹⁴
 - e) What is important to understand about these variants is

that *the message* of God's Word is clearly communicated and preserved. No variant between the manuscripts undermines the validity and reliability of God's message to us. Where there is a significant variant, and thus a scholarly debate on how that text should read, that same truth is clearly communicated elsewhere without textual variants, and thus is void of textual criticism.

- i. "No doctrine of Christianity rests solely on textually disputed passages."¹⁵
 - ii. "Readers of English translations of the NT need not wonder if textual variants lurking behind every verse they read would drastically change the meaning of the passage. . . . Good editions of the various modern translations contain footnotes to alert readers to most of the significant textual variants"¹⁶
- c. It is clear that God would not have us worship the exact wording of the text, nor should we idolize a certain translation of the Scriptures. Rather, we are to worship God and humbly try to follow God's message in the pages of the Bible.
3. The message of the Bible is reliable because of its miraculous formation.
- a. God inspired some forty authors from all walks of life, spanning almost 1,600 years in the Bible's formation; yet the message of the Bible has an incredible unity and centrality.
 - b. The canonicity of the Bible, or the way the canon of Scripture was formed, also lends credibility to the reliability of the message of God's Word.
 - 1) The word *canon*, as applied to the Bible, "refers to the collection of biblical books that Christians accept as uniquely authoritative."¹⁷
 - 2) Two prominent Jewish scholars, David Kimchi (1160-1232) and Elias Levita (1465-1549), passed down as Jewish tradition that Ezra and the members of the Great Synagogue

completed the final collection and organization of the Old Testament canon during the fifth century before Christ.¹⁸

- a) The secular historian, Josephus, indicated that the Old Testament canon was completed during the reign of Artaxerxes, which would correspond to the lifetime of Ezra. We also know that Ezra would have had access to an impressive library that would have aided in his scholarly work.
- b) Witness of Scripture also supports Ezra's educational ability to organize the sacred books of the Old Testament (Nehemiah 8:1; 12:36; Ezra 7:6, 11).
- c) While acknowledging their historical value, the Apocrypha books have not been accepted by most Protestants into the canon of the OT.¹⁹
 - i. At the time of Christ, the Jews only accepted the 39 books of the OT that we recognize today.
 - ii. This was because of a wide-spread Jewish belief, well documented in rabbinic literature and by historian Josephus, that "divinely inspired writings ceased after the time of Ezra, Nehemiah, and the latest of the minor prophets: Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi."²⁰
 - iii. The Apocrypha books date from the inter-testamental period after Malachi and before the NT; thus, they were not accepted as inspired by God.
 - iv. Further, "the New Testament authors never quote these works directly, as they do the rest of the OT."²¹
- 3) The New Testament canon was shaped "as a result of the obvious genuine character of the books."²² Each book was tested by the early church, according to the following five principles:
 - a) Apostolicity was of primary importance. The human author either had to be an apostle of Christ, or had to

sustain such a relationship to an apostle as to raise his book to the level of the apostolic books.

- b) The book had to be suitable for public reading.
- c) The book had to have universal reception throughout the early Christian community and Church.
- d) The contents and message of the book had to be of certain spiritual character.
- e) The book had to bear abundant evidence of having been inspired by the Holy Spirit.²³

II. The Reach of the Bible (vss. 7-14).

- A. The Bible has a message of salvation for all of humankind lost in their sin (vs. 7).
 - 1. The perfection of God's law proves the sinful condition of all human beings.

Galatians 3:22 – But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.
 - 2. A realization of our sin should cause us to turn to Christ Jesus for salvation.

Galatians 3:24-25 – ²⁴Let me put it another way. The law was our guardian until Christ came; it protected us until we could be made right with God through faith. ²⁵And now that the way of faith has come, we no longer need the law as our guardian.
 - 3. Only Jesus can “revive the soul” and bring true salvation (vs. 7).

*God's Word provides Wisdom,
Knowledge, and Understanding.*

B. The Bible supplies us for the Christian life (vss. 7-8).

Proverbs 2:6 – For the LORD grants wisdom! From his mouth come knowledge and understanding.

Proverbs 24:3-4 – ³A house is built by wisdom and becomes strong through good sense. ⁴Through knowledge its rooms are filled with all sorts of precious riches and valuables.

1. The Bible imparts “wisdom” to help us see life from God’s perspective.
2. The Bible imparts “good sense.”
 - a. Good sense helps us to respond to life with insight, reacting as God would have us react.
 - b. This will cause abiding joy in our lives.
3. The Bible imparts “knowledge.”

C. The Bible provides safety for us as believers.

1. The Bible cautions us that we must give a full account of our lives to God.

2 Corinthians 5:9-10 – ⁹So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him. ¹⁰For we must all stand before Christ to be judged. We will each receive whatever we deserve for the good or evil we have done in this earthly body.

 - a. In this we see a warning for the disobedient.
 - b. We also see a reward for the obedient.
2. The Bible reveals sin in our lives, so that we can seek forgiveness and a different way to live in Christ.
3. The Bible can help us to overcome bad habits and break the chains of addictions (Ps. 9:12-14).

III. The way to research our Bibles.

- A. We should pursue a relationship with God by spending time reading the Scriptures on a daily basis. A suggested Bible reading guide is provided at the end of this session.
- B. Scripture passages that stand out to us should be studied carefully.
 1. Take time to pray before studying the Scriptures. Invite the Holy Spirit to be your guide and teacher in proper understanding.
 2. Take time to read each passage of Scripture in its literary context of the surrounding Scriptures.
 - a. Be careful of “proof-texting,” meaning that you shouldn’t isolate a Scripture out of its contextual relevance.
 - b. Compare Scripture with Scripture before forming an opinion. Theology should not be formed solely upon one passage of Scripture, but rather should be thought through in unity with the entire witness of Scripture.
 - c. Discuss difficult passages within the community of faith. Listen deeply and allow the collective wisdom of other believers to speak into your understanding.²⁴
 3. Reflect on the historical, social, and cultural settings of the primary audience who first received the passage.²⁵
 - a. Why was this passage of Scripture written?
 - b. What is the primary message God communicated?
 - c. What message from God transcends the primary audience and is relevant to us today?
 4. Consult with commentaries and Bible dictionaries for a better grasp on how the church has traditionally understood the passage. A recent edition of a Study Bible, the Bible Hub online, and Bible Gateway online are just a few sources that are readily available.
 - a. Caution: Every source online is not helpful in understanding the Scripture. Notice the author, publisher, and date of the scholarship.
 - b. Read broadly before forming an opinion.

- c. Don't forget to discuss these ideas with others in your community of faith—especially your pastor and Bible study leaders. Tap into the wisdom of other believers.
5. Ask yourself some questions as you analyze the passage:
 - a. “How does my personal experience of God inform my understanding of this passage?”
 - b. “Are there intellectual discoveries that should inform my understanding and application of this passage?”
- C. We should take time to meditate upon and share the selections of Scripture that are particularly helpful in our faith journey.

Psalm 119:11 – I have hidden your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

IN CONCLUSION

So, let me come back to my original question, “Is the Bible relevant for today?” I sure believe so and answer with a resounding, “YES.”

How about you? Consider your life for a moment. What priority have you placed on the Word of God? If the Bible is to be relevant to your life, you must choose to pursue it. You must read, study, and put into practice its message.

Also, don't get “bogged down” by passages you don't understand. Study difficult passages as the Holy Spirit leads, but continue to move forward in your reading. You will get greater clarity on difficult passages as you grow in your understanding of the Bible. I encourage you to read a portion of God's Word each day, and read until you get a blessing. You may be surprised at just how much you truly understand as the Holy Spirit illumines God's message to your heart.

The suggested reading guide on the following pages is a great place to start, and I truly hope you will give it a try. Nonetheless, find a routine or pattern that works for you—something that will keep you challenged—and stay with it!

May God bless the Word of God to your heart and life.

A Suggested Bible Reading Guide

You will probably find it easier to read out of a different Bible than you carry to church. In your “Study Bible,” put a slip of paper (bookmark) at the beginning of each of the nine sections outlined below. On these bookmarks, indicate the section heading and the number of chapters to read there each time.

Each section serves like a book that you will read start to finish at the prescribed rate of chapters each time. For instance, the first section is Genesis through Deuteronomy. You treat this as an entire book and read it start to finish at the prescribed pace. You also read a portion of the next section and so forth until you have completed the first division. It is a good idea to use a pencil to place a small check mark on each chapter as you read.

***DIVISION A**

Section 1: Genesis – Deuteronomy Read 2 chapters

Section 2: Joshua – 2 Chronicles Read 2 chapters

Section 3: Ezra – Job Read 1 chapter

Note: When finished reading this section, move over to Ecclesiastes – Song of Solomon and still read one chapter.

Section 4: Psalms – Proverbs Read 2 chapters

***DIVISION B**

Section 5: Isaiah – Ezekiel Read 2 chapters

Section 6: Daniel – Malachi Read 1 chapter

Section 7: Matthew – John Read 1 chapter

Section 8: Acts Read 1 chapter

Note: When finished reading this section, move over to Hebrews – Revelation and still read one chapter.

Section 9: Romans – Philemon Read 1 chapter

**Please note: Division A and Division B is simply an organizational tool to divide all nine sections into two different days.*

FOR EXAMPLE

On your **first reading day:**

Genesis 1 & 2, Joshua 1 & 2, Ezra 1, and Psalms 1 & 2.

On your **second reading day:**

Isaiah 1 & 2, Daniel 1, Matthew 1, Acts 1, and Romans 1

On your **third reading day:**

Genesis 3 & 4, Joshua 3 & 4, Ezra 2, and Psalms 3 & 4

On your **fourth reading day:**

Isaiah 3 & 4, Daniel 2, Matthew 2, Acts 2, and Romans 2

And so forth...

This guide will give you a panoramic view of the Scripture and will help to keep your interest as you read through the Bible. If followed exactly, it will guide you

through the entire Bible in about 180 days.

Realizing that you may not have time to read every day, read as often as you can. A good goal is to plan to read on the days that you work, or have classes. Make an appointment with God and try to be as faithful to God as you are to your other commitments. Remember to say a prayer before you read the Scriptures, inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to you through the Word of God.

You may find that weekends or holidays are difficult to keep up with a routine—that is perfectly okay! If you skip a few days each week and holidays, it may take you a year to read through the entire Bible. Even so, you will find this format beneficial for reading and studying God's Word.

I challenge you to try it!

ENDNOTES

¹ St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo 396-430 C.E., was one of our early Church Fathers, and is a renowned theologian. His writings have greatly influenced Christianity.

² Herman Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1956), 113.

³ Strong, NT:2315: theopneustos (theh-op'-nyoo-stos); from NT:2316 {theos, the supreme Deity} and a presumed derivative of NT:4154 {NT:4154: pneo (pneh'-o); a primary word; to breathe hard, i.e. breeze.}; thus meaning divinely breathed in. This is understood by Easton's Bible Dictionary to mean that the Scriptures were "divinely breathed into by God."

⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2000), 232. Erickson, crediting Augustus Hopkins Strong (*Systematic Theology*, 211), labels this as the "Dynamic Theory" of Inspiration. He says, "The dynamic theory emphasizes the combination of divine and human elements in the process of writing the Bible. The Spirit of God works by directing the writer to the thoughts or concepts, and allowing the writer's own distinctive personality to come into play in the choice of words and expressions. Thus, the writer will give expression to the divinely directed thoughts in a way uniquely characteristic of that person." NB: While identifying closely with this theory, I want to make clear that I believe direct quotes from God were preserved word-for-word, and thus were "Verbally Inspired."

⁵ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 4-6.

⁶ Bavinck, *Our Reasonable Faith*, 114. In Dr. Bavinck's words, "Every translation, after all, is really a kind of interpretation."

⁷ The "Parallel" feature at Biblehub.com is an excellent and free resource you can use to easily compare translations.

⁸ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 265. NB: The Church of the Brethren released a similar statement in 1979: "We affirm the Bible, rightly interpreted, is a fully trustworthy guide for our lives. In this sense we reaffirm our historic understanding of Scripture as an infallible rule of faith and practice. . . . We are not yet fully agreed on whether 'trustworthy' means 'inerrant.' Some of us believe that the Bible's witness to its own authority implies that the statements of Scripture are without error of any kind, whether factual, historical, or doctrinal. Others of us believe that such a claim is contrary to the intent of the biblical writers and a denial of the true humanity of Scripture." ("Biblical Inspiration and Authority: A Study Guide to the Annual Conference paper," 27;

reprinted in *Another Way of Believing: A Brethren Theology* by Dale W. Brown.)

⁹ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 63-102.

¹⁰ Randolph W. Tate, *Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2008), 273-324.

¹¹ Clinton Baldwin, "Factor Analysis: A New Method for Classifying New Testament Greek Manuscripts," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 48, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 29-53, accessed October 26, 2019, EBSCOhost. NB: According to the official register kept by the Institute for New Testament Textual Research (Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung) in Münster, Germany, as of May 2006.

¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 120.

¹⁴ Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1976), 306.

¹⁵ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 122.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁸ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, rev. Vernon D. Doerksen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), 60.

¹⁹ Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 104-105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²² Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, 60.

²³ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

²⁴ In Anabaptist terminology, this is called "Congregational Hermeneutics." For more reading, I suggest *Biblical Interpretation in the Anabaptist Tradition* by Stuart Murray, published by Pandora Press, Kitchener, Ontario, 2000.

²⁵ Michael J. Gorman, *Elements of Biblical Exegesis: A Basic Guide for Students and Ministers* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2001), 65-73.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Have you read and studied this entire session? Yes No

Please answer the Discussion Questions below in complete sentences, using our website. When you submit your answers to OJM, you will get a copy of Larry's and Diane's answers in return via email! (You may wish to keep a copy of your answers to compare yours with theirs as you continue discovering truth.) If you are not sure how to answer each question, go ahead and "take a stab at it." Once you start writing, you may surprise yourself! There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. We want to hear your thoughts!

1. Please describe your interactions with the Bible before studying *A Journey of Faith*. What relevance and importance has the Bible had in your life? Will anything change after this session?
2. In your own words, describe what you believe the Bible means when it says that it has been "inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).
3. What do you think is more important, the "words" or the "message" of the Bible? Please explain your answer.
4. Pastors and religious leaders are still writing books today. Please discuss and explain the difference between their writings and the Apostle Paul's writings preserved in the Bible.
5. Let's practice. Using the ideas given under "The way to research our Bibles" (point III), please discuss the relevant message God has for us today from 2 Corinthians 13:12.

IN ADDITION...

Remember to write out the Abiding Principles on the website. If you complete these simple assignments, you will earn an upgraded certificate!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All the glory and praise goes to God for all of the many blessings we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. I truly am grateful to God for the wonderful people God has put in my life since I was but a small child. I chose the theme verses for Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) from [Psalm 71:17-18](#), for truly as the Psalmist said: “[God has] taught me from my earliest childhood.” I am indebted to many voices and guides who have spoken into my faith *Journey* to bring me to this new opportunity to teach others *A Journey of Faith*.

My *Journey of Faith* started many years ago, when in God’s grace and providence, God allowed me to be born into a Christian home. When I was but three years of age, God led my parents, Larry and Linda, into full-time missions work. My early life was enriched by their experiences of faith and service to Christ. I owe them my lasting gratitude for the many ways they gave me a wonderful start in life.

Further, I am very grateful for the church families that have allowed me to serve Jesus in their midst since 1992. So much of what I have learned has been in the pursuit of their needs. Also, searching questions that have come to the surface in both my life and theirs, have called forth a diligent study on my part. I love each and every person with whom I have had the opportunity to minister throughout the years, and I appreciate all that they have taught me. Space would not allow me to thank each person by name, but to those who were part of these church families, know that I am eternally grateful that our journeys have intersected. I feel that we have blessed each other forward in our mutual faith, and I am thankful for what you have brought into my life.

I am grateful for a host of professors, pastors, teachers, and counselors who have spoken into my faith journey. I studied officially in many classrooms, but unofficially, I have sat at the feet of so many wonderful Christians—some whom I have pastored and others whom I have led as part of my church staff. Those very ones whom I was called to lead have led me in many ways. I can’t thank these mentors enough. I only wish that space would allow me to mention each one by name.

I also want to offer my appreciation to my first wife, Holly, and my children, Nathaniel and Jessica, for allowing me the time to pursue ministry, writing,

education, and the lofty dreams that I felt God placed within my heart. While I felt my motives were pure and my intentions were the best, I haven't always known how to balance my time and priorities well. I am sure that in my early zeal for God, I often got caught up in lofty goals that were more than what God had called me to pursue. In those times, my family suffered a great deal for my lack of attentiveness to them, and I regret that. I also made my share of mistakes and needed forgiveness. For those sacrifices they made to invest in who I have become, I offer my sincere thanks and humble gratitude. If I could go back, I would do things very differently. My children are grown now, and I love them very much.

God in his mercy and grace has allowed me to remarry a wonderful partner, Diane. I am very grateful for her support and the expertise that she has brought into my life. She is a dedicated follower of Jesus Christ, a grammarian, and an excellent musician. Her humble ways of living out her faith in Jesus Christ are constant lessons to me. She has a gentle spirit and has modeled to me the Christ-life, to which I aspire. I can't say "thank you" enough to her. She has a courage about her that is remarkable, and even though God has entrusted to her a battle with Stage IV cancer, she fights on with great courage. My thanks for her careful review of all of our written materials and the excellent edits. She might just make a grammarian out of me yet. I doubt it, but it is worth her continued try! Also, a special thank you is in order for Diane's parents, Don and Doris Johns. They are special folks, and they sure reared a fine daughter!

I must give a special thanks to my church family at Bethel. They are simply the BEST. I would never be able to express to them how much I love them and the church that we all call "home." It is such a privilege to be their pastor and to help carry on the work of Jesus. I appreciate Bethel's support and belief in the project of OJM. Their partnership is such a blessing to us. I want to give my appreciation to the chairperson of our Church Board, Robert Phillips, and his wife Lena, and also the chairperson of our Deacons, Ron Wampler, and his wife Carolyn. All of the leaders at Bethel are dear friends and encouragers in the work of Christ—I wish I had the space to list all of their names. I also want to thank our District Executive Minister, Bro. John Jantzi, for his review of some of our lessons and his excellent input and ideas. Also, my thanks go to him for believing in me and being the conduit that God used to bring Bethel and us together. He is a blessing and such an encouragement as we endeavor

to serve Christ together. I also want to give a shout out to the Discipleship Ministries Team with whom I have the privilege of serving: David Chappell, Jan Orndorff, and Debby Rimel are wonderful friends and encouragers. My “thank you” to the team! They have made me a better disciple of Jesus, and I appreciate their steady encouragement to look to Jesus and keep the attention on HIM!

Only Jesus 4 Me (OJM) was born out of a calling that I felt through fervent prayer on my knees. I shared the vision first with Diane, and she was right there to support me. We both prayed for God’s direction in putting the right people into our path to help launch this ministry. In the early days, God led us to a local businessman, C.L. Russell of C.L. Russell Photography in Broadway, Virginia. He is the creative genius behind the videography and photography! He and his wife, LaShonda, have become good friends, and we are very grateful for the ways they have supported OJM. In those early days, God also led us to Josh Hallahan of Christian Internet Design in Missoula, Montana. He and his team have brilliantly developed the website and have constantly been a source of encouragement in the Lord. They have found the tools to make the vision a reality! We are very grateful to them.

As we began to delve into the work of creating OJM, we realized very quickly that we needed some expertise in graphics design, technical issues, and developing the ministry materials, such as the book that you are reading. After much prayer, the Lord reminded me of a good friend who had assisted us on many previous projects, Tillman Ross of Graphic Imaging in Concord, North Carolina. We asked Tillman to consult with us as our Impressions Manager, and he graciously accepted. He is gifted at bringing colors, web pages, pictures and concepts into a unified whole. His creations speak of excellence, and we feel they are a wonderful reflection on OJM’s passion for Jesus. A “thank you” to Tillman for his steady and creative guidance, as well as being a friend in the Gospel ministry since 2003.

On the business side, we have been working with our CPA and friend, Ed Neese, from Greensboro, North Carolina. I pastored there in the late 1990’s and asked Ed to do my personal taxes. Since that time, Ed has done my yearly return and has counseled me on many financial matters. He loves the Lord Jesus, and he has been a true business friend. I am deeply grateful for his

guidance in financial matters concerning OJM, and ministry in general, but even more so for his consistent friendship and encouragement to both me and Diane. God has also brought into our lives a good friend and attorney, Dan Neher from Harrisonburg, Virginia. He is a solid brother in Christ and has been a source of encouragement and assistance in advising us on legal matters concerning OJM. We are grateful to Dan for his expertise.

Musically, God has put in our path a new friend from Nashville, Tennessee, Peter Young. Peter is an accomplished drummer, arranger, and producer. He has given “wings” to the theme song God allowed me to compose, “Only Jesus 4 Me,” and brought together incredible talent in Nashville to produce the song at the legendary Studio 19. He has been awesome to work with. Our thanks to Peter, and a thank you to the recording studio and all of the musicians who played on the project: Kyle Hershman, Studio Engineer; Chris Nole, Keyboards; Ron de la Vega, Bass; Peter Young, drums; Tony Paoletta, pedal steel; Joe Spivey, Acoustic Guitar, Fiddle and Mandolin, and Chas Williams, Lead Guitar. Mike Lusk is the awesome singing talent on the theme song, and he sounded just great. We appreciate Mike and all the musicians for their contributions!

There are so many others God has used in my life—many friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues who have prayed for me—and I am truly grateful for each and every one. If I have failed to mention you by name, please understand that it was not on purpose. Yet above and beyond all others, I am humbled by the friendship of Jesus. I am so grateful that Jesus would entrust to me his vision for *Only Jesus 4 Me* and *A Journey of Faith*. I realized long ago that inspiration and creativity do not come from a human being; rather, all that is good comes from the Holy Spirit working through a yielded person to accomplish the purpose of glorifying the Lord Jesus Christ. When I am at my best, I feel the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, and I give all the glory to Jesus. “In him, I live and move and have my being” (Acts 17:28). I know all the glory goes to God and I am eternally grateful for any small part that I have in Jesus’ kingdom. If this ministry touches your heart and is a help to you, please join with us in giving God the glory. God alone is worthy! Praise be to Jesus! Thank you, Jesus. Only Jesus 4 Me! Amen!



PHOTO ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Photo 2: “Women reading the Holy Bible,” January 18, 2018, by contributor: Krisanapong Detraphiphat, on istockphoto.com, stock photo ID: 905827952.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Larry was born in Atlanta, Georgia, and reared on the missionary field. He is the second of six children. His folks served the Spanish-speaking world until Larry was a teenager, and then they traveled as a family in full-time evangelistic work in the United States. He recalls being in forty-three states and three other countries before going to college. During these formative years, Larry gave his heart and life to Christ and felt a calling to serve the Lord in local church work.

Larry was ordained to the full-time Gospel ministry in 1992, serving as a music and youth minister until 1995. Since that time, he has had the privilege of lifting up Christ as a pastor in the Baptist Church, the United Methodist Church, and the Church of the Brethren (COB). He is currently serving as the pastor of Bethel-Mayland COB in Broadway, Virginia, and the interim pastor of Pine Grove COB in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He also serves with the Shenandoah District COB as a member of the Discipleship Ministry Team.

Larry has earned three seminary degrees: a Master of Theology (Th.M.) and a Doctorate of Theology (Th.D.) from Covington Theological Seminary, Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; and a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Eastern Mennonite Seminary, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

Larry is the father to two grown children, Nathaniel and Jessica, and a grandfather to Kirsten. Larry and his wife Diane reside in New Market, Virginia. When not busy in the ministry, Larry enjoys music, the outdoors, golf, tennis, riding motorcycles, and reading—especially biographies. Diane shares many of the same interests and is also a wonderful pianist. They both enjoy ministering, spending time together, traveling, and meeting other believers.



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Diane was born near Tacoma, Washington, and grew up as the baby sister of two brothers. At seven years of age, her family moved across the country back to her mother's home in the mountains of Pennsylvania. They took up residence in an old farmhouse on the edge of the family farm and got very involved in their local church and Christian school. Diane's dad served as an assistant to the pastor, and her mother taught high school maths and sciences in the Christian school.

After graduation from high school, Diane went to Pensacola Christian College (PCC) and earned her bachelor's degree in Music Ministry in 1999, traveling with the PCC Ensemble for two years and helping to promote the college. She was offered an opportunity to continue her studies as a Graduate Assistant and earned a seminary degree in Church Music (M.C.M.) through Pensacola Theological Seminary in 2001.

Diane has had a diverse opportunity to experience Christ and how various traditions practice their faith. She grew up in a Community church, belonged to a non-denominational church, served on staff at a Baptist church, attended a Full Gospel church, and has belonged to the United Methodist Church. She is now a member of the Church of the Brethren, where she serves with her husband, Larry. Diane has also served the local church as a choir member and director, pianist, Sunday school teacher, secretary, and financial secretary. She is very involved in supporting Larry's ministry as a pastor's wife.

She offers her input in the discussion questions throughout this book as a person who has experienced the *Journey* many times. She hopes that her input will help to broaden the discussions and further the conversations around these important topics.



A JOURNEY OF FAITH INCLUDES

- Session 1 | God's Wonderful Assurance of Salvation
- Session 2 | What Does Baptism Mean?
- Session 3 | The Meeting House of God
- Session 4 | Is the Bible Relevant for Today?
- Session 5 | A Guide to Prayer and Fasting
- Session 6 | God's Will: Revealed & Concealed
- Session 7 | Financial Wisdom
- Session 8 | The Worldwide Ministry of the Holy Spirit
- Session 9 | Anointed by the Holy Spirit
- Session 10 | Why Do Bad Things Happen to God's Children?



Don't Miss A Session!