



VOL. 3
Holy Spirit & Bible

MILESTONES

Connecting God's Word to Life



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MILESTONES / INTRODUCTION

Milestones was developed by the creators of *Bible Studies for Life: Students*, which exists to point students and student leaders to the application of biblical teaching to everyday life through weekly group Bible studies and additional resources. Every lesson within *Bible Studies for Life* contains a bible study that points students to Jesus, is rooted in Scripture, and provides application for living in today's context. The topics and subjects chosen in each quarter of *Bible Studies for Life* fit within a larger framework called *Levels of Biblical Learning*. *Levels of Biblical Learning* consists of ten theological topics we believe students should grasp before graduating high school. These include:



Within these ten topics are 52 theological statements, which make up the core content students would be exposed to and learn each year as they go through *Bible Studies for Life*. The quarterly topics and Scripture passages that make up each lesson in *Bible Studies for Life* are tied the framework of *Levels of Biblical Learning*, which guides the Scripture selection.

While we are able to connect students to the *Levels of Biblical Learning* and the theological statements in each lesson of *Bible Studies for Life*, we wanted to provide a resource capable of going deep into the weight and significance these levels have for personal faith and discipleship. This is what *Milestones* seeks to do. Over the course of six volumes, each of the 52 theological statements will be explored in depth, noting both the theological importance and personal application each has for everyday life. By going through these six volumes, we hope students will grow in their personal knowledge and understanding of God and His world. We also pray that God will use these resources to equip another generation to boldly proclaim the truth of the gospel in a world where Jesus—the truth—is desperately needed.

MILESTONES / HOW TO USE

This Bible-study book includes eight weeks of content for group and personal study. Each session is divided into the following components:

ENGAGE

Each session opens with a *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*, which gives an overview of the session's topic. Following the statement, each session contains an introduction to help your group as you begin your time together, setting up a natural transition into the material for each week.

DISCUSS

The Discuss section expands upon the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*. During this time, groups will explore Scripture, answer questions, and engage with additional content to help explain the session statement.

LIVE IT OUT

The Live It Out section is designed to close out your group time by calling out three specific points of application under the headings of Christ, Community, and Culture. By doing so, this section seeks to demonstrate specifically what the session material teaches us about Christ, how to live in Community, and how to engage with Culture.

DOING, BEING, AND APOLOGETIC STATEMENTS

This section also contains Doing, Being, and Apologetic statements. These statements are directly related to the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement*, and provide opportunity for the group to expand on what these doctrinal truths communicate about us as individuals, how we are to live, and how we might engage culture apologetically.

DEVOTIONS

Three personal devotions are provided for each session to take students deeper into Scripture and to supplement the content introduced in the group study. With biblical teaching and introspective questions, these sections challenge students to grow in their understanding of God's Word and to respond in faith.

LEADER GUIDE

At the back of this book, you'll find a leader guide to help you prepare each week. This guide will help you gain a broad understanding of the content and learn ways to engage with students throughout your time together.



ALL GOD'S PEOPLE



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



Each person who comes to faith in Christ receives the Holy Spirit and is given a spiritual gift to be used to serve the church.

I grew up in a small, rural town—and by “small” I mean there were 27 people in my entire high school class. However, the summer before my senior year, my family moved a few hours away into the city. A few days after moving, I went to my new school to register for classes. Let’s just say, the experience was quite overwhelming for this small-town kid.

When have you felt a little out of place? What made that situation tough to handle?

Fortunately for me, my cousin attended my new school. And we happened to be the same age, shared many of the same classes, and were super close. Not to mention, she was a star athlete and was well-loved by everyone at the school. Immediately, Kari made sure I knew how to get around, but more importantly, she made sure I never felt left out. She introduced me to her friends, and they began involving me in all the things they did together. She helped me belong.

ALL BELIEVERS RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

School hallways are full of divisions. Think about it: jocks and cheerleaders, band nerds and goths, cool kids and mean girls. There's something about being human that makes us look for ways to divide ourselves. Sometimes it's harmless (like choosing a specific gaming system or sports team), but sometimes it's not. History is full of painful discrimination based on race, gender, class, religion, and geography.

Think about your daily life and the things you participate in. What divisions have you created, even if you didn't intend to be divisive?

The church is called to be altogether different. When Jesus was on earth, the Holy Spirit came upon His life to strengthen Him (Isa. 42:1) and to anoint Him to preach the gospel to the poor (Luke 4:18). Jesus carried out this ministry for three years before giving His life, being raised from the dead, and ascending to heaven. Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit after he left to help us carry out this same ministry of living in obedience to God and being witnesses to the lost and poor (John 16:7).

The unity and love that exists among the church is one of the clearest examples of how Christ makes a difference in our lives.. In fact, the church today functions as Christ's body on earth (1 Cor. 12:13). How can a body be divided? Is there any way we could separate an arm or an ear, and each part would be better off? No way. Our bodies function best when all parts are connected and working in unity.

The same is true of the church. Here's the key: the Holy Spirit creates this essential unity. The Holy Spirit comes into the lives of all Christians at the moment we're saved (Rom. 8:9). Without the Spirit, there's no possibility of unity within the church, but because of Him, we are knit together in unity and love (Eph. 4:3-4). This brings awesome benefits: We experience God's love, and the world sees the difference He makes in our lives.

How has being part of the church helped you to experience love and acceptance?

When have you experienced the Spirit strengthening you or prompting you to share the gospel?

GIVEN A SPIRITUAL GIFT

We all have our strengths and weaknesses. Some of you are awesome at math; others are gifted musicians.

What are you particularly good at? What would you say is one of your weaknesses?

Why is it a good thing that people have different strengths?

Life is richer because we're all unique. If we were all good at the same things, then there wouldn't be anything to appreciate about everyone else. And if we all had the same weaknesses—if everyone was bad with numbers, for example—then we'd *all* be in trouble.

God designed the church to work similarly. Not only are we connected together as one body, but each of us has a specific function within the life of the church. Scripture calls these spiritual gifts—special abilities or capacities given by the Holy Spirit to all believers which empower us to effectively minister to others.

Read Romans 12:4-6.

Just like the nose has a different purpose than the knee, so each person in the church has a different role to play. When we all fulfill our responsibilities, the church functions smoothly and transforms lives. When the preachers preach and teachers teach, people learn and grow. When the evangelists share, the lost are saved. When the servants serve, the encouragers encourage, and the leaders lead, the church makes a difference. However, when someone decides to stay home, go to the lake, or participate in sports instead of in the church, a part of the body is missing. The church can't operate at full capacity.

It can be easy to think some gifts are worth more than others. However, all gifts—and all people—are equally valuable. Each one of us has the gift God has appointed. Discern your giftedness and put it to good use. When you do, God will use you to make a powerful difference in others' lives for the sake of His kingdom.

What are some ways God has gifted you? How can you put those gifts to use in your church?

What's happens when Christians don't plug into a church?

FOR SERVING THE CHURCH

Jesus promised that, after He ascended, He would send the Holy Spirit as our Helper (John 16:7, 14:26). He helps us in practical and immediate ways. For instance, the Spirit helps us resist temptation and opens our eyes to understand Scripture. In a much broader sense, the Holy Spirit helps us to fulfill the purposes for which we were originally created:

- By the Spirit, we are born again and made to live in a relationship with God (John 3:5).
- By the Spirit, we are given gifts that allow us to reflect God's character to others in unique ways.

What role does the Holy Spirit play within the Trinity? How does it relate to the work done by Christ?

Some things are better done alone, like taking a test. Others require teamwork, like basketball. We're often tempted to think of our faith as a personal reality. Although we will ultimately answer to the Lord as individuals, our faith is to be lived out in community. This involves using our spiritual gifts to the best of our abilities to build up others in the church (Eph. 4:11-12).

If we all go to church with the focus on *being* served, but no one's doing the serving, we all leave empty. But when we focus on serving others, everyone leaves filled, encouraged, comforted, and built up. This is the way our spiritual gifts are designed to work—to build up the church so we most effectively fulfill the purpose for which God created us.

Why is it so important to serve others instead of looking for others to serve us?

How have you used your gifts to build up the church?



BEING // As members of God's family, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have received from Him gifts to be used in serving the church. Exercising these gifts is a privilege and responsibility, and God works through us to impact others.

DOING // Because the Holy Spirit resides in the lives of all believers and has given us all a spiritual gift, we should work to discern that gift and then exercise it in building up the church.

APOLOGETIC // Whereas many see the Holy Spirit as an energy or force, the truth is the Holy Spirit is a person, co-equal with the Father and the Son within the Trinity, and is Himself God.

CHRIST

In one of the most familiar passages in Scripture, John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus we must be born of the Spirit to be part of God's family. Today, we are called to live by the Spirit to be in a continued relationship with Christ (Gal. 5:16-18). This means desiring and doing the right things and putting away things that don't line up with God's desires.

In your own words, explain what it means to "live by the Spirit"?

How does your life show that you live by the Spirit?

What will you do this week to put away the desires of the flesh to live by the Spirit?

COMMUNITY

The Holy Spirit gives every believer a spiritual gift to be used for serving others. Have someone read aloud each Scripture pertaining to spiritual gifts below. What gifts do you see in each passage?

- **Romans 12:6-8:**
- **1 Corinthians 12:4-11:**
- **Ephesians 4:11-13:**

What specific gifts do you think God has given you?

How will you use your gifts to serve those in your church?

CULTURE

The Holy Spirit gifts some to be evangelists (Eph. 4:11). Evangelism means simply sharing the good news of Christ with the lost. We may be tempted to think: *If I'm not gifted in that area, then I don't have to share.* But this isn't the case. Paul told Timothy to "do the work of an evangelist" (2 Tim. 4:5). Everyone, gifted in this area or not, is called to evangelism.

Who do you know who is far from God and needs to know of the hope found in Jesus?

How will you go about sharing with them this week?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 1

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 6. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 7-9 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 10-11. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 1, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 12-15 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 1.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

2

MINISTRIES OF THE SPIRIT



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

Jesus promised that God would send the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit has come to convict, teach, comfort, lead, strengthen, and seal us, as well as to produce fruit within and through us.



Everyone has their favorite teacher. Maybe it's the teacher who gives more interactive assignments, or maybe it's the nice one who lets you store your books in her classroom. The best teachers academically, though, are the ones who walk through concepts with their students step-by-step.

We all need people who help us understand tough concepts and walk beside us along the way. Without older, wiser teachers like that, we would all be a wreck.

As followers of Christ, we have a Helper alongside us who ministers to our needs in profound ways. Unfortunately, just like we may have failed to recognize the difference our teachers were making in our lives, many Christians today often fail to see the difference the Holy Spirit makes. The truth is, in Him, we have the best Helper we could ever ask for. Without the Spirit, we'd be blind to the truth and powerless to live well. However, because of His ministry to us, it's possible to see God and experience His blessings.

What are ways you've recognized the Holy Spirit's helping you in the past?

JESUS PROMISED THE HOLY SPIRIT

During Jesus' ministry on earth, He invited His disciples into all aspects of His life. They were with Him when He healed. He prayed for them and with them. Jesus also spent considerable time and energy teaching them the things they needed to know to honor God and establish the church. As a church planter in Baltimore, I know planting a church in a big city is an incredibly difficult task. Can you imagine the weight associated with starting *the church*?

When has someone helped you carry out a difficult task? What would have happened if you had been on your own?

The disciples were known to make some pretty serious blunders. While Jesus was sharing the Lord's Supper with them, they began to argue over who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). Only hours before Jesus would die on the cross, He invited His disciples to pray with Him, but they fell asleep—*three times* (Matt. 26:40-45). As Jesus faced His accusers and ultimately faced crucifixion, all His disciples deserted Him (Mark 14:50).

These aren't just mistakes—they're disasters. These same men, only a few days after Jesus' death, would be entrusted with one of the greatest responsibilities the world has ever known: laying the foundation for the church Jesus had started. Since He was gone, they were surely going to make a mess of things. Except, Jesus promised to send "another" Counselor—a helper—to guide them (John 14:16).

For years, Jesus walked with His disciples to teach them and guide them, but the time had come for Him to go away. However, it was essential that they had continued help, so the Spirit came to minister to the disciples in the same ways Jesus had. In fact, Jesus said it was better that He went away and the Spirit came (John 16:7).

This Counselor would help the disciples—and all believers—to follow and fulfill their calling by living for God's glory. Without the Holy Spirit, we would fail over and over again. But, by the Spirit, we are able to live out God's calling on our lives.

Read John 14:18-26.

Why is it better that Jesus left and sent the Spirit?

BEING // As members of God's family, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have received from Him gifts to be used in serving the church. Exercising these gifts is a privilege and responsibility, and God works through us to impact others.

DOING // Because the Holy Spirit resides in all believers and has given us all a spiritual gift, we should work to discern that gift and then exercise it in building up the church.

APOLOGETIC // Whereas many see the Holy Spirit as an energy or force, the truth is the Holy Spirit is a person, co-equal with the Father and the Son within the Trinity, and is Himself God.

CHRIST

The Holy Spirit is central to our relationship with Christ. By the Spirit we are born again, convicted of our sins (John 16:8). Conviction, confession, and repentance are essential parts of coming to faith. However, these don't stop at salvation. In order to live in a close relationship with Christ, we must continue to confess our sins and live in repentance.

In what areas of your life do you sense the Holy Spirit convicting you?

What do you need to confess and change to live in close relationship with Christ? List some practical steps to help you make those changes.

COMMUNITY

The Holy Spirit ministers to us in many different ways. He convicts, teaches, comforts, leads, strengthens, seals, and produces fruit within us. As the Spirit works in us, we serve others in similar ways. For instance, though we don't necessarily convict others of sin, when we lovingly help them see ways they're not aligning their lives to God's standards, the Spirit works through us to convict them.

How can the Holy Spirit use you in others' lives in these areas?

Teaching:

Leading:

Comforting:

Strengthening:

CULTURE

Without the Holy Spirit opening our eyes to the truth of the gospel, we never would have understood who Jesus is. This is true of everyone. Without the Spirit's help, our friends and neighbors will never come to know Jesus. Because of this, there are at least two things we need to do continually:

- **Teach:** Share the good news of gospel. Always be respectful, but also be persistent. Without knowing the truth, people we know and love will miss out on God's ultimate blessings.
- **Pray:** Continually ask the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of your unbelieving friends and family; even those around the world. As you share the gospel, only the Spirit can cause them to receive the message. Prayer is powerful, and God works through our prayer to make a difference.

Name two friends you will share with this week and commit to pray for them every day.

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 2

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 16. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 17-19 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 20-21. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 2, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 22-25 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 2.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

THE SPIRIT'S INTERCESSION



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

The Holy Spirit intercedes before the Father on our behalf when we don't know how or what to pray.



Intercession isn't a word we hear every day, but it's an important biblical theme. Intercession means to act on behalf of someone facing difficulty or trouble. And in the Holy Spirit we have an intercessor who pleads before the Father on our behalf. When we suffer, He intercedes before the Lord for our good and our blessing. He continually appeals to the Father, that He would help us through hardship and pour out blessings on our lives. Ultimately, the Spirit asks God to help us to live out the purposes that He desires for us.

We, too, are called to intercede for others. It's on us to desire good things for all people—even those who offend us—and to pray for God's blessing on their behalf.

Why is it so important that the Spirit intercedes for God's people?

INTERCESSION OF THE SPIRIT

As Christians, prayer is central to our lives. Many times, we may be tempted to see prayer primarily as asking God for the things we want and need. This type of prayer is good, and is something Jesus taught in His model prayer: “Give us today our daily bread” (Matt. 6:11). When we ask God to supply the things we need, we recognize that the good things in our lives come from Him and that we depend upon His provision. This type of prayer is also called supplication.

In your own words, how would you describe prayer?

Prayer isn’t primarily about asking God for things. The essence of prayer is communication with our Father that allows us to stay meaningfully connected with Him. Devotional prayer—personal, subjective prayer often used to start the day—is central to our relationship with God and essential to our spiritual lives.

The problem is, no matter how much we want to remain connected with God, we get wrapped up in other things and neglect prayer at times. Thankfully, we have a Helper who prays for us when we’re weak or don’t know what to pray. Scripture teaches that He intercedes on our behalf (Rom. 8:26-27). In fact, the Spirit expresses those prayers with “groanings.”

Read Romans 8:26-27.

All of creation groans as it strains and struggles underneath the weight of sin’s curse, anticipating the time God will make all things new (Rom. 8:22). The Spirit’s prayers on our behalf express a similar feeling. He’s with us as we strive to live for God in this broken world, and He ministers to us in our struggles. The Spirit offers groaning prayers to the Father asking for the good of His people, and ultimately longing for God’s restorative work.

Just as the Spirit offers intercessory prayers on our behalf, we also pray for others. When we see people suffer from the effects of sin, we are to sympathize with their pain and pray passionately that God would work for their good. This sort of intercession truly makes a difference: It leads to God blessing others and deepens our own connection with God.

Why does the Spirit groan as He prays for us?

How do we reflect the Spirit when we pray for others?

BEFORE THE FATHER

According to the Old Testament system of worship, God's people were called to go before the Lord with animal sacrifices. However, they couldn't go directly into the Lord's presence.

God instructed his people to build a temple in a very specific way. In the back of the temple was a room called the holy of holies. Inside it was the ark of the covenant, which contained a pot with manna, Aaron's rod, and the tablets inscribed with the Ten Commandments. On top of the ark was the mercy seat—the place where God's presence dwelled among His people.

The holy of holies was separated from the rest of the temple by a heavy curtain, and worshipers weren't allowed to pass beyond the curtain. If they did, they'd die. This was their punishment because God is holy, and sinful people aren't allowed the privilege of living in His presence. Only the high priest could enter once per year, and he had to be very careful about the way he approached God. The people could come to God only through the priest.

After Jesus died on the cross and defeated sin and death, people of faith no longer live according to the old covenant. He's established a new covenant which allows us many new privileges. It's important to know that nothing has changed in terms of approaching God. He is still holy and we are not: We're still not fit to come into His presence. However, Jesus is our perfect High Priest, He has torn the veil that separated us from God, and we now have free access to God through Christ.

Read Matthew 27:50-51 aloud. What is the significance of the curtain tearing?

Today, the Spirit—just like Jesus—approaches the Father for us. Whereas on our on we have no access to the Father, because of the Spirit, God receives prayers on our behalf.

Why weren't believers in the Old Testament allowed into God's presence?

Why is it so important that the Spirit approaches the Father for us?

FOR OUR WEAKNESS

Think about a skill you've built over time. Maybe when you started playing guitar, you didn't even know what chords were, but now you can play a whole song. You may not be a professional musician, but you have come a long way from just playing some chords. If you play sports, you've probably noticed a similar pattern. When you start out on a county or community center team, you were likely just learning the basics. Now, maybe you wouldn't say you're ready to try out for the NBA or go to the Olympics, but you've probably picked up a few more skills along the way.

What's something you've desperately wanted, but didn't have a natural talent for?

We struggle with something similar in our relationship with God. Scripture teaches that all people are born with an awareness of God (Rom. 1:18-21). However, we choose to do things our own way. Many people believe they can get to heaven through any number of routes apart from God. But here's the problem—in order to have eternal life and a relationship with God, we have to be holy and sinless. We have to be *perfect*. As we build skills in sports, music, or other extracurricular activities, we can dream of “going pro” up to a certain point. But when it comes to eternity, there's no hope whatsoever for us.

Here's the good news: Because God loves us so much, Jesus came to earth, paid the price for our sin, and made His righteousness available to us in place of our sin (2 Cor. 5:21). Where we were impossibly weak, Jesus helped us. The Spirit ministers to us in a similar way today. In order to remain closely connected with God, we must live in continual devotion to Him in prayer. But there are times we simply don't pray like we should. Maybe we just don't know what to pray. Maybe we've become distracted. Whatever the case, the Spirit continually intercedes for us, seeking our good and asking God to keep us secure in Christ.

What's difficult about having a regular, healthy prayer life?

How does the Spirit minister to us in our weaknesses?

BEING // As members of God's family, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have received from Him gifts to be used in serving the church. Exercising these gifts is a privilege and responsibility, and God works through us to impact others.

DOING // Because the Holy Spirit resides in all believers and has given us all a spiritual gift, we should work to discern that gift and then exercise it in building up the church.

APOLOGETIC // Whereas many see the Holy Spirit as an energy or force, the truth is the Holy Spirit is a person, co-equal with the Father and the Son within the Trinity, and is Himself God.

CHRIST

When we don't know how or what to pray, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. In fact, God's intercession on our behalf is a common theme in our relationship with Him. When it comes to our relationship with God, we are helpless and must depend on Him to meet all our needs. When we were lost in sin, Jesus paid the price to redeem us.

This week, memorize Romans 8:26-27. Write it out to help you get started.

Spend time in prayer every day this week thanking the Holy Spirit for ministering to you in this way.

COMMUNITY

The New Testament is full of “one another” statements—love one another, serve one another, be patient with one another, encourage one another, bear one another’s burdens. One way we fulfill the spirit of these commands is to intercede for those we love.

This week, reach out to five friends and ask them about a need they have, or about how they may be struggling in their faith.

Make it a point to intercede on their behalf. Ask God to bless them, to meet their needs, and to work in their lives to accomplish His purposes.

Check back in and let them know you’ve prayed for them.

CULTURE

Our culture is characterized today by people who want little to do with God. Some may like the idea of God, but they don’t necessarily want His hands in the details of their lives. Others are altogether opposed to God. Either way, many people are cut off from Him and are without His blessings in their lives. It’s up to us to intervene on their behalf.

Write down the names of two friends who don’t have a relationship with God. Make it a point to pray for them every day.

Write a brief intercessory prayer specifically for each of them.

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 3

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 26. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 27-29 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 30-31. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 3, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 32-35 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 3.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

4



BREATHED OUT BY GOD



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT

The Holy Spirit inspired and guided people to write the Bible and used the personalities and voices of men to communicate the very words of God.



When God revealed Himself to us, He chose to do it through people who would then speak to us. Scripture contains many powerful examples of God speaking directly to people: Adam, Abraham, and Moses, for starters. But God chose a different way to bring Scripture to us.

God used regular people like you and me to write down the specific words He has for us. Though the words came through the mouths and pens of men, the message originated with God and carries His full authority.

At times, we may not necessarily feel like obeying the laws of men. After all, people's rules don't always make a lot of sense. But that's never the case with God's laws. Scripture is perfect in every way. God's using people to deliver His Word to us doesn't make it any less perfect.

Why did God use people like you and me to deliver His Word?

Why is it so important to know that God's Word is right and true?

INSPIRATION OF THE SPIRIT

God has spoken to His people since the very beginning. When Adam and Eve were in the garden, God communicated directly with them (Gen. 2:16-17). He spoke again through Moses, establishing a covenant with His chosen people through the Ten Commandments. Throughout the Old Testament, God spoke to His people through the prophets, warning them of the consequences of sin and reminding them of the blessings that come with obedience.

When have you felt like God was speaking to you? How did He choose to do it?

Finally, when the time was right, God sent Jesus to be the clearest and best communication about eternal things. In the Book of John, we read, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (1:14). But it was never God’s purpose for Jesus to remain on earth among us forever—at least not this earth. God gave us His Word so that we may continue to hear Him speak.

Relationships are built on communication. If we are to know God, we have to hear Him speaking to us. Both the Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures are “inspired by God” (2 Tim. 3:16), meaning they are “breathed-out,” literally spoken by God. So, through God’s Word we have the privilege of hearing His voice. The Holy Spirit played an essential role in the writing of Scripture. He inspired even the finest points of Scripture—the dot of every I and the cross of every T (Matt. 5:18). Because of this, we can trust in God’s Word—specifically the original manuscripts—as whole and perfect.

Because the Holy Spirit inspired Scripture, we have the privilege of living daily in a relationship with God. Let us continually pursue God in His Word, asking the Spirit to open our eyes to understand clearly the truth with which He inspired the writers.

Why is it important that God would speak to us?

Why can we trust that Scripture is true?

VOICES OF MEN

If you read Psalms, it definitely has a different tone than Proverbs. Genesis feels different than Isaiah. These differences are due to a couple factors. For one, Scripture consists of a variety of genres—books of law, books of history, books of poetry, and personal letters. Another reason is that these books were written by people who had differing gifts, personalities, and experiences.

However, this doesn't change the fact that God's Word is trustworthy and without error. In Deuteronomy 18:18-19, God said to Moses (who had already delivered the Ten Commandments and other parts of God's Law), "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to my words that he speaks in my name."

God's speaking through people doesn't change the fact that it's God speaking. These words carry the same authority as when God spoke directly to Adam and Eve in the garden. In fact, to disobey the commands spoken through people carries the same consequences as disobeying God Himself. And to disbelieve the truths God revealed through the Bible's authors is to disbelieve God.

It's important to understand that the canon of Scripture is closed. Many people today claim to hear God speak. While there are many instances of God speaking directly and personally to people throughout Scripture, we must remember that this occurs over the course of 4,000 years of history, and God's speaking is the exception, not the rule. God is able to speak to us any way He chooses, and there's no biblical reason He can't or won't today. Though God may choose to speak audibly or guide us through wise counsel, here's the simple truth: God's Word is inspired, and it's the primary, clearest, and most dependable way God speaks to His people.

What's your favorite book of the Bible? Why?

Why is it important that Scripture is inspired—literally “God-breathed”?

WORDS OF GOD

Though it's difficult (impossible, even) for us to grasp, the one true God exists in unity as three Persons (Deut. 6:4; Matt. 3:16–17; 28:19). So, when the Holy Spirit speaks—when He breathes out words of Scripture—He speaks the very words of God. Even though they were written by men, the Scriptures are inspired by the Spirit and carry all the authority of God Himself.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church, they were being persecuted by Jews—their own countrymen—who refused to follow Jesus. Paul had first evangelized the people of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey. As was often his custom, upon his arrival there, Paul sought out the local synagogue to share the gospel with Jews. These were people who valued the Old Testament Scriptures. In fact, they rightly viewed them as God's words to His people. When Paul proclaimed the truth of the gospel to them, the Holy Spirit worked in their hearts and minds and helped the Thessalonian believers recognize Paul's message as “the word of God” (2 Tim. 2:13).

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

Jesus is the Word made flesh (John 1:14), and we may be tempted to think we're left without a clear word from God because Jesus has gone. But this isn't true. God still continues to speak to us through His Word today. The message inspired by the Holy Spirit—which has been recorded in our Bible—is the literal words of God. When we read Scripture, we hear the voice of God. We know Jesus as the Word living among us, and we receive guidance and encouragement from the Spirit as He opens our eyes to the truth of God.

How is Jesus “the Word” in human form?

Why do you think the Thessalonians received Paul's message as “the word of God”?

BEING // As members of God's family, we are filled with the Holy Spirit and have received from Him gifts to be used in serving the church. Exercising these gifts is a privilege and responsibility, and God works through us to impact others.

DOING // Because the Holy Spirit resides in all believers and has given us all a spiritual gift, we should work to discern that gift and then exercise it in building up the church.

APOLOGETIC // Whereas many see the Holy Spirit as an energy or force, the truth is the Holy Spirit is a person, co-equal with the Father and the Son within the Trinity, and is Himself God.

CHRIST

John 1:14 says, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. We observed his glory, the glory as the one and only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." God gave us His Word so that we might still hear His voice after Jesus' departure. We can have a relationship with God only because the Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures, also opens our minds to understand the Scriptures.

Discuss with your group a passage in the Bible you've had trouble understanding.

What process did you go through to understand it? How was the Holy Spirit involved?

This week, as you have your daily Bible study, make note of passages you may not understand. Pray for the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to the truths of Scripture.

COMMUNITY

God used people like you and me to record His words and complete the canon of Scripture. Though that canon is complete, and God doesn't use us today to add to the words of Scripture, He does use people to speak Scriptural truth to others to impact them in real ways.

How has God used a friend, family member, or teacher to help you see how the Bible applies to your life?

CULTURE

Without God revealing the truth of the gospel to us, we'd have no hope for a relationship with Him. Thankfully, He gave us the Scriptures and put people in our lives to share that message with us—a parent or grandparent, a friend or teacher. Who can you play that role for now? God wants to use you to share the gospel with someone who is far from Him.

Who do you know who doesn't have a relationship with God? Do you think these people may be receptive to the message of the gospel? Explain.

What will you do this week to help them understand God's Truth?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 4

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 36. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 37-39 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 40-41. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 4, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 42-45 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 4.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

GOD'S INSPIRED MESSAGE

5



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



The Bible consists of the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments and is the only inspired written Word of God.

Have you ever messaged somebody and thought their response would come right back, only to wait, and wait, and wait? It can be anxiety-inducing. Now imagine waiting 400 years. That's the time period between the Old and New Testaments, when God didn't speak to His people.

However, God loves us too much to leave us alone. When Adam and Eve sinned, they brought separation between God and people. But God wasn't willing to leave us in our broken state, so He made a way for reconciliation. God is still committed to us today, even though we are sinners. Because of His great love for His people, He speaks.

Throughout the generations, God has communicated in many different ways with His people. Though we'll never know everything God says and thinks—after all, He's infinite in nature—He has chosen to record the things He wants us to know about Himself and about how we should live. Today, we have clear communication from our Father through the Scriptures. As we read His Word, we know Him and have the great privilege of living in relationship with the God of the universe. So read it. Learn it. Listen to the voice of God and know Him.

How have you come to know God personally through the Scriptures?

POINTING FORWARD TO CHRIST

God's people must have a revelation from Him to come to know Him. This means we can't know God apart from His revealing Himself to us. There are several ways God has made Himself known. For one, "his invisible attributes, that is, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what he has made" (Rom. 1:20).

God has also revealed Himself to people through their own consciences (Rom. 2:15). When unbelievers follow God's rules concerning right and wrong, it reveals that He has written His law on their hearts. Further, God revealed Himself most clearly through Jesus, who is the perfect image of God in human form. However, Jesus has ascended to heaven and is no longer among us in physical form. Thankfully, God has given us His written Word so we can know Him.

Why is it so important that we have a revelation from God?

The Ten Commandments are the earliest written record of God's words. God wrote on the tablets with His finger (Ex. 31:18), and these served as the basis of God's covenant with His people. After Moses died, Joshua replaced him as leader and wrote down further words of God (Josh. 24:26). Later, God would speak to His people through prophets—warning them of the consequences of disobeying, and reminding them of the blessings associated with following God (Deut. 11:26-28)—and these words are recorded for us today.

Among the most beautiful truths about the Old Testament is this: It points forward to Christ. The First Gospel is found in Genesis 3:15, when God promised that the seed of woman would crush the head of the serpent. From that point on, we see types representative of Jesus; prophecies about Jesus' life, birth, death, and resurrection; and God's repeated promises to send One who would deliver us from sin and death.

Christians today can be confident that we have the full counsel of God's Word and nothing has been left out of or added to the Old Testament Scriptures. God has always been in control, and we have His Word exactly as He desires.

How does the Old Testament point forward to Christ?

THE GOSPEL

The gospel is central to our faith. The word *gospel* means good news. Here's the message: God created all things good, but rather than live by faith, people chose to do things our own way and rebelled against Him. This brought sin's curse upon all creation, including our separation from God and, ultimately, death. But God wasn't content to leave us in this state, so He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sin. If we trust and follow Him, when God one day restores all creation, we'll live for eternity with Christ in heaven.

How can we see the gospel in the following passages?

In the Old Testament, God shared the gospel with His people:

"To the serpent, God said, 'I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.'"

GENESIS 3:15

"The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in faithful love, forgiving iniquity and rebellion. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generation."

NUMBERS 14:18

The gospel is certainly present in these passages (and many others). However, the truth of the gospel wasn't made plain at that time, and many of God's people didn't understand the nature of God's message—even though they looked forward to the time God would fulfill His promises. The Old Testament closes with anticipation of the coming Messiah (Mal. 3:1-4; 4:1-6), and the next Scriptures are written upon the arrival of Jesus.

During His ministry on earth, Jesus called apostles, who walked alongside Him and witnessed His power. The Holy Spirit worked in the lives of these men so they could accurately communicate these truths for future generations. The apostles had the authority to communicate the words of God (2 Pet. 3:2). Further, Paul claims to speak words taught by the Spirit so that we can be spiritually alive (1 Cor. 2:13).

Why did the Apostles have the authority to write Scripture?

How has God proven faithful to His people throughout history? Through the Scriptures?

TWO TESTAMENTS, ONE WORD

In the New Testament, Jesus quoted the Old Testament Scriptures again and again. In fact, He quoted the Old Testament over 75 times, including over 25 times from the first five books alone. He referred to the Old Testament as “the Scriptures” (Matt. 21:42), “the word of God” (Luke 11:28), and “the wisdom of God” (Luke 11:49).¹ The apostles cited the Old Testament over 295 times, and considered it “God’s words” (1 Pet. 4:11).²

Some people may question if the books included in the Old Testament are the right ones. But Jesus and His disciples, as well as the religious leaders and Jews as a whole, agreed that inspired writings had ceased after the time of the prophets until Jesus came on the scene. Jesus and the apostles never quoted from any other books as having divine authority. This gives us great confidence that the books included in our Old Testament are exactly as God intended.

In Hebrews 1, we learn that “long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son” (vv. 1-2a). In the Gospels, we have a record of Jesus’ life and ministry, and each one emphasizes a unique aspect of Jesus’ character. In the other books of the New Testament, we learn how to interpret the truth about Jesus and live it out.

In the Old Testament, we read of how God worked among His people and the promises of the Messiah to come. In the life of Jesus, we have a perfect picture of God’s truth. And in the New Testament, we receive inspired directions of how to apply God’s truth to our lives. Not only does the New Testament reference the Old Testament again and again, but in hundreds of places, the Old Testament predicts the events of the New Testament. The New Testament is the fulfillment of—and a testimony to—the authenticity of the Old Testament. Both Testaments must be considered together as the Word of God.

Why is it so important that the Old Testament looks forward to the New?

Why is it important that the New Testament often quotes the Old Testament?

Why can we be confident that we have the complete Word of God?

BEING // As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus. The Bible reveals who Jesus is, and grow to be more like Him as we understand and apply the truths found in the Scriptures.

DOING // Because we are transformed by the Bible, we should devote ourselves to regularly studying and applying the truths of Scripture.

APOLOGETIC // Many claim there are errors in Scripture or that the Bible contradicts itself in places. However, all Scripture is the Word of God, is without error, is trustworthy, and is transformative.

CHRIST

Jesus is the central character in the Bible. The Old Testament points to him, and the New Testament tells of his life and ministry. Even though the two testaments were written hundreds of years apart, they tell one story: the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus' death to pay the price for our sins.

In what ways do we see Jesus in the Old Testament?

- *Example: Abraham's call to sacrifice Isaac pictures Jesus' sacrifice for us.*

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What can you learn about Jesus from these examples?

COMMUNITY

God's Word reveals all we need to know about how we're to love Him. But it's also a guide for how we're to love others. The early church is a beautiful picture of God's people living in community, sacrificing for one another, and using their lives as testaments to His mercy.

What things does Scripture call you to do in the ways you relate to other people?

What are you doing well?

Where is there room for growth?

CULTURE

In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), Jesus called His followers to take the message of the gospel to the ends of the earth, "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (v. 19). We are responsible to share all that God has communicated with us with those who haven't yet received His message.

What opportunities are available in your church for living out the call to reach people near and far?

How is God specifically calling you to reach people who are near to you?

How would He have you be involved in reaching those from "all nations"?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 5

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 46. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 47-49 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 50-51. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 5, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 52-55 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 5.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

6



GOD'S TRUTH,
WITHOUT ERROR



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



The Bible is God's Truth, is internally consistent and without error, is totally trustworthy, and will last forever.

No matter how well we take care of things, eventually they rust or break down or fall apart. Think about vehicles. Over time, rust bubbles might form under the paint and miles will roll up on the motor. Despite maintaining it meticulously, your vehicle will probably become more trouble than it's worth.

In Luke 21:33, we learn that even the things which seem most stable and permanent to us—mountains and valleys, the sun and stars, even heaven and earth—will one day pass away. However, the Word of God is eternal and unchanging. It will not fail, and it will never pass away.

In this life, we will be tempted to trust in things which aren't trustworthy at all. When we seek satisfaction in material things, they will break. When we seek happiness in entertainment, we'll find it never brings true joy. Our parents aren't perfect and our friends will let us down. But thankfully, God's Word is eternal and true, and in it we find the words of life that will never fail.

How does it make you feel to know God designed Scripture to last forever?

GOD'S TRUTH

In the hours leading up to the cross, Jesus was put on trial. In fact, he faced six separate trials—three religious and three legal. Before Caiaphas, the Jewish high priest, and the Sanhedrin court, Jesus faced a long line of false witnesses who spoke lies, although there was no evidence of wrongdoing and nothing could be proven. Ironically, Caiaphas broke one law after another in trying Jesus as he did, and ultimately Caiaphas sentenced Him to death.

Because the Jewish court couldn't carry out the death sentence, Jesus was sent before Pilate, the Roman governor, for further trial. As Pilate heard the lies of false witnesses, but with no evidence, he felt it necessary to talk with Jesus alone, so the governor invited Jesus into his quarters for a private conversation. Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). After a few exchanges, Jesus finally answered, "You say that I'm a king...I was born for this, and I have come into the world for this: to testify to the truth" (John 18:37).

Pilate's response to Jesus' statement is one countless people have asked throughout history: *What is truth?*

How would you answer this question?

The Greek word for "truth" is *aletheia*, which essentially means *to hide nothing*. The truth, because it is good and right, has nothing to hide. In fact, one day, all truth will be made known and nothing will be left hidden. Further, the Hebrew word for "truth" is *emeth*, which means "firm" or "constant." This means the truth is unchanging and reliable.

Jesus is the truth, but because He is no longer physically present with us on earth, God made sure His people will always have access to His truth. In John 17, Jesus prayed that God would shape our lives (yes, Jesus prayed for you and me) with His truth. Then, He defined that truth: "Your word is truth" (John 17:17).

Pilate didn't know that standing before him was the very essence of truth—even as he asked questions to determine the truth of the situation. Today, we have the privilege of living in relationship with Jesus, the truth, through the Word of God. From the beginning was the Word (John 1:1). Jesus is the Word (John 1:14), and the Word is Truth (John 14:6, 17:17).

Have you ever had a tough time distinguishing whether something was true? How could you tell?

What did Jesus mean when He said, "I am the truth"?

WITHOUT ERROR AND TRUSTWORTHY

If we are to call ourselves “Christians,” then it’s necessary that we have faith. Ephesians 2:8 teaches that God’s grace saves us, and we have access to His grace through faith. Faith is one of those ideas that is super familiar for those who have spent time in church,. However, it can still be difficult to wrap our minds around what faith truly is. One way to think about faith is this: *Faith = trust + action*.

Break that down as a group. Why trust? Why action? How are they connected?

True faith involves placing our trust in something—but also acting on it. We express faith in lots of things every day. When we hop in the car with an older sibling or friend, we’re trusting that person to drive us safely to practice. When we eat chicken nuggets from our favorite restaurant, we’re trusting they’re safe to eat. When we sit on the bleachers for the basketball game, we’re trusting them not to collapse.

We have faith, in a sense, because we *have to* in order to function well. Otherwise, to trust in nothing would mean living in a constant state of uncertainty and anxiety. This doesn’t mean we should trust everything, though. In fact, it’s exactly the opposite. We place our trust in things based on what they’ve proven in the past. If the bleachers haven’t collapsed in 50 years, chances are they’ll hold up one more day.

We’re not called to blind, unquestioning faith. Instead, we’re to examine God’s promises and evaluate how we should live based on what He has told us. Thankfully, all of Scripture is a testament to God fulfilling His promises. We serve a God who cannot lie (Titus 1:2). He has revealed Himself and His purposes to us in Scripture, including the ways He wants us to live.

Faith is an absolute necessity in our everyday lives and our spiritual lives. We’ll exercise it one way or another. Either we put our trust in our own ability to determine right from wrong, or we exercise faith in God. I know what I’m choosing. We can trust His promises and the blessings that will come when we do.

In your own words, how would you define faith?

Why can we have confidence that God’s Word is true and trustworthy?

WHAT LASTS FOREVER?

In Scripture, mountains are a picture of permanence. They are massive and immovable. Jesus used the image of a mountain to demonstrate the power of true faith: Even something as firmly fixed as a mountain—specifically the problems in our lives that seem insurmountable—can be moved when we live by faith. But everything goes away eventually, including the mountains.

Read 2 Peter 3:10.

On the day of the Lord, the heavens and earth will pass away (2 Pet. 3:10). Because of sin's curse, death and destruction have entered our world and our experience. But this isn't God's final plan. One day, He will destroy this world and everything in it. Thankfully, He will create a new heaven and earth where we will dwell with Him for eternity.

Despite the fact that material things will pass away, Scripture is very clear that a few things will endure. One thing that will endure is the people He created—either in His presence and subject to His eternal blessings or separated from Him for eternity in hell.

Another thing that will last is the Word of God. Luke 21:33 teaches that “heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.” Because God is faithful and unchangeable (Heb. 6:17-18) and the truth of Scripture will never pass away, we can know for sure that His promises are good. And if His promises are true, we can rest in the fact that all who are devoted to Him are secure for eternity.

When have you seen something that seemed permanent not last?

Why is it important to know the Word of God will last forever?

BEING // As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus. The Bible reveals who Jesus is, and grow to be more like Him as we understand and apply the truths found in the Scriptures.

DOING // Because we are transformed by the Bible, we should devote ourselves to regularly studying and applying the truths of Scripture.

APOLOGETIC // Many claim there are errors in Scripture or that the Bible contradicts itself in places. However, all Scripture is the Word of God, is without error, is trustworthy, and is transformative.

CHRIST

Jesus is the central character in all the Bible. As we saw before, the entire Old Testament points to His coming, and the New Testament celebrates his life and mission. Christ is the most important part of the most important book ever written—the only book that will last forever. The greatest command we have is to love God with all we are. Scripture teaches us how by showing us Jesus.

Jesus perfectly embodied loving God. What are examples of the ways Scripture calls us to love God?

How did Jesus live these out? What will you do to follow Him in loving God?

COMMUNITY

Jesus not only loved God perfectly, He loved other people—even those who treated Him terribly. Following Christ means we are to love and serve one another. Sometimes that comes easily. Often it doesn't. But God's command is clear: *Every person is created in His image.* We show we love Him by loving others. No one was created to live alone.

How has the Bible specifically called us to love others?

How will you follow Christ this week in actively loving the people in your life?

CULTURE

Scripture very clearly reveals the character of God and calls us to be a reflection of His character to the world around us. This happens as we live in relationship with Him and serve the people in our church. Further, Scripture calls us to reflect God as we love, serve, and reach even those outside the church.

Read these verses:

- 1 Peter 3:14-16
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- Acts 2:38-39
- John 14:6

What do these Scriptures teach about reaching the lost world?

How this week will you live these out in following God's commands?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 6

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 56. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 57-59 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 60-61. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 6, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 62-65 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 6.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES

KNOWING GOD THROUGH HIS WORD



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



Through the Bible, we know God Himself, and we know how He expects us to live in order to follow Christ and experience His blessing.

Have you ever received a text and thought, *Uh, how should I take that?* Relationships hinge on so much more than words. We have to pay attention to tone and inflection, gestures and facial expressions. If we're not facing the person we're communicating with, it can be hard to tell what they're really trying to say. A simple "Why would you do that?" could be a joke, a harmless question, or a hurtful response.

Communicating with someone takes a lot of effort and humility. Communicating with God is no different. But there's one major difference: Through His Word, God has revealed everything we need to know to live in a healthy relationship with Him.

He's never broken a promise, He's never become inappropriately angry, and He's never been too busy to listen or share. If we seek God with our whole hearts, the Holy Spirit will help us understand His message for us in His Word, and we can have a great relationship with our heavenly Father.

When have you thought it was difficult to get to know God? How did that make you feel?

WE KNOW GOD HIMSELF

From the beginning, God created people to live in a relationship with Him. Adam and Eve actually had the privilege of knowing God personally in the garden as He walked and talked with them. They chose sin instead of faith, which brought separation. But our purpose—to know and love God—has never changed.

Because God loves us, He wasn't content to leave us in our broken state, alienated from Him, and He made a way to repair what was broken. That way—the difference between death and life—is Jesus.

In John 17, after Jesus had eaten the last supper with His disciples, He prayed what is often called the High Priestly Prayer. Jesus began this prayer by acknowledging His authority to grant eternal life to those who trusted in Him for salvation, and He defined life this way: “that they may know you, the only true God, and the one you have sent—Jesus Christ” (v. 3). Eternal life hinges on one thing: our knowing God. It means being restored to the original relationship enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the garden. The way we know God is through Jesus.

Read John 17:1-4.

However, there's an issue. After Jesus died and was raised, He spent forty days with His disciples, giving proof of the resurrection and teaching them about the kingdom. But then He ascended to heaven in a cloud. Since Jesus is no longer here among us we must ask the question: If knowing Jesus is the key to eternal life, then how can we know Him today?

The answer is that Jesus is still with us. Though He's not here physically, we have the eternal Word—the Scriptures—which clearly reveal the person and character of God. In John 1:1, Jesus is described as the Word which “became flesh.” Further, John shared that Jesus, the Word which was with God from the beginning, is in fact Himself God. Though He has ascended to heaven to prepare a place for God's children, Jesus remains among us through the truth of the Bible. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and through Him we have access to God and have the privilege of knowing Him personally (John 14:6).

Why is Jesus the only way we can know God?

How does Jesus live among us today?

WE KNOW HOW GOD EXPECTS US TO LIVE

You may feel sometimes like your parents have too many rules for you. But have you ever thought about why? Is it possibly that they want you to live in healthy ways? Is it possible that they also want you to reflect positively on them? Yes. But here's the thing: Parents can only expect their kids to obey if they work hard to teach them about what's right and wrong. Otherwise, they would not know what was expected.

For those who are part of God's family, He is our Father. We carry His name, and our behavior reflects on Him. Because of this, He cares in a big way about how we live. But He hasn't left us to figure it out on our own. God has given us His Word, which reveals clearly how He expects us to live.

In five words or less, explain how God expects us to live.

In Matthew 22, we read of a man who asked Jesus: "Which command in the law is the greatest (v. 36)?" Jesus' response? The greatest command is that you love God with everything you are (v. 37)! And the second is similar. Love others as you love yourself (v. 38). Then Jesus shared something profound. He said that these two commands sum up every word written in Scripture (v. 40). All the commands in Scripture, all the promises and prophecies, all the stories—they're all included to help us know how, and to inspire us, to love God and others.

There's no bigger question in life than this: "What's my purpose?" People often say: "I really want to know God's will for my life." Here's the good news. God has promised His people, "You will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). Sometimes, we may want to know everything He has for us for the rest of our lives: where we should go to school, who we should marry, which classes to take, and which car to buy. This isn't how it works. His Word is a lamp to our feet, not a spotlight that lights up the horizon (Ps. 119:105). And when we devote ourselves to knowing Him and His Word, God will reveal the wisdom we need to take one step at a time, living in ways that are best for us and that reflect well on Him.

In your own words, what are the most important things God expects of His children?

What does it mean that God's Word is a lamp to our feet?

WE EXPERIENCE HIS BLESSING

We know that through the Bible God revealed Himself to us and clearly communicated how He expects us to live. Often, that includes rules. Now, there are two ways to look at rules: You can think, *God is restricting my freedom and suppressing my fun*. Or you can see that God's rules keep us from doing things that will harm ourselves and help us understand how to get the most out of life.

As God was affirming His covenant with His people, He shared this: “Look, today I set before you a blessing and a curse: there will be a blessing, if you obey the commands of the LORD your God I am giving you today, and a curse, if you do not obey the commands of the LORD your God and you turn aside from the path I command you today by following other gods you have not known” (Deut. 11:26-28).

Obedying the commands of God meant refusing to give in to temptations they desired. It meant giving up on things they saw as enjoyable. However, these enjoyments weren't what God intended for them. To give in meant they would experience difficulty as a result.

God wanted to protect them from that, so He called them to obey. More importantly, God would be pleased with His people when they obeyed Him, and they would put themselves in the position to receive God's blessings.

Today, we have the same choice. We may not necessarily like all the rules we're expected to obey, and when we break them, there will be consequences. But when we live by faith in obedience to all God has commanded, we have the great privilege of enjoying a relationship with Him, and we will experience the blessings of His joy and peace in our lives.

What rules do you have trouble following?

How are rules (home, school, government, and God's law) healthy for us, and not simply to kill our joy?

BEING // As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus. The Bible reveals who Jesus is, and as we understand and apply the truths found in the Scriptures we grow to be more like Him.

DOING // Because we are transformed by the Bible, we should devote ourselves to regularly studying and applying the truths of Scripture.

APOLOGETIC // Many claim there are errors in Scripture or that the Bible contradicts itself in places. However, all Scripture is the Word of God, is without error, is trustworthy, and is transformative.

CHRIST

In Scripture, God has revealed much about Himself and He's also made us a number of great promises that we can hold on to. Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of these promises—the great gospel to which the entire Bible points.

What do these promises God made to His people reveal about His character?

- Exodus 20:12:
- Isaiah 40:29:
- James 1:5:
- 1 John 1:9:

What other promises do you know from Scripture?

How does knowing these promises affect your relationship with God? How do you need to grow in your relationship with Christ as a result of these promises?

COMMUNITY

Knowing God is one of the greatest blessings (perhaps the greatest blessing) we have. One way God allows us to experience the good things He desires for us is through our church family. Scripture teaches us how we're to relate to one another. When we follow its teaching, others experience blessings through us, and we receive good from others.

How have you experienced the blessings of God through other people?

What specifically will you pursue this week for God to bless someone through you?

CULTURE

God is incredibly kind to share the truth about Himself through the Scriptures. The problem is that many people refuse His message to us. And because of this, they remain cut off from a relationship with God.

Why do you think so many people refuse God's message?

What has God revealed through the Bible that you think is absolutely essential for lost people to understand about Him?

Who will you commit to sharing these truths with this week?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 7

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 66. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 67-69 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 70-71. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 7, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 72-75 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 7.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES



ONE GREAT STORY



LEVELS OF BIBLICAL LEARNING STATEMENT



The Bible is the story of God's work to redeem fallen creation through the saving work of Jesus, who will one day make all things new.

All great stories have certain things in common. A hero. A bad guy. Inciting action that kicks things off. A conflict, a sacrifice, and a satisfying resolution. From *Rocky* to *Star Wars* to *The Avengers*, the best stories follow the same general arc. God's story of redemption is no different.

Who's your favorite hero or protagonist? What sacrifice did they make to overcome their challenge?

In the beginning, we're introduced to our good God, who by His very word establishes all creation, including people. But the devil rebels, and deceives the man and woman, bringing a curse upon all creation. God responds by promising to one day send a Savior who would defeat the villain and bring restoration to all sin had destroyed.

For centuries, we see the ways God graciously and patiently related to His people, until His promise was finally fulfilled and the Savior comes to earth. But this Rescuer is rejected, and faces the greatest struggles imaginable in pursuing God's will, until finally, He is put to death on the cross. But this isn't the end of the story, and in the greatest high-point we've ever witnessed, the Savior rises from the grave, putting a final end to sin's reign in God's creation.

We're not only witnesses to this story—we're part of the narrative! The story's not yet over, and though the outcome has been decided, God's still writing the ending. And when we choose to follow Him, we share in the victory the ultimate Protagonist is securing for His people.

What do you see as the most exciting part of God's story? How does it make you want to live your life?

THE STORY OF GOD'S WORK

Stories teach us important lessons. Heroes show us bravery. People of faith show us sacrifice. In fact, all the Bible is one great story of how God works in the world to accomplish His purposes.

Since stories teach us lessons, what main lesson do we take from the Bible?

In Acts 13 details the early days of Paul's first missionary journey. When he arrived in a city called Pisidian Antioch, they went directly to the synagogue where the local community of Jews had gathered. Paul, as a well respected teacher, was invited to offer encouragement to the people. Paul's response was to recount the story of God's people from Abraham's call all the way to Jesus.

In this high view summary, Paul shared about God causing the Israelites to prosper, even as they suffered in Egypt. He told of their time in the wilderness, and how God conquered seven nations and delivered into the hand of His people the promised land. From there, Paul traced David's lineage to Jesus, whom the Jews had murdered. However, He was raised from the dead, demonstrating His power over sin and death.

As we read Scripture, we may see it as a collection of stories, each one containing a specific lesson, or revealing a particular truth about God and His expectations for us. However, the truth is that God has shared with us through the Bible one continual story, written over thousands of years that is still being written today. The main character is Jesus, but we have an important part to play. Thankfully, God has revealed to us the ways we're to live. If we follow His script for our lives, we'll share in the victory He's securing for His name and His people.

What evidence do you see that the whole Bible is one large story about Jesus?

How would you describe your part in God's story?

REDEMPTION THROUGH JESUS

For most of the 430 years the Israelites were in Egypt, they suffered as slaves to Pharaoh. They were treated harshly and unfairly, and as the Israelites cried out because of their misery, God heard them and took action.

God chose Moses to be the instrument He would use to free His people. Though Moses was hesitant to take on this responsibility, God made him this promise: “Therefore tell the Israelites: I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians and rescue you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment” (Ex. 6:6). God promised not only to free His people from Egyptians, but to redeem them from slavery.

To redeem means to pay a ransom or to purchase back. Think about a gift card: When you take it to your favorite restaurant or theater, you “redeem” it for something. The meal or movie isn’t free. Sure, it’s free to you—but someone paid a price that you have the privilege of enjoying.

When God promised to redeem His people, He knew it wouldn’t be free. It would require a price. For us to understand what God meant when He made that promise to Moses, we must look forward to Jesus. What God did for Moses and Israel, setting them free from Egypt, was really a picture of the deliverance from sin He offers to all people.

In Galatians 3:13 we read, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.” The curse of the law means we must be holy—*perfect*—to live in relationship with God. And we’re simply not.

However, God loves us so much that He wasn’t willing to let us remain in this cursed state. And the price for our sin was the life of Jesus, the only sinless man. Jesus took on our curse so we could experience freedom from sin. Instead of eternal judgment, we can now enjoy the blessings of God forever. We have this redemption, the forgiveness of sin, “through His blood...according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1:7).

Remember: Forgiveness may be free to us, but it isn’t free. Jesus paid the price for it.

Describe redemption in your own words.

Why was it necessary for Jesus to die to free us from slavery to sin?

ALL THINGS NEW

When God created the earth, it was very good. It was exactly the place He'd designed where people would be able to live in relationship with Him, and where we'd have the privilege of reflecting Him in the ways we lived our lives. However, we weren't content to live by faith, and our father, Adam, chose sin instead. This brought a curse upon all creation. Since then, though we still see God's beauty in creation and receive many of His blessings, we also experience the brokenness inevitably tied to sin and even death.

The beautiful news is that God was never satisfied to leave us or His creation as a whole in this sad, broken state. He made redemption a reality through Jesus, and one day He will make everything sin has damaged brand new. In Isaiah, we read, "For I will create a new heaven and a new earth; the past events will not be remembered or come to mind" (65:17).

Throughout the Old Testament, we have one picture after another of God working in the lives of His people to restore what sin damaged. Ultimately, all these pictures point to Jesus, the one who is seated on the throne when it's all said and done; the One who says, "Look, I am making everything new" (Rev. 21:5a).

Day after day, year after year, the new things we experience will—sooner than we often realize—become old things. The novelty wears off, things break, or we simply grow and change. But the new heavens and earth God will one day bring about will be whole and perfect, and because they'll no longer be subject to sin's curse, they will always be that way. Scripture is the story of God working in time and history toward bringing about this ultimate restoration of creation, including you and me.

When have you seen something new and exciting become old and forgotten?

What do you look most forward to about God ultimately restoring creation?

BEING // As God's children, we are called to be like Jesus. The Bible reveals who Jesus is, and grow to be more like Him as we understand and apply the truths found in the Scriptures.

DOING // Because we are transformed by the Bible, we should devote ourselves to regularly studying and applying the truths of Scripture.

APOLOGETIC // Many claim there are errors in Scripture or that the Bible contradicts itself in places. However, all Scripture is the Word of God, is without error, is trustworthy, and is transformative.

CHRIST

Because of sin, we were cut off from God, not only in terms of a relationship, but also from His blessings. However, because He loves us so much, He sent Jesus to pay the price for our sins. In fact, the Bible teaches that for us to be restored to God Jesus took upon Himself our very sin, suffering God's wrath.

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Take a few minutes to reflect on this verse, and to pray about what it took for you to be restored.

What do you want to say to Jesus based on this truth?

How will this truth—that Jesus became sin that we could receive God's blessings—affect the way you live moving forward?

COMMUNITY

For us to know God, Jesus had to pay the price and restore us. Christians are called to minister to others in similar ways:

- **Reconciliation:** helping people in conflict with one another work out their differences
- **Restoration:** working to return something broken to its previously unbroken state

How can you help someone experiencing conflict to mend a relationship with another person?

How can you be involved in helping someone experiencing brokenness to be made whole, physically and spiritually?

CULTURE

When we rebelled against God, the curse of sin infected all creation, and we experience brokenness in real ways every day. Thankfully, one day Jesus will restore all that sin has broken. But tragically, those who don't know Him will not only miss out on the new heavens and earth, they'll experience the full effects of sin for eternity. This is a sobering thought, and God wants to use us to help as many people as possible avoid this fate.

According to the Bible, what are the consequences of refusing Christ?

What will you do this week to help people experience the redemption and restoration found only in Jesus?

LEADER GUIDE / SESSION 8

ENGAGE

Start the session by reading the *Levels of Biblical Learning Statement* on page 76. Then, use the introduction provided as a way to begin your group time before transitioning to the Discuss section.

DISCUSS

Be sure to read the Discuss section on pages 77-79 before coming together as a group. Doing so will allow you to be familiar with the material and will help you select which portions of the material you would like to cover in the allotted amount of group time. Look for places in the Discuss section where you can add a personal anecdote to a question or a Scripture passage to share in addition to what has been provided. Making preparations like these will help your group time run more smoothly and be more effective in the end.

LIVE IT OUT

After your group works through the Discuss section, take some time to move through the application found in the Live It Out section on pages 80-81. Look for specific, personal ways you can connect with the material from your own past. Sharing a personal story or illustration that connects with the lesson is a great way to connect with students and creates an atmosphere where students also feel comfortable sharing.

WEEKLY LEADER TIPS

- Introduce the personal devotions that follow Session 8, and remind students to complete the session devotions on pages 82-85 before your next meeting.
- Challenge students to memorize the Levels of Biblical Learning Statement for Session 8.
- Encourage students to be in the habit of building into their personal prayer lives with what they have learned this week.

WEEKLY LEADER NOTES
