

BIBLE STUDY | WINTER/SPRING 2023

A Firm Foundation

HOW TO STUDY THE LITERARY GENRES OF SCRIPTURE



CHRIST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We have three recommended ways for engaging with *A Firm Foundation* – **dig in**, **go deeper**, and **deeper still**.

DIG IN

- If you are in a small group, join your group weekly to enjoy conversation, discuss the lesson, and talk through the Group Discussion Questions. If you are doing the study individually, work through the Group Discussion Questions at your own pace.
- Listen to or watch the teaching each week. The teaching is available on SoundCloud and YouTube. You can subscribe on those platforms or visit **christpres.org/group-resources**, where you can find all the Bible study resources. You'll also receive a weekly email with a link to the teaching.

GO DEEPER

- Read the weekly Scripture and go through the Foundation and Application Questions to deepen your dive into God's Word.
- Feel free to complete questions throughout the week or all in one sitting. If you are in a group, your group may discuss some of these questions each week.
- Read the Application Summary.

DEEPER STILL

- We recommend the following resources as companions to your study:
 - *Literarily: How Understanding Bible Genres Transforms Bible Study* by Kristie Anyabwile
 - *The ESV Literary Study Bible*; Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, General Editors
 - *He Reads Truth/She Reads Truth Bible*; Holman Bible Publishers

A FIRM FOUNDATION

AN INTRODUCTION

What is the Bible? At the most basic level, it is a book. Though it is no ordinary book, it is God's inspired, infallible, authoritative Word. But the primary means by which God chose to circulate his Word is on paper, bound in a cover, in the form of a book.

For much of the world, a book is a way to capture and pass along information. And when you approach a book, certain questions need to be answered early if its contents are to be understood—questions such as, “Who wrote this book? And “Why did the author write this book?

In this regard, the Bible is no different than any other book. The reader who approaches it will soon ask the same questions—who wrote this and why?

As affirmed in 2 Timothy 3:16, confessing Christians believe that the Scriptures were “breathed out by God.” God is the author of the Bible. But it seems God has set a pattern; the sovereign means by which he executes his work is through people. He could have easily written his words in the sky or simply implanted all that we could know of God in our minds automatically—but no—he used the hands of people to write down his words under his divine inspiration. In Peter's second epistle (2 Peter 1:21), we're told, “men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”

So let there be no misunderstanding: the Bible is the Word of God. But how he chose to write the Bible is also worth exploring. Using people, the Scriptures were written in the manner that people write! It's written in a way that people can understand. And as diverse as humanity is, so too is the way they write. Kristie Anyabwile, author of the book *Literarily: How Understanding Bible Genres Transforms Bible Study*, describes it like this:

“There is order to the Bible. Structured like an anthology, God's Word is a collection of writings by different people on a similar subject.”

Different people write in different styles with different intent. Each writer God used to write down his words had a purpose—a reason to communicate. And that writer would use a style of writing to best suit the situation. So to best understand the message the writer is communicating, it is of paramount importance to understand the style in which it's written.

Why is it important to understand the style—or, as we'll refer to in this study, the *genre*?

As stated in the ESV Literary Study Bible:

“These literary features are not extraneous aspects of the text—not optional matters to consider if we have time or interest to do so after we have assimilated the message or content of a passage. Instead, they are the forms through which the content is mediated. If the writing of the Bible is the product of divine inspiration—if it represents what the Holy Spirit prompted the authors to write as they were carried along (2 Peter 1:21)—then the literary forms of the Bible have been inspired by God and need to be granted an importance in keeping with that inspiration.”

In other words, the genres of the Bible are important to understand because that's the way that God, by his sovereign design, chose to give them to us.

So as we proceed in this study, remember, we always read the Bible *literally*—but we read it literally according to the genre in which it's written. So we read the Law as one would write a law; we read a poem as one would write a poem; we read a letter as one would write a letter; in so doing, we better understand what the Scriptures say. And the more we understand what the Scriptures say, the more we understand God himself.

To know the Scriptures is to know God himself.

THE LITERARY GENRES OF THE BIBLE

While the genres below do not represent a comprehensive list of literary styles found in the Bible, they do represent those most often used. You may find other listings in various resources that differ slightly from this, but getting a grasp on what's listed below will get you down the road to understanding how to read and interpret the Bible according to the genre in which the author wrote it.

In this study, when trying to interpret any given biblical passage, use the definitions below to help you determine its genre. It's also important to note each book of the Bible doesn't always limit itself to one genre; depending on the book, there may be two or three, or more genres in one book. The classifications below refer to the book's general classification.

THE LAW

Sometimes referred to as the "Pentateuch," which encompasses the first five books of the Bible. While many of these books' writings are presented in a narrative (or story) format, the overarching concept reveals the standard under which God's people were to live. The law tells us of God's holy character, and in his holiness, he details his explicit expectation for how his people should conduct themselves personally, in worship, and in civil matters as ones who would call themselves "the people of God."

An Important Characteristic of the Law: The Law is straightforward and instructive; there's no hidden meaning. The Law is more *prescriptive* than *descriptive*. Also, ascertaining the difference between moral, ceremonial, and civil law is invaluable for making sense of the Law in a modern context!

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

While almost every book of the Bible contains some history, the books categorized as Historical Narrative primarily detail a factual, historical account of the nation of Israel. This chronicle spans from the entry into the promised land through the destruction of Israel. These books include Joshua through Esther.

An Important Characteristic of Historical Narrative: It's a true story detailed as the events happened. There are lessons to be learned from stories, but just because David did something (or any other Bible figure, for that matter) doesn't mean we should do it too! Historical Narrative is more *descriptive* than *prescriptive*. However, Historical Narrative can be indirectly prescriptive. (We can learn something from the mistakes of others!)

WISDOM LITERATURE

Often grouped with Poetry as they share many common characteristics, Wisdom Literature is distinct in that it is a collection of short statements of truth and general rules of life. The message of wisdom should be considered as a whole message, knowing that wisdom's response is often dependent upon the circumstance. The Bible's Wisdom Literature includes the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes.

An Important Characteristic of Wisdom Literature: Don't read it like the Law. Unlike the Law, sometimes wisdom necessitates exceptions.

POETRY

The biblical poetry books are prayerful, worshipful, lyrical collections that utilize many of the characteristics you would find in almost any poetry collection, with the exception of rhyme and meter. Metaphor, balance, hyperbole, and repetition are all tools the Bible's poetry writers use to paint an artistic expression of God's truth. The Poetry books of the Bible include Psalms and Song of Solomon.

An Important Characteristic of Poetry: When reading biblical poetry, understand the overarching impression the writer is trying to present while being aware of poetic tools like metaphor and hyperbole.

PROPHECY

Comprised of major and minor prophets (the major are simply the longer books of prophecy), the Prophecy books were

penned by God's chosen messengers equipped with a specific message—oftentimes a warning—to deliver to God's people; this message of warning was typically accompanied by a call to righteousness. The prophets were the mouthpieces of God—we might liken them to an attorney—delivering subpoenas to God's people. The books of the prophets are Isaiah through Malachi.

An Important Characteristic of Prophecy: Biblical prophecy most often had an immediate context specifically addressed to God's people (Judah or Israel), but also had a meaning that projected out—or foretold—what was to come in Jesus Christ. When reading biblical prophecy, ask yourself, “How did the original readers understand this?” and “How does this project out to its fulfillment in Jesus Christ?”

THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

Similar to Historical Narrative, we read a lot of history in the Gospel books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, unlike the Historical Narratives of the Old Testament, the Gospels writers didn't write a step-by-step chronicled account of the life of Jesus. Instead, each gospel writer had a specific reason for their writing, and they emphasized communicating those details more than writing an exhaustive history. Similarly, Acts focused on the early actions of the apostles, beginning with the ascension of Jesus, the early ministry of Peter, and concluding with Paul's missionary journeys.

An Important Characteristic of the Gospels and Acts: Understanding the why behind the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John might be of greater value than looking at them as timelines of the life of Jesus. On the other hand, Acts presents more of a timeline but gives insight into how the Lord established the early Christian Church. While there are *descriptive* elements of what is detailed in the Gospels (similar to Old Testament Historical Narrative), the teachings of Jesus and the apostles are most always *prescriptive*—instructive commands for the early Christian Church.

THE PAULINE EPISTLES

Epistles are letters, and the Pauline Epistles were letters written by Paul directed to a church or individual church leaders, often addressing topics the church or individual was dealing with at the time. They provide us with timeless truths on complex issues the church has wrestled with through the ages. There are 13 of Paul's letters in the New Testament, Romans through Philemon.

An Important Characteristic of the Pauline Epistles: Similar to prophecy, it's essential to understand the context or reason for the letter while also understanding how it applies to the Church universal. The context may be different, but the central truth remains.

THE GENERAL EPISTLES

The General Epistles are all the letters of the New Testament not written by the apostle Paul. Similar to the Pauline Epistles, they were written with a specific audience in mind yet teach timeless truths that are applied in the Church throughout the ages. The General Epistles are Hebrews through Jude.

An Important Characteristic of the General Epistles: Just like the Pauline Epistles, it's essential to understand the context of the reason for the letter while also understanding how it applies to the Church universal. The context may be different, but the central truth remains.

APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Of all the Bible genres, Apocalyptic Literature might be considered the most intimidating because of its highly symbolic nature. Its content, while sometimes describing frightening imagery, conveys a future hope. The writers received revelation from God about things to come, specifically, the end times, which will accompany Christ's second coming and the restoration of all things. Apocalyptic Literature is found in the books of Revelation and Daniel, though Daniel has Historical Narrative accounts as well.

An Important Characteristic of Apocalyptic Literature: It is highly symbolic! A mountain isn't always a mountain, or the sea isn't always a sea. So how do you make sense of it? Look to the clear parts of Scripture to provide insights on the less-clear parts of Scripture. Are there other passages that refer to, for example, mountains and seas? Do those Scriptures provide clarity on mountains and seas as described in Apocalyptic Literature?

WEEK ONE

WHAT GENRE IS THIS?

THE CREATION | GENESIS 1:1-31

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

GENESIS 1:1-31

¹ In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³ And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶ And God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters." ⁷ And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸ And God called the expanse Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹ And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so. ¹⁰ God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

¹¹ And God said, "Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth." And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. ¹⁶ And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, "Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens." ²¹ So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth." ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

²⁷ So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

²⁹ And God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Do you notice any correlation between the first day and the fourth day? The second day and the fifth day? The third day and the sixth day? What, if anything, might this tell the reader?
2. Numerous times throughout the passage, we read that God saw the work of his creation and "saw that it was good." What does this reveal to us about God's character?

3. Reread Genesis 1:26-28, then read Genesis 2:5-7 and 21-22. Why do you suppose there are two separate accounts of the creation of man and woman? How does the first account read differently than the second account? Does this affect your understanding of what genre Genesis 1 is?
4. Based on your reading of Genesis 1, do you interpret it to mean the earth was formed in six days exactly (or 144 hours), or something else? How might you answer a person who objects to the scientific impossibility of the earth formed in 144 hours? Is it important either way?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-19. What connection, if any, might there be between Genesis 1 and this passage in 2 Corinthians? Is it just a coincidence that Paul uses the word "creation" in this New Testament passage? What does the creation account tell us about our own salvation?

"The creation of the heavens and the earth is the first of the revealed acts of God in Scripture. In that first act, the triune God brought all things out of nothing by the word of His power."—Ligonier Ministries

2. Read and reflect on the quotation above. Whether you believe Genesis 1 to be affirming the creation was completed in 144 hours or believe it to be affirming something else, what might you say is the most important message to take away from Genesis 1?
3. Reread Genesis 1:27. How does the phrase, "So God created man in his own image," inform you on how you understand Mark 4:29-31 or Matthew 5:43-44?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

We begin with a passage that isn't easy in terms of identifying the genre. It's not easy because it doesn't seem to fit cleanly into one specific category. In fact, Genesis is a bit of a troublemaker in this regard. It's a part of the Pentateuch, so we might categorize it as "The Law," yet it's also primarily written in what seems to be Historical Narrative. And then there's Genesis 1, where we see poetic elements of repetition and symmetry. So what conclusion are we to make? Bible scholars haven't reached a clear consensus on Genesis 1 either, so we're in good company. Some believe "a day is a day," and therefore, the Lord created the earth in 144 hours; then there are those who believe its poetic elements tell us Moses didn't write Genesis 1 as a detailed chronological history. Both views and another view that suggests the word "day" can refer to more than just 24 hours are all considered to hold a high view of Scripture. In other words, there's a compelling case made for all three arguments, and we probably will never know—for sure—which is correct, at least not on this side of heaven. But what we do know of this account *for sure* is that God, by the power of his word, spoke the world into existence out of nothing. It shows us that the triune God created the world with intentionality and purpose. The account teaches us that God made us in his image—all of us. And it also teaches us that the one who created our world and everything in it is also the one who can and will redeem and restore it. The one who made the world by his word will undoubtedly restore it through his revealed Word, Jesus Christ.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

WEEK TWO

THE LAW

I AM THE LORD YOUR GOD | LEVITICUS 19

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on page 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

LEVITICUS 19

¹ And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. ³ Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. ⁴ Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the Lord your God.

⁵ "When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. ⁶ It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire.

⁷ If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, ⁸ and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the Lord, and that person shall be cut off from his people.

⁹ "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

¹¹ "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

¹³ "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. ¹⁴ You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

¹⁵ "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. ¹⁶ You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.

¹⁷ "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

¹⁹ "You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.

²⁰ "If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; ²¹ but he shall bring his compensation to the Lord, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. ²² And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the Lord for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.

²³ "When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. ²⁴ And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the Lord. ²⁵ But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the Lord your God.

²⁶ "You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. ²⁷ You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord.

²⁹ "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. ³⁰ You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

³¹ "Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God.

³² "You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

³³ "When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

³⁵ "You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. ³⁶ You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷ And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the Lord."

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. God gives three types of law in the Old Testament: moral, civil, and ceremonial. Moral laws are rooted in God's perfect design for his people and reflect his character. Civil laws governed ancient Jewish society. Ceremonial laws were designed to help the Jewish priests and people in worship and sacrifice. Reading through the passage above, list which verses reflect each type of law.

Moral:

Civil:

Ceremonial:

2. Read Galatians 2:15–16. What does Paul say about the Law? What does that show you about God’s intention for the Law?

3. John Calvin wrote that the Law “is a kind of mirror. As in a mirror we discover any stains upon our face so in the Law we behold, first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse, as the consequence of both.” In what ways does today’s passage serve as a mirror to your life? What do you see about yourself when you read it?

4. Read Matthew 22:36–40 and Romans 13:8–10. Look back on Leviticus 19:9–18. How do these passages build upon each other? Why do you think Jesus said all the Law depended on those two commands?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. Leviticus 19 is a passage often quoted by those who seek to undermine the credibility of scripture. “Do you really believe the Bible? It says you can’t wear clothes made of two kinds of fabric!” Have you heard this type of argument before? How does understanding the purpose of the Law help you formulate a response?

“Technically speaking, Christians are not under the old covenant and its stipulations. Yet, at the same time, we are called to imitate Christ and to live as people who seek to please the living God.”—R.C. Sproul

2. Reflect on the quotation from Sproul above. How does the Law help you as you grow in faith and Christlikeness?

3. Reread verse 37. How do you respond to it? How do you think our current culture responds to it?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The books of the Law, also known as the Pentateuch, include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. In these books, we see the earliest history of the Jewish people layered with God's good and perfect design for his people, as shown through his Law. When studying the Law, it is helpful to understand that there are three types of Old Testament Law (moral, civil, and ceremonial), and Scripture gives us three uses of the Law as well. Ligonier Ministries explains them this way:

"Its first function is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings . . . A second function, the "civil use," is to restrain evil . . . it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust . . . Its third function . . . tells God's children what will please their heavenly Father."

The Law is convicting and inspiring; it shows us how much we need a Savior, but it also paints a picture for us of a world free from brokenness and sin. It shows us how we should treat God and others, and how God designed the world to work in perfect harmony. It scans our motivations and actions and asks us to respond to God in repentance and in living a holy life.

In Galatians, Paul wrote extensively about the Law. Chapter 3:19–26 says this:

"Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith."

This is the gift of the Law. The Law does not give us life. But the one who came to fulfill the Law perfectly is the one who gives us life and life abundant. Praise be to God, the architect of the Law, the Son, who fulfilled the Law, and the Spirit, who helps us believe.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

A MOST UNLIKELY KING | 1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

1 SAMUEL 16:1-13

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these." ¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here." ¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. God instructs Samuel to go to Jesse to find a new king—an instruction which causes him to fear for his life should Saul, the current king, find out. So the Lord tells him to take a heifer and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." Was what Samuel told Jesse true or an incomplete statement? Does this mean that sometimes it's permissible to omit portions of the truth? Why or why not?

2. We read in verse 7, “man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” Is this a command from God for us to never consider someone’s outward appearance? How does identifying the genre of literature of this passage inform your response?

“Samuel could see only the outward appearance, which evidently did not appear very royal. But God could see into David’s heart. David may not have been impressive, but he had integrity. He may not have had proven battle skills, but he did have a passion for God’s honor. This is what God was looking for in a king over Israel.” —Nancy Guthrie, from The Son of David: Seeing Jesus in the Historical Books

3. As the selection process of the king unfolds, what do we learn about God’s discernment in contrast to man’s discernment? How are they different? Can you think of other passages from both the Old and New Testaments that might support your answer?

4. How do the selection and description of David in verses 11 and 12 remind you of Jesus?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. David was initially rejected, yet ultimately anointed king. Does this provide us any insight into the life of a Christian? Does this bring you comfort, concern, or both? How so?
2. Considering 1 Samuel 16:1-13 as a whole and the attributes of God we see in it, in what ways does the present-day church do a good job of reflecting those attributes? In what ways does the present-day church *not* do a good job of reflecting those attributes?

“To David’s inner qualities, God added something else—the power of his Spirit (v. 13).”—D.F. Payne, from The New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition

3. Read the brief quote above from D.F. Payne. How does understanding the role of the Holy Spirit influence your conclusions and takeaways from this passage?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Those unfamiliar with the Bible often say it is “just a bunch of rules to follow.” However, in reading the Historical Narrative passages of the Bible, we discover we aren’t reading rules; instead, we’re reading true stories that tell us something about God’s perfect nature and something about our imperfect nature. In her book, *Literarily*, Kristie Anyabwile says, “Narratives showcase embodied, imperfect human experience as both a mirror and a window—a mirror that helps us to see our lives reflected in the lives of those in Scripture, and a window through which we can see the lives and circumstances of others and learn from them.” In other words, if the Bible were nothing more than a bunch of rules, we might understand their meaning, but we’d have little insight into how to apply them. In all his mercy, God provided us with not just a bunch of rules but a means of seeing the difference between following and not following his Word. In 1 Samuel 16, we don’t get a prescription for choosing a king; instead, we get a description of how God looks at the heart in contrast to how outward appearances persuade man. Beyond this narrative, we see this central truth repeated at other points in David’s life and then repeated throughout Israel’s history; we learn about God’s character through real stories. However, most importantly, we see how this truth foreshadows and is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Echoing David’s life and foretelling that of Jesus, Isaiah 53:2 tells us he would have “no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” In his Word, the Lord described his nature through narrative and then showed us that exact nature—his Word personified—in Jesus Christ.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

WHAT IS WISDOM? | PROVERBS 1:1-33

PROVERBS 1:1-33

20 Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; ²¹ at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks: ²² "How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge?" ²³ If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you. ²⁴ Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, ²⁵ because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof, ²⁶ I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you, ²⁷ when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord, ³⁰ would have none of my counsel and despised all my reproof, ³¹ therefore they shall eat the fruit of their way, and have their fill of their own devices. ³² For the simple are killed by their turning away, and the complacency of fools destroys them; ³³ but whoever listens to me will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster."

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The opening verses of this chapter include the phrase, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Compare this to Psalm 111:10, where the psalmist says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom." How can both statements be true? What is the difference between knowledge and wisdom?

2. The principle behind verses 8-19 could be summarized as a parental plea to their child to avoid unjust gain (ambush the innocent) as it provides immediate satisfaction but will lead to an ultimate path of destruction. Do you find this principle to be true all the time? Why or why not?

"There are various forms of foolishness, as we will see. But the ultimate foolishness is to make anything the center of our lives besides God. That will always lead to disappointment and breakdown."—Timothy and Kathy Keller, from God's Wisdom for Navigating Life

3. In Proverbs, the opposite of the wise is the fool. What are some characteristics of the fool as presented in this chapter?

4. In verse 26, the response to foolishness seems awfully harsh, as stated, "I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you." Is the Bible instructing us to laugh at our adversaries or mock them when they suffer? Why or why not?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. When reading phrases like, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge," how does that hit you? Do you find comfort in "fearing the Lord," or does it trouble you? Why is fear in this context good, yet in other places in the Bible where we're told, "do not fear," it seems bad?

"The simple can change and learn sense but they can also 'inherit folly'—graduate into being full-blown fools. Nevertheless, we should be careful not to equate credulity and naïveté with a lack of sophistication. We once pastored an entire congregation of somewhat unsophisticated people, but they were by no means simple. You can lack sophistication, as the world assesses it, and still be wise. And you can be sophisticated—well-off, well connected, and educated—but still be simple."—Timothy and Kathy Keller, from God's Wisdom for Navigating Life

2. In what ways do you identify with the wise person described in this passage? In what ways do you identify with the fool in this passage?

3. What areas in your life are you most opinionated and least open to criticism? How does this passage inform you about how you should receive criticism?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

If the reader of Proverbs is looking for a few quick steps to a happy life, they will walk away disappointed. The purpose of proverbs is to instill wisdom in its reader, and wisdom is not something acquired quickly; wisdom is something to be wrestled with, and in the process, it develops in its subject. The book of Proverbs—a book of wisdom—doesn't pinpoint where wisdom stops and sinfulness starts. The book of Proverbs (and other Wisdom Literature) doesn't make a practice of making concrete statements. Proverbs are not promises but generalizations and observations, not hard-fast rules. They are tendencies, not guarantees. The Proverbs do, however, offer practical guidance for making wise decisions.

The author divides the book of Proverbs into two parts. The first nine chapters work like a preface that attempts to convince the reader why wisdom is so valuable. Chapters 10 through 31 are collections of wise sayings—short, clear, memorable statements of truth learned through life's experiences. In the book of Proverbs, wisdom and foolishness are personified and given human qualities. For example, when wisdom "mocks" foolishness, it is a statement of comparison, not a command for the wise to mock the foolish.

Lastly, the reader of Proverbs must remember that we are a fallen people in need of salvation and that salvation is in Jesus Christ. As Tim Keller notes, "The personified wisdom that created the world (Proverbs 8:22–31) is finally revealed to be Jesus, the Word of God, with whom God created the world (John 1:1–4.) Paul calls Jesus the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30), the one in whom all God's wisdom is hidden (Colossians 2:3)." When we realize that Jesus is wisdom, we read the Proverbs, not as a checklist of things to do, instead, we see it as a portrait of who our Heavenly Father is shaping us after—Jesus Christ, our Lord.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. ² Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. ³ There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and, like a strong man, runs its course with joy. ⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them, and there is nothing hidden from its heat.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from hidden faults. ¹³ Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me! Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read Psalm 19 out loud. Alternatively, you can listen to it on the Dwell Bible App or ESV Bible app being read to you. Close your eyes as you listen. What imagery stands out to you? How does hearing the poem differ from reading it on the page?
2. Take a moment to read some other famous poems in the Bible, like 1 Corinthians 13, Luke 1:46–55, and Psalm 8. How do you respond to God differently when you read poetry than you do other genres, such as Law or Historical Narrative?

“The very sound of the two movements of the psalm (Psalm 19) tells something of their two concerns: the broad sweep of God’s wordless revelation in the universe, expressed in the exuberant lines of verses 1–6, and the clarity of his written Word, reflected in the quiet conciseness of verses 7–10, to which the heart-searching of 11–14 is the worshiper’s response.”—Derek Kidner

3. How does Kidner’s description of the three movements of Psalm 19 help you understand it better? How do they build upon each other? How are they different?
4. What does Psalm 19 say about God’s Word? How does it, along with the rest of this genre study, help you to know and love God’s Word more? What questions does it prompt in you?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What does Psalm 19 reveal to you about God? His Word? How we should respond to him?

2. Looking back to our study on the Law as a genre (page 13), how does this poetry help you to better understand Law? How does one genre aid your understanding of the other, and vice versa?

3. What would it look like to incorporate poetry from the psalms into your prayer life? How do you think it might increase your love of God and his Word?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

C.S. Lewis called the poetry of the Psalms “a little incarnation, giving body to what had been before invisible and inaudible.” It is an incredible gift to us that when God spoke, he didn’t do so just in lists of rules and straightforward facts. He speaks in poetry, in lyrical phrases and rhymes, with clever literary devices like onomatopoeia and acrostic. Hearing and reading poetry in the Bible should inspire our imaginations as we glimpse the beauty of God and his creation.

There are many technical ways you can interpret poetry in Scripture, by breaking it down into codas and strophes and stanzas, by reading the original Hebrew and seeing the depth of the intricacies of acrostics and parallels. And yet, the experience of reading poetry should be as much an emotional exercise as a clinical one. Poetry in the Bible, and in the Psalms, in particular, gives us permission to express the fullness of our emotions before God. As you study poetry in Scripture, experience it as an incarnational reality, a glimpse of God captured in our language.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.

2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?

3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?

4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

PROPHECY

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

¹⁰ "For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place. ¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹² Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³ You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, declares the Lord, and I will restore your fortunes and gather you from all the nations and all the places where I have driven you, declares the Lord, and I will bring you back to the place from which I sent you into exile.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

Some Helpful Background Information

"Jeremiah the prophet ministered before and during the Babylonian exile, when the southern kingdom of Judah suffered the covenant curse of expulsion from the promised land for its continued unfaithfulness to the Lord (Deut. 28:36; 2 Chron. 36:15–21). Jeremiah had warned the Judahites that punishment was coming, and he pleaded with them to repent of their idolatry and evildoing. When they did not, he prophesied that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, would conquer Judah and Jerusalem and carry off the people into exile (Jer. 25:1–11)." —Kevin D. Gardner

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
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3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

⁶ *"For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth."—Deuteronomy 7:6*

"The prophet's job was difficult, but their calling built their faith to believe that God's people would indeed hear the message and turn back to Him in loving obedience and worship."—Kristie Anyabwile, from Literarily

1. Consider the verse from Deuteronomy and the quote above. In reading through Jeremiah 29:1-14, what is Jeremiah asking of the people of God? What makes this a difficult and even surprising message for them to hear?
2. At this point in Israel's history, Babylon is the conquering nation that removed many of Israel's citizens from their homes and brought them to live in exile in Babylon. Now Jeremiah is telling those exiled citizens to "seek the welfare of the city." What do you think this means? Are there any limits to this command?
3. In verse 4, in no uncertain terms, God is taking credit for Israel's exile to Babylon. What, if anything, does this act tell you about God? Does this bother you or encourage you?
4. While this passage certainly includes some harsh words of judgment for God's people, what else do you notice about the passage? Are God's people left without hope? What does this tell us about God's posture towards his people?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. A pervasive theme in this passage is "exile." In what ways might you be compared to an exile today in your family, culture, or social group? How might this passage apply as it relates to both seeking the "welfare of the city" and having a future hope?

2. Another theme in this passage deals with discernment; God's people were instructed to listen to Jeremiah but reject the words of the "prophets and your diviners who are among you." How can you discern between what is of God and what is not? What are some practical ways to exercise godly discernment?
3. Verses 11 and 12 are often quoted in modern contexts and used as verses for encouragement for almost any difficult circumstance. What is the actual context for these verses? Is this a blanket promise for all Christians throughout history? Why or why not?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

As is the case with all the prophetic books of the Bible, it's important to remember that there is an immediate meaning (not directly written to us) and a meaning that telescopes out its fulfillment in Jesus Christ (that certainly *applies* to us). In Jeremiah 29, we see the immediate context is a warning—punishment is on the way. Embedded in that warning is a call for God's people to repent for their wayward spirit, and in their refusal to do so, Jeremiah tells the people of the judgment that awaits them. Jeremiah's words oppose the other so-called prophets of the day who said to the people their stay in Babylon would be short—that they'd soon be leaving. Whereas the words of Jeremiah—God's words—were along the lines of, "Prepare to stay awhile. Settle in and seek the welfare of the city. You're going to be here for some time."

But along with the words of warning came words of hope. The prophet tells God's people to allow their sons and daughters to marry, thrive, and grow in and to the benefit of the land of exile—a signal of life and ultimate restoration where previously were only words of extinction (Jeremiah 4:7). To the original audience, this passage says, "Because of your sin you will be judged, but the Lord, in his mercy, will restore you and bring you back home." However, the broader meaning that telescopes out to believers of all ages says, "Because of your sin, you will be judged, but the Lord, because of his mercy, will place that judgment on Jesus Christ, and he will bring you home." So, we can't assign the words written to the exiles directly to us—we weren't the original audience. But as Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians 1:20, "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him." So, in our union with Christ, the plans and promises of "welfare," "future hope," and restoration are given to us, not based on our obedience, but his.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

THE GOSPELS AND ACTS

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

¹⁸ And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" ¹⁹ And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" ²¹ And he said, "All these I have kept from my youth." ²² When Jesus heard this, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." ²³ But when he heard these things, he became very sad, for he was extremely rich. ²⁴ Jesus, seeing that he had become sad, said, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." ²⁶ Those who heard it said, "Then who can be saved?" ²⁷ But he said, "What is impossible with man is possible with God." ²⁸ And Peter said, "See, we have left our homes and followed you." ²⁹ And he said to them, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, ³⁰ who will not receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come eternal life."

This image shows a full page of blank handwriting practice paper. It features approximately 20 evenly spaced horizontal green lines across the entire width of the page. The background is white, and there are no margins, text, or other markings present.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
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REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Read the parallel passages of this account in Matthew 19:16-30 and Mark 10:17-31. What differences do you notice between the three? Does it bother you that there are any differences at all? Why do you suppose John didn't write about this exchange?
2. As the rich ruler approaches Jesus, he calls him "good." Jesus responds with, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone." Of all the ways Jesus would have replied, why do you suppose he says this? Isn't Jesus good?
3. As Jesus continues in his response to the rich ruler, he begins with what is essentially a recapitulation of the Ten Commandments, yet he starts with the latter half of the law. Why do you think Jesus did this? Why does Jesus bring up the Law at all; isn't the gospel all about grace?
4. Think about Jesus' comment, "How difficult it is for those who have wealth to enter the kingdom of God!" What do you think he means by this? Why, of all things, does he specifically mention wealth? Does this mean it's easy for the poor to enter the kingdom of God? Why or why not?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

"From the young man's perspective, Jesus was merely a sagacious and good human being. Jesus said: 'No, don't call Me good. You don't know the depth of what goodness is.' He challenged the man for his loose understanding of goodness."—R.C. Sproul, from Luke: An Expository Commentary

1. How do you measure goodness? What is the standard by which we typically measure goodness? Why is it important for believers to understand that Jesus is more than good?

“The man had just claimed to have followed all of the Ten Commandments from his youth. So, Jesus started with commandment number one: ‘You shall have no other gods before me’ (Ex. 20:3). He tested the young man about his other ‘god’ that was before Him: the young man’s riches. Jesus told him to give it all away.—R.C. Sproul, from Luke: An Expositional Commentary

2. Read the quote above. It seems that it wasn’t wealth that Jesus was against but rather anything we place above our devotion to God. For the rich ruler it was wealth; his god was his money. What other gods do people in the church today tend to place above our devotion to God? Is there something with which you personally have a hard time?
3. Verses 29 and 30 indicate that sacrifice today will yield blessing “in the age to come eternal life.” How are we to understand these verses? Is our motivation to sacrifice today simply to gain reward in the life to come?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

With belief and understanding that Jesus is, as the Nicene Creed states, “very God of very God,” when Jesus speaks, we listen (though we hold all Scripture in equal weight). So when Jesus tells the rich young man, “go, sell all that you have and give to the poor,” we might wonder if Jesus is issuing a new commandment and if we should go and do likewise. This account shows us how the gospels can be both *descriptive* and *prescriptive*. This account is descriptive in that Mark details Jesus’ interaction with a specific person; Jesus directed his words at one person. So it’s essential to understand the context of what Jesus tells this individual. No, Jesus is not instructing all believers (nor the audience who observed the exchange) to divest themselves of all they have; yes, Jesus is telling *all* believers to have no other gods—wealth or anything else—before him. The rich young ruler made a god of his material wealth. In this exchange, Jesus is recapitulating a portion of the Ten Commandments, which is prescriptive. So, Jesus is not condemning wealth—he’s condemning idolatry. But, at the same time, Jesus does devote much of his speech to the subject of wealth, perhaps as a warning that material possession can provide a false sense of security when, in fact, real security—eternal security—can only be found in God the Father. And the security that awaits us is not simply a better version of what we sacrifice today; the reward is God himself. As R.C. Sproul comments on verses 29-31, “Jesus promises that those who follow Him will be blessed in ways they cannot imagine, ways that will make our worldly wealth seem paltry by comparison.”

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

PAULINE EPISTLES

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

¹⁵ For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, ¹⁶ I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, ¹⁷ that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, ¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, ¹⁹ and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ²⁰ that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. ²² And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Paul give thanks for the Ephesians? What outward response did they show from their inward transformation through faith?
2. Paul often refers to all three persons of the Trinity in his statements. What does he say about each (Father, Son, Holy Spirit) in this passage? Read some of the other passages in Paul's letters where he does this: Galatians 4:4–7; Romans 8:1–11; 2 Corinthians 13:14. Make note of what Paul says about each person.
3. Underline what this passage says about Jesus. What themes about Jesus are evident here?
4. What are the blessings we receive that Paul lists in verses 7–13? Write a few notes about each. Mark any you don't understand or have questions about.

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul mean by the "hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints"? (Look up Ephesians 2:12, 3:8.)
2. How does knowing that this letter was sent to a specific group of people (the Ephesians) change how you read it?

3. Reflect on the phrase in verse 4: “even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ.” Look up Romans 8:15 and 8:29 for additional context. Do you think of yourself as adopted by God? Think about the “before and after” story of your faith and reflect on your adoption into the family of Christ.

APPLICATION SUMMARY

In this passage from Ephesians, we see many of the hallmarks of Paul’s epistles. There are personal anecdotes to the people in Ephesus, complex theological truths, and encouragement for the Church universal. It is a gift to have Paul’s letters as a part of the canon of Scripture; they are inspired words by God, inerrant statements about our faith, and testimonies to the person and work of Jesus in the lives of saints through the ages. It has parallel passages to other epistles and references to the Old Testament.

As you seek to better understand Paul’s letters, learning a little bit about each place can help tremendously. Using a Study Bible (or reputable internet sources like Ligonier or The Gospel Coalition) can help you research the people and places to whom Paul wrote. For example, Paul wrote to the Galatians to speak against the false teachers who told the Gentile believers they needed to follow Jewish laws to be saved. What might knowing that change the way you read a verse like, “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Galatians 3:26)?

Paul’s letters help us see the past, present, and future of our faith. Paul’s rich exposition of the Old Testament helped his original readers understand that Jesus is the Messiah. Today, we can read his works and glean wisdom for living the Christian life in a post-Christian world (similar to Rome in the pre-Christian world). And Paul consistently points us forward to Christ’s return and our hope in heaven. These letters are for the original readers and for us.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

OF HEARERS AND DOERS | JAMES 1:16-27

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does this passage say about God? What does it teach us about him and his Word?
2. What do you think James means by “the implanted word”? Look up Ephesians 1:13 and John 1:14.
3. James is a general epistle, but sometimes scholars call it “the proverbs of the New Testament.” Looking back to the section on Wisdom Literature, what similarities does this passage show to Proverbs?

“James is not saying here that salvation rests on our ability to keep the Law. We are unable to keep the Law perfectly and must rely upon Christ alone who has kept the Law perfectly and can alone put His people into right standing with God. Nevertheless, we must be concerned with obedience to God’s commands, for in our obedience we show that we possess true saving faith.”—Ligonier Ministries

4. Another major theme in James is obedience to God’s Law. How does this passage reflect both James’ knowledge of the Law and his acceptance of Christ’s complete obedience of the Law on our behalf?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How does this passage say we should respond to God?
2. Which of the commands in this passage do you find hardest to follow regularly? Why?

“What James is suggesting by describing the Word in this way is that the Christian must not think he is done with the Word of God after it has saved him. That Word becomes a permanent, inseparable part of the Christian, a commanding and guiding presence within him. The command to receive the implanted Word, then, is not a command to be converted (‘receive the Word’ means this elsewhere in the New Testament), but to accept its precepts as binding and to seek to live by them.”—Douglas Moo

3. How has this study helped you love God and his Word more?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

The General Epistles are similar in form and function to the Pauline Epistles, only they were written by authors other than the apostle Paul. The authors include James, John, and Jude. We do not know the author of Hebrews. These letters, like Paul’s, were written to a specific audience at a specific time for a specific reason, yet, they are full of inerrant words from God for all believers through all time. Kristie Anyabwile notes the author “will either be explaining a theological truth or exhorting believers to right living in light of that truth. Explanations are often statements of fact, which we call indicatives. Exhortations are commands which we call imperatives. They are the Christian’s response to the truth they know.”

The indicative-imperative model of Bible study is a particularly helpful lens through which to view the General Epistles. In the passage from James studied above, the indicative is that we have been chosen by God to be his people. The imperatives are the instructions that follow: be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, be doers of the Word, and care for widows and orphans.

This passage reminds us of the transforming power of knowing God’s Word, of letting it read us when we read it, and of its sanctifying presence in the lives of believers.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.
2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?
3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?
4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

WEEK TEN
APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE

Read through the passage several times, noting words, concepts, and ideas that stand out to you. Try and identify which genre this passage might be categorized under, utilizing the descriptions on pages 6 and 7. Then, ask the Holy Spirit to draw your attention to what God would like you to see and jot down what comes to mind in the notes section.

REVELATION 1:9–20

⁹ I, John, your brother and partner in the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance that are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. ¹⁰ I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet ¹¹ saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea."

¹² Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, ¹³ and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. ¹⁴ The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, ¹⁵ his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. ¹⁶ In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.

¹⁷ When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last," ¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. ¹⁹ Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this. ²⁰ As for the mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.

FOUNDATION QUESTIONS

1. Based on the descriptions on pages 6 and 7, under what genre might you classify this passage? What are your reasons for identifying it as such?
2. Who is the author of this passage? For whom was this passage written? For what purpose might the author have written this passage?
3. In short, what is the overarching message of this passage?
4. How might this passage and the genre in which it's written point us to Jesus?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Verse 11 describes the book of Revelation as a letter. Who was the letter written by? Who was it written to? Thinking back to our study of the Pauline and General Epistles, what characteristics of a letter does Revelation have, and how does it help you better understand it?

"But the Bible, the closer you look at it, the more it hangs together . . . (The) Old Testament prophets (are) working from the law, and now we see John is going to work from these Old Testament prophets. We see its connectedness, its cohesiveness, and why is that? It's because it has one divine author. And all of that helps me to esteem the Bible more. So, rather than look at the Bible closely and it falls apart . . . No. You look closer at the Bible, and the more you realize what a magnificent book the Bible is, and that it actually must be written by one divine author."—Nancy Guthrie

2. Work through this exercise and respond to Nancy Guthrie's quotation above.

Copy Revelation 1:12 here:

Look up these verses: Exodus 25:37; 2 Chronicles 4:20; Zechariah 4:2; Revelation 1:11; Revelation 1:20. Write down what they say about lampstands.

What connections do you see? How do those connections change your understanding from the first time you read Revelation 1:12?

3. Look up Matthew 17:1–2 and Acts 1:10–11. Note John's presence. When John had the vision in Revelation 1, he may have been seeing someone as he had seen before. What similarities do you see in the passages?

4. How does Revelation 1:19 help define the genre of Apocalyptic Literature?

APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. How do you feel about reading and studying Apocalyptic Literature? How has that changed through this study?

2. John wrote Revelation while he was exiled on the island of Patmos (Revelation 1:9). How do you think about reading Revelation, particularly its emphasis on the restoration of all things (Revelation 21), knowing about its human author's suffering?

3. In the vision of the son of man, Jesus says, "Fear not . . . I died, and behold I am alive forevermore." What hope does that give you as a believer?

APPLICATION SUMMARY

Have you ever done an Escape Room? Where you have to put together lots of different puzzles or decode riddles to figure out how to escape before the clock runs out? They are a lot of fun and remind me of the Bible's Apocalyptic Literature. Most commonly thought of as parts of Daniel and the book of Revelation, the Apocalyptic Literature in Scripture can be understood as the compilation of many puzzles, numerical patterns, and symbols throughout the Bible. When decoded, we have a much better picture of the kingship of Jesus over all creation. But we can't decode all of it, at least not until Jesus comes again.

The Greek word "apokalypsis" means "revelation." These revelations in Scripture show us (and the original audiences) how God will act. In the Old Testament, many apocalyptic passages point toward the destruction of Jerusalem or the exile (such as Amos 8 or Jeremiah 1:11–16). In the New Testament, the book of Revelation mixes warnings about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD with foreshadowing about Jesus's return and the renewal of all things (Revelation 21).

Apocalyptic Literature in Scripture isn't easy to understand, but it is possible. And when we hold it in the same hand as the rest of the Bible, we see who God is and how he acts in the arc of redemptive history. Creation, fall, redemption, and restoration are the movements of Scripture and of time. Apocalyptic Literature traces the need for and the actions required to accomplish the restoration of all things.

GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

1. Reflect on what you have learned from this passage, especially anything new if you have read or studied it before.

2. Did any of the Reflection or Application questions stand out to you that you would like to discuss with the group?

3. What is the one overarching principle that you would consider to be the most important takeaway from this passage?

4. Where do you see Jesus in this passage?

RESOURCES USED FOR THIS STUDY

Blessed: How the Old Testament Helps us Make Sense of Revelation with Andrew Sach (Episode 3) Podcast by Nancy Guthrie

The CSB Study Bible; Edwin Blum and Trevin Wax, General Editors

The ESV Literary Study Bible; Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, General Editors

God's Wisdom for Navigating Life by Timothy and Kathy Keller

Hard Sayings of Jesus by F.F. Bruce

He Reads Truth/She Reads Truth Bible; Holman Bible Publishers

James: An Introduction and Commentary by Douglas Moo

Ligonier Ministries (www.ligonier.org)

Literarily: How Understanding Bible Genres Transforms Bible Study by Kristie Anyabwile

Luke: An Expositional Commentary by R.C. Sproul

New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition; D.A. Carson, R.T. France, J.A. Motyer, & G.J. Wenham, General Editors

Proverbs: A Shorter Commentary by Bruce K. Waltke and Ivan De Silva

The Son of David: Seeing Jesus in the Historical Books: Volume 3 by Nancy Guthrie

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