



KNOW YOUR BIBLE BETTER

How to let Scripture transform you.

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NEMI

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Written by Ryan Peter

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to NCMI's course on knowing the Bible better. This course is not meant to be a technical course on what is called *hermeneutics* (the fancy, theological word for interpreting the Bible) but is meant to help the average person grasp their Bible better and let it do its work in them.

For this reason, serious theologians and scholars will probably find the material lacking in some detail. But this resource is not designed to be on the level of a theological seminary, but is more designed to help average Christians grapple with the subject at hand and provide material for churches and small groups to use. As Dudley Daniel once said, we are not trying to provide information, but rather looking for *transformation*. Scripture is about transforming us.

INTRODUCTION

So in this course you will not find:

1. A detailed apologetic on why we should believe the Bible
2. A historical breakdown of each book of the Bible
3. Textual criticism and historical studies
4. Allegorical studies
5. Historical developments of doctrine

What you will find, however is:

1. What we believe to be some of the best guidelines and tools to help you along
2. Methods to help you go deeper with the Bible
3. Exercises that will grow your skills with the Bible
4. Plenty of points about the Bible that will make you more passionate about knowing it better

This course is designed for groups and for readers at home. There are practical exercises that you can do on your own and others that would be helpful to do with others.

CHAPTER 1:

The Transformative Book

2 Timothy 3:16–17

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

This scripture above shows us how we are to use scripture to be equipped for every good work. The Bible, therefore, is a very practical book. It's not full of hidden secrets and esoteric wisdom, but is God's revelation to us about himself and how to live. There is no Bible Code to break. It is not

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a book of rules and laws and information but a book that is used for the purposes of enriching our relationship with God Himself. Therefore, we don't approach it in a purely cerebral way, looking to become more clever and understand information. Rather, **we approach it with an open heart, ready to hear what God says to us, personally and corporately as a local church, and His Church everywhere and at all times.**

IT IS A LIVING WORD

Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

This means that the Bible has a certain kind of power, inherent to itself. Unlike other books which may produce some sort of reaction from you—move you emotionally, disgust you, or interest you, the Bible goes a step further and actually transforms you.

Isaiah 55:11

"So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;

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it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

God is the one who inspired the Bible, and therefore He will accomplish His purposes through it. It is through His Word that He convicts of sin, reveals the coming judgement, weighs our motivations, reveals Christ and His salvation, and unpacks the gospel—all for the purposes of changing us, making us like Christ, and restoring His image in us. It is a word that pierces and discerns us. It knows you better than you know yourself! And so the point is not to know the Bible as much as let it help you to know God and yourself!

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE WORD

The Word of God works with the Spirit of God. Ephesians 6:17 says, *"take the helmet of salvation, **and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.**"*

This is why you cannot just be a "Word person" (someone just who studies the Bible) or just be a "Spirit person" (someone who likes to operate in the charismatic gifts) which is how some people like to speak. It is both. You cannot have the Spirit of God without the Word, and you cannot have the Word without the Spirit! If you try to separate the two, you get a half-baked Christianity!

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- **The Word sustains us.** That is why Jesus said, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. (Matthew 4:4).
- **The Word produces faith.** Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (Romans 10:17.)
- **The Word makes us born again.** Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. (1 Peter 1:23.)
- **The Word abides with us and is what ultimately brings the victory.** The word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.
- It is through God's Word that we will become "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season, and whose leaf does not wither." (Psalm 1:2-3.)

Jesus is the Word of God in the flesh. John 1:14 says, "*The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*" It is ultimately the words of Jesus, through the Bible, that pierce to the division of soul and spirit.

Jesus warned against making scripture into something purely informational and cerebral, or something that teaches rules and regulations or secret knowledge.

This is why He said in **John 5: 39-40**:

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

THEREFORE, WOULD IT NOT MAKE SENSE TO PAY ATTENTION TO IT?

However, the Bible is not going to hover above our beds at night and read itself to us! Nor is it going to somehow osmosis itself into you if you sleep with it under your pillow. While being a very practical and powerful book, the Bible does require consistent study and attention. There is some effort required from you. You've got to want to be changed, as God is not going to force this on you. You've got to, as it were, put yourself in its firing line.

To help us along, God has gifted us with teachers (Ephesians 4:11) and preachers whose job it is to study the scriptures and to bring out its treasures, through various means (Bible studies, preaching, books and resources). We don't just read the Bible, but also hear it taught through teachers and preachers. It's true that not all of us can devote hours and hours of study to the finer details—what the words mean in their original language of Greek; the historical background of a

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city; cultural background, etc. Therefore, we rely on others whose calling it is to do this, to tell us.

But this also creates the possibility of false teaching. False teaching can have dire consequences for the church, and for our own Christian life. If we believe, for instance, the false teaching that God is not three persons in one (the Trinity) we will lose the centrality of Christ in our faith, eventually drifting into all sorts of alternate spiritualities that are harmful to us and our family and our communities. Conversely, getting better at our theology (which is what we do when we come to understand the Bible better) can greatly enrich our relationship with the Lord and make us more into who He wants us to be, not to mention give us what we need to bring others into liberating truth.

This is why you need to be equipped with the right tools to study the scriptures for yourself. Not everyone is a theologian, but everyone has a theology, whether you like it or not. Bad theology will always suck the life out of your Christianity. On the other hand, solid theology will free you and keep you free.

In this course, we want to give you some of the basic tools to help you stay on the right track. We're not going to get down to the nitty-gritty details, but were going to give you what we believe you need to get the most out of your Bible.

The Bible is a very layered collection of books, with more and more treasures to uncover the more we get to know it, the more we understand the context each of its books were

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written in, the more we come to know God and His will and His ways. As we let the Word change us, so we go deeper, and it changes us ever more deeply. It goes deeper than just what we read on the surface especially as it begins to speak to our hearts. And it's our hearts that it works on and changes, transforming us to being more like Christ.

THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

Because the Bible is God's inspired and perfect revelation to mankind, we must give it the highest authority in our lives. Writings, prophetic utterances, or spiritual leading that contradict the Bible cant possibly be from God since it differs from God's unchanging truth. Since the Bible has absolute authority in the Christian's life, it follows that we should give priority to studying it as much as we can, so that we may access the thoughts, the emotions, the truth, and even the very heart of God.

WHY WOULD GOD USE LETTERS ON A PAGE TO REVEAL HIMSELF?

It's perfectly reasonable and logical that the God of all creation would choose to communicate with us, His creation, in a way that we would understand.

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God always communicates himself to us through the physical world He created. Jesus, as part of the Trinity, came down to earth as a man and lived in our physical world because God wanted to reach out to us and let us know Him.

We also see that God communicates through nature. Psalm 19:1,2 says that, *"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork."* So we see that God reveals himself to us in an objective, physical way. But we must understand that the most clear revelation of who He is, is found in the Bible.

But God also communicates to us in a subjective way—in other words, internally. He communicates through our conscience (Romans 1:32, Romans 2:14–15), speaks to the deepest parts of us by His Holy Spirit, and He speaks to our minds through His written word. The Bible is a physical book that speaks to our physical minds, to help us control our physical bodies in this physical world in a way that glorifies God.

One of the mistakes we can make as Christians is to place emphasis on either God's objective revealing of himself or His subjective revealing of himself. God uses both because God created both. And both of these actually meet in the Bible. It's a book that speaks to our mind, and in so doing, speaks to our heart. God really, truly, speaks through it. Romans 12:2 says, *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."* God renews our mind through His written, revealed and inspired words, found in the Bible.

EXERCISE:

Read the following passage of scripture *slowly*. These are Jesus' words to the crowds who came to Him, but they are also written for you.

As you read this scripture, stop at each phrase and do the following:

1. **Think deeply on what it means to you.**
2. **Turn it into a prayer.**

For example, when you read "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,*" ask God to help you see the kingdom, to want the kingdom, and to give you His kingdom. Talk to Him about your fears, your doubts, and those things that excite you.

Go through each line and do the same. Remember, prayer is a conversation! In this exercise, you are letting the words of scripture not just be information, but become a conversation between you and God, opening yourself up to Him to transform you by His Spirit.

Matthew 5:1–11

"Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him. And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

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Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

CHAPTER 2:

Discovering the central message of the Bible

The Bible is actually made up of 66 different books written by different authors and at vastly different times. Genesis is dated at 1445–1405BC, and the historical books of the Old Testament take us through Israel's story from 1400 to 400BC. The last book of the New Testament is dated 94 - 96 AD. So, as you can see, the book spans thousands of years!

Not only that, but the Bible spans several different kinds of genre. It contains poetry and song in the Psalms and traditional Hebrew wisdom literature (a genre of its own) in

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Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. (By the way, Job is the oldest book of the Bible.) Song of Songs is an interesting mix between love poetry and wisdom literature. In the New Testament there are historical accounts of Jesus' life and teachings (which are actually a unique genre of their own); historical accounts of the church in the book of Acts; Paul's letters; and apocalyptic literature (another unique genre of its time) in the book of Revelation.

With all this, it is marvelous that **the Bible actually has one consistent message**, but told in uncountable different ways. Knowing what that central message is gives you the principle key to unlocking it.

SO WHAT IS THE CENTRAL MESSAGE?

The Bible tells us who God is and how we can know Him. Put another way, it is the **one word of the one God about the one way of salvation.** (See *Six Steps to Reading the Bible*, by Matthias Media.)

Of course, this one word or message is told in many, many different ways, and the point is to find out how it's being told in that particular book. The reason for this is that we may know that Jesus is the only way to salvation, but yet simply knowing it as a fact, while helpful, is not enough.

This is especially not enough when life gets tough, when we suffer loss, when we are facing relationship breakdown,

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when we are faced with tough scepticism that tries to discount God (and which we can't seem to answer), when doubts come, or when temptation strikes.

It is also not even good enough when life is good, we are enjoying prosperity, and are pretty much coasting through life. In fact, for many, this is even a bigger danger.

Why? Because in these times we lose faith in God. We either give up and believe He does not love us, or we believe we don't need Him because we are secure in our finances, or some or other thing.

This is why the Bible is therefore a *living word that gives us faith by showing God's promises; that transforms us into His people of love; and gives us revelation to live out.*

It's not enough to know facts. Our faith and theology and worldview and philosophy must be *liveable*. And the Bible shows us how it becomes liveable. It ultimately does this by showing us who God is and how we relate to Him.

HOW THE BIBLE IS BROKEN DOWN

Briefly (and in a very simple way) here is how the Bible is broken down:

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The Old Testament	The New Testament
The law books	The gospels
The historical books	The book of Acts
The wisdom books	The letters
The prophetic books	The book of Revelation

A. The first section of each testament above is that testament's foundational section

The five 'law books' in the Old Testament consist of Genesis to Deuteronomy. These tell us about how God picked out Israel from all the fallen nations of the world and made a covenant with them. The 'law' (Hebrew, *Torah*) outlines the essential elements of that covenant.

The New Testament's four gospels (Matthew to John) are the foundation of the New Testament and record the life and the teachings of the saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ. **Ultimately, the whole Bible hangs on these revelations of Jesus as He is the revelation of the whole Bible.** Since the Bible is the 'one word about the one God and the one message of salvation' we find that Jesus is the Word, God's method of salvation, and the Son of God. He is the perfect representation of the Father. If you want to know what God is like, you look at Jesus.

B. The next section is each testament's history

All the historical books in the Old Testament showcase how God kept His covenant with Israel, even while Israel kept failing at keeping their side.

Likewise, the book of Acts is the church's history document, showcasing how Jesus kept His promise by sending His Holy Spirit, and how His people, the Church, began to impact the world because of His gospel and His Spirit.

C. The wisdom books and the letters

In the Old Testament, the books of Job to Song of Songs are called the 'wisdom books'. These are often devotional in nature and present guidance to God's people on how to deal with the problems of our world.

In the same way, each of the New Testament letters provide guidance to the problems and questions we encounter in the world. The difference is that the Old Testament wisdom books focus very much on man's wisdom, while the New Testament letters are about God's wisdom in the gospel and the gift of Jesus.

D. Prophetic books

In the Old Testament, the books of Isaiah to Malachi record what God said to His people through His prophets. While

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many people think prophecy is about only telling the future (which isn't necessarily wrong), we find that the main point is what God is saying for the here and now.

There is only one primarily prophetic book in the New Testament and that is the book of Revelation. While we may find prophetic elements in the other books, this is the only book that is prophetic all the way through. Likewise, we must not treat it as a book of the future, but a book telling us how to live in the now.

WHY THIS BREAKDOWN IS IMPORTANT

This is a helpful breakdown to help us quickly place each book in its broader context without needing to know its very specific genre or the specific context it was written. It is important to place each book in its context because then you will not make the mistake, for example, of interpreting the book of Revelation literally when it should be interpreted allegorically. A brief example will suffice.

Revelation 13:1

"And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads."

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Questions to ask yourself on this verse:

- A. Will one day a real, literal beast rise up from the sea, with ten horns and seven heads and ten crowns and a whole lot of names on all of its heads?
- B. Was John (who wrote this) watching the movie Godzilla?
- C. Or is there a deeper, more allegorical / metaphorical meaning behind this passage?

Given that the answer seems to obviously be (C), you begin to understand that Revelation deals with its subject through the use of allegory (picture language). Of course, the real question then begins: *what exactly is the subject it is dealing with?*

The answer to this will come as you develop sound methods of what we call hermeneutics or Bible interpretation, which hopefully this course can introduce you to. But the point is to deal with each book in its own genre and context, while also remembering the overall theme of the Bible.

THE GOAL OF INTERPRETATION

To start, you must come to grips with the goal of interpretation, which is in the form of the question:

What was the original author communicating to the original readers, and how is that applicable to today?

This is called the "author-intended meaning". However, most of us are inclined to look for a "reader-response meaning", which is when we read the work as if it was addressed directly to us.

Note that the *books of the Bible were written for us, but not to us*. (Kevin Gary Smith, *A Practical Guide for Studying God's Word*.) This is a very helpful distinction to remember. Each passage you read has one *meaning* to its original hearers, but it will have several different *applications* for today.

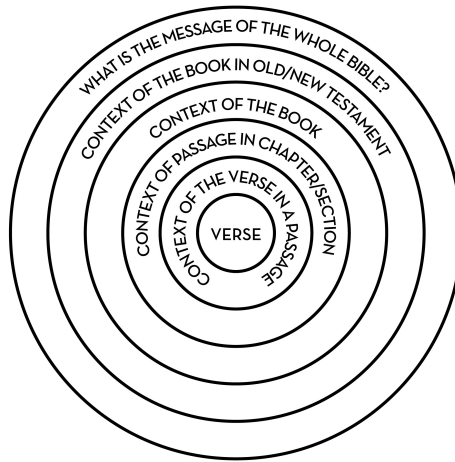
This requires you to understand two keys in any Bible reading that you do:

1. **Understand the context** (who were the original hearers and what did the writer originally mean when they wrote it to them?)
2. **What is the application for today?**

Context is a word you're going to hear a lot about. We've already examined the larger and briefer context of each book of the Bible, but each book has its own context. **And also, each passage has a context within the passage that you must attend to.** You cannot take an isolated text on its own - it must be read and grasped within its larger context.

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This diagram might help:



As you can see, you can't come up with an idea and try and find Biblical support for it. This is called *eisegesis*. That would lead to a false theology and false application. What would the point of that be? It will not be worth anything.

Instead, you have to let the Bible tell you what it is *actually* saying, and build your doctrine that way. This is called *exegesis*. From good doctrine you can find good application, and so live your life according to the truth of God's word.

We will come to more of this later in this course.

What can help you:

In order to understand a context better, you can turn to external helps, but we don't recommend you turn to external helps too quickly. Let the Holy Spirit speak to you in a passage and work with it for awhile by yourself. There is such a thing as the plain meaning of scripture.

But sooner or later, you are going to need help. You can do the following:

A. Get yourself a good study Bible

These often come with a brief introduction to each letter. Read these introductions and come to understand the context of the letter.

B. Use Bible commentaries

Fortunately, more than ever there are free options online. We recommend the following websites: biblegateway.com; biblehub.com.

C. Ask a leader

Your friendly elder at your local church will be only too happy to discuss the Bible with you.

D. Do lots of reading

Especially of books that like to talk about the Bible, such as Michael Eaton's *Preaching Through the Bible* series.

EXERCISE:

We're going to examine three very popular phrases that people in our society love to quote from the Bible. As you look at each of these three (or choose just one), think about:

A. How you think about this verse

B. How others have used this verse

1. "Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matthew 7:1)
2. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13)
3. "God is love." (John 4:16b)

Look these up and examine their immediate and broader context. Write down your thoughts of these verses **apart from any preconceived notions or how others have used or even taught these scriptures.**

Now, how has your mind changed regarding these?

What other examples can you think of?

CHAPTER 3:

Discovering the central application of the Bible

By now you should have come to understand two major keys in reading your Bible better and interpreting what it says.

1. Allow the Bible to transform you. (Approach it with faith).
2. Ask what the original author was communicating to the original readers, and how is that applicable today?

In the previous section we unpacked how to come to grips

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with what the original author was communicating. In this section, we want to look at application.

THE ONE APPLICATION YOU CAN ALWAYS RELY ON

Despite there being several applications, there is always one application you can always rely on. This application points to the entire theme of the Bible, and it is this:

John 6:29

"Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"

For ultimately, this is what the scriptures are revealing in myriad ways. To believe Jesus means we trust Him for salvation through the final judgement. But it also means we trust Him through all the aspects of our lives. We trust what He says, do what He says (as a result of that trust), and trust that He will shape us and form us and guide us and help us and be with us, until the very end.

You get to this by asking this one question:

What does this mean for me if I also have a relationship with God, who is the same yesterday, today, and forever?

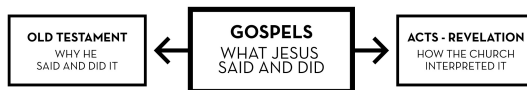
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Jesus Himself said:

John 5:39–40

"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life."

And this is why Jesus has to be your central hermeneutic (start and end point) in all you are doing when reading the Bible. This is why, even though the Bible is traditionally divided into two parts (Old and New Testaments) it is helpful to study the Bible in three parts:



God the Father has revealed Himself through His Word. The Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son, is the "Living Word" and the Bible is the "written Word". If you recall the first section, we dealt more into how this "Living Word" transforms us. The reason why it is "living" is because it is the person of Jesus Himself, transforming us by His Spirit within us, through the words of scripture. The Spirit gives revelation and guides us into all truth, as Jesus promised. (John 16:13.)

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Therefore we read all of the Bible through the lens of Jesus Christ, first revealed in what is called the gospel (good news) accounts - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

What this does not mean:

A. That the other parts of the Bible are not important!

On the contrary, they flesh out the application of what Jesus said and did, or give us a context of understanding why He said and did what He did.

B. That we are, 'What-Jesus-said-and-did-only' people.

Some people choose to only accept the authority of the gospel accounts and not the authority of other forms of scripture, leading to interpretations that are out of sync with what the apostles (who spent time with Jesus and who Jesus taught directly) taught. We are not saying that the gospel accounts have more authority than the other parts of scripture, only that these are the lens from which to look through. This is because it is the message of the gospel—Jesus born, lived, crucified, risen again, ascended to heaven—that is the message that brings life.

Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes."

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And everything else in the Bible explains what this gospel means.

This now will lead into some questions on why we can trust the Bible and what is meant by inspiration and inerrancy.

1. HOW CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

This is a huge question and we can't cover it all here. But we will touch on some basics.

1. Historically speaking, the original text of the Bible is better preserved than many other historical books we take for granted.

We have more copies, and older copies, of ancient manuscripts than we do for any other kind of historical book dating to ancient times. Most people will not dispute the writings of Aristotle or Plato, but yet we have more evidence for the New Testament than we do for those writings. In fact, we have copies of Mark's Gospel which even date to as far back as the third century and we have 14,000 copies of it, as opposed to something like Caesar's *Gallic War* where we have 10 copies that only date to 825 AD.

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2. When Christianity began, certain letters from Paul, Peter, and the gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) began to be seen as canonical (which means the 'rule of faith and truth').

These documents encapsulated what the early Church was mainly teaching, and what Christians all agreed on. By the time Christianity was legalised in Rome (313 AD), Christianity in the East and West had accepted the 27 New Testament books we have today as canonical, which was confirmed at three church councils.

3. The Old Testament books were copied over generations and thousands of years by scribes who would work under very strict circumstances if they made a copy error.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, which are dated to be from 135 BCE to 73 CE (and some to the eleventh century) were incredibly similar to the younger manuscripts we had before their discovery. The differences were very, very minor! The reasonable conclusion is that what we have today has proven to be astonishingly accurate to what the Hebrews would have had in ancient times.

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4. There is also, of course, the testimony of Christians throughout history who have found that the teachings in the Bible are true for life.

They have been true for all cultures, at all times, and have never become irrelevant or outdated. The Bible still manages to provide a true account of human experience and what ails us, and still manages to speak into that experience and provide a true solution: Christ.

Rationally speaking, there is very little reason, if any reason, to dispute the reliability of the Bible. Often such disputes are grounded in conspiracy theories or just unreasonable scepticism.

2. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY REVELATION AND INSPIRATION?

The Bible is of extreme importance since it is the surest, clearest and most detailed account of God's revelation to us concerning His character, salvation plan, and other truth. In the words of Nigel Day-Lewis, *"The Bible is the divinely inspired, infallible and inerrant record of all God's revelation to mankind, and is our final authority in all matters of life and doctrine. It contains everything we need to know for salvation, and nothing can or must ever be subtracted from or added to it."*

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When we speak of 'revelation' and 'inspiration', what we mean is that God, through the Holy Spirit, guided the writers of each of the 66 books of the Bible so that the end result was His Word in their words.

It is inspired, not dictated. It is God's words in the writers' words.

It is very specific revelation. God didn't provide a general inspiration around concepts and left it up to the writers to figure out how to teach those concepts, but was very specific in what topics should be covered and how—usually by using real-life situations that the writers themselves had to deal with. Even the very genres used were God's plan from the beginning.

3. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INERRANCY?

a. The scriptures are without error in their original form. Sometimes, translation errors might occur from the original Hebrew or Greek into English or other languages. Translating the meaning of a word from one language into another is often difficult. The Hebrew language is very nuanced, ancient Greek is very basic, and new discoveries in linguistics are happening all the time; plus the English sentence has to make sense to an English reader!

Therefore, inerrancy does not mean that our English Bibles won't have very minor discrepancies here and there, but

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often footnotes and study materials are provided for the reader to understand (this is why a Study Bible is a good idea) and the 'problems' are not major doctrinal issues of faith.

In the ancient times, the scriptures were copied by hand in order to preserve them. Sometimes there were copy errors, but they were minor. This is why, when new ancient manuscripts are found, it's a big deal. When the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, which are now the oldest copies of the Old Testament we have today, it confirmed how astonishingly reliable the copies of the Old Testament we had up to that time actually were. There were some spelling variations, but no actual variation in basic Bible doctrine.

b. The scriptures are without error, taking into account the genre of each book. For example, Psalms is a book of song and poetry; Proverbs a book of wisdom; Genesis a mix of several genres; Revelation is an apocryphal book (it uses picture language).

Biblical inerrancy is not Biblical literalism. In other words, not every book is to be taken literally. This means that the beginning of Genesis, for example, is not trying to provide a formula for physics but is conveying to us who God is and why there is sin in the world. We form our doctrine from the Genesis account but not necessarily our science. Likewise, we don't get our doctrine from science! This doesn't mean science and faith are at odds, only that we know where to go with the right questions.

c. It is inerrant in revealing God and salvation. The scrip-

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tures are revealing what we need to know about salvation and God. They do not reveal everything about the universe and time and space, or even everything about God—only what we need to know.

God has left a great deal of exploring and discovering of His created universe up to us because He created us to discover all He created! *It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out.* (Proverbs 25:2.)

Science and scepticism

The doctrine of the inerrancy of scripture frequently comes under attack from sceptical quarters who place science above revelation in all matters.

'Inerrant' means that it is incapable of being wrong and it has the highest authority in the believer's life. **It is not scripture that is subject to us, but we are subject to scripture.**

It's worth noting that Christians should not have a problem with science at all, and frequently faith and science actually work together very well. There is no reason to worry when scientific theories appear to be contradicting the Bible. It's usually true that either:

- A. The scientific theory is wrong. Sceptics would have us believe science is never wrong, but science itself

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makes no such claim. It does not claim to cover every aspect of human experience and knowledge, and science claims to expect that it will change.

OR

- B. The way we have been reading that particular portion of scripture is incorrect which usually becomes more clear as we study it.

The best thing to do is be patient, study the scriptures, get to know the science a bit better, and let God lead you to a reasonable conclusion.

EXERCISE

Read Genesis 3.

What does this portion of scripture in the Old Testament tell you about Jesus? Think also about why He did what He did and why He said what He said. Write your answer down and share it.

CHAPTER 4:

Exegesis - Your Best Friend

In this section we want to provide you with one of the most powerful tools of reading the Bible - what is called EXEGESIS.

Don't let the word scare you. Its actually not difficult to understand.

***Exegesis* means to draw out the meaning from a text in accordance with its context and discoverable (plain) meaning of its author.** In other words, you seek to read what it actually says, rather than presume what it says or read INTO what it says.

It's often good to understand it by knowing its opposite, which

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is EISEGESIS. This refers to reading *into* the text a preconceived idea or notion of your own. You bring your own prejudice, bias, agenda, presuppositions, and so on to the text.

Obviously, if you do that, you will run into trouble. Rather than reading what the Bible says, you will be reading what you WANT it to say. There will be no transformation in that! You might as well go read a book of fiction and form your life on that!

Learning to do exegesis is a little like learning to drive. It's slow and deliberate as you begin, but as time goes on you will do it quite naturally.

THE FIRST KEY

The first key to proper exegesis—to always reading what the text is saying—**is remember to make it Christ-centred.** In other words, anything that leads you away from Christ and toward Man (or, of course, the devil) is not of God. We have covered this in our course up until now.

THE SECOND KEY

We must understand the purpose of the Bible, which is to reveal God's character and His plan of salvation to us, and

transform us through this Word to be more like Him in character. We have covered this in our course up to now.

THE THIRD KEY

The third key involves using scripture to interpret scripture. While the Bible contains 66 books of different genres, written in different times and places and contexts, and with different authors, it is a remarkably consistent book. Therefore, if you can find the same theme or idea or doctrine in other parts of scripture, you are uncovering the truth of the matter, rather than just guessing.

Exegesis is not something you learn by knowing, but by doing. Let us therefore conduct an exercise from the book of Genesis.

EXEGESIS IN GENESIS

Genesis 1: 1–3

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 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.

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"And God said, Let there be light, and there was light."

Now, verse 27:

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

Question: When you read these words, what truth do you take away from them? Write down your answers.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

In this one verse of scripture, there are several areas being addressed:

- A. God as creator (we are not the result of random chance, some cosmic fight between gods, or the seeding of aliens.)
- B. God creates through the power of His words
- C. God created us in His image
- D. Male and female, together, reflects this image of God

Each of these four (and maybe you've found another) are deep messages in the Bible that uncover marvelous truths. One of them will more than likely scratch where you itch. For example, if you're going through some marriage trouble or are thinking of marriage, (D) will be a fantastic Bible study.

WHAT WE'LL STUDY NOW:

In order to help you with the differences between exegesis and eisegesis, and to further explore the main topic of this course (the Word of God and its power), we will be examining a popular doctrine taught from Genesis 1 today.

The doctrine addresses (B) above and its logic works in this way (first read the scripture again and then follow the logic):

1. God spoke, and through the power of His words, the world and universe were created.
2. Therefore, God's words have power
3. This power includes the ability to create, to change and transform, to bring chaos into order, and to create resources etc.
4. God made Man in His own image
5. Therefore, Man's words have power
6. This power includes the ability to create, to change and transform, to bring chaos into order, and to create resources etc.

CONCLUSION:

Your words have power.

APPLICATION:

Positive words will bring positive results. Negative words will bring negative results. You must therefore speak positive words over others and yourself in order to see positive results in your life. If you speak negative words, you put curses on your life and that of others.

This seems like a logical conclusion and application from Genesis, but is it correct? And is it an example of exegesis or eisegesis?

a. Write down what you think initially

b. How have you come to this conclusion?

Perhaps you didn't write down anything for(a)because you hadn't come to a conclusion yet! Great. So let's come to a conclusion.

If you have studied this before and have a conclusion, do the exercise anyway so that you have a documented reason for your conclusion.

A PROCESS TO HELP YOU:

1. **Pray.** Ask the Holy Spirit to help you. Never approach scripture and its study as an intellectual exercise alone! Converse with God as you study scripture.

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2. **Context:** As you read scripture, remember the five "W's" and one "H" of journalism. These will help you understand a context.

These are: **WHAT, WHY, WHERE, WHO, WHEN, HOW?**

Remember this technique - it's vital when you read scripture.

WHAT is being said?

WHY is it being said?

WHERE is it being said, or did it take place?

WHO is involved?

WHEN was it said?

HOW is it being said?

Write down your answers to these questions in light of the scripture above.

3. **Observe:** Observe your own reaction to this passage. What's going on in this passage, and what's going on with you as you read it?

Ask yourself: What doesn't make sense? What doesn't sit right with me? Why is that word, phrase, or paragraph there? Does something seem odd or out of place? Who is that person and for what reason is he or she there?

Remember this technique - it's vital when you read scrip-

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ture.

4. **Look.** Look at other scriptures which address the topic we're talking about. Remember, scripture interprets scripture. So for our example, where else is the power of words mentioned? Where else is creation mentioned? Where else does the Bible speak of God's image? These are vast topics.

Here are some tools to help:

A. Your own reading and memory. Perhaps there is a verse you remember, but don't know where to find it? Look it up using the next three methods.

B. The old-school way is to use a chain-reference Bible. This has pages at the back that lists specific topics in alphabetical order, and then links together scriptures that use this topic. In this case look up words and see what you find. Or look up a word in a scripture you remember.

C. The new-school way is to use the Internet or a Bible app. You could simply Google scriptures about the power of words or use the topical index function at a reputable website like biblegateway.org. You can also try bible.org, biblehub.com. Here you can also look up some key phrases from any scripture you remember. Write these scriptures down and come back to them.

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D. You can do old-school in a new-school way, by buying an electronic version of a chain-reference Bible (or buying one in an app such as the Olive Tree Bible app).

5. **Meditate.** To meditate means simply to think about something deeply, regularly, chew on it, and come back to it again and again through various means.

This does not refer to Eastern meditation. The word "meditate" has more than one meaning. You might think of it to simply let the words become so important to you that you spend a lot of dedicated time thinking about it, and come back to it regularly. It's important to note that Eastern meditation is about emptying your mind through silence and techniques, while Christian meditation is about *filling* your mind with God's Word and truth. If you ever encounter anything that claims to be Christian but tells you to empty your mind, you are not encountering something Christian.

Psalm 119 shows how David meditated upon scripture—he says he will talk about it, sing it, hear it, read it, day and night and always, and think of nothing but God's Word. The Hebrew words for meditation refer to speaking, humming, musing, muttering, murmuring, and even groaning. It means it becomes something of an obsession.

So meditate on this scripture and what it is you uncover. Keep talking to God about it and let the Holy Spirit be part of this process in your heart.

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Go through this exercise and write your answers down. These can be discussed the next time you meet as a group. If you're not going through this book with a group, then please go through this exercise before looking at the next section. This is important for your own growth in using the Bible better.

CHAPTER 5:

Exegesis Step-By-Step

In our previous section we outlined an exercise in exegesis. We provided some tools to help you come to a conclusion.

Discuss the conclusion with your group and let's hear what everyone found!

In this section, we're going to go through the process as briefly as possible. It's great doing this as a group. If you found this difficult or are not sure about your conclusion, this is to help you along.

A. QUESTIONS TO ASK OF THE PRESENTED DOCTRINE USING OUR THREE KEYS:

1. Is it Christ-centred?
2. Does it reveal God's character and salvation?
3. Is it anywhere else in the Bible?

ANSWERS TO THESE QUESTIONS

To answer (1) and (2), we have to use (3). This is because other scriptures will make it clear as to whether this doctrine is a revelation of God's salvation and character, and if ultimately it is about Jesus.

In that case, we may find some scriptures to back this claim up. As mentioned before, here are some of the ways you could find these:

A. Your own reading and memory. Perhaps there is a verse you remember, but don't know where to find it? Look it up using the next three methods. Remember, the more you read and listen to the Bible, the better your own memory of it will become!

B. The old-school way is to use a chain-reference Bible. This has pages at the back that lists specific topics in alphabetical order, and then links together scriptures that use this

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topic. In this case look up “words” and see what you find. Or look up a word in a scripture you remember.

C. The new-school way is to use the Internet or a Bible app. You could simply Google “scriptures about the power of words” or use the topical index function at a reputable website like biblegateway.org. You can also try bible.org, biblehub.com. Here you can also look up some key phrases from any scripture you remember. Write these scriptures down and come back to them.

D. You can do old-school in a new-school way, by buying an electronic version of a chain-reference Bible (or buying one in an app such as the Olive Tree Bible app).

For our purposes, we’re going to bring out three verses that are usually used to support the conclusion and application listed in the previous section about the power of words. There are many more, but these ones are quite common. These are:

Proverbs 12:6

“The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers them.”

Proverbs 18:21

“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

James 3:2

"For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle His whole body."

QUESTION: do these three scriptures, *in their context*, support the doctrine? Go look at these scriptures in their context and write down your answer.

EXAMINING GENRE

It would make no sense to use a book of love poetry to understand the science behind boiling an egg. That is why, as we've said, you have to approach each book in the Bible with at least some understanding of its genre. Is it a letter? Is it a book of history? Is it a book of songs?

In this case, what is Proverbs? It is a book of many sayings of wisdom. It ultimately tells you how to live "the good life" on earth, using your common sense. For example, it is common sense to not speed and drive recklessly on the highway. If you do, you take your life (and others) into your own hands. You heighten your odds of having an accident. Therefore, what is the wise thing to do? Drive safely and in the speed limit.

Of course, you cannot take driving safely and within the speed limit as a *guarantee* that an accident won't happen. Something could happen that's out of your control. That's why

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Proverbs does not give guarantees (and you should not treat it as if it does). It gives you general wisdom, but it does not always take into account the many other variables that could happen. That is why the Bible also includes the book of Job (which deals with tragedy) and Ecclesiastes (which looks at things from a more negative angle).

Therefore, we understand that Proverbs does not always tell the whole story. But if we examine the context in Proverbs 12:6 and 18:21, quoted above, what do we find? **Go through the scriptures line by line and see what you come out with in the end. Please don't continue to go through this section until you have done so yourself.**

If you don't have a Bible on you right now, you can use these pasted scriptures below:

Proverbs 12, from verse 5 - 8 [NIV]

"5 The thoughts of the righteous are just; the counsels of the wicked are deceitful.

6 The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright delivers them.

7 The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand.

8 A man is commended according to his good sense, but one of twisted mind is despised."

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Proverbs 18, from verse 18 - 24 [NIV]

"18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud.

20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord.

21 The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.

22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly.

23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips.

24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body."

Can you get the sense of what these scriptures are about?

Write down your answers before continuing!

ANSWERS

In case you missed it, here is some help from Proverbs 18.

18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. [Dealing with the heart]

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19 It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud. [Dealing with the heart]

20 Whoever gives thought to the word will discover good, and blessed is he who trusts in the Lord. [Dealing with the heart and the mind and thoughtful speech.]

However, at this point you ought to stop and ask one question. Is this dealing with our words, or with God's Word, or the words of others in our relationships? It would be wise to use a resource that uncovers the original language (Hebrew, in this case). You might require a Strong's Concordance or you can look it up on the Internet. Biblehub.com has a great interlinear resource. (This means it shows the English and Hebrew side-by-side. Clicking on the Hebrew word shows its meaning and other references for it.)

Alternatively, you could also look it up in multiple translations and get a gist for how other translators have worked this out for you. In this way, you will note that the word for "word" in the translation above is *dabar*. (Strong's reference 1697.) This means "word", "talk", or "thing" in Hebrew. Sometimes it refers to the Divine Word, and sometimes not. This would require deeper study and our space is limited here. At any rate, the context of the passage makes us lean into saying that this is about simply thinking carefully about the words you speak.

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21 The wise of heart is called discerning, and sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness. [A good heart produces sweet, kind, persuasive speech]

22 Good sense is a fountain of life to him who has it, but the instruction of fools is folly. [Foolish instruction - speech - is useless, because it comes from a fool. You ought to get for yourself good sense.]

23 The heart of the wise makes his speech judicious and adds persuasiveness to his lips. [Again, from the heart comes judicious, persuasive speech]

24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body. [This is about gracious, kind speech towards others.]

In both cases, we see that the scriptures are addressing firstly the heart and then the mind, and making the case that those with good hearts and a sound mind will produce gracious, kind, thoughtful and persuasive speech. You won't be quick with an opinion! Rather, you will think your words over before speaking. And if you do so, you will get great results.

But it also should make us ask the question: how do I get such a heart? The answer: Jesus!

Do these scriptures support the doctrine we have been addressing, or do they say something else? Write down your answers.

LOOKING AT JAMES

It's now time to address our quote from James. Let us see it in context:

James 3

"3 Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. 2 For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body. 3 If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. 4 Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. 5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things.

"How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. 9 With

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it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. 10 From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so. 11 Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? 12 Can a fig tree, my brothers, bear olives, or a grapevine produce figs? Neither can a salt pond yield fresh water."

What do we see here? Before continuing, write down your own observations. Then look at these:

- A. This is in the context of *teaching*. In other words, false *teaching* is what James has in mind. (See verse 1.)
- B. James makes the point that the tongue cannot be controlled, but ends off with saying a spring cannot produce both fresh and salt water. What does that mean?
- C. We can use other scripture to uncover its meaning. In fact, it lines up perfectly to when Jesus said, A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.
- D. The point, then, of this scripture is to show that the heart and mind of a person *must change before the tongue can change*.
- E. We know that the gospel is what changes the heart, because the Holy Spirit convicts and comes to live in the believer.

F. Therefore, what we need is the gospel—and, as Christians, we need to put more faith in Christ to change our hearts, so that our tongues will reflect His nature and image properly.

SEEING THE WHOLE PICTURE OF SCRIPTURE

If we now look at scripture as a whole we find that this theme of the heart and mind is everywhere. Once the heart is addressed the mind will change, and then once that happens our speech will change, because we become people of love toward others. It is only in Christ that true and lasting change will happen.

Is there more we can unpack here? Yes. **There is another theme with regards to words that we have to look at. For it showcases the Christ-centred nature of the Bible.**

WHERE ELSE DOES THE BIBLE SPEAK OF CREATION?

This should have surely been one of your questions as you went through this exercise. Perhaps you've thought of it and discovered it already.

John 1:1–5; 9–14

“1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made

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through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. 4 In him was life, and the life was the light of men. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

"9 The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. 12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

"14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth."

Remember, we want to be Jesus centred and understand that the New Testament sheds light on the Old Testament. With that in mind, what amazing truth does this highlight, when we think of it in light of Genesis 1?

Putting the two together, we get an amazing picture of the authority of Jesus. He is the very Word that created it all! It is through God's Word that He created, and it is now through His Word that He recreates—that He makes us new creatures, makes us born again, and sustains us. As His Word created male and female "in His image", so His Word re-

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creates us into His image, conforming us to the image of Christ.

That Word is coming to you as you read and hear the scriptures, study it, and let it do its work. This is why we say the Spirit and Word work together. In the Word you will find the Spirit, and the Spirit will lead you to the Word. **Therefore, when He speaks through His Word, and you hear His Word and believe it, you change!**

And this is a very different conclusion to the original premise presented, isn't it?

EXAMINING THE CONCLUSIONS:

Let us remind ourselves of the conclusion and application from Genesis 1 that we were presented with and that we are studying to find if it's true.

PRESENTED CONCLUSION:

Your words have power.

PRESENTED APPLICATION:

Positive words will bring positive results. Negative words will bring negative results. Speak positive words over your-

self and others. If you speak negative words, negative things will happen.

Now, having done the study as above, write down your own observations on this conclusion and application of Genesis 1.

THIS EXAMPLE SHOWCASES HELPFUL THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. **Eisegesis means you read your own conclusions into a scripture.** Exegesis means you draw the conclusion out of it yourself. The presented conclusion was an example of eisegesis, because it is arrived at through a presupposed idea and notion of the Bible. Many people approach the Bible as a book of rules or techniques to make themselves into something; to find some kind of self-glory. Meanwhile, the gospel says God makes us into who He wants, through the work of Christ. Eisegesis frequently brings psychological helps, false theology and teaching, and even some of our hopes into the text, but ultimately brings a false conclusion. In this case, we might bring our belief in positive psychology to the text. (Positive psychology is not evil, but it must have its place. Start with scripture and then examine psychology in its light.) Or we might bring previously held superstitions about blessing and cursing to the text. When we approach scripture we cannot read

psychology or some other belief into the scripture and come out with a conclusion we like. Rather, we must deal with the text as it is. Otherwise we are led to false theology which leads to false application, and therefore it does not lead to life but to death.

2. **Logic does not always equate to truth.** The idea that being made in the image of God means that our words carry the same amount of power may be *logical*, but it is not *Biblical*. It does not carry through to the whole of scripture and its themes. One can create a logical argument to justify sin or infanticide or any idea, to be quite honest. Logic is not the answer to truth, its only one tool to help come to a reasonable conclusion.
3. **The presented conclusion and application exalts Man and Man's authority and does not exalt Christ and His ultimate sovereignty.** It is obviously Man-centred and not Christ-centred. We saw this by looking at the overarching theme of scripture around the tongue and speech and then noted the central nature of Jesus in creation, and how the Word has the power to change us. The Bible is Christ-centred. Anything that is not must be scrutinised heavily. If it is not about Jesus first, it is suspect.

Therefore, the presented conclusion is false teaching. And the application of the false teaching is also false.

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The application of this teaching is known as "positive confession" in Christian circles. While the Bible affirms that being a positive *person* is better than being a negative one, as negativity cycles into cynicism and other dangers, it does not scare us into believing that every word we say will bring either a curse or a blessing over us. This is not a liveable theology. Sooner or later, you will fail at it. It creates superstitious Christians who cannot be honest about their situations or surroundings, in the belief that if they say something negative they can bring a curse on themselves. The ultimate conclusion is that God is not all-powerful, but that everything is up to us and how self-controlled we are with our tongue. In fact, the application of this teaching is more on the lines of the idea of *karma* than Christian grace.

However, it's important to remember that our words do have power, but not the kind of power in mind from the conclusion. **The lesson here is to note that false teaching is not always completely wrong, it is often half-true. And therein lies its danger.** False teaching is often subtle and brings in enough truth to be believable. This is why it is so dangerous, pervasive, and often difficult to deal with.

In this case, the truth is that what our words *can* do damage. Our words can break people down, create anarchy and confusion, destroy relationships, and cause chaos and confusion. However, this is all in the context of *relationships*. Our words cannot bring health and wealth to us. You do not speak magical words into the air and see things happen, unless you live in the world of Harry Potter. While a

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positive attitude may correlate to us having better health, it is not the same as saying that by positively confessing over yourself every morning and evening that you will not go bald or that God is going to make you wealthy. You cannot positively confess situations away. Most of your situations require you to make decisions and choices that are either in line with scripture or not. You cannot avoid responsibility for your actions, or avoid the tough things about life, by trying to confess good things over your life.

CHAPTER 6:

How to Have God's Word Live in You

Colossians 3:16

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

It would be foolish to learn how to know the Bible better and yet never get to the point where it makes a change to your life. The whole point of getting to know the Bible is to have it live and work in you, and perform what God set it out to do—to renew your mind, to conform you to Christ's image, to sanctify you and transform you.

HOW TO HAVE GOD'S WORD LIVE IN YOU

John 17:17

"Sanctify them by your truth. Your Word is truth."

It is God's Word that, literally, sanctifies you. It makes you more like Jesus.

In the first part of this course we highlighted that God's Word is living and active, and the Bible is a book that transforms its reader. You could say that the Holy Spirit lives in the Words of God, and when those Words are in you, the Holy Spirit does His Work.

According to the scriptures, Jesus Himself is the Word, and the Word is God. We have seen this in John 1 several times in this course. It is indeed a beautiful mystery. It cannot be explained in full and finite detail. All that we know is that when God speaks, His words accomplish things.

Isaiah 55:10-11

"10 For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11 so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."

In Genesis we see all of creation is spoken into existence by God's own words. As God's Word created all that there is, so

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God's Word creates new life in you, a believer in Jesus. It is significant that Jesus spoke to diseases and illnesses in the gospels, as this highlights His authority as the Word. In fact, it is the Word of Christ that brings revelation of the gospel.

Romans 10:17

"So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

This does not mean that the Bible is a fourth member of the Trinity, or that the Spirit is limited to the Bible alone. As Romans 10:17 shows us, in its context, it is about hearing. We aren't simply referring to reading the Bible in this instance. We are referring to hearing it preached and proclaimed, and hearing the main message of the Bible—Christ and Him crucified, raised again, ascended—that brings life. You could say that God works through His message, the message of faith in Christ as the means of salvation. That message is found in the Bible. The more you come to know the Bible intimately, the more you can actually see it, and the more it does its work in and through you.

HIDING THE WORD IN YOUR HEART

Psalms 119:9–12

"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word. With my whole

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heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander
from Your commandments! Your word I have hid-
den in my heart, that I might not sin against You.
“Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes.”

It would be good to remember that the Hebrew word for 'law' (*Torah*) sometimes refers to the actual books of the Law, and sometimes is a more loose word that simply means “God's whole teaching”. In this way, we are able to interpret the Old Testament Psalm through the lens of the New Testament, understanding that the thrust of God's teaching is salvation “to the uttermost” (Hebrews 7:25) by faith alone through Christ alone. If this Word of salvation is hidden in our hearts, it works wonders!

We want to teach you a very basic method that helps you to hide the Word in your heart, as Psalm 119 above says. If you do this, you will open yourself to God's Spirit in transforming you and sanctifying you. Of this method, Luther said:

“I want you to know how to study theology in the right way. I have practiced this method myself. The method of which I am speaking is the one which the holy king David teaches in Psalm 119. Here you will find three rules. They are frequently proposed throughout the psalm and run thus: *Ora-tio, meditatio, tentatio* (prayer, meditation, trial).”

In this course we have tried to be clear that our study of scripture is under-girded by *prayer*, and we have examined

ways to *meditate* on the scripture. However, it is now to the last part we briefly turn to - *trial*.

WRESTLING WITH SCRIPTURE

As you continue to let scripture become your first and final authority, you will find yourself entering an interesting struggle that can be described as "wrestling". You wrestle with God and what scripture is doing to you. You wrestle with temptations that will come your way. You wrestle with guilt and even anxiety caused by the Word when you realise something in your life needs to change. But then you find the gospel in the Word, and you find peace.

In speaking of this, Luther said that:

"This is the touchstone which teaches you not only to know and understand, but also to experience how right, how true, how sweet, how lovely, how mighty, how comforting God's Word is, wisdom beyond all wisdom."

One thinks of Genesis 32, where Jacob wrestles with an angel all night, and then is renamed "Israel". In the morning, the angel displaces his hip, and Jacob walks with a limp for the rest of his life.

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Scripture will do that to you. It will tear down your pride. It will make you deal with the difficult things of life. It will bring tension into your life you never had to deal with before. You will be faced with having to make decisions that before might have been easy, but now are difficult, as you realise your ways are not God's ways. There are things in the scripture that will concern you, bug you, make you wonder about God and life.

But then it will always come and delight you, make you happy, and comfort you. It will tell you what life is really like, and then bring you comfort and peace, as you rest in God and know that all is in His hands. It will take you through the wilderness, but it will always bring you to the Promised Land in the end. You will realise that despite all, the Lamb wins.

TWO THINGS GOD'S WORD WILL DO

To make this a bit more easier to understand, it's good to remember that God's Word always presents to you two realities.

1. The Law

As you come to know God's Will and Ways through the Bible, you will become more aware of your own sinfulness, your own falling short of the mark, and how humankind falls short

of God's glory and purposes. You will find pain in realising that you do not live up to the standard. You will find guilt. It is in this way that scripture functions as a mirror (James 1:23). It shows you what you look like, and you might be tempted to look away and ignore what it says, because the pain of dealing with it is too much.

2. The gospel

But it is then that we run to God for our salvation—for our justification and sanctification before Him! We realise that we are always meant to be found in Christ, and rely on His work and His Spirit. As we realise our own falling short, we put our faith ever deeper into Christ. And this is the point: the pain of realising who we really are and the presumptuousness of our techniques and methods and little spiritualities to get favour with God; the self-righteousness of all our actions; will make us realise that it is *whose* we are that counts! And if we belong to Christ, who we really are is no longer a sinful human being, but a new creation! As a Christian you live in God's grace!

2 Corinthians 5:17

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come."

Romans 6:6,7

"6 We know that our old man was crucified with [Jesus] so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 (For someone who has died has been freed from sin.)"

It is in this tension that your faith will be tested. The devil will come to test, but Jesus has defeated the devil and all his works! (1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14.) As you meditate upon scripture, again and again, God's grace will come to you—and it is this grace that will energise your life toward love for others; toward a love that looks like Christ. It is through God's forgiveness that we forgive; through His unconditional love that we love; through His gentleness to us that we are gentle to others; through His truth proclaimed to us that we proclaim Truth in love; and so on. Grace builds upon grace.

You will be tempted to disbelieve this gospel. You will find yourself going back to your own works and trying to build up your own righteousness, rather than rely on the righteousness of Christ. The voice of the devil will come at you in myriad ways to draw you away from the truth of the Bible and convince you of this world's philosophies and ways of life. But only God's truth will set you free. Jesus is the only Way, Truth, and Life. As you fall into temptation, and the despair that will come of doing so, you run to Jesus all the more! You get His Word into you and you live in it! You meditate on the Word all the more! You let the gospel become your

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life. You put more faith in Jesus. For,

"If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died more than that, who was raised who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

"No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:31b-39.)

While many spiritual techniques promise to give you peace, the fact is that the Bible doesn't require you to exercise spiritual techniques to find peace and rest: it requires you to

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simply put yourself in the firing line of God's Word already spoken, already given, and given *to you* and *for you*. If you remember anything from this course, simply remember to let the Bible happen *to you*. Let it become your guide. Believe what it says—that Christ died for *you*. And that is how it goes from words on a page to living words, dividing bone and marrow (Hebrews 4:12) and conforming you to the image of Christ (Romans 8:29).

Deuteronomy 30:11–14

"For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. 12 It is not in heaven, that you should say, Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? 13 Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it? 14 But the Word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

