

# Something More

*Pursuing a Deeper  
Relationship with God*



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*Pursuing a Deeper  
Relationship with God*

By Kristi Houser

*Something More* Teacher's Manual  
Pursuing a Deeper Relationship with God  
Written by Kristi Houser

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## Dear Teacher,

My team and I wanted to share with you how this study came to be. Recently Positive Action for Christ produced a yearlong Bible study titled *Mighty Men*. As I read *Mighty Men*, a study for young men on the spiritual disciplines, I was so captivated by its message that I knew it deserved a counterpart for young women. Little did I know that a year after I first made this suggestion to our editor, he would assign the task to me and give me a team of ladies to work alongside me.

The team started with a surplus of ideas—which could easily have been made into five studies or more—and then started whittling away until we had the core of what we wanted. We decided that our study would not only mirror *Mighty Men* in its structure, it would also mirror its content.

First, we started with Jesus' words from Mark 12:30 about loving God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. Then we classified the spiritual disciplines according to where we believed they fit best among those descriptions. This is, in fact, how the order of the lessons was determined. Next, we conducted a survey with teenage girls from churches in our area to give us an idea of their perceived needs. The results astounded us. While many of them claimed that they knew God “pretty well” and wanted to know Him “very well,” their own questions betrayed them. Questions like: Is God real? Does God really see me? Does God really hear me when I pray? Does God really communicate with me? Does God really have a plan for my life? The word “really” used repeatedly expressed their sense of disbelief, and their questions revealed a disconnect between head knowledge and heart knowledge.

Seeing this disconnect and knowing that these surveys represented the hearts' cries of believing, churching teenagers broke our hearts. As a team, we realized that this study must be about so much more than just the spiritual disciplines. In fact, the disciplines themselves are just that—disciplines. They are a means to an end, not the end themselves. None of us needs one more thing to check off of a list or a formula for spiritual growth. What we need is a relationship with God—one that is vibrant and alive. Once God Himself reveals to us that He is real, that He really does see, hear, and communicate with us, and that He really does have a plan for us, everything changes. The disconnect vanishes.

That being said, our deepest desire for this study is not simply to add to your students' head knowledge but to connect to their hearts. Our prayer is that the “something more” they've been looking for may be found in a deeply rooted relationship with a very real and personal God.

May God bless you and your students as you journey together through this study.

Kristi Houser and the PAFC Team (Paula, Michelle, Christa, and Tracy)



# Preface

## Course Objectives

	The students will...
Studying Scripture (Part 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize God’s primary design for the Bible—to reveal God to us</li> <li>• Discover how seeing God as He is changes their perspective</li> <li>• Appreciate the Bible’s uniqueness</li> </ul>
Studying Scripture (Part 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study God in the Bible, rather than simply studying the Bible</li> <li>• Look for God in every passage and verse they read</li> <li>• Draw conclusions about God’s character and ways from the passages they study</li> </ul>
Meditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine what biblical meditation is not</li> <li>• Define biblical meditation</li> <li>• Explore some of the reasons believers should meditate</li> <li>• Identify practical ways to make meditation part of their daily lives</li> </ul>
Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize the importance of prayer</li> <li>• Follow Jesus’ pattern of prayer</li> <li>• Explore the Bible’s teaching about prayer</li> <li>• Implement some of the practical suggestions outlined in the lesson</li> </ul>
Journaling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record their prayers, praises, and special verses in a prayer journal</li> <li>• Remind themselves of what God has done</li> <li>• Reflect upon what God has done</li> <li>• Share with others what God has done</li> </ul>
Memorization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine some of the reasons why memorizing Scripture is important</li> <li>• Memorize Scripture on their own, following the basic steps of memorization</li> <li>• Choose a memorization method that suits their unique learning style</li> </ul>
Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study reasons that believers should make learning a priority</li> <li>• Familiarize themselves with basic tools that aid in learning</li> <li>• Explore ways to get started with learning</li> </ul>
Fellowship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contrast our modern concept of fellowship with the true meaning of biblical fellowship</li> <li>• Explore the reasons that we need fellowship as believers</li> <li>• Take steps toward building godly relationships that reflect true fellowship</li> </ul>
Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examine both why and how they should serve</li> <li>• Explore the definition, purpose, and use of the spiritual gifts</li> <li>• Determine their function in the body of Christ and start using their spiritual gifts</li> </ul>

## **Features in the Teacher’s Manual**

### **Lesson objectives**

Key concepts to be taught in the lesson

### **Introduction**

A note of encouragement to prepare the teacher’s heart before each lesson

### **Student outline**

A duplicate of the outline in the Student Manual with answers filled in

### **Session notes**

In-depth information following the points of the outline in the Student Manual

### **What we’ve learned**

A quick summary of the main points contained in the lesson

### **Questions for review**

Questions for group review, quizzes, or games

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## **Features in the Student Manual**

### **Story**

A modern day narrative bridging the needs and spiritual disciplines

### **Session notes (outline)**

An outline with blanks for the students to fill in containing the main points to be covered in the lecture

### **What we’ve learned**

A quick summary of the main points contained in the lesson

### **Additional sections**

Extra sections that further expound on the lesson

### **This month’s assignment**

Monthly homework for practicing the spiritual disciplines

### **Devotional passages**

Select passages of Scripture for use with the devotional format

### **Scriptural letter**

Personalized letter written from God’s perspective adapted from the monthly devotional passages studied

## Teaching Strategy

### Partner Study

This study has been designed as a counterpart to *Mighty Men*, a study for young men on the spiritual disciplines. Because of their structure, these two studies can be taught simultaneously by splitting your boys and girls into separate groups.

### Dual Components of This Study

#### Spiritual disciplines

Though there are many spiritual disciplines that could have been included in this study, we have chosen the eight that we thought were the most basic—studying Scripture (broken into two parts), meditation, prayer, journaling, Scripture memorization, learning, fellowship, and service. Each month's lesson centers on one of these disciplines. After a new discipline has been presented, students will practice that discipline throughout the month, as well as review the other disciplines that they have already learned.

#### Needs

In addition to teaching students about the spiritual disciplines, this study also addresses the common questions of many teenagers today—Is God real? Does God really see me? Does God really care? Does God really hear me when I pray? Does God really communicate with me? Why is life so hard? What can I do to know God better? Why does God allow bad things to happen? Does God really want to use me? The answers to these questions—truths of who God is and what He is really like—will build the foundation of your students' faith.

### Suggested Schedule

This study contains nine lessons to be taught on a monthly basis over the course of nine months—roughly the length of a school year. Based on your group's needs, you may determine if meeting once a month is sufficient.

If meeting once a month seems too infrequent, consider meeting on the off-weeks to review, share what God has been teaching you, and pray together. This will give your students a chance to experience true biblical fellowship, getting to know each other on a much more personal level.



## Suggested Formats

### Once-a-Month Format

#### Monthly Meeting (Suggested Length: 2½ Hours)

- ✧ **Review.** Use short quizzes, Q&A's, or games to review concepts from the previous lesson.
- ✧ **Share.** Have students share what they learned through their devotions the previous month.
- ✧ **Bridge.** Read or act out the story to introduce the new spiritual discipline.
- ✧ **Teach.** Have students fill in the outline in their Student Manual as you teach the lesson.
- ✧ **Explain.** Discuss the next month's homework assignment.
- ✧ **Pray.** Share prayer requests and pray for one another, either in pairs or as a group.

### Weekly Format

#### Monthly Meeting (Suggested Length: 2 Hours)

- ✧ **Review.** Use short quizzes, Q&A's, or games to review concepts from the previous lesson.
- ✧ **Share.** Have students share what they learned through their devotions the previous week.
- ✧ **Bridge.** Read or act out the story to introduce the new spiritual discipline.
- ✧ **Teach.** Have students fill in the outline in their Student Manual as you teach the lesson.
- ✧ **Explain.** Discuss the next month's homework assignment.
- ✧ **Pray.** Share prayer requests and pray for one another, either in pairs or as a group.

#### In-Between Meetings (Suggested Length: 1½ Hours)

- ✧ **Review.** Play comprehensive games to review concepts learned throughout the year.
- ✧ **Share.** Have students share what they learned through their devotions the previous week(s).
- ✧ **Pray.** Share prayer requests and pray for one another, either in pairs or as a group.



## LESSON 1

# Studying Scripture (Part 1)

## Lesson Objectives

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The students will...

- \* Recognize God's primary design for the Bible—to reveal God to us
- \* Discover how seeing God as He is changes their perspective
- \* Appreciate the Bible's uniqueness

## Introduction

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Do you remember the first time you realized that God was real—I mean, really real? For me, it was at age 14. Disappointed by every failed attempt to fill my nagging emptiness, disillusioned by the hypocrisy I'd seen in the church, and weary from the turbulence of my short life, I cried out to God, "If You are real, do something." I had no idea what I was even asking for; I just knew that something had to change. God's swift answer to that prayer of desperation altered the course of my life. When God engaged my heart with His love, showing me that He was real and that He really did care about me, everything changed.

What about you? If you and I could talk in person, you would probably tell me a similar story of how God captured your heart. Though the details of our stories may differ, our God remains the same—still rescuing the lost, filling the empty, and healing the brokenhearted. As you begin teaching this lesson on Studying Scripture, allow God to penetrate your heart once again with the wonder of who He is. I pray that God will grip your heart and the hearts of your students with His reality. May God bless you all as you start this journey into deeper relationship with Him.

## Student Outline

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Why Should I Study the Bible?

- \* To get to know God
  - ↳ The Bible is His Story
  - ↳ Every book and passage reveals His character
- \* To see things in their proper perspective
  - ↳ We see God as He is
  - ↳ We see ourselves as we are
  - ↳ We see everything else as it is

- ✧ To discover the Bible's uniqueness
- ↳ Inspired and preserved by God
- ↳ Living and active

## Session Notes

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### Why Should I Study the Bible?

#### To get to know God

Ask: What do you think was God's main purpose in giving us the Bible?

Though the Bible has been referred to as many things—a handbook for Christian living, a rule-book, a map, a piece of great literature—what is its real purpose? Is it to teach us about characters from the Bible so that we can learn from their mistakes and emulate their successes? Is it to teach us how to get to heaven? Is it to teach us how to live? While these are all good things, none of them is God's primary purpose for His Word. So, what is?

This unique Book was designed by God to reveal to us who He is. God wants us to know Him!

#### The Bible is His Story

The Bible is not a collection of books; it is one Book, written by one Author to tell one magnificent story—His Story. From the creation of the world in the Book of Genesis to the restoration of all things in the Book of Revelation, the Bible unfolds God's Story.

Though God has always existed, the part of His story told in the Bible began with His creation of the world—a perfect place, untainted by sin (Gen. 1). Creation reached its climax when God made man in His own image and breathed life into his body (Gen. 2:7). Then God fashioned woman to be man's companion and helper (Gen. 2:20-22). Adam and Eve, the first man and woman, enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God. Everything was perfect—just as God intended it to be. God gave Adam and Eve only one rule—not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Then Satan, God's fiercest enemy, entered the scene, tempting Eve to question God's character and to disobey God. Man chose to rebel against God, first Eve and then Adam. Their sin brought a curse upon all mankind and all creation (Gen. 3).

Who would free them from the curse? Who would pay the penalty of sin?

The rest of the Bible answers these questions as God Himself intercedes on behalf of mankind. From the very moment that judgment was pronounced upon sin, God's plan to crush Satan and redeem man was thrust into action (Gen. 3:15). This intricate plan began with the selection of a man named Abraham from whom came the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Gen. 12:1-3). From Jacob's family came the twelve tribes of Israel (Gen. 49:28). The people of Israel became a nation singled out as God's special possession (Exo. 19:5-6), and through this nation came King David (2 Sam. 2:4). From King David's line came the promised Messiah (Matt. 1:1).

This Messiah was God's very own Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus left the splendor of heaven and came to earth to live among His own creation, taking on the lowly flesh of a man (John 1:14). Living a sinless life, Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, was the only Sacrifice acceptable to God. By dying on the cross, Jesus willingly sacrificed Himself in our place so that our relationship with God could be restored (Heb. 10:5-14). By rising from the dead, He defeated Satan, fulfilling the prophecy made in Genesis 3:15 and breaking the curse of sin (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

Now God extends forgiveness to all who call upon His name and acknowledge Him as Lord (Romans 10:9-10). Saved believers form His body, the Church (1 Cor. 12:27), and the Holy Spirit lives inside each believer (1 Cor. 6:19). Even though the story of the Bible hasn't reached its full conclusion on our timeline, we already know the ending. Jesus will return for His bride (the Church), and we will live in heaven in unbroken fellowship with God for all eternity—just as He intended from the beginning (Rev. 19:7-8; 21:1-4).

What a story! His Story!

Suggestion: Draw simple pictures on the board as you tell the story of redemption. If time permits, have your students draw the pictures on their own paper as well.

Every book and passage reveals His character

Since the Bible is God's story, then all of it was written about Him. That means that every passage of every book reveals something about who God is. The reason that most of us have missed this fact is because we haven't been actively looking for Him. It's something like looking at a Magic Eye image, a picture with layers that aren't visible until you begin focusing on what's deeper inside the picture. When it comes to reading the Bible, many of us have been concentrating so hard on the obvious things—like the people, stories, and teachings—that we've missed what's underneath—the portrait of a timeless God in all His glory.

Suggestion: Bring a Magic Eye picture as an example and have students try to see the hidden picture.

## To see things in their proper perspective

When we begin to study Scripture from a God-focused approach, looking for Him instead of just concentrating on the obvious things, we begin to see everything differently. The way that we see the world is often a very small picture of the whole. Imagine a photo of a child peering into the face of a ferocious-looking dog. Should the child be afraid? Now imagine that the angle of the picture is widened to show that the dog is on a strong leash and that his master is beside him. Does that change your perspective of the situation? This is exactly what happens when we study Scripture with a God-focus. We are changing the lens on the camera so that what we see includes much more than we could possibly take in from our limited point-of-view.

Suggestion: Bring a photo to use as an example. It does not need to have the picture described in the paragraph, just something that would be viewed differently if the whole picture was seen as opposed to just a part of it.

## We see God as He is

The first, and most remarkable, thing that happens when we study Scripture with God as our main focus is that we begin to see God as He really is. Viewing things from the world's perspective often leads us to a skewed view of God. For instance, if you base your view of God on the daily news, the chaos, injustice, and escalation of depravity may lead you to believe that God is not in control or that He is distant and aloof. If you base your view of God on modern science, you will likely doubt that God exists at all. Many scientists have worked hard at explaining away the Creator, even crediting "Mother Nature" with His splendid displays of power in nature. God's character is being assaulted from every side, and the picture being painted of Him looks very little like His true image. That is why we must discover for ourselves who God really is.

Ask: How do you think people in the world today view God? Make a list on the board with the students' answers.

### What does the Bible say about Him?

- \* God is above all. There is no one like Him. No other god could ever compare to Him. (Isa. 44:6-8)
- \* God is eternal. He was, and is, and is to come. He is outside of time, for He created it. (Rev. 4:8-11)
- \* God is faithful. His Word stands true forever. His promises are eternal. (Ps. 33:4-5)
- \* God is free. He does whatever He wills. Nothing can confine or limit Him. (Ps. 115:1-3)
- \* God is gracious. He does not treat us as our sins deserve. Instead, He shows us favor. (Ps. 103:10-12)
- \* God is good. He blesses those who are His. He is the giver of all good gifts. (Ps. 145:8-10)
- \* God is glorious. He surpasses all other glories. His very nature is light. (Rev. 21:22-24)
- \* God is holy. He is set apart in perfection. He is wholly sinless—free from any flaw or blemish. (Isa. 6:1-4)
- \* God is immutable. He never changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Heb. 13:8)
- \* God is infinite. He is beyond measure. Our minds have no way of comprehending Him. (Ps. 90:1-2)
- \* God is just. He judges the world in righteousness. He governs His people fairly. (Ps. 9:7-8)
- \* God is loving. He sacrificed His own Son for our sake. He redeemed us at His own expense. (1 John 4:9-10)
- \* God is merciful. He forgives repentant sinners of a debt they could not pay. He died for us while we were still sinners. (Rom. 5:6-8)
- \* God is omnipotent. His power is limitless. He is not bound by natural laws, for He created them. (Job 26:7-10,14)



- \* God is omnipresent. He is everywhere. There is nowhere that He is not present. (Ps. 139:7-10)
- \* God is omniscient. He knows everything. Nothing in all creation is hidden from His sight. (Heb. 4:12-13)
- \* God is self-existent. He has always existed. There is no God before or after Him. (Isa. 43:10-13)
- \* God is self-sufficient. He needs nothing. Everything in heaven and earth is His. (Ps. 24:1-2)
- \* God is sovereign. He is in perfect control of all things. He is King now and forevermore. (1 Chron. 29:10-13)
- \* God is wise. His ways are not our ways. His thinking is infinitely above our own. (Isa. 55:8-9)

This list is but a few drops of water compared to the vast ocean of who God is. We could spend a lifetime studying God and never understand Him completely. It will take all eternity to get to know the depths of our infinite God, and even then, we will never exhaust our study of Him (John 17:3).

Suggestion: Before class, write some of the attributes of God (e.g., God is above all) and their references on note cards. Because these same passages are covered in this month's homework, there is no need to go through all twenty attributes; just select a handful to use for sake of example. Distribute the note cards among your students and have them take turns reading the passages from their Bibles and sharing their attributes. Then have them tape their cards on the board, covering the list from the prior discussion of how people in the world view God. This is a visual illustration of how replacing an incorrect view of God is done with the truth of God's Word.

We see ourselves as we are

Once we rightly see God, the way we see ourselves quickly changes too. When Isaiah the prophet saw the LORD seated on His throne, it changed his perspective forever. According to Isaiah's description of the scene, the train of God's robe filled the temple, and as the angels proclaimed the holiness and glory of God, the doorposts and thresholds shook (Isa. 6:1-4). Next to the purity and perfection of God Almighty, Isaiah recognized his own sinfulness. He was suddenly aware of how unclean He was (Isa. 6:5). Seeing God as He is can make us feel shamefully inadequate.

Ask: How do you think we must look to God?

Next to God's unlimited power, we seem pathetically weak. Next to His selfless love, our love looks like a self-serving imitation. Next to His infinite wisdom, our ideas seem like utter nonsense. And next to His holiness, our best works look like filthy rags (Isa. 64:6). Imagining what we must look like to God is somewhat like seeing earth from an airplane window—towering buildings look like toy blocks, roads and rivers look like spaghetti, and people look like ants.

On the other hand, seeing ourselves as God sees us in Christ can give us great value and worth. The fact that God created us shows us His great love. He fashioned us together, selected our features, gifted us with talents and abilities, and chose the place and time of our birth (Ps. 139:13). We are His workmanship—His masterpiece (Eph. 2:10). Not only did He make us, but He also redeemed us. That means that He bought us back. He paid our ransom not with silver or gold, but with His own precious blood (1 Pet. 1:18-19). Then He made us part of His own family (Eph. 1:5). Though others may not always want or include us, God does. Talk about priceless! In reality, everything about who we are is wrapped up in God. In order to discover our own identity, we must first discover His.

We see everything else as it is

Likewise, if we are to have an accurate view of the world and this life, we must first have an accurate view of God. Since God made the world, then every person on earth is accountable to Him (Ps. 100:3). He is King over all (Ps. 95:3-7). He laughs at the silly plots of earthly rulers and kings (Ps. 2:4-6); His plans cannot be stopped. Nothing stands in His way (Ps. 33:10-11). Compared with eternal God, the lives of men are just dots on the timeline of history (Ps. 103:15-16). And underneath the reality we see is an even truer reality of a spiritual world that we cannot see (Eph. 6:12). Our smaller stories are really part of the huge drama of His Story.

That means...

- \*✧ This world isn't all there is. We don't have to spend our lives trying to satisfy our own needs, getting all we can out of life before it is too late (Matt. 6:19-20; 2 Cor. 4:18).
- \*✧ Our story is part of something much bigger. The things that God allows in our lives are to achieve His ultimate purpose—to make us more like Christ. This is for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28-29).
- \*✧ God is in control. Even when it seems like the world is in chaos, we don't have to fear the future or place our hope in men. God is on His throne, and His plans cannot be thwarted (Ps. 103:19).
- \*✧ As Christians, our citizenship is in another place. If we feel like we don't belong here, it is because we don't (Phil. 3:20).

Ask: How differently would we look at this life if we saw it as God sees it?

## To discover the Bible's uniqueness

Ask: What are some things that make the Bible a unique book?

We study Scripture not only because it teaches us about God and helps us see all of life from a proper perspective, but we also study it because there is no other book like it. This book, written over a span of 1,500 years by about 40 different authors, contains sixty-six distinct books that fit together to form one cohesive whole. Its authors were as varied as the content of the Book itself—kings, poets, shepherds, doctors, fishermen, prophets, and politicians. Despite all its variation, the Bible remains absolutely error free. How is this possible?

## Inspired and preserved by God

The answer is that it isn't humanly possible. Though God used humans as His vessels in writing the words of the Bible, it is He who inspired its text from beginning to end (2 Tim. 3:16). Scripture says exactly what God intended for it to say because it did not come by the will of man but through the divine enabling of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet.1:21). What other book could boast such a thing? Because of the Bible's supernatural inspiration, we can trust every word. It is truth (John 17:17).

Not only did God inspire the Bible, but He has also taken great care in preserving it so that future generations will come to know Him. According to its own testimony, the Word of the Lord endures forever (1 Pet. 1:23-25). Though many evil men have tried to destroy God's Word, it cannot be done. Even today the Bible is the most widely sold book in the world. Why is that? Because there is something special, something divine, about this Book.

## Living and active

As if its inspiration and preservation were not enough, God's Word is alive (Heb. 4:12)! As God's glory is revealed to us through Scripture, God's words penetrate our hearts, exposing our deepest thoughts and motivations. Like a mirror, the Word confronts us with what we are really like. But God doesn't leave us as we are. As believers, God has given us the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, to guide us into all truth (John 16:13-15). First, He comes alongside us and helps us understand the Bible, and then He helps us to change. God's ultimate goal for every believer is to make us more like Christ (Rom. 8:28-29), and He uses His Word and His Holy Spirit in that transformation process. Because the Bible is living, you cannot read its words without being changed.

## What we've learned

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- \* God wants us to know Him.
- \* The Bible is His story, and every passage is ultimately about Him.
- \* Seeing God as He is changes the way we see ourselves and everything else around us.
- \* The Bible is a unique Book, inspired and preserved by God.
- \* God uses His living Word and the Holy Spirit to change us into Christ's likeness.

## Questions for review

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1. What is the primary purpose of the Bible? (to reveal God to us; God wants us to know Him)
2. Whose story does the Bible tell? (His story; God's story)
3. Where in the Bible does God reveal Himself? (in every passage and verse)
4. When we see God as He is, in what ways does this change our perspective? (It changes how we see ourselves, the world, and everything else in life.)

5. How do some people in our society mistakenly view God? (Answers will vary.)
6. What does the Bible tells us God is really like? (Answers will vary.)
7. How do we look when we compare ourselves with God? (We fall short in every way.)
8. How does God see us in Christ? (we are priceless; His masterpiece)
9. In what way is the Bible unique? (it is error free; it was inspired by God and has been preserved by Him; it is alive and changes those who study it)

## LESSON 2:

# *Studying Scripture (Part 2)*

## Lesson Objectives

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The students will...

- \* Study God in the Bible, rather than simply studying the Bible
- \* Look for God in every passage and verse they read
- \* Draw conclusions about God's character and ways from the passages they study

## Introduction

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Do you remember what it was like when the Bible first came alive to you? For me, it was in college. I still recall the timeworn armchair I sat in, the collection of colorful highlighters I marked with, and the green leather study Bible I used. I felt like Paul's letters were written directly to me, and my Bible bled neon yellow, green, and orange. Every word seemed fresh and new and packed with meaning.

Sadly, over time, something changed. Though I faithfully read my Bible, parts of it became a little too familiar, and reading Scripture became something I did more out of habit or duty than a true desire to know God more. That is, until God redirected my focus and I learned that all of Scripture was written to reveal Him. Before, I had simply skimmed the surface—studying characters that I did or did not want to emulate, deducing spiritual truths that could be applied to my life, and learning basic factual information. Though none of those were bad things, I was still missing the main point—God longed to reveal Himself to me! Now, as I approach studying Scripture with that focus in mind, it is like reading the Bible again for the first time.

What about you? Has your study of the Bible lost some of its luster? Do you sometimes read Scripture just because you know you should? Have you, like me, been looking for everything but God in the passages you've been reading? If so, don't lose heart. All you need is to do is change the lens you've been looking through. Though you may sometimes have to squint to see it, God's unchanging character can be seen in every line of every verse. May God give both you and your students fresh eyes to see Him as you study His Word.

# Student Outline

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## How Should I Study the Bible?

- ✧ By looking for God in everything
  - ↳ In His actions
    - Obvious actions
    - Behind-the-scenes actions
  - ↳ In His words
  - ↳ In the words and actions of others
- ✧ By uncovering what these actions and words reveal
  - ↳ About His character
  - ↳ About His ways

## Session Notes

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### How Should I Study the Bible?

#### By looking for God in everything

To say that Christians need to “study the Bible” is misleading terminology. What we really need is to study *God* in the Bible. Since the Bible was written primarily to reveal God to us, then we must look for Him intentionally in every passage we read. For most of us, this approach will be unfamiliar because it’s a whole new way of thinking. However, once we’ve practiced it, it will soon become second nature. Then we will see God in passages even when we’re not trying—like when a person has finally mastered the Magic Eye pictures!

In fictional writing, authors use a process called characterization to reveal the personalities of their characters. Authors describe their characters both directly and indirectly through a combination of actions and words. While writers plainly explain some things to the reader, the reader must conclude other things herself. In order to have the fullest view of a character, however, the reader must consider the character’s actions and words along with the actions and words of others.

Though the Bible is not a fictional work, our goal *is* to study its main character—God! So our approach will be much like how we would study a literary character. We will begin by studying God’s actions and words and then observe the actions and words of others towards Him.

#### In His actions

When studying God in Scripture, noting His actions is a good place to start. In some passages, God’s actions can be clearly seen, while in others we must look deeper. Therefore, we will categorize His actions under two headings—obvious and behind-the-scenes.



Note: Exodus 14 has been used as example to show you how the process of looking for God in Scripture works. For your class example, you may use Exodus 14 or a passage of your choice.

Suggestion: Make a copy of the devotional template provided for the students to use as a sample as you discuss each of the following points in class. Each section corresponds directly with the devotional format your students will be using for their homework.

### **Obvious actions**

God's "obvious" actions are easy to spot because they are clearly stated. In these cases, simply look for God's name and then what He did. Let's use Exodus 14, the account of God parting the Red Sea, as an example. What did God do in this passage?

- \* The LORD instructed Moses to have the Israelites encamp between Migdol and the sea (vv. 1-2).
- \* The LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he pursued the Israelites (v. 8).
- \* The LORD instructed Moses to raise his staff, stretching out his hand to divide the water of the sea so that the Israelites could cross on dry ground (v. 16).
- \* The LORD moved the pillar of cloud between the armies of Egypt and the Israelites, providing light for the Israelites and darkness for the Egyptians (vv. 19-20).
- \* The LORD drove back the sea all night, turning it into dry land (v. 21).
- \* The LORD threw the Egyptian army into confusion, jamming the wheels of their chariots so that they could not drive (vv. 24-25).
- \* The LORD instructed Moses to stretch out his hand over the sea so that the water would flow over the Egyptian army (v. 26).
- \* The LORD swept the Egyptians into the sea (v. 27).
- \* The LORD saved Israel from the Egyptians (v. 30).

Note: This section corresponds with the first question on the devotional page: "What does God do in this passage?" See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

### **Behind-the-scenes actions**

God's "behind-the-scenes" actions are trickier to see; however, they are well worth searching out. In fact, some passages in the Bible will not contain any obvious actions, like the Book of Esther in which God's name is not mentioned even once. In these cases, we must look for God's providences—circumstances that appear to be coincidental but in actuality are divinely guided by God. Let's consider the providences found in Exodus 14. First, we will look for things that seem coincidental, and then we will observe how God is at work behind the scenes.

- \* Was it a coincidence that God instructed Moses to have the people camp beside the sea—a place where they would have no escape from the Egyptians (vv. 1-2)? God wanted the Israelites to have no other place to turn so that they would see His mighty power.
- \* Was it a coincidence that Pharaoh changed his mind about letting the Israelites go and decided to pursue them (vv. 5-8)? God was leading Pharaoh—and his powerful army—into a carefully orchestrated trap.
- \* Was it a coincidence that God allowed Pharaoh’s army to overtake the Israelites by the sea (v. 9)? God could have kept the Egyptians from finding the Israelites. In fact, God could have thrown the army into confusion as He did later in the story, but He was waiting until just the right time.
- \* Was it a coincidence that God held back the waters of the sea until the entire Egyptian army was inside it (v. 23)? God’s plan from the very start was to wipe out the entire army at one time.
- \* Was it a coincidence that the Egyptians were killed but the Israelites went through on dry ground (vv. 28-29)? God wanted to show both the Egyptians and the Israelites that He is LORD and that those who hurt God’s people will be punished.

Note: This section also corresponds with the first question on the devotional page: “What does God do in this passage?” See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

## In His words

Once we have examined God’s actions, we must look at His words. After all, whose words could reveal more about God’s character than His own?

In the Bible, God has communicated in different ways over different periods of time. In the Old Testament, God spoke directly to people like Abraham, Moses, David, and the prophets. However, we can also learn about God’s character from His commands and promises. In the New Testament, Jesus spoke directly to His disciples, the Pharisees, and the people to whom He ministered. In addition, we can learn about God through Jesus’ teachings and parables.

Since our sample text is from the Old Testament, we will observe God through His direct communication with Moses. Did God tell Moses anything that would reveal His character? If we compare verses 4 and 17, we will find some striking similarities.

The LORD said:

- \* I will harden Pharaoh’s heart
- \* I will gain glory through Pharaoh
- \* The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD

What do God’s statements reveal about Him? He has the foreknowledge to know what is going to happen before it occurs. He has the power to harden a man’s heart. He can use even the wicked to gain glory for Himself. And when He displays His power, there is no mistaking that He is LORD!

Note: This section corresponds with the second question on the devotional page: “What does God say in this passage?” See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

## In the words and actions of others

Besides considering God’s words, it is also helpful to observe how others respond to Him—both His friends and His enemies. In our example, we see both.

- ✧ When the Egyptians had overtaken the Israelites and the situation seemed dire, Moses told the Israelites not to be afraid. He had full confidence in God’s ability to rescue them. He encouraged them to stand still and to watch the deliverance that the LORD would bring. He explained that the LORD Himself would fight for them (vv. 13-14).

What do Moses’ statements reveal about God’s character? Because God is trustworthy, they had no reason to fear. God Himself would be their Deliverer, and He had a plan.

- ✧ When God threw the Egyptian army into confusion in the midst of the sea, they cried out to one another. They knew that they must flee and get away from the Israelites. Because of the strange things happening with their chariots, the Egyptians concluded that the LORD was fighting for the Israelites (v. 25).

What does the reaction of the Egyptians reveal about God’s character? They knew that a greater power was at work. What was happening to them was supernatural—God Himself was fighting for His people! Their words confirm that God’s plan to gain glory for Himself through Pharaoh and to reveal that He is LORD to the Egyptians was indeed accomplished.

- ✧ When the Israelites saw God’s mighty power displayed against the Egyptians, they feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses, His chosen leader (v. 31).

What does the reaction of the Israelites reveal about God’s character? The LORD is all-powerful and is worthy of respect and complete trust.

Note: This section corresponds with the third question on the devotional page: “What do others say about God, and how do they act towards Him?” See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

## By uncovering what these actions and words reveal

Once we have looked for God in everything, it is time to uncover what the actions and words we’ve found reveal about God’s character (who He is) and His ways (the way He works). The details we’ve noted are like puzzle pieces, and this step is where we put them all together to form the whole picture.

## About His character

The best way to understand how the process works is to see it in action. Let's go through our sample passage one step at a time. You will find that many of the points repeat themselves. This is normal and is, in fact, helpful in what we are trying to accomplish.

1. What do we learn about God from His obvious actions?
  - ☞ He is all-knowing—Because God knew everything that would happen, He could clearly instruct Moses about what to do every step of the way.
  - ☞ He is all-powerful—Can you imagine the power it must take to hold back the waters of the sea for even one minute, much less all night?
  - ☞ He is a mighty Deliverer—God wiped out an entire army without even picking up a weapon.
2. What do we learn about God from His behind-the-scenes actions?
  - ☞ He is our help in trouble—There was literally nowhere for the Israelites to turn, but that did not deter God from saving them.
  - ☞ He is all-wise—Only God could devise a plan to lure an entire enemy army into a trap, devastating them completely—without fighting!
  - ☞ He is patient—God waited until the perfect time to bring His plan to fruition.
3. What do we learn about God from His words?
  - ☞ He is all-powerful—God has the power to harden a man's heart.
  - ☞ He is all-wise—God used His own enemies to gain glory for Himself.
  - ☞ He is LORD—God's unprecedented display of supernatural power convinced both the Israelites and the Egyptians of His awesome power.
4. What do we learn about God from the words and actions of others?
  - ☞ He is LORD—Even God's enemies could see that they were fighting against a supernatural force.
  - ☞ He is all-powerful—God's mighty power over the Egyptians inspired the Israelites' awe and trust.

Now let's consolidate what we've observed. What are the key things that we discover about God's character from this passage? He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise. He is our help in trouble, our mighty Deliverer. He is LORD.

Note: This section corresponds with the fourth question on the devotional page: "What does God reveal about Himself in this passage?" See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

## About His ways

Next, let's go through the sample passage again, this time thinking about what God reveals about the way He works. The principles that we find will be things not only true of this particular story, but also for us as well.

1. What do we learn about God's ways from His obvious actions?
  - ☞ Because God is all-knowing, He knows exactly what we should do in any situation and will help us if we ask.
  - ☞ Nothing is too difficult for God. If He can part the waters of the sea, there is nothing in our lives that He cannot handle.
2. What do we learn about God's ways from His behind-the-scenes actions?
  - ☞ Sometimes God places us in situations that force us to turn to Him for help.
  - ☞ God's plan is always flawlessly orchestrated and perfectly timed.
3. What do we learn about God's ways from His words?
  - ☞ God can use even the worst situation to gain glory for Himself.
  - ☞ God wants everyone to know that He is LORD.
4. What do we learn about God's ways from the words and actions of others?
  - ☞ God fights for His people.
  - ☞ God deserves our honor and trust.

What are the key things we discover about the way God works from this passage? God wants us to turn to Him in difficult times; nothing is too hard for Him. He can use our hardships for His glory, and He wants all people to know that He is LORD. He alone is worthy of our respect and trust.

Note: This section also corresponds with the fourth question on the devotional page: "What does God reveal about Himself in this passage?" See the sample devotional page at the end of this lesson.

Now that we've put the last pieces of the puzzle in place, it's time to step back and look at the picture. Isn't it amazing to see how much God revealed about Himself in just one passage of Scripture? That's the power of studying God in the Bible!

## What we've learned

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- ✧ Our goal shouldn't be studying the Bible, as much as studying God in the Bible.
- ✧ We can uncover truths about God by observing His actions and words, as well as the actions and words of others.

## Questions for review

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1. Why is the phrase "study the Bible" misleading terminology? (We should really study God in the Bible.)
2. How is our approach to studying God in the Bible much like studying a literary character? (We can learn about His character from His words and actions, as well as the words and actions of others.)
3. How are God's providences different from coincidences? (His providences are circumstances that seem like coincidences but in actuality are divinely guided by God.)
4. What do we hope to uncover about God in the words and actions we study? (His character and ways)



## Passage: Exodus 14

What does God do in this passage?

- Instructed Moses to have the Israelites camp between Migdol and the sea (vv. 1-2)
- Placed the Israelites where they would have no escape, so they would see His mighty power (vv. 1-2)
- Hardened Pharaoh's heart so that he pursued the Israelites (v. 8)
- Instructed Moses to raise his staff so that the waters would part (v. 16)
- Moved the pillar of cloud between the armies of Egypt and the Israelites (vv. 19-20)
- Drove back the sea all night, turning it into dry land (v. 21)
- Waited for just the right time to unleash His plan for the Egyptians (v. 23)
- Threw the Egyptian army into confusion, jamming their chariot wheels so they couldn't drive (vv. 24-25)
- Instructed Moses to stretch out his hand so that the water would cover the Egyptian army (v. 26)
- Swept the Egyptians into the sea (v. 27)
- Showed both the Israelites and the Egyptians that He is LORD (vv. 28-29, 31)
- Saved Israel from the Egyptians (v. 30)

What does God say in this passage?

- I will harden Pharaoh's heart (vv. 4, 17).
- I will gain glory through Pharaoh (vv. 4, 17).
- The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD (vv. 4, 17).

What do others say about God, and how do they respond to Him?

- Moses had confidence in God's ability to rescue the Israelites and encouraged them to stand still and to watch the deliverance the LORD would bring. He explained that the LORD Himself would fight for them (vv. 13-14).
- When God threw the Egyptian army into confusion, they cried out to one another. They concluded by all of the strange things happening that the LORD was fighting for the Israelites (v. 25).
- When the Israelites saw God's mighty power displayed against the Egyptians, they feared the LORD and put their trust in Him and in Moses, His chosen leader (v. 31).

What does God reveal about Himself through this passage?

- He is all-knowing.
- He will help us if we ask.
- He is all-powerful.
- Nothing is too difficult for Him.
- He is a Mighty Deliverer.
- He is our help in trouble.
- Sometimes He intentionally places us in situations we can't handle so that we will call on Him.
- He is all-wise.
- His plan is always flawlessly orchestrated and perfectly timed.
- He is patient.
- He is LORD, and He wants everyone to know it.
- He fights for His people.

How does what I've learned about God impact my life today?

- Answers will vary.

Special verse.

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What do others say about God, and how do they respond to Him?

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Special verse.