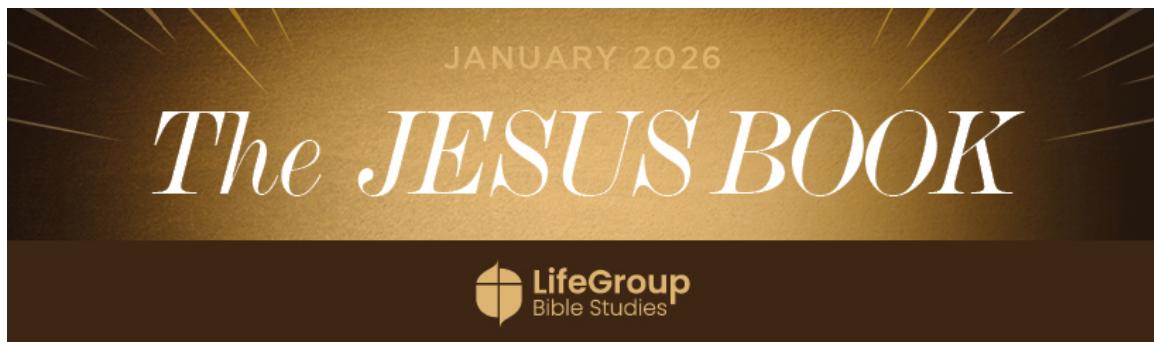


Week 1: *What Is the Bible?*

Hook



Main Point: The Bible is one unified story of God's work in the world, which centers on Jesus.

Q: Do you prefer printed or digital books?

Q: What book(s) have been most impactful in your life?

The Library of Congress is the largest library in the world – boasting more than 25.8 million catalog books. Visitors to the library will discover books in 470 languages, more than 3,000 employees, and 4.4 million square feet of space across all buildings.¹

Included in the massive library are personal papers of John Jay. Founding father John Jay (contributor to *The Federalist* essays, first Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, governor of New York, President of the American Bible Society), wrote to his son, comparing the Bible to other books:

“The Bible is the best of all books, for it is the word of God, and teaches us the way to be happy in this world and in the next. Continue therefore to read it, and to regulate your life by its precepts.”²

Q: Why is the Bible so valuable?

Q: In what ways has the Bible changed your life?

Study introduction: This is a four-part series based on *The Jesus Book* by Dr. Jack Graham. The heart of *The Jesus Book* is that the purpose of the Bible is to bring us to know Jesus. God wants us to study His Word because He wants us to know Him – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – and live in fellowship with Him. There is no book like the Bible. No other book is as authoritative and trustworthy. There is no other book that is living and active, that reading is a supernatural experience. The Bible contains many

stories, principles for living, proverbs, and more, but it is primarily the story of God's relationship with humanity, His salvation plan to rescue the world – a plan that finds its climax in the life, ministry, death and Resurrection of Jesus. Jesus is the point of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. As John wrote about his Gospel, "But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (John 20:31). This is why we call the Bible "The Jesus Book."

*This first lesson covers the introduction and chapters 1–3 of *The Jesus Book*. All page numbers listed below are from *The Jesus Book* unless otherwise noted.

Week 1: What Is the Bible?

Book

Main Point: The Bible is one unified story of God's work in the world, which centers on Jesus.

John 20:30–31; Hebrews 1:1–3; and Philippians 3:8–11 [Read]

Talking Point 1: The Bible's purpose is to help us know Jesus.

Q: John: Why did John write his Gospel? What was his purpose?

Q: Hebrews: How did God speak to His people in the Old Testament? The New Testament?

Q: Philippians: What value did Paul place on knowing Jesus? Why?

People have many different views about what the Bible is – a history book, an instruction manual for a moral life, a theological treatise, and more. But at its very core, the Bible is the story of God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit – and His covenant relationship with humanity. As the saying goes, it's not history; it's His Story (p. 13). The overall, big-picture story of God's relationship with humanity is like a romance: The characters fall in love (God's love for us); they break up (the Fall); and then they get back together (redemption in Jesus) (p. 120). The climax of that story is our redemption in Jesus. Everything before it leads up to that point and everything after it applies it to our lives, showing us what it looks like to live in that reality. As Dr. Graham writes, "The Bible is the Jesus Book. He is the point of the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments. All of Scripture is about Him and centers on Him" (p. 13).

The Bible is "The Jesus Book" because the Scripture is God's written Word, and Jesus is God's Word incarnate – God's Word made flesh, God's living Word (John 1:14). The whole purpose of Scripture is for people to come to know Jesus. The Old Testament points ahead to Christ. When Jesus explained the Scriptures to the disciples on the road to Emmaus after His Resurrection, He started with Genesis and went all the way through the Old Testament, explaining to them how what was said in the Old Testament Scriptures was about Him (Luke 24:25–27).³ The Bible is one continuous story, written over a 1,500-year period covering more than 40 human generations, written by more than 40 human authors from every walk of life, in a host of different places on three continents, in three different languages, covering many different subjects, written in many different genres, and including many different literary forms (p. 31–32). And yet it

tells one story. Just as the body of Christ, the Church, is a picture of unity in diversity, so is the Bible itself.

The purpose of reading the Bible is to come to know Jesus, so we can be saved (John 20:30–31). But it's not just about salvation or eternal life; it's also about knowing Jesus so we can walk with Him in this life, as His disciple, following His ways. Isaiah said God's ways are not like our ways and His thoughts are not like our thoughts; they are so much higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth (Isaiah 55:8–11). But Scripture is God's way of reaching into our world and communicating His ways with us. In Scripture, repeatedly throughout human history, God has met us, humanity, where we were, spoken our language, and revealed Himself to us. Then in Jesus, God came down to our world and *became* one of us, so we could see in Jesus what He is like (John 1:1–14; Hebrews 1:1–3) (p. 34).

The purpose of the Bible is to know Christ, which Paul said was worth losing everything else in life. He considered everything else – all his material possessions, all his accomplishments – to be garbage compared to knowing Jesus (Philippians 3:8–11). The only thing that matters is knowing Jesus. Why? Because Jesus is God. It is through Jesus that we can know the Father, through the Spirit that we can have fellowship with the triune God – Father, Son, Holy Spirit (John 14:6; Ephesians 2:18; 1 John 1:5–10).

This is why in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do the will of His Father. This isn't saying that getting into heaven is about doing good works. The next line is, "I will declare to them 'I never knew you.'" (Matthew 7:21–23). He was saying that those who really *know* Jesus will live by His ways, not just "call Him Lord," giving Him lip service. Knowing Jesus isn't just about eternal salvation; it's about the way we live in the here and now. Not because our works earn us salvation but because when we live in fellowship with Jesus, we will walk in His ways. We will do the will of His Father. This is what it means to be in real relationship with Jesus. Because Jesus is the living Word and the Bible is God's written Word, the Scripture is where we can go to know Him.

As Dr. Graham writes, "The Bible should not be sought so much for its own sake, but should be searched for the purpose of finding Christ. ... If you're reading the Bible and it doesn't make sense to you, start with Christ and your relationship with Him. What could be missing is knowing the One of whom the Bible speaks, the One the Bible is all about. If you have no desire to read God's Word or take no delight in it, check your heart. Because if you want to know God, you will hunger for His Word" (pp. 14, 37).

Q: Reflect on times you have found Jesus in Scripture. How has reading and studying Scripture helped you to know Jesus better, more deeply, more fully?

Q: Describe your own Bible study habits. What do they tell you about your relationship with Jesus?

Q: If someone were to ask, “Why do you read the Bible?”, what would you say?

Q: How does viewing the Bible as “The Jesus Book” change the way you read it?

Q: What challenges do you face in keeping Jesus as the focus when studying the Bible?

Psalm 12:6; 1 Corinthians 2:9–13; 2 Timothy 3:16; and 2 Peter 1:20–21 [Read]

Talking Point 2: We can trust the Bible because it is the inspired, infallible Word of God.

Q: Why can we trust what the Bible says?

Q: How is the Bible like honey and gold? What do those metaphors tell us about it?

We can trust the Bible because it is the Word of God, not just a book people wrote *about* God but written *by* God through people. Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the Bible is “God-breathed” (NIV) or “breathed out by God” (ESV). This is a compound word (God + breathed) that is found only here in Scripture, as if Paul had to create a new word to describe the uniqueness of the Bible. The word for “breath” can also mean “wind” or “spirit” and is the word the Bible uses for the Holy Spirit. Just as God breathed life into Adam at creation, so He breathed life into Scripture by His Spirit. Peter said the prophecy of Scripture did not come from man’s own interpretation, but when “men spoke from God as they were being carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). It’s God’s Spirit that makes the Bible authoritative, not any authority of the human authors. We don’t believe *everything* ever written by Paul or Jeremiah or James was God’s Word, just the books we have in the Bible. The writing of the biblical books was a unique supernatural process unlike any other book in history.

Critics of the Bible question the reliability of the text, but we have exponentially more original copies of the New Testament than any other ancient document – 5,664 in the Greek. For comparison, we only have 643 copies of Homer, five of Aristotle, and seven of Plato, but no one doubts their reliability. Across all those copies of the New Testament, there are only a few minor discrepancies, none of which is theologically significant; they are things like one copy saying “Jesus Christ” and another saying “Christ Jesus.” The manuscripts of the Bible are shockingly reliable, because those who copied

them knew they were performing a sacred task and the Holy Spirit guided and protected the entire process (pp. 24–25).

Psalm 12 says the words of the Lord are pure, like silver refined seven times, the ancient number of completion or wholeness. Silver may have to be refined *more* than seven times to be totally purified, but this was a poetic way to say it was perfect. Theologians use the words *infallible* and *inerrant* to tell us that everything the Bible says is true; it has no errors. This does not mean the Bible tells us every truth there is to know about the world or even about God, but that everything it *does say* is true. It doesn't explain gravity because it's not a science textbook; that's not its purpose. It's a theological book, written to give us the story of God's relationship with His people and His salvation plan for the world.

God reveals Himself to us, in part, through "general revelation"; the beauty and order of creation and the morality of the human conscience show us that there is a Creator God and a standard of right and wrong. But the details of who God is and how He interacts with His people can only be understood by "special revelation," what He reveals to us through His written Word, His Word incarnate (Jesus), and by His Spirit. Paul said God has revealed to us by His Spirit things no human mind can conceive, things we could never know apart from divine revelation (1 Corinthians 2:9–10). His Spirit also explains His Word to us as we read it, "explaining spiritual realities with Spirit-taught words," (NIV) making reading the Bible a supernatural experience for all those who have the Spirit within them (Proverbs 1:23; John 14:26; 1 Corinthians 2:6–16).

As Dr. Graham writes,

So when you open the Bible, ask God by His Spirit to open your heart. It is the role of the Holy Spirit to teach us. It is our responsibility to be teachable. ... The greatest athletes are coachable, always wanting to improve ... they listen to instruction and practice relentlessly under the guidance of a trained leader. ... I want to be a coachable Christian. This means I am always learning, growing, and exercising my spiritual muscles. As I have sought to be teachable over the years by studying the Scriptures, things that I have known for years have come alive to me in ways I can only describe as miraculous. This happens when I get reps in reading God's Word (pp. 20–21).

Dr. Graham continues with the bullet points below, stating that because we can trust the Bible, we should dedicate our lives to diligent study of it (pp. 44–45):

- **The Bible is authoritative.** Submit yourself to it without reservation. Come with questions but stay until you allow God to answer them. ... Trust God to reveal His unique voice to you through His Word (John 7:17).
- **The Bible is authentic.** Remember that if God inspired the Bible, then He inspired all of it, so any part can speak to you. Each time you engage with the Bible, ask God to show you what He would like for you to learn from the passage you're reading. ... Ask Him to open your eyes as you read (Psalm 119:18).
- **The Bible is accurate.** If Jesus Christ trusted in the accuracy of all that is written in the Bible, you can rest assured that the Bible can withstand your scrutiny. Strive to be like the Bereans of old who studied the Scripture daily to verify the accuracy of what the apostle Paul was teaching them (Acts 17:11). If you come across something you don't understand or can't resolve, seek help from your pastor or from a good Bible study resource. Keep in mind that the Bible will reveal its treasures just as the earth reveals its gold and silver *to the diligent* (Proverbs 2:3–5). ... Make it your lifelong quest to prove to yourself what an amazing book the Bible is.

Q: How have you found the Bible to be authoritative and accurate? How do you know you can trust the Bible, besides just that it's what you were taught in church or in childhood?

Q: If the Bible is *the truth*, what does that tell us about how we should study it?

Q: In what ways have you experienced the Bible “coming alive” to you when you read it? How do you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to you when you read the Bible?

Q: How do you respond when someone questions the accuracy or authority of the Bible?

Q: How does the supernatural process of inspiration affect the way you approach Bible study?

Q: What role does the Holy Spirit play in helping you trust and understand Scripture?

Hebrews 4:12 and Psalm 19:7–11 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Scripture transforms people by the Holy Spirit.

Q: How deeply does the “sword” of the Bible cut into our hearts?

Q: List all the things Psalm 19 says the Word of the Lord does for people.

The Bible is not just any book; it is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). God's Spirit is working and moving in His Word in a way that makes it alive. Not just words on page but an interactive supernatural experience that makes an impact on our minds, our hearts and our lives. Because the Word of God is alive, we can have a fresh encounter with it every time. Though God's Word never changes, each time we read it, we are in a different place than we were before, and God's Spirit can meet us where we are with the truth of His Word in a different way. He speaks to us through His Word in a way that is unique to the Scriptures beyond the experience of reading any other book, even other books about God.

As Dr. Graham wrote, "Unlike any other book, those who embrace, consume and surrender to the Word of God will be changed; they will be utterly transformed" (p. 42). Hebrews tells us that the Word of God pierces deep into our hearts, so deep that it even divides soul and spirit, joint and marrow (Hebrews 4:12). The writer of Hebrews described the Bible as a double-edged sword, but it isn't described as being used as a weapon against other people. It is instead like a surgical knife, cutting open our own hearts.

The parable of the sower (Matthew 13) teaches us that the Word of God is like a seed; it can produce fruit when it is planted in good soil, watered, and fertilized. God's Word can transform our lives, but we must water it and fertilize it. This means spending time in God's Word, in prayer, in meditation, in study. When we prioritize time spent in God's Word every day, our lives will be transformed – our work, our marriages, our friendships, our family, our dreams, our mission and purpose. Time spent in God's Word will change your heart, aligning it with His heart and His will for our lives. How does God's Word transform us? Psalm 19:7–11 lists six ways:

- **It revives the soul.** This isn't just talking about the long-term resurrection of the soul to eternal life but the way God's Word revives our souls every day. It gives our souls nourishment, our daily spiritual bread. It brings our souls life, peace and joy.
- **It makes wise the simple.** God's Word brings wisdom to all of us; this is a supernatural process empowered by the Holy Spirit. The more we study God's Word, the more we get it into our heart and our head, the more we will think like Christ. The more we think like Christ, the more we will act like Christ.
- **It rejoices the heart.** In the Bible, the "heart" isn't just the emotions; it's the whole inner person. When you know God's Word, you can find deep joy in your inner person no matter what mess is happening on the outside. Because your mind becomes increasingly aligned with God's will, you can see His plan and His purposes in your suffering. You can trust He is working for your good. You can consider it all joy (James 1:2–4).

- **It enlightens the eyes.** The Bible transforms our vision. It helps us to see things the way God sees them. God's Word is a light and a clear direction amid the darkness. True wisdom is seeing things from God's perspective.
- **It endures forever.** The Bible transforms our future. In a world where everything is constantly changing, God's Word is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). It is relevant to every generation. Its truth is absolute and unchanging. When we don't know where to turn or what to believe, we can put our trust in God's Word.
- **It is righteous altogether.** The Bible will transform our behavior. When we trust in God's Word, we will put it into practice (Matthew 7:24–27). We will live by His ways and follow His commandments, not out of obligation or guilt but because we believe it's the best way to live. When we are not only hearers of the Word but *doers* of the Word, our lives will change, and the world will change, too.

As Dr. Graham writes, “We discover in the Bible that we aren’t who we think we are or what the world says we are, but we are who God says we are (Psalm 145:13–14, 17). ... When you begin your day with God and His Word – praying, meditating, and worshiping Him – it changes everything, including how you live your day. You can then live with expectancy, excitement and enthusiasm. The Bible, God’s Word, will fill every day with wonder, joy and optimism. You will never be the same as Jesus transforms the way you live” (p. 61).

Q: How has God’s Word transformed you throughout the course of your walk with Jesus? Give specific examples.

Q: When you start your day with God’s Word, what kind of an impact does that have on the rest of your day? When you make a habit of Bible reading, how does it impact your life?

Q: Which of the six ways listed in Psalm 19 has impacted you most, and why?

Q: What does it mean for the Bible to be “living and active” in your own experience?

Q: How can we cultivate “good soil” in our hearts so God’s Word produces fruit?

Week 1: What Is the Bible?

Took

Main Point: The Bible is one unified story of God's work in the world, which centers on Jesus.

The Atrium of the Plano Campus of Prestonwood features more than 300 feet of stained-glass windows; artists devoted a window to every book of the Bible, each featuring imagery unique to the book. However, as you move from Genesis to Revelation, you'll notice a scarlet thread weaving its way through. It's a reminder of the beautiful story of redemption that is found in every book of the Bible; the color scarlet points us to the blood that Christ shed on the Cross, and the thread reminds us that the books of the Bible are not disjoined but each a piece of a greater story.

He is the thread that ties Genesis to Revelation – the One promised in the garden, foreshadowed in the sacrifices, revealed in the prophets, born in Bethlehem, crucified on Calvary, and risen from the tomb. Every story, every command, every psalm, and every prophecy points to Him.

So, when you open your Bible, remember – it's not just words on a page or lessons about morality. It's a love story about the God who came for you. The purpose of the Bible isn't just to inform you – it's to transform you, by helping you know Jesus.

May we be people who don't just read the Bible, but who meet the Living Word in its pages, again and again.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on how God's Word has impacted your life. Not just your understanding of Jesus or theology, but the way you live your day-to-day life. How has reading the Bible "renewed your mind" (Romans 12:2). Look back on the way you thought and lived 10 years ago as compared to today. How has God changed your thinking? Your actions? Your lifestyle? Your relationships? Your family? Your career? What specific things in Scripture can you point to that made an impact on you for the better?

PRAY for God to give you a deeper passion for His Word. Pray for Him to give you a thirst and a hunger for studying His Word daily. Ask Him to show you how His Word can meet your deepest needs, penetrate deep into your heart, and show you who He is and how best to live a life that leads to your flourishing. Pray for the perseverance and

discipline to study God's Word regularly and the humility and openness to listen to God's voice in it.

ACT: Look for Jesus. This week read the Gospel of John and note everything you learn about Jesus. Ask yourself – what was He like? What did He say? How did He act? Whom did He reach out to? Whom did He criticize? Why? Focus on knowing Jesus better through His Word.

¹ <https://www.loc.gov/about/general-information/>

² Jay, John, 1745-1829 and Jay, Peter A. (Peter Augustus), 1776-1843, "John Jay to Peter Augustus Jay, front," *Columbia University Libraries Online Exhibitions*, accessed October 6, 2025, https://exhibitions.library.columbia.edu/exhibits/show/john_jay/item/12346.

³ "Beginning with Moses" doesn't mean He started with the story of Moses in Exodus. It means "the books of Moses" – the Torah, the Pentateuch, the first five books: Genesis–Deuteronomy.