

**UNDERSTANDING
THE BIBLE
W/ SCOTT ASHER**



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Session 1: Why Should I Read the Bible?

Where our God is so crazy amazing – creating everything that exists, holding together and in place every atom, quark, or Wolverine in X-Men 3 while fighting against Dark Phoenix – that we decide, “whelp! God’s cool and all, but Instagram” and take a selfie instead of reading His freaking book.

Reading the Bible is _____. How many of us committed to doing the read-it-through-in-a-year thing then we got to like Deuteronomy or Exodus and quit?

Honestly, those chapters can be like a lawyer writing rules for their fantasy football league in King James:

- I. *Thalt shalt keep four (4) keepers;*
 - I. *Thalt shall notify yon Commissioner (c.f. XVI.2b) prior to the draft;*
 - II. *If ye keepeth yon players whom thou doth loveth, thou shalt sacrifice thouest draft selections in reverse serpent order;*
- II. *If though dropest a player whom is verily pickedupeth by yon other master, thou are owedst a draft selection plus five (5) sheckles...*

Then listening to them list out every pick for like a whole chapter: *The Whatsamatta Ewes selected Todd Gurley, from yon Los Angeles Rams, who begat thirteen (13) touchdowneths and one thousand three hundredth and five spans on the fieldeth of battle...*

It is hard. I get it.

But for believers, not reading it is _____.

My wife and I really fell in love over letters. I was one year ahead of her and went off to college to collect my student loan debts (and a piece of paper) and she was over 100 miles away surrounded by less handsome, less funny, but way closer dudes. So I wrote her letters. We corresponded almost every week over that year and when she went to college she came to the one I attended. (Like *Felicity*, except it worked out.)

If I loved her how could I not look forward to reading what she has to say? How could I not pour over the letters and look for every detail and hint of her character and her feelings for me?

If we love God, how can we treat what He has written for us differently? But we do. I mean, we totally do. And it’s really messed our faith up.

The Shema

For thousands of years, Jews when they wake up and when they go to bed prayed the same words from Deuteronomy 6:4-5, call the Shema:

“**HEAR** O Israel, the **LORD** is our God, the Lord is one, and as for you, you shall **LOVE** the Lord your God with all of your **HEART**, with all your **SOUL**, and with all your **STRENGTH**.”

-Deuteronomy 6:4-5

(Bible Project Word Study: Shema - “Listen”)

Shema means hear or listen. It also means obey. In Hebrew, listening/hearing and obeying are “two sides of the same coin” (BP).

How, though, can we listen or obey God if we don’t know what He says?

Option 1: Make It Up

In 2016, LifeWay Research (commissioned by Ligonier) found that most Americans, and a large portion of so-called Evangelicals are heretics:

- ____ of “Evangelicals” think God accepts the worship of all religions.
- ____ of Americans say Jesus is the first and greatest being created by God.
- ____ of Americans say we have to contribute to our salvation.
- ____ of “Evangelicals” believe that God rewards the true faithful with material blessings (prosperity gospel).
- ____ of “Evangelicals” say all people will be reunited with loved ones in Heaven.
- ____ of those beliefs are taught in the Bible.

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(The fact that ____ of “Evangelicals” believe “worshipping alone or with family is a valid replacement for regularly attending church” may explain these heresies and also prove yet another sermon for J.D. next time he does the We Church Not Me Church series.)

These beliefs describe the American Religion: _____ – a faith built on the pursuit of happiness through a mix of American nationalism and consumerism. Think the American Dream but with a Heaven cherry on top.

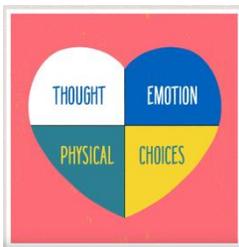
"We have Bibles in every size and shape and color. But there's a failure to recognize what's contained inside the cover of the Bible. We grow apathetic, and I think that the issue is reacting to the Word of God. Not just carrying, but get back into the Word of God and then get the Word of God into us. It's all about mining the scripture, memorizing the scripture, and meditating with our scripture." ~ Hank Hanegraaff

Option 2: A Rational Faith

Personally, I bristle at the idea that following Jesus is a leap of blind faith. I don't want to turn my brain off when I think about God. And I don't think we should.

Back to the Shema: Jesus reaffirms in Luke 10 that the Shema is indeed the greatest of all commandments. But there is a slight difference:

- In Deuteronomy (Hebrew): heart, soul and strength.
- In Luke (Greek): heart, soul, mind and strength.



This is because in Hebrew, the word for “heart” (lev) is more than just an emotional organ - the heart didn't just physically make our bodies go or deal with love, but it was also the place where thinking and choices were

(BP Word Study: Lev) rooted.

So the Greek makes this a little more clear to Western readers: we are to love the Lord with our _____ as well as desire.

When Peter, in his first epistle, talks about getting along with others he says something I think is incredibly important, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

How can we give a reason for the hope we have if we don't even know what that hope is? Do we have hope based on what other people told us? (See the study on the prior page for the danger in that!)

We have to go to the source: the _____.

One of the passages in the Bible that hits home for me is Jesus' famous message that ends with “the truth will set you free!”

Not because of Braveheart or whatever, but because out of context the truth doesn't set you free at all (try telling the judge the truth and see if you get out of jail time.)

What truth? What are we free from? We need more information than simply a sentence floating in nothingness.

When we read that passage in context, we get our answers:

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:32-33).

So this is how it goes:

1. You want to be free from the burden of your mistakes (sins), and the punishment you deserve.
2. Freedom only comes when you know the truth.
3. Knowing the truth is the result of being Jesus' disciples, because he is the truth (and the way and life, John 14:6).
4. We are only his disciples if we follow his commands.

What are his commands?

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind. And love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-40)

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“I have a burden for my people right now, just like I do for myself, that we get beyond propositions and Bible verses to Christ. I do not mean “get around” Bible verses, but “through” Bible verses to Christ, to the person, the living person, to know Him, cherish Him, treasure Him, enjoy Him, trust Him, be at home with Him. I want to count Him more to be desired than all other things — wife, husband, children, success in career, leisure, vacations, health, food, sex, money. He’s more precious.” – John Piper (2002)

Christians should read the Bible to know God and we should want that for others as well.

Is the Bible for Non-Believers?

What about people who don’t believe though? Is there a benefit to reading the Bible for them? Of course!

Consider the following fake and real presidents and their comments on the Bible:

“I wanted to ask you a couple of questions while I had you here. I’m interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She’s a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleared the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?

“While thinking about that, can I ask another? My chief of staff, Leo McGarry, insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it OK to call the police?

“Here’s one that’s really important, ‘cause we’ve got a lot of sports fans in this town. Touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean, Leviticus 11:7. If they promise to wear gloves, can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point?” – (West Wing TV) President Josiah Bartlet

And

“Which passages of Scripture should guide our public policy? Should we go with Leviticus, which suggests slavery is ok and that eating shellfish is

abomination? How about Deuteronomy, which suggests stoning your child if he strays from the faith? Or should we just stick to the Sermon on the Mount - a passage that is so radical that it’s doubtful that our own Defense Department would survive its application? So before we get carried away, let’s read our bibles. Folks haven’t been reading their bibles.” – President Barack Obama, 2006

I have personally heard so many of these same comments over the years. They sound like pithy, winning arguments against a horrible book that has no place in modern America.

But they are simply, factually, wrong: the Bible does _____ tell us to do any of these things.

Non-believers aren’t dumb. Most that I know are really bright people who just haven’t been exposed to what the Bible really says. Perhaps they’ve heard from the New Atheist “authorities” or, very likely, they heard crazy stuff from an actual Christian while they were still in church growing up.

Some Christians were well meaning and just don’t know the Bible. Other’s are bucketheads who refuse to know it correctly.

(See master buckethead Steven L. Anderson’s *Pisseth Against the Wall* sermon on YouTube for example.)

Whatever the reason for the lack of faith, if people want to reject God and the Bible I can’t stop them. It’s sad, but I respect their choice. But do they really want to make that life changing, supremely important choice out of ignorance?

Is it ok with them that they are taking a _____ of _____ in not believing the Bible?

I don’t think so. So for those who choose not to follow Jesus, reading the Bible correctly gives them the information that they need to make an informed, rational decision.

Plus, “faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ” (Romans 10:17).

WHY SHOULD I READ THE BIBLE?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

I used each of the following resources liberally in this class. They have been extremely valuable to my understanding of the Bible and I think they will be to you as well. Check them out.

How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth by Fee & Stuart, 4th Edition

Maybe the best starting place for how to read the Bible, including chapters with examples for how to read each type of literary style in the Bible.

Has God Spoken? By Hanegraaff

An easy to use book laid out in a memorable pattern, that answers the question of trustworthiness of the Bible through textual criticism, archeology, prophecy and history as well as giving tools to help understand how to interpret the Bible.

Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes by Richards & O'Brien

Dude, Jews in the ancient near East were way different than Westerners! This book helps us Westerners see the Bible a little more clearly by interpreting through the lens of the culture in which the Bible was written.

Paul Behaving Badly: Was the apostle a racist, chauvinist jerk? By Richards & O'Brien

A concise book that asks questions about Paul's apparent racism, his lack of objection to slavery, and his apparent open hostility to women. tl;dr Paul was radically pro-women, pro-slave and wasn't racist.

Is God a Moral Monster? By Copan

There are so many ways that modern readers, with no cultural understanding of the ancient near East, misunderstand the Bible it is no big surprise that God ends up looking so bad. This book helps readers understand what is really going on with passages that seem to be pro-genocide, pro-slavery, and pro everything else that seems to make God look like a monster.

The Bible Project

I recommend the following video series' (see their YouTube channel): How to Read the Bible, Word Studies, Biblical Themes, The Torah Series, The Wisdom Series, Old Testament Books, New Testament Books... just watch all of the freaking videos!. This is maybe the most important Bible study tool I've come across in my life. It can be life changing!