

# Understanding the Bible

By Matthew McKellar

## Pre-Session Assignments

One week before the session, participants will take the following assignments.

### Assignment One

After reading 2 Timothy 3:16-17, turn to 2 Peter 1:16-21. This passage is a corresponding text with reference to the concept of inspiration. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What does it deny regarding the nature of Scripture? What does it affirm?

### Assignment Two

Read 2 Timothy 3:16 and then turn to the comments related to it in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following question: What are the four activities for which Scripture is declared to be "profitable"?

### Assignment Three

Psalm 119 contains a number of words that describe and are synonymous with *Scripture*. Turn to the comments related to Psalm 119 in the section **It's in the Book**. Prepare to share your answers to the following questions: What two words are used for *Scripture*? Can you identify others in Psalm 119?

### Scripture to Memorize

*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"* 2 Timothy 3:16

### Session Goal

Consistent with God's Word and in the power of the Holy Spirit—by the end of this session, disciples will grasp more of the Bible's nature, function, and purpose and commit to pursue greater understanding of it.

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## It's in the Book

30 minutes

### Real-Life Scenario

John had been attending Bible study for about a month and had many questions about the Bible. He asked the leader, "How would you explain the difference between the Bible and other books?" If this question were presented to you, how would you answer it?

### The Nature, Function, and Purpose of Scripture

Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17 out loud.

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 16. Scripture.** This word means "writings." Although only the Old Testament existed at the time Paul wrote to Timothy, we may apply his description here to the New Testament as well. Therefore, **Scripture** includes all 66 books of the Bible. **breathed out by God.** This important term highlights the fact that Scripture originated with God. It is a supernatural form of communication from God to us.

Paul told Timothy that all of Scripture has been "breathed out" of the mouth of God. This verse highlights the nature of Scripture. It is not "just another book" that "inspires" in the sense that a good book or movie might entertain or inform us. One of the most important factors for truly understanding the Bible is to recognize that it is an absolutely unique book from an absolutely unique source.

#### Assignment One Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment One** during the week can now report on 2 Peter 1:16-21. What does it deny regarding the nature of Scripture? What does it affirm?

#### Discussion Question

How is the Bible's inspiration different from the inspiration of other books?

#### Studying the Passage

**Verse 16. profitable.** This designation and the remainder of the verse shed light on the function and usefulness of the Bible. All Scripture is described as helpful to and beneficial to the disciple. **teaching . . . reproof.** Here Paul uses the first of two pairs of words to indicate the usefulness of the Bible. This first pair of words focuses on doctrine or matters related to the content of what the Bible stresses we are to believe and affirm. All Scripture is declared to be profitable for "**teaching.**" Therefore, both the Old and New Testaments must be studied. One might say we need to be informed and transformed by the Bible. **reproof.** This word conveys the idea of a warning. Scripture frequently offers warnings and alerts related to those matters which pose a threat to our spiritual health.

**Verse 16. correction . . . training.** This second pair of words focuses on conduct. Not only must we receive teaching and reproof, but we must also let it shape the way we live on a daily basis. **correction** comes from the Greek word for "straight." God's Word has a powerful capacity to "straighten us out." **training** carries with it the idea of instruction. **righteousness** in this verse should be understood as conformity to God's standard. Of course, Jesus Christ is the measure and model of the righteousness of God.

## Assignment Two Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Two** during the week can now report on the four “profitable” functions of Scripture as seen in verse 16.

**Verse 17. complete, equipped.** These terms direct us to the overarching purpose of Scripture: to equip or “outfit” the believer with everything needed to honor the Lord in every area of life. Verse 17 uses two forms of the Greek word for “equip;” one being used as an adjective and the other as a participle. The emphasis of this verse corresponds with what Paul wrote to Timothy in verse 15. There Paul stresses that the “sacred writings” are able to make one wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

## On Your Own

In the space below, describe some specific ways the Bible has been “profitable” for you recently. As you do this, relate your answers to the four functions covered in verse 16. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

With this overview of the Bible’s nature, function, and purpose in place, let’s think about how to understand it better and what it means to “treasure” God’s Word.

## A Treasure That Transforms

**Read** Psalm 119: 9, 11, 27, 34, 105 out loud.

## Studying the Passage

Psalm 119 is the longest of the psalms. It contains 22 stanzas, each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This arrangement highlights the wonders of God’s Word and points us to the benefits of relying on it.

**Verse 9. pure.** To be pure is to be clean and untainted by sin. Purity has a strong connection to the concept of holiness. God’s people are to be “set apart” to Him and should reflect His perfect purity. This verse expresses the psalmist’s conviction that purity hinges on conformity to what Scripture reveals.

**Verse 11. stored up.** Treasuring God’s Word means we assign value to it and prioritize it as the standard for our behavior. When we value Scripture and take its commands seriously, we are given a defense against sin. The psalmist saw treasuring God’s Word as a deterrent to sin.

## Assignment Three Feedback

The person who completed **Assignment Three** during the week can now report on the words used in Psalm 119 as synonyms for Scripture.

## Studying the Passage

**Verse 27. understand.** The starting point for comprehension of Scripture is earnestly to request it. The psalmist asks the Lord to cause him to grasp the nature of His precepts. **precepts.** This is one of many words used in Psalm 119 as a synonym for Scripture. It refers to

God's standards or guidelines for living. When we grow in understanding, we, like the psalmist, will have an intensified desire to meditate or "dwell on" the wonders of God's character and activity.

**Verse 34. keep . . . observe.** Notice the connection here between understanding God's Word and obeying it. **law.** This is another synonym for Scripture that means "teaching."

**Verse 105. lamp . . . light.** This verse indicates the illuminating power of the Bible. It is the lamp to the feet and the light to the path for the one who treasures it.

### **On Your Own**

In the space below, identify two or three subjects in the Bible you would like to understand better. Spend some time asking the Lord for greater understanding in these areas. When everyone is finished, the group can share their responses.

## **Heart and Hands**

8 minutes

Read again the **Real-Life Scenario** near the beginning of the lesson. Consider whether your answers have changed during the session.

Be silent for two or three minutes. Thank Jesus for His sacrifice and for the gospel. Adore Him for His glorious reign on the throne of heaven. Then ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you:

1. A way the Scriptures you studied today will change your heart for the glory of Christ.
2. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to stop doing something for the glory of Christ.
3. Or a way those Scriptures will lead you to do something for the glory of Christ.

Write what the Spirit reveals to you below and then be ready to share what you have written with the group.

## **Since Last Week**

5 minutes

Give the group this update: "In our last session I made a commitment to . . . I want to let you know how that turned out. On that same issue I think the Holy Spirit now is leading me to . . ."

## **Grace-Filled Accountability**

5 minutes

Disciples can agree on a way to hold one another accountable. Confessing faults with other disciples allows them to offer grace, insights, and encouragement. Even more important is confession to Christ, the source of true forgiveness and cleansing.

## **Planning for Evangelism, Missions, and Service**

5 minutes

Groups of disciples always are making preparations for evangelism, missions, and service. Use these minutes to work on the next plan.

## **Prayer**

7 minutes

Every disciple will pray aloud, offering praise to Jesus, thanking Him specifically for His gracious acts, making heartfelt confession, committing to actions flowing from the Bible study, praying toward evangelism locally and globally, and interceding for others as prompted by the Holy Spirit.

## At Home: Nail It Down

A key consideration related to the understanding of the Bible is its unique source and inspiration. Second Timothy 3:16-17 contains the Bible's own declaration concerning the doctrine of inspiration. Second Peter 1:16-21 is also an important passage in light of its description of how Scripture is inspired and how it uses human writers.

With regard to the "profitable" aspect of the Bible, you saw that verse 16b described four beneficial functions of Scripture. These functions give a balanced emphasis on right belief and right behavior. The ultimate purpose of these functions is that the disciple may be equipped to honor and please the Lord in every area and activity of his or her life.

As important as it is to grasp the nature, function and purpose of the Bible, we observed that we must also desire to understand it and obey its commands. Psalm 119: 9, 11, 27, 34, and 105 are key verses which contain appeals for understanding and which link that understanding to delighting in God's Word and experiencing its protection.

Disciples who love God should relate to the Bible in the following ways:

- Affirm its uniqueness as the inspired, "breathed out" Word of God.
- Recognize its beneficial functions with regard to Christ-honoring belief and behavior.
- Acknowledge its value in preparing and equipping disciples to serve Jesus.
- Ask the Holy Spirit for understanding and comprehension as they read and meditate on it.

### Follow up Question

*How is the Bible "inspired," and how does it equip disciples to think and act?*

The Making Disciples curriculum is a gift from Southwestern Seminary to those who, for the glory of the Father and in the power of the Spirit, will spend a lifetime embracing the full supremacy of the Son, responding to His kingly reign in all of life, inviting Christ to live His life through them, and joining Him in making disciples among all peoples.