



# Connect to the Bible

## Leader's Guide

### Week 1

#### *Topic Week 1: Bible Basics*

Focus for this class: The focus of this 6-week class is to make the Bible more accessible. Many people haven't read the bible and feel intimidated by it and so this class provides a broad-brush overview as a way of introduction. After completing this class, participants will have a more "big picture" view of the bible and will hopefully feel more compelled to study it more in depth.

**PREWORK: Read the full leader's guide and watch the videos on the website. Note the time of the video so you can plan well.**

**Study these teaching points covered in the video (*Refer to participants guide week 1*):**

- 1) The unified nature of the Bible and why we read it.
- 2) Broad overview (OT/NT, time period it was written, languages).
- 3) Sections (Bible Bookshelf)
- 4) How the books were selected/how the Bible was formed.
- 5) How the Reformation impacted Christians reading the Bible.
- 6) Basics of translation types

**Speaker: Pastor Shawn Allen**

#### **Start Script\*\*\***

My name is Shawn Allen. And over the next six weeks, I'm going to lead you through a series of classes where we are going to walk through the Bible. Really this is more of a mad dash through the Bible because trying to go through the Bible in six weeks is virtually impossible. But when we created this class, which we've called Open the Bible, an Introduction to the Greatest Book Ever Written, we did it because many people haven't read the Bible or feel intimidated by it. It's a difficult book. It can be really hard to understand parts of it. And we wanted to make it accessible. We wanted people to see how the Bible fits together and really understand it. And maybe that would entice them to enter into it. What we found is that a lot of people who have read the Bible enjoyed it as well, because maybe they've read the Bible in parts and they've read some here and some there, and they've never gotten the big picture. So, over the course of the next six weeks, that's what we're going to try to do. We're going to try to give you the big

picture of the Bible. And hopefully that will give you the incentive to then sit down and try to work your way through it.

So why don't we read some now? I've picked two verses here, both from second Timothy, both by the apostle Paul. The first one says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the Word of truth." So, the Bible is for us. It's so that we know who God is and we understand His teachings.

And then also Paul goes on to say, "All scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching rebuking, correcting training in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." So now it's not just for us, but it's for what we can do to help others as we are making disciples and as we are helping people in their walk. And without the Bible, I think you'll see that it's very difficult to do that.

So, why do we need the Bible? Well, obviously we need the Bible because this is God's Word. This is the message that He has handed down of his teachings. Sometimes people just read through quickly, say, to check that book off. "Thank goodness I'm done with that one." But when we do that, we miss a lot of the importance, a lot of the underlying connections throughout the Bible. One important aspect of reading the Bible is for understanding. We want you to read and understand the Bible. And we'll talk more about this, especially when we talk about which type of Bible to get. Maybe you will get one that has some information along with it, or some books that can help you along the way.

The other reason we need a Bible is for educating. This gives you the opportunity to teach other people about the Bible. Avoiding intimidations may be kind of a weird one to put up there but let me tell you my story: I've always been a Christian, but for years, I wasn't really out advocating about it because to be honest, I hadn't read the Bible. It's like saying, "Oh yeah, this is my favorite book, but I've never read it." And I was afraid that if I was advocating for Christianity and telling people about it and they asked me questions I didn't know, I would, well, I'd feel dumb. But also, I think it would discredit what I was trying to teach. So, I just avoided doing it. It wasn't until I really sat down and got to know the Bible, that I felt confident in then walking through the Bible with other people.

The last reason we need to read the Bible is for correcting. There's a lot of bad theology out there. Some of it's intentional, some of it's not. Maybe somebody was taught a certain way and

they continue to repeat it. Or maybe they use the Bible to their own end. A lot of people do that. And if you don't know the Bible, you're not in a position to correct that wrong teaching. And that's one of the most detrimental things I think that's happened to Christianity is that there has been bad teaching out there about the Bible. One of the things you want to be able to do is to say (obviously very nicely), "that's not quite right. Here's what it actually says." But in order to do that, you've got to read it.

So where are you in the Bible? I think a lot of times people think, "Oh yeah, the Bible, it's an old book. It's an old teaching." And some people even kind of say, "it's not that applicable today." But let me tell you, I put this quote up there and you notice there's an ellipsis in there and it's a very big one because it starts out "in the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth." And that is from Genesis 1:1, and the rest of my quote, "the grace of the Lord, Jesus be with all the saints. Amen." And that's from the very last verse of the Bible in Revelation. See, the Bible encompasses the entirety of time from creation to the ultimate redemption of resurrection at the end, it hasn't happened yet. We are still living in the Bible. And so, I put that sign. There, you are here, you are in the Bible. This is your story. And it's still an active story in your life. And so don't think of it as just reading an ancient book. Think about it as you're reading a book that's written for you and that you're a part of.

Now we're going to run through some of the basics so that you can understand an overview of the Bible. There are 66 books in the Bible. There are 39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament. For some denominations or churches like the Episcopal Church or the Catholic Church, they include what is known as the Apocrypha. These books fall between the two Testaments and not all churches recognize them. They cover a lot of the period between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

The Bible was written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by about 40 different authors. For a lot of the books, we know the authors, and some of them, we don't. We'll talk about that as we go along. The Bible is written over a period of time from approximately 1500 or 1450 BC to about 180; and it's written in three languages. A small part of the Old Testament is written in Aramaic and the rest of the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament was written in Greek. Around the second or third century BC, the Old Testament was translated into Greek. That version is called the Septuagint. The New Testament authors often refer to the Septuagint when referencing the Old Testament.

The Bible is the greatest selling book of all time, and for good reason! It is the truth, the teaching of God. And it's something that we are blessed to have. I think we take for granted the

Bible, we can go grab one out of the pew. We can go to the store, we can pull up an app. There are a lot of people around the world and places where it's illegal to have, or they don't have them, and they would give anything for these opportunities. We need to be appreciative of how easy it is to access and not take it for granted and actually take the time to sit down and read it.

One frequent question is how did they decide what books would be in the Bible? To answer this I'm going to look more at the New Testament. There was not a formal get together in order to vote and they arrived at the 27 books. There were certain books and letters, like the gospels and the letters that were written by Paul, that they began to be read alongside the old texts. When we talked about the quote earlier and referenced scripture being, God-breathed, Paul is talking about the Old Testament. There wasn't a New Testament when he was writing his letters. In the New Testament in Luke, Jesus reads the scrolls from the Old Testament of Isaiah. These Old Testament books were read in worship and in time, some of the New Testament writings (they were not called that yet) began to be read alongside them.

The books of the Bible were not organized until a man named Marcion, a heretic, came along. He taught really bad theology, that there were basically two gods. There was the Old Testament, God (bad) and then the New Testament, God (good). He began to discredit everything from the Old Testament and he took the New Testament writings, finding the ones that were the most anti-Old Testament, or he would cut out portions of them. He put together what he thought was an assemblage of the books that should teach what he thought. And in response to it, the church realized they needed to counter that. The church started gathering up the books that they thought correctly taught the story of Christ and the theology of God. There were a lot of disputed books. The Canon is the name for the selected books of the Bible. They didn't necessarily agree at first on whether or not they would be included within the Canon. It wasn't until 367 when Athanasius, a famous Bishop in history of the church who every year, put together a list of certain writings. And that year he put together a list that had those 27 books on it. This was accepted at that time and became the Canon of the New Testament. Occasionally, you'll hear about other books that are not included in the Bible. The early church looked at these books and the authors and the doctrinal accuracy. If it taught something different than what they knew to be the teachings of God, then they excluded it. It just didn't belong. There are a few examples of some that were really close but didn't make it (Didache—a practical guide to worship and baptism, the Gospel of Peter, The Shepherd of Hermas, etc.). If you hear about a new book being found, likely they always knew about that book and for whatever reason, those teachings weren't accurate.

Let's discuss the Reformation Age when everything shifted by having access to the Bible. Before then in the Catholic church, individuals didn't have access to a Bible. For 500 years

people were advocating to have the Bible available to them. John Wycliffe began writing the Bible in English which was punishable by death. In 1439, Gutenberg invented movable type, which made things easier. You no longer had to write out everything, you could quickly make these books. In 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the door of the church which outlined his complaints about the Catholic Church. Among these complaints was the lack of access to the Bible. He stated, "A simple layman armed with Scripture is greater than the mightiest Pope without it." These people fought and died so that the scripture would be in the hands of everyone. One of the pillars of the processing of information on the mainland of Europe was *sola scriptura*, meaning "by scripture alone". This movement spread to England during the English reformation. Most people remember that Henry the Eighth wanted a divorce, but it's quite a bit deeper than that regarding theology. One of the things that did happen under Henry the Eighth was the Great Bible—an English version of the Bible ordered to be put in every church in England. So now, every single person had access to go to the church and read the Bible if they could read, and if they wanted to. In 1611 King James ordered a translation to be written and distributed—the most famous translation. The King James Version contained all 66 books and the Apocrypha. The reformation drastically changed the ability for us to have the Bible in our hands. We would not be where we are with all the people who could read it and teach it through the years if it had not been for this monumental change.

Let's do a quick run through of the divisions in the Bible. Above this line is the Old Testament and below this line is the New Testament. The Old Testament is basically split into five categories: the Law – also known as the Torah. This is Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. We'll be talking about the Torah next week. Next you have History – 12 books of History that goes through the entire history in the Old Testament. Next is Poetry – there's five books of poetry including Job, Psalms and Proverbs. The last two categories are the Major Prophets (5 books) and the Minor Prophets (12 books). The Old Testament sections or categories are broken down as this number of books in each section: 5, 12, 5, 5, 12. Now, the important thing to know about the Prophets is that they are not "major" and "minor" because of importance, they're major and minor based on length of the books. There are incredibly important things that happen in the minor prophets. The other important thing to note in the Prophets is that they're not in chronological order. It can get kind of difficult, because it goes back and forth.

The New Testament begins with the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Then there is one book of history, Acts, which is the history of the church. Next you have Paul's letters, the General Epistles are the ones written to the entire church. Last is Revelation, which is the apocalyptic book, written by John.

Lastly, let's discuss the different translations. Frequently we hear, "I read the NIV or I read the Message or I read this, etc". What does that mean? Well, the Bible has been translated into 500 different languages. One way to look at it is as a translation versus a paraphrase. A translation is word for word – they took the Greek word and they translated it the best they could, or the Hebrew word into the English word, etc. Some of them can seem very hard to read because the structure is not smooth and fluid, but it's very accurate. Some of them try to do a thought for thought. So, it's not quite word for word, but it's very close. And those are generally translations. A paraphrase is trying to put it in our language, something that's really easily accessible, something that we can understand. For example, this is the New Revised Version, a word for word translation. This is the English Standard Version, also similar. This is the New International Version. This is what's in our pews at the church. It is a little more thought for thought, but still a very accurate translation. So, let's look at a few different translations. In the NASB, this is James 1:2-3, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. The NIV, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters" (some of these, will expand it so it's not limited by gender) "whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." This is very similar, it's not that different. And then you go to The Message, "Consider it a sheer gift, friends, when tests and challenges come at you from all sides. You know that under pressure, your faith life is forcing the open and shows its true colors." So that's another way of saying it differently. The Message was written by Eugene Peterson, who was a Bible scholar and a great pastor. It's not inaccurate, it's just a different, a more modern take on the Bible. Regarding the question of what you should read, it is whatever you feel most comfortable with. Some people want to read the hyper-accurate version of it. Some people want to read something that's easier to understand. I will say this, I don't have the King James version listed here. Many people grew up with the King James as the only Bible you read. But since 1600, there have been discoveries of better versions of the original Greek and there's more accurate and easier to read translations. I would recommend if you were wanting to get a Bible, the NIV is a great option that's good for everyone.

When studying the Bible, one thing to remember is it was written for a different culture. Yes, it applies to you today, but it had to be written so that they understood it at that time. And sometimes you have to do a little research on your own to understand the culture and purpose that the authors wrote for. Each author wrote with the intention that it be to a specific group, for example, Paul's letters were written to a specific group that was dealing with a specific problem. Now those problems are still around today, that's why it is still useful to us now. But each one had a reason for what they wrote, and they were all written in different styles. But incredibly, despite these differences, the Bible is one book. It's one story, that is made up of a lot of different books by a lot of different writers. It doesn't always sound the same and it's not supposed to be comprehensive. One of the greatest damages that's ever been done to the Bible is people trying to use it to answer every question. That's not what it was intended for or

written for. And John even says, “now there are many other things that Jesus did if every one of them were to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” John is saying, I couldn't even contain or write everything that Jesus did, let alone all the history of time. We need to make sure we understand what the Bible is, but also what it's not trying to be and what it isn't. It wasn't written as a compilation. When Paul was writing these letters, he didn't know that we would be studying them 2000 years later.

Finally, and most importantly, you have biases. I have biases. If you go to the Bible with the idea of, “I believe this, and I'm going to find where the Bible tells me I'm right”, then you will read the Bible to tell you you're right. The problem there is you are not reading the Bible as it was written. You're reading the Bible as you wanted it to be written. And so, you need to study the Bible to learn your beliefs, not to confirm or affirm the beliefs that you bring to it. And that's the last one for today. Next week we will be looking at the first five books of the Old Testament. Thank you.

**End Script\*\*\*\***

### **Tough questions prep:**

Understand that the Bible is a very large book with very large concepts. It is not your job to know everything. That is God's job.

If there is a question you cannot answer, it is always appropriate to say you do not know. Offer to help get them in contact with Pastor Shawn Allen, or a pastor on staff at Mount Pisgah who may be someone better equipped to answer their questions.

It is often hard for people to contextualize big-picture Biblical stories, and it may be even harder for you to answer specific questions about the context, time period, culture, or author's desired audience in a specific book of the Bible. Give them assurance that their question may be covered in the next few lessons.

Here are some common questions you might receive and answers:

### **Why does God seem so cruel in the Old Testament?**

First, it is important to note that the verses seem 'cruel' are far more limited in the OT than it may originally seem. The majority of the verses show a God that, though often frustrated with the Israelites, offers protection and redemption. Second, we must remember the Bible does not attempt to recount all the historical events. There may be considerations that are difficult to understand without context. Third, we should read the whole bible through the lens of progressive revelation (discussed more in week 2). Generally, this is the idea that humans gained a better understanding of God through time as He revealed Himself. This revelation culminated with Christ. Finally, we have to remember that the OT, though inspired by God, was written by man. We do not know how that lens affected the writing (especially as it may relate

to the feelings and relationships between the Israelites and the other nations), nor do we understand God's purpose in all that happens. In the end, we have to remember that it is the same God that rescued the Israelites and repeatedly forgave them when they turned away that sent Jonah to save the Ninevites and that ultimately sent his Son to die for our sins.

**Was it written by man or by God?** The Bible was written by man but is inspired by God. The Bible does not lose the authority of the Word of God because it was physically written by man.

**Where do I start reading?** At the end of the class there will be a discussion of various plans to begin the Bible journey. In the meantime, Luke and Acts is a great way to learn about the Life of Jesus and the history of the early Church.

**Why are there so many disagreements about the meaning of parts of the text?** We do not have access to the thoughts of the authors beyond what we have in the text. Many of the disagreements involve disputes over translation or whether something is to be read literally or allegorically. Many times, these come from our desire to have the Bible answer questions on issues beyond what it intended (See Richter quote above). However, if the Bible is read as the story of God's creation and redemption of this world (and all of us) then the disagreements are neither substantive nor problematic.

**What version should I read?** The translations range from the closest literal translation (NASB, ESV) to the moderate (NIV) to the paraphrased versions (The Message). Read a version that you enjoy and that will help you stay with it. The NIV is the most prevalent (and the red pew Bible at Mt. Pisgah).

**Key Scriptures to review prior:**

2 Timothy 2:15

2 Timothy 3:16-17

### *Class Timeline:*

	Estimated time
1. Introductions	15 min
2. Teaching Video	Pastor Shawn Allen, 22 min
3. Discussion Questions & Activity	20 min
4. Takeaways	1 min
5. Prayer	1 min
6. Invitation for next week	1 min



**1. You may find it helpful to ask some of these questions as way of introduction:**

***Have you ever read through the entire bible?***

***What are your earliest memories of the bible?***

***What role did the Bible play in your family growing up?***

***What interested you about taking this class?***

**Introduce the content and video for this class (*say in your own words*):**

Many people are intimidated by the Bible. The language and culture can seem foreign and inaccessible; some of the material can seem inapplicable; and the breadth and depth can seem overwhelming. You are not alone. Yet there is nothing more important as Christians than understanding the Word of God given to us in the Bible.

The idea behind this class is to make the Bible more accessible by a) understanding it as one story, b) understanding how that story came to be, c) and understand our role in the story. One of the best ways to understand this idea is the following description from Sandra Richter:

“The Bible in all its parts, is intended to communicate to humanity the realities of redemption. Over the centuries, the church has stumbled when it has forgotten this truth, and has thereby, ironically, damaged the authority of the book from which it has drawn its life. Often the error has run in the direction of making this book less than it is – less than the inspired Word of God, less than the supernatural report of God’s doings throughout the ages, less than the definitive rule for faith and practice among those who believe. But just as often, the error has run in the other direction – attempting to make the Bible more than it is. Too often in our zeal for the worldwide influence of this book, we forget that it was not intended as an exhaustive ancient world history, or a guide to the biology and paleontology of creation, or even a handbook on social reform. We forget that this book was cast upon the waters of history with one very specific, completely essential and desperately necessary objective – to tell the epic tale of God’s ongoing quest to ransom his creation. And to, thereby, give each generation the opportunity to know his amazing grace. The Bible is the saga of Yahweh and Adam, the prodigal son and his ever gracious heavenly father; humanity in their rebellion and God in his grace. This narrative begins with Eden and does not conclude until the New Jerusalem is firmly in place. It is all one story. And if you are a believer, it is all your story.”

Sandra L. Richter “The Epic of Eden” p. 15

**2. Play the teaching video.**

### **3. Discussion questions (see page 8 & 9 of the participants guide)**

1. What has kept you from reading the Bible in the past?
2. Have you ever thought of the Bible as a library and how you would approach it in a logical way not in basic order?
3. What caught your attention in the video?

#### **Activity:**

Here are some activities to encourage group participation if you have time-

1. You can do 3 or 4 “find the verse” challenges
2. Throw out some questions (How many books? How many in the NT? How many in the OT? What languages was the Bible written in? Name three types of books?)

### **4. Closing / takeaways in your own words:**

The Bible was written for you! Just as Christ died for each of us, so to the Word of God was given to each of us. It is not always easy; so you should never feel bad about struggling. But understanding the big picture is the first step to being able to immerse yourself in the teachings.

### **5. Close in prayer Use the PRAY model as we teach them to pray:**

P = praise – praise God for who He is and what he has done. Use attributes to describe Him.

R = Repent – helps us confess any sins and change the way we think or feel

A = Ask – petition your request for this group to our Father in Heaven including any doubt they may have

Y = Yield – Submit to God’s will and let go of our will.

<b>PRAISE</b>	Matthew 6:9	"Pray, then, in this way: 'Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.'"
<b>REPENT</b>	Matthew 6:12	"And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."
<b>ASK</b>	Matthew 6:11&13	"Give us this day our daily bread."  "And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from evil. [For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.]"
<b>YIELD</b>	Matthew 6:10	"Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven."

## 6. Invite them back next week to learn about . . . . .

In Week 2 of Connect to the Bible we will be talking about the Pentateuch! Join us next week to learn about the first 5 books of the Bible!