



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 12

Why the Bible is Trustworthy

Day One

God's Word

Lesson 11, *Refresh—Sharing Christ*, as its name indicates, was a refresher in sharing the gospel. Notably, the way we share Christ is an extension of our personality. Our words encompass our thoughts and attitudes—we cannot speak what has not been formed or generated in our minds.

In the same way, God's words are an extension of Himself. What God says contains His particular thinking and attitudes on specific subjects. We could not possibly take in all of God's thoughts and attitudes because of His massive intellect and wisdom. So, the Lord provides humanity with everything we need to know about Him through His Word, the Bible.

No matter what form the Bible takes, it is still the Word of God. For example, we may hear words spoken aloud from the Bible or we may read them silently from a magazine, Bible study, or book. The Bible may also be on a computer, tablet, iPad, or through some other electronic device. The medium of the message does not change the fact of its divine communication.

In the Old Testament God's Word is a synonym¹ for the Law or Torah. Statute is another word for law, order, or decree. For the Israelites to have known the one, true, living God, they were to study and meditate on God's Law (Joshua 1:8–9). They were to study and meditate on God's Word so they could obey Him—so they might hide His Word in their hearts (Psalm 119:11).

Jesus taught the same concepts regarding God's Word found in the Old Testament (Luke 11:28). He confirmed the importance of God's Word by telling parables (Luke 8:11) and speaking against those who would try to change it (Mark 7:13). In all His teaching and instruction, He spoke as one with authority—He spoke as God would speak. Jesus did this beautifully and seamlessly because He was, is, and always will be God. This is the great truth of the Bible: Jesus is God—the third Person of the Trinity.

In John 1:1, we are told that Jesus is the Word. The apostle John chose the Greek term *logos* (λόγος) that we translate *word* into English. He chose *logos* for his opening statement about Jesus because it served his purposes in explaining the truth to both the Greeks and the Jews, who made up his main listeners or readers at the time.

¹ Synonym is a word that means the same, or almost the same, as another word in the same language, either in all of its uses or in a specific context.

In the sense that John is talking about creation, the Greeks understood *logos* or the *word* to be divine reason or divine wisdom in the planning and coordinating of the universe. They knew something had to account for their finely tuned and structured world. But they did not know the *Who* behind *logos* (reason, wisdom).

The Jews clearly understood the concept of the Word of God as being communication from the one, true, living God. They believed God and His Word were inseparable. The Old Testament is filled with God speaking in power to create and rule. God speaks, and it comes to pass.

Thus, *logos* or *word* represents divine wisdom and divine speech. Both the Greeks and Jews would understand the concept being conveyed to them. Jesus is both divine wisdom and divine speech— He is one with God. This is not to say that everyone would accept the truth of what John was writing, but only that they would understand what was being communicated to them.

Read Matthew 4:4 and answer questions 1–4:

Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” Matthew 4:4

1. In addition to bread or food, what should people also live on?
2. Where do people get the words that come from the mouth of God (See 2 Timothy 3:16–17; Hebrews 1:1–2)?
3. How are *you* living on every word that comes from the mouth of God?
4. How are *you* discipling others to live *on every word that comes from the mouth of God*?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #1–4 with your discipleship team.

Brother Andrew: God’s Undercover Agent² (Part 1 of 3)

Not everyone has access to God’s Word. Perhaps your calling is to get Bibles into as many hands as possible. That was ‘brother Andrew’s calling. He has been nicknamed “God’s Smuggler” because at the height of the Cold War³ he secretly carried Bibles and tracts behind the Iron Curtain.⁴

² Alan Millwright, *Brother Andrew, God’s Undercover Agent, Heroes of the Faith Series* (Uhrichsville, Ohio: Barbour Publishing, 1999). The next eight paragraphs about Brother Andrew are gleaned through this resource.

³ The “Cold War” refers to a state of political tension and military rivalry between nations that stops short of full-scale war, especially that which existed between the United States and Soviet Union following World War II.

⁴ The “Iron Curtain” defines an impenetrable barrier to communication or information especially as imposed by rigid censorship and secrecy. The term was used by Winston Churchill in 1946 to describe the separation between democratic and communist countries.

Brother Andrew was born Andrew van der Bijl on May 11, 1928. He was born in Sint Pancras, in the region of Holland located in the country of the Netherlands where he grew up in a Christian home. However, He had no interest in “religion” and was known as a reckless child and youth in his village. He would lie and steal because he could get away with it. It did not bother him at all.

On May 11, 1940, Germany’s Nazi army invaded Holland. At first the changes were small and the Dutch people did not seem to mind. But soon the Nazis showed their evil nature. They took available resources, so many Dutch had to dig up and eat tulip bulbs in order to survive. They also started rounding up Jews, young Dutch boys, and men who were never seen again.

Andrew joined the Dutch underground movement and was successful in evading the German soldiers. He stole weapons, food, cigarette lighters, knives, pencils, and anything that might be useful for their effort to stop their adversaries. The Nazis remained in Holland for almost five years until finally they were defeated and World War II ended.

With only a 6th grade education and no actual trade, Andy chose to join the Dutch army. He was assigned to the Dutch East Indies,⁵ which encompassed over thirteen thousand islands off Asia. The Dutch had been in control of these islands for over 300 years but during the war the Japanese had conquered them and convinced the natives to help them defend the islands.

Nevertheless, Andrew did not expect much warfare, but he was mistaken. He did not understand guerilla warfare and how devastating it would be to his company. Only 8 soldiers out of 80 returned alive.

His mother gave him a Bible as he left for the Dutch East Indies, but he had no intention of reading it. In fact, during all the killing and bloodshed, he did not seem to seek God. Instead he sought alcohol. When he was not fighting for his life and the lives of his comrades, he would get drunk. Losing so many of his friends just made him angry and mean.

After two years in combat, a bullet shattered his ankle. Amputation was considered, but in the end they did not remove his foot. His recuperation took place in a hospital run by Franciscan nuns. His friends brought his things, which included the Bible his mother had given him. He started reading it through boredom and to get more attention from one of the nuns, Sister Patrice.

The Bible

We get the word “Bible” from the Greek word *biblia* (βιβλία). *Biblia* is a plural noun meaning books, scrolls, and written statements. “The earliest Christian use of *ta biblia* (‘the books’) in this sense is said to be 2 Clement 14:2 (c. AD 150)”⁶ 2 Clement is a non-canonical Christian writing on self-control, repentance, and judgment. The author is thought to be different from 1 Clement, Clement of Rome, who authored the First Epistle of Clement.

⁵ Today these islands are part of Indonesia.

⁶ J.D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1982), 137.

Definitions: *Canon* is defined as a set of religious writings regarded as authentic and forming a religion's body of scripture. The word *canon* is derived from a Greek word *kanon* (κανών) meaning rule. "Since the 4th century *kanon* has been used by Christians to denote an authoritative list of the books belonging to the OT or NT"⁷ The *Bible* is the collection of books considered part of the Christian *canon*. *Non-canonical* means that a writing is not part of the *canon*.

"The doctrine of biblical inspiration is fully developed only in the pages of the NT. But far back in Israel's history, we already find certain writings being recognized as having divine authority and serving as a written rule of faith and practice for God's people. This is seen in the people's response when Moses reads to them the book of the covenant (Exodus 24:7)"⁸ The Book of the Covenant is a collection of laws and promises God had given to Moses to write down prior to Moses reading it to the people (Exodus 20:22–23:33).

Read Matthew 4:4 and answer questions 5–6:

Then he [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey" Exodus 24:7

5. What book of the Bible contains the Book of the Covenant today?

6. From the people's response, how did they view the Book of the Covenant, which is part our Bible today?

There have been differences of opinions as to what books should make up the canon. However, all but a few Protestant denominations accept 39 books of the Old Testament and 27 books of the New Testament. These are the books represented in the vast majority of Bible translations. Protestants do not accept any of the 15 books known as the Apocrypha.

The New Testament was formally affirmed in various Protestant confessions and creeds during and after the Reformation period. These include the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689).

The Catholic Church accepts 12 of the 15 apocryphal books into their canon. With slight variations, the Greek Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox churches follow in the Catholic apocryphal tradition. The word apocrypha is derived from a Greek word and means "things that are hidden" These apocryphal books were written between 200 BC and 100 AD. Except 2 Esdras, all of the apocryphal books are included in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. *Notably, these additional 15 books have never been part of the Hebrew Bible.*

"Since Catholics consider these books canon, therefore they do not call them apocrypha but deuterocanonical, meaning later canon. The Council of Trent in 1546, declared the Apocrypha as

⁷ Ibid., 166.

⁸ Ibid., 167

canon, except for 3 Esdras, 4 Esdras and the Prayer of Manasseh which they call apocryphal”⁹
The names for these writings can differ between Protestants and Catholics.

Although the apocryphal books were part of the Vulgate, the official Latin translation of the Bible, they were excluded by the Protestants at the time of Reformation. Historically, Protestants have not considered these books inspired by God, but useful for study and edification. It should be noted that there are scholars who believe Jude 1:9 and 1:14 made references to apocryphal works. This is not to prove that these extra biblical works belong in the Bible, but only that they were used by the early church and are still useful today. The cultural and historical aspect can be particularly helpful in understanding the people, their concerns, and ways of doing things.

Apocryphal Books:

	Protestant Names	Roman Catholic Names
1	Tobit	Tobias
2	Judith	Judith
3	Wisdom of Solomon	Wisdom
4	Ecclesiasticus / Sirach	Ecclesiasticus
5	I Maccabees	I Maccabees
6	II Maccabees	II Maccabees
7	Baruch	Baruch 1–5
8	Epistle of Jeremiah	Baruch 6
9	Additions to Esther	Esther 10:4–16:24
10	Prayer of Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men	Daniel 3:24–90
11	Susanna	Daniel 13
12	Bel and the Dragon	Daniel 14
13	I Esdras	3 Esdras (sometimes called I Esdras)
14	2 Esdras	4 Esdras (sometimes called 2 Esdras)
15	Prayer of Manasseh	Prayer of Manasseh

7. Does the Hebrew Bible canon accepted by Judaism, include or ever included any of the above apocryphal books? Yes No (Underline One)

8. Have you ever read any apocryphal books? Yes No (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #5–8 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

⁹ <http://truthnet.org/Bible-Origins/6_The_Apocrypha_The_Septugint/index.htm>(accessed 7/5/2013)

Day Two

Recognized as the Word of God

Brother Andrew: God's Undercover Agent¹⁰ (Part 2 of 3)

“One of the sisters who noticed him [Andrew] reading his Bible mentioned that Ignatius of Loyola was a Spanish soldier wounded in a battle with the French in the year 1521. During his recuperation he [Ignatius] turned to religious books out of boredom. He found that Christianity answered all his questions. He was a compulsive man. If Christianity had all the answers, should not a man pursue its truths to the very limit of his understanding?”¹¹ Ignatius eventually became the founder of the *Society of Jesus* or the *Jesuit* order, focusing on education.

Andrew did not know much about Catholics, so the sister patiently explained that St. Francis of Assisi was the founder of her order. An order is composed of men and women who live under the same religious vows (promise). She then quoted a prayer St. Francis had written:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace.

Where there is hate, may I bring love;

Where there is offense, may I bring pardon;

May I bring union in place of discord;

Truth, replacing error;

Faith, where once there was doubt;

Hope, for despair;

Light, where was darkness;

Joy to replace sadness.

Make me not so crave to be loved as to love.

Help me to learn that in giving I may receive;

In forgetting self, I may find life eternal.

“Is that what you Franciscans believe, or do all Catholics believe that? asked Andrew. What was that last item: ‘in forgetting self, I may find life eternal’?”

“Yes, said the sister, smiling”¹²

Andrew began to wonder if Jesus really is God's Son who came to save humanity from their sins. But it seemed like such a wild story. He continued to read the Bible, but it did not really bring him much joy.

¹⁰ Millwright, *Brother Andrew, God's Undercover Agent, Heroes of the Faith Series*. The next nine paragraphs about Brother Andrew are gleaned through this resource.

¹¹ Ibid., 49.

¹² Ibid., 50.

When Andrew was healed well enough to leave the hospital, Sister Patrice told him a story of how the Javans captured monkeys. He patiently listened even though he knew how they did it.

“The natives take a very large, heavy coconut and bore a small hole in it. After they drain the milk, they put a pebble inside the coconut. Then they wait in the bushes for a monkey to come down out of the trees to investigate the coconut. Eventually a monkey will come down. The hole is just large enough for the monkey’s hand. He reaches inside and feels the pebble. But he can’t take his hand out when he clutches the pebble. The hole isn’t big enough”¹³ When the natives come out of the bushes, the monkey will not let go of his pebble. He cannot run or climb a tree very well with the coconut attached.

“Maybe you are like that monkey, Andy [Andrew]. What are you holding on to? What is it that will cost you your soul?”¹⁴

8. In regard to the story of the monkey and the coconut above, what are you holding on to that keeps you from reading and applying God’s Word daily?

During biblical times, there was a diversity of spiritual texts and beliefs beyond those included in the Protestant and Catholic canon. For instance, there were various ideas about the creation of the world and the existence of other gods. So, how did the people know what was truth and what was not? The following list of principles to recognize and collect divinely inspired books was compiled from “The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict,” by Josh McDowell.

Five Principles for the Recognition and Collection Divine Scripture¹⁵

(1) Was the book written by a prophet or spokesperson of God?

The life of Moses is insightful. He lived among the people as God’s prophet and wrote the first five books of the Bible. God not only spoke through him, but also performed miracles through him. The nation of Israel was an eyewitness to these miracles and to the fact that when Moses spoke, his words were fulfilled. If Moses had spoken or written falsehoods, the Israelites would have refused these books as the Word of God and as having divine authority.

9. Read 1 Kings 8:56. Who gave Moses the words to speak, and were these words fulfilled?

“Praise be to the LORD, who has given rest to his people Israel just as he promised. Not one word has failed of all the good promises he gave through his servant Moses” 1 Kings 8:56

(2) Was the writer of the book confirmed by acts of God?

¹³ Ibid., 51.

¹⁴ Ibid., 52.

¹⁵ John McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999) 21–22. (Quoting Geisler/Nix, GIB, 223–231).

Throughout the Bible, miracles can be seen to separate the true prophets from the false ones. When John the Baptist was in prison he sent his disciples to ask Jesus if He was the One—the Messiah. Jesus confirmed His status with acts of God: ‘Go back and report to John: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised.’ (Matthew 11:2–6)

However, we must be cautious in evaluating miracles because God does allow Satan to engage in supernatural acts (Matthew 24:24; 2 Thessalonians 2:9–10). Look at other aspects of the person or religious group performing acts that influence nature. Do their beliefs and actions line up with the truth of God?

Now, back to Moses. After the Egyptians had enslaved the Israelites for 500 years, Moses was called by God to speak His words. God would tell Moses what to say to Pharaoh and he would say it. Ten times Moses told Pharaoh to let God’s people go so they could worship Him. Ten times Moses told Pharaoh the consequences that would happen if he did not do as the Lord commanded—Ten times the words came true in the form of miracles and signs.

Read Exodus 9:20–24 and answer questions 10–13:

Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside. ²¹ But those who ignored the word of the LORD left their slaves and livestock in the field. ²² Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt—on people and animals and on everything growing in the fields of Egypt” ²³ When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; ²⁴ hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation. Exodus 9:20–24

10. Who is speaking to Moses (v. 22a)?

11. What did the Lord tell Moses to do (v. 22b)?

12. When Moses stretched out his hand with his staff toward the sky as the Lord told him, what happened (vv. 23–24)?

13. How would this miracle confirm Moses as a prophet of God?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #8–13 with your discipleship team.

Not only is divine inspiration and divine authority true of the books in the Old Testament, but it is also true of the books of the New Testament. For example, Jesus lived among the people and the truth of His words and miracles could be verified. There were many eyewitnesses both Jews

and Gentiles who were still alive when the writings about Jesus appeared. If anything were false or inaccurate, the people would have known and not accepted the writings as the divinely inspired Word of God. For example, the Gospel of Thomas and the Gospel of Peter, written in 1st or 2nd century were not considered divinely inspired and not part of the New Testament.

(3) Did the message tell the truth about God?

The consistency of the books of the Bible was certainly a factor in helping people discern what texts were truly inspired by God. There are 66 books in the Bible written by approximately 40 different authors over a period of 1,600 years, in 3 different languages—yet its message is uniform and constant. Its consistent message is the redemption of humanity by the Messiah, Christ Jesus.

14. Read Numbers 23:19. What is true about God that is not true about people?

God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill? Numbers 23:19

Read Mark 12:14 and answer questions 15–16:

They came to him and said, “Teacher, we know that you are a man of integrity. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are; but you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” Mark 12:14

15. In trying to trick Jesus by asking him a difficult question, these men make three statements about Jesus. No one in the crowd disagrees. What are these three statements of truth?

16. What do you do when you are not sure about the truth of a statement or teaching about God?

(4) Did the message come with the power of God?

Action Step

17. Now it is your turn. Write two questions, one from Romans and one from Hebrews below, regarding principle number 4 of recognizing that the books of the Bible are divinely inspired because they come with the power of God. Then, answer the questions that you have asked.

Regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David, ⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Romans 1:3–4

Your question and answer from Romans 1:3–4:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrews 4:12

Your question and answer from Hebrews 4:12:

(5) Was the message accepted by the people of God?

18. Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. Why did the apostle Paul thank God continually?

And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe. 1 Thessalonians 2:13

19. List the Five Principles that guided the recognition and collection of divinely inspired books. Take turns sharing these principles with your discipleship team or with other people you know.

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

(5)

It is important to have confidence in the Bible and to be able to share that confidence with believers and nonbelievers, alike. All of our knowledge about God and His Son, Jesus Christ, begins with the Scriptures. Also, remember to share the truth with patience and in love.

20. How has learning the “Five Principles for the Recognition and Collection Divine Scripture” given you confidence in the Holy Scriptures as the reliable Word of God’?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #14–20 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Two—

Day Three

The Word of God to Others

God's plan for giving out His Word is the same as giving out the gospel. It is interpersonal. For example, in the case of the Bible, it was translated into your native language, edited, published, and widely distributed. It was either purchased for one's personal use or to give to others. God uses human hands and talents in the process of making His Word available.

21. How were you introduced to the Word of God?

22. How are you introducing others to the Bible?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #21–22 with your discipleship team.

Brother Andrew: God's Undercover Agent¹⁶ (Part 3 of 3)

At 21 Andrew was released from the hospital and continued his drinking and sour attitude. A few months later, he was invited to a revival. He went but was drunk and boisterous. The speaker prayed for them and then led the audience in a booming hymn to drown out Andrew and his drunken friend's laughter and remarks.

The next day a peace settled on him and he picked up his Bible. The words were clear and God's message of salvation real. Soon after, one night in January 1950, he surrendered his life to God. He was not going to be like the monkey—he let go of the pebble.

God put a desire on his heart to become a missionary, but with only a 6th grade education he was concerned. He expressed his concerns to the British evangelist Sidney Wilson. Sidney said, "Have you not heard of Gladys Aylward? She was a tiny, mousy parlor maid almost thirty years old. The mission people told her that at her age she could never learn a foreign language. She went to China on her own and became an assistant to a missionary. Today she speaks Mandarin Chinese like a native. Although she disdains fame, she is famous anyway. That tiny woman escorted one hundred orphan children through the mountain during the war to save them. Don't ever say 'I can'!"¹⁷

With that encouragement he enrolled in the WEC missionary training school in Glasgow, Scotland. It was founded by missionary C.T. Studd, who died in Africa in 1931. C.T. also had inspiring words to encourage Andrew:

"Some wish to live within the sound of church and chapel bell. I wish to run a rescue mission within a yard of hell!"¹⁸

¹⁶ Millwright, *Brother Andrew, God's Undercover Agent, Heroes of the Faith Series*. The next eleven paragraphs about Brother Andrew are gleaned through this resource.

¹⁷ Ibid., 70.

¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

Right before he graduated from his training school, he prayed for direction. He was led to a communist magazine and noticed a youth conference to be held in Warsaw, Poland, July 15, 1955. He sent the organizers a simple note about being a Christian and desiring to exchange ideas at the conference. Amazingly, he was invited and given a special permit to board a train and enter Poland.

Andrew packed a few clothes but took a huge suitcase filled with copies of a booklet entitled “The Way of Salvation” in Polish. Not only did he distribute all the booklets, but he realized the great need for Bibles in communist countries. Christians were desperate for the Word of God.

Thus began Andrew’s unique missionary work—taking Bibles behind the Iron Curtain. The countries included Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Hungary, East Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and Russia. It was dangerous work, as he would have to pass inspection by each border patrol as he entered into a foreign country. He would pack his car and hide the Bibles and tracts in and among his clothes and camping gear. He prayed for God to blind the guard’s eyes to the Bibles and Christian materials that he was carrying. God answered his prayer.

All of these countries wanted to end Christianity but they all had a different way of dealing with it. For example, in East Germany, they allowed the churches to remain open but attacked God and Christianity. They had their propaganda machine working and publishing things such as, “only a moron would believe in God.” Plus, every state ceremony had the people vowing loyalty to the Communist state and not to God.

But for the faithful, they knew the Bible was God sent. Tears would roll down their cheeks when Andrew would bring out a Bible in their own native language. The Bible was also a needed reminder that Christians in the free world had not forgotten them.

Andrew married a young woman named Corrie in 1958 and together they had four children. By 1960, Andrew was going by the name of Brother Andrew. It was a way of protecting his identity. It is harder to track someone if you do not know his last name.

God sent other workers into the field with Brother Andrew and his work has developed into a ministry called “Open Doors International.” The ministry delivers Bibles and strengthens Christians in 45 countries, including those that are Muslim.

23. How has Brother Andrew’s story encouraged or inspired you?

24. Read Isaiah 40:8. How long will God’s Word be effective and true?

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever. Isaiah 40:8

The Bible is true and will remain true forever. However, technology is changing the way we receive and study it. God’s Word is now accessible through the Internet or software programs via

computers, tablets, and phones. This opens up opportunities and unique ways the Lord may lead you or others in studying, sharing, teaching, or proclaiming His Word.

Definition: *Study* is a verb meaning to apply one's mind purposefully to the acquisition of knowledge or understanding of (a subject). *Study* also means to read carefully and to memorize. *Studying* the Bible is applying our minds in an organized fashion that helps us understand God and His ways without predetermined (decide in advance) conclusions.

25. Read John 14:26. Why are believers never alone when they are studying God's Word?

But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. John 14:26

There are various methods in studying and interpreting the Bible. Depending on whether one is studying to teach, learn, or edify (improve mind or character) will dictate the method used. There are many biblical tools to help you in your study. These include commentaries, Bible dictionaries, Bible Atlases, Bible Encyclopedias, and other books written in the past and present (Luke 1:1–4; Joshua 10:13; Acts 17:28 and Jude 1:14). All these resources may be online.

Definition: “A Bible *commentary* is a written, systematic series of explanations and interpretations of Scripture. *Commentaries* often analyze or expound on individual books of the Bible, chapter by chapter and verse by verse. Some *commentary* works provide analysis of the whole of Scripture”¹⁹

Ask the Holy Spirit to give you discernment (ability to judge) in using these other resources—we must be diligent in distinguishing truth from error. Just because an author is a theologian does not mean they know and abide by the truth of Scripture. Sadly, many have not placed their faith in Jesus and do not hold a high view of Scripture. This could be true of anyone handling the Word of God, so take care (Acts 17:11).

One of the best ways to study is to choose a subject that you are interested in or have difficulty with. For example, if you want to know God better, study His attributes or characteristics. Feeling a shortage of patience, study patience.

Subject Study

I have come to realize that as believers we will always be searching to know God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, more intimately. But, at one point in my life, and as a fairly new believer, I wanted to know Jesus in a more personal way. So, I am using this as an example to help address studying a particular biblical subject.

One of the ways the Holy Spirit led me to grow closer to Jesus was by choosing a subject about Him. The subject I chose was the “I am” statements Jesus made about Himself. There are seven:

¹⁹ <<http://christianity.about.com/od/glossary/g/Commentary.htm#>>(accessed 3/15/2015)

I am the bread of life; I am the light of the world; I am the gate; I am the good shepherd; I am the resurrection and the life; I am the way and the truth and the life; and I am the true vine. I then wrote the verses on index cards to read and meditate on Jesus' identity and mission.

In order to find the verses, I looked up "bread" in my concordance. After I found the "bread of life" verse, I was able to cross reference and find the other "I am" statements. Some Bibles have cross-reference sections on each page of the Bible referring the reader to similar concepts, specific words or parallel passages. Of course, one can also search the internet or an AI (Artificial Intelligence) app to accomplish a quicker result.

Definition: A *concordance* is an alphabetical list of the words present in a text, usually with citations of the passages concerned. If a Bible includes a *concordance*, you will typically find it located at the back of the book under the title "*Concordance*."

If you want to study or teach on a particular subject, look it up in the Bible concordance and write down all the verses that relate to it. Then study what the Bible says about it, checking study Bible notes and other cross references. Check out Bible dictionaries for words that you do not clearly understand. Read other books on the subject or look up some of the verses in a commentary. If you do not have these extra books, please do not be concerned. They are helpful but not required.

Action Step

26. Prayerfully choose and study a biblical subject that you would like to know more about. Summarize what you learned.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #23–26 with your discipleship team.

You may also want to study a particular book of the Bible. Read it all the way through once to get an understanding of the author's goal or reason for writing the book. Why is this book in the Bible and what does God want His people to understand? Here also, as with the subject of study, one can also make use of various resources to study word meanings, definitions, cultural differences, etc.

—End Day Three—

Day Four
Studying the Bible

The Bible is literature. God ordained for His Word and His truth to be handed down through the written word. Being literature, the Bible makes use of figurative language and other literary concepts. Understand that there are different forms of literature and the form may influence the meaning.

Read Matthew 16:6–9 and answer questions 27–28:

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”⁷ They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?⁹ Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Matthew 16:6–9

27. Did the disciples have enough faith to understand Jesus’ words? Yes No (Underline One)

28. Why did Jesus say their lack of understanding had to do with a lack of faith (vv. 8–9)?

The disciples’ lack of faith and understanding was serious—they overlooked a crucial warning about certain religious leaders. If we fail to grasp figurative language, we too might overlook vital warnings and lessons in the Bible essential for our spiritual well-being.

Definition: “*Figurative language refers to all uses of words that are metaphorical or symbolic in nature, conveying a meaning different from their common, literal sense. In biblical interpretation, understanding the meaning of figurative language often involves the study of its cultural, historical, and literary contexts*”²⁰

29. Read Matthew 16:11–12. What did Jesus mean when He warned against the “yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (v. 12)?

“How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Matthew 16:11–12

Jesus also used parables or stories to make a point or clarify His instruction. The parables usually illustrated a moral principle to follow. As Jesus’ disciples, we have the Holy Spirit to help us understand the reason behind the stories, difficult words and complex passages of Scripture.

²⁰ James D. Hernando, *Dictionary of Hermeneutics* (Springfield, Missouri: Gospel Publishing House, 2005), 22.

Definition: *Literal* is an adjective meaning to conform or to uphold the exact or primary meaning of a word or words. It can also be defined as word for word or verbatim. *Literal* means avoiding exaggeration, metaphor, or embellishment; factual.

When the literal sense seems right and appropriate to the context of the passage, accept it unless there is a good reason not to. We want to get the clear meaning of Scripture using the rules and tools of grammar. Take care not to “spiritualize” or look for meaning that is not in the text.

A figure of speech employs words in a non-literal manner to evoke a meaning or effect beyond ordinary language. While numerous figures of speech exist, here are some examples.

Figures of Speech in Language²¹

Anthropomorphism: (an-thro-po-mor-ph-ism) *noun*

A description or depiction of God as if He were a human being, sharing some human characteristic or function. As a result, anthropomorphic language helps the author convey truth about God in human terms, ascribing to God some attribute or action that belongs to humans. Biblical example: *Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear* (Isaiah 59:1). Anthropomorphism can also mean assigning human motivation, characteristics, or behavior to inanimate (lifeless) objects, animals, or natural phenomena.

Hyperbole: (hy-per-bo-le) *noun*

A figure of speech in which exaggeration is used for emphasis or effect, as in *I could sleep for a year* or *This book weighs a ton*. Biblical example: *Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.* (John 21:25)

Irony: (i-ro-ny) *noun*

The use of words to express something different from and often opposite to their literal meaning. Irony is also a literary style employing such contrasts for humorous or rhetorical effect. Biblical example: *Then Job replied: “Doubtless you are the only people who matter, and wisdom will die with you!”* (Job 12:1–2)

Metaphor: (met-a-phor) *noun*

A figure of speech wherein an implicit comparison is made, one thing being spoken of in terms of another. A metaphor suggests a strong symbolic image that communicates not so much what is true to fact but as to feeling. Biblical example: *He replied, “Go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal.’”* (Luke 13:32)

Personification: (per-son-i-fi-ca-tion) *noun*

Occurs when personal qualities or activities are attributed to something that is impersonal such as animals, things, or ideas. Biblical example: *Lift up your heads, O you gates; be lifted up, you*

²¹ Ibid., definitions of figures of speech.

ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. (Psalm 24:7) This literary technique is used to create vivid and colorful images and is sometimes referred to as “figures of humanization.”

Simile: (sim·i·le) *noun*

A figure of speech that explicitly compares one thing to another by using the words “like” or “as”. What is being compared may be either objects or actions, but the nature of the comparison is formally expressed and easily identified. Biblical example: . . . *and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove.* (Luke 3:22a)

30. What is the difference between literal and figurative language?

31. How will being aware of figurative language help someone better understand the Bible?

Kathleen’s Story of Bible Study²²

Within days of being saved in 1995, I felt the Lord impressing upon me to get into a *serious* Bible Study. Although I was familiar with the stories in the Bible through weekly sermons, I had little contact with the Bible itself. I also felt the Lord saying the Bible studies available at our church did not have the depth He desired for me. I did not know where to begin.

As divine appointments go, a friend gave me a ride home from our women’s circle meeting one evening. I really do not remember why I needed a ride, but on the way home I mentioned that I was interested in a serious Bible Study. She told me about BSF (Bible Study Fellowship). It is an interdenominational organization with classes across the United States and the world. Everyone studies the same book of the Bible at the same time. Volunteers teach and manage the study groups at all their locations. My friend was both attending and volunteering at one in Raleigh.

At this particular location, they only allowed women to sign up once a year during the month of May for the following September. She was concerned that the May sign-up had already been completed but she would check. As it turned out, the following Monday was the last sign-up. I attended, was accepted, and studied with this group over the next four years.

After I learned that the Old Testament was written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek, the Lord put a desire in my heart to learn these ancient languages. I wanted to be able to interpret the Bible for myself and not rely on other people telling me what God was saying. Someone told me that it was possible to take Hebrew at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary without enrolling in seminary.

That sounded good to me, plus the seminary was only about 30 minutes from my home! However, when I called I was told that I could not just take one course but had to enroll in a program of study toward a degree. The woman on the phone mailed the application to me and when it arrived at a convenient time I thought—*I’ll apply and see what happens.*

²² Kathleen Skaar, author of *Disciples of Christ* Bible lessons.

After completing the majority of the application requirements, I found myself discussing the process over the phone with another representative from the seminary. I remarked, “This really is a lot of work just to take one class!” She replied, “Oh, you don’t have to enroll in the full seminary program for one class. We have simple application for that program I can mail to you.”

The first person on the phone had given me the wrong information! But I did not see any purpose in starting the application process anew and soon, I was accepted into the seminary program. Not only did I complete the Hebrew and Greek courses, but continued taking one or two classes each semester until after twelve years, I completed my Master of Divinity degree.

32. How has Jesus opened your mind so that you can understand the Scriptures?

33. How effective can you be as a disciple of Christ if you do not know the truth of Scripture?

The Bible is not only God’s Word, it is a literary masterpiece. Within its 66 books are poetry, prose, letters, narratives, proverbs, parables and satire. It also contains history, biographies, and future revelations. Understanding these different forms of literature and the various figures of speech gives us a more accurate meaning of the text and how to apply it to our lives. We want to know God’s intended meaning of the Bible so we can know Him better and follow His commands.

Sometimes it is necessary to reflect upon or to consider at length certain scripture passages. Meditation offers wonderful spiritual benefits to disciples. It fosters a deeper communion with God and cultivates confidence in His presence. Additionally, it serves as an act of worship and a pathway for encountering spiritual truth and experiencing renewal. There are many reasons to study and meditate on the words in the Bible, but here are three notable ones:

- (1) The words are inspired by God.
- (2) The words are historically accurate.
- (3) The words provide God’s guidance.

34. Read Joshua 1:8. Why will *you* study and meditate on the words in the Bible?

Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Joshua 1:8

35. Pray: O Father God, please give me a love of Your *Holy Word*. Make me trust it as truth and apply it to my life. Holy Spirit, illuminate Scripture so I may understand it and teach it to others. Lord Jesus, help me to use the Bible in telling others about You. Amen.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #27–34 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

The Bible and History

Those who ignore history are bound to repeat it. George Santayana ²³

History is the study of past events, particularly those involving human societies. It encompasses the examination, analysis, and interpretation of the recorded actions, experiences, and developments of individuals, communities, nations, and civilizations over time. History seeks to understand the causes and consequences of significant events, changes, and movements, providing insight into the context, dynamics, and patterns of human existence and progress.

Most likely, you studied history in school. It may have been your favorite subject, or it was not your preferred topic, and that's okay. Regardless, history can still serve you on a more personal level. For example, it contributes to your identity, moral choices, and understanding of good citizenship. Additionally, *it confirms the reliability and accuracy of the Bible*, shedding light on the context and events described within its pages.

The Bible references events in history placing them in time and geographical locations. Nothing in the Bible has ever been proven inaccurate. Even when the Bible appears to be wrong about an ancient fact or citation, an archeological site will be discovered with information that proves the Bible was right all along.

“For example, the Old Testament mentioned a people known as the Hittites nearly 50 times. But for centuries, those who studied the ancient world questioned the Bible because they had discovered no evidence of such a people. In 1906, however, the Hittite capital was uncovered about 90 miles east of Ankara, the capital of Turkey”²⁴

The biblical authors who documented historical events were methodical and meticulous, ensuring to capture the cultural and worldly backdrop against which they believed God was communicating. They exhibited clarity of mind, devoid of confusion or instability. Plus, their narratives were grounded in a context that remains verifiable even thousands of years later.

Since history is so important to humanity—three tests, bibliographical, internal evidence, external evidence—have been developed for the reliability of historical documents. We now take a brief look at the three tests and how they can be used to verify God’s Word.²⁵

(1) Bibliographical Test: Examines the textual transmission (communication) of documents.

Definitions: *Bibliographical* in this context is defined as the history of books and other publications, and the work of classifying and describing them. *Text* refers to a book or other written or printed work.

²³ The original text written by George Santayana in “Reason in Common Sense, The Life of Reason,” Vol.1, was “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” However, Santayana was misquoted and the new quote became popular and easier to recall.

²⁴ David Sper, *Can I Really Trust the Bible?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), 19.

²⁵ McDowell, *The New Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. Used as source for pp 19–22)

We look at the Bible today and say okay, here it is, but how did it get to us? We do not have the original words written on stones, animal hides or papyrus (paper made from papyrus plant), so do we have an accurate account of what we are reading? This is what the bibliographical test seeks to answer. This test looks at the date and reliability of the copies that are in existence.

New Testament

The New Testament books were the most frequently copied of any ancient manuscripts. Recall the New Testament was originally written in Greek. It was the universal language from about 300 BC to 200 AD because of Alexander the Great and his world conquests.

“There are now more than 5,686 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate²⁶ and at least 9,300 other early version (MSS)²⁷, and we have close to, if not more than, 25,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation (evidence). In comparison, Homer’s Iliad is second, with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the thirteenth century. (Leach, OB, 145)”²⁸

Most ancient manuscripts survive with only a few copies. The sheer number of copies of complete and partial biblical manuscripts makes it possible to reconstruct the original text with accuracy and precision. Thus, we have received God’s Word in the way He divinely purposed.

36. Explain in your own words why the New Testament books are historically reliable by using the bibliographical test.

Old Testament

The Old Testament is much older and by that fact alone has fewer copies. In addition, the Jews today hold their Scripture in such reverence that old or damaged copies are buried.²⁹ Therefore, it is likely that the ancient Israelites buried theirs as well.

The first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch) authored by Moses were most likely written during his time in the desert with the Israelites (1446–1406 BC). Nevertheless, when comparing the accuracy of the Old Testament to other ancient literature of its time, it stands as a far superior work in every way. The Hebrews were relentless in their pursuit of accuracy. They were faithful to the original text as they kept and protected it from all attacks. One of the ways that we know this truth about the Hebrews is the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls*.

²⁶ The Vulgate is the principal Latin version of the Bible, prepared mainly by St. Jerome in the late 4th century, and (as revised in 1592) adopted as the official text for the Roman Catholic Church.

²⁷ MSS is an abbreviation for manuscripts.

²⁸ McDowell, 34.

²⁹ <<http://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/ask-the-expert-burying-the-genizah/>>(accessed 3/15/2015.)

The Dead Sea, also known as the Salt Sea, is 1,300 feet below sea level and is one of the world's saltiest bodies of water. It is located 13 miles east of Jerusalem and 8 miles south of Jericho. Fish and plants cannot survive in it because of the high amounts of salt, hence its name.

In 1947 a young shepherd boy was looking for a lost goat near the Dead Sea and the ancient ruins of Qumran. He stopped along the way to throw some stones into a small cave opening. The stone did not make the kind of sound he expected. It sounded like shattering pottery. He went into the cave to investigate and found several large jars containing leather scrolls.

Eventually scrolls would be discovered in 11 caves in the area—scholars have identified the remains of about 825 to 870 separate scrolls. Fragments of every book of the Old Testament have been discovered except of the book of Esther. The scrolls are the oldest group of Hebrew canon (Old Testament) manuscripts ever discovered.

Scholars date the scrolls from about 200 BC to 68 AD. They were probably copied and written by the Jewish sect known as the Essenes.³⁰ It is estimated that the scrolls were hidden in the caves about 66–70 AD during the Jewish revolt against Rome. Roman soldiers put down the revolt and the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

When scholars compare the Dead Sea scrolls (for example the Isaiah scroll, 125 BC) with the next oldest known Hebrew text (Isaiah scroll 916 AD) the accuracy is remarkable. There is over a thousand-year period between the two scrolls and yet there is little difference. Plus, the 5 percent differences are simple scribal (copyist) errors, such as variations in spelling, which do not change the meaning of the text.

37. How does this information about the Dead Sea Scrolls build up your faith in the reliability and trustworthiness of the Scriptures?

(2) Internal Evidence Test: Claims the writer himself makes in the document.

For the Bible's internal test, we might ask a couple of questions:

“What do the writers of the Bible say about it?”

“Do the writers agree with one another?”

We know that the authors of the Bible all agree and maintain that it is a message directly from God. The authors were told what to say and what to write by God Himself. The Bible is not only historically accurate, but it also claims to be inspired by God. Below are several citations confirming this fact from both the Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament (Read Exodus 32:15–16; Isaiah 1:2, 30:8; Zechariah 7:12)

³⁰ The Essenes were members of a Jewish sect that existed in Judea during the time of Christ, but not mentioned in the New Testament. They were ascetics who lived in a separate community and attached great importance to the study of the Scriptures. Ascetics practice severe self-discipline and abstinence.

New Testament (Read Hebrews 1:1–2, 2:3; 2 Peter 3:15–16; 2 Timothy 3:16)

38. The Bible is consistent in claiming to record God’s words. True False (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #36–38 with your discipleship team.

(3) External Evidence Test: Claims other writers (in other documents) make about the manuscript in question.

Publius Tacitus (56 –117 AD), considered one of the greatest Roman historians, wrote the “Annals” and “Histories” In “Annals” Tacitus mentions that Christ suffered *the extreme penalty* under Pontius Pilate. He also stated that Christians get their name from Christ.

Flavius Josephus (37–100 AD) was a Jew working on historical documents under Roman authority. His book “Antiquities of the Jews” had references to Jesus, John the Baptist, and the beginnings of Christianity. He also wrote “Jewish Wars” and both these works confirm geographical and historical accounts listed in the Bible.

Suetonius Tranquillus (69–135 AD) was secretary to the Emperor Hadrian and his writings or reports confirm the use of punishment on Christians. His writings also confirm Acts 18:2, in which Claudius commanded all Jews to leave Rome.

There are also early Christian writers, such as Eusebius, Polycarp, Papias, and Irenaeus, who confirm the reliability and authenticity of the Scriptures. In fact, there is an unbroken line of Christians since the time of Christ who have trusted and followed the Holy Scriptures as the true Word of God. Not only do we have an unbroken line of writings affirming God’s Word, but we have an unbroken chain of witnesses willing to give their lives for this truth.

In conclusion, we affirm the divine authority and inherent truth of Scripture while acknowledging the challenges in comprehending God's message. Written millennia ago in vastly different cultures, the Bible demands careful interpretation due to linguistic and cultural disparities. Despite claims of scientific errors or contradictions, diligent study and collaborative inquiry reveal the Bible's coherence and timeless relevance. While recording human imperfections, the Bible offers progressive revelation, exemplified by Jesus Christ’s fulfillment of ancient sacrificial practices. It is essential to recognize the Bible’s literary nature, incorporating metaphorical language such as the “rising and setting of the sun” to convey deeper truths beyond scientific precision.

—End of Day Five and Lesson 12—

Next—Lesson 13: Overcoming Emotional Suffering, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

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