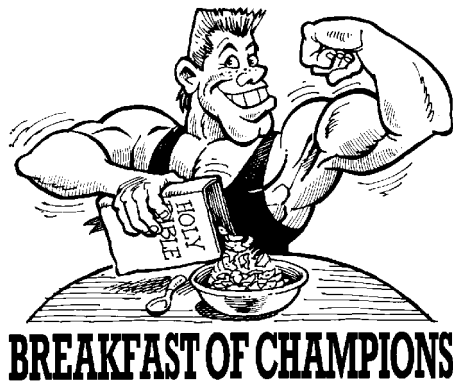


LESSON 6

Scripture: God's Letter to Us

**Sneak a peek at the timelines and a list of all 66 books in the Bible at the end of this lesson.*

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." ~ 2 Timothy 3:16-17, NRSV



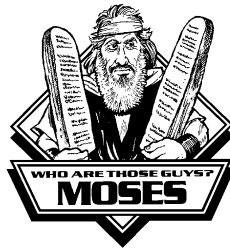
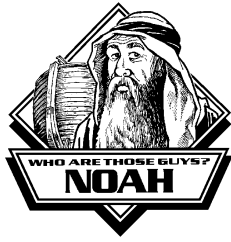
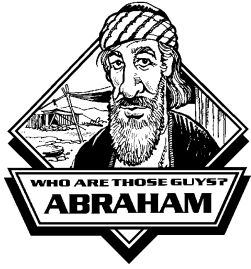
This lesson is one of the most exciting because we get to talk about the Bible, God's Word. One of the best ways to think of the Bible is as God's letter to us. It is God talking to us on paper, telling us about His great love, and giving us direction in our Christian walk and every day lives. (Lots of people also call the Bible our "roadmap" through life.) The Bible, or commonly called "Scripture," was written over a period of time of more than one thousand years, and it is made up of 66 books – 39 books in the Old Testament, and 27 books in the New Testament. The Bible was originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek but has gotten translated into many other languages over time.

The writers of Scripture never intended for their words to be read like those in other books. What they wrote wasn't supposed to just entertain people or state history. They had experienced God in real and powerful ways, so they wanted to write their experiences for others to read. They wanted their stories to be real in the lives of others so that God could be known by all. God inspired their writing so that when we read each book, we learn the truth about God and His presence in the world.

Because every person who wrote part of the Bible had different experiences with God, each story is different. We can see lots of different sides of God when we read the Bible. This may make God seem confusing, but don't let it discourage you! There is one clear message throughout the Bible that should ease your mind: *the relationship between God and God's people (us!) is a covenant.* *Covenant* can mean "promise" or "bond." Throughout Scripture, God pursues a complete and wonderful relationship with His children – those of the past and us today. God loves us, has a plan for our lives, and promises to always be with us.

The Bible is a story of a special people, God's people. It is split into the Old Testament and the New Testament. "Old Testament" means "old covenant." In Leviticus 26:12, God spoke to the

Israelites and said, “*I will be your God and you shall be my people.*” From the beginning, God wanted to be in charge, take care of His children, and be in a relationship with them.



The people above were some of the earliest Hebrew people who were in a covenant relationship with God. What do you know about them?

Unfortunately, lots of people in the Old Testament didn't want to stick to this covenant relationship with God. They wanted to go off and do their own thing, ignoring God. Some of them even wanted to worship other gods than God. Can you believe some people worshipped a *golden calf*?! The Old Testament tells lots of stories about people letting sin get the best of them and breaking God's covenant relationship with them. They were sexually impure and rebellious, got drunk, fought with their friends, and did all kinds of bad things. The people were very unfaithful, and the world was very broken. Thankfully, though, the story doesn't end there!

“New Testament” means “new covenant.” It tells the second part of the story - God's faithfulness to His covenant through Jesus Christ. Jesus made an agreement with his followers at the Last Supper before he was crucified: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (1 Corinthians 11:25). If they believed that he was the Son of God sent by God, they would live with him forever and be restored to a complete relationship with God on earth.

One of the most important things you can learn in Confirmation is this: The Bible's stories are NOT just stories of the past. We experience brokenness and sin just like the people of the Old and New Testaments did. How many times have we fought with our parents or our friends? How often do we say things we shouldn't? What about our thoughts? Are they always what we should be thinking? Hopefully you see the pattern. We're not exactly perfect people! And that's not even mentioning all of the violence, hatred, and sin in our schools, cities, and around the globe. We live in a very broken world. In fact, it's so broken, it's sometimes hard to see God in it. There's hope, though! Instead of being a part of all the yuckiness of the world, we can choose to live in the light of God's Word. We can accept Christ as our Lord, be forgiven of our sins, and enjoy a new and complete relationship with God. The Bible is our way to “grow in grace.” All of its teachings remind us of God's covenant of love with us and challenge us to keep walking with Jesus in our daily lives.

Now, let's look a little more closely at both the Old and New Testaments. How were they written, and why were they written that way? How are they the same, and how are they different? What do they tell us about God and about ourselves? We'll start with the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT:

The Old Testament was written as many things - a history book, a bunch of stories and family trees/genealogies, even a collection of *poetry*! Without a doubt, it's one of the most interesting and complex things you'll ever read. Check out all of the different aspects of the Old Testament and then pick your favorite!

The Old Testament is full of history!

Lots of people think the Old Testament is really boring because there's a bunch of history in it. For example, it tells about Abraham and Sarah, the slavery of the Hebrews under Pharaoh, war battles, and more. Some of these stories might seem a little long, but they're actually very interesting and important because they tell us a lot about God and how He worked in the world and in the lives of His people a long time ago. For example, if it wasn't for Abraham and Sarah, we wouldn't see how faithful God was. If we didn't know the story of all of the battles fought, we wouldn't know how God fought for good over evil back in the old days. See? All the stories of history in the Bible show us that God has been involved in the world for as long as anyone can remember! (And even longer than that, actually!) To read a little bit of the Bible's history, check out [Joshua 1-6](#) or [1 Kings 1-6](#).

The Old Testament gave us the first Law.

As we've learned, the Old Testament told of God's covenant with God's people (remember, these people were the Hebrews or Israelites). God created the first laws to give God's people order and make sure they obeyed God and lived rightly. If the people didn't do what they were supposed to, they had separated themselves from God and broken the covenant. The first five books of the Old Testament are called "The Law," or the Torah ("Torah" is the Hebrew word for law), and they outline just about all the rules that the people were supposed to follow at the time. The Ten Commandments are included in the Torah. All of these laws are important to us today because they tell us everything God expected from God's people way back then and a lot of what God expects from us today. Look in the books of [Exodus](#) and [Leviticus](#) in the Bible. There are all kinds of crazy laws in there! (For example, did you know that God commanded God's people not to cook a young goat in its mother's milk?!)

In the Old Testament, God inspired poetry!

Some of the most beautiful writing in the Old Testament is its poetry. Because poems use fancy language, pictures, and metaphors, they are able to communicate how awesome God is in really unique ways. A lot of the images don't need to be taken literally, but they still tell the truth about God and us. The Psalms praise God and talk about human's sinfulness in very real ways. Other poetry in the Old Testament tells stories of history, and still others foretell the future of the New

Testament. The Bible's poems show us God's beauty and describe God in ways regular words and stories cannot. *"The Mighty One, God, the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets. From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth..."* (See Psalm 50.) Wow – now that's good stuff!

The Old Testament told of what was to come.

Did you know that even before you read the New Testament, you can find out that Jesus is coming into the world? It's pretty weird to think that men in the Old Testament knew God so well that they knew what God would do in the years to come. A lot of the prophets of the Old Testament were not liked very much because they said stuff that was totally different than what the rulers, religious leaders, and rest of society thought. Still, they were bold in telling God's truth to the people, even if they got in trouble or became unpopular. Prophets were cool because they could interpret the times they were living in and also tell about future events. They were so "in tune" with God that they could tell others what God was like, what He thought, what God was planning to do, and what would happen to the people if they didn't have God in their lives. God gave the prophets the ability to understand God's thoughts and actually *communicate* these thoughts to the people! *"This is what the LORD says,"* the prophets say. Take a look at the book of Isaiah.

THE NEW TESTAMENT:

Remember, just as the Old Testament tells the story of the covenant between God and the Hebrew people, the New Testament tells the story of God's *new covenant* with *all* people through Jesus Christ. This new covenant is God's way of letting humankind back into a relationship with God, after all of the sin and brokenness that keeps us away. The New Testament can be divided into two major parts - the *gospels* and the *epistles*. There are other books to study as well, though. Let's look at these in more detail:

The gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John

"Gospel" means "good news." The first three gospels – *Matthew, Mark, and Luke* – are called the *synoptic gospels* because they are similar in the way they talk about Jesus. They tell most of the same parables (or stories) about Jesus and keep a similar order. The gospel of *John* is a little different in the way it was written, how Jesus talks, and what order the stories are in. The gospels were written at different times, at different places, by different men and tell us a ton about Jesus and the "good news" he brought to the world! Glance through your Bible and note the differences and similarities in the different gospels. (FYI – any time you see red writing or font, Jesus is talking.)

The epistles

As we learned several lessons ago, “epistle” means “letter.” The epistles were very important in the early church because they helped shape the earliest Christian individuals and communities. Today, they continue to teach us how important it is to have Christ in our lives. Paul wrote a lot of the epistles, which is cool considering who Paul was before he became a Christian. His name was then Saul, and he was a mean man who persecuted Christians. One day, though, the Lord came to him and changed his heart (and his name!) completely! Paul is considered the first Christian missionary. After his conversion, he went all over the place to tell people about the love and power of Jesus Christ.

Paul went through all kinds of hard times for preaching the Good News of Christ – he was even put in prison! During all of his struggles, though, Paul stayed faithful to God. And because he had a ton of life experience, Paul had a ton of advice to give! His letters to different churches encouraged the people, challenged them, and blessed them. He began most of his letters with a loving greeting and finished them with a benediction. Want to read one of these cool letters for yourself? Read the book of 1 Corinthians!

Other books in the New Testament

Other books in the New Testament have different purposes. *Acts*, as we’ve learned, celebrates the birthday of the Church and shows how it spread. *James* tells us how important action is in our faith. The last book in the Bible, *Revelation*, talks about the end times – what it will be like when Christ comes to earth again. Every book in the New Testament serves as a great guide to Christian living. Whenever we’re facing any kind of problem or need some direction, we can read a gospel, a letter, or any other book in the New Testament to get God’s perspective on what we’re going through!

Keep in mind that even though all the books of the Protestant Bible are the same, there are different translations of Bibles. There are also paraphrased versions. Translations mean that the Bible has been directly interpreted from the original Greek and Hebrew texts into another language. Paraphrased versions of the Bible have been rewritten in simple and sometimes incomplete terms. All Scripture, though, is inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The Greek word for *inspired* means “God breathed,” so we can also say that all Scripture is “God breathed.” It is straight from God to us.

What does “God breathed” mean to you? How do God’s words in Scripture speak to you?

Check out the different translations and versions of Scripture below! Did you have any idea how many different ways people could write the 23rd Psalm?!

KING JAMES VERSION (KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

REVISED STANDARD VERSION (RSV)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;

For thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (NRSV **the official translation of the United Methodist Church*)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil;

For you are with me; your rod and your staff... they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE (Version)

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall want nothing.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, and leads me beside the waters of peace; he renews life within me, and for his name's sake guides me in the right path.

Even though I walk through a valley dark as death,

I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy crook are my comfort.

Thou spreadest a table for me in the sight of my enemies; thou hast richly bathed my head with oil, and my cup runs over.

Goodness and love unfailing, these will follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

COMMON ENGLISH BIBLE (Translation)

The LORD is my shepherd. I lack nothing. He lets me rest in grassy meadows; he leads me to restful waters; he keeps me alive. He guides me in proper paths for the sake of his good name.

Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no danger because you are with me. Your rod and your staff—they protect me. You set a table for me right in front of my enemies. You bathe my head in oil; my cup is so full it spills over!

Yes, goodness and faithful love will pursue me all the days of my life, and I will live in the LORD's house as long as I live.

THE LIVING BIBLE (Paraphrase)

Because the Lord is my Shepherd, I have everything I need!

He lets me rest in the meadow grass and leads me beside the quiet streams. He restores my failing health. He helps me do what honors him the most.

Even when walking through the dark valley of death I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me, guarding, guiding all the way.

You provide delicious food for me in the presence of my enemies.

You have welcomed me as your guest; blessings overflow!

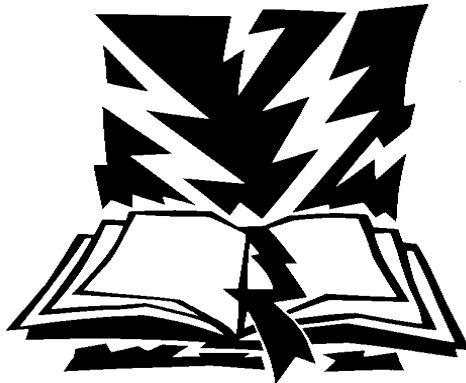
Your goodness and unfailing kindness shall be with me all of my life, and afterwards I will live with you forever in your home.

AWESOME!! This Bible stuff is making me curious! What else would be good to know?

Remember John Wesley, the founder of our Methodist Church? He said that of all the things that are important in the Christian faith, Scripture is the most important. He believed it was "a must" for living the Christian life! It might be easy for us to "know" that, but do we *believe* it? More than likely, we all have different attitudes about the Bible and its importance in our lives. What about you? When you think about the words of the Bible, what did you think? (Keep in mind there are no "right" or "wrong" answers here!)

- a) "Hmm... cool that God did that for those people then."
- b) "Hmm... cool that God can do those things in my life today!"
- c) "Bible? Nah, I'm not really into it these days. I can always read my Bible later and do other things like pray and hang out with my Christian friends now."
- d) "Bible? Yeah, no time for that. I've got dance, and band, and church, and homework, and family, and..."
- e) "Bible? Only dorks read the Bible!"
- f) "Oooh! This lesson has gotten me excited! I'd like to read the Bible more and get to experience God in my life today!"
- g) "Bible? Yeah, it's cool. But you don't have to read the Bible to be a Christian, so I think I'll just go with what I know."

However you think about the Bible, the truth is this: We can't live our lives as Christians the way God intended us to without reading the Bible. There's no other way that we can know God's perspective and how God wants us to live than reading God's very words to us. Besides that, as much as we'd like to pretend we know about God by what we feel, our feelings are not enough. We need to read God's Word in order to really get to know God for who God is and what God has done over time. Think about your friends. Do you know them only by what you've heard about them through other people, or have you actually spent time with them? The same is true with God. We get to know God by spending time with God. And we spend time with God by reading God's Word.



The Bible is powerful as it changes our lives day by day! Lots of times we don't give the Bible enough credit. Instead of seeing it as God's words to us today, we think it's just old, boring, and not relevant to our lives. Or sometimes we just think of the Bible as a magic wand! There are a lot of misconceptions about what the Bible is. Check out some of these "Bogus Bible Claims" below.

Bogus Bible Claims:

- The Bible gives immediate answers to life's problems.
- The Bible is a good luck charm to stay out of trouble and hard times.
- The Bible lists the boring rules to follow so we can get to heaven or be a "good person."
- The Bible is something we read to look cool in front of other Christians in the church.
- The Bible is what we read to "feel better" all the time.

If you're guilty of "believing the bogus," don't be discouraged! Understanding the Bible takes time, and God is patient. But now that you know what the Bible is *not*, read all the things that the Bible *is*, and get excited about growing in God's Word!

The Bible...

- shows us how God worked in the lives of people long ago and how God works in our lives today.
- tells us God's plans and purposes for the world and for our lives
- tells us the story of Jesus.
- brings us into and carries us through a relationship with Christ.
- teaches us about God – what God is like, what kinds of things God does, what makes God happy and sad, etc.
- teaches us how to be better followers of Christ – how to make the right decisions, love our friends and enemies, honor God, etc.
- shows us God's perspective.
- helps us fight the bad stuff in the world and hold on to the good.
- gives us peace when life is crazy.
- lets us feel God's presence.
- comforts us.
- helps us praise God.
- cheers us on.
- shows us God's great love and faithfulness.

THE CHALLENGE...

Now, let's get real. Some of you may be thinking, "Yeah, the Bible is cool, and I know I should read it...," but you pretty much know that you're not actually *going* to read it. Well, that's understandable because as we've talked about, there's a lot to read in the Bible. Not only are there a lot of pages in it, but there's some serious stuff covered. You may think the easiest way to get around Bible reading is just to go with what you've learned from these pages in the Confirmation book. Sneaky... 😊 But not smart. ☹️ The truth is, none of the stuff you've been learning about Scripture will do you much good if you don't actually read the Bible. You may think you know what Scripture can do for you, but you'll have no idea until you actually read the Bible for yourself. God will really speak to you! Now, reading the Bible on your own may seem like an impossible task, but it's really not. Here are some helpful hints on how to do get started reading your Bible:

- 1) Set aside some time for Bible reading.
- 2) Go ahead and make the assumption that God is with you while you're reading (He is!).
- 3) Don't necessarily start at Genesis and try to read through to Revelation... you probably won't make it.
- 4) Pray before reading. Ask God to open your heart and mind to God's words in Scripture. Ask God to teach you more about God and about you as you read.

- 5) Pick a book and start at the beginning of the book. Start with some of the shorter books such as *The Gospel of Mark* or *James*.
- 6) Open the book and read the chapter or Bible story you have chosen out loud. Read it from several translations. Underline or highlight words/sentences and write down questions and insights that jump out at you.
- 7) After you have read the passage, ask the following questions:
 - a. What did I learn about God from this passage?
 - b. What did I learn about humans from this passage?
 - c. What does this passage tell me about my personal relationship with Christ?
 - d. How does this passage call me to grow in my faith?
 - e. How does this passage comfort, help, or heal me?
- 8) If you don't feel like you've learned anything, don't get discouraged. Be honest with God and pray to God. Say something like, "God, I have no idea what you mean by this passage. I'm frustrated. Please open my mind and my heart to you and help me understand what in the heck you're saying here." Then, close your Bible and try again tomorrow!

Now, try it! Look up the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 or Psalm 51 about sin and use the above study hints. Hopefully you'll enjoy learning more about God and your faith as you read God's words to you!

And don't ever, ever forget... as you read your Bible, God is with you! When you read every word, believe God is surrounding you. *God will speak to you*, showing you God's love and teaching you how to follow God.

***FAST FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE:**

- United Methodists call the 66 books of the Bible Holy Scripture.
- The stories of the Bible are canonical. This means they contain God's Word in a way that sets them apart from other writings. Because the Bible has been canonized, we can accept it as God's Holy Word, and we can use it as a guide to live for godly living.
- The New Testament was canonized in 400 AD.
- Most of the ancient people did not read or write. In order to tell the stories in the Old Testament, people would memorize them and tell them over and over again. This is how the stories were passed down from generation to generation, and it is called the Old Testament's Oral Stage.
- The Torah, or first five books of the Old Testament, is also called the Pentateuch. "Penta" means five. The Torah is the main text that Jewish people still use for guidance today.
- During the Reformation, led by Martin Luther, the Bible was translated into many different languages.
- 1517 AD – The first Bible in English was completed.
- Today, the Bible is translated into over 1000 languages and many versions.

* Go The Extra Mile!

Memorize all 66 books of the Bible below.

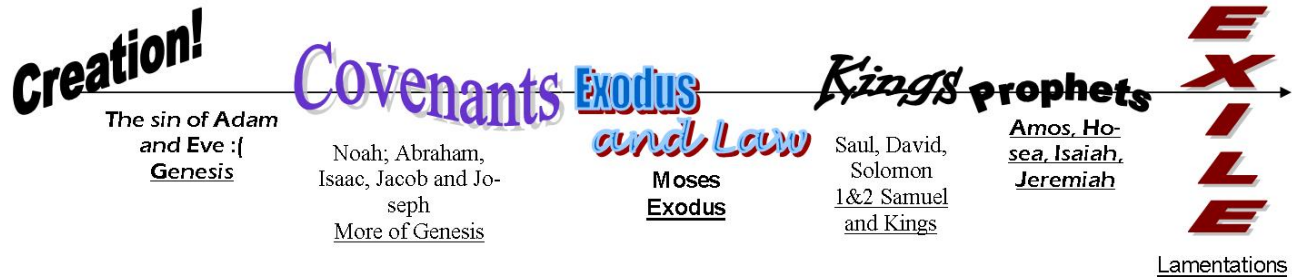
OLD TESTAMENT:

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy
Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1 Samuel
2 Samuel
1 Kings
2 Kings
1 Chronicles
2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Ester
Job
Psalms
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Song of Solomon
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Daniel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkak
Zephaniah
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

NEW TESTAMENT:

Matthew
Mark
Luke
John
Acts
Romans
1 Corinthians
2 Corinthians
Galatians
Ephesians
Philippians
Colossians
1 Thessalonians
2 Thessalonians
1 Timothy
2 Timothy
Titus
Philemon
Hebrews
James
1 Peter
2 Peter
1 John
2 John
3 John
Jude
Revelation

Old Testament Timeline



New Testament Timeline

