

# The Blessing

God's Promise, Our Purpose



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## **Acknowledgements**

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## A Message for Translators

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We hope this manual will benefit many peoples in their quest to know and experience God's story. Our primary aim is to make this material available to as many as will use it, in a way that honors everyone involved in the work. For this reason, we grant you permission to translate this work into languages other than English, free of charge, and without soliciting our written permission, in accordance with the following conditions:

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## A Message for Group Leaders or Instructors

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We designed this material for study in a group setting, whether through formal classroom instruction or informal discussion and training. However, the material may also be used for individual study. For the information you need to use this material effectively, please see page 173, *Appendix A: For Leaders—How to Use This Resource*.

# How to Study the Bible to Be Transformed

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A people group, community, family or individual can only experience transformation when there are radical changes in their views of the world. A people must seek and find better answers to the basic questions of life. All people groups of every generation seek answers to these questions.

- » The **Bible** answers these questions for us:
  - » Who are we? Where do we come from? What is our purpose?
  - » What has gone wrong with humanity and the world?
  - » What is the solution or the way out?

God's answer to these life questions is at the heart of the **Great Story** revealed in the **Bible**.

When we come to each story or passage of text in the **Bible**, we face an opportunity to encounter God and experience His transforming power. This is no small matter and we must begin with reverence and open hearts.

Understanding the **Bible** is something God makes possible for every man, woman and child to do today. *“Ears that hear and eyes that see—the LORD has made them both”* (Proverbs 20:12).

The steps for study we outline below come from Jesus' teaching to the disciples in Matthew 13:15. They will guide you through the process of opening your heart and mind to God so that He might transform you, your family, and your community, through the study of His story as He reveals it through the **Bible**.

*When we come to each story or passage of text in the Bible, we face an opportunity to encounter God and experience His transforming power.*

**“... they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears...” (Matthew 13:15)**

*Step One: When we come to a story or passage of text in the **Bible**, we first put aside all the things we think we know or understand about God, about humanity, and about the world.*

If we do not open our hearts and put aside our boastful knowledge, we cloud our eyes and ears with messages from our own culture and from God's enemy. We must put our own ideas aside enough that we are able to truly see what is in this part of the **Bible**.

- » We ask:
  - » Who are the characters?
  - » What are the important events?
  - » What do humans do and say in this story?
  - » What does God do and say in this story?
  - » What thoughts, feelings, decisions and actions do those in the story experience?

*Step Two: As we think of questions, we look for answers in the story itself. Engage in conversation with the story.*

We often must read or listen to a story several times to see and hear all the information the author includes. We begin to hear how the story breaks into sections marked by key ideas, words, or phrases the author repeats. We begin to identify the important thought of each section of the story, then the important thought of the story or passage itself, and we are ready for what God does next.

**“... they might...understand with their hearts....” (Matthew 13:15)**

*Step Three: Once we hear and see the truth revealed in what a story or passage of text tells us, we are able to discover what it means. God transforms our minds and beliefs as He reveals truth to us.*

Each story or passage we study in the **Bible** was included by its author for a reason. There is a meaning or message God wants us to understand.

- » To discover that message or meaning, we ask:
  - » Why does the author include this story or text in this place?
  - » How does it fit with the other stories that come before or after it?
  - » If you were the author, what message would you be trying to give?
  - » If you were one of the original readers or hearers of this story or text, what message would you understand?
- » To help you understand more about the meaning, ask:
  - » How is God at work in this place, among this people, to restore His good relationship with all peoples?
  - » How is God at work in this place, among this people, to restore His righteous rule over all kingdoms?
  - » How is God at work in this place, among this people, to make His name and reputation known to all peoples so that they may honor and follow Him?

*Step Four: Only when we understand the meaning of a story or passage can we begin to understand it with our hearts.*

When we understand the original message of a story or text, we can translate that message into our own culture, to our own people and our own generation. If we seek to understand the message in this way, we will gain more than just information. We will gain true understanding of God's message, revealed to our hearts.

*“...if you...[apply] your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God” (Proverbs 2:1-5).*

## “... and turn...” (Matthew 13:15)

*Step Five: When God reveals His truth and His message to us in the stories and texts of the **Bible**, they touch our minds and hearts in a way that compels us to respond.*

After Jesus reveals God’s truth and message to the crowds, He asks them to repent and **believe** (Mark 1:15). When we repent, we turn away from **seeking our own way**, and turn towards seeking the way of God. When God reveals truth in the stories and texts of the **Bible**, we recognize Him asking us to repent and **believe**.

» We ask:

- » Does this story or text contain a new truth for me to believe?
- » Does it correct an error in my previous understanding?
- » Does it reveal a new attitude I must adopt or a new command to obey?
- » Does it reveal a sin or destructive behavior I must give up?
- » Is there an example I must follow, or one I must avoid?
- » Is there a promise I must believe and remember?
- » Is there a prayer I must pray?

As we repent and turn, we remember the warning James gives, “*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does*” (James 1:22-25).

## “... and I would heal them.” (Matthew 13:15)

*Step Six: When we repent and believe, God restores us to good relationship with Himself. God heals us. He transforms us. He invites us to share the truth of this story and text with others.*

When God heals us, we reflect His image to others. Our hands do His good and loving deeds, our mouths speak His truth, our feet carry us throughout the world to bless all peoples. When we are healed we have life, and we share that life with others.

Healed families and communities reflect God’s righteous kingdom to all peoples. Our relationships demonstrate love and forgiveness. Our families bring strength and honor to our people. Our community prospers and overcomes evil and suffering, replacing them with good works. When our families and communities are healed we bring the **kingdom of God** near to others.

God heals and transforms us in this way if we are faithful to study the stories and texts in the **Bible**. Every lesson in this material contains key stories designed for you to study in this way. Each story reveals God’s truth and important messages for all people and for your people. Follow the six steps outlined above each time you approach a story. Expect God to heal and transform you through this process.





# Introduction

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## The Great Story

History is the **Great Story** of God at work among the peoples of the earth. It is the story of God restoring His rule over His creation. It is the story of God blessing and transforming entire peoples. It is the story of God displaying His glory to and through His creation and receiving worship from all He has made.

God reveals His **Great Story** to humanity through the words and deeds of His followers. Entire groups of peoples recognize their part in the story. They worship Him. They reveal His glory on earth. They join in His work in the world. This **Great Story** transforms thousands of peoples and individuals—Europeans, Asians, Africans and Latin Americans.

God reveals His story all through history. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, men and women recognize it. Obedient prophets and servants of God preserve the meaning for us. We hold that inspired record in our hands—the **Bible**.

All peoples must discover how their story is part of God's **Great Story**. We designed this course so that your people might recognize how your story brings glory to God, then help others discover the same.

## The Bible Reveals the Story

The **Bible** is not just a collection of stories, myths and fables. It is the most trustworthy book of all time. In its pages, the **Bible** tells about Creation, including the creation of humanity. It reveals how evil enters creation and how humanity responds to the Evil One. It reveals God's **promise** to overcome evil and restore His rightful rule over creation.

It tells of God's love, and how all peoples can have their relationship with God restored through the **Promised Son**, Jesus. The **Bible** reveals the **Great Story**—past, present and future.

More people have wanted to read the **Bible** than any other book ever written. They can read it now in over 1,700 languages. The hard work and sacrifice of those who made God's Word available to us in our own language inspires us.

## A Story for All Peoples

Two men on the road to Emmaus, confused by events that just happened in Jerusalem, hear a story from Jesus that changes their lives. *“And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, (Jesus) explained what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself”* (Luke 24:27).

Soon after they hear His story, the events in Jerusalem make sense to them. Jesus opens their eyes and they recognize Him. His story connects these followers' lives to God's **Great Story** (see Luke 24:30-32). Stories still capture our minds and hearts. They make it easy for new truths to take root in our lives.

In the **Great Story**, we find the early parts to our own peoples' story. We find meaning to the stories unfolding in our day, both for us individually and in the life of our people. We find understanding for both the difficult and wonderful parts of our story.

People—alienated from their Creator, unaware of His love and work—wander off to **seek after their own way**. By their own efforts, they try to find meaning and **purpose** in life. They are on a path that

leads nowhere. They become corrupt in their thinking and behavior. They exchange a lie for the truth of who they are and why God created them (Romans 2:25).

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*We designed this course so that your people might recognize how your story brings glory to God, then help others discover the same.*

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Humanity's deepest need is to turn away from **seeking after its own way** and return to the way of the Creator God. Returning to God gives us new **identity** as members of His household. This **identity** gives us honor. It gives us value. It also gives us **purpose**: to connect others to the **Great Story**.

Prophets of the Old Testament and apostles of the New Testament recognize God's **purpose** in their day. They understand God reveals truth and writes history. They believe God controls history and completes it according to His **promise**.

This truth changes their lives and they become His followers—ambassadors and servants who worship Him and make Him known on earth.

Our **purpose** as God's people is to realize our place in His **Great Story** in our own generation. The most freeing, life-giving experience is to know and worship the Creator God, to recognize His work in the world, then to offer ourselves for the completion of His story on earth. He makes us for this **purpose**.

Jesus says, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to finish His work"

(John 4:34). Can we say the same about our lives today?

## **The Great Story is the Whole Bible**

How do you use your **Bible**? For many people, it sometimes feels overwhelming to read and understand the **Bible**. They do not take time to hear it or learn from it.

Others turn only to the last part of the book, the New Testament. This is like starting in the middle to tell a story. Much of the story's meaning is lost. We must know the beginning of a story to understand it fully.

Others choose parts of the **Bible** they want to study, and focus only on that which interests them. These people may have an incomplete understanding of a story and miss the truth. We look to the **Bible** to meet our needs. We find comfort when we hurt (I Peter 5:7). We find spiritual food to help us grow (II Timothy 3:16-17). We find guidance for the future (I Corinthians 2:9-16).

The **Bible** is a good resource for us. But if we use it only as a resource for our needs, we may miss the overall message it reveals.

Every book of the **Bible**, and even each small story inside every book, is a part of God's **Great Story**. Two themes work their way from the beginning of God's Word to the end.

- God's **purpose** for all peoples is to worship and follow Him (Genesis 3:15, 12:1-3 through Revelation 7:9-12).
- The **Promised Son**, Jesus, makes a way for blessing to flow to all peoples (Genesis 3:15).

In this way, God restores His rule over humanity, and over all His creation.

It is easy to miss the **Great Story** when we only focus on the concerns of our own lives. Few people connect their own stories and the story of their people with the **Great Story**. Few people understand this

story gives us our **identity** and **purpose**, for which we work and give our lives.

As you work through the pages that follow, let God connect you now to the **Great Story** for life. Begin on the first page of the **Bible**, where God begins His story to us.

