



WEEK 1

HOW DOES GOD SPEAK TO US?

WEEK 1 • OVERVIEW

We're beginning this course by looking at the Bible. It is through the Scriptures that we learn about God, His plan for humanity, and the life we are called to live in response.

Before we go on to affirm what we believe about God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and various other subjects, we need to look at how we came to receive this knowledge and how we can know such beliefs are true.

DAYS

1. God Revealed
2. The Writers
3. True & Complete
4. An Authority
5. Trustworthy

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand how the Bible serves as the primary way God reveals Himself to us
- Learn about the formation of the Bible and why we can trust its content
- Discover how the Bible is true in all it says, sufficient for us to know God, and authoritative in what it teaches

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MEMORY VERSE

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

WEEKLY PRAYER *(write down your prayers for this week)*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 4:2).

DAY 1 • GOD REVEALED

Let's start with reviewing our memory verse for the week:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Think for a second. If there was something beyond our universe, some all-powerful being who caused everything to come into existence and continues to guide it, do you think that being would want to be known? Do you think it would find some way to be revealed to its creation, or would it remain absent, separated, and unknown to the universe? It seems strange that such a being would create conscious, thinking beings like humans and yet keep itself from being known to them, doesn't it?

The very first chapter of the Bible tells us that before everything, God existed. As He created the universe, we read that He spoke everything into existence (Genesis 1:1-31). From the very beginning, God was a communicator. He even spoke directly to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (verses 28-30). And so, God, the creator of all things—the unmoved mover—wants to be known to His creation.

God has revealed Himself to humanity in various ways. Theologians tend to group this revelation into two categories: general revelation and special revelation. General revelation includes how God has made Himself known through creation, the human conscience, and His work in human history. These point to an intelligent and powerful being beyond ourselves. The universe gives testament to this as it is marked by such order, complexity, and wonder. The Bible expresses how God has revealed Himself to us in what He has made:

¹*The heavens declare the glory of God,
and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

²*Day to day pours out speech,
and night to night reveals knowledge.*

³*There is no speech, nor are there words,
whose voice is not heard.*

⁴*Their voice goes out through all the earth,
and their words to the end of the world.*

(Psalm 19:1-4).

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How has God made himself known through His creation?

What aspect of creation causes you to marvel or be in awe?

God also created humanity as thinking beings, capable of reasoning and being guided by conscience, capable of conceiving of something greater than ourselves. Creation, then, whether it be the world around us, or the complexity of our own minds, points unequivocally toward an intelligent and powerful God. (We will think a little more about creation next week when we focus on the character of God.)

The second way God makes Himself known to us is through special revelation. This includes various supernatural ways God has intervened to make Himself known throughout history. Examples include dreams and visions, such as were experienced by Daniel; being spoken to by angels, like Mary, Joseph, and the shepherds were in the nativity story; or God speaking to His people through prophets like Elijah or Isaiah. **However, there are two forms of special revelation that are especially significant: the Bible and Jesus Christ.**

We will cover the life and work of Jesus in depth in Weeks 3 and 4. For the remainder of this week, we will focus on God's revelation through the message contained in the Bible.

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God chose to use a variety of human authors spanning many centuries and using many different writing styles to communicate His special message for humanity—the story of His love and mercy and how we can truly know Him. The Bible (which we will also refer to as the Scriptures and the Word of God interchangeably) weaves together an incredible story, beginning with the creation of all things.

The Bible recounts God's story: His creative acts and purpose; His dealings with humanity in their trials and their victories; His promises kept time and time again; the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the salvation we can all have by placing our faith in Him; and the renewal of all of the cosmos. There is no greater story in history!

And yet, the Bible is more than just stories. It is a living word that speaks anew to us over time. It draws us closer to God when we abide in it. In short, it provides all we need to know the one true God.

What has your experience been of the Bible? Have you read it before or is it new to you?

JOURNAL

Read Romans 1:18-20. What can we know about God through creation?

Read Romans 2:14-16. What can we know about God through the human conscience?

Read Psalm 19:7-11. What does the Word of God accomplish in our lives?

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DAY 2 • THE WRITERS

Take a minute to review our memory verse for the week:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

The statement of faith of Calvary Bible Church affirms that the Bible is the “verbally inspired Word of God” which He spoke “through the words of human authors.”

The Bible is not a just a single book, but 66 books—39 in the Old Testament and 27 in the New Testament—written over the span of many centuries. The Bible is richly diverse in style and content, containing law, history, poetry and songs, wisdom, prophecy, and personal letters. And its authorship is no less diverse: prophets, shepherds, kings, historians, doctors, tax collectors, fishermen, and the list goes on. Yet all the authors of the Scripture had one thing in common: their words were inspired by the one true God.

Notice what our memory verse says about the source of the Bible: “All Scripture is breathed out by God...” So, while the Scriptures were written down by human authors, God inspired each of them so that what was recorded is what God desired to communicate.

He chose a specific group of individuals from different times and with different perspectives and writing styles to convey His message to the world—a message of truth and grace for all to hear. And since all Scripture comes ultimately from God, we can know that it is without error in its original manuscripts.

Why does it matter that the Bible contains God’s words rather than just human words?

That God inspired human authors to compose the Bible shows how much He values His own creation and how special our individuality makes us. He did not choose to dictate the Scriptures to one person, nor do it word-for-word, nor did He have them mysteriously appear from out of nowhere one day.

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Instead, God used the talents, personalities, and experiences of His own created beings. This way, God displayed the wonder and versatility of His creation and reminds us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made to praise Him with our unique abilities.

The Gospels (the accounts of Jesus' life) alone give evidence of the unique styles and backgrounds of their authors: John's literary use of irony; Mark's use of short stories of Jesus' life; Luke the physician's meticulous attention to detail; and the credibility of Matthew, a former tax collector whose commitment to Jesus revealed a radical change.

Yet, in addition to thinking about the human aspect of the Bible's authorship, we must remember that these are the very words of God, given through supernatural inspiration to those authors. This gives us confidence that the Bible can be trusted in all it says, that it contains the only words necessary to understand God's plan for salvation, and that it plays a unique role in our lives—guiding and molding us through its living and eternal truths.

JOURNAL

What do the following passages teach us about the origin of the Scriptures?

2 Peter 1:20-21
2 Timothy 3:16-17

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If you're familiar with the Bible, what sections or books do you enjoy most?

According to our memory verse, what four or five things can God's word accomplish in our lives?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

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DAY 3 • TRUE & COMPLETE

Let's start by reviewing our memory verse for the week:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

Write it out to help you memorize it:

At Calvary there are several things we affirm about the Scriptures, the first being that the Bible is wholly true and without error. Because God superintended human authors to record His word, the resulting product is a reflection of God the author, the God of truth. "All your words are true" Psalm 119:160. The Bible is without error in its original writings, or manuscripts.

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The Bible also contains all that is necessary for salvation, and godliness. It is the complete and sufficient revelation of God to humanity that would otherwise not be known about His person, purpose, and plan of salvation. Therefore, God's word is infallible, as it will not fail to achieve His purposes. God's word will not return to Him void but accomplish all that He desires.

The Bible is not an exhaustive historical account that tells of every single thing Jesus did in His life. (see John 21:25). Rather, God gave us all that is necessary for us to understand His perfect nature, our sinful predicament, and His remedy through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Although the Bible does not address every issue that we may face in our lives today, its message and eternal truths can be applied to any situation and, when guided by the Holy Spirit, we can know how to live out our lives in a way that is pleasing to God.

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Take a few moments to pray that God will reveal Himself to you this week as you study His Word.

Read Psalm 119:18. What does this say about our need for God to help us even as we read His Word?

Read Psalm 119:105. What do you think it means for God's Word to be this kind of lamp or light?

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DAY 4 • AN AUTHORITY

Try reciting our memory verse out loud from memory:

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

So far this week we have looked at various components of the memory passage: that the Bible consists of the “sacred writings” of various authors; that these words were “breathed out by God”; and that the Scriptures are “able to make [us] wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

We now turn to another quality of the Bible: that it holds ultimate authority over all human knowledge, and therefore serves to guide us in all that we hold true and in everything we do.

In the passage above, the apostle Paul was writing to his companion and protégé, Timothy, to encourage him to hold fast to the Word of God, which he has learned and believed from a young age. He was writing to Timothy at a time of great change and upheaval. Persecution against the church was rife, and false teachers had also crept into the church. Paul himself was in prison when he wrote this letter, presumed to have been executed shortly after writing it.

The cruel and oppressive Emperor Nero had embarked on a vicious campaign against Christianity. In writing this letter, Paul was encouraging Timothy to hold fast to the word, to believe it and affirm it, no matter the cost (1:8,11-12). Even if persecution and death resulted, the Word of God must be the ultimate authority for Timothy.

Another purpose in writing was to warn Timothy of the creeping heresies threatening the early Christian church. Throughout his epistles, Paul warns of those seeking to distort the gospel and troubling believers with a false message (Acts 15:24-27; 2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6-9). In 2 Timothy 1:14, Paul charges Timothy to “guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you.” It was important that Timothy protect the integrity of the Word of God and that it remain the sole authoritative written word for believers.

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List some heresies (wrong beliefs) of our day that we need the Word of God to help combat.

The Bible serves as the ultimate test of truth. As Christians, we live our lives believing the Bible is our ultimate authority—believing it in all that it teaches, obeying it in all that it requires, and trusting it in all that it promises. Other knowledge should not be dismissed—science, mathematics, languages, etc. These are all useful and important, as all truth is God’s truth. All knowledge must be held up against the yardstick of Scripture, though, to know if it reflects God and His will.

Do you believe the Bible is the ultimate authority for your life? Why or why not?

When we live with Scripture as our ultimate authority, it shapes who we are and how we live. Our memory passage tells us that the Word of God is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,” and that through this we can become “complete” and “equipped for every good work.” We must allow God’s Word to guide us and shape us, conforming us to the likeness of Christ. The Bible is not a historical artifact or a lofty philosophical treatise. It is a living and active work that continues to guide and shape us, to convict us of sin and foster the joy and the hope we have knowing God loves us and has offered us a path to spend eternity with Him.

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Read Hebrews 4:12. How does this describe the authority of God's Word?

What are some ways people seek truth outside the Bible instead of looking to the Bible?

In order for the Bible to be an authoritative guide for our lives, we are required to know what it says. From the options below, circle which best reflects your level of knowledge of the Bible.

I know very little

I know the basics

I have a pretty good knowledge

I have a strong command of Scripture

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What is something practical and specific you could do to improve this in the coming weeks and months?

Use this space to ask the Lord to help you believe all the Bible teaches, obey all it requires, and trust all it promises.

Which of these is the hardest for you to do?

[illegible]

DAY 5 • TRUSTWORTHY

Be able to share our verse with your group when you meet this week.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
(2 Timothy 3:16, 17).

A common argument made against Christianity is that it is based largely on what is written in the Bible, and so since the Bible is not trustworthy, the Christian faith has little credibility. Critics of Christianity may make claims that the Bible is a book of fables—farfetched stories that were fabricated or embellished as they were passed down through the generations.

They might point to perceived inaccuracies in Scripture, or discrepancies in the authorship of certain books in the Bible. If you're honest, you've probably had similar doubts from time to time. Did God really create Adam and Eve? Could the Red Sea really be parted so that the people of Israel crossed through it? Did a man named Jesus really die, only to be raised to life again? These are all valid questions. Fortunately, many of these questions have answers.

Let's begin with the New Testament. Theologian F. F. Bruce wrote in his book *The Books and the Parchments: How We Got Our English Bible*, that “there is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.” There are four ways to support this claim.

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The first thing to note is that we don't have original manuscripts of any ancient document, and so we rely on copies of those originals. Our confidence in the accuracy of the copies is strengthened first by how early the copies were made after the original: the closer to the original, the more confidence we can have that our copies are an accurate replication of the original.

Concerning other ancient documents, the earliest copies we have of Plato's works are from around 1,300 years after the originals were supposedly written. For Aristotle, the time elapsed is 1,400 years. Similar time frames apply to the writings of Julius Caesar (1,000 years), Thucydides (1,300 years) and Herodotus (1,350 years).

Amazingly, and unlike these great historical works, we have one manuscript fragment from the New Testament Gospel of John dating back to around just 40 years of the likely composition of the original document.

Many other New Testament manuscripts date to the early second and third centuries. Read the words of Sir Frederic Kenyon, former director of the British Museum: “The interval then between the date of original composition and the earliest extant evidence become so small to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scripture have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed.”

A second measure of ancient textual attestation is the number of ancient manuscript copies that exist. Aside from the New Testament, the highest number of copies for any ancient text is for Homer’s *Iliad*, of which there are 643 copies. Most others have significantly fewer (for example, we only have seven manuscripts from Plato’s writings). By comparison, there exist over 5,700 manuscript copies of the New Testament in the original Greek and almost 25,000 documents in total when including manuscripts written in other languages such as Syriac, Coptic, and Latin.

A third test for the trustworthiness of the New Testament is how early the original documents were written. Being written closer to the time of the actual events leaves less room for error brought on by time, and also allows for greater accountability from those who witnessed the same events. Looking at the gospels alone, we know that they were written within the generation of the eyewitnesses to Jesus’ death and resurrection. Conservative estimates suggest Mark was written 30 years later, Matthew and Luke 40 years later, and John 70 years later. By comparison, the earliest writings about the life of Buddha came 700 years after his death, and the first biography of Muhammad came one century after his death.

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Fourth and finally, the words of the New Testament receive tremendous support from other historical documents outside the Bible that were written around the same time. Various authors have recounted details of Jesus and the early church, most of whom were not sympathetic to the movement. Without even reading the gospels, we know from these external historical writings that Jesus existed, was a Jewish teacher, performed miracles and was called the Messiah, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, and was worshiped as the Son of God and resurrected Savior by multitudes thereafter.

The veracity of the New Testament lends strong credibility to the Old Testament also. If we can reasonably assert that Jesus was who He claimed to be, and that He could not be wrong in anything He said, then His own words about the Old Testament support the trustworthiness of this body of writing.

We should not forget that the “Bible” Jesus had was what we refer to today as the Old Testament! Jesus excelled in His knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and referred to them constantly. For example, He regularly referenced the Mosaic Law (Matthew 15:4, 22:32; Mark 10:19), the Psalms (Matthew 26:64; Luke 13:35; John 13:18), and Isaiah’s prophecy (Mark 11:17; Luke 8:10; 22:37), among others. By His use of the Old Testament, Jesus affirms its authority.

The Bible is an incredible work: written by multiple authors over many centuries, and yet weaving together one major theme; spread across the world to many different cultures and languages, yet passed down from generation to generation with remarkable accuracy. Its historical reliability far outweighs the most revered ancient works. In sum, we have an abundance of reasons to be confident that its words are as true today as they ever were.

JOURNAL

How does today's study build your confidence in the trustworthiness of the Bible?

[illegible]

How can a young man keep his way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ¹²Blessed are you, O Lord; teach me your statutes! ¹³With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. ¹⁴In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.
(Psalm 119:9-16).

Describe the life of someone who deeply trusts in the Word of God.

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WEEKLY PRAYER *(write down your prayers for this week)*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.
(Colossians 4:2).