

Tutorial Session: Reading the Bible – What It Is and What It's For

Theme: Finding the Word in the Word

Length: ~60 minutes

Lectures Covered:

- - Lecture 1: What is the Bible?
- - Lecture 2: The Arc of the Story

Session Outline

Time	Segment	Description
5 mins	Opening	Welcome, prayer, and introduction
10 mins	Part 1 – What is the Bible?	Overview + Discussion
10 mins	Part 2 – Why Was it Written?	Reflection + Discussion
10 mins	Part 3 – Who Wrote It?	Theological Input + Group Reflection
15 mins	Part 4 – The Arc of the Story	Narrative, Genre + Application
10 mins	Conclusion	Personal Reflection + Prayer

Part 1 – What is the Bible? (10 mins)

Mini-Input Summary:

The Bible is not just one book, but a library of diverse texts—66 books (or more), written by around 40 authors over 1500 years, in multiple languages. It's viewed in many ways: a rulebook, history, mythology, ethical code, or sacred story. But centrally, it's a sacred witness to God's self-revelation and ongoing relationship with humanity.

- Discussion Prompts:

- When you think of “the Bible,” what image or metaphor comes to mind?
- How do your current reading habits reflect what you believe the Bible to be?
- How does seeing the Bible as a library rather than a manual shift how you might approach it?

Part 2 – Why Was the Bible Written? (10 mins)

Mini-Input Summary:

Scripture is written to reveal God's character and purposes, particularly as fulfilled in Jesus Christ. It's not simply a moral guide or theological answer book—it's an invitation to wisdom and to a life shaped by God's ongoing story (Peter Enns).

- Discussion Prompts:
 - Think of a recent time you opened the Bible—what prompted you?
 - How do you understand the Bible's purpose in your life or your community?
 - In what ways does Scripture invite you into a journey, not just a conclusion?

Part 3 – Who Wrote the Bible? (10 mins)

Mini-Input Summary:

The Bible was written by people—real, flawed, faithful people—who were also inspired by the Holy Spirit. This dual-authorship means we need to take both its historical context and spiritual significance seriously.

- Discussion Prompts:
 - How do you hold together the Bible's human authorship and divine inspiration?
 - Does it matter if parts of the Bible are time-bound, poetic, or culturally specific?
 - Share an example when the Bible felt like it “spoke” to you. What made that moment feel inspired?

Part 4 – The Arc of the Story (15 mins)

Mini-Input Summary:

The Bible tells one grand story with multiple “acts”: Creation, Fall, Redemption, Church, and New Creation. Each Testament and each genre (poetry, history, law, apocalyptic, etc.) contributes to this overarching narrative.

Understanding the genre of a biblical book or passage is crucial to interpreting it well. The Bible is not a single genre document, but a rich tapestry of literary forms including poetry, law, history, wisdom, narrative, prophecy, parable, and apocalyptic writing. Each genre communicates truth in different ways and requires a unique approach to interpretation.

For example, interpreting a psalm (poetry) as literal historical fact would miss its artistic and emotional depth. Conversely, reading a historical narrative like Acts as purely symbolic would ignore the grounded realities of the early church. The genre shapes how we read, what we expect, and what kind of truth we are listening for.

- **Key Considerations When Reading Different Genres:**
 - Poetry (e.g., Psalms): Uses metaphor, imagery, and parallelism. Often emotional and expressive.
 - Law (e.g., Leviticus): Sets out community and covenant expectations. Must be read within its historical covenantal context.
 - Narrative/History (e.g., Genesis, Acts): Tells the story of God's people. Pay attention to plot, character, and divine action.
 - Wisdom Literature (e.g., Proverbs, Job): Offers general truths, often through metaphor and proverb. Not always promises or rules.
 - Prophecy (e.g., Isaiah): Speaks to a specific time but often with layers of meaning. Combines poetry, judgment, and hope.
 - Apocalyptic (e.g., Revelation): Symbolic, visionary literature meant to encourage faith in times of trial. Rich in metaphor.

Recognising genre helps us to be faithful readers—listening for what God is truly saying through each unique voice and form.

- **Discussion Prompts:**
 - Which part of the biblical story feels most central to your life right now—creation, redemption, church?
 - Why does genre matter when reading Scripture? What risks arise when we ignore genre?
 - How does thinking in terms of a 'grand story' change how you read the Bible or see your own life?

Conclusion: Living the Story (10 mins)

Mini-Input Summary:

We live in the “Church” act—the fourth part of the story. Our purpose is to embody the Gospel as a community of love and mission until the renewal of all things.

- **Discussion Prompts:**
 - What does it mean for you to live as part of God’s story?
 - How might your reading of Scripture change if you saw yourself on stage in this divine drama?

- What one habit or practice might you begin this week to better listen for God's Word in the Bible?

Appendices

Key Quotes

- "The Bible is not a rulebook but a sacred invitation into wisdom." – Peter Enns
- "All Scripture is inspired by God and useful..." – 2 Timothy 3:16–17
- "The end is the beginning." – Lecture 2

Acts of the Biblical Narrative

- Creation – Genesis 1–2
- Fall – Genesis 3
- Redemption – Covenant with Israel, fulfilled in Jesus
- Church – The Spirit-filled witness of Christ
- New Creation – Revelation 21–22