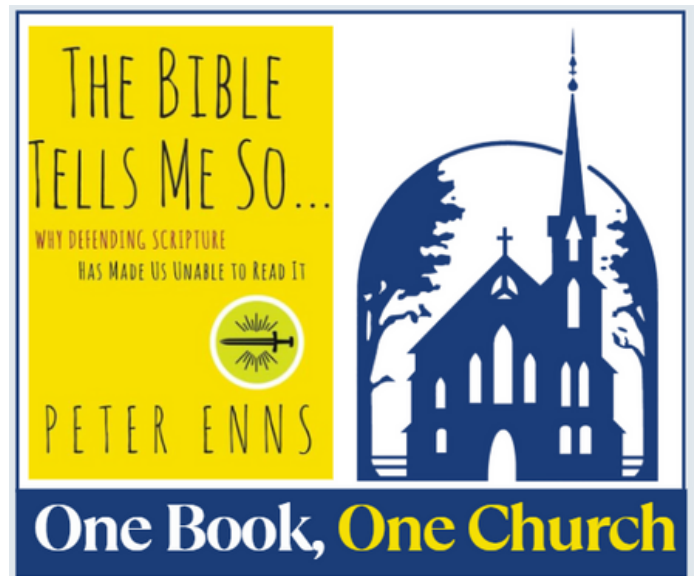

DOYLESTOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



SUMMER GROWTH GROUPS

The Bible Tells Me So
Peter Enns





A note for you...

Thank you for taking the time to engage with your own spiritual curiosity.

Doylestown Presbyterian Church takes biblical literacy seriously!

I've loved the Bible for a long time, but not always in the same way. I keep wanting to study it more. A few years ago, I picked up Peter Enns' book *The Bible Tells Me So*. Here was someone who had studied deeply, questioned honestly, and still loved the Bible, maybe more because of the questions, not in spite of them. Peter Enns doesn't write dry theology. He's a biblical scholar, yes, but also a deeply funny and accessible guide. His book is full of charm and clarity. He doesn't hide from the hard parts of the Bible, he enters into them with humility and humor. I found myself underlining half the book and laughing out loud during the other half.

Having organized a few groups to read this book a few years ago, I saw first hand the dialogue and curiosity that developed into conversations with each other. We talked about our upbringings, our faith traditions, other moments in our lives we learned things from, scriptures we took to heart, scriptures we were confused about, and what we had picked up and left behind in our long faithful spiritual journeys.

It was beautiful. It was community building.

It helped us all see that engaging Scripture faithfully doesn't mean having all the answers. Sometimes it means learning how to live with the questions. Or seeing how the Bible, in all its ancient context and human voices, still points us to something bigger, Someone bigger. I hope you'll come along, wrestle with us, laugh with us, and maybe fall in love with the Bible all over again. Thank you for joining a growth group. I've written this guide specifically for DPC to help facilitate all of the above.

Let's grow together.

Rev. Becca Bateman

Associate Pastor

Doylestown Presbyterian Church

**Dr. Peter Enns will be speaking at
Doylestown Presbyterian Church on
Sunday, September 14,
9:30 AM Worship & Lunch**



Before you meet with your group Pre-session

In the opening chapters of his book, *The Bible Tells Me So*, Peter Enns invites us to rethink what the Bible is and how we engage with it. He frames it as an ancient, sacred conversation, written by people in specific cultural contexts, shaped over time, and bearing witness to a dynamic relationship between God and humanity.

Questions to ponder:

- Think about the Bible you reach for most often, how did it come into your life, and what makes it special to you?
- In the first chapter Peter Enns reflects upon three moments in his life in which he would call “turning points.” They are shaped around key moments in his life in which he would conclude helped to shape his faith. His were in describing his itch to go to seminary and in getting a PHD in Biblical studies. Can you think about some moments in your life in which you might also name a “turning point” of your faith and intrigue about the bible?
- Consider our civic, political, corporate, and household leadership. In what ways do you influence others because of your prudence in the study of scripture?
- If someone asked you what the Bible is, how would you answer today? How might that answer be different from what you would have said five, ten, or twenty years ago?
- Is there a quote or idea from a spiritual writer or pastor that’s stuck with you recently? What about it resonated with you?
- What kind of community makes it easier for you to be honest about your fears or questions?

Closing

What tools do you need before you begin. A bible, the book “The Bible Tells Me So,” perhaps a journal to write all your extra notes, this guide, snacks, doodling supplies, and what else?



Consider Making A Group Covenant

Step 1

If you are diving into this book with a growth group, consider making a group covenant. A group covenant is a shared agreement for how we will treat one another as we learn, question, and grow together. What do you need from others in this group to be open and curious? What do you hope this group will feel like?

Step 2

Circle some covenant Values you might want to include

Feel free to add, edit, or choose from these:

- We commit to confidentiality, what's shared in the group stays in the group.
- We honor different perspectives and questions without needing to debate them.
- We give everyone space to speak, no one dominates, and no one is forced to share.
- We practice curiosity over certainty.
- We speak with grace, listen with humility, and respond with kindness.
- We agree that growth sometimes comes through discomfort.
- We believe disagreement does not equal disconnection.
- We welcome laughter, silence, and everything in between.
- _____
- _____



Session 1 The Bible Tells Me So... God Did What?

Main Idea

The whole Bible is made up of hard parts and encouraging parts. All the parts are for us.

Gathering Question

If there were more books in the Bible, what would you hope to find in them - more poetry, more parables, more battle scenes, more stories about certain people, or something entirely different?

Scripture

The marching orders for the conquest are given in **Deuteronomy 20:10-20** (read 1-9 to get a fuller picture.

The Book of **Joshua** records the conquest itself (you might remember Jericho from Sunday School in **chapter 6**).

Judges 2:20-3:1 shares their updated status.

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapters 1- 2

Opening

A regular rhythm of scripture in one's life is essential to Christian Spiritual Formation. The spiritual practice of reciting, listening, or reading biblical scripture daily or weekly dates back to the early church. A modern Christian might be encouraged to begin with the book of Genesis. It has it all: themes of love, betrayal, courage, and resilience. Though many become curious with God who creates and is actively engaged with creation, many also become overwhelmed by the ambiguity of the characters that embody archetypal roles and motifs. When one continues a few more books in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, there has been so much wandering and bloodshed, is one worse for the wear and tear of the journey? The rest of the Old Testament's power struggles and reminder of the failure of people might have one jumping to the New Testament to begin again. Only to find a confusing mixture of similar stories shared in four different ways leading one to think, "Have I read this already?" If one does get to Revelation, it is questionable whether one feels rewarded for their diligence, because it is not wrapped up in a tidy bow like a series finale. This is a call, or more of a challenge, the Bible is a lifelong companion, and is a book to be taken seriously and perhaps more carefully than we have before!

**"It's a challenging book that leaves you with more questions than answers."
Dr. Peter Enns, The Bible Tells Me So (4)**



Highlights from chapters 1-2

“So that’s why this chapter looks the way it does- to put right in front of our eyes the antiquity of the Bible, and to see how embracing that antiquity is the beginning point for exploring the Bible as it is, to accept the challenge to investigate even some of its darker pathways, and so to begin learning how we, too, can embrace Israel’s story for our journey... In that sense, Canaanite genocide is more than just a perplexing moral problem to work through. It has positive value, for it is a window onto a much larger issue, one that we face on virtually every page of the Bible and that we are going to look at next: how do biblical writers talk about the past?” (70)

“If I had to give a top-three list of awkward issues that trouble Christian readers of the Bible, God ordering, sanctioning, or carrying out mass killings in the Old Testament is often at the top.” (66)

-Chapter 2 outlines three possibilities for how one might understand the stories of Israel’s conquest and violence in the Old Testament.

1. God really did command these violent acts. This view takes the Bible based on a straightforward reading raises questions about God's character that are troubling. (33+)
2. The Israelites thought God told them to act violently. This perspective sees the stories as a reflection of the ancient Israelite worldview, not God’s actual instructions. (50)
3. Written much later, the stories were shared to shape the identity and claim of the land as sacred national memory. Seeing them as shaped more for a particular purpose and less as literal historical events.(67)

“This drives home a key point for understanding many other parts of the Old Testament: the ancient Israelites’ tribal mentality about themselves, their world, and their God is reflected in what they wrote.” (57)

Discussion Questions

- When and what context have you heard of these conquests in scripture? How do they compare to the ones described in chapter 2.
- Knowing that God’s ways and thoughts are bigger than ours, how do we reconcile the tension that God is indeed a good God and God prospers the upright and opposes the evildoers?
- How does seeing the Bible as ancient storytelling shift your reaction to violent passages?
- What modern parallels might exist in how we tell our national or religious histories?
- When someone in your life has challenged what the Bible says, have you ever felt like you had to 'hold it all together' for others spiritually? How did that affect your spiritual life?

This chapter looked closely at Canaanite genocide as the how the writers of the Bible talked about the past as storytellers.

Closing Wondering Question

What might it mean for our spiritual growth if we learned to trust the Bible more not by explaining away its hardest passages, but by walking honestly with them?



Session 2 The Bible Tells Me So... God Likes Stories?

Main Idea

The Bible recounts sacred experiences beyond the words themselves.

Watching these ancient pilgrims work through their faith, even wrestling with how they did that, models for us our own journeys of seeking to know God.

Gathering

What's something you wish someone had told you earlier about faith, the Bible, or following Jesus?

Scripture

The resurrection accounts are in Matthew 27:62-28:20, Mark 16:1-8 (shorter ending) and 16:9-20 (longer ending), Luke 24, and John 20-21. And the Plagues are in Exodus 7-9.

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapter 3

Opening

From hearing the tale from your 10 year old about how the window broke (and the ring camera that tells a different story), to true crime podcasts interviewing dozens of people to sift out new intel, the inquisitive mind of a person longs to understand the whole story. Yet, we are human, and there is still room for error. The Bible often shares several angles from the perspective of writers that help share a more full picture. For example, Genesis has two beginnings, Exodus has two times the commandments are given, history books like Judges, Kings, Chronicles, and Samuel shade in various colors of the tribal collective people of Israel, the gospels have four accounts, five if you count Paul's letters as commentary. In order to understand the Bible, sometimes there is a need to look at the careful details and sometimes there is a need to take it in larger sections. In this chapter, the subsections share examples of the writers of the Bible who lived at different times and places and wrote for different reasons. There are times the Bible is able to fill in historical details and there are times historical details and context help fill in understanding of the Bible. Both are needed and only one perspective will leave an incomplete perspective and understanding.



Highlights from chapter 3

“The gospels weave together bits and pieces of the past into narratives that reflect how it could have happened.” (74)

“The story of Jesus, the center of the Christian faith, is told from four different perspectives in the four Gospels. In the Old Testament we have two lengthy, very different takes on Israel’s past. At times these stories of Jesus and Israel contradict each other. They can’t be combined somehow to make one story without losing large portions of any one of these stories. Each story is meant to stand on its own, as their storytellers intended them to.” (76)

Regarding biblical writers ‘writing history,’ “Getting the past “right” in a modern sense wasn’t a high priority. All four Gospels are connected to history, but each also tells us a lot about how these writers saw Jesus, what they believed about him, what was important to them and their communities. Judging where history ends and creative writing begins is tough, and biblical scholars got back and forth on all that.” (79-80)

“Whenever biblical writers talk about the past, we should expect them to be shaping the past as well.” (99)

The Ten Plagues and possibly against which Egyptian god or goddess (121)

- *blood (7:14-25) Hapi and Osiris, of the Nile.*
- *frogs (8:1-15) Heqet, of fertility.*
- gnats (8:16-19) Geb, of the earth or dust of the earth.*
- *flies (8:20-32) Khepri, of rebirth had the head of a fly*
- *dead Livestock (9:1-7) Apis, livestock*
- *...or Hathor, of love and protection depicted with the head of a cow*
- *boils (9:8-12) Isis, of medicine and peace*
- *hail rained down (9:13-35), Nut, of the Sky*
- *locusts (10:1-20), Seth, of storms and disorder*
- *affecting their lifesource of food and water*
- *darkness (10:21-29)*
- *against Ra, the god the sun.*
- *death of firstborn (11:1-10), Pharaoh- the ultimate power of Egypt seen as a god*

**not all of the plagues can be conveniently matched up with Egyptian gods or texts*



Discussion Questions Chapter 3

- When you're given some interesting new context about scripture? What helps you reflect or respond?
- Each Gospel tells the resurrection story a little differently. What stands out to you in those differences, and why do you think the writers might have included or emphasized certain details?
- When the Bible surprises or unsettles you, what kinds of questions help you dig deeper?
- When you think about the plagues aimed at specific Egyptian gods, what does that tell you about who God is and what God is doing in the Exodus story?
- Do you find it easier to relate to Adam as an individual person or as a symbol of something larger? What difference does that make in how you read his story?
- How were you introduced to the Bible growing up? Has that understanding shifted for you over time, especially as an adult? If so, what experiences or questions prompted that change?

This chapter looked more closely at how the Bible's storytellers shaped the past when writing about things that happened in recent history to them to help explain the present moment they were writing in.

Closing Wondering Question

What are some questions you're interested in learning more about in scripture?



"Piecing Together the Resurrection" Quiz

Only by reading the different gospel stories would you get a complete picture

1. Which Gospel says an earthquake shook the ground when the angel appeared at the tomb?

- A) Mark
- B) Luke
- C) Matthew
- D) John

2. True or False: Every Gospel says Mary Magdalene was at the tomb on Easter morning.

3. Who ran to the tomb after hearing that Jesus was alive?

- A) James
- B) Peter
- C) John
- D) Thomas

4. Which Gospel includes Jesus appearing to two disciples on the road to Emmaus?

- A) Matthew
- B) Mark
- C) Luke
- D) John

5. How many angels were at the tomb, according to different Gospel accounts?

- A) One
- B) Two
- C) None
- D) Three

6. What did Jesus say to Mary Magdalene when she first saw Him but didn't recognize Him?

- A) "Peace be with you."
- B) "Do not be afraid."
- C) "Woman, why are you weeping?"
- D) "Go and tell the others!"

7. In Matthew, how did the Roman guards react when the angel appeared?

- A) Fled to the city
- B) Fainted in fear
- C) Tried to seal the tomb again
- D) Asked Mary what happened

8. Which disciple doubted Jesus' resurrection until he saw Jesus for himself?

- A) Peter
- B) James
- C) Thomas
- D) Andrew

9. What did Jesus eat with His disciples in Luke to show He wasn't a ghost?

- A) Bread
- B) Honey
- C) Fish
- D) Lamb

10. Which two Gospels describe Jesus ascending into heaven?

- A) Matthew & Mark
- B) Luke
- C) John & Matthew
- D) Acts & Revelation



Piecing Together The Resurrection Quiz Answer Key

1. (Matthew 28:2) Only Matthew records the earthquake when the angel rolls away the stone! 2. True! (Matthew 28:1, Luke 24:10, John 20:1) She's always mentioned, but the other women vary depending on the Gospel. 3. Peter (Luke 24:12) & John (John 20:3-4) Luke mentions Peter running, while John's Gospel says Peter AND John ran together! 4. (Luke 24:13-35) Only Luke tells this story! 5. One (Matthew 28:2, Mark 16:5) and Two (Luke 24:4, John 20:12) Matthew and Mark say one angel; Luke and John say two. This is why reading multiple accounts gives a fuller picture!

6. C Woman, why are you weeping?" (John 20:15) John's Gospel captures this deeply personal moment when Jesus calls her by name—and then she realizes it's him!

7. B) Fainted in fear (Matthew 28:4) Only Matthew records the guards reacting in terror and collapsing! 8. C) Thomas (John 20:24-29) Thomas needed proof, and John's Gospel preserves this moment! 9. C) Fish (Luke 24:42-43) Luke is the only Gospel that records this meal! 10. B) Luke (Luke 24:51) & Mark (Mark 16:19) Matthew ends with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), while John doesn't explicitly mention the Ascension. Luke and Mark describe it!



Session 3 The Bible Tells Me So... Why Doesn't God make up his mind?

Main Idea

God is by our side every step of the way.

Gathering

What scripture verse or story instantly alters your mood?

Scripture

The near sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22:1-19 or The golden Calf incident Exodus 32. Job 38:1-7 where God speaks from the whirlwind.

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapter 4

Opening

The Protestant Reformation rightly emphasized the authority of Scripture, but over time this emphasis sometimes narrowed into treating every verse of the Bible as a direct life application. In the 20th century, especially in American culture, this approach grew popular teaching tools that tried to make the Bible feel practical and accessible (do you remember ever hearing clever acronyms like “B.I.B.L.E. = Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth” which reinforced the idea. While this view comes from a sincere desire to live faithfully, it can miss the richness of Scripture as a dynamic, formative, and Spirit-led conversation with God. This chapter invites us to let go of the idea that the bible is an instruction manual. We can't get ironed out answers.

It does however help us see ourselves discovering that God walks beside us even in the gray areas, the hard stories, and the open-ended questions. In this way, the Bible becomes a tool for spiritual formation, not by offering us all the answers, but by transforming the kinds of questions we ask and the kind of people we're becoming along the way.



Highlights from chapter 4

“The bible is a book that shows us what a life of faith looks like. The bible shapes and molds us by drawing us into this world and inviting us to connect on many different levels, wherever we are on our journey, and to see ourselves better by its light by stirring our spiritual imagination to walk closer with God. “That’s how the bible acts as a guide for the faithful-by being a story, not by giving us a list of directions disguised as a story.” (136)

“Israel’s laws sometimes contradict each other... These traditions (or “law codes” as they are sometimes called) were produced independently by- sto[me if you’ve heard me say this already- different groups of Israelites living at different items and in different places, and each reflects different ways of understanding what God’s will is for them.” (162)

“But this ungodlike God of the Bible gets at the very heart of both Jewish and Christian beliefs about God. This God doesn’t keep his distance but embraces human experience and becomes part of the human story. He is “on the scene” with bracing regularity. In the Christian story, God steps further down. He becomes one of us, God in the flesh. We actually need God to be less of an on-high-keeping-his-distance kind of God, and more a God who reacts, changes his mind, and can be reasoned with. Without a God like that, the whole idea of prayer can’t get off the ground.” (158)

Discussion Questions

- What Bible stories have helped you picture a God who draws near to humans (you)?
- When you're reading Scripture, how do you decide whether to zoom in on the details or step back to see the bigger picture?
- How does your connection to God in prayer shift when you feel God’s presence as near instead of far away?
- What do you think about Enns’ comment about, “Getting the bible right and getting Jesus right are not the same thing”?
- What does it mean to you that God answered Abraham in his own swirl of tension walking up the hillside with Isaac or dissolution of Moses seeing the Golden Calf or Job hearing God’s voice out of a whirlwind? Have you ever sensed God’s presence in something wild, overwhelming, or beyond your understanding?

This chapter looked more closely to how the Bible includes multiple voices when speaking, not just about the past.

Closing Wondering Question

What do we gain when we read the Old and New Testaments as parts of one story, God’s story?



Session 4 The Bible Tells Me So... Jesus is Bigger than the Bible?

Main Idea

There is more to Jesus than just what is recorded.

Gathering

Share someone whose Bible was well-worn and well-loved. What do you remember about them, and what did their love for Scripture teach you?

Scripture

Matthew 5:21–48; Luke 4:14–30 (The Sermon on the Mount)

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapter 5

Opening

Becoming familiar with Scripture has always been central to faith traditions like Judaism and Christianity. In Jesus' time, it was common for people to memorize large portions of the Hebrew Scriptures, stories, laws, psalms, as a shared language for making meaning, discerning God's presence, and navigating life. Jesus exemplified this deep familiarity. He quoted, reinterpreted, and reimagined Scripture in ways that were both rooted in tradition and radically expansive. His words gained credibility and weight because they started from a common place, though, as we see in scripture, he often flipped assumptions upside down. What this chapter helps us see is that the Gospel writers give us glimpses, not exhaustive accounts, of Jesus. There is more to Jesus than what was written, and more to God's story than can ever be fully captured on a page (even the pages of all the theology books that fill libraries and bookshelves). As people of faith today, our task is not to memorize the Bible for trivia's sake or to defend it, but to live in it, so that it lives in us. Only then can we begin to respond creatively and courageously to God's call in our own time, just as Jesus did in his. And follow Jesus' ultimate example, whose power was shown through weakness.



Highlights from chapter 5

“Revering the bible and handling it creatively might sound like a contradiction to us, but it wasn’t to ancient Jews.” (171) “The big problem the Jews faced though, was that their scripture was set in writing while the world around them kept changing.” (172)

“And by plumbing the depth of scripture, Jews believed they were accessing the deeper mystery of what God was saying to them now. Indeed, it was God himself extending that invitation to them to dig deeper.” (173)

“Debating the Bible, especially Torah, and coming up with creative readings to address changing times was a mark of faithful Judaism. Jews were not “legalistic” about handling the Law, which is still a common Christian caricature. Even though scripture was God’s word and binding, they understood that the Bible-including Torah- was not a rulebook to be followed to the letter at every point.” (174)

“For Jesus, interpreting and respecting Torah meant- when necessary- not following the script, but being creative and adapting the past to speak to changing circumstances in the present. And in some cases, like divorce and oaths, Jesus finds Moses’ words to be inadequate and in need of correction.” (182-183)

“The Gospels, of course, have a lot more to say about Jesus, and, as we saw in chapter 3, the four Gospels present Jesus differently. The Gospel writers wrote a generation and more after Jesus’ life, and they wrote about him not simply as a part of past history but how that itinerant preacher was with them now in the present. They had faith that Jesus was the risen Son of God, and their stories of Jesus, though different, reflect that faith. Working how these four portraits of Jesus work together to present Jesus to us fill shelves with thick books. Still, when I read the Gospels, one word sums up what I see about Jesus as a whole: counterintuitive. A working-class man whose words and deeds were of resounding authority, wisdom, and cleverness, enough to capture the negative attention of the Jewish authorities and of the Roman government. A leader who modeled self-sacrifice and service to others instead of power. A deliverer who suffered and was executed, whose power was shown through weakness.” (189)



Discussion Questions

- Who is someone, parent, pastor, teacher, friend, who helped you engage Scripture in a new way? What did they do that opened it up for you?
- This chapter talks about becoming so familiar with Scripture that we learn to work with it creatively. What do you think it means to “know” the Bible well?
- Jesus reinterprets the commandments in the Sermon on the Mount, saying, for example, that murder includes angry words and adultery includes hidden thoughts. (181) Is there a part of your life or faith where Jesus’ deeper teachings from the Sermon on the Mount feel especially relevant or challenging right now?
- Many pastors today follow this same tradition—reimagining what Scripture means for our time. Can you think of a sermon or teaching that brought Scripture into your present reality in a surprising or meaningful way?



This chapter we looked at how Jesus handled his Bible as a Jew in the first century CE.

Closing Wondering Question

What might it look like for you to become more familiar with Scripture in a way that gives you not just knowledge, but wisdom, imagination, and spiritual courage?



Session 5 The Bible Tells Me So... No One Saw This Coming

Main Idea

A widening view of God's love which includes Gentiles.

Gathering

Share a book or section in the bible you hope to grow more curious about this year.

Scripture

The inclusion of the Gentiles is in Ephesians 3:5-6. Paul's declaration that there is no longer "Jew or Greek" is in Romans 10:12. The true mark that designates one as a person of God, faith working through love, is in Galatians 5:6. Circumcision command to Abraham is Genesis 17:9-14 and Exodus 4:24-26 shares God's anger with the son of Moses for not being circumcised which his wife Zipporah quickly fixes.

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapter 6

Opening

It's hard not to talk about Jesus. His presence, his teaching, and his love were so compelling that people couldn't help but be transformed. He had a way of breaking through rigid thinking and opening hearts and minds to a bigger, more generous vision of God. The Gospel writers, and later, Paul, picked up on this expansive movement. They weren't just telling stories about Jesus; they were helping their communities make sense of a culture shift: that the God of Israel was not only for Israel, but for all people. Access to God also shifted.

What if openness, not boundaries, is the truest mark of faith? This chapter nudges us to notice how the tone shifts from the Old Testament to the New Testament, from covenant rooted in one people to a welcome extended to all, including the Gentiles. Sometimes, that shift can feel so familiar to us as modern Christians that we forget how radical it really was. After all, most of us are the Gentiles. We may never have noticed the boundaries because we weren't on the outside of them. But early followers of Jesus had to wrestle with what it meant to let go of inherited categories and widen their understanding of who belongs. As we read Scripture today, we're invited into that same work, not just to celebrate inclusion where it's already happened, but to keep opening the circle wider in our own time and place.



Highlights from chapter 6

"The Bible was nonnegotiable as God's word, but it wasn't God's final word. Jesus was. Israel's story, taken on its own terms, is not adequate to bear the weight of God's surprise move of a crucified and resurrected messiah. It must be reshaped around Jesus." (195)

"Matthew used Hosea's words in a way that Hosea absolutely did not mean, and in a way Hosea would never, in a million years, have understood. Today we would call this reading "into" the text what we want to see there. And this is exactly what Matthew is doing. His faith in Jesus drove him to adapt Israel's story to speak about Jesus, even if Jesus is off topic from the point of view of Hosea's own words." (204)

"As we glimpsed in chapter 3, part of Matthew's creative telling of Jesus' birth story is to present him as a new Moses. Both Jesus and Moses escaped a mass-murdering monarch..." (204)

Genealogy (208)

"Since Jews and Gentile followers of Jesus are now equal members of the family of God and therefore one people, Paul argues that Jesus put an end to the requirement of Torah-keeping not only for Gentiles but also for Jews. That means Torah takes a backseat to Jesus- for Jews and Gentiles. That doesn't mean Jewish followers of Jesus had to stop getting circumcised, for example, or refraining from eating pork. It means, though, that faithfulness to God would no longer be defined by Torah-keeping. Talk about rewriting Israel's story around Jesus." (220)

"In the book of Romans, (Paul) reminds us, his readers, that God called Abraham from his homeland and made a pact with him long before God actually gave the law to Moses several hundred years later on Mt. Sinai. Hence, Paul reasons, if God began his relationship with his people apart from Torah keeping, then Torah-keeping doesn't secure anyone's status before God. Only faithfulness to God does." (221)

Discussion Questions

- Who in your life has best reflected the kind of wide, generous love that Jesus modeled? What impact did they have on you?
- Have you ever been surprised by who feels welcome, or unwelcome, in faith communities? How did that affect your own faith?
- Circumcision was a visible marker of covenant in Genesis 17. In today's Christian context, what does it mean to belong, and what signs (visible or invisible) do we rely on to affirm that belonging?
- When you're feeling unsure about your beliefs or your place in the community, what helps you stay grounded?
- Where in your life or community might God be inviting you to widen the circle, either in thought, welcome, or compassion?

In **chapter six**, we see Jesus who is deeply a part of the world of first-century Judea. We see the effects of transforming a tribal story and purity of a group of people, into a global story of God's grace and peace to all nations. A lot of what Paul says can make more sense if we keep this in mind.

Ending Wondering Question

What does it mean to "get Jesus right?"



Session 6 The Bible Tells Me So... Jesus as it is

Main Idea

God cannot be contained in the Bible

Gathering

Share a belief that you've had to unlearn in your life.

Scripture

Did you catch the pages 245-254 in this chapter in which he describes "Where in the Bible were we?" Is there something you would like to go read?

Reading

The Bible Tells Me So ...
Chapter 7

Opening

God is a God on the move. From the moment God called Abraham to journey into the unknown, to the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, to the risen Christ meeting disciples on the road, Scripture testifies again and again to a God who will not be boxed in. Studying Scripture in a group is one of the greatest gifts we share as Christians, not because we arrive at all the answers, but because we share stories of where God has shown up in our lives and allow those stories to meet and challenge the stories in the Bible. And yet, the church tries to tame that mystery. We build systems, creeds, and confessions to help give shape to faith, and while those can be meaningful tools, they can also quietly become barriers. God doesn't stay behind the walls we build.

This chapter reminds us that God is not a static concept to be mastered, but a living presence that keeps surprising us. May we become surprised by God. That we would be able to look back on key moments in life seeing they helped to shape our faith. May we encourage one another even when there are more questions than answers.

May we be a place within a church that creates space where vulnerability is welcomed and not judged. Part of the spiritual work of reading the Bible together is helping one another find language for faith, not just the polished kind, but the raw, searching kind too. When we make room for that, we often discover that God is already there, meeting us in unexpected ways. That is the kind of church and Church we should long to be a part of.



Highlights from chapter 7

“God is one the move, challenging his people not to limit his actions by their perceptions...I think part of what it means for God to “reveal” himself is to keep us guessing, to come to terms with the idea that knowing God is also a form of not knowing God, of knowing that we cannot fully know, but only catch God in part—which is more than enough to keep us busy. If we read the Bible today thinking that this God of creation, freedom, and mystery is bound by a book as if it were a contract, with nothing left to say, no further moves or surprises, we will miss much. The Bible tells us so.” (235)

“So much can be learned from other traditions. In the long history of the Christian Church, so many different, even conflicting, points of view have been embraced as true and valuable. Even today, at this very moment, literally thousands of recognized, established, Christian denominations dot the world, where members worship God to understand his ways differently from each other.” (240)

“Who we are always affects our spiritual perceptions. Maybe God likes the diversity. If he doesn’t we’d have to conclude that he hasn’t done a good job of controlling it. But maybe diversity tells us something about what God is like.” (241)

Discussion Questions

- What helps you remember that God isn’t limited to the pages of the Bible, but is still moving, speaking, and guiding now?
- Have you ever had a moment in your life where God felt especially mysterious—or beyond your expectations? What was that like?
- If God is still revealing, still on the move—how do we stay open, while still rooted? What helps you hold on to faith in a changing world?
- The same God who walked with Abraham, Moses, Miriam, Deborah, Rahab, Mary, Peter, Paul and Dorcas is present today. What helps you stay open to that ongoing presence?
- Looking back on this study, what’s one thing about your relationship with the Bible, or with God, that has grown or shifted?

In **chapter 7**, we see God showed up and shows up, and how that can cause tension.

Ending Wondering Question

In reading your Bible again, what’s the worst thing that could happen? And, what’s the worst thing that could happen? These are two very different questions.