

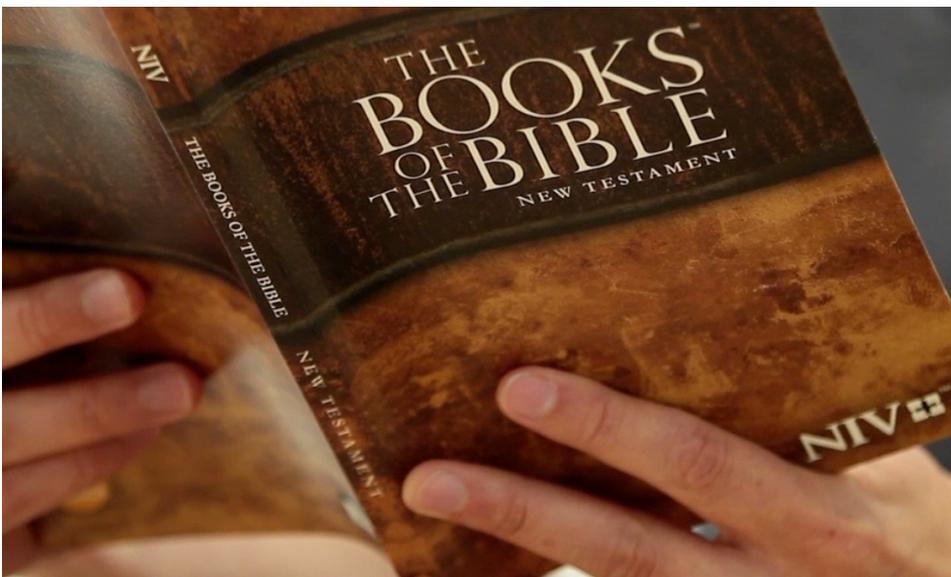
# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

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Covenant  
Community  
Bible Experience™

Created and Developed by Biblica



# LEADER'S GUIDE

p12-36

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# SMALL GROUP GUIDE

Dear Reader:

Community Bible Experience is a 40 day Bible reading of the entire New Testament. These daily readings can be done by yourself, however the experience is enhanced when we read together with friends, family and the church. This Small Group Guide will provide one simple outline per week, which can be used for your small group or as an aid to help in your personal reading.

This Small Group Guide has been adapted from the Covenant Community Bible Experience material to fit Crossview Covenant Church. We are wanting the Community Bible Experience to be simple to use so that God's Spirit is given more space to move as we read the Word of God together. This is the material we will cover during our Monday Night Gathers at church from Feb 20-April 10 at 6-7:30pm. Feel free to come Mondays with your group or come alone. You can use this guide on other days of the week too. If you want feel free to pick other readings from that week. The point is that we read the Word of God—do what works best for you and your group.

The Small Group Guide might feel over-simplified to you, and that is the point. We are removing the "middle-man" so it is you and God:

1. spur your group members to read the Bible, whatever they can. God's Word is living and will produce fruit, we just need to give it space to transform.
2. help your group not get stuck on the "O"(observation) part of the S.O.A.P. questions. Observations are fun to make, but they do not help us grow in faith. Get your group to spend most of their time in "A" (apply) part of S.O.A.P.—where appropriate, making the passage applicable to one's life.
3. Pray that you and the people in your group will be transformed as they read the Bible. Things you can do while praying: praise God, listen to God, and intercede for one another.

Your brother in Christ and in ministry,

Aaron Thompson, Community Life Pastor  
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For more and free resources: [www.crossviewcov.org/cbe](http://www.crossviewcov.org/cbe)

# FIVE TIPS FOR READING

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## 1. Read what you can.

Don't get discouraged if you fall behind. Keep at it, even if you don't make it all the way through each day's reading. If you have trouble keeping up, listening to the FREE audio version can help. ([crossviewcov.org/cbe](http://crossviewcov.org/cbe))

## 2. Read every day.

Read five days a week, Monday through Friday. Most readings take around 30 minutes to complete. Some daily readings are longer or shorter, because each one ends at the close of a book or a natural section break within a book. Section breaks are indicated by line spaces—the bigger the space, the bigger the break. The pace may be a little intense, but reading large portions of Scripture is also incredibly rewarding. (And remember, you only have to keep this pace up for eight weeks.)

## 3. Be fully present.

Avoid distraction while reading. (Turns out we're not that good at multitasking.) Instead, devote your full attention to the text. Take notes to remember what God is doing in your life.

## 4. Read the book intros.

The Books of the Bible includes brief introductions or “invitations” to each book, unpacking the context and literary structure of what you're about to read. Trust us, they're well worth your time.

## 5. Don't worry about the parts you don't understand.

The goal is to read big, not to catch every detail. You can always go back and study a specific passage in greater detail later. For now, take in the big picture; let that be your focus for the next eight weeks.

# Week 1: Luke-Acts

(suggested reading: Luke 2:1-40 p6-8)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
- 2 Ask yourself 2-3 of these questions as you **observe** and reflect on the passage. Attention: don't get stuck here, spend most of your time on 3 and 4!
  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
  - What didn't make sense to you, or what would you like to know more about?
  - What did you read that resonated with you?
  - What was a challenge for you?
  - How could you put the main idea in your own words?
  - Do you sense God is speaking to you through this passage and if so, what is God saying?
  - What are Jesus' expectations of His followers?
- 3 Personalize what you read/heard and observed. How will you **apply** this to your daily life? Focus most of your time here.
- 4 Spend some moments in **prayer** as a response: this may be confessing to God, thanking God, asking for help, listening for His guidance, or praising Him.

## Week 2: Luke-Acts, Letters of Paul

(suggested reading: Acts 2:1-47 p56-58)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
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  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
  - What didn't make sense to you, or what would you like to know more about?
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- 4 Spend some moments in **prayer** as a response: this may be confessing to God, thanking God, asking for help, listening for His guidance, or praising Him.

## Week 3: Letters of Paul

(suggested reading: 1 Corinthians 3:1-4:21 p121-123)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
- 2 Ask yourself 2-3 of these questions as you **observe** and reflect on the passage. Attention: don't get stuck here, spend most of your time on 3 and 4!
  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
  - What didn't make sense to you, or what would you like to know more about?
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# Week 4: Letters of Paul

(suggested reading: Romans 15:14-16:2 p185-186)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
- 2 Ask yourself 2-3 of these questions as you **observe** and reflect on the passage. Attention: don't get stuck here, spend most of your time on 3 and 4!
  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
  - What didn't make sense to you, or what would you like to know more about?
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# Week 5: Matthew

(suggested reading: Matthew 3:13-4:17 p244-245)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
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  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
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## Week 6: Hebrews, James, Mark

(suggested reading: Hebrews 3:1-4:13 p295-297)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
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  - What happened in this passage?
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## Week 7: 1-2 Peter, Jude, John

(suggested reading: 1 Peter 1:3-2:10 p353-355)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
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  - What happened in this passage?
  - What words or phrases stick out to you as important, surprising or interesting?
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## Week 8: 1-3 John, Revelation

(suggested reading: 1 John 4:7-5:12 p414-415)

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- 1 Read the **scripture** passage for today.
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# LEADER'S GUIDE

Dear Small Group Leader:

This section, the Leader's Guide, gives you: things to be mindful of, tips for leading your group, and introductory information on the books your group will be reading that week. If you are finding that this section is eating away at your small group time then IGNORE this section altogether. The goal is to be in God's Word and not just studying around it. So use the Small Group Guide first and foremost, but this section is supposed to help read deeper and wider. The "preparing for the week ahead" section should be made brief—so just highlight the important parts.

This Leader's Guide has been adapted from the Covenant Community Bible Experience material to fit Crossview Covenant Church. This is the material we will cover during our Monday Night Gathers at church from Feb 20-April 10 at 6-7:30pm. Feel free to come Mondays with your group or come alone. You can use this guide on other days of the week too. If you want feel free to pick other readings from that week. The point is that we read the Word of God—do what works best for you and your group.

Your role as a leader is only threefold:

1. spur your group members to read the Bible, whatever they can. God's Word is living and will produce fruit, we just need to give it space to transform.
2. help your group not get stuck on the "O"(observation) part of the S.O.A.P. questions. Observations are fun to make, but they do not help us grow in faith. Get your group to spend most of their time in "A" (apply) part of S.O.A.P.—where appropriate, making the passage applicable to one's life.
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## PREPARING

### Five tips for weekly gatherings

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This may be one of the easiest discussion groups you've ever led. You don't have to have all the answers; you just need to get the ball rolling each week. Chances are, participants will come full of things to talk about. Here are five tips for a great experience.

#### 1. Don't stress.

You don't have to do any advance preparation to lead your group on this journey. Just do your best to keep up with each week's reading.

#### 2. Think "book club."

Participants will come with different perspectives, backgrounds, and assumptions. Some may be new to the Bible; others may be lifelong students. Your job isn't to settle every debate or answer every question. Let the Bible speak for itself, and let each person absorb the story as it unfolds. Have people write down their thoughts first and then share what they wrote.

#### 3. Give everyone a voice.

Encourage everyone to join the conversation, but don't pressure someone to share if they don't want to. Make sure no one inadvertently monopolizes the conversation. If they do, invite some of the quieter participants to chime in.

#### 4. Share the reins.

Anyone can facilitate a Community Bible Experience discussion group. If you feel like a change of pace, give yourself the night off and invite another member to guide the conversation.

#### 5. Get a copy of *The Books of the Bible*

All the references to the various pages in this guide refer to the pages in the paperback book. Page numbers in eBooks etc might be different. So as a leader you may need to help people know where to start and end.

### Five tips for reading

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#### 1. Read what you can.

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 1: Luke-Acts

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### Introduction (10 minutes)

Be sure to cover the following points at your first gathering:

- Pray
- Introduce Community Bible Experience by sharing the information on "five tips for reading" in this guide.
- Discuss the challenge of reading 12 pages a day. Remind participants that most readings take around 30 minutes to complete—about the same time it takes to watch a short TV show.
- Invite each group member to share what they hope to get from their journey through the New Testament.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce everyone to the first grouping of New Testament books by sharing the information below.

- Our journey through the New Testament begins with Luke-Acts and the letters of Paul. We're starting with these books because, together, they provide an overview of the entire New Testament period.

Next, introduce your group to the first two books by sharing the points below:

- Luke and Acts are two volumes of a single work. They were addressed to Theophilus, who may have been a Roman official who sponsored Luke's work.
- Luke wrote to convince Theophilus that he could believe what he'd heard about Jesus and the church. Together, the books of Luke and Acts show how everything unfolded according to God's plan—how Jesus the Messiah brought salvation not only to the Jews, but to all nations.

Here's some information specific to Luke, which you can share with your group.

### Overview of Luke

- Like other historians, Luke says he carefully researched his account so he could paint a compelling portrait of Jesus' life.

- Luke wanted to show how God kept a promise made long ago to the people of Israel by sending Jesus as their Messiah, or king. But Luke also reveals another dimension to God’s plan: Jesus is “a light for revelation to the Gentiles.” Centuries earlier, God had told Abraham, Israel’s forefather, that “all peoples on earth” would be blessed through him. According to Luke, Jesus came to fulfill that promise.

### Structure of Luke

- Luke begins with a preliminary introduction describing Jesus’ early life (p. 3–11). This is followed by three main sections. The first describes Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, to the north of Jerusalem (p. 11–24). The second follows Jesus’ fateful journey to Jerusalem; along the way, Jesus teaches what it means to follow him (p. 25–42). The final section tells how Jesus laid down his life in Jerusalem, only to rise again and become Ruler and Savior of the world (p. 42–54).

### What to watch for in Luke

- Notice how important location is to Luke. A third of his gospel highlights Jesus’ journey toward Jerusalem (and toward his own death). Luke’s follow-up, the book of Acts, will highlight the spread of the good news out from Jerusalem after Jesus’ resurrection from the dead.
- Keep watch for some unlikely cast members in Luke’s drama. Luke highlights Jesus’ compassion toward the outsiders and outcasts of his day: the poor, the disabled, tax collectors, women, children, and others. According to Luke, Jesus is for everybody.

### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above ”preparing for the week ahead” in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the [S.O.A.P. study on page 4](#)

**SHARE YOUR STORIES:** A good way to encourage others in their Bible reading is by sharing your story of how reading the Bible is changing your life. Share on Crossview’s Community Life Group on Facebook (picture/video). Or contact Pastor Aaron with your story.

# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 2: Luke-Acts, Letters of Paul

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce your group to the book of Acts by sharing the information below.

### Overview of Acts

- Like its predecessor, Luke's second volume is fairly short when compared to other historical works of the day. Acts covers roughly the first 30 years of the movement ignited by Jesus after his resurrection and ascension.
- Luke's first volume showed how God kept his promise to the people of Israel by sending Jesus as their Messiah, or King. Next, God invites non-Jews (known as Gentiles) to follow Jesus as well. Acts picks up the story where the gospel of Luke leaves off, with the risen Jesus about to return to heaven. Before going, he commissions his disciples to spread the good news about him "to the ends of the earth."

### Structure of Acts

- Acts consists of six parts, each describing a successive phase in the expansion of the community of Jesus-followers. First, the community is established in Jerusalem (p. 55–64). Then it expands into the surrounding area (p. 64–70). Soon, Gentiles are welcomed into the community alongside Jews (p. 70–75). In part four, the community spreads into the Roman province of Asia (p. 75–81) and in part five, Europe (p. 81–86). Finally, the gospel reaches into the highest levels of Roman society in the empire's capital city (p. 87–102).

### What to watch for in Acts

- Notice how God uses hardship to advance the good news about Jesus. In Acts, the church's expansion beyond Jerusalem is a direct result of persecution. The religious crackdown backfires, and before long, what started as a local movement becomes an empire-wide phenomenon.

- Acts gives a glimpse into some of the early church’s growing pains. You’ll see, for example, how Jewish believers struggled to welcome Gentiles at first (day 8). The issue of Gentile inclusion—and what Gentiles must do to be accepted into the community—also features prominently in several letters written by Paul, a key figure in the book of Acts. Next, introduce your group to 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

#### Overview of 1-2 Thessalonians

- 1 and 2 Thessalonians are among the apostle Paul’s earliest letters. In his first letter to the young church at Thessalonica (in modern-day Greece), Paul encourages believers to hold on to their faith in spite of intense opposition. Paul wrote his second letter to correct a false report that the “day of the Lord” (that is, the day of God’s final victory) had come without the vindication the Thessalonians were hoping for.

#### Structure of 1-2 Thessalonians

- Both letters follow the usual pattern for correspondence of the time. Each begins with an opening greeting, followed by a thanksgiving and prayer. Then comes the main body of the letter, followed by a closing section.

#### What to watch for in 1-2 Thessalonians

- To better appreciate the context of these letters, think back to Paul’s experience in Thessalonica (covered on day 8). Take a moment to refresh your memory by rereading page 83 of Luke-Acts.

#### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above “preparing for the week ahead” in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the S.O.A.P. study on page 5

If you or someone you know might want to be a small group leader sometime in the near future, please contact Pastor Aaron to discuss this possible interest. Inquiring is welcomed and no obligation necessary.

# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 3: Letters of Paul

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce your group to Paul's next two letters by sharing the points below:

#### Overview of 1 Corinthians

- Corinth was a wealthy, cosmopolitan center of the ancient world. 1 Corinthians is Paul's response to a letter he received from the church he'd founded in Corinth. In it, he addresses several of questions from the community there and also challenges some of their beliefs and practices.

#### Structure of 1 Corinthians

- Paul opens with a brief greeting and thanksgiving (p. 119). In the main body of his letter to the Corinthians (p. 119–137), Paul addresses a number of issues, including their tolerance of immorality, their participation in pagan ceremonial meals, their discrimination against the poor during the Lord's Supper, and their questions about Jesus' resurrection. Paul then gives some instructions for an offering he's collecting for the poor (p. 137). Finally, he shares his travel plans and closes his letter (p. 137–138).

#### What to watch for in 1 Corinthians

- 1 Corinthians is not for the faint of heart. At times, Paul is intense, angry, even sarcastic. That's because the church in Corinth was on the brink of destroying itself. As you read, imagine how you might respond if someone you loved was in a similar situation today.

#### Overview of 2 Corinthians

- Paul experienced a great deal of conflict with the church he started in Corinth. After they reaffirmed their respect for his authority, Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to reassure them—and to address some new problems.

### Structure of 2 Corinthians

- Paul retraces his steps since his last visit to Corinth. He explains why he had paid an unexpected visit (p. 141–142), then recounts his time in Troas (modern-day Turkey), where he was separated from his ministry partner Titus (p. 142–146). Paul then relates his reunion with Titus in Macedonia (modern-day Greece) and his relief at hearing about the Corinthians’ change of heart (p. 146–149). Finally, Paul looks ahead to his next visit, including some difficult confrontations still to come (p. 149–152) and shares a benediction (p. 153).

### What to watch for in 2 Corinthians

- Watch for the recurring theme of comfort. (Paul uses the word 13 times in his letter.) God comforts us in our afflictions, Paul writes, so that we can comfort others.

Introduce your group to Paul’s next two letters by sharing the points below:

### Overview of Galatians

- Paul wrote this letter to Gentile (non-Jewish) believers in Galatia, a province in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). After Paul had established a church there, some “agitators” came along, insisting that Gentile converts had to observe Jewish customs in order to be saved. Paul wrote to refute this idea.

### What to watch for in Galatians

- Notice how Paul connects Jesus to the story of Israel, arguing that all who follow Christ are children of Abraham. For Paul, the “new creation” matters more than circumcision or other religious rituals.

### Overview of Romans

- Unlike his earlier letters, Paul addressed Romans to a church he hadn’t met before. Paul was planning a journey into the western half of the Roman Empire, and he wanted to make Rome a base of operations. So he wrote to introduce himself to the believers there and to ask for their support. The main theme of Paul’s letter (and his motivation for taking the gospel to new places) was his belief that Jesus is for everyone—both Jewish and non-Jewish.

### Structure of Romans

- Though longer and more complex, Romans follows the same basic pattern as Paul’s other letters. The main body has two basic parts. There’s a teaching section (p. 167–182), in which Paul argues that God wants to rescue Jews and non-Jews alike through Jesus’ death and resurrection. In the practical section (p. 182–185), Paul challenges the Roman church to live as a new, redeemed humanity.

### What to watch for in Romans

- Romans contains a good deal of complex theology. In fact, it's one of the most hotly debated books in the New Testament. Whatever you make of Romans, keep in mind Paul's main purpose for writing it. His mission was to call Gentiles to "the obedience that comes from faith." That's how he begins and ends this letter. Romans, then, is basically Paul's defense of his ministry to Gentiles.

### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above "preparing for the week ahead" in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 4: Letters of Paul

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Since you'll be finishing Romans this week, you may want to re-read the Roman notes from last weeks material.

Introduce your group to Paul's next letters by sharing the points below:

### Overview of Colossians

- Paul's last recorded visit to Jerusalem sparked a riot that led to his arrest. After numerous hearings, he invoked his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed to Caesar. While in Rome awaiting trial, Paul wrote the church in Colossae (modern-day Turkey) to warn about those who insisted on religious observances, secret spiritual knowledge, or harsh treatment of the body as necessary for salvation. Paul argues there's no need to add anything to the salvation already found in Christ.

### What to watch for in Colossians

- Notice how Paul alternates between pragmatic exhortation and almost lyrical prose. For example, many scholars think the first paragraph on page 192 is an early Christian hymn to the supremacy of Christ.

### Overview of Ephesians

- Despite its name, this letter may not have been written to the church at Ephesus. The words "in Ephesus" don't appear in some early manuscripts. Also, Paul had spent a great deal of time in Ephesus. If he were writing to believers there, he probably would have included a personal greeting. It's possible this was a general letter circulated among the churches of Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). In any case, Paul's letter encourages Gentile converts to replace their old way of life with one of purity and integrity.

### What to watch for in Ephesians

- See if you catch any recurring themes from Paul's other letters. For example, Paul addresses the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers, as he does in Romans. He also emphasizes the supremacy of Christ, echoing a key theme from his letter to the Colossians.

### Overview of Philemon

- Philemon was a wealthy individual living in Colossae, a city in Asia Minor. Philemon's slave, Onesimus, had run away. While on the run, he put his faith in Jesus and became Paul's assistant. The apostle Paul sent Onesimus back to Asia Minor to deliver some letters for him. This meant going home and facing his former master. In this radical letter, Paul pleads with Philemon to welcome Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but . . . as a dear brother."

### What to watch for in Philemon

- Notice how Paul employs every ounce of persuasion to prevail upon Philemon. He reminds Philemon that he has the authority to tell him what to do, but gives Philemon the opportunity to choose the right path for himself. (It didn't hurt that Paul's letter was likely read in front of Philemon's entire house church!)

### Overview of Philippians

- The believers in Philippi (modern-day Greece) were some of Paul's most loyal supporters. Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome to thank them for their friendship. Like Paul, the Philippians were experiencing hardship, so Paul counsels them to follow his example of patient endurance—and to stand united.

### What to watch for in Philippians

- Joy is the dominant note of this letter—which is remarkable, given that both its author and its recipients were experiencing persecution. See if you notice how many times Paul mentions joy in Philippians.

### Overview of 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy

- Paul's final letters were written to two of his ministry partners, Timothy and Titus, whom he had dispatched to Ephesus and Crete, respectively, to bring order to renegade churches. Among other things, Paul advises his two young protégés on how to appoint properly qualified leaders.

### What to watch for in 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy

- These letters reveal another dimension to Paul's character. Paul could be a fierce leader at times, but he was also an affectionate mentor—especially to Timothy, whom Paul had handpicked as his ministry partner. Paul's letters to Timothy are full of fatherly advice for his "true son in the faith."

This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above "preparing for the week ahead" in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the S.O.A.P. study on page 7

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 5: Matthew

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce everyone to the second grouping of New Testament books.

- Our journey continues with the second group of New Testament books. Matthew, Hebrews, and James are worth reading together because they share a common audience: Jewish followers of Jesus.

Next, introduce your group to Matthew by sharing the points below.

### Overview of Matthew

- Matthew tells the story of Jesus from a Jewish perspective, presenting him as Israel's promised king or Messiah.

### Structure of Matthew

- Matthew draws a number of parallels between Jesus and Israel. Like the nation of Israel, Jesus wanders in the desert, where he faces a series of tests. Like Moses, Israel's most famous leader, Jesus narrowly escapes an attempt on his life as an infant.
- [Tip: Share the chart on the next page with your group to illustrate the parallels between Jesus and Israel in Matthew.]
- Matthew has five main sections, each of which reveals something about what Jesus calls "the kingdom of heaven." Each section starts by relating a series of events, which lead up to one of five major speeches by Jesus. The transitions from one section to the next are indicated by variations of the phrase, "When Jesus had finished saying these things . . ."

# JESUS AND ISRAEL

MATTHEW CONNECTS THE DOTS



Jesus was a descendant of...  
Abraham, Israel's founding father  
David, Israel's greatest king



Jesus escaped the killing of Hebrew  
boys in Bethlehem, just as Moses  
escaped a similar massacre in Egypt.



Jesus' family took refuge in Egypt,  
just like Jacob's family did in  
Genesis.



Jesus was baptized in the Jordan,  
much like Israel was "baptized" in  
the Red Sea when they left Egypt.



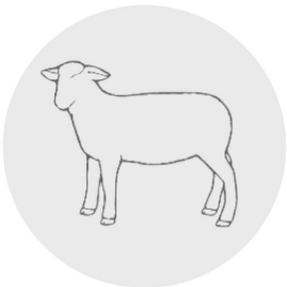
Jesus endured 40 days of testing in  
the wilderness, much like Israel  
endured 40 years in the wilderness.



Jesus gave his greatest teaching from  
a "mountainside," just as Moses gave  
the law from Mount Sinai.



Jesus chose 12 core disciples,  
reminiscent of the 12 tribes of Israel.



Jesus became a new Passover  
Passover lamb, through whom the  
world was rescued from sin.



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### Structure of Matthew (continued)

- The first main section (p. 242–251) shows how Jesus’ kingdom is characterized by a particular way of life where outward action expresses inward character. In the next section (p. 251–256), Jesus sends his disciples on a mission to announce the good news of the kingdom to his fellow Jews. The third section (p. 256–262) explores the mysterious nature of the kingdom, while the fourth section (p. 262– 270) shows how Jesus’ kingdom creates a new community. The fifth section (p. 270–283) reveals that members of Jesus’ kingdom are destined to be scattered throughout the world by their enemies, giving them an opportunity to tell people everywhere about Jesus.
- Matthew concludes with an account of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This too is connected to Israel’s story. In Jewish religious practice, the Passover meal commemorated their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Matthew presents Jesus as a new Passover—our deliverance from sin, oppression, and death.

### What to watch for in Matthew

- Matthew uses the term “kingdom of heaven” about 30 times. As you come across each reference, think about what this kingdom looks like and how we can make its presence more visible in our world today

### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above ”preparing for the week ahead” in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the S.O.A.P. study on page 8

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 6: Hebrews, James, Mark

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce everyone to the next two books by sharing the points below:

#### Overview of Hebrews

- Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians living at a time when Judaism was still a legal religion in the Roman Empire. Jewish followers of Jesus could avoid persecution by hiding their Christian identity. The author of Hebrews warns against doing so, urging readers to remain faithful to their Messiah.

#### Structure of Hebrews

- The writer of Hebrews alternates between theological arguments and lessons from Israel's history. In the first of four sections (p. 293–295), the author argues that the salvation offered by Jesus is greater than the Law of Moses. The next section (p. 295– 297) teaches that Jesus leads his people into a promised land greater than the one into which the Israelites were led. In the third and longest section (p. 297– 304), the writer says Jesus is a greater high priest than those who serve in the Jewish temple. The last main section (p. 304–308) includes a plea for readers to respond to all God has done for them by stepping out in faith.

#### What to watch for in Hebrews

- With its rich imagery and complex theology, Hebrews is one of the most challenging books in the New Testament. If you find yourself getting bogged down, focus on the writer's main argument: the new covenant, given to us by Jesus, is superior to the first covenant.

#### Overview of James

- Though it begins like a letter, James is actually a collection of practical wisdom, similar to the Old (or First) Testament book of Proverbs. It's possible these sayings were adapted from sermons given by James, the brother of Jesus. The book, addressed to Jewish believers scattered throughout the Roman Empire, focuses on questions of daily living: the pursuit of wisdom, caring for the poor, the responsible use of wealth, controlling the tongue, and more.

### What to watch for in James

- The book of James consists of several short sayings, as well as a few slightly longer discussions of practical topics. Slow down as you read James; allow yourself time to ponder each nugget of wisdom.

Next, introduce everyone to the third grouping of New Testament books.

- This week, we'll also start the third group of New Testament books: those written or influenced by the apostle Peter. These include the gospel of Mark, thought to be written from Peter's viewpoint; two letters from Peter himself; and a letter from Jude, which bears a lot of similarities to Peter's second letter.

Next, introduce your group to Mark by sharing the points below:

### Overview of Mark

- Mark was written to a Roman audience. Given the eyewitness nature of Mark's account, many scholars believe he recorded the memoirs of his old friend and ministry partner, Peter.
- Mark's gospel highlights the importance of being willing to suffer for Jesus. A master storyteller, Mark builds dramatic tension around the question of Jesus' identity and his conflict with elements of the religious establishment.

### Structure of Mark

- Mark reads like a drama comprised of two halves. Each can be further divided into three acts.
- [Tip: Share the chart on the next page with your group which illustrates the outline of Mark as a six-act drama]

# THE DRAMA OF MARK

IN SIX ACTS

## PART 1: Who is Jesus?

**ACT 1:**  
Teacher and healer  
(pages 321-324)

**ACT 2:**  
Opposition to Jesus  
(pages 325-329)

**ACT 3:**  
Jesus and his disciples  
(pages 329-334)

## PART 2: Jesus vs. the powers

**ACT 4:**  
Journey to Jerusalem  
(pages 334-339)

**ACT 5:**  
Conflict in Jerusalem  
(pages 339-345)

**ACT 6:**  
A surprising victory  
(pages 345-350)



- Throughout the first half, Mark confronts readers with the question of Jesus' identity. In act one (p. 321–324), Jesus teaches and heals, as crowds swarm to him. Act two (p. 325–329) shines a spotlight on the opposition Jesus encounters as he introduces a radically new way of life. During the third act (p. 329–334), Jesus' disciples struggle to understand who he is.
- The second half of Mark highlights the overt conflict between Jesus and the leaders of the religious establishment. Act one (p. 334–339) sees Jesus and his disciples traveling to Jerusalem. Upon their arrival in act two (p. 339–345), Jesus teaches in the temple and clashes with the authorities. In the final act, the establishment has Jesus executed, seeming to overturn all he has done. But God overturns their deed by raising Jesus from the dead (p. 345–350).

#### What to watch for in Mark

- The shortest of all four gospels, Mark moves at breakneck pace. To get a feel for the tempo, try reading as quickly as you comfortably can. Rather than trying to catch every detail, allow yourself to get caught up in this action-packed drama from a master storyteller.

#### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above "preparing for the week ahead" in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the S.O.A.P. study on page 9

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 7: 1-2 Peter, Jude, John

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (8 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Introduce everyone to the next three books by sharing the points below:

#### Overview of 1-2 Peter

- While living in Rome, the apostle Peter wrote two letters to encourage believers in what is now Turkey. His last letter came near the end of his life, shortly before he was executed by the Roman emperor Nero.

#### Structure of 1-2 Peter

- Peter's first letter consists of three parts. First, he reminds readers that they are called to a new way of life (p. 353–355). Next, he assures them their new life will make an impression on those who mistreat them (p. 355–357). Finally, Peter comes to the main point of his letter: to encourage believers to remain faithful in the face of intense persecution (p. 357–358).
- Peter's second and final letter also has three parts. First, he challenges readers to godly living and stresses the reliability of what they've been taught (p. 361–362). Then he condemns false teachers who were claiming that Jesus would never return (p. 362–363). Finally, Peter explains why Jesus hasn't come back yet (p. 363–364).

#### What to watch for in 1-2 Peter

- Watch for the recurring theme of endurance in the face of suffering and false teaching. This theme can also be found in the letter from Jude.

#### Overview of Jude

- Jude, like James, was one of Jesus' brothers. He was less well known than James, but likely an important church leader. Jude's letter bears a striking resemblance to 2 Peter—so much so, that it's possible the two men were addressing the same situation. Like Peter, Jude exhorts his readers to “contend for the faith,” actively resisting false teaching. However, he also calls on them to be “merciful to those who doubt.”

### What to watch for in Jude

- As you read, think about how you can “contend for the faith” while giving people space to process their doubts and ask honest questions.

Next, introduce everyone to the fourth and final grouping of New Testament books.

- This week, we’ll also start on the fourth and final group of New Testament books, which includes John’s gospel and his three letters, along with the book of Revelation.

Introduce your group to the next few books by sharing the points below:

### Overview of John

- John presents the story of Jesus as a story of new creation. That’s why he starts by echoing the very first words of Genesis: “In the beginning...”
- Near the end of his gospel, John clearly states his purpose for writing: he wants people to “believe that Jesus is the Messiah.” According to John, Jesus is nothing less than God in the flesh—a theme that will come through in one of his letters as well.

### Structure of John

- John starts with a prologue (p. 371), echoing the creation story in Genesis. This is followed by two main sections. First is the “Book of Signs” (p. 371–395), chronicling seven miracles which, for John, prove Jesus’ divine identity. This is followed by the “Book of Glory” (p. 395–407), which focuses on the final days of Jesus’ life—including his death and resurrection. The book ends with an epilogue (p. 407–408) that was probably added to refute a rumor that John wouldn’t die until Jesus came back.
- [Tip: Share this chart on the next page with your group, highlighting the seven signs and statements in John’s gospel.]

# 7 SIGNS & STATEMENTS

JOHN REVEALS JESUS' IDENTITY

For ancient Jews, the number seven represented completeness or wholeness—a finished work of God. The apostle John took full advantage as he crafted his account to point to Jesus' true identity. John includes seven miraculous signs and seven "I am" statements spoken by Jesus, connecting him to God.

## SEVEN SIGNS

## SEVEN STATEMENTS

BOOK OF SIGNS

BOOK OF GLORY

Turning water into wine  
(page 373)

Healing the royal official's son  
(pages 377-378)

Healing the man at Bethesda  
(page 378)

Feeding the 5,000+  
(page 380)

Walking on the water  
(page 380)

Healing the blind man  
(pages 387-389)

Raising Lazarus from the dead  
(pages 390-392)

I am the bread of life.  
(page 381)

I am the light of the world.  
(page 385)

I am the gate for the sheep.  
(page 389)

I am the good shepherd  
(page 391)

I am the resurrection and the life.  
(page 391)

I am the way, the truth, and the life.  
(page 397)

I am the true vine.  
(page 397)



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### What to watch for in John

- Notice how the number seven features prominently in John's gospel. It's no coincidence, for example, that the "Book of Signs" features seven miracles. John's gospel also includes seven "I am" statements from Jesus, connecting him to one of the most important names for God in the Old (or First) Testament. John is not simply being clever; for Jewish people, the number seven represented completeness or wholeness—a finished work of God.

### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40-60 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above "preparing for the week ahead" in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

Go to the [S.O.A.P. study on page 10](#)

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# WEEKLY DISCUSSION

## Week 8: 1-3 John, Revelation

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### Pray (2 minutes)

### Reflecting on the previous week (3 minutes)

Use your notes from last week to help prompt your group.

### Preparing for the week ahead (10 minutes)

Since you'll be finishing the writings of John this week, you may want to re-read the material above. Or you can introduce your group to 1, 2, and 3 John by sharing the points below.

### Overview of 1-3 John

- John's three letters give us a good picture of the Church toward the end of the first century AD. In some cases, it was a church embroiled in controversy. The recipients of 1 John, for example, had been heavily influenced by Greek philosophy—namely, the belief that all flesh is evil and only spirit is good. They struggled to accept the idea that God had come to earth in a human body.
- John wrote his first letter to remind believers of the truth they had “heard from the beginning,” stressing the importance of the physical incarnation of Jesus and urging compassion for others. His second and third letters warned churches against providing assistance to false teachers and encouraged hospitality toward those promoting the true message of Jesus.

### Structure of 1-3 John

- Rather than following a clear outline, John weaves together several themes in his first letter. His second and third letters are among the shortest books in the Bible.

### What to watch for in 1-3 John

- As you read, see if you notice any parallels between John's letters (particularly 1 John) and his gospel.

Next, introduce your group to the last book, Revelation, by sharing the points below:

### Overview of Revelation

- By the end of the first century, Rome's power was virtually uncontested. Wealthy cities across the empire competed for Caesar's patronage, spawning a cult of emperor worship. Any resistance to this cult jeopardized a city's standing with the emperor. But in city after city, followers of Jesus acknowledged a different Lord. For these Christians, it was Jesus, not Caesar, who sat on the throne. Their refusal to toe the party line made them vulnerable to persecution.

- During one such period of intense opposition, God sent a vision to the churches of Asia (modern-day Turkey) through the prophet John. This vision was meant to encourage the faithful to stand firm, “even to the point of death.”

### Structure of Revelation

- Revelation is an apocalypse, a literary form well known in John’s day. In an apocalypse, a heavenly visitor uses vivid symbols to reveal secrets of the future. The recipient of the vision typically goes on a journey through heaven and offers a review of history leading up to the present crisis between good and evil.
- Revelation is divided into four parts, each marked by the phrase “in the Spirit.” In part one (p. 428–431), John brings words of warning and encouragement to the seven churches of Asia. In part two (p. 431–444), John is taken into heaven, where he sees the exalted Jesus execute judgment against his enemies. Section two is interrupted by section three (p. 444–449), where John is taken to the wilderness to see the true spiritual state of the Roman Empire. Section two then resumes (p. 449–451) with Jesus’ triumph over his enemies. Finally, Revelation concludes with the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven (p. 451–453.)

### What to watch for in Revelation

- Revelation has some of the most cryptic imagery in the Bible. Whatever you make of its content, remember the key message: Stand firm, because in the end, God wins. God is coming back to dwell with his people.

### This weeks discussion and Bible reading (40 minutes)

- Take the time your group needs to go through the following S.O.A.P. questions. Some groups can go through these rather quickly, while others might want to go more in-depth.
- Feel free to shorten or quickly highlight the above ”preparing for the week ahead” in order to create more time for reading the Bible and for God to move.

### Final gathering and reflections (5-15 minutes)

- Give each person a chance to share how their journey through the New Testament impacted them, how it shaped their understanding of the Bible, and what implications it might have for their life. Share your stories on Facebook, others, and Pastor Aaron.
- And don’t forget to celebrate your achievement together! Reading through the New Testament in just eight weeks is a major accomplishment.

Go to the [S.O.A.P. study on page 11](#)