

VOICES

HEARING GOD IN A WORLD OF IMPOSTORS

New Testament

by

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Leader's Guide

VOICES

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My fellow leaders, this study has been harder for me to write than any other to this point. Because of the ear-tickling days we live in, I have felt not merely called but also compelled to write it. As you lead your students through this study, I want to caution you with the same truth that I have had to live with day in and day out in writing and week in and week out in leading: Let the Scriptures speak for themselves. There are many strong opinions on this topic today, evidenced by several books currently on Christian best-seller lists. Rather than striking and calling out specific books, authors, and genres based on opinions, let's ask God to establish us in His Truth and make His Word our plumb line to measure all else. His Word is truly "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Hebrews 4:12). Let's allow it to do its good and perfect work and do our best not to get in the way.

*Many blessings,
pam*

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Voices New Testament

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WEEK ONE

What Voices are Calling?

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	10 min.	Class Basics • Introductions • Ground Rules • How to Use this Study Inductive Study Basics
Segment 2:	10 min.	Review—Revelation Before the Incarnation Presuppositions and Current Views Hebrews 1:1-2
Segment 3:	15 min.	The Main Players Zacharias: Luke 1:5-20 Mary: Luke 1:26-38 Joseph: Matthew 1:18-25
Segment 4:	15 min.	Others Who Heard Shepherds: Luke 2:8-20 Simeon: Luke 2:21-35 Anna: Luke 2:36-38 Magi: Matthew 2:1-12
Segment 5:	10 min.	“Go home, Joseph!”: Matthew 2:13-23 Wrap-up

BEFORE YOU START**HOW TO LEAD THIS STUDY:****The Basics**

Well here you are! You've either been called, appointed, or dragged into leading a Bible study. Regardless, here is some good news – *Voices* is designed to be flexible to both students and teachers alike, to give newer teachers the help they need, and to give more seasoned teachers wings to grow their gifting. With this in mind, please use this Leader's Guide to help you prepare to lead a *Voices* group. Always remember that it's a guide, not a strict set of step-by-step rules and edicts.

Although presented as an 8-week study with weekly homework, *Voices* can be stretched over a longer period of time with "homework" sections done either at home or during class time. If class time is limited, as is often the case for Sunday School, leaders may choose to work through smaller portions of a lesson together. Thus, it is possible for this 8-week Bible study to flex and expand to fill a 16-week session or more depending on how deep you and your students want to go.

For those who have ample time and are running an 8-week study, consider adding an additional week or two for a technology day or a guest speaker on a topic of interest. This person can be a pastor, local Bible professor, or someone well-versed on a particular topic in the text. With the advance of technology, it's now possible to bring in people from other parts of the country or the world to talk to your class via tools like Skype. Additional people and material mix things up and keep the class on its toes. This additional week gives you the flexibility to match the class length to the needs of things like, say, the church calendar. Hey, it's reality!

Some of you who are reading this Leader Guide are thrilled to be leading because you have the spiritual gift of teaching. You may find that you don't even use this guide – that's fine! If God has gifted you to teach and you like doing your own research and prep, that is great!! Praise God! Go entrust to the faithful who will be able to teach others also! Others of you, undoubtedly, have been dragged in kicking and screaming. (That was me for a few years while I was still resisting my gifting!) Somebody had to lead and you were drafted. It is my deep hope that you will find help in this guide to make your leading experience not only less traumatic but also filled with great joy!

Small groups or Sunday School classes may decide to simply talk through the questions that are in the lesson but study groups will benefit from additional talk points and material.

However God has gifted you, I can't stress enough the importance of drawing your class into discussion. One of the best ways I've found to do this, particularly in larger class settings, is to have smaller groups of students discuss questions (perfect if you have access to round tables!) and then draw the table groups into a larger group discussion. This gives more people opportunity to talk in a less "threatening" situation. Remember, discussion is key to helping your class think through and retain the material.

* Skype is a free service that allows you to use the internet to video conference in guest speakers or those who just want to listen in to your class. Learn more at www.skype.com.

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About the Leader Guide

This leader guide is a basic outline, a road map of one way to go in a class discussion. Just like there are many ways from Chicago to Chattanooga, there are different ways to run a class.

Each week we'll suggest a time frame for running the class one or two hours. You'll find background information and suggested discussion questions. Always look for opportunities to help your students move from Observation and Interpretation to Application. We want them to learn the truths of Scripture not so they can win at Bible trivia but so that their thinking will be renewed and their actions will more and more reflect the One they belong to (Romans 12:1-2).

For the sake of space, we typically list only suggested discussion questions. Also, when possible we'll leave space for you to fill in your own thoughts so you don't have to go flipping back and forth between the student book and the leader guide. Finally, you may look at the material and think, "There is no way that I can cover all this in the allotted time!" If that's the case, you can pick and choose from the elements to craft your lesson.

Starting on Time

One way to start on time every week is to read through the week's main text(s) at the beginning of class. In doing this you will reinforce the importance of continually being in the text of Scripture itself. As odd as it may sound, when we study deeply the temptation to stray away from the text and toward commentaries can be intense. By reading the text every week and starting promptly (even if it is just you and your most prompt student!), you will reinforce the importance of the text and gain the added bonus of training stragglers to arrive on time.

START CLASS HERE**SEGMENT #1: CLASS BASICS****Introductions and Ground Rules**

- **Introduce yourself**
- **Have class members introduce themselves**
- **Set boundaries (see below)**

Make sure you allocate adequate time the first week of class for general introductions and ground rules. If you're teaching men or a mixed group, estimate based on the size of your class. If you're teaching women, take the time you think this will require and double it. Asking everyone to share their name and respond to a specific question will help keep things moving. If you ask for "a little bit about yourself," you're sure to get more than a little bit! Start out by introducing yourself in a concise manner to set the tone. Feel free to use an icebreaker game or other ideas you have to help people connect.

You'll also want to establish ground rules during Week One. The time to set effective boundaries in any relationship is the first meeting. A boundary can always be relaxed, but it is very difficult to establish or strengthen one if you do not set it properly at the start. This applies to both how you will lead your class discussions and how you will let your class interact with you throughout the week. Depending on your situation, you may ask them to contact you primarily by e-mail and make certain times of the day off-limits. My classes know I rarely answer the phone when my kids are home from school. That is my boundary. When they are home, my primary job is being their mom. Your class will respect this and perhaps even learn the importance of proper boundaries in their own lives from your example.

Let your class know that it is your job as the teacher/facilitator to keep the discussion on track and that you may from time to time have to reel a person in, stop a rabbit trail, or discontinue until after class an interesting but off-topic discussion. Also let them know that you do not have all the answers. No one has all the answers, even those who have studied a lifetime. While acknowledging your limitations may seem uncomfortable at first, you'll find it is freeing for everyone! If someone asks a question you can't answer, either look into it further yourself or (preferably) assign it to the questioner for further study. This will draw out future teachers – who come back with it answered and prepared to share. Assigning questions also helps people begin discerning what makes a germane question.

Encouraging your class to ask questions and helping them learn how to ask right questions is a huge part of your job as a teacher. Still, as important as questions are, more questions can be asked than we have biblical answers for. Sometimes you will simply have to answer with an honest, "I don't know."

CROWD BREAKER

In the book of Hebrews, we're told that Abraham "when he was called . . . went out, not knowing where he was going."

Where is the most interesting place God has had you live so far?

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Basics of the study guide and philosophy

- **WEEKLY STUDY material**
- **FYI boxes**
- **ONE STEP FURTHER and other sidebar boxes**
- **DIGGING DEEPER boxes**

While the study is self-explanatory, reinforce its flexibility with your students. Direct them to the “How to use this Study” page of their books and encourage them to find a level of study that brings joy and not guilt. They can do more one week, less the next; they can mix and match and find the fit that is right. You may have students who are overburdened and overbooked. Help them find the joy and sweetness of God’s Word and ask His Spirit to begin healing through the power of the Word. Take some time to read the “How to use the study” page (prior to Week One) with them and let them know you believe in them and their ability to use this material.

Take special care in stressing the flexibility to long-time Precept Upon Precept® students since many have a finish-every-question-at-all-cost mentality. Such discipline in studying God’s Word is beautiful. The every-last-question mind set, however, can throw people off with a flexible study. Because the material is designed to flex to very advanced students, the volume of material can overwhelm people who force themselves through every question and sidebar. Assure your class that most students won’t finish every question every week by design. Some weeks they will, but probably not every week. If every student finished every week, the study would not be flexing to meet the needs of the most advanced students. The goal in allowing the material to flex is not to have people study less; it is to have each person take the next appropriate step from where they currently are and to study and apply more as they are continually drawn into deeper relationship with Jesus.

INDUCTIVE STUDY BASICS

Observation | Interpretation | Application

If your students are unfamiliar with inductive Bible study, be sure to take some time to give them the basics. They will catch up and catch on as we go, but giving them an overview will help put them in context! You'll want to impress on your students that inductive Bible study simply means the Bible is our main source of truth. Before looking for insights from people and commentaries about the Bible, we get into the Word of God itself. We go to the primary source and learn to discover truth for ourselves. Inductive Bible study involves three basic components: observation, interpretation, and application.

1 Observation

This is a very interactive process, well worth the time because the truths you discover for yourself will be accurate and profound. It begins by asking the five W and H questions.

Who is speaking? Who is this about? Who are the main characters? Who is the author speaking to?

What subjects and/or events are covered in the chapter? What do you learn about the people, the events, and the teachings from the text? What instructions are given?

When did or will the events recorded occur?

Where did or will this happen? Where was it said?

Why is something said? Why will an event occur? Why this time, person, and/or place?

How will it happen? How will it be done? How is it illustrated?

Careful observation leads to interpretation – discovering what the text means.

One important part of observing the text involves identifying key words. A key word helps to “unlock” the meaning of the text. It is vital to understanding the text and is often repeated.

2 Interpretation

The more you observe, the greater you'll understand God's Word. Since Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture we'll be looking at contexts and cross-references to help us understand God's message that was communicated to the original audience. Observation and interpretation lead to application.

3 Application

After we've observed the text and discovered the meaning, we need to think and live accordingly. Although the text of Scripture has one interpretation – what God inspired the author to write to his original readers – we can have numerous applications. The result is a transformed life – the more you and I are in the Word of God and adjusting our thinking and behavior to its precepts for life, the more we are changed into the likeness of Jesus Christ! He is the living Word of God who became flesh, the Savior of the world, our coming King of kings!

It is exciting to learn and know about the faith of others. It is transforming to live what we have learned!

SEGMENT #2: Review—Revelation Before the Incarnation

If you have students in your class who have completed *Voices Old Testament*, spend some time discussing the following questions from the Workbook on page 4:

How did God speak during Old Testament times?

What types of people did He speak to?

What, if any, recurring patterns did you notice?

What was your biggest takeaway from studying how God spoke during Old Testament times?

What is your biggest question as we move into the New Testament portion of our study?

Presuppositions and Current Views

If you have enough people in your class to break into small groups do so and have the groups discuss presuppositions they are bringing to the class. If you have a small class, simply discuss the questions on pages 4 and 5 together. If you decide to break into smaller groups, be sure to pull them back together to see what each one discussed.

How do you think God speaks today? Why do you believe this?

If someone said, "God told me to . . .", how would you respond?

Do you think the Bible is authoritative? Why or why not?

Do you think the Bible is sufficient? Is it "enough" to answer life's questions? Why or why not?

Hebrews 1:1-2

Hebrews points to a shift in the way God speaks. Long ago He spoke:

- in many portions and in many ways,
- to the fathers in the prophets.

The entire Bible was not revealed all at once; it came progressively, piece by piece over time. In the Son, though, revelation is complete. “In these last days”—which started with the first coming of Christ—“God has spoken [Greek *laleo*: an aorist indicative] to us in His Son.” Jesus is God’s final and complete Word. New Testament scholar F.F. Bruce puts it this way: “The story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but there is no progression beyond Him” (in Kistemaker, S. J., & Hendriksen, W. (1984). *Exposition of Hebrews* (Vol. 15, p. 27). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House).

It is important to remember that in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God has said everything He intended to say. The tenses of *laleo* here are telling. Both references to God speaking—long ago (v. 1) and in these last days (v. 2)—are aorist verbs, the first a participle (“having spoken”) and the second an indicative (literally “spoke”). Unlike a present tense that indicates continuous or ongoing action, aorists usually (particularly in the indicative) picture actions as completed. God spoke to the fathers and God spoke in His Son.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE SECTIONS:

As we move into more historical narrative sections of Scripture we will provide overview material to help you with the general direction and flow of the discussion but not with the extensive detail we supply when critical doctrinal issues regarding the nature of Scripture itself are involved. Here are some basic guidelines for each section of the text:

1. Depending on length, either read the text aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God’s voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #3: The Main Players – Luke 1:5-20; Luke 1:26-38; Matthew 1:18-25

Key Talk Points:

- The revelations to Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph, while having personal elements, all tie together in pointing toward the coming of Jesus, the Savior of the world.
- Each revelation tells of the imminent fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

Context/Comments: God breaks a silence of about four-hundred years when He sends messages via angels to Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph.

Luke 1:5-20 (Zacharias)

Gabriel's appearance in the temple was anything but common or expected. As in the days of the judges Word from God was rare, but on this day God chose to speak through His angel Gabriel to a priest named Zacharias. One of an estimated 18,000 priests in service, Zacharias had been selected by lot to offer up incense in the temple at Jerusalem. Although this particular sacrifice was offered twice a day everyday, not every priest received the honor and those who did were given the opportunity only once in a lifetime. The lot fell to Zacharias in His old age as God put him in the temple to hear His Word exactly when He wanted him to be there.

The details of the account are interesting. The angel "appeared" (*orao*) to Zacharias "standing to the right of the altar of incense." The altar of incense was in front of the veil while with the table of showbread was immediately to the priest's right as he entered and the lampstand to his left. Seeing this angelic being poised between the altar and the lampstand "troubled" (*tarasso*) the priest and "fear gripped" (*epipipto*: literally "fell upon") him. Clearly he was not expecting an angel.

As in many Old Testament accounts, the angel tells his audience not to be afraid. He then delivers a message that seems wonderfully impossible:

- God has heard Zacharias's petition.
- Elizabeth will bear a son.
- Zacharias is to name the child John.

Gabriel also tells Zacharias what John will be and do. He will:

- "be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb."
- "turn many of the sons Israel back to the Lord their God."
- go "before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah" (see also Malachi 4:5).
- "make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

Although Zacharias alone hears this message it is confirmed in several ways.

- In response to Zacharias's doubt, the angel renders him mute until the birth of his child. Some commentators believe he was deaf also because others around him sign to him.
- The child, John, is born to this old and previously childless couple—an “Abraham” kind of miracle.
- The child eventually grows up to be and do exactly what the angel told Zacharias in advance.
- The Lord follows His forerunner.

The same angel Gabriel will soon bring news of another humanly impossible birth to both Mary and Joseph.

Luke 1:26-38 (Mary)

Shortly after visiting Zacharias in the temple in Jerusalem, Gabriel brings a message to Mary in Nazareth of Galilee. According to Luke 1:26, this happened in “the sixth month” which likely refers to the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy (see Luke 1:36). He addresses her as “favored one” and tells her “The Lord is with you.” She is “very perplexed” (*diatarasso*)—a compound form of the same word used to describe Zacharias (*tarasso*)—and responds by “pondering” (*dialogizomai*: reckoning or thinking through) what he meant.

In an exchange very similar to that with Zacharias, Gabriel tells Mary not to be afraid and then tells her about the Son she will conceive: He

- will be great.
- will be called the Son of the Most High.
- will be given the throne of His father David.
- will reign over the house of Jacob forever.
- will have a kingdom that does not end.

Mary asks the angel a question that sounds very similar to Zacharias’s question that ended up with him mute for over nine months.

Mary: “How can this be since I’m a virgin [*andra ou ginoko*: literally ‘I know not a man’]?”

Zacharias: “How can this be since we are old?”

Mary’s “How can this be?” (*pos estai touto*, literally “How will this be since I have not known a man?”) differs in the Greek from Zacharias’s “How can this be” (*kata ti gnosomai touto*, literally “How will I know this since we are old?”). Mary asks how something that has never happened before will happen while Zacharias asks about something that has precedent in the Old Testament accounts of Abraham, Isaac, and others. Both births will be miraculous, but Jesus’ birth will be unprecedented.

Mary submits herself to God fully, immediately calling herself “the bondservant of the Lord.”

Matthew 1:18-25 (Joseph)

Like Zacharias, Joseph is called “a righteous man.” Before he succeeds in breaking off his betrothal to Mary, God sends him a message by an angel in a dream that is similar in content to the announcement of John’s coming birth. The angel tells Joseph that Mary will bear a Son and that he is to name Him: Jesus. The name reflects His mission on earth: “He will save His people from their sins” (1:21). Gabriel told Zacharias that his son will prepare the way of the Lord and Mary that her Son will reign on David’s throne forever, but Jesus’ name and the Good News of the forgiveness of sins was revealed to Joseph who “did as the angel of the Lord commanded him” (1:24).

Sample Discussion Questions:

Again, if you have a large group, let your students discuss these questions around tables and then bring them back for a large group summary discussion. I suggest giving them two or three discussion questions at a time if they are breaking into small groups.

Describe the encounters Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph had with the angel of the Lord. Where and how did God speak to each of them?

What message did each receive?

,How do the messages relate to one another?

How did each person respond?

SEGMENT #4: Others Who Heard

- Key Talk Points:**
- God’s good news is for all people.
 - Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, and Magi all hear God’s message and respond!

Context/Comments: After the good news came to Mary, Joseph, and Zacharias God sent word to others, too, from lowly shepherds in Israel to wise men from a distant land.

Luke 2:8-20 (Shepherds)

While Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph had one-on-one encounters, the angel of the Lord announces “the good news of great joy” (the birth of Christ) to a group of shepherds who immediately go out and find the Baby in a manger. This good news is not for them alone; it will be for “all the people.”

Again we see fear accompanying the presence of angels. Help your students see that our culture’s view of cute angels with wings and an average age of 18 months that we wear on lapels and paint on ornaments is not biblical. When the angel of the Lord appears the shepherds are “terribly frightened” (*ephobethesan phobon megan*: literally “they feared [*ephobethesan*] with great [*megan*] fear [*phobon*]”). The angel directs the shepherds to the city of David prophesied to be the birthplace of the Messiah—Bethlehem.

While Zacharias was highly respected and both Mary and Joseph, though poor, were from David’s line, shepherds were the lowest in their society. These humble workers, though, are first to know of the Savior’s birth and they share this good news with all who will listen.

Luke 2:21-38 (Simeon and Anna)

While Jesus is named and circumcised according to the Law on the eighth day after His birth, it is on the fortieth day that Mary and Joseph take Him to the temple in Jerusalem. They go to offer a purification sacrifice according to Leviticus 12:1-4 and to present Jesus to the Lord God.

At the temple, two people meet the Holy Family and further confirm many prophecies about Jesus including the truth that the salvation He brings will go beyond the Jewish people and reach to the Gentile world as well. Simeon, described as “righteous and devout,” has been looking for the “consolation” (*parakleisis*, literally “comfort”; same root used of the Holy Spirit who is the Comforter) of Israel. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him that he would see the Christ before he died and when Jesus enters the temple Simeon recognizes the Baby as God’s “salvation” (2:30).

Simeon confirms what they had already been told and Anna, the 84-year old widow who “never left the temple” (2:37), confirms Simeon’s words and, like the shepherds, spreads the word continually “to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38).

Matthew 2:1-12 (Magi)

Although nativity sets often place the magi at the manger scene, the men from the east arrive later and find the Child and Mary in a house in Bethlehem. Help your students to see that both the magi and Herod believe God’s revelation but respond in vastly different ways. The magi are looking for the King to worship, while Herod is looking to crush this threat to his power and dominion.

Like Simeon and Anna, the magi are looking for a king, perhaps having learned of the coming Messiah from Judean exiles like Daniel who influenced their culture during the Babylonian captivity. Like others who received revelation about the Christ, the magi obey. After following the star, they obey God’s clear instruction to avoid Herod on the return trip. The account of the magi shows God’s light of revelation reaching Gentiles early on!

Sample Discussion Questions:

Describe the ways God spoke to these other people. What messages does He send?

What kinds of people does God communicate with? What are His purposes?

How do these messages compare with the messages to Zacharias, Mary, and Joseph?

How do these people respond when God speaks to them?

How are you doing at conveying this message of salvation to others today?

How quick are you to respond when God speaks to you through His Word?

SEGMENT #5: “Go Home, Joseph”

Key Talk Point: • Joseph obeys immediately.

Luke 2:8-20

In the span of just ten verses (2:6-15) Matthew records three dreams in which God commands Joseph to specific actions. The first two are commands respectively to flee to Egypt and then return . . . and why in both cases.

- “Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt and remain there until I tell you [what to do]; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him [why to do it].”
- “Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel [what to do]; for those who sought the Child’s life are dead [why to do it].”

In both instances Joseph has no way of knowing *on his own* whether or not there is a threat to Jesus. God tells him of both Herod's threat and Herod's death. In doing so, He moves Jesus to Egypt and then back to Israel fulfilling the prophecy "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON" (2:15).

The third dream has a different dynamic. Upon entering the land of Israel, Joseph discovers that Herod's son is ruling and fears for Jesus' safety. In the third dream, God confirms Joseph's his concern over settling in Judea and so he settles the family in Nazareth of Galilee to the north.

Sample Discussion Questions:

What dreams does God give Joseph and how does he respond to each?

How does the third dream and the circumstances attending it differ from the first two?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What is your key take-away point this week?

How will you live it out?

WEEK TWO

Decreasing and Increasing

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	10 min.	Review basic concepts
Segment 2:	10 min.	John the Baptist
Segment 3:	10 min.	Jesus and John
Segment 4:	15 min.	Prayer
Segment 5:	15 min.	Signs

START CLASS HERE**SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Basic Concepts**

A little review each week will cement the basics and give your class a framework for study. Although we'll focus on specific inductive tools each week, keeping the basic components of OBSERVATION, INTERPRETATION, and APPLICATION in front of your class consistently will equip them for a lifetime of handling God's Word. Always remind them that the goal is transformation! We don't learn for the sake of learning; we learn because God uses His Word to transform us and conform us more and more into the image of His Son. Familiarity with the basics will give your students confidence to work through their homework and begin applying and living the texts.

Review Questions:

What are the components of inductive Bible study?

*What is **Observation** and why is it important? What question does it answer?*

*How is **Interpretation** different from **Observation**?*

*What do we need for proper **Application**?*

Application needs to be grounded in the single God-intended meaning of the text, its interpretation.

Be aware at this point that you can run into two distinct problems:

1. Some people do not want to apply. They seek knowledge but bristle at application.
2. Others want to apply the text without dealing first with what God said to the original hearers. They want to know "What this means to me" before "What God said."

It is important for you to continually guide your class toward application that comes from the text. When discussions veer toward speculation or issues that do not promote life-change, redirect them to consider what the Author intends.

For those who gravitate toward opinions and ungrounded applications, gently direct them with questions like “Where do you see that in the text?” Continually point them to the text and appropriate application. It may take some repetition, but they will learn. Always be gentle in your approach remembering Proverbs 16:21b that the “sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness.”

Review Questions:

How did you apply the Word of God in your life last week?

How are you doing at obeying immediately?

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE REMINDER:

So you don't have to flip back in the text, here are the basic guidelines to remember for historical narrative sections.

1. Depending on length, either read the text aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: John the Baptist, Luke 3:1-18, Mark 1:1-11

- Key Talk Points:**
- John fulfilled everything prophesied about him.
 - John prepared the way for Jesus by preaching repentance.

Luke 3:1-18

A word from God *about* John comes to his father, Zacharias, before the child is even conceived, and when John is grown, a word from God comes directly *to* him. As with the word to the father, the word to the son has a distinct setting. The word comes to John during the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar's reign. Luke further anchors the event by listing the lower-tier leaders at the time: Pilate, Herod, Phillip, and Lysanias. While others rule on high and while Annas and Caiaphas hold the high priesthood, God speaks to John in the wilderness.

When the word comes to him, John begins "preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," fulfilling Isaiah 40:3-5 as he clears the way for Jesus. Remind your students that Isaiah prophesies a voice in the wilderness clearing the way for none other than YHWH Himself.

As John preaches the Gospel to the people, they begin to wonder if he is the Christ, but he consistently points not to himself but to the One to come who will baptize "with the Holy Spirit and fire" (3:16).

Mark 1:1-11

In Mark 1 the voice that comes "out of the heavens" confirms the voice of the one calling out in the wilderness. John's life points to Jesus and he continually calls people to repent from their sins and be baptized. John says "He is coming!" and the voice from heaven says "He is here!" (Mark 1:11).

Sample Discussion Questions:

John responded quickly and thoroughly when the word of God came to him. How are you doing in this regard?

How does John's call to repentance apply today? How are we doing in proclaiming it? As individuals? As a Church?

SEGMENT #3: Jesus and John the Baptist, Mark 11:2-6, John 10:40-42

- Key Talk Points:**
- Jesus points John to His actions and the revealed Word.
 - John performs no miraculous signs but fulfills his purpose.

Mark 11:2-6

The key point you'll want to help your students see in this section is that when John sends his disciples to ask Jesus if He is the Expected One, He does not answer with a simple "Yes." Instead He tells them to bring word to John of what they have heard from Him and seen Him do, actions that He has done that will line up with what John knows from Scripture about the Messiah—the blind seeing, good news being preached to the poor, and the dead being raised. In essence, He helps John discover the truth for himself by pointing to His actions that are verified by prophecy.

While Isaiah 26 probably waits for fulfillment later, we still see the expectation of resurrection associated with the Messiah's coming . . . and Jesus gives a foretaste of this latter-day fulfillment during His time on earth.

John 10:40-42

The power of John's witness isn't in miracles. He performs a grand total of none! He fulfills his purpose of preparing the way for the Lord by preaching a baptism of repentance and pointing the way to Jesus. He preaches provocative topics like sin, judgment, and repentance. Jesus says of him that "among those born of women there is no one greater than John" (Luke 7:28a, see also Matthew 11:11).

Sample Discussion Questions:

How does Jesus answer when John's messengers ask if they should be looking for someone else?

What did John already know about the coming Messiah?

How are you doing at lining your life up with what God has already revealed?

SEGMENT #4: Prayer, Matthew 6:5-13, Luke 11:1-13

Key Talk Point: • Jesus defines prayer as addressing God.

Matthew 6:5-13

What is prayer? While God certainly leads believers through His Spirit, there is much in current church culture that veers from what the Bible teaches about prayer. Instead of debating if prayer is speaking, listening, or both, take your students to God's Word to see what Jesus teaches.

He begins with who not to emulate and what not to do. Jesus tells His followers not to draw attention to themselves when they pray. He describes the hypocrites who "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners." Individual prayer, He says, should be done privately, in secret and it should not include "meaningless repetition." God knows what His people need.

Jesus teaches a simple model prayer that includes:

- Honoring God's name.
- Praying for God's kingdom and God's will.
- Asking for physical needs to be met.
- Asking for forgiveness.

Praying to be delivered from evil and from being led into temptation.

Throughout His model prayer, Jesus tells people how to *address* God. The emphasis here is on bringing our concerns and requests *to* God and bringing our minds in alignment with the purpose of His Kingdom. While such concepts as "listening prayer" are common in the church, you'll never find God communicating with people called "prayer" in the Bible.

Luke 11:1-13

While very similar to Matthew's account, Luke introduces the Lord's Prayer as Jesus' response to His disciples' request to teach them how to pray. He follows up the teaching with two illustrations—the first about a friend who comes at midnight asking to borrow bread, the second about human fathers responding to requests from their children. The point you want to help your class see is that in each case prayer is defined as the way man speaks to God—praising Him and making requests—not vice versa. God responds, absolutely, but His response is never called prayer.

Sample Discussion Questions:

What does Jesus teach about prayer?

How does it compare with how you typically pray? Explain.

What does prayer depend on?

What assurances do believers have when they pray?

SEGMENT #5: Signs, Matthew 12:38-40, Luke 16:19-31, John 20:24-29

Key Talk Points:

- Jesus condemns sign-seeking.
- Jesus commends faith.

Matthew 12:38-40

Signs were not bad. Obviously God performed signs through people and for people throughout the Old Testament period and Jesus performed many signs throughout His earthly ministry. Jesus had not been hiding under a rock or concealing His work when the scribes and Pharisees demanded to see yet another sign. They wanted more signs even though they had seen Jesus in person; today's generation often wants more signs even though we live on the other side of THE SIGN . . . the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Sign-seeking, according to Jesus, characterizes a generation that is evil (*poneros*) and adulterous (*moichalis*): "An evil and adulterous generation craves [*epizeteo* from *epi*, an intensive, plus *zeteo*, to seek and so an intensive seeking as in: requires, demands, craves] for a sign" (Matthew 12:39).

Luke 16:19-31

Jesus talks about the afterlife and shows with brutal clarity the hardened heart's resistance to truth. A rich man in Hades begs Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn his five brothers about "this place of torment" assuming that a miracle of this magnitude will break through their hardened hearts.

Abraham responds that they already have what they need—"Moses and the Prophets." A person who will not respond positively to the Scriptures will not be persuaded by someone rising from the dead.

Belief is based on truth, not signs.

John 20:24-29

Thomas wants physical proof and Jesus meets his doubt with physical proof of His resurrection and a call to Thomas to believe.

Our culture often elevates those who claim ecstatic spiritual experiences as having more faith, better faith, etc. But Jesus says just the opposite: "Blessed are they who did not see and yet believed" (John 20:29).

Sample Discussion Questions:

Why did the scribes and Pharisees want to see signs?

Why do people crave signs today?

Can signs make a person believe? Explain your answer from Scripture.

What does Jesus commend?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What is your key take-away point this week?

How will you live it out?

WEEK THREE

Keep Watching

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	25 min.	Thinking in Accord with the Word: Mark 8:31-38 Luke 2:41-52
Segment 3:	15 min.	What Not to Do: Mark 13
Segment 4:	15 min.	What to Do: Matthew 25:1-13 Matthew 25:14-30

START CLASS HERE

SEGMENT #1: Review

Review Basic Concepts

Review Questions:

What are the components of inductive Bible study?

How do they function together?

What risks do we run if we don't correctly observe the text? (Misinterpretation and misapplication)

What risk do we run if we don't apply personally?

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE REMINDER:

Again, here are the basic guidelines to remember as you walk your class through texts from the Gospels this week.

1. Depending on length, either read the text aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

**SEGMENT #2: Thinking in Accord with the Word,
Mark 8:31-38, Luke 2:41-52**

- Key Talk Points:**
- Know what God has said.
 - Remember what God has said.
 - Use your renewed mind to think clearly by the power of the Spirit!

Context/Comments: In both of these texts we see the importance of *knowing* what God has said and *thinking* application. The unregenerate mind cannot please or follow God because the ungodly “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Romans 1:18). As those whose minds are being renewed, we are to prove what the good, acceptable, and perfect will of God is (Romans 12:2) by walking in the Spirit and not according to the flesh.

In a culture that is so feeling driven, it is critical to remember that the Spirit renews *the mind*.

Bringing eleven chapters of doctrine to a point of application in Romans 12:1-2, Paul writes:

“Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Mark 8:31-38

In Mark 8 Jesus reveals very clearly what is to come: suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection. Mark says “He was stating the matter plainly” (8:32), but Peter does not like the message he’s hearing. In fact, he starts to rebuke (*epitimaō*) Jesus but Jesus rebukes (*epitimaō*) him for setting his mind on the wrong “things.” Peter wants what Peter wants, failing to align himself with God and set his mind on His ways.

The Christian life is not one of being swept away by our emotions. Discipleship involves setting our minds on God’s way and making hard choices to deny ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow Jesus. It is not “warm fuzzies”; it is choosing to lose our lives (literally “souls”) for the Gospel to save them in the end (Luke 9:24).

Although Peter’s attempt to rebuke Jesus shows his shame in the moment over Jesus’ words, tradition tells us that Peter eventually dies as a martyr for Christ and His kingdom. Encourage your students that if they have felt shame along the way over the words of Christ that Peter’s story brings great hope.

Sample Discussion Questions:

How do our interests compare with God's interests?

How do people actively oppose revealed truth today? Do you? Why?

Are there ways your life shows you to be ashamed of Jesus' words today? If so, what kind of hope does Peter's life bring?

Luke 2:41-52

As a mom, my heart races with Mary's as she realizes she has lost her son and frantically hunts for Him throughout Jerusalem. Luke says Mary and Joseph have not only been trying to locate Jesus but also have been "looking anxiously." The NASB muffles the intensity, consistently translating forms of *zeteo* (seek), even the emphatic compound *anazeteo*, simply as "look."

v. 44 ". . . and they **began looking** [*anazeteo*: diligently seek; the preposition *ana* intensifies the verb] for Him among their relatives and acquaintances."

v. 45 "When they did not find Him, they returned to Jerusalem **looking** [*anazeteo*] for Him.

v. 48 "Behold, Your father and I have been **anxiously** [*odunao*: to have sorrow, pain or distress] **looking** [*zeteo*] for You."

v. 49 "Why is it that you were **looking** [*zeteo*] for Me?"

Simply put, **zeteo** is a verb with some edge to it. Add the intensifier *ana* to two of its uses and the adverb *odunao* to a third and it's clear that Mary's was not a casual response to the situation. She and Joseph were searching with great concern!

In Mary's question—"Son, why have You treated us this way?"—we hear this mother's troubled and concerned heart. When Jesus responds with, "Did you not know that I had to be in my Father's house?", we find out that they *didn't* understand. Hindsight being 20/20, it seems to me that because they knew that Jesus had come to save His people from their sin, that they could have searched without the panic.

While they certainly needed to find 12-year old Jesus, they didn't need to "search anxiously." Immanuel was still going to save His people from their sins even though his parents briefly lost track of Him.

Sample Discussion Questions:

Do you ever lose sight of the big long-term picture God has revealed in His Word and worry over small, more immediate problems? Explain.

How can remembering what we know about God and His plans hold us when we're tempted to fear?

What revealed truth can save you from anxiety you're experiencing now?

SEGMENT #3: What Not to Do, Mark 13

- Key Talk Point:**
- Don't be misled; don't be worried or frightened.
 - Be on your guard.
 - You have advance warning! (Mark 13:23)

Mark 13

The Olivet Discourse, so called because Jesus taught it at the Mount of Olives, is recorded in each of the synoptic Gospels. In this teaching Jesus instructs His disciples about what *to do* when He is gone and warns them what *not to do*. As His followers, we need to pay particularly close attention to Jesus' "what not to do" words in light of the fact that Christians often err on the side of being too trusting, even when wolves start hanging around the flock.

After talking about the coming destruction of the temple, Jesus' disciples ask Him when it will happen and what signs they should be looking for. Before even acknowledging the questions, Jesus warns them not to be misled. Indeed the entire teaching encourages appropriate caution, a wise but not fearful wariness, and endurance in truth.

As mentioned in the sidebar on page 48 in the Workbook, Jesus uses the imperative form of *blepo* (see to it, v. 5; be on your guard, v. 9; take heed, vv. 23 and 33) four times to warn His disciples against deceivers and persecutors and to remind them to stay alert.

Blepo literally means "to see." When Jesus leaves, the disciples will need to keep their eyes opened, to pay attention, so they will not be led astray.

Although the disciples are to be watchful, Jesus does not want them to live in fear. He specifically commands them not to be frightened by wars and rumors of wars and

not to worry about what to say when they are arrested and handed over to authorities because God will give them words to speak through His Spirit: “. . . do not worry beforehand about what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit.”

By telling His followers “everything in advance” (Mark 13:23), Jesus equips them to stand firm when false Christs and false prophets come with “signs and wonders” intent on leading them astray. This will not be an isolated problem. Remember, Jesus says that *many* will be deceivers and *many* will be deceived: “Many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am *He!*’ and will mislead many” (Mark 13:6).

Wolves are coming, but Jesus has armed His sheep! When deceivers come, stand on the truth that Jesus has already “revealed everything” we need to know in advance! (Mark 13:23)

Sample Discussion Questions:

Which of the dangers that Mark 13 talks about most concern you? Why? What is the appropriate response?

What does Jesus say about “signs and wonders” in this context? How convincing are signs and wonders to most people?

How are you obeying Jesus’ instructions to “be on guard” and “alert” today?

SEGMENT #4: What to Do, Matthew 25

- Key Talk Points:**
- “Be on the alert” like the prudent virgins.
 - Know your Master.
 - Steward well what the Master has given you.

Context/Comments:

Jesus follows up the Olivet Discourse in Matthew with two parables on how to live when the Master is away. Both have to do with preparedness and living on alert.

Matthew 25:1-13

Beginning in Matthew 25:1, Jesus tells a parable about ten virgins only five of whom are “prudent” (*phronimos*, root *phren*). *Phronimos* comes from the verb *phroneo*, which means to think or to set one’s mind. Simply put, *phronimos* describes a person who lives wisely because he thinks wisely. In the case of the parable, the five prudent virgins are ready for the bridegroom to come immediately but they are also ready in the event that he should delay. The foolish ones, though, have not thought ahead and are caught unprepared. The five prudent virgins provide exemplify being “on the alert” (*gregoreo*: to watch, to stay awake, to pay attention). Jesus calls His disciples to live “on the alert,” not knowing the day or hour of His return.

Matthew 25:1-14

Jesus’ second parable drives home a similar point.

In this case though, a master entrusts three slaves with different monies to tend to while he goes away. Not knowing when the master will return, two of the slaves quickly invest and double the amount entrusted to them. One turns five talents into ten, while another turns two into four. A third slave buries the money in the ground.

Upon arriving back after a long absence, the master lauds and rewards the two “good and faithful” slaves and gives them more responsibility. When the third slave returns the buried talent citing fear, knowing that his master reaps where he hasn’t sown, the master rebukes him: “You wicked, lazy slave, you knew that I reap where I did not sow and gather where I scattered no seed.”

Knowing what he did about his master, the third slave should have at the very least deposited the money in a bank to earn interest. Consequently his master took back the money and gave it to the servant who had turned five talents into ten.

Sample Discussion Questions:

Summarize the main points of the parables.

What examples of prudent and foolish living with respect to God do you see today?

How well do you know your Master?

How are you doing at stewarding what you have in light of your Master?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What is your key take-away point this week?

How will you live it out?

WEEK FOUR

Words in the Upper Room

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	10 min.	John 14
Segment 3:	15 min.	John 15
Segment 4:	15 min.	John 16
Segment 5:	15 min.	John 17

START CLASS HERE**SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Questions:**

What are the components of inductive Bible study?

What is the most important truth you've learned or been reminded of up to this point?

DISCUSSION REMINDER:

This section of text is comprised entirely of Jesus speaking to His disciples. You may decide to read the text aloud first or simply talk through it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points. For this lesson, one of the easier ways to do this will be to stick closely to the Workbook for your discussion questions since we will be talking straight through the text without comparing scriptures from different places as we often do.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.
You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: John 14

Key Talk Points:

- The only way to know the Father is through the Son.
- The Father sends the Spirit to those who love Jesus.
- Those who love Jesus keep His Word.

John 14:1-15

In His last major teaching before the cross, Jesus says tells His disciples that:

- He is going away.
- He will prepare a place for them.
- He will come again for them.
- They know the way where He is going.

Thomas, however, says that not only don't the disciples know how to get where Jesus is going, they don't even know where He is going.

Using two forms of words for "know" (Greek: *oida* and *ginosko*), Jesus discusses what the disciples know, what they don't know and, more importantly, what they should know. To know Jesus is to know the Father the only way to the Father. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Jesus also emphasizes the importance of keeping His commandments because we know we love Him when we do what He tells us to do. This is not a cold and hard obedience, though; it is relational. We obey Jesus because we love Him and we know the Father. We can ask things of the Father in Jesus' name because we know and are in relationship with Jesus. Lots of people say they know and believe in Jesus, but the ones who actually do obey what He says do so because He loves them and they love Him.

Jesus again defines love in terms of keeping His commandments:

- "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (v. 15)
- "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me" (v. 21)
- "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word" (v. 23)

By contrast, those who don't love Jesus don't keep His words (v. 24).

When Jesus goes to the Father, the one who believes in Him will do greater works *because* He goes to the Father. He will do whatever we ask in His name so that the Father will be glorified in Him. While the context is a miraculous healing and forgiveness on a sabbath, the "greater works" certainly includes the disciples taking forward the word of the finished work of the cross. Jesus builds His Church through this Spirit-empowered work.

When the Spirit comes, the disciples will be more connected with Jesus. Because they love Him, they will do what He commands; because He loves the Father, He will do what they ask in His name so that the Father will be glorified.

John 14:16-30

Although Jesus is going away to prepare a place for His disciples, He will not leave them alone. The Father will send the Spirit of truth who will abide with and in believers.

The Holy Spirit:

- is sent by/from the Father (14:26, 15:26)
- is called another "Helper" (*parakletos*; 14:26)
- will be with believers forever (14:16)
- is known by believers (14:17)
- abides with believers (14:17)
- abides in believers (14:17)

- is the Spirit of truth (16:13)
- guides believers into all the truth (16:13)
- glorifies Jesus (16:14)

The world:

- cannot receive the Holy Spirit (14:17)
- does not see Him (14:17)
- does not know Him (14:17)

When the Spirit comes, Jesus tells His disciples, He will “teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (v. 26). Some commentators try to limit this to the original disciples who needed to recall the words of Jesus to write them down as Scripture. While the Spirit certainly did cause them to recall, delimiting the Spirit’s activity to the writers of Scripture is unnecessarily stringent. Consider Psalm 119:102 where the psalmist says that God Himself has taught him through His ordinances. While believers today do not receive new words from Jesus, the Spirit, who does not speak autonomously according to John 16:13, brings to our minds what Jesus said (John 14:26) and what the Old Testament said about Him (1 Peter 1:11).

When Jesus goes away He will leave His disciples His peace. Again He reminds them not to let their hearts be troubled because He has told them everything they need to know before it happens.

SEGMENT #3: John 15

Key Talk Points: • Apart from Jesus we can do nothing, so abide!

- Love one another.
- The world will hate believers, but Jesus will send the Helper.

John 15:1-17

What does “abide in the vine” mean and what difference does it make if a branch bears or doesn’t bear fruit? The answers make all the difference in the world because Jesus calls Himself the true vine and His Father the vinedresser. Here’s what He says about branches that bear and branches that don’t.

Branch that bears fruit:

- He prunes so it bears more fruit, v. 2
- abides in the vine, v. 4

Branch that doesn't bear fruit

- He takes away, v. 2
- does not abide in the vine, v. 4
- is thrown away as a branch and dries up, v. 6
- is gathered and cast in the fire and burned, v. 6

Jesus' words about ABIDING:

- abide in Jesus and Jesus in you, v. 4
- branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, v. 4
- disciples cannot bear fruit unless they abide in Jesus, v. 4
- the one who abides in Jesus and Jesus in him bears much fruit, v. 5
- if disciples abide in Jesus and Jesus' words abide in them, they can ask whatever they wish and it will be done for them, v. 7
- disciples are to abide in Jesus' love, v. 9
- if disciples keep Jesus' commandments, they will abide in His love, v. 10
- Jesus kept His Father's commandments and abides in His love, v. 10

John 15:18-27

Jesus never sugar coats what life will be like for the disciples. The world will hate them as it has hated Him. The way they are to deal with this is to *remember* Jesus' words. Disciples won't need a new word from God to get through persecution, only to remember what Jesus already taught: "A slave is not greater than his master! If they persecuted Me, they will persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also" (v. 20).

When Jesus came into the world, He exposed darkness. People who saw and heard Him were now responsible for the new truth He revealed. Although they were sinners before, they have actively rejected the incarnate Son of God . . . as people do today. They show their hatred for the Son, the Father, and His people in their attitudes, thoughts, and actions.

Believers, though, can stand because they do not stand alone. Jesus promises to send the "Helper" (Greek: *parakletos*), the Spirit of truth, from the Father. Jesus' followers are called to testify about Jesus, and the Spirit He sends testifies about Jesus as well. Help your class see that this is a major issue in discernment: the Holy Spirit does not beat His own drum; rather, He continually points to Jesus.

SEGMENT #4: John 16

- Key Talk Points:**
- When tribulation comes, we need to remember Jesus' words.
 - The indwelling Holy Spirit brings great advantage to the believer.
 - Because of our relationship to Jesus we can ask the Father for things we need in Jesus' name.

John 16:1-4

Jesus uses the pronoun *houtos* (translated “these things”) three times in this section to refer back to what He has just told His disciples, particularly to the coming trials He spoke of in John 15:18-27. He wants them to be aware of what is on the horizon so they will not stumble (v. 1) and so that they will remember what He has said (v. 4) when He goes away. Hard times are coming for the disciples and they are to live by Jesus' words when they arrive. Remembering His words, though, presupposes having known them before. For we disciples now to remember His words, we need to have learned them by studying the Word He gave us. Help your students reason through the truth that a person cannot live by what he doesn't know. We can't remember what we've never taken time to learn in the first place.

John 16:5-15

Although sorrow has filled the disciples' hearts, it is not based on eternal truth. They fear abandonment but the eternal truth is Jesus does not abandon. In fact, He tells them the truth of the situation: they are better off if He goes away (that is ascends to the Father) because when He does, He will send the Helper, the Holy Spirit. They will not be alone.

The Holy Spirit will be more than enough. He:

- is the Helper (14:26, 16:7)
- will teach all things (14:26)
- will bring to the disciples' remembrance all Jesus said to them (14:26)
- is the Spirit of truth (15:26, 16:13)
- testifies about Jesus (15:26)
- will convict the world concerning sin, righteousness, and judgement (16:8)
- will guide disciples into all the truth (16:13)
- will not speak on His own initiative; will speak what He hears and disclose it (16:13)
- will glorify Jesus (16:16)

Help your students to see that the Holy Spirit convicts both unbelievers and believers of sin and that He guides believers to truth. It is because of the ministry of the Holy Spirit that we are able to read God's Word with understanding and live out what we learn and know.

John 16:16-33

In verse 16 and following Jesus tells His disciples what is about to happen, but they are baffled and begin trying to figure out what Jesus means. Three key words in verses 16-22 are *see*, *joy/rejoice*, and *grief*. Time phrases are also significant and easy to identify (*in a little while*, *an hour*, etc.) as Jesus explains that although He will be going away, He will see them again and they will rejoice. The grief will be intense, like that a woman in childbirth, but it will be momentary. What will remain is the joy that follows.

Important time phrases continue in verses 23-33 (*in that day*, *until*, *an hour is coming*) that point primarily to the time after Jesus ascends and how life will be in the days to come with regard to the Father. In that day, the disciples will ask (Greek: *aito*, used four times) the Father for things in Jesus' name ("in My name" used three times). Their making requests "of the Father" presupposes relationship with Him through Christ.

While this new access to the Father will be an enormous blessing, life will not be without difficulty. Jesus says that He has spoken these things so that His disciples will have peace. They will have tribulation in the world, not a matter of if but when. Still, in the midst His disciples then and now can take comfort in the truth that Jesus has already overcome the world.

SEGMENT #5: John 17

Key Talk Points:

- Jesus glorified God by accomplishing God's work.
- Jesus prayed for us that we would be sanctified in the His Word which is truth.

John 17:1-12

In John 17, Jesus shifts from talking to His disciples to talking to His heavenly Father. The key word in this section is "glory" (Greek: *doxa* [noun], *doxazo* [verb]) which He uses six times in just twelve verses. He prays that the Father will glorify Him (the Son) so that He (the Son) may in turn glorify the Father. The Son had been glorified with the Father before the world was. Again we see that the Son was with the Father from eternity past but that He came to earth in the flesh so that men might have eternal life. That eternal life He defines as knowing "the only true God, and Jesus Christ" whom He sent.

While Jesus was on earth, He glorified the Father by accomplishing (Greek: *teleioo*, to finish, to complete) the work that His Father had given Him. Challenge your students to think through this, since much evangelical talk of glorifying God is confined to songs sung on Sunday mornings. What if glorifying God includes Monday through Saturday? Remind them of what they just saw in John 15:8 where Jesus says, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples." Jesus calls us to 24/7 living!

Jesus prays specifically for His disciples too—the men God gave him out of the world who kept His word. Because they had come to know Jesus, they had also come to know His Father. Jesus prays that when He leaves the world the Father will keep them in His name. Jesus had guarded them while He was on earth; now He prays for the Father to guard them.

John 17:13-26

Throughout John 14–17 Jesus has been explaining to the disciples how they can have joy even when He departs because:

- He is going to the Father who is greater (14:28)
- His joy will be in believers as they abide in the vine (15:1-11)
- His children will be able to ask and receive (16:24)
- He has spoken what they needed to hear to have joy (17:13)

The disciples are going to need joy within them to deal with a world that hates them as it hated their Master, because they are not “of it.”

Jesus sends them directly into this battle as the Father sent Him into the world. He prays that the Father will “keep them from the evil one” and “sanctify them in the truth” which He defines as God’s Word. This is His prayer for us also who have believed through the Word that has been handed down over the ages.

He also prays for unity: “that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me” (17:21). It is important here to help your students see the context of unity here. Jesus has just spent the previous verses talking about the importance of being sanctified in the truth of God’s Word. True unity exists only when it is based on truth. The cultural winds of our day often call for unity at the expense of truth, but unity at the expense of truth is “unity” in word only. True unity and love among believers displays the truth of Jesus to a watching world.

Wrap-Up Questions:

What have been your biggest takeaways this week?

How are these truths changing the way you’re thinking and acting?

WEEK FIVE

Empowered by the Spirit

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	10 min.	The Coming of the Spirit
Segment 3:	10 min.	Life with the Spirit
Segment 4:	10 min.	Peter's Experiences
Segment 5:	10 min.	Casting Lots/Jerusalem Council
Segment 6:	15 min.	Peter's Instructions

START CLASS HERE

SEGMENT #1: Review

Review Basic Concepts

Review Questions:

What are the components of inductive Bible study and why is each important?

What is the most important thing you've learned or been reminded of up to this point?

Has your thinking changed at all in our study so far? If so, how?

DISCUSSION REMINDER:

So you don't have to flip back to a previous lesson, here are the basic guidelines for talking through the text:

1. Depending on the length of the text, either read it aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: The Coming of the Spirit

- Key Talk Points:**
- Jesus makes His people His witnesses.
 - Jesus gives them His Spirit who empowers them to obey.

Acts 1:1-8

Luke the physician writes Acts to follow up his Gospel in which he recorded “about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). According to Luke, after Jesus rose from the dead He made appearances for a little over a month (over 40 days) before being taken up to heaven. Prior to His ascension, though, He commanded His disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit who will empower them to be His witnesses to the world. With the indwelling Holy Spirit, they will have everything they need to obey. Help your students realize the greater benefit we have today with the entire written Word of God.

Acts 2

In obedience to Jesus’ command, the disciples gather together in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost with Jews “from every nation” who speak a variety of languages.

Luke describes the coming of the Spirit as follows:

- they hear a noise like a “violent rushing wind”
- they see “tongues as of fire” on each of them
- they are filled with the Holy Spirit
- they begin to speak with other tongues

It’s important to note here that these “other tongues” were known languages understood by native speakers present. The Jews and proselytes (Gentiles converted to Judaism) hear “the mighty acts of God” declared in their own languages although the speakers are Galilean. The crowds react with a mixture of amazement, perplexity, and some mockery suggesting that the speakers are drunk. To this Peter responds that Joel’s prophecy is being fulfilled in front of them. Unlike in Old Testament times when the Holy Spirit fell on specific people for specific purposes for specific lengths of time, now God is pouring out His Spirit on all of His people—men and women, young and old.

The “miracles and wonders and signs” that the people see attest to who Jesus is—the Holy One of God, the heir to the throne of David. Peter’s message that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (i.e. Messiah) pierces his hearers’ hearts. Three-thousand repent, are baptized, and receive the Holy Spirit. Signs and wonders continue through the Apostles as the Lord grows the early church.

Depending on the make-up of your group, you may have some spirited discussion with regard to signs and wonders. Keep it focused on the texts. It may be helpful to bring Hebrews 2:1-4 into the discussion. Here the author attributes signs and wonders and miracles to the Apostles—“those who heard” the Lord’s “great salvation” (v. 3). Help your students note the progression:

- The Lord spoke the Gospel, (Heb. 2:3)
- The Apostles (“those who heard”) confirmed it to the next generation (“us”; Heb. 2:3)

–God bore witness to the Apostles (“those who heard”/“them”) “both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Heb. 2:4)

It’s important to note that the signs and wonders, miracles and gifts were according to God’s will, not man’s. No man controls the working of God.

Sample Discussion Questions:

How do the books of Luke and Acts relate?

What is Jesus’ plan for His followers?

How will He equip them to obey?

Describe the coming of the Holy Spirit.

What are the various responses among the Jews and proselytes?

How is the ministry of the Spirit expanding from what it had been in the OT?

How has the Spirit helped you witness in your sphere of influence?

SEGMENT #3: Life with the Spirit

- Key Talk Points:**
- No man controls the Spirit.
 - The Holy Spirit indwells Jewish, Samaritan, and Gentile believers.

Context/Comments: In Acts 8:14-25 and 11:1-18 the Gospel goes beyond limits some Jewish believers expect, first to the Samaritans and then to the Gentiles.

Acts 8:14-25

Although we're historically separated from the early Church there are people today like Simon who crave the ability/authority to dispense spiritual power. In the case at hand, when a new group of people (the Samaritans) accept the Gospel God sends the Spirit when the Apostles pray and lay their hands on them. This authenticates their conversion—that the power is from God, not from the Apostles. Simon, though, wants this power that he sees demonstrated to use for his own purposes but Peter sees and condemns the wicked desire of his heart.

Acts 11:1-18

The apostle Peter's vision in Acts 11 relates to the Gospel going forth to the Gentiles, something few expected. In the vision a voice tells him to kill and eat animals the Law had declared unclean. When Peter refuses, the voice says, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy." Peter soon finds out that the vision is about far more than formerly unclean foods when three men show up at his door and invite him to go to Caesarea (and the Spirit tells him to go!). Again, we see a vision authenticated. Peter's vision does not stand alone. An angel had told Cornelius to send to Joppa for Peter who would speak words that would save him. Cornelius obeys, Peter obeys and preaches, and the Gospel and Holy Spirit break through to the Gentiles.

Acts 19:1-7

The question at hand in this section is "Whose disciples?" These people were not believers in Christ but rather followers of John the Baptist. When they're reminded that John told them to believe in "the One who comes after [Him]" (Jesus), the Holy Spirit comes upon them and they believe in Jesus.

Sample Discussion Questions:

If people controlled the dispensing of the Spirit today, what outcomes would you expect? Explain.

What do these passages teach about the Holy Spirit?

What does Peter's vision mean and how does he know this?

How did the Gospel's spread compare with some Jewish believers' expectations? How does God show affirm that His salvation has truly been extended to the Samaritans, Gentiles, etc.?

SEGMENT #4: Peter's Experiences

Key Talk Points:

- Signs and wonders are happening at the hands of the apostles.
- Miraculous works are serving specific purposes.

Acts 5:1-11

In a chilling vignette from the early church, Luke recounts the lives of Ananias and Sapphira who sold property and gave part of their profit to the Apostles for needs within the church. Giving a portion was not the problem—lying was. This husband and wife conspired to let everyone think they were giving all while they held back some of the money. The text is clear that they both were in on it:

- “[He] kept back some of the price,” v. 2
- “with his wife’s full knowledge,” v. 2

Sapphira even lies directly to Peter when he specifically asks about the purchase price.

The big issue in this section is the purity of the Church. By revealing to Peter that Ananias and his wife were lying, God guarded the purity of His church. The Church learned once for all what God thinks of lying to the Church when He took out the first two to do it. Today He guards His Church with His completed Word.

Acts 5:12-16

Help your students see that Acts 5:12 is very clear that the signs and wonders were taking place “at the hands of the apostles” and as a result men and women were coming to faith in the Lord.

Acts 5:17-21

Again, we see a miracle happening with regard to the Apostles. In this case the Apostles don't perform it; rather an angel of the Lord frees them after they have been imprisoned because of the jealousy of some Sadducees. The angel doesn't simply let them go; he also sends them out on a mission: “Go, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life” (v. 20).

Sample Discussion Questions:

Describe Ananias and Sapphira's situation.

What characterizes their behavior?

How do you think Peter knew what they had done? Explain your answer.

Who performs the various signs, wonders, and miracles? What is the purpose/ effect of each?

SEGMENT #5: Casting Lots / Jerusalem Council

Key Talk Points:

- God has spoken through lots but has never been obligated to.
- God has given believers His revealed Word, His Holy Spirit who repeats Jesus' words, and minds regenerated by His Word (James 1:18; 1 Peter 1:23).

Acts 1:15-26

With the apostasy and subsequent death of Judas, Peter (drawing from the Psalms) says it is necessary to appoint another man to his office. This person has to have been with them from Jesus' baptism by John all the way to His resurrection from the

dead. Two qualified men are identified—Joseph and Matthias. They address the Lord as the One “who know the hearts of all men” and ask Him to reveal His choice to them (vv 24-25). Then they draw lots (v. 26).

It is interesting to note that this lot casting is the last one we see recorded in the Bible and it happens prior to the coming of the Holy Spirit. Does God cause the lot to fall the way He chooses? Yes. Doubt it? Check out Proverbs 16:33. On the other hand, can we assume that when God has given us renewed minds and His Spirit to lead us that we should take Acts 1:26 as a directive to flip a coin? No.

Help your students see that God is not a Magic 8 Ball. Although He has answered by fleece and by lot, He is not obliged to now nor was He ever obliged to in the past. The potential for bad consequences in presuming God has to answer a certain way by fleece or lot is enormous.

Acts 15:1-29

Unlike the decision in Acts 1 between two outwardly equal candidates, the decision the Apostles and elders faced in Acts 15 fundamentally defined the basis of salvation. Clearly they were not authoring the definition; they were revealing God’s mind on the matter after debate. Is circumcision required for salvation? Will Gentile believers need more than faith to be saved? Will the Apostles and elders affirm that faith alone saves? After Paul contended with believers in two locations who were former Pharisees (15:1 and 5) and also Peter (Galatians 2:11), Peter finally conceded the salvation of Gentiles by grace through faith alone—which became Paul’s thesis for Galatians. There he argues that this Gospel was continuous from Old to New Testament times and even preached to Abraham, the Scripture “foreseeing” (fore-writing) that God would justify the nations by faith alone (Galatians 3:8).

Moreover God had already poured out His Holy Spirit on Gentiles who believed, apart from their being circumcised. After Peter concedes to the truth (15:8, 9) he notes that those who claim circumcision is necessary are “putting God to the test” (15:10), disturbing believers, and “unsettling” their souls (15:24). He argues that the Spirit saved Gentiles by “cleansing their hearts by faith” (9) and concludes that Jew and Gentile alike “will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” (11).

Sample Discussion Questions:

Compare the options the Apostles faced in Acts 1 and Acts 15.

Based on your study why do you think they cast lots to make a decision in Acts 1? Defend your answer.

Based on your study why do you think they sought God’s wisdom another way in Acts 15?

SEGMENT #6: Peter's Instructions

- Key Talk Points:**
- Peter had many supernatural experiences including walking on water and seeing visions.
 - Peter directed people to cling to God's Word.

1 Peter 1:13-2:3

Writing to scattered believers (those living as aliens in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia), Peter opens his first letter talking about their salvation and their Savior whom they love though they have not seen Him. One day, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, they will see Him, but for now Peter calls them to action in verses 1:13–2:3 with a “Therefore” and tells them what to do and how to act.

Positive actions:

- “prepare your minds for action” (participle)
- “keep sober in spirit” (participle)
- “FIX your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (Imperative)
- “BE [made] holy . . . in all your behavior” (Imperative)
- “conduct yourselves in fear” (Imperative)
- “fervently LOVE one another” (Imperative)

Don't let them miss here that it is because of “obedience to the truth” that we are able to “fervently love one another.”

- “LONG for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.” (Imperative)

Things to avoid:

- “do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance” (participle)
- “put[ting] aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander”

Note that Jesus Christ will be revealed again—twice we see reference to His coming “revelation”—and “He was made apparent” (aorist passive) in these last times. This “made-apparent” revelation Peter points to includes physical events; it's not a spiritual “Jesus-behind-every tree emotionalism.” As believers we are to fix our hope on His grace, be holy as He is holy, love one another fervently, and long for the pure milk of God's Word while we eagerly await our Savior's return.

Peter's commands to his readers are grounded in living now in anticipation of the Savior who is to be revealed at His second coming. He is helping them and us learn how to live practically in the “now” while we wait for Jesus to return.

1 Peter 4:7-11

In light of “the end of all things . . . at hand,” Peter hammers out two more imperatives that have to do with thinking clearly:

- *sophroneo*, be of sound mind; think clearly
- *nepho*, to be sober-minded literally and/or spiritually, thinking without any impediment

The *Theological Wordbook of the New Testament* explains this last term well: “When the word is used figuratively the subject is a person or the human *logismós* and what is meant is the opposite of every kind of fuzziness. Sober judgment is highly valued in both individual and public life” (Otto Bauernfeind in Kittel, G., Friedrich, G., & Bromiley, G. W. [1985]. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [p. 634]. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans.)

Again Peter commands sobriety of spirit. In all he will use the imperative “be sober” three times in this short letter (1:13, 4:7, and 5:8). Challenge your students to wrestle with this: not just physical sobriety but sober-thinking sobriety. While some claim that being “drunk in the Spirit” is noble, Paul is clear that while an over-abundance of wine leads to dissipation, being filled with the Spirit leads to edification (Ephesians 5:18-20). Some at Pentecost accused the believers of being drunk when they spoke in other tongues, but Peter soundly refutes this and his presentation of the Gospel in Acts 2 is sober-minded and clear.

1 Peter 5:8-11

Peter continues to tell his readers how to live with three more imperatives:

- “be of sober spirit” (Imperative)
- “be on the alert” (Imperative)
- “resist” your adversary the devil (Imperative)

Why sober and alert? Christians have a real enemy who actively seeks their destruction. Cast here as a lion, the devil prowls around looking for someone to swallow (Greek: *katapino*). This is not literary “good guys and bad guys”; it is literal war. The adversary hates God and he wants to destroy God’s people.

2 Peter 1:12-2:3

In the opening verses of his letter, Peter exhorts his readers to grow up in the Lord. In Christ they have what they need to live and to grow. As he moves into 12 and the following verses, he points his readers back to the truth and prophecy they already know to equip them to move into the future with confidence. They don’t need to be looking for new truth; they have already been established in the prophecies he and others have seen fulfilled first-hand. Knowing the truth that has already been revealed is sufficient will help them identify and successfully oppose false teachers and heresies that will come.

Peter gives some key warning signs about false teachers. They:

- Act covertly.

False teachers do not bring attention to their false teaching. They secretly introduce it; it slides in a side door unnoticed at first but destroys like cancer when it gains a footing.

- Deny the Master.

False teachers err in Christology, specifically denying that Jesus is Lord. This may not show on the surface, but dig a little and you will find it.

- Practice sensuality.

False teachers are characterized by sensuality—typically sexual excesses, pleasure-seeking, debauchery.

- Greedily exploit.

False teachers use false words to exploit others for their own greedy purposes.

2 Peter 2:18-19

Having just compared the false teachers of his day to Balaam who turned on the people of Israel, Peter continues to list red-flag behaviors. They:

- Speak arrogant and vain words.

False teachers talk big and deliver nothing. The Greek for arrogant (*hyeronkos*) literally translates as a “swollen mass” here of words that are vain (Greek: *mataiotes*; empty, worthless).

- Entice.

False teachers don’t just talk and hope someone listens, they actively fish (Greek: *de/eazo*; literally to bait, trap) for victims, baiting their traps with sensual things that attract fleshly desires.

- Make false promises.

False teachers promise freedom to others but are themselves slaves of corruption.

False teachers today show themselves the same ways. They don’t wave a flag saying “Here’s a trap, watch out!” but destructive heresies brought in secretly can only hide for so long.

- Do all this *in* the Church.

Peter says “there will also be false teachers among [*en*: in or within] you” (2 Peter 2:1b).

Both Jude and Peter use very vivid phrases to describe these people.

Jude says they are:

- “hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear,” v. 12
- “clouds without water, carried along by winds,” v. 12
- “autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted,” v. 12
- “wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam,” v. 13
- “wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever,” v. 13

Peter's descriptions are similar in 2 Peter 2:

- “like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge,” v. 12
- “stains and blemishes, reveling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you,” v. 13
- “springs without water and mists driven by a storm, for whom the black darkness has been reserved,” v. 17

Once they are “inside,” the battle for truth becomes harder as many people simply accept what is being taught.

2 Peter 3:1-2

Peter again points his readers back (reminder, remember, beforehand) to what they already know. He is “stirring up” (Greek: *diegeiro*; literally “wake up”) their “sincere” (Greek: *eilikrines*, a compound of *eile*, the shining of the sun, and *krino*, to judge) “mind” (Greek: *dianoia*). Peter is trying to motivate them to discern, in case they dozed off. Now was the time for them to pay attention, to ready their minds to discern properly by knowing and remembering two main categories of truth:

1. “the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets”
2. “the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles”

2 Peter 3:13-18

Having just mentioned the coming day of the Lord, Peter instructs his readers to look for the things he predicted::

- the coming day of God, v. 12
- the new heavens and a new earth, v. 13.

He also tells them to be on guard against those who distort Scriptures. Here Peter describes them as:

- untaught, v. 16
- unstable, v. 16
- unprincipled, v. 17

He tells them to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Sample Discussion Questions:

*What does Peter say about deceivers who will come? What characterizes them?
How can we guard against them?*

What does Peter tell the people to actively seek and hold on to?

How do you think you are doing with this? How is your church doing with this?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What have been your biggest takeaways this week?

How is the truth you're learning changing the way you're thinking and acting?

WEEK SIX

Paul: Obedient to the Heavenly Vision

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	15 min.	Paul's Conversion
Segment 3:	10 min.	A Vision of Heaven
Segment 4:	15 min.	Paul's Instruction to Titus
Segment 5:	15 min.	Paul's Instruction to Timothy

START CLASS HERE**SEGMENT #1: Review****Review Question:**

*What is the biggest takeaway **Application** you have had thus far?*

DISCUSSION REMINDER:

Here are the basic guidelines for each section of the text:

1. Depending on the length of the text, either read it aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: Paul's Conversion

Key Talk Point: • God gives Paul and Ananias visions that confirm each other's.

Acts 9:1-20

Pre-conversion Saul is a man on a mission to persecute and destroy Jesus' disciples. He travels to Damascus to bind and bring back to Jerusalem both men and women who follow "the Way." On his way there, however, the One he is truly persecuting speaks to him from heaven.

Luke recounts that "light from heaven flashed around" Saul and he heard Jesus' voice (v. 3). His traveling companions also hear the voice but do not see anyone. Saul later recounts that he "could not see because of the brightness of the light" (22:11) and it is for this reason God sends Ananias to restore his sight.

This Ananias (not of Ananias and Saphira infamy) goes to Saul at the direction of a very specific vision from the Lord (v. 11):

- go to Straight Street
- go to house of Judas
- find Saul from Tarsus

Ananias knows Saul's reputation as a persecutor but the Lord assures him that Saul is "a chosen instrument" to bear His name. Each of the visions confirms the other.

The Lord tells Saul on the road:

- "...get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do" (v. 6).

The Lord gives Saul a vision once in the city:

- "sees in a vision sees a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight" (v. 12).

The Lord tells Ananias in a vision:

"Get up and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying, and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him, so that he might regain his sight" (vv. 11-12).

Neither Ananias nor Saul could deny God's hand. Although Saul has been a persecutor, he will now be the persecuted one because he proclaims the name of Jesus—declaring Him to be the Son of God—and suffers for the sake of the Gospel.

Acts 26:1-20

Paul recounts to King Agrippa the incident Luke records in Acts 9. Prior to his encounter with Jesus, Paul had lived from his youth following strict Jewish laws as a Pharisee. When Jesus came on the scene, Paul did everything possible to oppose Him from imprisoning His followers to casting votes to have them put to death to chasing them in foreign cities. Paul goes into more detail of what Jesus told him and tells Agrippa that he is doing what God has told him to do.

Challenge your students to ask themselves if they are doing what God wants them to do. Are they engaged in turning people "from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God" (v. 18)?

Sample Discussion Questions:

How does Paul describe his encounter with Jesus?

What was "Saul's" purpose? How did God's purpose for "Paul" differ?

How has your life's purpose changed now that you know Jesus?

How are you doing at fulfilling God's purpose for your life?

SEGMENT #3: A Vision of Heaven

- Key Talk Points:**
- Great revelation can cause boasting.
 - The one who had the vision was not allowed to speak what he heard and did not boast about what he saw.

2 Corinthians 12:1-12

While today's bookstore shelves are filled with people who happily recount what they've seen in "visits to heaven," Paul does no such thing. In fact when telling about a vision of heaven, his readers are left to wonder whether it was Paul's vision or someone else's. The visionary, he says, saw things he was not permitted to speak about. I think it's likely the vision was Paul's since he goes on to talk about an affliction in his flesh so that he won't be filled with pride over "the [articulated] revelations" he has "been given." It hangs on how you weight the evidence. On the one hand, Paul says "Of such a person I will not boast" (which sounds like a 3rd party) but on the other he articulates "revelations" which could (but might not) be earlier in time than the vision the "person" had. Although he asks God three times for the affliction to go away, God refuses. God will provide grace enough for Paul to endure.

While we may be tempted to want more answers as we look at this account, the text shows that even Paul didn't know everything about the specifics of the vision, for example whether the person was in the body or out of the body when it occurred. Here's what he did know about it:

- it happened 14 years ago
- the person was caught up to "the third heaven," to "Paradise"
- the person heard inexpressible words a man is not permitted to speak

Still, even what he knew he wasn't going to boast about.

He doesn't want anyone giving him "points" for something other than what they actually see in him and hear from him.

The only thing Paul will boast of is his weakness so, as he says, "the power of Christ may dwell in me" (v. 9).

Sample Discussion Questions:

What danger does Paul associate with the receiving of visions and revelations?

What did God do to him as a result of “the revelations” he had been given?

What is Paul’s purpose in relating the vision? Does he instruct people to seek such visions? Explain.

SEGMENT #4: Paul’s Instructions to Titus

Key Talk Point: • Paul points Titus and those in his care toward sound doctrine and living that matches.

Comments: Throughout his letter to Titus Paul holds up the standard of God’s Word and encourages his young protégé to hold to it, walk by it, and encourage others in sound doctrine.

Titus 1

As Paul leaves Titus in Crete, he tasks him with setting up a stable church structure on the island with elders in every city who hold fast to the Word of God, who can teach the Word of God, and whose lives reflect transformation by the Word of God.

These elders are to shepherd the church and guard her against those who seek her harm—the rebellious, empty talkers and deceivers. The standard for evaluating these threats will be the truth of God’s Word.

Titus 2

Paul tells Titus to “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine” (v. 1). Older men, younger men, older women and younger women should each live lives above reproach according to the truth they hold to. What is at stake is not merely personal reputation but also the reputation of God’s Word; God’s people are to live in such a way that His word will not be dishonored (v. 5).

Titus and his church are to refuse “ungodliness and worldly desires” as they live “sensibly, righteously and godly” (v. 11). Again we see the two-edged sword that involves rejecting the world and embracing the cross while looking forward to the return of Christ (v. 13).

Titus 3

Paul continues with practical instructions for living in chapter 3 and focuses on how to get along with people—those in charge and everyone else. Believers, having been regenerated and renewed by the Holy Spirit, can deal wisely and properly with all men from rulers to factious men we advance warn about apostasy. Throughout this letter Paul elevates the Word of God as the standard for truth and sound doctrine and calls believers to lives that shine it forth.

Sample Discussion Questions:

What role does sound doctrine play in Paul's letter to Titus?

What difference does having a standard of truth make in practical living?

What does Paul say in this letter about the role of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life?

What does Paul tell Titus to be looking for? What does he tell him to avoid and reject?

What from this letter did you find most applicable in your life this week?

SEGMENT #5: Paul's Instructions to Timothy

Key Talk Points:

- Paul tells Timothy to guard the treasure.
- Paul warns Timothy about deceivers to come.

1 Timothy

Paul writes to Timothy, his child in the faith (v. 4).

1 Timothy 1:1-11

When he goes to Macedonia, Paul leaves Timothy behind at Ephesus to care for the church. His prime responsibility there is to guard the true Gospel and help people grow in their faith. The result of teaching sound doctrine will be practical and clear:

love, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. When people stray from *sound* to *strange* doctrine, as some were doing in Paul and Timothy's day, emptiness follows. Paul says that strange doctrine, myths and endless genealogies foster "mere speculation" and "fruitless discussion." This sounds very similar to our culture today where everyone's truth is their own and many people seek not answers, but more and more questions to turn their eyes from and often against hard truths. The Gospel is solid-ground truth in a world of shifting sand.

1 Timothy 4:1-8

While we often associate the word "doctrine" with truth we need to keep in mind that demons also have doctrines. This is why Paul qualifies "doctrine" with "sound" four times, twice in Titus and once each in 1 and 2 Timothy. Deceitful spirits will draw some in the churches away.

The way to stand against false doctrine and practice is by knowing the truth. If God created marriage it's clear that forbidding marriage is not sound doctrine. Instead of engaging these lies, myths, and false doctrines, Paul says believers should have nothing to do with them. Rather they are to be "nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" which they have been following (v. 6).

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Paul's final words in 1 Timothy are, in a sense, defensive words. He is to "guard what has been entrusted," that is, the truth of the Gospel, and he is to avoid empty words and false "knowledge." What has been revealed is adequate but already in Paul's and Timothy's day people had begun chasing other ideas and straying from the faith Jude (Jude 3) tells us was "once for all handed down to the saints"

2 Timothy

In his final letter before his death at the hands of Rome, Paul gives Timothy final instructions and exhortations.

2 Timothy 1:13-14

An apt title for 2 Timothy is "Guard the Treasure." Timothy has been entrusted with the truth of the Gospel. There is nothing he needs to adapt or add to. His job is to retain, guard, and pass on (which we'll see in the next chapter!) the sound and complete truth.

- Retain (Greek, *echo*; hold) the standard of sound words.
- Guard (Greek, *phulasso*; watch, keep) the treasure which has been entrusted to you.

Using the imperative mood in both sentences, Paul commands Timothy to focus on and watch over the revelation already given to him. The Holy Spirit who indwells will give him the power to do just that. The Spirit will not give different or contrary words but will empower God's people to guard the truth.

2 Timothy 2:1-2

Timothy is not only to guard the truth but also to pass it on to faithful people who will be able to pass it on to others. What man needs to know has been revealed and the faithful are to continue to pass it on to the faithful.

2 Timothy 2:14-15

While accurately handling the Word of truth brings God's approval and benefits the body of Christ, word-wrangling damages those who hear and partake. Instead of warring over empty words, believers are to diligently please God as good workmen in handling His Word. Remind your students that they are learning to do this as they continually practice and hone their inductive study skills.

2 Timothy 3:14-17

Having just talked about coming evil days and godless, persecuting people earlier in chapter 3, Paul instructs Timothy to continue in the revealed truth that he knows. The contrast drawn between a scripturally-grounded man of God and men and women of "the last days" could not be more stark. The scripturally-grounded man is "adequate" (Greek: *artios*, noun. Complete, totally fitted to fulfill purpose) and "equipped" (Greek: *exartizo*, verb, a compound verb form of *artios*). Zodiates says this last term means "to furnish or fit completely" (Zodiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000.) With the Word we have everything we need, because God gave us Scripture that is inspired (Greek: *theopneustos*; God-breathed) and profitable for:

- teaching
- reproof
- correction
- training in righteousness

Conversely, people of "the last days" will oppose truth. Opposition is always truth negation. Godless, last-day "lovers of self" and "haters of good" will hold to a "form of godliness" and weak women will be "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Sound familiar?

Paul tells Timothy in verse 14 to continue in what he has learned and become convinced of, that is the sacred writings (Old Testament Scriptures) which give the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

The last of Paul's words again point Timothy back to the Word of God, to sound doctrine, to truth. Why? With the Word Timothy will be able to reprove, rebuke, exhort, and fulfill his ministry in a culture that desires to hear what it wants to hear. It's not that the last days will be devoid of teachers, not at all. The last days will be filled with ear-ticklers who teach popular messages to give people not what they need but what they want to hear.

Sample Discussion Questions:

How do Paul's commands and warnings work together to equip Timothy?

Why is sound doctrine important? Can its importance be over-estimated? Underestimated? Explain.

How does our culture compare with what Paul warned was coming? How are you living in light of this?

How are you doing at accurately handling the Word of truth and passing on what you know?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What have been your biggest takeaways this week?

How is the truth you're learning changing the way you're thinking and acting?

WEEK SEVEN

Paul: Walking by the Spirit

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	15 min.	Romans 8, Romans 12:1-3
Segment 3:	15 min.	1 Corinthians 2
Segment 4:	10 min.	Paul's Prayers for the Churches
Segment 5:	15 min.	Paul's Instructions and Warnings

START CLASS HERE

SEGMENT #1: Review

Review Basic Concepts

How would you explain inductive Bible study?

What is your biggest takeaway from Paul's writings so far?

Has your thinking been challenged? If so, how?

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES:

Here are the basic guidelines for each section of the text:

1. Depending on the length of the text, either read it aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: Romans 8, Romans 12:1-3

- Key Talk Points:**
- Walking by the Spirit doesn't mean having all the information.
 - Walking by the Spirit involves trusting the One who does have all the information and being transformed into His image.

Romans 8**Romans 8:1-17**

Throughout Romans 8 Paul contrasts two mindsets—one set on the flesh and one set on the Spirit. The Spirit inclines believers toward God, making obedience both desirable and possible. Help your class see that while it is a hard teaching for some to accept, those who do not have the Spirit of Christ do not belong to Him (v. 9).

This does not mean Christians will live a perfect life, but by the Spirit they will continue to put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13). More often we will choose words of grace over words that cut others. Our mind will be set toward serving others in a world that tells us to exalt ourselves. We will live in the assurance of God's love as sons, not slaves, because His Spirit testifies with ours that we are His children (v. 16).

Help your students see that this entire section of text is as far removed from “spiritual emotionalism” as possible; it is all about the mind transformed by the Spirit of God. The key words “mindset/set the mind” (Greek root: *phronema*) are thought words. Believers actively align their minds (thoughts) to God's ways and away from the world's ways. We choose forgiveness over retaliation, kindness over anger, humility over pride. We recognize and choose God's ways over the world's ways. This is something only the power of God can sustain.

Romans 8:18-30

Having the Spirit and walking by the Spirit does not mean we “see” the future (v. 24). Paul clearly says that Spirit-indwelled believers “hope for what we do not see” (v. 25). We will, though, know right from wrong and our hearts will long with creation for what God has in store. Much of the Christian life is “waiting eagerly” (Greek: *apekdechomai*); Paul uses this tension-filled term three times in these verses: 19, 23, and 25. Christ is our sure hope but we can't see Him yet. So we wait eagerly like a child on Christmas morning.

Waiting and praying taxes our hearts, particularly in a world that daily has more information than we can process and handle. We live in a world that cultivates a “need to know now” attitude and an unhealthy elevation of self that demands answers. We will always know enough to follow, but God has never intended for us to know everything. We don't need to if He is God. That He knows and is equipped to handle all is enough for us to know.

Help your class reason carefully through Romans 8:26-27. Believers do not always know what to pray for. Jesus taught His disciples *how* to pray but there are times

when we are at a loss to know specifics because our finite perspective can't give us all the information. But this should not impede our prayers because even though we don't know a great deal, the Spirit intercedes for us and aligns our prayers with God's will.

We don't need to know all the reasons why events happen. According to Scripture God works all things together for good for those who love Him and those who are the called according to His purpose (v. 28). Even in hard times I can know that God is in control and working because He has already assured me that He is and will.

Romans 8:31-38

Again Paul encourages his readers that even in situations that are terrible (tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword), where there is temptation to doubt God's love, they can be confident in this truth: there is nothing that can "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39).

God's love for us cannot be questioned as He not only foreknew, predestined, called, justified, and glorified us; He also did it not sparing His own Son.

God is for us . . . even when terrible things happen in a fallen world. Even when we don't know the answers to "Why?" in our little pictures of life. We can know some answers in the big picture Scripture gives us and we can live in confidence.

Living by the Spirit is being okay and assured even when everything around us says "Don't be."

Romans 12:1-3

Again we see the critical role of the mind in following God. Having outlined the Gospel in the first 11 chapters of his letter, Paul calls his readers to action in both body and mind. Presenting their bodies as "a living and holy sacrifice" is the reasonable (Greek: *logikos*, translated "spiritual" in the NASB) response. They are to guard their minds against being squeezed into the world's mold (Greek: *syschematizo*) and instead be transformed by having their minds renewed. The verb "transformed" (Greek: *metamorphoo*) is passive. Everyone is molded by something—either the world or God. Believers are to guard against the one and submit to the other.

Sample Discussion Questions:

What does walking by the Spirit involve?

Does walking by the Spirit mean we have "all the information"? Explain.

How and why can you walk confidently even when you don't have all the answers according to Romans 8?

What in your life has the most power to squeeze you into the world's mold?

What has been most helpful in conforming you to God's ways? Explain.

SEGMENT #3: 1 Corinthians 2

- Key Talk Points:**
- The message of the cross is spiritually understood.
 - We know the things freely given to us by God that have been revealed.
 - He has not revealed everything, but He has revealed more than enough!

1 Corinthians 2

In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul drives home the message “Jesus Christ, and Him crucified” and the ability or inability of people to understand it. The message of the cross is spiritually understood because it does not come from men or their wisdom but from God Himself.

Paul's contrast between the world's wisdom and God's wisdom fills both 1 Corinthians 1 and 2. The world in its wisdom cannot understand the message of the cross and those who do understand it do so because God gives them the ability.

As believers who have been given the indwelling Holy Spirit, we “know the things freely given to us by God” (v. 12). While unbelievers hear of the cross and snicker or mock, we hear and know that the preaching of the Gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16-17).

These verses do not teach that we will know everything God knows or that He will reveal to us everything we want to know about a given question or situation. Rather, having the mind of Christ and therefore able to “spiritually appraise” (Greek: *anakrino*; examine, judge, discern; passive in v. 14 indicating work of the Spirit) we can discern God's truth and men's lies as His Spirit guides us. Help your students see the connection here with the renewed mind in Romans 12. If you have time, you may also want to bring in Philippians 2.

Sample Discussion Questions:

How does man's wisdom differ from God's wisdom?

What kind of information do people often crave? Why?

What assurance does 2 Corinthians 2 give believers? Is it enough? Explain.

SEGMENT #4: Paul's Prayers for the Churches

- Key Talk Points:**
- Paul prays that people will know God.
 - We come to know God through His Word and His Spirit.

Ephesians 1:15-23

Paul prays that the Ephesians will have spiritual vision, that "the eyes of your heart may be enlightened." He prays that they will know some very specific things:

- Him, v. 17
- the hope of His calling, v. 18
- the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, v. 18
- the surpassing greatness of His power toward those who believe, v. 19

How often do we forget that even our faith in God is a gift? We believe because God has taken the veil off of our eyes and given us the ability to understand His Word and believe.

This does not mean full comprehension of every event, but a clear big picture. We live and walk as seeing that which is unseen (Hebrews 11:27). If you have time, you may want to take your class for a brief flyby of those who saw the unseen in Hebrews 11.

Knowing that God is using resurrection power in us who believe gives us the strength to live in hope of what is coming even in the darkest of days. Understanding the big picture and knowing tomorrow is sure can make all the difference when we can't make sense of today.

Colossians 1:9-12

Paul wants it “all” (Greek: *pas*) for the Colossian church:

- to know God’s will in ALL spiritual wisdom and understanding, v. 9
- to please God in ALL respects, v. 10
- to bear fruit in EVERY (still the Greek *pas*) good work, v. 10
- to be strengthened with ALL power, v. 11
- to attain ALL steadfastness and patience, v. 11

Using the word “knowledge” (Greek: *epignosis*) twice in the section, Paul first refers to the knowledge of God’s will and then to knowledge of God Himself. Help your students see that this is knowledge that transforms thinking and action. As we know God better, as we abide in the vine (John 15), He transforms us more and more into the image of His Son (Romans 8:28).

Sample Discussion Questions:

What do people with spiritual vision see and understand according to the text?

What practical outcome will this knowledge have?

SEGMENT #5: Paul’s Instructions and Warnings

- Key Talk Points:**
- Don’t be tossed about, deceived, and defrauded.
 - Grow up and think with your renewed mind.
 - Don’t desert the Gospel.

Ephesians 4:14-24

Having just talked about spiritual gifts and maturing in Christ, Paul addresses some specific dos and don’ts.

As people mature in Christ—and this is Paul’s goal for all—they are no longer to be children who are easily deceived or like Gentiles who simply lack truth. Instead, they are to grow up and walk as adults with renewed minds, laying aside the old self and putting on the new self.

In laying out what the Ephesians are “no longer” to be, Paul fleshes out the characteristics of “children” and “Gentile.”

NO LONGER BE CHILDREN (Greek: *nepios*, literally “infants”)

–tossed here and there by waves, v. 14

–carried about by

- every wind of doctrine, v. 14
- the trickery of men, v. 14
- craftiness in deceitful scheming, v. 14

Children can be swayed by those who are misled themselves and by those who intentionally defraud in order to harm. Although we don't want to read into the text, demonic influences are alluded to in the phrase “craftiness in deceitful scheming” as craftiness and scheming are clearly associated with Satan (see also 2 Corinthians 11:3, Ephesians 6:11). Paul's bottom line: Children are easy prey . . . so Grow Up!

NO LONGER WALK IN FUTILITY OF MIND as the Gentiles

–futile minds, v. 17

–darkened in understanding, v. 18

–excluded from life of God because of ignorance, v. 18

–callous, v. 19

–practicing every kind of impurity, v. 19

Paul contrasts the futile (vain, empty) Gentile mind with the renewed mind of believers.

Colossians 2:18-23

The word the NASB translates “defrauding” (Greek: *katabrabeuo*) literally means “to judge against” and it's associated with games. The idea here is that of an umpire who rules against the people of true faith.

Paul pictures self-appointed umpires of the Christian life who like “officiating” in others' lives. They commend themselves for things believers properly reject:

- physical self-abasement
- angel worship
- visions of their own minds

The Greek word for **self-abasement** (*tapeinophrosune*) is translated “humility” in other places in Scripture. In those cases it is an internal quality, the negation of pride. Here it is used to describe showy (sometimes harsh) externals like gloomy faces hypocrites put on to prove they're fasting (Matthew 6:16-17). This is counter to godly humility which does not seek to be “noticed by men” (v. 16).

Worship of angels—or anything other than God for that matter—is prohibited by the first of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:3-5). Paul warns against receiving “another gospel” even from an angel (Galatians 1:8). An angel tells John to worship God alone (Revelation 22:9).

While God has a history of speaking to people in visions, Paul takes to task here people who arrogantly claim **visions** by referring their origination to “fleshly minds.” “Paul does not deny the visions; he regards them as a false path because as he sees it all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are given him in Christ alone (2:3)” (Herbert Preisker in Kittel, G., Bromiley, G. W., & Friedrich, G. [Eds.]. [1964]. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [electronic ed., Vol. 2, p. 536]. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.)

Long story short is this: Paul tells us to ignore those who treat their bodies harshly, worship angels, and claim visions and judge us negatively if we don't. He tells us to hold fast to Christ.

Help your students understand that even today we see contrast between those who desire Christ, godly wisdom, and humility and those who crave only showy human wisdom and practices.

Galatians 1:6-9

The grave threat Paul addresses in Galatians is rejecting the truth of the Gospel message itself.

The Galatians were drifting away from the true Gospel of salvation by grace through faith and veering toward a works-based religion that certain Jewish leaders were trying to impose on them. To this, Paul said “No!”

Not even a known apostle or angel could alter the Gospel message Paul had delivered. Paul is clear that the Gospel has been revealed and will not change. Even if he—a recognized apostle who had seen the risen Lord—or an angel should give a message, contrary to what he had already preached and the church had received, that person was to be accursed. Twice he calls God's destruction (Greek: *anathema*) down on anyone who would dare preach a contrary gospel.

Can this happen today? Remind your students that not everything that claims to be light (truth) is light. Paul tells the Corinthians in Corinthians 11:14 that “even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.” The only norm for truth is the revealed Word of God.

Sample Discussion Questions:

What warnings does Paul give these churches that are particularly relevant today? Why?

How are you biblically growing up in your faith?

How are you encouraging others to grow?

Wrap-Up Questions:

What have been your biggest takeaways this week?

How is the truth you're learning changing the way you're thinking and acting?

WEEK EIGHT

He Who Has An Ear, Let Him Hear

Class-at-a-Glance

<i>Segments</i>	<i>1 Hour Class</i>	<i>Topic</i>
Segment 1:	5 min.	Review
Segment 2:	20 min.	John's Epistles
Segment 3:	15 min.	John's Vision: Revelation 1:1-20
Segment 4:	20 min.	Jesus' Words to the Churches

START CLASS HERE

SEGMENT #1: Review

Review Basic Concepts

What are the basic components of Inductive Bible study?

Which one did you progress in most during this class?

How are you doing with applying what you are learning?

DISCUSSION GUIDELINES:

Yes, you probably have these memorized by now, but just in case you need them here are the basic guidelines for each section of the text:

1. Depending on the length of the text, either read it aloud or help your class talk through a summary of it using the 5Ws and H to hit the high points.
2. Identify who God is speaking to.
3. Note why He speaks and what He reveals.
4. If another voice is speaking, note what characterizes that voice.
5. Discuss how people respond to God's voice and to other voices, and what results.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS WEAVE IN APPLICATION QUESTIONS.

You can find many in the Workbook and you can add your own.

SEGMENT #2: John's Epistles

Key Talk Points: • John was an eye-witness to Jesus' life and ministry.

- John points his readers to revealed truth.
- John warns of false teachers to come.

1 John

Just as judge and jury look for eye-witnesses to confirm the truth of events, John's message to his readers about "the eternal life which was with the Father" (1:2) is built not on hearsay, visions or dreams, but on propositional revelation from the Father through His Son. His instructions and warnings are clear practical diagnostic tools for people to examine their own lives and so they can know if they truly know God.

In chapter 2, John warns:

- People who say they know God and disobey His commands are liars; *they do not have the truth.*
- People who say they are "in the Light" and hate their brothers still walk in darkness; *they do not have the Light.*
- People who love the world *do not have the Father's love in them.*

Help your students see that when John talks about not loving the world, he is referring to the world system (Greek: *cosmos*) which is characterized by "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life" (2:16).

Then and now, talk is cheap. Claiming to have truth, light, and love means nothing if not backed up by a life that validates the claims. Those who know Jesus will live in a manner that shows the relationship:

- keeping His commandments/His word (2:3, 5)
- walking the way He walked (2:6)
- loving the brethren (2:10; 3:14; 4:7)
- doing the will of God (2:17); practicing righteousness (2:29)
- abiding in what they have heard from the beginning (2:24)
- abiding in Him (2:27-28)
- confessing that Jesus has come in the flesh and is the Son of God (4:2, 15)

While John assumes his readers know truth (2:21) he still warns them about false prophets and deceivers, specifically those who deny that Jesus is the Christ (2:22). That Jesus is fully God and became fully man (came in the flesh) is a key distinctive truth of orthodox Christianity.

The world listens to the Spirit of Antichrist, not to the witness of the Prophets and Apostles who preached the Word of God throughout the ages. The one who knows God, though, listens to and embraces the preaching and teaching of God's Word.

John, an eye-witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, points his readers to what they already know about Jesus and what pleases Him and assures them that the Spirit will lead them to all truth (John 14). They need not fear, but they must be wise and guard against deceivers Jesus Himself warned would come.

2 and 3 John

“Truth” is a common key word in John’s second and third letters. In 2 John, he is concerned again about deceivers who do not acknowledge the humanity of Jesus. The proper way to guard against this and other deception is to “abide in the teaching of Christ” (2 John 9). John says we should not support in any way those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ. We are never to be complicit in the spread of false teaching.

Truth again is at the forefront in 3 John where John loves in truth (v. 1), his readers are “walking in the truth” (v. 3), and believers are to be “fellow workers with the truth” (v. 8).

Sample Discussion Questions:

What is John most concerned about in his letters? Where does he want his readers to focus their attention?

What are his key instructions/commands? How are you doing at these?

What are his key warnings? How do they apply today? How are you doing at listening and obeying?

SEGMENT #3: John’s Vision—Revelation 1:1-20

- Key Talk Points:**
- John and Jesus were friends.
 - John responds to the vision of the glorified Christ by falling at Jesus’ feet like a dead man.

Revelation 1:1-20

As you walk your students through this next section, help them understand that even though John knew Jesus intimately on earth, this “reunion” was nonetheless terrifying because of His Master’s glory. While the risen Christ touches him and is kind, telling John not to be afraid, His appearance brings to mind Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9-10:

“I kept looking
Until thrones were set up,
And the Ancient of Days took His seat;
His vesture was like white snow
And the hair of His head like pure wool.
His throne was ablaze with flames,
Its wheels were a burning fire.
“A river of fire was flowing
And coming out from before Him;
Thousands upon thousands were attending Him,
And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him;
The court sat,
And the books were opened.”

Writing from the isle of Patmos and likely exiled there by the emperor Domitian, John is a credible witness who had walked on earth with Jesus and received a message from Him mediated by an angel to give to the churches.

Sample Discussion Questions:

Is John’s trepidation what you would expect, given his relationship with Jesus during His earthly ministry? Why/why not?

How does John’s vision of Jesus in Revelation compare with Daniel’s vision of the Ancient of Days in the book of Daniel?

What made John and Daniel credible witnesses? How do these accounts compare with modern-day accounts from people claiming to have heard from Jesus?

SEGMENT #4: Jesus' Words to the Churches

Key Talk Points:

- Jesus commends and reproaches the churches.
- Jesus specifically instructs each church.

Context/Comments: Jesus addresses a variety of churches ranging from those following well to those in grave danger. As you talk through this section, help your students wrestle with how our churches compare to these seven churches, where Jesus points their gaze, and what He tells them to do and prepare for.

Ephesus*Positives*

- deeds, 2:2
- toil, 2:2
- perseverance, 2:2, 3
- cannot tolerate evil men, 2:2
- put to the test false apostles, 2:2
- endurance, 2:3
- not weary, 2:3
- hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, 2:6

[While there is disagreement on the precise identity of the Nicolaitans and exactly what they taught, it is clear that they taught false doctrine and lived immoral lives incompatible with true belief.]

Negative

- left their first love, 2:4

Bottom line

- remember where you've fallen from, 2:5
- repent, 2:5
- do what you used to do, 2:5

Smyrna*Positives*

- endured tribulation, 2:9
- endured poverty but "rich" spiritually, 2:9
- endured blasphemy, 2:9

Negatives

None mentioned

Bottom line

- suffering is coming, 2:10
- some will be cast into prison, 2:10
- you will be tested, 2:10
- you will have tribulation, 2:10
- be faithful until death, 2:10

Pergamum*Positives*

- hold fast Jesus' name, 2:13
- did not deny My faith (even when people were being martyred), 2:13

Negatives

- some hold to the teaching of Balaam—enticing people to idolatry and immorality, 2:14
- some hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans, 2:15

Bottom line

- repent

Thyatira*Positives*

- deeds getting better, love, faith, service, and perseverance, 2:19

Negatives

- tolerate false prophetess named Jezebel who teaches and leads Jesus' bond-servants (Greek: *doulos*) astray to commit immorality, 2:20

[The reference to bond-servants committing idolatry probably refers to true believers enticed to commit isolated acts of sin as the verbs *porneuo* (to fornicate) and *esthio* (to eat, here coupled with “meat offered to idols”) are aorist infinitives. If these were habitual (ongoing) sins we’d expect to see the present tense of the verbs.]

- some have known the deep things of Satan, 2:24

Bottom line

- Jezebel will be judged (“I will throw her on a bed of sickness”), 2:22
- Jezebel's children will be killed with pestilence, 2:23
- repent of Jezebel's deeds or be thrown into great tribulation with her, 2:22
- others are to “hold fast” until Jesus comes, 2:25

Sardis

Positives

- had received and heard the truth, 3:3
- they had begun good deeds, 3:2 (but see below)
- some are worthy and not soiled, 3:4

Negatives

- although they look alive, they are dead, 3:1
- their deeds are incomplete, 3:2

Bottom line

- wake up, 3:2
- strengthen what remains, 3:2
- remember, 3:3
- keep what you received and heard, 3:3
- repent, 3:3

Philadelphia

Positives

- deeds, 3:8
- have a little power, 3:8
- have kept Jesus' word and not denied His name, 3:8

Negatives

None mentioned

Bottom line

- Jesus will keep them from the hour of testing, 3:10
- They are to "hold fast" what they have until Jesus comes, 3:11

Laodicea

Positives

- Jesus loves them, 3:19

Negatives

- lukewarm: neither cold nor hot, 3:16
- wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked but don't know it, 3:17

Bottom line

- be zealous and repent or Jesus will spit you out of His mouth, 3:19

Sample Discussion Questions:

Which church do you relate with most? Why?

What common problems did some of these churches have? Do we see similar problems today?

What does Jesus tell the various churches to do going forward?

How are you doing at having ears that hear?

Final Wrap-Up Questions:

What has been your biggest takeaway from studying God's Word these past weeks? How is it changing the way you think and act? How will you remember it and live it out?

What's your next step in the Word as this study is coming to a close?