

Theoacademy

Form Your Faith. Anytime. Anywhere.

Lesson 4: Update Your Faith System

Theocademy

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Getting Started

Before watching the video, consider the following questions.

- Have you studied the Bible before? If so, what types of experiences have you had? If not, what do you think a Bible study is “supposed” to look like?
- If someone in this church came up to you and invited you to attend a Bible study, what would your response be? Why do you think you’d give that sort of response?

During the Video

As you watch the video, think about the following questions.

- What are some of the ways Christians have historically approached the idea of Bible study?
- Why isn’t merely learning **about** the Bible sufficient?
- Why should we as Christians constantly re-evaluate our faith?
- How can the Bible help us to re-evaluate our faith?

What's So Special about the Bible?

As the video describes, we Christians are a “People of the Book.” But that book has been around for thousands of years – so why do we keep coming back to it? Let’s take a look at what some of the Bible writers have to say about that. As a group, read through the following passages and discuss the accompanying questions.

Psalms 119:7-16 I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. ⁸ I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me. ⁹ How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. ¹¹ I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. ¹² Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. ¹³ With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. ¹⁴ I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

John 1:1-4 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

- What terms and ideas are used to describe the Bible in these passages?

- Think back to the idea of *shalom* that we discussed in the second lesson. According to these passages (and any others that you might know), how does God’s Word help us to restore *shalom* in our relationships?

God and Humans	
Humans and World	
Humans and Other Humans	

- How do these writers describe their approach to scripture? In what way(s) is it similar to your approach? In what way(s) is it different?

Trust Me – I Have a Plan!

For a lot of Christians, the biggest roadblock to studying the Bible is the intimidation factor. It's nothing to be ashamed of – like we've already mentioned, the Bible is thousands of years old and talks about people and situations that don't seem to be that similar to our modern context. It's easy to get discouraged or frustrated, and think that it's not worth the effort to dig into the Bible. Keep in mind, though, the fact that it's **been** thousands of years and we still haven't run out of things to say about this book means that there's something special going on here. God can (and does) still speak in a powerful way through scripture to those who study it – so what we need, then, is a strategy that can make our study both systematic and meaningful. Here's one option for you to consider. By no means is it the only strategy, and by all means can it be adapted to fit your particular needs. Think of it as a skeleton that you can “flesh out” as you see fit.

Step 1. Find the main point of the passage.

Get the “Big Idea” of what the author's trying to get across.

- What is the author talking about here?
- What is the author trying to say about what s/he's talking about here?

Step 2. Determine the context of the passage.

You don't have to answer all these questions; just pick the ones that are the most relevant. This is where resources like a Study Bible, a Bible dictionary, or a Bible commentary might come in handy.

- **Who** is the author? **Who** is the audience?
- **What** cultural or historical details would help to clarify the meaning or significance of this passage?
- **When** was this passage written?
- **Where** was this passage written? **Where** did the events take place?
- **Why** was this passage written? (What occasion/purpose caused the author to write it?)
- **How** was this passage written? (In what form did the author choose to convey his/her message – narrative, poetry, letter, law, etc.?)

Step 3. What does the rest of the Bible have to say about this?

A key tenet of Reformation faith is that scripture is its own best interpreter; let's run with it.

- Is this passage quoted elsewhere in scripture? If so, where? How does/do the other reference(s) interpret this passage?
- Where else in the Bible are the themes or ideas of this passage mentioned? How are they handled there?

Step 4. How does this affect my life?

The study of scripture was never meant to be solely an academic exercise. Put feet on it!

- In what way(s) do the details of my life intersect with what's going on in this passage?
- How would my life look/be different if I really took this passage seriously?

Let's Try It Out!

John 4 tells the story of Jesus' life-changing encounter with a Samaritan woman at a well one hot afternoon. With a partner, read through the chapter and take it through the four-step strategy. If time permits, share your findings with the group.

John 4:1-42 Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John"² -- although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized--³ he left Judea and started back to Galilee.⁴ But he had to go through Samaria.⁵ So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink."⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.)⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?"¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?"¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back."¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband';¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!"¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem."²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us."²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?"²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people,²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something."³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about."³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?"³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work.³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed

there two days.⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word.⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Step	Findings
1. Main Point	
2. Context	
3. Rest of the Bible	
4. My Life	

For Further Study

Book of Order

- **W-1.1004:** Through Scripture, proclamation, and Sacraments, God in Christ is present by the Holy Spirit acting to transform, empower, and sustain human lives. In Christian worship the people of God (1) hear the Word proclaimed, (2) receive the Word enacted in Sacrament, (3) discover the Word in the world, and (4) are sent to follow the Word into the world.
- **W-5.3001:** Scripture is the record of God's self-revelation through which the Holy Spirit speaks to bear witness to Jesus Christ and to give authoritative direction for the life of faith. Personal worship centers upon Scripture as one reads and listens for God's Spirit to speak.
- **W-6.2006:** The primary standard and resource for the nurture of the church is the Word of God in Scripture.

Second Helvetic Confession

- **Chapter 1. CANONICAL SCRIPTURE.** We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures. And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same.

Westminster Confession

- **Chapter 1.6.** The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture:10 unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.11 Nevertheless we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word;12 and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed.

Westminster Shorter Catechism

- **Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?** A. The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Confession of 1967

- **Part 1.C.2 :** The one sufficient revelation of God is Jesus Christ, the Word of God incarnate, to whom the Holy Spirit bears unique and authoritative witness through the Holy Scriptures, which are received and obeyed as the word of God written. The Scriptures are not a witness among others, but the witness without parallel. The church has received the books of the Old and New Testaments as prophetic and apostolic testimony in which it hears the word of God and by which its faith and obedience are nourished and regulated. As God has spoken his word in diverse cultural situations, the church is confident that he will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.