

Effective Bible Study

Discerning and Applying God's Truth

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Effective Bible Study: Discerning and Applying God's Truth
Adult Bible Study Leader's Guide

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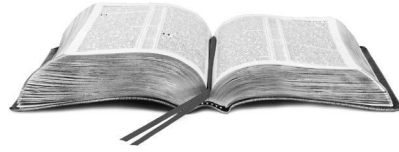
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Contents



Lesson 1	The Bible Is God's Revealed Word	9
Lesson 2	The Bible Is God's Accurate Word	17
Lesson 3	The Bible Is Profitable	24
Lesson 4	The Bible Is God-directed Truth	31
Lesson 5	Steps to Effective Bible Study	39
Lesson 6	Observing Context and Text	46
Lesson 7	Observing Narratives	54
Lesson 8	Literary Types and Structure	62
Lesson 9	Figures and Feelings	70
Lesson 10	The Right Tools for the Job	78
Lesson 11	A Solid Explanation	86
Lesson 12	Just Live It!	93
Lesson 13	Bible Study Is a Joy	100

How to Use *Truth for Living*

Truth for Living:

A comprehensive, trustworthy curriculum that presents the truth of God's Word without compromise. The curriculum plan includes through-the-Bible courses as well as topical courses. Perfect for adults who want a guide in using all of God's Word as God intended.

As you prepare to teach these lessons, keep these two factors in mind:

- The FOCUS of productive adult Bible learning is the learner. The intent of teaching is not teaching, but learning—the learner's learning.
- The GOAL of productive adult Bible learning is an appropriate life-response to Biblical truth. You do not teach simply to impart information; you teach so that the Holy Spirit of God can use the truths of the Word of God to change the child of God into the image of the Son of God.

The Lesson Plan

Each *Truth for Living* lesson has three distinct parts. GETTING STARTED is the attention-getter. The questions and activities “set the table,” as it were, for the study. SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES is the heart of the lesson. A series of study questions leads the teacher and learners through the Biblical text. MAKING IT PERSONAL applies the truth to life.

As is true of any teaching experience, you can adapt the parts of the lesson to fit your particular class. You may choose to alter the beginning activities or change the focus of the application. You will find more material in the study than you can probably cover in one class session.

The Study Book

This leader's guide is designed to accompany the Bible study book. We encourage you to distribute Bible study books to your learners. Urge them to complete the study before class. The more your learners have studied on their own, the better the class discussions will be. Most of the questions in the leader's guide are picked up from the Bible study book. You will notice the question numbers in parentheses after the questions. The answers to the questions are in italics following the questions.

Other Resources

The resource CD has PowerPoint presentations for every lesson. They incorporate the resource visuals and provide a good way for teachers and learners to track the lesson. The resource CD also has Prezi presentations for some of the lessons. Instructions for using the Prezi presentations are on the CD. Other resources include lesson outlines and verse cards.

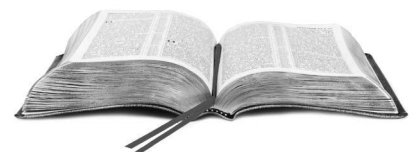
Preface

Effective Bible Study is designed to show students the character of God's Word and provide them with a laboratory to develop the skills necessary to dig into God's Book personally.

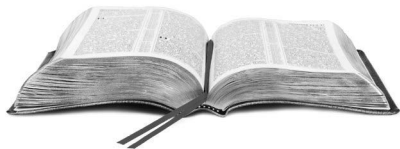
Second Timothy 3:16 and 17 provides motivation and direction for us: *All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.* Paul expected Timothy to accomplish enormous tasks, and the Word of God is the tool that made it possible.

Second Timothy 3:16 opens our eyes to the nature and use of God's Word. When we open it, we must remember that it comes directly from God. Although we know that God breathed his Word, He did not tell us many of the details of the process. He used prophets to communicate His Word. He spoke with them and guarded them from error in teaching His truth. He protected His Word so that it would come to us without error. That gives us full confidence in it. We can actually hold the message from God in our hands!

The God who authored the Word also determines its proper use. That certainly is an author's prerogative. In this case, He wants us to use His revelation for four doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. As we do, God's Word will furnish us for all good works.



The Bible Is God's Revealed Word



Topic

Revelation

Theme

God reveals His truth and His nature through general and special revelation.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will appropriately respond to God's revelation of Himself.

Materials

- Resource 1
- Visual 1

Scripture Focus

Psalm 19:1–11; Romans 1:18–20; Hebrews 1:1–4; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17

Summary

God reveals His truth through revelation. Understanding the difference between general and special revelation will show the importance of God's written Word, the Bible—the only way to personally know God and to live His way.

Outline

I. God's Revelation

- Definition
- Purpose
- Implications

II. General Revelation

- Definition
- Benefits
- Limitations

III. Special Revelation

- Definition
- Methods
 - Prophets
 - Miracles
 - Visions and dreams
- Embodiment
 - Jesus Christ
 - Bible

Memory Verses

*"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork.
 . . . The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul:
 the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple"
 (Psalm 19:1, 7).*

GETTING STARTED

To Where Do I Turn?

ASK: How likely are you to seek directions when you don't know what to do or where to go? (Q1)

ASK: Where do people often turn for directions on how to live life to its fullest? (Q2) *Other people, experts, themselves.*

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. **ASK:** In what areas of life do we need direction from God? (Q3) (Reveal or record answers.)

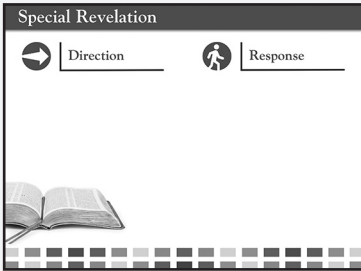
This lesson will emphasize the specialness of God's special revelation in the Bible. It will encourage believers to desire to be in God's Word to find direction for life.

After the Storm

When Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, Louisiana, in 2005, the devastated evacuees asked first for water and food. Their third request was for Bibles.

ASK: Why would the displaced New Orleans residents want the Bible in a time of devastation and loss?

ASK: What does the Bible have that no other possession can provide? *God's living truth.*



SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

We desperately need God's truth. Life is meaningless without it. Praise God that He wisely revealed to us all the truth we need to know to be rightly related to Him.

I. God's Revelation

A. Definition

Revelation is the work of God by which He makes Himself and His purposes known to humanity. This definition does not specify how God sends revelation, because the means are secondary to His purpose in giving it. His purpose is to allow people to have knowledge of Him.

B. Purposes

Revelation existed before Adam sinned. Of course, the heavens declared the glory of God from the moment God created them. But even in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve needed God to show them truth. Neither of them knew their purpose as individuals or as a couple until God taught them.

On the sixth day of creation, God took the initiative to show Adam's incomplete-

ness. Adam needed a helper suited to him (Gen. 2:18–20). To meet Adam’s need, God created Eve and brought her to Adam (2:21–24). Adam was overjoyed. He said, *This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*. So God initiated His revelation to Adam, revealed Adam’s need, and then revealed that He met Adam’s need.

God still reveals His truth to humanity today, but humanity’s need for God’s truth has changed. The need is now desperate because sin entered the world and affected every person’s relationship with God (Rom. 3:10). Every person would be separated forever from God if God did not reveal how to be reconciled to Him.

Human attempts to seek answers to life have usually ended up with the creation of idols as physical representations of gods. Making idols allows people to be in control of their gods. They set up the rules for worshiping their god and even place demands on it. Their gods are obligated to respond to their actions. Of course, their gods are completely worthless because they are lifeless.

READ: Psalm 115:1–8. **ASK:** Contrast what the passage says about God with what it says about idols. (Q4) *God resides in Heaven, does what He pleases, helps those who trust in Him, and is the creator of all. Idols are lifeless, helpless, inanimate objects made by helpless people.*

ASK: What does the making and worship of idols, both in Old Testament times and now, reveal about the universal needs of humanity? (Q5) *All people are created to commune with God. Idol worship is a futile attempt to meet that need.*

Since sin warps the thinking process (Rom. 1:28), we cannot think our way out of the mess of sin. In fact, our understanding is darkened (Eph. 4:18), and our minds are hostile and rebellious against God. We cannot please Him (Rom. 8:7, 8). Our sinfulness has created a world of error and confusion, and we cannot find the way to peace and life.

God’s revelation reveals God’s grace. When we were blinded by sin, God caused the light of the gospel to shine so we could see the way to Him (2 Cor. 4:4). At the root of the term translated as *revelation* is the idea of *unveiling*. God unveils what we would not have known and could not have known, including what we needed to live as His child.

The revelation of God gives us the opportunity to know the will of God. We can learn of His nature and of His plan. However, we should realize that God has not revealed everything that He might have revealed. According to Deuteronomy 29:29, God has reserved some secrets for Himself.

God’s revelation is not deficient in anyway. It gives us all we need to know in order to obey Him and be rightly related to Him.

C. Implications

There are several important implications of God’s revelation to humanity. We must submit to God’s revelation without trying to guess what God has chosen not to tell us. We must also be satisfied with the information He has determined that we should know. We must acknowledge that our greatest need is to be reconciled to God, and then we must recognize that His revelation gives us the only opportunity for reconciliation.

God has revealed truth to us in different ways. Without God's revelation we would be clueless and absolutely hopeless.

II. General Revelation

A. Definition

General revelation is called *natural* revelation by some theologians. It may be defined as God's work of revealing truth about Himself through the universe He has created. The first chapters of the Bible reveal God's creative activity. When there was no one else, He existed. When there was nothing, He created something. According to Exodus 20:11, *For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day.* Many places in the Bible pick up on this theme, but Romans 1 and Psalm 19 clearly teach the benefits of general revelation.

B. Benefits

According to the apostle Paul, judgment hangs over humanity because humans are ignoring the obvious. Creation necessarily points to a creator. It is God's teaching device, and ever since the time of the creation of the world, Creation has been announcing His presence (Rom. 1:18–20).

READ: Romans 1:18–20. **VISUAL:** Display visual 1. **ASK:** What conclusions about God could we draw from these pictures of God's Creation?

Paul asserted that Creation gives every person a clear, unmistakable message about God. Humanity's problem is not that people cannot see what is clear, but that they choose to ignore it.

ASK: According to Romans 1:18, what do people naturally do with the truth they learn about God from nature? (Q7) *They suppress it or push it out of their minds.*

ASK: How is this reaction to the truth seen today in society? (Q8) *The widespread acceptance of the theory of evolution as truth; the reliance on humanity to save the earth from becoming uninhabitable; the growing intolerance of people who teach Biblical truth.*

People suppress the truth that surrounds them every minute of every day. While Creation provides a great benefit for them—they know of God's existence—they ignore that revelation to their eternal peril.

Paul's thoughts in Romans 1:18–20 might have been sparked by Psalm 19:1–6. Both the heavens and the skies speak volumes about God. They teach day and night (Ps. 19:2).

READ: Psalm 19:1–6. **ASK:** Why is it significant that general revelation reaches around the globe? (Q9) *No one is exempt from God's revelation of Himself through nature.*

The heavens and the sky teach across the cultural barriers of the globe (19:3, 4). As an example, God offers the daily journey of the sun. Just as the sun illumines every-



The word *hold* in Romans 1:18 means to *hold down* or to *suppress*.

thing on the face of the earth, so the universe illumines the God Who created it.

God's character is glorious, according to Psalm 19:1. The word *glory* contains the concept of *worthiness*, of *value that is unmistakable*. God has done that which no one else can do. Not only did He create something out of nothing, but He also made it vast and grand and complex. The general revelation of Creation shows us a God Who is worthy of worship.

C. Limitations

General revelation, however, is limited in its effect. It *shows*, but it does not *speak*. We learn of God's existence, power, and glory, but we learn relatively little of His character. General revelation does not reveal the way to a relationship with God, that is, the way of salvation.

READ: Romans 8:18–22. **ASK:** What effect does the curse on the universe have on the effectiveness of general revelation to reveal God? (Q10) *Natural disasters, sickness, and killings can cause some to accuse God of not being in control or of being a God Who does not care.*

The majesty of Creation, even in its sin-cursed state, should draw people to the Creator. They should become curious, asking how they could know the One Who had the ability to create a system as large as the universe. To find the answer, humanity needs special revelation.

III. Special Revelation

A. Definition

Special revelation is not special because it is better in quality than general revelation; its uniqueness lies in its narrower purpose. In special revelation, God revealed truth that will bring humanity into a saving relationship with Him and will meet their needs within that relationship. In a sense, special revelation is built on the foundation of general revelation. Those who respond to creation's call to learn of the creator must do so on His terms.

B. Methods

God used an interesting variety of methods to provide special revelation.

1. Prophets

The *prophet* served as the *mouth* of the Lord. Prophets never gave their own ideas as if they were the originators of God's message. They were carried along by the Spirit as they provided revelation (2 Pet. 1:21). We know very little about the way God revealed His message to the prophets. When *the word of the LORD* came to the prophet, he relayed the same words to the people. What he received, he gave, so God must have spoken with the prophets in their own languages.

READ: Deuteronomy 13:1–5. **ASK:** What do God's instructions to Israel about false prophets tell you about how seriously God took the prophet's role? (Q11) *God took the role of prophets very seriously in that He instructed Israel to put false prophets to death.*

The prophets were careful to state the divine authority for their message, so the announcement *thus says the LORD* rings throughout the Old Testament. Failure to heed the prophet was failure to heed God (1 Sam. 15:1–3, 19–23).

2. Miracles

God also used *miracles* as a form of special revelation. When God created the universe, He designed its mechanisms. The universe operates by the laws that God placed into effect. Since He is the Creator of both the universe and its systems, He may choose to bypass His laws to convey a message.

ASK: What are some examples from the Bible of God's superseding the laws of nature to convey a message? (Q12) *Crossing of the Red Sea, Exodus 14; drought during the reign of Ahab, 1 Kings 17:1; Jesus' walking on water, Mark 6:45–51.*

READ: Exodus 7:5. **ASK:** What message did God send to the Egyptians by bringing the plagues upon them? (Q13) *That He is the Lord.*

As the plagues God brought on Egypt intensified (Exod. 7–12), the Lord made it clear to Pharaoh that he could not seek a natural explanation for God's miracles. The plague of flies did not affect Goshen, the homeland of Israel, though the flies made life unbearable for the Egyptians (8:20–24). This special revelation was designed *to the end thou mayest know that I am the LORD in the midst of the earth* (8:22).

In addition to this evangelistic purpose, the Lord's miracles influenced His people, drawing them to a deeper knowledge of His love and care for them. During Israel's forty years of wandering in the wilderness, God brought miraculous food daily in the form of manna. He provided water out of a rock where there was no water. The Israelite's shoes and clothing did not wear out as the people traveled. His miracles tested and humbled Israel so the people would depend on Him and His Word alone (Deut. 8:1–4). All of this proved that God cared enough for His people to discipline them and draw them back to Himself (8:5).

3. Visions and dreams

On occasion, God used visions and dreams as special revelation. He supplied the interpretation of these revelations, lest the recipient choose the wrong option from the many possible interpretations. Joseph's rise to prominence was revealed in advance by his dreams (Gen. 37). Later God gave Pharaoh dreams that made sense only when God allowed Joseph to interpret them (41). Much later, Ezekiel had a vision of the temple that God would allow Israel to rebuild in the millennial rule of Christ. The reality of the vision and the certainty of its fulfillment are seen in the exacting design and dimensions revealed (Ezek. 40–43).

ASK: Why doesn't God use visions and dreams to convey His messages today? (Q14) *The Bible represents God's completed revelation for this age.*

C. Embodiment

Special revelation is forever tangible and observable in the person of Jesus

Christ and in the record of God's Word, the Bible. All the means of special revelation detailed above pale when compared to the revelation of Jesus Christ and the Bible.

1. Jesus Christ

As God in flesh, Jesus is the perfect revelation of God. John 1:1 and 2 plainly teach the eternity of Christ. As the Word, He has always existed and has always been God. When He came to earth, He revealed His glory to humanity.

READ: John 1:1, 2, 14. **ASK:** What is included in the glory that people behold when they look at Jesus, the Word? (Q15) *They can know the glory of the Father because the Word is God.*

The first four verses of Hebrews make clear the fact that Jesus is the perfect revelation of God.

READ: Hebrews 1:1–4. **ASK:** According to these verses, what do we learn about God from the life of Christ? (Q16) *The glory and person of God.*

READ: John 14:7–11. **ASK:** What did Christ convey to His disciples about His relationship with the Father? (Q17) *Christ showed the Father by His life; Christ was in the Father and the Father was in Christ; the Father did works through Christ.*

By His sacrifice, Jesus also revealed that He is the way to God the Father. He *purged our sins* by His death on the cross (Heb. 1:3). Special revelation goes far beyond stretching our minds with information that we would never have guessed from general revelation. It draws us to the knowledge of God. It gives us an opportunity to be rightly related to God.

2. Bible

We know about special revelation because God recorded some of it in the Bible (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). But the Bible is far more than a record of God's special revelation. The Bible *is* special revelation. It is God-breathed; therefore, it is miraculous in essence and accurate in its entirety. It is designed to reveal God to us and draw us to a vital relationship with Him. God's Word has extraordinary value because it leads us to Him (Ps. 19:7–11). During the succeeding lessons of this course, we will explore the unique aspects of the Bible's special revelation.

ASK: Why might we sometimes take God's Word for granted and fail to treat it as the very Word of God? (Q18) *We are so familiar with it; we have immediate access to it; we are free to read it without fear of persecution.*

Special revelation gives us the opportunity to know God. That knowledge leads to a growing relationship with Him. We need to learn a great deal, but the task is not unpleasant. The Lord saw our need for Him and responded with just the sort of revelation that we needed to gain true knowledge. Psalm 19:7 and 8 teach that the Word is absolutely trustworthy and that it will bring change to our lives.

When we immerse ourselves in God's Word, we begin to know the Lord as we desire. His Word will not disappoint us.

Responding to General Revelation

ASK: How will you respond when you observe God's general revelation in Creation? (Q19)

ASK: How might you use Creation as a door to introducing others to God? (Q20)

Responding to Special Revelation

RESOURCE: Display resource 1. **ASK:** How should you respond when you are exposed to God's special revelation? (Q21) (Reveal or record answers.)

ASK: What do you need to do to immerse yourself more regularly in God's Word? (Q22)

Encourage your learners to plan to attend the Effective Bible Study course. Learning to understand and apply the Bible is the first step in developing a meaningful relationship with the God Who wrote it.

