

Confirmation Lesson #27 - "The Bible As A Guide To Belief"

Lesson Preparation

Purpose: To help class members understand and appreciate how the UMC approaches the Bible as a guide to belief and the different ways that the Bible can help us in our beliefs and in our living of the faith.

Core Teaching: For United Methodists the Bible is both the "*measuring stick*" (canon) and "*primary source*" of belief. We begin with scripture as the place where we learn who **God is**, who **we are**, and what **the relationship** is between God and us. We believe that the Bible contains truth - many different kinds of truth that must be interpreted in many different ways.

Small Group Resources: **Each small group will need: flip chart, a Bible, a grab bag containing nine items: a compass, a real roadmap, a small mirror, a piece of yarn 6 feet long, a miniature window, a tool - pliers, screwdriver, etc., a family photo album, crystal ball, and a CD of an encyclopedia.**

Preparation: Have a **yardstick** and a **Bible** available up front along with crystal ball and CD of an encyclopedia.

Scripture: **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**, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.*

2 Peter 1:20-21

*First of all you must understand this, that **no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation**, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

Luke 4:14-21

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to

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the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

John 20:30-31

*³⁰Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. ³¹But **these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.***

Large Group

Singing: Music team sings 2-3 high energy songs.

Offering: Two students bring the offering collection box to the leader.

Doxology: Sing Doxology

Affirmation of Faith: Have the class join together in reciting the "Apostle's Creed".

Introduction to the lesson: **The Bible As A Yard Stick ("Canon")**

The leader will use a **yard stick** to help the class understand how the early church understood the Bible and its role in faith. He/she will summarize the following material.

The leader will show **some physical object** (a book, a chair, whatever) and ask:

"How big or "large" or "tall" is this object?"

The leader will solicit several responses - hopefully ones that contradict each other. You may even want to plant another teacher who will argue for a different size. A few additional teacher comments might help here. Then the leader will ask:

*"How do we know **for sure** how big (or tall) this really is?"*

The leader will solicit several more comments. What the leader is trying to elicit is that we need a **way to measure** - a ruler or yardstick. The leader will produce **the yardstick** and measure the object, announce the correct size, and then state: *"Now we **know** how big it really is!"*

The leader will comment that we know the correct size, because we have a way of measuring - a yardstick.

Ask: *But how do we measure matters of faith?*

How do we measure what we believe - to see if it is correct?

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Large Group

As it turns out, we have a yardstick or ruler for measuring our faith. The first Christians decided on a "canon" (this is a Latin word that literally means "ruler" or "yardstick").

Ask: *Does anyone know what our yardstick is?*

Invite the class to give a few guesses.

Show the class: the Bible and comment that this is the "canon" or yardstick the early church used. When we want to **measure matters of faith**, we refer to our yardstick, the Bible

Tell the group: A) What the Bible is Not

1. A Crystal Ball

Show the group the Crystal Ball. Ask how many of them know what Crystal Ball is and what is used for. Have a few give their responses. The main idea is that it is used by some people to "tell fortunes" - or to gaze into the future.

Share with the group:

that some people view the Bible in this way - as a way of seeing into the future. Parts of the Bible (like Revelation) is seen by some as "prophecy" in the sense that they believe that it accurately predicts specific events today and in the future. Let them know that though it is true that portions of the Bible were concerned about the future, it is **not primarily** a crystal ball.

2. A CD of an Encyclopedia

Show the group the CD. Ask them what it is and what we use it for. The main idea is that we look for answers for specific questions. It tells us what we need to know - on almost any subject. All we have to do is just look in the right place, and - voila! - we have the answer.

Share with the group that some people view the Bible in this way - as an encyclopedia that contains the answers to all our questions. Let the group know that though the Bible does contain answers to many things, it is **not primarily** intended as an encyclopedia.

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Small Group

Opening Prayer: Begin the small group session with a prayer. You may want to do a sentence completion prayer, a "build a prayer", or ask for a volunteer to pray. The main idea is for the youth themselves to pray. This is how they learn and how they become comfortable with prayer.

Note: *In today's curriculum there are more exercises and ideas than you can possibly get to in the time you have. Be sure to **focus on the Bible Grab Bag activity as it is the core of the session.** Beyond that, be ready to choose the activities you think are most important.*

I. Pass The Bible Exercise Pass a Bible around the circle. As the Bible comes to each person, have them share the **memories, images, thoughts, feelings, and questions** that come to mind as they hold the Bible. You might begin with the adult leaders of the group to model what you are trying to do.

In this way the group will build a **collage of meaning**. The group will be able to see that the Bible evokes different things from different people - all of which is important.

II. Bible Grab Bag This exercise falls into two parts, what the Bible **is not** and what it **is**. Use the following information as a resource for the Bible Grab Bag exercise. The key here is to *identify* what the object is usually used for, and then to *relate* that function to the Bible to get an insight into how the Bible can be used.

A) What the Bible Is: This raises a fundamental question. If the Bible is not primarily a crystal ball (showing us the future) or an encyclopedia (that answers all our questions), then what is the bible? To answer this question, pass the grab bag around the circle and have volunteers take out items until all have been taken. Tell the group that every item in the bag gives us an important insight into what the Bible is and can help us understand how the Bible can be used as a resource for our faith and our life. Using the order of the items given below, have a class member show his or her item and have the group brainstorm how this item and the Bible might be similar.

Ask:

- 1) *What is this?*
- 2) *What is this item used for" (What does it do?)*
- 3) *How can this help you?*
- 4) *How can the Bible be used in the same or similar way?*
- 5) *Does this item relate to one of the kinds of truth we looked at earlier?*

When the group is finished with these questions on the first object, affirm the answers and then have the person who drew out the object read the explanation that goes with it from the *Bible Grab Bag Sheet*. Repeat the process with the other items. When you have finished, pass the Bible around the circle again, and have each of the group members share which of the images most closely represents what the Bible means to them.

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Bible Grab Bag Objects

Use the following information as a resource for the Bible Grab Bag exercise. The key here is to identify what the object is usually used for, and then to relate that function to the Bible to get an insight into ways the Bible can be used as a resource for faith.

1. A Family Photo Album (historical truth)

A family photo album tells us something about who we are by telling us something about the family we belong to. It is a history of our family. The stories that go with the pictures are our stories. If you know and understand your family history, you know and understand more about yourself and the family you have today.

The Bible is a family photo album of our faith family. It contains - in words - snapshots of our family history. It tells us who we are by telling us who we have been. The people of the Bible are our spiritual ancestors. Their stories are our stories.

2. A Window (truth about God)

A window is something you *look through* in order to see something that you otherwise could not see. A window allows you to see a wider, richer world.

The Bible is a window to God and to the things of God. It allows us to "see", through stories and teachings, who God is, what God is like, what God has done.

3. A Mirror (human truth)

A mirror is something we use to look at ourselves. We may not always like what we see. But it does help us to see ourselves. It helps us to see ourselves not just as we want to be seen but as others see us.

The Bible is a mirror that allows us to see ourselves better. Its stories reflect human nature, human problems, human issues. When we read about the people in the Bible, we see aspects or pieces of ourselves.

4. A Compass (moral truth)

A compass always points to in the same direction - true north. If you know how to use a compass, you can find your way. A compass is most helpful when you are lost. With it you can find your way back.

The Bible is a moral compass. It helps us know "true north" on many issues. With it we can find our way to what we believe or what we need to do. This is important - especially in a world in which so many seem to have lost their way.

5. A Map

A map shows you how to get from where you are to where you want to be. If you can read a map, you can go anywhere. It will show you, step by step, what you need to do to get from where you are to where you want to go.

Much of the Bible is devoted to being a map - showing us how to get from where we are to where God would like us to be. If we know how to use the Bible, we can get where we want to go.

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Bible Grab Bag Objects (continued)

6. A Lifeline (a piece of yarn from the "Lifeline" exercise we did last summer)

In the "Life Line" exercise last summer, we used **the yarn** to guide us. Even though we could not see where we were, or where we were going, we had something we could hold on to and trust. By following it, we were safely guided to our destination.

The Bible is a "life line" for people of faith. At times we do not know where we are or where we are going. But, even in these moments, we have something we can "hang on to" - the Bible. By following it, we keep from losing our way.

7. A Tool

A tool is something we can use to accomplish a task, or use to do something we could not otherwise do (or at least do it easier). Maybe we could drive a nail in without a hammer, but a hammer sure makes it easier. Taking a screw out of an object without a screw driver would be a challenge.

The Bible is a tool of faith. In fact, it might be more correct to say that the Bible is a toolbox - full of all kinds of different tools for us to use. Like any tool, it's only good if you know how to use it. If we learn how to use the Bible, we will be able to do things we otherwise could not do.

A. What our Heritage says about the Bible

Show the class the following from the Articles Of Religion of the United Methodist Church and Confession Of Faith of the Evangelical United Brethren that are found in the United Methodist Book of Discipline. We briefly looked at these last week. This statement contains the "official" United Methodist historic statements on the Bible. **Have volunteers read** them and **then ask** them what they say about the Bible being a standard. or canon.

THE ARTICLES OF RELIGION OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

Article V—Of the Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures for Salvation

The Holy Scripture **contains all things necessary to salvation**; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament of whose authority was never any doubt in the church.

THE CONFESSION OF FAITH OF THE EVANGELICAL UNITED BRETHREN

Article IV. The Holy Bible

We believe the Holy Bible, Old and New Testaments, **reveals the Word of God so far as it is necessary for our salvation**. It is to be received through the Holy Spirit as **the true rule and guide for faith and practice**. Whatever is not revealed in or established by the Holy Scriptures is not to be made an article of faith nor is it to be taught as essential to salvation.

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Small Group

B. What the Bible says about itself

Take a couple of minutes to have the class read over today's scriptures and see what the Bible has to say about itself. See if your group members can summarize what each of these scriptures say.

C. More about the Bible

You will be given **an envelope** during class in which you will find a handout that contains a set of cards with information about the Bible. Hand out cards to group members, then have the members read their cards to the group. Be prepared to answer any questions that arise from the material.

D. Is the Bible "true"?

- Ask your group:**
- 1) *Is the Bible true?*
 - 2) *Are there parts of the Bible that are harder to accept as true than others?*
 - 3) *If so, which parts?*

Share with the group that we believe the Bible contains **many different kinds of truth** - that must be **interpreted in many different ways**. We run into problems if we expect every verse in the Bible to be the same kind of truth. There are things in the Bible that are literally and historically "true" - they actually happened. However, there are many places in the Bible where the "truth" is of a different kind.

Let your group know that there *are least 8 different kinds of truth in the Bible*. Go over these with your group. *[These should be cut up and in an envelope. Have them read in numerical order.]* Make connections back to some of the items in the Grab Bag. Let your group know that next week we will be looking at specific Bible stories and passages to see what kinds of truth they contain. For today our goal is just to understand that not every verse in the Bible contains the same kind of truth.

- Ask your group:**
- 1) *Which kinds of truth are the most important?*
 - 2) *Which are the most important **to you**?*

Joys & Concerns: Ask students to share any Joys & Concerns for the week.

Lord's Prayer: Lead the small group in the Lord's Prayer.

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Large Group Closing

Announcements/Birthdays:

Sing "Sanctuary": Have the class form a circle and link arms (right over left) before singing.

UMYF Benediction: Lead the group in the UMYF Benediction.

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The following is resource information for small group leaders.

8 Kinds Of Truth In The Bible

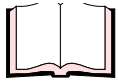


1. **Historical Truth:** The Bible contains the history of the Hebrew people from approximately 2000 B.C. until 100 A.D. Much of this history was passed down orally for generations before it was written down. Nonetheless, it is surprisingly accurate. There are, however, some historical errors in the Bible. At times there are more than one account of a story. For example, did Noah take two of every creature, or seven. It depends on which story you are reading. **In some ways the Bible is like a family photo album. It contains "snap shots" of our history.**

2. **Geographical Truth:** The geography of the Bible is accurate as far as it goes - which isn't very far. The "whole world" of the Bible consisted of the Mediterranean and Mesopotamian areas.

3. **Truth About God:** Much of the Bible is concerned about giving us insights into who God is. In fact, in any given passage you can ask: *"What does this say about who God is?"* Through the Biblical story we learn who God is, what God had done, and what God desires from us. We learn a lot about God. In some ways, the Bible is like a **window** through which we can see God.
4. **Human Truth:** Another big concern of the Bible is to tell us who we are. The Bible functions like a **mirror**, allowing us to look at ourselves. In the stories of the Bible we learn a lot about what it means to be human. We learn about human relationships, human problems, and human qualities. We see ourselves reflected in the stories of the Bible and in the people of the Bible.
5. **Religious Truth:** The Bible is primarily concerned about God, about us, and about our relationship with God (religious truth). The Bible tells about the covenant relationship between God and God's people. What does God want from me? What should I believe? Who can I really trust? What gives life meaning? These are the subject matter of religious truth.
6. **Moral Truth:** Moral truth tells us what we must do and how we must live if we want to be good people, pleasing to God. What is right? What is wrong? How should I treat others? What is harmful? What is helpful? These are the concerns of moral truth. However, the Hebrew scriptures reflect the morality of the Hebrew people, whose standards were very different from ours. For instance, according to Hebrew morality, if a person poked out your eye, you were permitted to poke out one of his; if someone knocked out your tooth, you could knock out one of hers. The Christian scriptures tell us that Jesus expressly raised the moral standards to a higher level. Jesus often began a teaching with the phrase, "It was said of old" and concluded with "but I say to you". In this sense, the Bible functions much like a **compass** - pointing us in the right direction
7. **Symbolic Truth:** Much of the truth in scripture is told in stories, symbols, parables, myths, and allegories. We have to interpret these writings to discover the truth being presented in them. The story of the tree of good and evil in the Garden of Eden is an example of such a symbol. There is truth in that story of the origins of sin, but it is religious truth about human freedom and divine laws, not historical/factual truth about a magic garden and talking snakes.
8. **Scientific Truth:** There is no "science" in the Bible in the way we usually understand that term. Science as we know it was invented in the 1700's and it would be inappropriate to hold any ancient document to the standards of modern science. The Bible makes a poor science textbook. However, the Biblical writers did reflect the scientific understanding of their day, which - as we know, was very primitive by our standards. For instance, the Bible says that the world was created in seven days. We are able to read through the scientific "error" in the Bible and find the religious truth the writer was trying to get across. Revelation is concerned with **religious truth** (that God created the world and what that means), not **scientific truth** (how the creation took place). The Hebrew people didn't have to know how the world was created in order to appreciate that God created it.

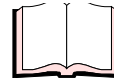
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About The Bible Cards The History Of The Bible

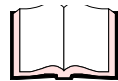
Did you know? . . .

- That the Bible is not just one book, but is really a library of 66 books.
- That the Bible was written over the course of 1,600 years and 60 generations.
- That the Bible was written by over 40 people, including kings, fishermen, scholars and peasants.
- The Bible was written on three continents: Asia, Africa and Europe and different places such as prisons, palaces, in the wilderness, and on the road.
- The Bible was written in three languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.



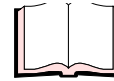
About The Bible Cards How The Bible Came To Be

For generations many of the stories in the Bible were never written down. They were passed down by word of mouth. Not every story from the oral tradition is in the Bible. And not every book written became a book of the Bible. The early Christians accepted the Jewish scriptures as their scriptures. The writings we call the New Testament were first just that - writings. Sometime during the 4th century A.D. the collection of writings we now call the New Testament was recognized as the canon, a word that means standard, measure, ruler, or yardstick. The books of the canon were those accepted by the leaders of the early church as writings that were authoritative for Christian faith and life. But who decided and how did they decide? Some books were chosen because they contained a clear record of the faith of Israel and the church. The main reason for making a book part of the canon was that it taught the faith handed down from the apostles. Later, in the 1500's, Martin Luther removed those books of the Old Testament that the Jews did not accept as scripture. These books are called the Apocrypha (or hidden books).



About The Bible Cards The Inspiration Of Scripture

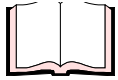
The word "*inspire*" comes from a Latin word that means "*to breathe into*". We believe that God has "breathed into" or "inspired" the writings in the Bible. We believe that the Bible contains God's word or truth. The Bible points the way to the Way. The Bible is the "inspired" word of God. What does that mean? It could mean: 1) that God dictated the Bible word for word; 2) or that each word is in the Bible because God wanted it there; 3) or that God guided men and women to think about and to write about the ideas in the Bible; 4) or that God's Spirit worked through people not words; 5) or that God worked through the community to get the message across. Different people understand this in different ways. But we all agree that the Bible reveals God and God's will to us.



About The Bible Cards What's In The Bible?

What's in the Bible? Well, actually, lots of things. Let's see, there are songs, poems, history, letters, laws, gospels (stories of the life and teachings of Jesus), visions, how the world began, where the world is headed, stories of war, stories of peace. The list goes on. And, it gets even better, the whole thing has a continuous thread that weaves through it and holds it together - relationship. The Bible word is "covenant", but what that means is that it is the story of the relationship between God and God's people - how God seeks to be in relationship with us, how we break that relationship, and how God still seeks us out.

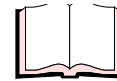
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About The Bible Cards The History Of The Bible

What's In It II?

If you have a study Bible, there is even more in the Bible than just the text itself. You can have **footnotes** that explain the meaning of things that we might not understand. You can have **cross references** that tells us if this scripture occurs in other places or is related to other scriptures. Your Bible may have a **concordance** which lists important words and where you can find these words in the Bible. It may have a **Bible dictionary** that explains words that are hard to understand. You may have an **atlas** or maps that show you where things took place. A good study Bible will have a lot of resources that can help you understand what you are reading. Let's check out the Bibles we have and see how many of these things are in the Bibles we have.



About The Bible Cards What To Look For In The Bible

There is a lot of stuff in the Bible. Honestly, you can get lost. But there are **three questions** you can ask that will always help you see the big picture. Here are the questions:

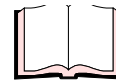
1. **What does it say about God?** What do you learn about God in this passage? That is an important part of any scripture.
2. **What does it say about us as human beings?** What do you learn about what it means to be human? Do you see yourself?
3. **What does it say about the relationship between us and God?**

If you can answer these three questions you have gotten the basic point of what the scripture is about.



About The Bible Cards The Bible Is . . . Amazing

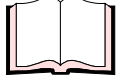
Did you know that: The Catholics have 13 books in their Bible that we do not have. The Orthodox Church has several books that neither we nor the Catholics have. That the church actually voted on what books made it and which didn't. Some books came within a few votes of being in. For example, The Shepherd Of Hermas, The Didache. Some of the books in our Bible almost didn't make it because they were so controversial. For example, The Book of Revelation. in the 1500's, during the Reformation, Martin Luther threw out several books of the Old Testament - even though he did not have the authority to do so (and they are still out of our Bible) two of the books in our Bible have longer versions in the Catholic Bible (Daniel and Esther) there are two versions of the Book of Esther (one in the Protestant Bible and one in the Catholic Bible) and that we have the version that does not even mention God. there are gospels that are not in our Bible (the Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of the Hebrews, etc). some of the books that would have gone in our Bible are lost (for example, Paul's third letter to the church at Corinth) the two people who were most responsible for the Bible we have today were both heretics. One wanted the New Testament to only have one gospel (Luke - with all of the Old Testament references cut out) and the letters of Paul. The other thought that anything he said or wrote was scripture. The three rules the early church used for deciding if a book got in the Bible were: Is its teaching sound? Is it associated with one of the first apostles? Was it in general usage throughout the church at the time? Wow, is the Bible interesting, or what?! It's amazing!



About The Bible Cards From Information To Formation

Mark Twain once said that he was not bothered by the parts of the Bible he did not understand. What bothered him was the parts of the Bible he did understand. What do you think he meant? Twain's statement relates to the distinction between information and formation. Information is about learning facts and memorizing verses. Formation is allowing our lives to be shaped and directed by what we read and learn. Formation means letting the parts of the Bible we understand bother us. Immerse yourself in the meaning of the scripture. Let the words begin to mold you and into a person who not only knows about the Bible, but has a relationship with God who is revealed there.

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About The Bible Cards In It II?

Scripture Must Be Interpreted

(Give It A REST!)

What this means is that what we believe comes to us through four sources: **R**eason, **E**xperience, **S**cripture & **T**radition. Or, more correctly, we interpret what we find in scripture by using the tradition of the church (what have Christians believed about this scripture in the past and today;), by our experience (how does it make sense in terms of our own lives), and reason (what does our God given brain tell us when we use it). When we dialogue with other Christians past and present, when we use our experience and our reason, we can better understand (interpret) what the Bible and our faith is saying to us.