

*Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About the Bible ... but were afraid to ask*  
Living the Message 2020-2021  
December Study Guide for Participants and Facilitators

**December's Question: Is the Bible the Word of God? [Video can be watched by clicking here.](#)**

### **Focus Statement**

The Bible is the Word of God not because of what it *is* – some sacred or supernatural book that has fallen from heaven – but rather because of what it *does*. That is, through the stories it tells, especially the stories of Jesus, the Bible conveys to us a) just how much God loves us and b) how determined God is to be in relationship with us. When we hear these stories, we experience God speaking to us today.

### **Opening Prayer**

*Dear God, open our hearts and minds so that when we read Scripture, we hear you speaking to us today. Amen.*

### **Opening Questions to Consider *Before* Watching the Presentation**

- When have you referred to the Bible – or heard others refer to the Bible – as “the Word of God?”
- What do you mean by the phrase? What do you think others mean?
- Even more, what is meaningful to you about that phrase?

### **Passages to Read *Before* Presentation**

You are invited to read [Luke 1:1-4](#) and [John 20:30-31](#). Luke's introduction and John's conclusion both offer insight into the intentions of the writers. That is, Luke hints at the beginning and John at the end what they hope will happen when we read their stories of Jesus. When you read these passages, how would you describe their intentions and hopes? How does knowing their intentions shape how you read the stories they tell?

### **Questions to Consider *After* Watching the Presentation**

- When we're talking about everyday life, what do you think makes some events particularly meaningful, significant, and important to you, while so many others we forget because they have little significance?
- When you tell someone a meaningful story from your own life, what are you hoping will be the impact and effect of your story? How does that compare with what Luke and John hope?
- Can stories about Jesus speak to different people differently or, similarly, can the same passage of Scripture speak to us differently depending on what is going on in our life? What does this tell us about how Scripture is God's Word?

### **Going Deeper into the Word**

*(There is [a second video](#) to assist with this exercise if you find that helpful. In it, Pastor Ruud elaborates on some of what he shared in the main video.)*

Focus Passage: [John 11:1-44](#) – “The Raising of Lazarus”

This is a long story, one of the longest St. John tells or, indeed, is told in any of the Gospels. Clearly, this was an important story! Before reading it, ask whether you or others in your group have heard this story? What details do you remember? It's sometimes interesting to see what we remember about familiar stories, as this can be an indication of what we found significant about it.

Then read the story aloud. Because it's long, it might be helpful to ask several people to take turns reading. As you listen, pay attention to what stands out to you – what phrases or descriptions grab your attention. These can be clues to what is most significant and meaningful in the story now.

If it's helpful, you can focus on the following verses and corresponding questions:

- v. 5-6: "Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was." Another way to understand the Greek word translated as "stayed" is "tarried," "abided," "remained," or "delayed." What emotions does it stir in you that Jesus "stayed/tarried two days longer" when he knew his friend was ill?
- v. 20-21: "When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'" How do you imagine Martha saying this? What emotions do you hear in her voice?
- v. 25-27: "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'" Do you think Jesus' words were initially comforting to Martha? What does her response to Jesus' question tell us about her? Does this confession of Martha remind you of any other confessions about Jesus that we may remember from other Gospels?
- v. 43-44: "When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'" Jesus makes two commands in this passage, one to Lazarus and one to the crowd watching. How are they similar, and how are they different? Now imagine Jesus addresses these two commands to you. With regard to the first command, what might Jesus tell you to come out from – from what holds you back, from your fears, from doubts or hesitations? With regard to the second command, it's interesting that after Jesus raised Lazarus from death, there is still work to do, work that the crowd is invited to pick up. So... what does God want us to unbind today? How might God be inviting us to continue God's work?

### **Closing**

Return to our Opening Question: *When have you referred to the Bible – or heard others refer to the Bible – as "the Word of God?" What is meaningful to you about that phrase?* How would you answer that question now?

*Prayer: Dear God, we give you thanks for the witnesses who shared their experiences of you in Scripture. Help us to pay attention to their confessions and, by paying attention, to hear you speak to us today. Amen.*