

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

May's Topic: Q&A with Pastors Lose and Ruud [Video can be watched here.](#)

Focus Statement

We said from the beginning that a good indicator of a successful Bible study isn't simply how many questions it answers, but how many new questions you have. Because that's why we keep coming to Scripture – not simply for answers, but for a give-and-take that is more characteristic of a relationship than it is simply pulling out a divine encyclopedia. And so in our final session of Living the Message this year, we took a number of the questions class participants have sent in, grouped them into categories, and used them to spark a conversation between Pastors Lose and Ruud. That conversation makes up the presentation this week.

Opening Prayer

Dear God, we give you thanks for the opportunity to study, struggle with, and be enriched through our engagement with your Word. Continue to bless our reading and conversation that we might grow in our relationships with you and with each other and trust your grace and mercy as we experience them most fully in the story of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Opening Questions to Consider Before Watching the Presentation

Across the time we've spent together this year:

- What is one key insight you've had that has helped you in your reading of the Bible?
- What is one key question that you continue to wonder about?

Questions to Consider After Watching the Presentation

- What new insight did you have after watching the presentation? Did any more questions occur to you?

Summary - Overview of this Year's Study

Below you'll find several of the guiding convictions that we've employed throughout the year and a few new ones that came up in the conversation recorded in the presentation. After reading through these, feel free to choose one or more of the possible Bible studies listed under "Going Deeper in the Word" as an exercise by which you (and your group) can put these principles to work.

- We value the Bible not because of what it is – some kind of divine or magical reference book that fell from heaven – but rather for **what it does** – introduce us to the God of the Scriptures and invite us into a living relationship with that God that, in turn, change lives.

- Similarly, we've described the Bible as a **very human book** – written by actual people located in particular times and cultures – **that God uses to achieve God's divine purposes** to bring people into life-giving relationship with their Creator and Redeemer. The goal of biblical writers, that is, is to tell us the truth about God rather than present facts about the world.
- We've affirmed that the Bible can be challenging to read because it contains such a variety of literary genres, represents voices from numerous historical periods and cultures that may have values quite different from our own, and was written over a thousand years. We've also affirmed that what holds this diverse collection of witnesses together is that each author and contributor **had an experience with the living God that was so powerful they had to share it**, and they did so in whatever cultural and/or literary form – song, legal code, poem, story – made the most sense to them.
- In this sense, the Bible holds a set of confessions about what it looks like when God gets involved in your life, and by tracing the patterns of these confessions we may find it easier to recognize when God is getting involved in our lives. We read Scripture, that is, because we believe that by **listening to the confessions of believers in the past it becomes easier to see God active in our lives and world today**.
- Along these lines, the biblical authors are **first and foremost witnesses** – telling what they see and believe about God. That insight enables us to distinguish that while a witness may be faithful – confessing God's activity to the best of their ability – they might not always be right. Or, to put it another way, we may have a different faithful interpretation of how God is active in the world. For instance, we believe that even though the Apostle Paul got the timing of Jesus' return absolutely wrong – Paul believed Jesus would return by the end of his lifetime – we believe Paul got the nature of God's love and grace absolutely and importantly right!
- When it comes to **seeking moral guidance** from Scripture, we've affirmed that it's important to note three things: 1) the temporal gap and cultural and circumstantial differences between the authors and ourselves, 2) that it's okay to disagree with some of the moral affirmations that come from faithful but also human witnesses, and 3) that the primary goal of Scripture is to help us make sense of the mystery of God that we might be more confident of the meaning of our life with God and each other and, along the way, to offer some moral counsel in light of our experience of God's grace and love.
- All the distinctions we make – whether we agree or disagree with a particular portion or passage of the biblical witness – stem not simply from our view of the world (though our experience and knowledge as 21st century believers is important) but far more from an **ongoing conversation with Scripture**. We bring our convictions and questions to our reading. As we read, Scripture may answer some questions, raise others, or even call our questions into question(!), and in this way inform the "lens" through which we read Scripture, which in turn invites and equips us to read Scripture again. And so on and so on! :)

Going Deeper into the Word

Here are two possibilities for Bible study. With the principles listed above in mind, choose one or more by which to flex your interpretive muscles! :) (The Deeper Dive bible study video with Pastor Lose can be watched by [clicking here](#).)

1) *Noticing the difference between reading for truth rather than reading for facts.*

Read what is often called the "second" creation story in [Genesis \(2:4-3:13\)](#) and discuss the following:

- What do you notice and what details stick out to you?

- What difference does it make if you are reading it as a “factual” or “scientific” description of history or reading it as a story that tells the truth, but was not intended to offer a historical and scientific explanation of creation.
- In particular, what does this story tell you about God, about the human condition, about our life with each other and in the world.

After reading and discussing the creation story in Genesis, now read Matthew’s account of the temptation of Jesus ([Matthew 4:1-11](#)) and take up the following questions:

- How does your reading of the Genesis story of creation in light of the truth it shares inform your conversation of Jesus’ temptation?
- Again, what do you notice and what sticks out to you?
- How does placing these two stories side-by-side shape how you hear St. Matthew’s confessions about Jesus?
- What do these stories tell us about our relationship to God and to each other?

Finally, what additional insights you do have, not just about these two stories, but about how we can read Scripture profitably?

AND/OR

2) How is God speaking to me (and to us) through Scripture?

On several occasions, we’ve read Jesus’ “Parable of the Prodigal Son” ([Luke 15: 1-2, 11-32](#)) noting a) why Jesus told this parable (and the two other “lost parables”) in response to the judgment of the Pharisees, b) that it can mean different things based on your cultural views, and c) that taking the perspective of one of the characters (one of the sons, the father, etc.) can deepen your experience. As you read the story again, focus on the following three questions:

1. What does this story share about the character of God?
2. What speaks to me most clearly in this passage?
3. How might this passage shape the way I live my faith in the world this week?

These “more personal” questions not only help us go deeper into Scripture but also see how Scripture can shape our present and future actions in the world.

Closing

We offered this class because we think how you understand and approach Scripture can make a huge difference not only in how you read and enjoy the Bible but also in how you understand God and how God continues to speak to us today through Scripture. This class is, of course, just a beginning, the invitation to a new and deeper relationship with Scripture that is meant to continue. As we go forward in our Living the Message experience, we look forward to continuing the conversation so that we might have a better sense of God’s presence in our lives and God’s hopes for us and the world. We’re so grateful you’ve been part of the journey and conversation so far and look forward to continuing it with you next year!

Prayer: *Dear God, bless our reading of Scripture, both individually and when we gather with others, that we might hear your voice in the witness of past believers so that we understand you better, feel your presence in our lives more fully, and sense your will for our lives. Bless us now and always so that when we read Scripture we may come to a richer understanding of your mercy for us and all the world. Amen.*