

STUDY JOURNAL

EIGHT SESSIONS

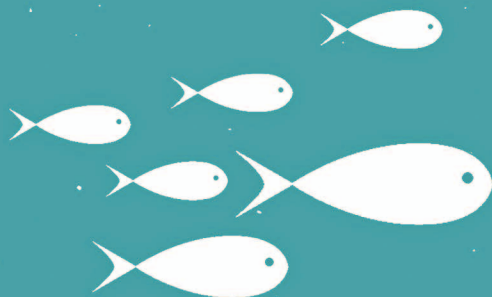


THE

NEW TESTAMENT CHALLENGE

WITH JEFF MANION

AN EIGHT-WEEK
JOURNEY THROUGH
THE STORY OF JESUS,
HIS CHURCH, AND
HIS RETURN

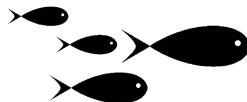


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AN EIGHT-WEEK JOURNEY THROUGH THE STORY
OF JESUS, HIS CHURCH, AND HIS RETURN



STUDY JOURNAL | EIGHT SESSIONS

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The New Testament Challenge Study Journal

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

What would happen if you actually *read* the New Testament? Not just a verse here or there, but every part of the New Testament, in its entirety? And what if, instead of going it alone, you had real conversations about the Bible—ones that anyone could join regardless of where they were in their faith journey? *The New Testament Challenge* is about reading the Bible as it was meant to be read—whole books, in community. It will take you beyond Bible study, beyond reading in fragments, and beyond reading in isolation. It will help you discover the complete story.

AN INVITATION

During this study you and your fellow group members will be exploring the New Testament in its *entirety*. The New Testament is the second of the two major divisions in the Bible, filling the final one-quarter of its pages. It continues the story, begun in the Old Testament, of how God is restoring his original purpose in creation by working through the chosen people of Israel.

The New Testament tells how this story reached its crowning moment during the first century AD as Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah, answered the question of who God is and what he is like once and for all. Through his teaching, Jesus revealed the deepest meaning of the laws and institutions that God had given to the people of Israel. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus introduced the forgiveness and life of the age to come into the present age.

The New Testament also tells how the followers of Jesus formed a new community and invited people from all over the

world to join them. It describes how they worked together to live out the reign of God that Jesus had announced and begun. Finally, the New Testament looks ahead to the day when Jesus will return to renew all of creation and to establish God's justice and peace throughout the earth.

HOW IT WORKS

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The New Testament Challenge will require you to take three key steps: (1) read big, (2) read real, and (3) read together.

1. **Read big.** During the course of this study, you will cover the entire New Testament in eight weeks, reading five days a week, or around twelve pages a day. Each day's average reading will take thirty minutes or so for you to complete.
2. **Read real.** You will use a groundbreaking presentation of the Scriptures called *The Books of the Bible*, which has been designed to feel more like reading the original.
3. **Read together.** You will meet with your discussion group once a week for book club-style conversations about the Bible.

A UNIQUE BIBLE

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As noted, during this study you will read from a revolutionary presentation of the New Testament called *The Books of the Bible*. When you open your copy, the first thing you will notice is that this is no ordinary Bible. There are no chapter or verse numbers. No study notes or cross references. No red lettering.

This is because none of these features are original to the Scriptures. Most were added centuries later to help us find things. But the Bible isn't a reference book. First and foremost,

it's a story. It's a collection of books, each of which was meant to be experienced as a whole. Modern Bible formatting imposes a different structure on the text, one that encourages us to read in fragments. But *The Books of the Bible* is designed to be read from beginning to end. So we've stripped away centuries of artificial formatting, leaving behind nothing but pure Bible text in a presentation that's easier to read and understand.

We've formatted each book in the New Testament so you can see the natural section breaks put there by the authors. We've also rearranged the books for easier understanding—for example, putting Paul's letters in a more chronological order (instead of longest to shortest), so you can follow along more easily. *The Books of the Bible* features the complete text of the New Testament using the New International Version®, the most widely read contemporary English translation of the Bible.

FIVE TIPS FOR READING



1. **Read what you can.** Don't get discouraged if you fall behind. Keep at it, even if you don't make it all the way through each day's reading. If you have trouble keeping up, listening to the audio version can help.
2. **Read every day.** Plan on reading five days a week, Monday through Friday. Note that some daily readings will be longer or shorter because each one ends at the close of a book or a natural section break within a book. The pace is a little intense, but reading large portions of Scripture is also incredibly rewarding. So be fully present.
3. **Avoid distraction while reading.** (Turns out we're not that good at multitasking.) Instead, devote your full attention to the text.

4. **Read the book introductions.** *The Books of the Bible* includes brief introductions or “invitations” to each book of the New Testament, unpacking the context and literary structure of what you’re about to read. Trust us, they are well worth your time.
5. **Don’t worry about the parts you don’t understand.** The goal is to read big, not to catch every detail. You can always go back and study a specific passage in greater detail later. For now, take in the big picture. Let that be your focus as you read.

PLANNING YOUR WEEKLY GATHERINGS

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Your small group should meet once a week during *The New Testament Challenge*. If possible, plan to meet on the weekends. There are no readings assigned for Saturday and Sunday, which makes the weekend a good time to get together.

The New Testament Challenge is broken into eight weeks of readings, but **plan on meeting nine times**. You will want to have an introductory gathering the week before you start reading, and then meet once a week for the next eight weeks to discuss the readings.

Most discussion groups meet for sixty to ninety minutes each week, but feel free to adjust this schedule based on the needs of your group. Spend the first 30 to 60 minutes of your group time sharing your reflections on the text you read during the week. Use these five simple conversation starters to get the discussions flowing:

1. What was new or compelling to you?
2. What questions did you have?
3. Was there anything that bothered you?
4. What did you learn about loving God?
5. What did you learn about loving others?

During the last fifteen to thirty minutes of your meeting, you will prepare for the week ahead by watching a video from Jeff Manion. **Be sure not to skip this step**, as the material Jeff presents will give you and your group members important background information to the passages you will be reading during the week. Note that a brief outline of the topics and concepts that Jeff presents has been included in this guide to help you follow along, and space has also been provided for you to write down your thoughts. Discuss any questions or personal insights that come out of this time of teaching with your group.

THREE TIPS FOR WEEKLY GATHERINGS

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If you have been part of a Bible study before, you might find these gatherings a bit different. Here are three tips to help you get the most from them.

TIP #1: THINK “BOOK CLUB”

Treat your weekly gatherings more like a book club than a traditional Bible study. The discussions are meant to be free-flowing and wide-ranging.

You may come to each week’s gathering with lots of questions. That’s okay. It’s what happens when you read twelve pages a day! Try to focus your conversation on the big picture—where the overall story is moving and the part you are invited to play in it. To help, you can suggest your group keeps a “parking lot” list of questions to explore further after your journey.

TIP #2: HONOR EVERY PARTICIPANT

It’s likely your fellow group members come from a variety of backgrounds. You may hold different perspectives or assumptions about the Bible. Some of you may be lifelong students of the text. Others may be brand new to it. Regardless, it is important

to remember that each person has something meaningful to add to the conversation.

TIP #3: LISTEN ACTIVELY AND SPEAK FREELY

Welcome every voice in the conversation, and don't hesitate to add your own. You never know how someone else might benefit by hearing what was new or compelling to you, what questions you had, or what you wrestled with during your reading of the New Testament.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



Thank you for your participation in this group and for accepting *The New Testament Challenge*. If you are a group leader, note there are additional resources for you at the end of this study journal on how to structure your time together and get the most out of your discussion times.

INTRODUCTORY SESSION

This opening introductory session introduces your group to *The New Testament Challenge*. Hold this session the week before your first meeting.

GETTING TO KNOW YOU (15–30 minutes)

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If your group members are new to each other, invite each person to introduce himself or herself, using any or all of the following prompts:

- What are three roles in your life, and what do you like about them?
- What one word describes your past experience of reading the Bible?
- What do you hope to get from this journey?

INTRODUCTION (15–30 minutes)

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Begin by discussing the information covered in pages vii–xii of this study journal. In particular, you will want to review the following key sections together:

- Five Tips for Reading
- Planning Your Weekly Gatherings
- Three Tips for Weekly Gatherings

Allow time for discussion about how your group wants to function with each other and to address any concerns people

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have about doing the Bible reading. Next, if time allows, read through all of the introductory materials in pages iii–xvii of *The Books of the Bible: New Testament*. If you have time constraints, read just “The Drama of the Bible in Six Acts,” beginning on page i, and “Invitation to the New Testament,” beginning on page xv.

PREPARING FOR THE WEEK AHEAD (15–20 minutes)

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Next, discuss the challenge of reading twelve pages a day. Remember that most readings will take around thirty minutes to complete—about the same time it takes to watch a TV show. Finally, to get the most out of what you will be reading during the coming week, close your time by watching the video of week 1, in which Jeff Manion **introduces the New Testament** and explains the themes and relevance of **Luke**. Use the following outline to write down any insights or questions.

WHAT IS THE NEW TESTAMENT?

The Old Testament asks, how can the presence of God
be restored?

In the New Testament, there is something new: God himself
enters the planet in Jesus.

The New Testament has twenty-seven books:

- The Gospels (four books)
- The Book of Acts
- The Epistles (twenty-one books)
- The Book of Revelation

As you read, keep the first-century audience in mind: “What did it mean to them?” Then ask, “What does it mean to me?”

The New Testament was written by nine human authors and the Divine Author.

LUKE

Gospel: means “good news”

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Themes of Luke

Early events of Jesus's life

Women: first-century world was very patriarchal

Meals

Holy Spirit

Relevance of Luke

How might God be calling your voice?

THIS WEEK



Read the book of Luke–Acts in *The Books of the Bible: New Testament*. Maintain your momentum by keeping these guidelines in mind:

- Read what you can.
- Read something every day.
- Always have your *Books of the Bible* with you.
- Remember every week is a new week.
- Use this study journal as you do your reading for week 1: Luke–Acts, recording any thoughts on the Daily Reading Journal pages.

WEEK 1

LUKE—ACTS



LUKE



The two volumes of Luke–Acts have been combined in *The Books of the Bible* and placed first because they provide an overview of the entire New Testament period. Luke wrote this two-volume history to serve several important purposes:

- He wanted to assure followers of Jesus that what they had been taught about him was trustworthy.
- He wanted to document how God kept the promise he made to the people of Israel by sending them their long-awaited Messiah, demonstrating that the true God is faithful and can be trusted completely.
- He wanted to prove that the extension of God’s blessings to the Gentiles is not a fickle change of plans but rather the masterful fulfillment of a plan God has been pursuing over the ages.

What to watch for in Luke: Look for some unlikely cast members in Luke’s drama. Luke highlights Jesus’s compassion toward the outsiders and outcasts of his day: the poor, the disabled, tax collectors, women, children, and others. According to Luke, Jesus is for everybody.

PERSONAL BIBLE EXPERIENCE

Your personal Bible experience starts with a daily practice of reading the Bible. This week before your group meeting, read the book of Luke. Use the journaling space to capture your thoughts, questions, responses, emotions, and insights as you read the daily selection. Keep in mind the following questions you will be talking about with your discussion group:

- What was new or compelling to you?
- What questions did you have?
- Was there anything that bothered you?
- What did you learn about loving God?
- What did you learn about loving others?

COMMUNITY BIBLE EXPERIENCE

You have been experiencing the Bible personally by reading through the book of Luke this week. Now, take some time as a group to reflect on what you have learned.

REFLECTING ON THE PREVIOUS WEEK (30–60 minutes)

Based on your Personal Bible Experience in Luke this week, have a conversation with your group about what you read by answering the following questions:

What was new or compelling to you?

What questions did you have?

Was there anything that bothered you?

What did you learn about loving God?

What did you learn about loving others?

PREPARING FOR THE WEEK AHEAD (15–20 minutes)

To get the most out of what you will be reading in the coming week, close your time together by watching the video for week 2, in which Jeff Manion explains the themes and relevance of **Acts** and **1–2 Thessalonians**. Use the following outline to write down any insights or questions.

ACTS

What the disciples did after Jesus ascended

Key to Acts: Movement

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

(Acts 1:8)

Key Event: At Pentecost, the Spirit descends

Key Picture of Transformation: Community

Key Lesson: God is at work in our disappointment

Key Figure: Saul

[Saul] fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” “Who are you, Lord?” Saul asked. “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,” he replied.

(Acts 9:4–5)

Key City: Antioch

Themes of Acts

Places

Sermons

Conflict and persecution

Movement of the Holy Spirit

Relevance of Acts

Jesus wants to be known

1–2 THESSALONIANS

Purpose of 1–2 Thessalonians

To encourage the Thessalonians in their faith

Themes of 1–2 Thessalonians

Encouragement in their suffering

Make a clean break from their old life, and step into their
new life

Comfort

THIS WEEK



Read Acts from the book of Luke–Acts and 1–2 Thessalonians in *The Books of the Bible: New Testament*. Maintain your momentum by keeping these guidelines in mind:

- Read what you can.
- Read something every day.
- Always have your *Books of the Bible* with you.
- Remember every week is a new week.
- Use this study journal as you do your reading for week 2: Luke–Acts, 1–2 Thessalonians, recording any thoughts on the Daily Reading Journal pages.