

# THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE:

*From Creation to the Cross*

**A Study Guide**  
**Prepared by Jon Burnett**

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## A Note to the Reader:

The material in this booklet was presented in the Sunday morning teen class of the Warner Robins Church of Christ from October 2017 to March 2018. What follows is a devotional survey of the Big Picture of the Bible. The goal was to present the single, overarching narrative of Scripture, so that we might remember that story, and so that we might disciple others.

As with any Bible study tool, one should focus primarily on the words of Scripture themselves rather than what men have to say about them. The general approach of this guide is therefore to watch a quick introductory video, pray, read a portion of Scripture, reflect on the meaning of the text, and discuss the same Three Big Questions from week to week. The best way to use this study is as a personal Bible study or a small group discussion with an experienced teacher.

For those who would like to dig deeper into the Big Picture, including the slides used for the classes, we recommend visiting our webpage [www.inearthenvessels.com/thebigpicture](http://www.inearthenvessels.com/thebigpicture).

No man-made work is ever flawless, much less complete. For corrections, questions or comments concerning this guide, or for any other spiritual matter, please contact us at [www.inearthenvessels.com/contact](http://www.inearthenvessels.com/contact).

May God continue to bless you and yours.

Your fellow servant,

Jon Burnett  
Warner Robins, Georgia

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## Foreword: What's Your Story?



I've always loved a good story. And I don't think I'm alone. Come to think of it, I don't know anyone who *doesn't* love being swept up into a good storyline. Whether it's your favorite book or memory, your favorite TV show or movie, you probably have a favorite story. In fact, hearing, creating, and passing on stories is part of what makes us human. We are story-telling creatures.

Our three kids remind me of this all the time. Of course, they don't recognize it, but there's a reason why our son grabs a lightsaber every time we watch *Star Wars*. Our latest discovery is the movie *Moana*, the story of a young girl who has to save her village and her island from an ancient evil. And in doing so, she realizes that she also has to remind her people who they are. In key parts of the movie, her ancestors sing, "We are explorers reading every sign / We tell the stories of our elders / In a never-ending chain ... / We know the way" ([go ahead and have a listen](#)).

***Here's why that matters: when they forgot their story, they forgot who they were.***

A few years ago I came across a quote that means a lot more to me now than it did then. When I read it I paused, pondered it, marked it in the text, typed it up in my notes... and then forgot

about it. But when I came across it again a few weeks ago I realized just how closely my life had been shaped by the truth of that statement. Here it is: “I had always felt life first as a story: and if there is a story there is a story-teller” (G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, ch. 4).

So what if I were to ask to you about your story. What would you tell me? Where would you start? What are your highlights? What would you leave out for now until we get to know each other a little better? What inspires you? Who is at the center of your story? How about this...

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and **in him all things hold together**. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20 ESV)*

Did you catch that? **Everything**—creation, the cross, the church—**comes together in Jesus**—by him, through him, for him, in him. He is God’s image, the firstborn, the creator, the head, the beginning, the peacemaker. As a Christian, I believe the most important part of our stories is to know where we stand in HIS story—to grow into it, to be shaped by it, to rejoice in it. To be a disciple of Christ we don’t need a new story, we need an old one. We need to step back and take a look at **the Big Picture of the Bible**. But before we dive into that story, let’s think about *three big questions...*

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## Three Big Questions



+ **PRAY** for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ **READ** [Psalm 19 \(ESV\)](#)

### + **REFLECT**

One of the best ways to get into a story is to sing about it. And when it comes to the Big Picture of the Bible, the song that comes to my mind is Psalm 19. It was written about 3,000 years ago by a guy named David. Throughout his life, David did a little bit of everything. He was a shepherd, a songwriter, a giant-slayer, a soldier, and the one God handpicked to become Israel's second king. And so his songs reflect the full range of human emotions; everything from worship and wonder, to doubt and despair. The scribes called this particular song a *mizmor* or "song of praise," and in it David does three simple things...

***Look up. Look down. Look within.***

It's not hard to imagine David as a stargazer. Shepherding was a 24-hour job. And though I'm sure he got plenty of rest along the way, it also seems he watched more than sheep. So he

begins his song: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). When David **looked up** to the vast expanse above him he saw more than light; he saw the splendor of Someone greater than himself. And that Someone has a voice, a voice the stars themselves echo; inaudible, and yet flowing forth to the ends of the earth, renewing its intensity with every sunrise and softening its tones as the day wanes.

But the stars can only get us so far. Space is cold. But since the one who stretched it out has broken into that space with his Word, we find a place we can call home. So David talks more about that Word; the very voice speaking through him at that moment: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (Psalm 19:7). When we **look down** into the Bible we discover not man’s witness but the Lord’s, not man’s ways but the Way of Christ, and not man’s words but the words of the Spirit. And for that reason—and *only* that reason—we find in the world joy despite sorrow, light despite the darkness, and justice despite all the wrongs around us.

And yet those wrongs remain. Not only around us, but inside us. And by trying to separate those wrongs within from the wrongs without, we humans get confused on who’s really to blame for the breakdown of our world. You see, in some fundamental way, each of us shares in that brokenness. And so David sings, “Who can discern his errors?” (Psalm 19:12). The answer? *No one*. When we **look within** we find not only brokenness, but blindness to just how broken we really are—our wounds run deep. And this means we need help that no mere human can give. We need to be clean, forgiven, freed, pardoned. No word we speak or thought we think can do it. We depend on Someone Else’s strength. Someone Else must pay the price.

As we work through the Big Picture of the Bible, try not to get too distracted by the details. Take a step back from the story to see how it all fits together, and why it all matters. In each lesson, try to think about these Three Big Questions: **How is God revealing himself? How does this make sense of us? Where do I stand in this story?** And remember David: *Look up. Look down. Look within.* So let’s start with this: *why this story, why this book?*

+ **DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## A Story Worth Sharing



+ WATCH ["Experience the Book"](#) from the Museum of the Bible

+ PRAY for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ READ [1 Peter 1:10-12, 22-25; 2 Peter 1:16-21; 3:14-18 \(ESV\)](#)

### + REFLECT

As we talk about the Big Picture of the Bible, you'll hopefully see just what this book means to God's people. After all, this is where we find out who we are, where we came from, and why we're here. The Bible is the book that tells us the story of Jesus. Now that might not seem very Earth-shattering. But if you remember what we said before about Jesus, and how "in him all things hold together," then that story's not just any story. It's about HIM and since it's about HIM, it's the untold story, the secret history of the whole world. And now we know it.

You see, when I talk about the Bible, I'm sharing a story that didn't start with me; someone else told it to me. And that someone at some time learned it from yet another person, and so on. And because it wasn't theirs, no one got to make it up or add their own spin to it. They took what they heard and passed it on. In fact, for thousands of years, billions of people around the world have come to know it. That history is no longer a secret, and once you know it everything else begins to make sense. Here's how one persecutor-turned-preacher described it:

*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my **gospel** and the **preaching** of Jesus Christ, according to the **revelation** of the **mystery** that was kept secret for long ages but has now been **disclosed** and through the **prophetic writings** has been **made known** to all nations, according to the **command** of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)*

***That story was a secret because only God saw it all happening in real-time, but this story is now good news because God has opened it up for all to see.*** Paul uses a variety of words, but this is what makes this story so special: ***God has spoken; it's HIS story.*** This isn't just any book; it's the *Biblia*, the Book of Books. The God who exists from eternity has spoken his Word ***so you can know his power, wisdom, and glory***—so that you can trust and obey him.

Sadly, for many the Bible simply remains a mystery. Sure, it might seem like everyone on this side of the Atlantic has one, and most people know at least something about it. Even those who deny what it teaches can't help but be moved by its beauty and depth of meaning. But few people really understand what they hold in their hands. The Bible is the most-read, most-translated, and most-influential book in human history. There are more handwritten copies of the Bible than any other body of ancient literature, and because of that we can trust that what we hold today speaks the same truths God's Spirit gave to his spokesmen through the ages.

And the more evidence we find—caves filled with hidden manuscripts, cities buried under centuries of dirt, or even the mapping of the human genome—the more we exult in God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The evidence confirms what Christians already know by faith: that God exists and that he has spoken. For many, that's still a mystery, but because of Jesus that's a story worth sharing. So, where do we start? How about here: *"In the beginning..."*

**+ ASK Three Big Questions**

1. How is God revealing himself?
2. How does this make sense of us?
3. Where do I stand in this story?

**+ DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## In the Beginning



+ WATCH **"How Did God Create the Ingredients for Life?"** from the BioLogos Foundation

+ PRAY for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ READ **Genesis 1:1-2:4 (ESV)**. If you're in a group of four or more divide the reading amongst four people (A, B, C & D), like Slide 3 (see below for attachment).

### + REFLECT

Every story has a beginning, but the Big Picture of the Bible is a little bit different. To see what I mean, listen to the very first words, on the very first page, in the very first chapter of the Bible:

*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2)*

**"In the beginning."** The Bible isn't just an ordinary story, it's the true story of the whole world, and so the Bible doesn't start just anywhere. Its beginning is THE beginning; where all things find their origin, when time itself springs into being, and every effect finds its ultimate cause.

***“In the beginning, God.”*** But that ultimate cause isn’t just another physical phenomenon in a long chain of physical phenomena. That cause is personal and spiritual, and he has a name: *Elohim*, The-Great-and-Mighty—God. Before anything or anyone else, there is simply... HIM.

***“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”*** In this opening prologue to the whole biblical narrative only God speaks, only God acts; and creation—*everything else*—simply flows from his Word, and is shaped by his hand. Before he speaks and shapes there was nothing, but because of him, everything simply *is*. Our cosmic home is radically dependent on a radically independent Creator—the Great I AM.

***“The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep.”***

When God creates, he begins with his own blank canvas: no particular shape, just an empty, fluid darkness. Over the course of three days he fashions the physical world (light & dark; sea & sky; land & vegetation) and then he returns to these places to fill them with their inhabitants, one day at a time (lights of day & night; fish & birds; land animals & humans). And everything was just so; not just “good,” but “very good.”

***“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”*** Just as God is our beginning, he is also our end; the first one to be and do, and the last one to take up his proper residence (on day 7). He is the end-all and be-all, the goal, the one “in whom all things hold together.” These heavens and earth are not ours, but his. This is HIS story; we belong to him.

Here is beauty. Here is order. Here is the melody and harmony of creation. As David knew, the stars sing, and their words call out for discovery. So we look and listen. We ponder the intricate dance of electromagnetism and gravity, weak and strong nuclear forces, and gravitational binding and rest-mass energy. We live in a universe in which only one less quark per billion antiquarks would have tipped the balance against everything but radiation—even us. But why is that so? Why that extra quark? Why those perfect ratios? Why the interconnectedness of all matter, or the intelligibility of the universe? Why? Because, *“In the beginning, God created...”*

**+ ASK Three Big Questions**

1. How is God revealing himself?
2. How does this make sense of us?
3. Where do I stand in this story?

**+ DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## The Image of God



+ WATCH ["The Image of God"](#) from the Bible Project

+ PRAY for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ READ [Genesis 2:4-3:24 \(ESV\)](#)

### + REFLECT

Every story has a cast of characters, and the bigger the story, the bigger the cast. But in the Big Picture of the Bible, it is always God who speaks and acts first. And since he is the Author of this story that means you only make it in if he writes you into it. So God creates this world and fills it with his creatures, but something is missing. Things are "good," but not yet "very good." And so God does something surprising. He pours out even more of his goodness into a creature that will reflect and represent who he is.

If I were to ask you to close your eyes and try to picture God, one of two images would probably pop into your mind. On one hand there might be a bright, ethereal light from heaven, which speaks in a booming voice. On the other, you might see a gentle or even grandfatherly figure clothed in white robes, with eyes that know your every thought. And if I were to ask you to imagine who God would create in his own image, you would probably think of spiritual beings that match one of those two images—like angels. After all, even the Bible calls angels “sons of God.” But that’s not who God crowns as the kings and queens of his creation. Listen:

*Then God said, “**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion** over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; **male and female he created them.** And God blessed them. And God said to them, “**Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,** and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” (Genesis 1:26-28)*

**Say what!?** Yep. If you want to know who God created to reflect and represent who he is, you can’t look up, you have to look down to the Bible, and then look within your own heart. The person whose face you see in the mirror every day is created in God’s own image. The person you love to be with more than any other person is God’s image-bearer. And even that person whom you can’t stand at work or at school was created to image that same God. That means everything about your life—your looks, your personality, your strengths and weaknesses, your gender, your relationships—all of these are gifts from the One who made you. He’s handed you a first draft of your own story, and invites you to finish it; to become his own co-author.

Of course, you may not feel that way about it at all. When you look into your heart—or into the face of your enemy—you don’t see how that can be true. But that’s part of the human story too. Adam and Eve were the first to discover it, but we all know it by experience (even if we don’t know what to call it). **We’re not that good at imaging God.** In fact, as the Bible says, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). What we need is to be rescued; a new way to be human. Not just from the evil without, but from the evil within. Adam failed God, but God wasn’t done yet. Instead, he sent forth a Son of Adam, “the offspring of Eve.”

**+ ASK Three Big Questions**

1. How is God revealing himself?
2. How does this make sense of us?
3. Where do I stand in this story?

**+ DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## Covenants of Promise



+ WATCH ["The Covenants"](#) from the Bible Project

+ PRAY for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ READ [Ephesians 2-3 \(ESV\)](#)

### + REFLECT

If there's one thing that always strikes me about the Big Picture of the Bible, it's just how BIG of a story we're talking about. Just think about it: this is the story of the cosmos, of humanity, of an eternal God who has always been and always will be. Or think about the Bible itself: 66 individual books written over 1,500 years by 40 or so different authors. On one hand that might seem a bit overwhelming; that's lots of years and lots of faces and lots of events to think about. But on the other hand, when you take a step back from each of those books, you begin to see

a single story taking shape—a story of truly cosmic proportions, one that involves every thing and every one. And it all comes down to this: **God became flesh.**

To see what I mean, try this out: open a Bible and turn to its table of contents. You'll notice that most of the books are listed under the heading, "The Old Testament," and several others are listed under another heading, "The New Testament." What you won't see on that page, though, is what connects those two sections. The hinge upon which these testaments turn is the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Remember what Paul said to the Colossians: "in him all things hold together." Now listen to what he wrote to a sister-church around that same time, about how they saw the Old Testament:

*... remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to **the covenants of promise**, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **For he himself is our peace**, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself **one new man** in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God **in one body** through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. (Ephesians 2:12-16)*

When you're trying to remember the Big Picture of the Bible, that word "covenants" is extremely important. Because it describes those times in human history when God steps out in his gracious love and calls a person into a relationship with him. And just like any good story, the best parts echo throughout its later chapters. So we see God covenanting with Adam and Noah, and Abraham and Jacob (the father of the nation of Israel), and then a guy named David. That's what these are: "covenants of promise"—each one building on the others to brings everything together in the Promise. Catch that? **Many covenants, one promise.**

And that promise is fulfilled in one man: Jesus. His very name means deliverance, the putting-back-together of what we unraveled. He is the one who says, "Your mess is mine," and then dies to prove it. And that's where the mystery becomes really good news. God knows even better than we do just how wrong we really are. He could have looked down at the mess we made of things and ended it all right there. But that's simply not who God is. And we know who he is because we've known his Son. And in Christ, we hear the gospel call, "*Follow me.*"

**+ ASK Three Big Questions**

1. How is God revealing himself?
2. How does this make sense of us?
3. Where do I stand in this story?

**+ DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## Follow Me



+ WATCH [“The Gospel of the Kingdom”](#) from the Bible Project

+ PRAY for open hearts and minds, especially yours.

+ READ [Acts 1-2 \(ESV\)](#)

### + REFLECT

As we wrap up the Big Picture of the Bible, I don’t want you to think the story is over. You see, if you’re hearing this for the first time, your journey is just getting started. But before you head down that path, it’s important to know the answers to two big questions: (1) WHERE are you going? and (2) WHY are you going? The first question is pretty obvious. Just try to hit “GO” in Apple Maps without a destination and see what happens.

But what about that second one; why is WHY important? Well, unless you're the freest of spirits (or exceedingly bored), you probably don't just jump in your car and head off into the unknown. There's probably a reason you've selected your destination. You need the WHY for other reasons too, like, When do I need to be there? When do I need to leave? If it's for an event (family, work, fun, etc.) the WHEN might already be set. But you probably don't treat all those as equally important. The WHY might dictate you **will** be there, no matter what.

So what is your WHERE and your WHY? For a Christian, the answer is simple: it all comes down to a WHOM: **Jesus**. To be a Christian means to be a disciple of Christ, walking in his footsteps, and obeying his every word in love. And that's not an easy thing to do. Jesus says it best: "If anyone would come after me, let him **deny himself** and **take up his cross daily** and **follow me**" (Luke 9:23). You see, we can't come to him on our own terms. We can't decide WHAT's really important or WHEN's the right time, because we know the WHY and he is a WHOM. And because of that, we follow—no matter how we feel, no matter what we have to give up, no matter how many times we fall—we take his hand and follow him.

Seven weeks to the day after Jesus rose from the dead, people from all over the world were gathered together in Jerusalem. Many of them had been there the day Jesus died, crying out, "Crucify him!" But when they heard what God had done for them through his own Son—by becoming human, dying for their sins, rising from the dead, and sitting at God's right hand in heaven—there was really only one question that remained: "What shall we do!?" Peter doesn't tell them to say a prayer, or to join the church of their choice. Listen to that first sermon:

*"**Repent and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." ... So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And **they devoted themselves** to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:38-42)*

When you first come to Christ, it can be hard. You have so many questions. There seems to be so much to learn. Things just aren't the same anymore. But don't let that stop you. He is the one who created you. He is the one who died for you. He is the one calling you. He is the one that all history longs for. And he's coming again. Be transformed. Be baptized. Give yourselves wholly to his church. Let us help you. And obey the voice of the one who calls, "Follow me."

**+ ASK Three Big Questions**

1. How is God revealing himself?
2. How does this make sense of us?
3. Where do I stand in this story?

**+ DIG DEEPER** with [slides for group discussion](#).

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## Behind the Big Picture



While preparing the Big Picture I did my best to keep things as accessible and brief as possible. Which means that if you're a teacher or other leader, you probably have a few more questions. So here are the works I drew on while preparing our material. If you have any other questions, feel free to hit me up at [www.inearthenvessels.com/contact](http://www.inearthenvessels.com/contact).

### + WORKS THAT SHAPED THIS STUDY

*The Bible Project*. Creative Directors: Jon Collins & Tim Mackie. Online video commentaries at [thebibleproject.com](http://thebibleproject.com) & [readscripture.org](http://readscripture.org). These guys are master-storytellers. I've used their resources twice in back-to-back classes with middle- and high-schoolers, so you'll see a few of their videos throughout the study.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. Trans. Daniel W. Bloesch. *Bonhoeffer Works—Reader's Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. iBooks. Bonhoeffer turns exegesis into poetry, and places it at the center of Christian community. Absolutely the best book on "life together under the Word."

Buzzard, Justin. *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life*. Chicago: Moody, 2013.

iBooks. I came across this pretty late in the game, but if you're looking for a book-length treatment of the subject, start with this one.

Chesterton, G.K. *Orthodoxy*. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1908. A must-read for just about everyone, and the source of the one extra-biblical quote you'll see in the text.

Ferguson, Everett. *The Rule of Faith: A Guide*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015. Print. Brother Ferguson is one of my favorite scholars, and in this short little book he shows how the early church remembered the Big Picture and then used it to disciple others.

Hauerwas, Stanley & William Willimon. *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony, Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2014. iBooks. From the front cover: "A provocative Christian assessment of culture and ministry for people who know that something is wrong." If Bonhoeffer is a poet, these guys are prophets, shaking contemporary churches out of their sleep.

Lloyd-Jones, Sally. *The Jesus Storybook Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zonderkids, 2007. Print. If you only read one book here, read this one, especially if you're doubtful about a story-telling approach to the truth. And no, it's not just for kids!

[Pixabay.com](http://Pixabay.com). This where I got all the cool pictures. From their site: "All contents are released under Creative Commons CC0, which makes them safe to use without asking for permission or giving credit to the artist - even for commercial purposes." But you can buy the photogs a cup of coffee!

Vosburg, David A., PhD & Kate Vosburg. *Jesus, Beginnings, and Science: A Guide for Group Conversation*. Farmville, VA: Pier, 2017. iBooks. This little book is a joy to read. Their conversational approach and discussion format show through a lot in this guide.

### **+ THREE BIG QUESTIONS**

MacIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, 2007. iBooks.

This is probably the most important book by any living philosopher. MacIntyre talks a lot about the problems with modern moral systems. Part of his solution: tell better stories.

He's also the inspiration for the third big question.

McGrath, Alister E. *Surprised by Meaning: Science, Faith, and How We Make Sense of Things*.

Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011. iBooks. If science doesn't make your heart stir, start here. If the idea of faith seems irrational, start here. And if you know a lot of people in one of those two camps, start here. This is the source of the first quote you'll see in the slides, the inspiration for my first and second Big Questions, and one of three

sources (along with *The Language of God* and *Questions of Truth*) I used to prepare the slides on the fine-tuning of the universe.

Tolkien, J.R.R. "On Fairy-stories." *Tales from the Perilous Realm*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008. Print. If words like "story," "myth," and "fairies" give you the willies, then this is the essay for you. Tolkien wrote this as a lecture, which means the tone is conversational and it can be easily read aloud. One major point: the reason why stories move us is because they reflect the world's greatest story—the gospel.

Yeakley Jr., Flavil R. *Why They Left: Listening to Those Who Have Left Churches of Christ*. Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 2012. Kindle. This book is a must-read for shepherds, preachers, deacons, and teachers. Brother Yeakley presents the results of a survey he conducted among former members of the church, along with additional insights on human behavior, group dynamics, and just how to *be* the church.

#### **+ A STORY WORTH SHARING**

*The ESV Study Bible*. Ed. Lane T. Dennis & Wayne Grudem. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. This is like a one-volume commentary, plus a systematic theology, plus a practical theology all rolled into one. You should also check out [ESV.org](http://ESV.org) and its companion apps for iOS and Android. Of particular note here are the articles on how we got the Bible. These are also published separately as *Understanding Scripture*, edited by Wayne Grudem, C. John Collins, and Thomas R. Schreiner.

Gilbert, Greg. *Why Trust The Bible?* Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. iBooks. This is by far the most accessible book I've read on this subject.

Lightfoot, Neil R. *How We Got the Bible*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003. iBooks. Brother Lightfoot does a great job telling about the story and evidence behind our Scriptures.

Preface to *The New King James Version*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982. I usually begin my studies in the NKJV, before switching over to the ESV for teaching. The preface does a fantastic job summarizing the evidence for our Old and New Testaments, as well as different ways scholars approach that evidence in the New Testament.

## + IN THE BEGINNING & THE IMAGE OF GOD

Aristotle. *Politics*. Trans. B. Jowett. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. Ed. Jonathan Barnes.

Princeton, 1994. iBooks. This may be a strange one to see here, but modern psychology has confirmed and extended Aristotle's nature-habit-reason paradigm in important ways. This helps us better understand what the Bible might mean when it says we're made in God's image.

Collins, C. John. *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006. Kindle. This is probably the best commentary I've seen on these four chapters, and is both academic and accessible. Collins' comments on covenants are also helpful.

Collins, Francis S. *The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*. New York: Free, 2006. iBooks. This book is my second-favorite on the science-faith dialogue, right behind *Surprised by Meaning*. Collins' personal journey from churchgoing, to agnostic, to atheist, to scientist, to believer, to the leader of the Human Genome Project is inspiring. His information on the moral law, genetics and fine-tuning is also helpful.

Dahlsgaard, K., C. Peterson & M.E.P. Seligman. "Shared Virtue: The Convergence of Valued Human Strengths Across Culture and History." *Review of General Psychology*, 9: 203-213 (2005). A cool but completely unwitting confirmation of the Moral Law. This is the source of the two slides in "The Image of God" titled, "Is There a Moral Law?"

Haidt, Jonathan. *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*. New York: Pantheon, 2012. iBooks. This is perhaps the strangest book here. Haidt synthesizes a vast array of findings across the fields of neuroscience, psychology, biology, and anthropology to present his view on human nature. He sometimes takes a negative view of revealed religion, but his thoughts on oxytocin, mirror neurons, intuition, and the art of persuasion are important.

Lewis, C.S. *The Abolition of Man*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2001. Originally published in 1944 as a book on English education, I tell people all the time that these are the best 100 pages written in the last 100 years. Lewis' ethical work is a natural bridge from the works of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, and Aquinas to even more modern writers, like Alasdair MacIntyre, John Collins and Alister McGrath.

Polkinghorne, John & Nicholas Beale. *Questions of Truth: Fifty-one Responses to Questions about God, Science, and Belief*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009. Kindle. This is the second strangest book. The authors do a pretty good job answering

common questions about science and faith, but their theology is a bit off at times. However, their appendix on fine-tuning is the best of three books I used here.

Sinek, Simon. *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*. New York: Penguin, 2009. Print. Okay, so maybe this whole section is strange. This one is here because it's my favorite book on leadership. But it is also the best summary of the WHY and the HOW, and their relationships to the brain's limbic system and neocortex (respectively). This also explains some of the strange capitalization I use in "Follow Me."

#### **+ COVENANTS OF PROMISE & FOLLOW ME**

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Discipleship*. Trans. Barbara Green & Reinhard Krauss. *Bonhoeffer Works —Reader's Edition*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015. iBooks. Bonhoeffer again outdoes himself: discipleship, the Sermon on the Mount, evangelism, and "the visible church-community—all in one book. This is longer than *Life Together*, but well-worth the read.

Chambers, Dan. *Churches in the Shape of Scripture: Churches of Christ and the Quest to Be More Than Just Another Evangelical Church*. Franklin, TN: FaithWorks, 2012. Print. Chambers' title pretty much says it all. His strength is dealing with fairly controversial issues (baptism, instrumental music, women leadership, etc.) with the love of Christ. He also proves that being right doesn't mean you have to be boring.

Ferguson, Everett. *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today*. Grand Rapids: Eerdsman, 1996. Kindle. That title might not sound like your cup of tea, but Ferguson's book really is a great book about everything. His thoughts on covenants, the Messiah, and ministry have been particularly helpful for me.

Rhodes, Kevin W. *Follow Me: A Call to True Discipleship*. Kevin is a good friend, and one of the most thoughtful, hard-working people I know. In the foreword, Mike Vestal says it well: "Kevin offers ... a veritable theology of discipleship." You can also catch some of Kevin's thoughts in a series of lessons called, "Follow Me," at Polishing the Pulpit 2018.