

Participant Guide

How to Read the Bible: A 10,000-Foot Overview

A 6-week study to explore Scripture, deepen faith, and grow together.

Welcome

Whether you have been reading Scripture for years or are just beginning, this study will help you discover the big picture, understand its beauty and complexity, and grow more confident as a reader of God's Word. Each week you will explore Scripture from a fresh angle, reflect on its meaning, and consider how to live it out in community.

What to expect:

- Weekly themes and Scripture readings
- Group discussion and spiritual reflection
- Hands-on practice and personal journaling
- Insights from Methodist tradition and theologians like Adam Hamilton

Weekly Overview

Week	Theme	Focus
1	What Is the Bible?	Sacred library and divine conversation
2	The Grand Narrative	God's story from Creation to New Creation
3	Reading by Genre	Engaging Scripture through literary forms
4	Reading in Context	Historical and theological awareness
5	The Word Speaks Today	Application to justice, discipleship, daily life
6	Praying with Scripture	Psalms, Lectio Divina, Scripture as prayer
7	Living the Word	Scripture-shaped life and ongoing calling
8	Passing the Flame (<i>Final Week</i>)	Teaching others, Scripture testimony, commissioning

Weekly Journal Template

Use this space each week to capture your insights.

Week ____ | Theme: _____

Date: _____

Weekly Order

Opening Thought or Prayer:

Scripture Notes:

- What words stood out?
- What surprised you or comforted you?

Group Reflection:

- What insights or questions came from discussion?

Wesleyan Lens:

- Tradition, reason, experience—how did they guide my understanding?

Application & Action:

- What is God asking of me this week?

Closing Prayer or Commitment:

Final Week Challenge: Reading Covenant

Use the space below to plan your next steps after the study.

My 4-week Bible Reading Plan:

- Theme/focus: _____
- Scriptures I want to explore:

Reflection practice: (Circle one or more)

- Daily journaling
- Weekly conversation with a partner
- Creative response (art, poetry, prayer)

Who might I invite to read Scripture with me next?

Helpful Tips for Engaging the Bible

- Think of the Bible as a library, not a single book
- Pay attention to genre—poetry speaks differently than narrative
- Ask about context—who wrote this, and why?
- Use the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, Experience
- Read in community—others often see what we miss
- Let Scripture lead to prayer, action, and transformation

About This Study

This study is born out of a deep longing to connect faith with action, sacred text with lived experience. Rooted in the rhythms of Scripture and the call to discipleship, it invites individuals and communities to rediscover the divine narrative woven into creation, compassion, and daily life.

Purpose:

To deepen our understanding of God's grace as expressed in creation and community, and to inspire faithful responses through worship, stewardship, and care for neighbor.

Themes Explored:

- **Mystagogy & Worship:** Encountering the holy through liturgical practice and sacramental reflection.
- **Creation Care:** Embracing ecological responsibility as an act of worship and discipleship.
- **Community Outreach:** Responding to hunger and need as tangible expressions of God's abundance.
- **Scriptural Storytelling:** Engaging biblical narratives that call us to justice, mercy, and transformation.

Intended Audience:

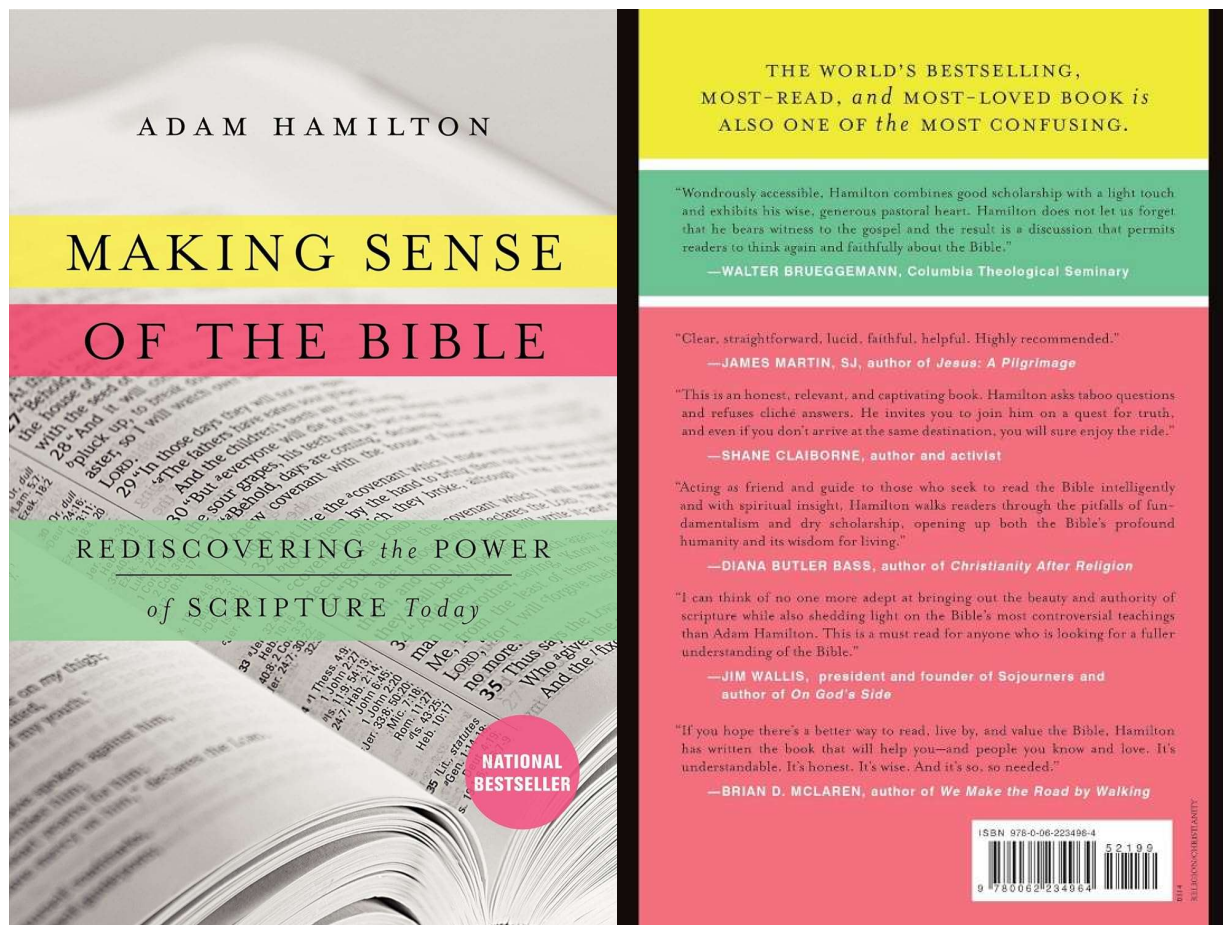
This study is crafted for congregations, small groups, ministry leaders, and anyone seeking to live out their faith through intentional action and spiritual depth. It speaks to hearts ready to be awakened by Scripture and hands prepared to serve.

Vision:

May this study be more than words on a page—may it become a movement toward wholeness, justice, and joy. May it strengthen the roots of faith and stretch branches outward to shelter, nourish, and transform.

Self-Paced Reading Option

(Optional) For Further Study: Incorporating, Adam Hamilton's *Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today* into your engagement of scripture.



ISBN: 978-0062234964

Week	Theme	Pages
Week 1	What Is the Bible?	pp. 1-18, 31-44
Week 2	The Grand Narrative	pp. 65-84
Week 3	Reading by Genre	pp. 45-62, 85-96
Week 4	Reading in Context	pp. 135-165
Week 5	The Word Speaks Today	pp. 166-178
Week 6	Praying with Scripture	pp. 123-129
Week 7	Living the Word	pp. 166-172, 179-188
Week 8	Passing the Flame	pp. 31-37, 189-198
Bonus 1	The Bible and Science	pp. 103-111
Bonus 2	The Bible and Evolution	pp. 112-122
Bonus 3	Violence in the Bible	pp. 135-142
Bonus 4	Women in Scripture	pp. 143-150
Bonus 5	The Bible and Homosexuality	pp. 151-165
<i>*The bonus readings cover controversial topics in scripture.</i> <i>Due to the potential divisive nature, The pastor is ready to discuss these in private in a one-on-one setting.</i>		

Week 1: What Is the Bible?

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton introduces the Bible as a divine-human conversation, a library shaped by history, inspiration, and faithful transmission.

Quote to Use:

“We don’t read the Bible for information; we read it for transformation.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: Introduction, The Nature of Scripture, The Bible’s Authority

Pages: pp. 1–18, 31–44

Excerpt:

Hamilton describes the Bible as “a disturbing, wonderful, perplexing, and inspiring book.”

Discussion Questions:

- What assumptions do you bring when opening the Bible?
- How does Hamilton’s approach to inspiration challenge or affirm your understanding of Scripture?

Week 2: The Grand Narrative

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton offers big-picture overviews of the Old and New Testaments to help readers see the unity and flow of Scripture.

Quote to Use:

“God’s grace weaves its way from the first pages of Genesis to the final words of Revelation.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: The Old Testament in 15 Minutes, The New Testament in 15 Minutes

Pages: pp. 65–84

Excerpt:

“The Old Testament tells the story of God’s efforts to redeem and restore humanity... The New Testament reveals how God did this through Jesus.”

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you see yourself in God’s ongoing story?
- What surprised you about the broad summaries of the Testaments?

Week 3: Reading by Genre

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton explains how recognizing biblical genres—poetry, history, prophecy, gospel—helps us interpret faithfully.

Quote to Use:

“Poetry shouldn’t be read like law; parables aren’t decoded like history.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: Interpreting the Bible, Reading the Gospels Today, Reading Paul Today

Pages: pp. 45–62, 85–96

Excerpt:

“The Bible contains many different genres... understanding this is essential to understanding the text.”

Discussion Questions:

- Which genre do you naturally gravitate toward—and which challenges you?
- How would misreading genre affect your interpretation?

Week 4: Reading in Context

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton urges readers to explore the historical, cultural, and theological context of each passage.

Quote to Use:

“The Bible is deeply contextual. Understanding that context is essential if we are to interpret it faithfully.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: Violence, Women, and Homosexuality in the Bible

Pages: pp. 135–165

Excerpt:

“We must ask what a passage meant to its original audience before applying it to our lives today.”

Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever misunderstood a passage because you did not know the context?
- How can we balance reverence for Scripture with critical engagement?

Week 5: The Word Speaks Today

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton shows how Scripture speaks into present-day decisions, from compassion to creation care.

Quote to Use:

“The Scriptures challenge us to reflect the character of God in how we treat others.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: What the Bible Says About Justice, Mercy, and Love; Applying Scripture Today

Pages: pp. 166–178

Excerpt:

“The question is not, ‘What does this passage say?’ but, ‘What is God saying to us through this passage today?’”

Discussion Questions:

- Where is God’s Word calling you to action right now?
- How do you keep Scripture from becoming just background noise?

Week 6: Praying with Scripture

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton explores the Psalms as a model for prayer—emotional, theological, and transformative.

Quote to Use:

“The Psalms give us words to pray when we can’t find our own—and permission to be brutally honest with God.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapter: The Psalms: Israel’s Prayer Book

Pages: pp. 123–129

Excerpt:

“The Psalms help us bring our whole selves—anger, joy, sorrow, hope—before God.”

Discussion Questions:

- How has a Psalm ever shaped your prayer life?
- What does it mean to pray Scripture honestly?

Week 7: Living the Word

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton emphasizes that Scripture is meant to be lived—not just studied.

Quote to Use:

“The ultimate goal of reading the Bible is not knowledge—it’s transformation, both personal and social.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: What the Bible Says About Justice, Mercy, and Love; Is the Bible the Word of God?

Pages: pp. 166–172, 179–188

Excerpt:

“To live biblically is to love, to serve, to forgive, and to seek justice.”

Discussion Questions:

- Where do you feel challenged to live more biblically?
- What helps you connect Scripture with real-world choices?

Week 8: Passing the Flame

Hamilton Tie-In:

Hamilton encourages readers to share Scripture with confidence and humility.

Quote to Use:

“The Bible doesn’t belong on a shelf—it’s meant to be shared.”

Suggested Reading:

Chapters: The Bible’s Authority; Making Sense of Scripture Today

Pages: pp. 31–37, 189–198

Excerpt:

“You don’t need to be a scholar to teach the Bible—you just need to love it and share what it means to you.”

Discussion Questions:

- What is one way you can share what you have learned with someone else?
- Who first passed the Word on to you?

Addendum: Additional Topics for Personal Reflection

These chapters are recommended for independent study:

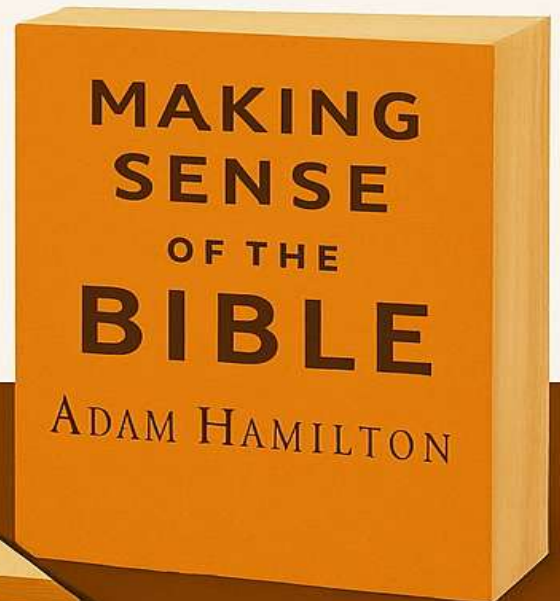
- The Bible and Science (pp. 103–111)
- The Bible and Evolution (pp. 112–122)
- Violence in the Bible (pp. 135–142)
- Women in Scripture (pp. 143–150)
- The Bible and Homosexuality (pp. 151–165)

HOW TO ENGAGE THE BIBLE

AN EIGHT WEEK STUDY

**WEDNESDAYS, 6:00 – 7:00 PM
SEPTEMBER 10 – OCTOBER 29**

All are welcome



RSVP

princetonumcpastor1855@gmail.com

Meet at Princeton UMC

Our Covenant to One Another:

1. Show Up Faithfully

We commit to attending each session as consistently as possible and arriving on time, prepared and ready to engage.

2. Create a Safe and Respectful Space

We will listen without judgment, honor each other's stories, and welcome diverse perspectives. We will not interrupt, correct, or debate, but seek to understand and be understood.

3. Speak Truth in Love

We will speak from our own experiences ("I" statements) and offer our insights with kindness. We will give others the benefit of the doubt and assume good intentions.

4. Hold What is Shared in Confidence

We will not share personal stories or comments from group members outside of our sessions. This is a sacred space.

5. Embrace the Tension

We will welcome questions, doubts, and disagreements as part of faithful wrestling with Scripture. We will not seek to "win" arguments, but to learn and grow together.

6. Engage the Bible with Openness

We commit to approaching Scripture—and one another—with humility and a willingness to be transformed. We will use *Making Sense of the Bible* and our study guide as tools for growth, not weapons of certainty.

7. Pray for One Another

We will lift one another up in prayer throughout this journey, supporting each other with grace, especially when life outside of group feels heavy.

8. Follow Wesley's Lead

Do no Harm, Do Good and in All Things Love God.

Appendix

Bible Study Reading Plan (Bookmark Style)

Week 1	What Is the Bible? (pp. 1-18, 31-44)
Week 2	The Grand Narrative (pp. 65-84)
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Visio Divina

Visio divina invites the viewer into "divine seeing." *Visio divina* shares roots with the ancient practice of *lectio divina*. (*Lectio divina* calls for a slow, careful interaction with scripture through meditation and prayer, allowing a word or phrase to rise in our consciousness, a holy word to savor and examine.) Similarly, *visio divina* invites us to encounter the divine through images. A prayerful consideration of and interaction with a photograph, an icon, a piece of art, or other visual representation allows the viewers to experience the divine in a unique and powerful way.

You may practice *visio divina* individually or in a small group or worship setting by using a piece of art as a focal point for prayer. You can also pair scripture with the image in order to reflect on the scripture through the art.

Try It Out

1. Pick out an image from a website: a photograph, painting, or icon.
2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay with the first thing you see. Focus your attention on the part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
3. Let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
4. Consider the following questions:
 - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
 - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
 - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.
5. Offer your prayers to God now in a final time of silence.

Lectio Divina: Praying the Scriptures

One ancient practice central to Christian prayer is called *lectio divina* or “divine reading.” In *lectio divina*, we begin by reading and savoring a short passage of scripture. Our inner posture is one of a listening heart with an unhurried expectation that God has a message to convey especially suited to our circumstance. We read and ruminate with the ears of our heart open, alert to any connections the Spirit may reveal between the passage and our life situation. We ask, “What are you saying to me today, Lord?” Listening in this way requires patient receptivity in which we let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to God’s shaping purpose.

Once we have heard a word that we know is meant for us, we feel naturally drawn to prayer. From listening we move to speaking—perhaps in confession or sorrow, perhaps in joy or thanksgiving, perhaps in anger or hurt, perhaps in trust or surrender. Finally, after pouring out our heart to God, we come to rest simply and deeply in the wonderful, loving presence of God.

Reading, reflecting, responding, and resting—this forms the basic rhythm of *lectio divina*. God is present in you through the Spirit who speaks to you in scripture and prays in you and for you. Ask for grace to listen to what God says, then choose one of the short biblical passages here and follow the steps: read, reflect, respond, and rest. (Read the scripture three times once for each of the first three steps)

1. Read the scripture slowly.

Watch for a key phrase or word that jumps out at you or promises to hold a special meaning for you. It is better to dwell profoundly on one word or phrase than to skim the surface of several chapters. Read with your own life and choices in mind.

2. Reflect on a word or phrase.

Let the special word or phrase that you discovered in the first step sink into your heart. Bring mind, will, and emotions to task. Be like Mary, Jesus’ mother, who heard the angel’s announcement and “treasured” and “pondered” what she had heard (Luke 2:19).

3. Respond to what you have read.

Form a prayer that expresses your response to the idea, then “pray it back to God.” What you have read is woven through what you tell God.

4. Rest in God’s presence.

Be still and let God’s loving spirit pour out on you.

Audio Divina

Audio Divina, or Divine Listening, is a contemplative spiritual practice similar to Lectio Divina (Divine Reading) and Visio Divina (Divine Seeing), where music is used as a means to connect with the Divine. The practice involves listening deeply to a piece of music, reflecting on how it moves the heart and mind, responding in prayer, and resting in the presence of the Spirit. It is a method of sacred listening that uses musical compositions as a focus for meditation and spiritual reflection, helping practitioners discover movement and guidance from the Holy Spirit.

How to Practice Audio Divina

1. Prepare:

Find a quiet place, get comfortable, and choose a musical piece you want to listen to.

2. Listen:

Quiet your mind and body and then invite the Holy Spirit to guide your listening. Listen with your "ear of your heart" to melodies, rhythms, and sounds.

3. Reflect:

Ponder what you are hearing and what emotions, memories, or physical sensations it evokes.

4. Respond:

Engage in prayer, reflecting on the thoughts and feelings that have surfaced during your listening experience.

5. Rest:

Finally, rest peacefully in God's presence, allowing the gifts of the Spirit to permeate your soul. You can also choose to journal your experience afterwards.