



Week of May 21
Reading the Gospels¹

Overview:

This sermon series will focus on how we got the Bible, why we can trust it, and what's most important as we study, interpret, and apply what we read. While the series will be topical in nature, our weekly discussion and reflection guides will each center around a *genre* of scripture...each one a unique type of literature to be read and understood in a unique way.

God chose to communicate eternal truths through events within the flow of history. Because of this, God can use these words to speak again in our own time, and within our historical particularity. Knowing what genre is used in each Biblical text helps us to understand the author's intent and manage expectations about **what** and **how** a text and its author are trying to communicate. In daily life, readers switch easily between various types of literature – most don't, for example, read *The New York Times* in the same way they would read *Lord of the Rings*.

As you learn about each genre, we'll provide sample texts that illustrate some of the uniquenesses about that genre. We hope this study helps you go deeper in your bible study skills and provides helpful context and application for the broader topics discussed in the sermon series.

Group Objectives:

Relationships and Life Transformation are the primary purpose of community groups.

- Reflect on this past Sunday's message and other devotional reading.
- Pray together and provide encouragement for other group members.
- Practice reading and interpreting gospel accounts in the Bible.

DNA statement(s) tie-in:

- *We encounter the Father daily.* God the Father speaks to us through the Bible, and we commune with him through prayer.
- *We are All for Jesus.* Jesus saves us from our past, remakes us to be like him, heals our broken places, and is coming back as our King.

Conversation Starters:

- What is your favorite gospel story (story about Jesus) and why?
- What stood out to you from this week's sermon?

Listening to God

- Where did you see God at work last week? How were you able to join him?

¹ This discussion guide was written by Dawn Gentry and Karl Pagenkemper and edited by Rachel Vaughn.

Learning about God's word: Gospel

The term “gospel” means “good news” and centers on the unique person of Jesus Christ. While much of it follows a narrative structure (as a historical record of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection), it also has sections of discourse or teaching from Jesus. In this regard, the good news is both proclaimed **by** Jesus (Mk 1:14-15) and proclaimed **about** Jesus (Luke 1:1-4). In addition to this historical record, each gospel record reflects various theological themes based on the author and his unique audience.²

- **Matthew** is traditionally attributed to one of the 12 apostles who was an eyewitness to the events recorded. He writes primarily for a Jewish audience and shares many Old Testament passages and fulfilled prophecies. Matthew shows Jesus as both the “new Moses” and a Messiah/King.
- **Mark** (often attributed to John Mark of Acts 12:12) purportedly wrote down the sayings and sermons of the apostle Peter. Most likely the first gospel to be written down, it is fast paced, full of action verbs and movement. He writes to a Gentile audience (possibly the church at Rome) and focuses on Jesus having power over death, disease, and demons.
- **Luke** was a travel companion to Paul and a well-educated doctor. Much of his gospel is shaped from interviews with eyewitnesses and focuses on themes of friendship and inclusion. Luke’s gospel also expands “the Jesus Story” through the book of Acts (a continuation of his earlier narrative). Luke’s primary audience was largely Greek-speaking, Gentile, and followers of Jesus.
- **John** writes the most unique gospel, focusing on Jesus as God’s son.³ His timeline is much shorter, centering on the last few weeks of Jesus’ life on earth. The author may well be John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ 12 apostles. His theology is the most fully developed of the four gospels and writes “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God” (John 20:31).

Each gospel writer chose specific stories about Jesus to share and unique ways to tell them, ultimately helping us understand the nature of God as seen in the face of Jesus. As we grow in understanding the kingdom Jesus established, we recognize our trajectory toward the kingdom **that will be**. In this manner, “the gospel is designed to persuade us to trust and follow Jesus so we can participate in the new creation that he began.”⁴

Learning from God's Word: Bible Study Discussion

Choose **TWO** of the four passages below to read and compare them with each other (OR divide into four groups and have each group answer the questions for their section). This is the story of the feeding of the five thousand. **Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14** (cf 6:25-35)

- What do you notice/learn about Jesus/God in this passage?
- What character or quote stands out in your version of the story?
- What do you notice in this story that may relate to your gospel writer’s specific focus/theme? (see notes above per author)
- What unique details stand out to you in this version of the story?
- After hearing answers from other versions of this gospel story, what do you notice is different?
 - Why do you think each gospel writer included those differences?
- If you knew this story as a child, what did you notice/learn in today’s reading that surprised you or helped you understand Jesus/God in a fresh way?

² See www.biblestudytools.com for more information and background on each gospel.

³ The “I AM” statements harken back to God’s appearance in the burning bush, Exodus 3.

⁴ Tim Mackie, <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/how-to-read-gospel/>

Leaning into Obedience:

- With whom do you most closely identify in this story? Jesus? The disciples? Andrew? The crowd? The little boy with his lunch? Why?
- How might “feeding the five thousand” translate into our modern-day context?
 - What are some principles learned in today’s story that we can adapt today as we learn to “follow and become like Jesus”?
- What does this story teach you about trusting God? Where do you struggle to trust God?
- Who might you share this story with? If you told this story to someone else, what are some of the unique details you would focus on?
 - *These questions help you understand how the gospel authors contextualized their version of the story for their context, and even theologized about a specific feature of Jesus they wanted to highlight.*

Prayer Prompts:

- Invite members of the group to share requests.
- Pray for specific encouragement in ways you want to trust God even more.
- Pray the Lord’s Prayer.

Our father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come,

Thy will be done on earth,

as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever,

Amen

For further study:

- Watch the final episode of *The Chosen*, season 3. It includes this story alongside the walking on the water story. Note Peter’s reaction to feeding the 5000 vs his experience in the boat.
- Mark E. Moore, *The Chronological Life of Christ*. (College Press, 2007)
- Fossum and Munoa, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction to Gospel Literature and Jesus Studies* (Wadsworth, 2004)
- Wright, NT. *Simply Good News: Why the Gospel Is News and What Makes It Good* (HarperOne, 2017)
- The Bible Project
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/gospel-mark/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/luke/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/matthew/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/john/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/podcast/why-are-there-4-gospels/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/how-to-read-gospel/>
 - <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/how-to-read-the-bible-the-parables-of-jesus/>