

But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a **WORD** against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come. "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. A brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For

who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A **SOWER** went out to **SOW**. And as he **SOW**ed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew

# SOWABLE WORD

out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless **WORD** they speak, for by your **WORDS** you will be justified, and by your **WORDS** you will be condemned." Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days

and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. Then it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation." While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and

up with me?" And he said to them, "Who are my mother, and my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A **SOWER** went out to **SOW**. And as he **SOW**ed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew

up with them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear." Then the disciples came and said to him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. Indeed, in this case the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled that says: "You will indeed hear but never understand, and you will indeed see but never perceive." For this people's heart has grown dull, and with their ears they can barely hear, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn, and I would heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. "Hear then the parable of the **SOWER**: When anyone hears the **WORD** of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been **SOWN** in his heart. This is what was **SOWN** along the path. As for what was **SOWN** on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the **WORD** and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the **WORD**, immediately he falls away. As for

## HELPING ORDINARY PEOPLE LEARN TO LEAD BIBLE STUDIES

PETER KROL



# SOWABLE WORD

HELPING ORDINARY PEOPLE  
LEARN TO LEAD BIBLE STUDIES

Peter Krol

For Mark Fodale,  
who first sold me on  
the delightful glory of  
interactive small-group Bible study

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**“If you are looking for a simple, practical way to lead group Bible studies more effectively, this is it.** Oftentimes, books on Bible study will either focus on the Bible part or group dynamics. In *Sowable Word*, Peter combines both. Get this book and use it yourself or give it to your small group leaders in your ministry or church. They will be glad you did.”

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*“Sowable Word* is Peter Krol’s great sequel to his *Knowable Word*. Whether you are new to leading a Bible study or an old hand at it, this book will equip you with tools and encourage you with zeal to lead a group into the Word. *Sowable Word* is **well-organized, biblical, thoughtful, seasoned, humble, practical, doable, readable and fresh**—what more can you want from a book?”

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“Learning to live well in Christian community is the task of every believer. And for that, preparing men and women to assist others in the study of the Bible is essential. **I know Peter Krol, and through him, some of the dozens of Bible teachers and small group leaders he has trained over the years. We owe him our thanks for *Sowable Word*.** For in it, the confidence many need to begin leading others in the joyful study of God’s Word can be acquired.”

**David Helm**, Senior Pastor, Christ Church Chicago; Chairman, The Charles Simeon Trust

*“Sowable Word* is a **simple but powerful resource** to give us practical help in studying the Word, then preparing and leading bible studies. **Any believer** who desires to dig deep and share biblical truths with others **will benefit greatly** from the guidance and skills Peter Krol gives us.”

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to the whole process of studying Scripture effectively in a group setting. **Fol-  
lowing through with these insights is like having a personal coach work  
alongside you** to help you develop and hone your skills, both in handling the  
text and relating to the group members. Best of all, the book is **thoroughly  
Biblical**, in the principles it identifies and the practice it illustrates. This is an  
**excellent training manual for a task of lasting importance** to groups of  
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will help you do it. Peter Krol gives an accessible, practical guide for how to  
create a Bible study that people actually want to attend. **The tools he puts  
forward are simple and effective. A novice leader will learn, and an experi-  
enced leader will be refined.**”

**Colleen McFadden**, Women’s Ministry Director, Trinity Community  
Church; Director of Women’s Workshops, Charles Simeon Trust

“So often I hear people referencing a Bible study of which they are a member  
reading through a book written about the Bible, not the Bible itself. I believe  
this is because many leaders today feel intimidated by teaching directly from  
God’s Word for a myriad of reasons. This is exactly why *Sowable Word* was  
written and is desperately needed. In it, Peter Krol gives **biblical, practical,  
step-by-step wisdom to every level of Bible study leader**. There is not one  
element of Bible study leadership that is left unconsidered in this thoughtful,  
easy-to-use guide. **It should be on the shelf of every serious leader.**”

**Vince Burens**, CEO/President, The Coalition for Christian Outreach

“Peter Krol is persistent. He wants you and your friends to study the Bible  
together the most effective way. **His website, *Knowable Word*, is a favorite  
of mine** and I have recommended it and passed along his articles many times.  
Now, he has gathered up some of his wisdom and persistence about teach-  
ing Bible studies into a book to help us do just that, and do it well. *Sowable  
Word?*— by all means. Read it and do it.”

**Jim Elliff**, Founder and President, Christian Communicators  
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# Building a Foundation

When God's Word falls on good soil, he promises the results will astound (Mark 4:8). That's why there's a surprising glory in leading a group of ordinary people to open their Bibles, read what's on the page, and discuss how God might use those words to change the world.

Perhaps you fear "getting it wrong" without expert guidance from a workbook or study guide. Is it possible to lead fruitful and engaging groups that actually study *the Bible*?

You might be familiar with the OIA method of Bible study (*Observe, Interpret, Apply*), but is it safe for you to *lead others* in OIA Bible study? (If you are not familiar with this method, have no fear. Chapter 2 will bring you up to speed.)

I wrote this book to encourage you in this task. I will present the unique opportunities and objectives of Bible studies. I will suggest ways to lead Bible studies that speak to both believers and non-believers. I will explain how to start a group, how to prepare for meetings, and how to lead a discussion. I will warn you of potential pitfalls, and I will cast a vision for training



others to lead after you. Whether you are a new Bible study leader or a pastor who's been doing it for years, I trust these ideas can help you to hone your craft.

The first part of this book will build foundations for Bible studies that actually study the Bible. I'll provide definitions and goals, such as what Bible studies are and why we have them. Then I'll summarize the Direct-OIA Bible study method, which equips us to lead others in Bible study. Finally, I'll address the basic skills required to get a group started.

I commend you for embracing this mission to lead others in study of God's Word. Through that Word, you might introduce some to the Lord Jesus Christ for the first time. And through that same Word, you can shepherd others unto maturity of faith. Your ministry may have seasons of planting and seasons of watering, but God alone is able to save souls and cause growth (1 Corinthians 3:6). He does such work through the implanted Word (James 1:21).

Therefore, there is something indescribably wonderful that happens when people learn to engage with God directly through his Word. People who are used to merely being told what to do learn to hear God's own voice. People afraid of messing up gain the confidence to take up and read. Consumers of content develop into distributors of truth. Committed disciples grow into influential disciple-makers.

And you now get to be a part of it. Let's see how.



One

# Why Lead Bible Studies?

Have you ever had a conversation like this?

“What do you have going on tonight?”

“I’m going to Bible study.”

“Great! What part of the Bible are you studying?”

“Francis Chan’s *Crazy Love*.”

## What Is a Bible Study?

Now, I’m no Chan-hater. I’ve never read *Crazy Love*, and probably I should have. But let’s be honest: while discussing a book can be a great use of your time, it’s fundamentally different than studying the Bible. It’s really a book club or a reading group.

A group Bible study is... wait for it... *a group of people studying the Bible*. So when I say, “Bible study,” I don’t mean a reading group, a prayer meeting, a hymn sing, a revival service, a sermon, or a classroom lecture. And for purposes of this book I don’t mean individual study. I’m referring to a group of people (which could be small or large) actively engaged in examining Scripture together.

Your commitment to leading Bible studies that

actually study the Bible will typically require you to take your group through selected books of Scripture. Therefore, though you may want to kick off each new series with an overview of the book under consideration, most of your subsequent meetings will involve an OIA discussion of a portion of the text.

Many Bible studies, of course, use a pre-packaged study guide or curriculum, and when these reflect a close adherence to the OIA method they can be valuable. But this book reflects my position—that the best studies will be unfiltered. Why? Because (as we will cover in more detail later in this book), although the main point of a given passage of Scripture never changes, how we think about it, talk about it, and apply it to our lives can vary in countless ways.

Indeed, this is why the Bible is uniquely valuable across history and across cultures, as it brings eternal, unchanging truth to bear on individual lives and societies. And it is why I'm interested in training people to study the Bible itself, directly. Of course, we shouldn't *ignore* what others have said about the Bible. We're a part of the community of faith, and we should never imagine that we can study the Bible in a vacuum and have a corner on the truth. But at the same time we must always evaluate what others say in light of what the text of Scripture says. Because if we never learn how to find what the text says, we're no different from the blind leading the blind. And that never ends well (Luke 6:39).

And what if your group or church leadership prefers that you use a curriculum? Then what you learn in this book will supercharge your use of it. If the curriculum is truly OIA in nature, you'll see its strengths and be able to maximize them. If it falls short, you'll be able to bring in any missing elements and put less emphasis on any content or techniques that distract from a close focus on the words of the passage itself.

In fact, to drill down a little further, what I'm doing in this book is to teach you how to help others discover *God's intended message* in any passage of Scripture. When you are able to do that, your group will obtain the greatest possible benefit from additional resources, because you will have a divine measuring rod against which to evaluate what those resources teach.

I propose that commentaries and study guides are most beneficial to us when we treat them as *conversation partners*. We consider what they have to say, but only insofar as they direct our attention back to the text. To ignore them altogether is hubris. To use the wrong ones makes us morally culpable for any resulting damage to people's souls. To use even good ones as our *source of authority* could make us slaves to every wind of doctrine—or it could inadvertently communicate to our group members that ordinary people simply can't be trusted with sacred things.

Therefore, regardless of which resources enter the conversation and how they do so, the living and

abiding Word of God ought to be the main course we serve our people.

## Why Have Bible Studies?

If Bible studies, rightly understood, are groups of people actively engaged in examining Scripture together, then they differ from sermons, classroom lectures, and informal instruction in that they consist primarily of group discussion. And this means, especially for leaders, that Bible studies can be terrifying. You never know what people will say... you might not know what to say in response... what if you lose control of the discussion? I admit, the prospect of leading a group in the way I propose can be daunting.

But while the best discussion is unscripted, it does not have to be out of control. Though open-ended, it doesn't have to be directionless. Though interrogative, it can still be powerfully declarative.

This is because Bible studies have something going for them that few sermons or personal quiet times can achieve: *interaction*. This is the chief advantage of Bible studies, and we see it playing out in all kinds of ways.

Because of interaction, we can see what part of the passage is hitting the mark with our group. This allows us to adjust in the moment to make better use of what's connecting with people's hearts, and jettison whatever is unhelpful.

Because of interaction, we can assess how people

are responding to the text. We get a good idea of what to follow up on later in personal conversations.

Because of interaction, we can see the fruits of faith or unbelief. We can often gauge where people are in their walks with the Lord as we see them wrestling with his Word.

Because of interaction, we can address difficult topics frankly. Some issues, normally considered impolite for pleasant conversation, may find safe harbor in an engaging Bible discussion. For example:

- What are some bad spending habits we should repent of?
- How can you be a more Christ-like father or mother?
- Last week you mentioned how stressed out you were. How does today's passage speak to your stress?
- What does Jesus say about how to receive eternal life? How would that affect your life if it were true?

Because of interaction, we can witness something extraordinary: the softening of human hearts. Sometimes people change their minds or their convictions over the course of a single discussion. At other times, it will take place over weeks, months, or even years. Sometimes we'll notice an improvement in attitude or character before the changed person even becomes aware of it.

Because of interaction, we can multiply our ministries. Through discussions, we can teach people how to study the Bible for themselves. We can train assistant leaders who will eventually lead their own Bible studies. We can coach people in particular skills such as making small talk, asking questions, listening attentively, or sharing vulnerably.

Because of interaction, people often feel respected and appreciated. This feeling encourages greater commitment and risk.

Because of interaction, we can better understand others and help them feel understood. God, who knows all things, chose to *interact* with Adam and not merely declare truth to him: “Where are you?” (Genesis 3:9). Jesus, who knew what was in the heart of a man, chose to *interact* and draw out others’ thoughts: “Is this what you are asking yourselves, what I meant?” (John 16:19).

As you learn how to lead better Bible studies, don’t fail to make use of your chief advantage: interaction.

## **Why Do People Join Bible Studies?**

So yes, interaction is invaluable, but a fundamental question remains: *Why* should we interact together about the Bible? What is our goal? What are we after? We could do many activities in groups—why study the Bible instead of doing something else?

Except for the rare cynic or mocker, nearly



everyone who joins a Bible study does it for reasons that are good. But good reasons become problematic when they supplant the best reasons. Watch out for the following reasons people might have for starting or joining a Bible study:

1. To learn about the Bible.
2. To support their church or its people in the study.
3. To sit under a gifted leader.
4. To be part of something great.
5. To make new friends or deepen existing friendships.
6. To be in a supportive environment.
7. To build a tightly knit community.
8. To develop more theological insight.
9. To grow as a Christian.

Those reasons are all good. We *should* have Bible studies for such reasons. But good reasons are only good when the best reason—to know God through his Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3, Philippians 3:7–11, Ephesians 1:16–17)—is continually kept front and center. Indeed, all good reasons will be served far better when we focus chiefly on the best reason.

God spoke his Word to show himself to us. And God's Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John

1:14). Though God spoke in many ways to the prophets, he has now spoken his Word in these last days by his Son: the glory of God, the imprint of God's nature, the only purification for sin, and the supreme power in all the universe (Hebrews 1:1–4).

We invite people to Bible studies so we can introduce them to Jesus (Acts 17:2–3). And we lead Bible studies so they may find eternal life by knowing God and his Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3). And whether they don't yet profess faith, or they have been walking with Christ for decades, their greatest needs are still to be "introduced" to Jesus in greater depth, and to revel in the eternal life of knowing him. God has made himself knowable, and we study his knowable Word so we might know Jesus, the living Word.

Winsome community and cogent education are terrific recruiters. But let's make sure we give people something that will address their deepest needs and last for eternity.

## **Will Your Bible Study Be Group-Centered or Christ-Centered?**

So the chief *advantage* of the group format is interaction and the main goal of group Bible studies is to help people know God through his Son Jesus Christ.

But sometimes that chief *advantage* can steal the limelight, and the main *goal* becomes the understudy.

Or if you prefer the athletic over the theatrical: the chief *advantage* can steal the ball, and the main *goal* gets benched. However you frame it, the result is the same: we get so excited by positive interactions between group members that our focus subtly slides from knowing God to knowing each other. And since knowing each other is a great thing, we might not even notice the shift.

Here are some questions to help you evaluate whether your Bible study is group-centered or Christ-centered. You may want to return to these questions periodically to evaluate your group's progress toward the right goal:

- Do group members spend more time sharing about their problems or testifying to God's grace in their lives?
- Does your Bible study always land on the same applications, or is there a sense of forward movement and invigorating variety?
- Do people depend on the leader to do all the thinking, or do they actively engage in the study?
- Is there general agreement and affirmation on most things, or do people feel free to challenge and disagree with one another?
- If the leader were to stop leading the group, would the group have another leader trained

and ready to take over, or at least heading in that direction?

- How long has it been since new people joined the group? Is the group so ingrown that new people would have a hard time fitting in?
- If any unbelievers unexpectedly showed up, would they meet God among you (1 Corinthians 14:24–25)?
- If your group discussed a secular self-help book instead of the Bible, would the discussion look any different?

From day one, seek to set strong cultural norms in your group, since these can be difficult to change once they become established (Chapter 3 will guide you in that). But before we can try to lead others, we must know how to study the Bible for ourselves.

Two

# Summary of the OIA Method

Before we can lead Bible studies that actually study the Bible, we must be able to study the Bible for ourselves. This chapter—which abridges material from my book *Knowable Word: Helping Ordinary People Learn to Study the Bible* (Cruciform Press, 2014, 2022)—serves as a reminder of the OIA process.<sup>1</sup>

## **A Simple and Reasonable Method**

Whether you are a pastor or elder, a small-group leader or Sunday school teacher, a conscientious parent or enthusiastic evangelist, the Lord calls you to rightly handle his Word of truth, without any need for shame (2 Timothy 2:15). Therefore, while we need the research of scholars to preserve and deepen knowledge, our fundamental method for Bible study must not require a graduate education or academic pedigree. Nor must it assume a library of knowledge or a specific set of cultural expectations.

There must be a simple method for Bible study that transcends history, geography, generational divides, and cultural norms. This method must not bore

scholars, and it must not leave school children behind. It should take only moments to learn but a lifetime to perfect. It should work for anyone of any age in any place at any time.

You have such a method already, and you use it all the time. You're using it right now. You follow this method every time you communicate with another person, dead or alive, through written or oral means. Perhaps you do it so instinctively you've never thought of it as a method.

1. *Observe*—What does it say?
2. *Interpret*—What does it mean?
3. *Apply*—How should I respond?

That's it. Your toddler niece does it when she *observes* her mother hand her a bottle, *interprets* the gesture as an offer of liquid treasure, and *applies* the event's meaning by seizing the bottle and taking a swig. Someone's great-great-great grandpa did it back in the Old World when he *observed* a customer enter his humble shop, *interpreted* the arrival as potential business, and *applied* the situation by smiling, welcoming the customer, and pitching his wares.

Think about reading the news, hearing a lecture, talking on the phone, communicating non-verbally with someone you just met, attending a business meeting, listening to music, watching TV, debating an issue, texting, or going on a date. Every act of meaningful

communication between two individuals—even when done across time through a book—can be broken down into three steps: Observe, Interpret, and Apply.

OIA. It's really that simple.

## **How OIA Helps Us to Use the Bible Rightly**

What would happen if you ignored any of those three steps? Imagine you're a homebuilder, and the buyer has communicated his intentions to you through a series of plans. Fail to *observe* the plans, and you'll end up with an "interesting" house not up to code or customer satisfaction. Fail to *interpret* the plans, and you may end up with a geothermally heated yacht, completely missing the designer's intention. Fail to *apply* the plans, and you won't stay in business for long; nobody wants to pay you to go golfing.

Picture how challenging it can be to communicate with someone who lacks one or more of the three skills required for those steps. When someone can't or won't observe the facts, we look for evidence of disability. Those unable to interpret the main idea communicated to them, we may see as aloof or socially awkward. And if they consistently fail to apply the main idea, we might call them lazy or irresponsible. In each case, we must adjust our expectations and fill in the gaps before communication can take place.

God has communicated to us through his Word,

the Bible. And communication hits its mark through OIA. So to understand what God has spoken, we must use the OIA method when studying the Bible. What matters most is not the exact terminology of OIA, but the substance of it. Many people say the same thing with different terminology: inductive Bible study, COMA, SOAR, CIA, the Swedish Method, and the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation are all essentially OIA with different names. So when I say, “we must use the OIA method on the Bible,” please don’t misread me to be saying “anyone who doesn’t use the terms *observe*, *interpret*, and *apply* must be misusing the Bible.” I’m merely saying we must read the Bible the same way we normally communicate with other people.

So how can normal people do this in their Bible study?

## Observe

Great Bible study begins with a few basic mechanics. Whether you’re an untested rookie or a seasoned professional, you can always improve at observing the following five elements of literature. Before you can interpret what the Bible means, you must develop mastery in observing what it says.

1. **Literary Form.** What kind of writing is it? Is this passage primarily narrative, discourse, or poetry? Does it have any secondary forms



embedded within the main form (for example, a speech-discourse embedded within a larger narrative; or narrative statements scattered throughout a lengthy poem)?

2. **Words.** Count how many times key words are repeated. Notice how various things are described or labeled. Keep track of how the narrator names the characters through the passage, and whether he changes their names or titles along the way.
3. **Grammar.** Identify the subject, verb, and object of each sentence. What are the main verbs? (This isn't as scary as it sounds; you're just looking for the actors and their actions.) In other words: who does what, and to whom or what is it done?
4. **Structure.** How does the passage fit together? Break it into paragraphs or stanzas. Notice transitions and linking words.
5. **Mood.** What tone does the author use? Does the passage inspire action, evoke emotion, or challenge assumptions?

Too many “biblical” arguments fail to observe the text carefully. For example, just pick up any tract from the Watchtower Society to find Bible-saturated arguments that Jesus is not God, the Holy Spirit is not a person, God’s kingdom was established in 1914, holiday

celebrations are sacrilegious, and blood transfusions are immoral. Without careful observation, your study will never find an anchor within the text. Therefore, observation is a critical first step.

## Interpret

The OIA method can be diagrammed in the shape of an X. The first part of the process (explained in the previous section) is to make as many observations as possible. Next we tackle *interpretation*. This involves investigating our observations through questions and answers until we understand the text's meaning (the author's main point).

Since we'll continue observing new things in God's Word until Jesus returns, our observations could be infinite in number. But interpretations are not infinite (though our grasp of them may mature over time). Biblical authors had agendas, and we are not authorized to alter or add to those agendas. We scrutinize the facts of the text until we're able to think the author's thoughts after him. And since biblical authors wrote God's very words, good interpretation trains us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to think God's thoughts. It's like when husbands and wives complete each other's sentences, only better.

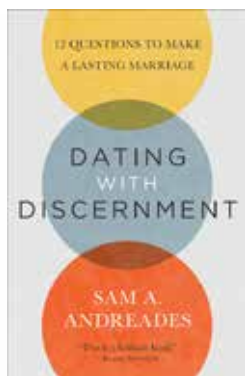
Three steps will help you conduct a sound and responsible investigation.

**Ask questions of your observations.** With your

observations as the raw materials of your study, investigate them further by peppering them with questions. What does that term mean? Who are the main characters and what is their history? Why is that word repeated? Why did the author shift from narrative to poetry and back? What do the connector words suggest about the author's chief argument? What are the grounds for that conclusion? Why is the passage structured as it is? How does one section relate to another? So what does the author expect his readers to believe or do as a result of what he's written?

**Answer the questions from the text.** Once you have asked your questions, answer them. But there's one critical rule: answer questions only if they are answered—explicitly or implicitly—in the text (Proverbs 30:5–6). If the answer is stated explicitly, find it. If you have reason to believe the original audience would have known the answer to your question because it was simply part of their history or culture, make use of a resource to help you cross the cultural divide. But if your questions are not clearly answered or assumed in the text at hand, let them go for now. Other texts will most likely take them up. Your job is to understand the point this author wishes to make in this text.

**Determine the author's main point.** Your investigation should lead you to the main point of the passage. Sometimes the author's main point is explicit (for example, Hebrews 8:1), but many times it's not.



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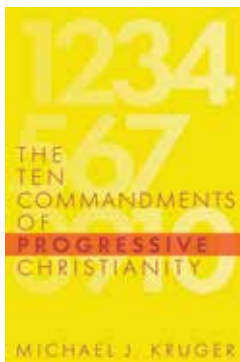


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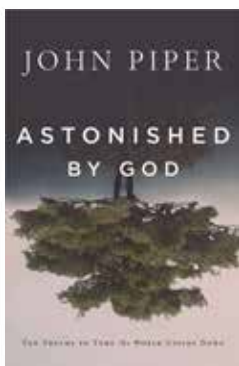
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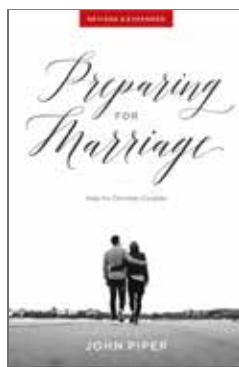


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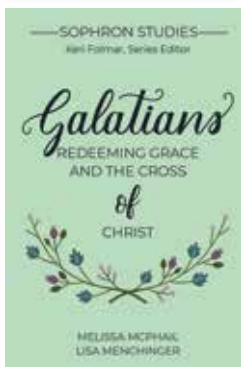
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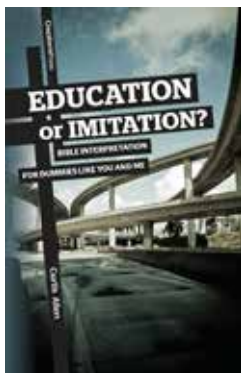


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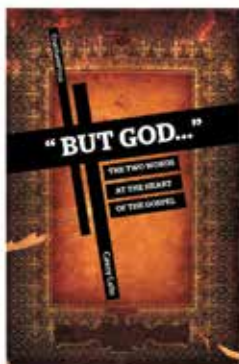


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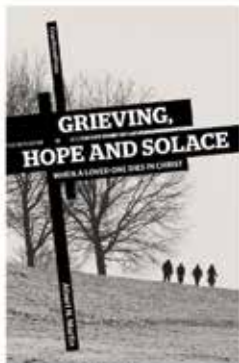
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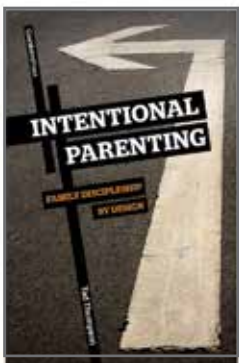
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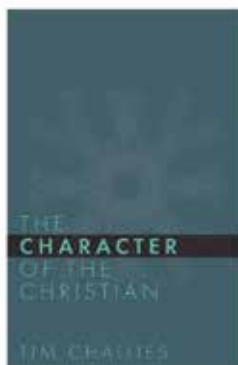
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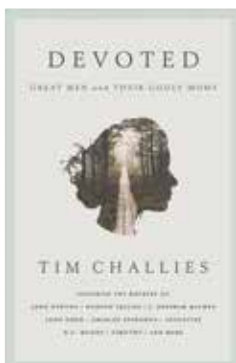


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