

THE BIBLE INITIATIVE



THE GOSPELS



THE BIBLE INITIATIVE



THE GOSPELS

For a digital version of this content, visit:

WWW.THEBIBLEINITIATIVE.COM

We believe God is the greatest reality in the universe. His Son, Jesus, is the greatest human to have ever lived. The story of Him saving humanity from sin is the greatest truth the world has ever known. There is only one place to find that story: the Bible -- a book that most acknowledge is important, but far fewer truly engage with regularly.

It is from this place that The Bible Initiative was brought to life. We have a desire to see God's people know God's story, to be fueled by faith in God's Son, and to expand God's Kingdom for His glory. What you're holding is a tool, a resource, to be used alongside God's Word, not to replace God's Word. Our longing is that The Bible Initiative would aid you in reading, studying, knowing, and being changed by the Bible.

We are praying that five things would happen through The Bible Initiative.

1) That God would speak. There is no substitute for the Word of God; He has spoken through Scripture. By meeting Him there, you allow Him the space to speak timeless truth to your heart.

2) That God would transform your heart and life into the image of Jesus. If you come before Scripture humbly, you allow the Holy Spirit room to move you into greater obedience to God.

3) That God would inform your mind of His truth. In the Bible, God has given you everything you need for life, salvation, and holy living.

4) That God would create in you a hunger for Him and His word. We pray that this year in Scripture will not be the end of your engagement with the Bible, but the beginning.

5) That God would lead you to worship. We pray that as you see the magnificence of God and His work to save humanity from sin, you will be left in awe of Him, longing to do nothing more than worship Him with all your life for the remainder of your life.

Inside this book, you will find a reading plan with five days of reading for each week, a brief explanation of that week's section of Scripture, a family devotional and activity, and individual or small group discussion questions. Each of these is designed to aid you and your family in reading, understanding, and applying the truth of the Bible to your everyday life.

-TIM FRITSON

OUR PRAYER IS THAT:

The Word of God would

SPEAK

LOUDER THAN ANY OTHER VOICE

TRANSFORM

OUR HEARTS INTO THE IMAGE OF JESUS

INFORM

OUR MINDS OF THE TRUTH OF SCRIPTURE

CREATE HUNGER

FOR MORE OF GOD AND HIS WORD

LEAD TO WORSHIP

IN AWE OF THE MAJESTY OF GOD

DAILY DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions are a tool to help small groups or individuals engage with Scripture on a daily basis. We hope that utilizing these questions will help you better understand the Bible. We do not want you to simply talk about the Bible; we want you to understand Scripture and know how to apply it to your lives.

1. What does this passage say? Where does this passage take place within the Bible's overall story?

Summarize the main point of the passage as succinctly as possible.

2. What does this passage mean to its original audience?

Understand the context of the passage by discerning the author's intent for its original audience. Often this may require consulting other study tools or cross-referencing other Biblical passages.

3. What does this passage tell us about God?

Discover what the text tells us about the character of God. Does it say anything about His work through the life and death of Jesus Christ?

4. What does this passage tell us about humanity? What does the text reveal about sin and humanity's need for the gospel?

Analyze the text to see what it reveals about humanity. This question should lead to reflection and self-examination.

5. What does this passage demand of me?

Apply the passage to daily life. Hopefully, the first four questions help you gain an understanding of the meaning of the text. Now you are positioned to correctly apply its meaning.

6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people?

Apply the passage to your relationships with others. We want to encourage discussion on how the text shapes both how you relate to other believers and how you "live on mission" in the world.

7. How does this passage prompt me to pray?

Pray. At our core we want to root our prayers in the Word of God. Hopefully, the previous six questions spark passionate prayer in the lives of believers – both in sanctification and in mission to reach the lost. Seek to walk away from each reading with an action step in mind.

Week 1

INCARNATION

The Bible is one book with two testaments -- Old and New. Despite the division, from start to finish, the Bible tells one story: the story of God redeeming humanity from their sin. The Old Testament unfolds the story of creation, the relationship-severing effect of humanity's sin, and God's covenant promise to use the offspring of Abraham to bring blessing to all nations of the earth. At the very beginning of the New Testament, in the Gospels, we see the culmination of God's eternal plan to save humanity from sin through the life, death, and resurrection of His own Son, Jesus Christ -- not through the Law, a priest, a judge, a king or a prophet, but through the fulfiller of the Law, the Highest Priest, the King of Kings. Through Immanuel, God with us.

In the birth of Jesus, we see one of the great mysteries and wonders of Christianity -- the incarnation. Jesus' birth is announced to Mary by an angel who tells her the exact purpose of His life. "He shall save His people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21) Jesus Christ, the eternally-existent Son of God, takes upon Himself the flesh of humanity. He is fully God and fully man, not half of both. He has a human body, human mind and human emotions, while retaining all the characteristics of His divinity. We see this in the miracles He performs, the authority of His teaching, as well as the references He makes about Himself as being the Son of God. The blessing-bearing, covenant-fulfilling seed of Abraham is born in the small town of Bethlehem, will lead a humble life, perfectly uphold the commands of God, die on the cross unjustly yet willingly, resurrect triumphantly over sin and death, and usher into the world the greatest blessing of all: salvation from sin held out to all the nations of the earth.

①

MATTHEW
1

②

MATTHEW
2

③

LUKE
1

④

LUKE
2

⑤

LUKE
3

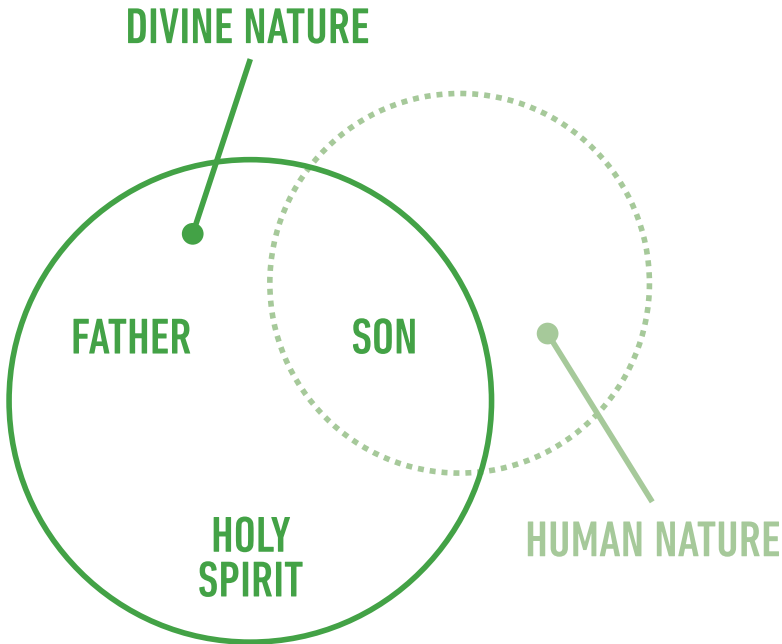
NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

THE INCARNATION

INCORRECT REPRESENTATIONS



CORRECT REPRESENTATION



A simple way to think about the incarnation of Jesus is with the phrase: "Remaining what He was, He became what He was not."

Adapted from Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 2

EARLY MINISTRY

There are roughly 30 years between the birth of Jesus and the beginning of His public ministry. The Gospel of Luke is the only gospel that includes any biographical information about Jesus' life during this 30-year window. Luke 2 tells us that Jesus made a trip to Jerusalem with His family, where He ended up amazing the teachers of the Law with His knowledge and understanding of scripture. In this, we also see that at the age of 12, Jesus understands His identity, telling His mother and father when they find Him in the temple, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49)

The next scenes in Jesus' life are His baptism by John the Baptist, His temptation by Satan in the wilderness, and the early portion of His ministry in the area of Galilee, which includes the calling of His disciples. From the very beginning, Luke carefully details the type of ministry Jesus has come to do. To the confusion and disdain of the religious elite of His day, Jesus does not follow the accepted religious norms of the time. He spends much of His time around the disreputable, the outcasts, the poor, and the sick. He embodies His own words to the Pharisees' question about the company He keeps: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Luke 5:31)

From the outset of Jesus' ministry, we see that He has not come to court the praise of the socially powerful and religious elite. He has come to bring salvation. The only ones who would find it then and will find it today are those who are aware of their need for it. "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:32)

①

LUKE
4

②

LUKE
5

③

LUKE
6

④

LUKE
7

⑤

LUKE
8

NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

GALILEE TO JERUSALEM MAP



The early portion of Jesus' ministry takes place in the region of Galilee before He "sets His face to go to Jerusalem."

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 3

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP

In this week's reading, we see a definitive turn in Jesus' life and ministry. Luke 1-3 records Jesus' birth and preparation for ministry. Luke 4-9:50 captures His early ministry and teaching in Galilee. Next, He begins to make His way to Jerusalem, where He will ultimately be arrested, tried, and crucified. Those events are still some time in the future for Jesus, but Luke 9:51 tells us that "... He set His face to go to Jerusalem." From this point forward, Jesus begins intentionally moving toward the eternally pre-determined fate of His life: His substitutionary death on the cross for the sin of all humanity.

While making His way to Jerusalem, Jesus gives His disciples (as well as readers today) clear instructions about what it means to follow Him, to be a disciple. First and foremost, it requires a confession of faith that Jesus is your Savior (Luke 9:18-20). Following Jesus means dying to yourself and your desires (Luke 9:23-27) and adopting a posture of humility in life (Luke 9:46-48). Being a disciple involves praying (Luke 11), living as light in a dark and broken world (Luke 11), boldly proclaiming the gospel to the world around you (Luke 12), resting in the care and provision of God rather than living to acquire material possessions (Luke 12). Being a disciple of Jesus means that having placed our faith in Christ for the forgiveness of our sin, we seek to lead the kind of humble, obedient, God-honoring, Spirit-led life that He lived. In this week's reading, we see Jesus not only model that life, but explain it clearly to His disciples; we see Jesus lay out the cost of discipleship.

①

LUKE
9-10

②

LUKE
11

③

LUKE
12

④

LUKE
13

⑤

LUKE
14

5 CHRIST-CENTERED DIVISIONS OF THE BIBLE

ANTICIPATION

GENESIS-
MALACHI

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW
MARK
LUKE
JOHN

PROCLAMATION

ACTS

EXPLANATION

ROMANS-
JUDE

CONSUMMATION

REVELATION

The large outline of the Bible can be remembered using five Christ-centered words. Everything in the Old Testament *anticipates* the coming of Christ. The Gospels are the *manifestation* of Christ. The book of Acts tells the story of the early Church's *proclamation* of Christ. The epistles are an *explanation* of living in light of Christ. The book of Revelation is the *consummation* of Christ's work, when He will return again to bring final judgment.

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 4

PARABLES

Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus teaches on a vast array of topics. In fact, by many throughout history (both inside and outside the Church) Jesus is considered the greatest teacher of all time. Jesus does not teach on every topic one could desire, but when He does teach, He does so with great clarity. He teaches about spiritual realities such as God, heaven, hell, sin, repentance, salvation, discipleship, the kingdom of God, faith, the heart, prayer, and fasting. He also teaches about more tangible, practical issues such as money and possessions, marriage and family, worry, anxiety, peace, forgiveness, and judging one another. His teachings affirm and provide deeper meaning to the Law as it was revealed in the Old Testament, demonstrating that the weightiest matters of obedience to the Law were issues of the heart, not merely issues of behavior. He illustrates that our sin is rooted in our heart and has marred not just our actions, but our thoughts and desires, as well. Sin has broken us at a fundamental level, not merely a behavioral level.

One common way Jesus teaches is through parables. In most cases, Jesus uses parables to teach important truths about the kingdom of God. Simply defined, a parable is a short story with a deeper spiritual meaning. Typically, a parable conveys one significant point. Some of Jesus' most famous teachings come in the form of parables: The Parable of the Soils, The Prodigal Son, The Good Samaritan, to name a few. We have read a number of parables in Luke already, but this week's reading includes seven of them. Jesus' parables communicate powerful truth and also provide memorable ways to remember those truths. For some tips on reading and understanding parables, see the chart on the next page.

①

LUKE
15

②

LUKE
16

③

LUKE
17-18

④

LUKE
19

⑤

LUKE
20

PARABLES OFFER US GLIMPSES OF GOD'S KINGDOM

3 STEPS TO UNDERSTANDING PARABLES

LISTEN

FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE
ORIGINAL AUDIENCE

LOOK

FOR THE MAIN POINT

LIVE

IN LIGHT OF THE PARABLE'S TRUTH

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 5

PASSION

The broad details of the end of Jesus' life are known by most people. He is betrayed by Judas, arrested, tried, convicted, sentenced to death, crucified, resurrected on the third day, then ascended -- or bodily returned -- into heaven. These events are recorded at the end of each of the four Gospel accounts, providing the climactic moment in all of scripture. The entirety of the Bible is about God redeeming humanity from their sin, and this is the moment it happens.

At the cross, we see the mingling of God's just wrath toward sin and His infinite love for humanity. They meet perfectly in the willing sacrifice of the Son of God on behalf of all of humanity. Though Jesus had committed no sin of His own, He bore the sin of all humanity, lovingly absorbing sin's just punishment. Jesus' substitutionary death provides atonement for the sin of humanity. Atonement means to reconcile two previously separated parties. By faith in Jesus' atoning work, it is possible for God and humanity to be brought back into relationship with one another.

If you've been reading throughout the Old Testament, you may recognize that Jesus' life, death, and resurrection provide the ultimate fulfillment to many of the Old Testament's shadows. In fact, all that the Old Testament anticipates finds its fulfillment in the person of Jesus. He is the final sacrifice for sin; no more bulls, sheep, or doves are needed. He is our High Priest; by faith in Him, our sin is washed away and we are able to enter into the presence of God. He is the ultimate Judge, saving us fully and finally from the affliction and oppression of our sin. He is our perfect and eternal King, sitting on the throne in heaven at the right hand of God, forever leading us into the eternal presence of God.

①

LUKE
21

②

LUKE
22

③

LUKE
23-24

④

MATTHEW
26-27

⑤

MARK
16

NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

PASSION TIMELINE

This chart represents an approximate timeline of Jesus' final day.

THURSDAY

6PM **LAST SUPPER**

FRIDAY

1AM **ARREST AT GETHSEMANE**

1:30AM **TRIAL #1 ANTIPAS**

6:00AM **TRIAL #2 PILATE**

7:00AM **TRIAL #3 HEROD**

8:00AM **BARABBAS RELEASED**

8:45AM **JESUS BEATEN**

9:00AM **JESUS CRUCIFIED AT CALVARY**

3:00PM **JESUS DIES**

4:00PM **JESUS BURIED**

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 6

WORD MADE FLESH

Matthew, Mark, and Luke are the *synoptic* Gospels. This simply means that they include many of the same stories in a similar order and often with similar wording. The fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John, stands alone. It even starts differently than the other Gospels. Rather than the traditional story of Jesus' birth that we know and love from Matthew and Luke, John takes us back even further. The opening few verses of the Gospel of John are breathtaking:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. - John 1:1-5

In just five verses, John packs in an immense amount of theology and sets forth the purpose of his book: Jesus is the eternal Son of God, sent from heaven to bring the light of life into the world. Though the darkness of sin may lead to His death on the cross, it cannot, will not, has not overcome Him.

John's intent in writing his Gospel is not merely that we would encounter the love of God in the person of Jesus, but that we would be transformed by it. His hope is that our hearts would be captured by a God who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

①

GENESIS 1
PSALM 33

②

JOHN
1

③

JOHN
2

④

JOHN
3

⑤

JOHN
4

NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

GOSPEL AUTHORS

The Gospels present a unified picture of Jesus through four different lenses.

NAME OF AUTHOR

APPROX. YEAR OF AUTHORSHIP

MARK

MID-50'S AD

Mark emphasizes Jesus' action rather than His teaching. He highlights that Jesus is not a political leader but a humble servant.

MATTHEW

EARLY-60'S AD

Matthew displays the relationship between Jesus and the Old Testament, repeatedly showing how Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecy.

LUKE

EARLY-60'S AD

Luke is the only Gentile (non-Jewish) Gospel author. He focuses on the signs, wonders, and miracles of Jesus, as well as the grace that Jesus extends to *all* people.

JOHN

75-100 AD

John most clearly depicts the relationship between Jesus the Son and God the Father. He shows that Jesus is sent by God as the only sufficient Savior for the sin of humanity.

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 7

MIRACLES

Much of Jesus' public ministry is spent with crowds of people flocking to Him. They do so because of the authority of His teaching and the compassion He extends to those around Him. They also do so because they are in awe of the miraculous things He is able to do. He controls nature, calming storms and walking on water. He heals diseases and lifelong disabilities such as leprosy or blindness. He multiplies meager amounts of food in order to feed large numbers of people. The prospect of being healed by Jesus or seeing Him do something miraculous was enough to draw large crowds of people into His presence.

Theologian Wayne Grudem defines a biblical miracle as "a less common kind of God's activity in which He arouses people's awe and wonder and bears witness to Himself." Jesus' miracles do exactly this. In fact, in His first miracle -- changing water to wine at a wedding in Cana -- we are told that, "This, the first of His signs...manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him." (John 2:11) Jesus' life begins with a miracle (the incarnation and virgin birth) and ends with a miracle (the resurrection). All of them arouse people's awe and wonder. They bear witness to His divinity. They draw people to belief.

This week's reading recounts multiple miracles, including two of Jesus' most famous miraculous acts: the feeding of the 5,000 with just five loaves of bread and two fish, and His walking on water in the midst of a storm. Both bear witness to Jesus as the fully divine Son of God and should leave us in awe and wonder at His power. They also serve as faint shadows of the greatest miracle of all, Jesus' resurrection from the tomb following His crucifixion.

①

JOHN
5

②

JOHN
6

③

JOHN
7

④

JOHN
8

⑤

JOHN
9

KEY CONCEPT

BIBLICAL MIRACLE:

A LESS COMMON
KIND OF GOD'S
ACTIVITY IN WHICH
HE AROUSES
PEOPLE'S AWE
AND WONDER AND
BEARS WITNESS
TO HIMSELF

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 8

IDENTITY OF CHRIST

Along with the many topics Jesus teaches about throughout His ministry, He also teaches very clearly about Himself -- who He is, why He has come, His identity as God, His relationship with the Father. The Gospel of John beautifully records many of these teaching passages.

There are many in the world today who would try to dismiss Jesus as merely a good teacher, a moral example, or maybe a prophet. To do so is to go directly against Jesus' own words about Himself. To this point in the Gospel of John, we have seen Jesus call himself as the only Son of God (John 3:16), refer to God as His father (John 5:18), and claim that His authority is equal to that of God (John 5:19-29). Jesus has called Himself "the bread of life" (John 6) and the "light of the world" (John 8). He's even made a statement about His own eternal nature: "Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." (John 8:58)

Jesus' words about Himself don't stop there. In this week's reading, Jesus begins to make clear that He must be killed (John 12:27-36) and that He is the means to salvation (John 12:44-50). He speaks of Himself as "the good shepherd" (John 10:1-21), one with the Father (John 10:22-42), the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), the way, the truth and the life (John 14:1-14), and the true vine that brings fruit to all those who abide in Him (John 15:1-17). Hearing Jesus say these things intensifies the Pharisees' desire to put an end to His life, but it also leads some to proclaim as Martha does, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God." (John 11:27). Seeing Jesus as He reveals Himself should lead us to the same confident proclamation that Jesus is the Savior of the world.

①

JOHN
10-11

②

JOHN
12

③

JOHN
13

④

JOHN
14

⑤

JOHN
15

NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

CHRISTOLOGY

JESUS IS

ETERNAL 1	THE IMAGE OF GOD 2	BORN OF A VIRGIN 3
FULLY GOD, FULLY MAN 4	SINLESS 5	THE FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW 6
THE SUFFICIENT SACRIFICE FOR SIN 7	RESURRECTED 8	ASCENDED BODILY INTO HEAVEN 9
THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND MAN 10	LIVING AND REIGNING 11	RETURNING TO EARTH 12

THE STUDY OF JESUS' PERSON, NATURE, ROLE,
AND WORK IS KNOWN AS **CHRISTOLOGY**

MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

Week 9

JESUS' LAST DAYS

The Gospel of John ends similarly to the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John gives a detailed account of the arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. He also gives account of multiple interactions Jesus has with the disciples following His resurrection but before His bodily ascension into heaven. Before working through the recounting of the final moments of Jesus' life, John 17 captures what is known as "The High Priestly Prayer."

This is the longest of Jesus' recorded prayers. In it, Jesus prays for Himself (John 17:1-5). He prays for His disciples (John 17:6-19). Finally, Jesus prays for the future Church, all those who will come to believe and place their faith in Him (John 17:20-26). Ultimately, Jesus' prayer is an amazing picture of His heart for the salvation of humanity. He preached about it, He has prayed about it, and now He will willingly give His life for it.

Whereas Luke began his Gospel by stating the intent of his work, John ends his with a similar statement: "...but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name." (John 20:31). While all four of the Gospels provide a historical picture of the man, Jesus of Nazareth, their intent goes far beyond historical articulation to eternal transformation. Reading the Gospels should not merely fill our heads with facts about Jesus, but should fill our hearts with the knowledge of and faith in God's ultimate redeeming work to save humanity from their sin by the life, death, and resurrection of His Son.

①

JOHN
16

②

JOHN
17

③

JOHN
18

④

JOHN
19

⑤

JOHN
20-21

NEW TESTAMENT VISUALIZED

THE HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER

JESUS PRAYS FOR

HIMSELF

JOHN 17: 1-5



THE DISCIPLES

JOHN 17: 6-19



ALL BELIEVERS

JOHN 17: 20-24



THE WORLD

JOHN 17: 25-26



MANIFESTATION

MATTHEW | MARK | LUKE | JOHN

These questions are a tool to help small groups or individuals engage with Scripture on a daily basis. We hope that utilizing these questions will help you better understand the Bible. We do not want you to simply talk about the Bible; we want you to understand Scripture and know how to apply it to your lives.

1. What does this passage say? Where does this passage take place within the Bible's overall story?

Summarize the main point of the passage as succinctly as possible.

2. What does this passage mean to its original audience?

Understand the context of the passage by discerning the author's intent for its original audience. Often this may require consulting other study tools or cross-referencing other Biblical passages.

3. What does this passage tell us about God?

Discover what the text tells us about the character of God. Does it say anything about His work through the life and death of Jesus Christ?

4. What does this passage tell us about humanity? What does the text reveal about sin and humanity's need for the gospel?

Analyze the text to see what it reveals about humanity. This question should lead to reflection and self-examination.

5. What does this passage demand of me?

Apply the passage to daily life. Hopefully, the first four questions help you gain an understanding of the meaning of the text. Now you are positioned to correctly apply its meaning.

6. How does this passage change the way I relate to people?

Apply the passage to your relationships with others. We want to encourage discussion on how the text shapes both how you relate to other believers and how you "live on mission" in the world.

7. How does this passage prompt me to pray?

Pray. At our core we want to root our prayers in the Word of God. Hopefully, the previous six questions spark passionate prayer in the lives of believers – both in sanctification and in mission to reach the lost. Seek to walk away from each reading with an action step in mind.



WWW.LCFLIBERTY.ORG

For a digital version of this content, visit:

WWW.THEBIBLEINITIATIVE.COM