



BIBLICAL DIMENSION

(**Note:** please read chapters 7 & 8 in Jesus Brand Spirituality for background on this class session.)

[INTRODUCTION]

Religion as a rope of three cords:

- _____ (the material aspects of religion)
- _____
- _____ (the focus of this class)

The rope of religion is surrounded by a casing to keep it all together...



The Christian story (“the gospel”) is the _____ story of God in search of _____.

[A STORY RUNS THROUGH IT]

To follow Jesus means _____ **our two stories**; the story of our life intersecting the story of his life to make a new story.

The Bible, then, is: the story of _____,
the story of _____,
the love story of God & Humanity.

Jesus understood his mission as the dramatic _____ of the love story of God in search of humanity.

"You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life." (John 5: 39-40)

"In the Beginning ["once upon a time"] was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.... All things were made through him and without him nothing was made that has been made.... The word became flesh and dwelt among us." John 1:1, 3, 14

[THE BIBLE: A CHALLENGING COLLECTION OF WRITINGS]

The Bible is a _____ word interpreted under the _____
of the Spirit in the _____ of community (past and present)
with the _____ of reason and experience.

Throughout church history, Christians have taken different approaches to this question, but these are the players in the "discernment process."

- **Sacred** _____: the writings themselves handed down to us
- **Sacred** _____: the living spirit who breathes on us as we read
- **Sacred** _____: the Bible after all is the book of the community, bearing witness to the role of the community in discerning truth
- **Sacred** _____: God speaks directly to our hearts through experience; examples in the Bible where direct revelation moderates or expands what was understood before (eg. Peter's vision...)
- **Sacred** _____: Jesus is the fulfillment of "Logos" (reason); part of what it means for us to be made in God's image is that we think and reason. We're not supposed to check our brains at the door when we come to church.

Together these elements form a **mosaic**, and you know you've got it right when the mosaic reveals the face of _____, who holds all things together.

“I will simply state my assumptions about the Bible: On its human side, I assume that it was produced and preserved by competent human beings who were at least as intelligent and devout as we are today. I assume that they were quite capable of presenting what they heard and experienced in the language of their historical community, which we can understand with due diligence.

On the divine side, I assume that God has been willing and competent to arrange for the Bible, including its record of Jesus, to emerge and be preserved in ways that will secure his purposes for it among human beings worldwide. Those who actually believe in God will be untroubled by this. I assume that he did not and would not leave his message to humankind in a form that can only be understood by a handful of late-twentieth-century professional scholars, who cannot even agree among themselves on theories that they assume to determine what the message is.

The Bible is, after all, God’s gift to the world through his Church, not to the scholars. It comes through the life of his people and nourishes that life. Its purpose is practical, not academic. An intelligent, careful, intensive but straightforward reading...is what it requires to direct us into life in God’s kingdom. Any other approach to the Bible, I believe, conflicts with the picture of God that, all agree, emerges from Jesus and his tradition.”

From [The Divine Conspiracy](#) by **Dallas Willard**, Harper, San Francisco, c. 1998 pp xvi-xvii. Willard is a theologian and scholar. He is professor at the University of Southern California’s School of Philosophy.

[FIRST PRIORITY: GET YOUR STORY STRAIGHT]

Helpful tools:

- The Book of God, by Walter Wangerin
- Jesus, by Walter Wangerin
- Even a good book of Bible Stories written for children
- Movies: *The Prince of Egypt*; *Jesus of Nazareth*
- An accessible translation of the bible, such as The Message, by Eugene Peterson.

Think of the Bible as....**The Love Story of God & Humanity in 5 Acts**

ACT ONE

Pre-History: Genesis 2-3 // The Primordial Garden

[Note: see pages 135-144 of *Jesus Brand Spirituality* for a fuller description of these 5 acts...]

Theme: “There’s a place for us”

Self-awareness is polluted by _____; awareness of others

distorted by _____; awareness of God obscured by _____

- _____.

ACT TWO

Ancient History: Ezekiel 47 // Ezekiel's Visionary Garden-Temple

ACT THREE

Jesus in Herod's Temple: John 7

Jesus; ***“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.”*** (John 7:37)

Fulfilling the words of the Hebrew Prophet Isaiah 58: 11 ***“you will be a well watered garden...”***

ACT FOUR

The Easter Garden: John 20

ACT FIVE

The Garden City to Come: Revelation 21 // Where's the Story Headed?

SUMMARY

We are living our lives between Act _____ and Act _____.

[DISCUSSION GROUND-RULES]

- 1. What's shared in the group stays in the group.**

- 2. No one is expected to share on any given topic; it's fine to pass.**
- 3. No unsolicited advice giving.**
- 4. Take your fair share of the time.**
- 5. Be respectful of the viewpoints of others.**

[QUESTIONS TO GUIDE DISCUSSION]

1. The Bible can be an inspiring and intimidating book. What are the things about the Bible, as you understand it, that either inspire or intimidate you, or both?
2. What do you think of the idea that there is a common thread or unifying theme that runs throughout the Bible? What was your response to the author's attempt to tell the story of the Bible in five short acts [see pp. 135-144]? Did you find it helpful (or not) and if so, how?
3. Have you ever personally identified with someone's story in the Bible? What was it, and how did it move you?
4. How do you think Jesus' understanding or treatment of Scripture differed from his contemporaries?
5. The author thinks we've underestimated the power of story as a means to convey truth. What do you think about this perspective? How have stories helped you engage the truth in ways that other ways of truth-telling haven't?
6. What are your thoughts on the tension between the certainty we crave and the idea that our knowing is always partial, at best? Have you ever found yourself acknowledging less certainty than you once had concerning a matter of faith or spirituality?