



# GODCONNECTS™

A COURSE IN CHRISTIANITY



[LHM.ORG/GODCONNECTS](http://LHM.ORG/GODCONNECTS)

DISCUSSION GUIDE - SESSION 2

## USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes links, which provide extra information on Internet sites where you can browse and dig as deep as you want.

A PDF discussion guide containing all 12 sessions, as well as single session guides, are available at [www.lhm.org/godconnects](http://www.lhm.org/godconnects).

To find the discussion guide on the DVD, load it into your computer (not your DVD player). You can right click the menu. Push "Open" instead of "Play" and you will pull up a list of files, which includes the discussion guide.



### ABOUT US

*God Connects* is a ministry of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). As a Christian outreach ministry, LHM supports churches worldwide, producing Christian radio and TV programming for broadcast, Internet and print communications, dramas, music, and outreach materials—all designed to reach unchurched people in the United States and more than 30 countries around the world. Lutheran Hour Ministries' flagship program, **The Lutheran Hour**, airs weekly on more than 1,400 stations and the American Forces Network. To learn more about this long-running Gospel program and LHM's other ministry resources, go to [www.lhm.org](http://www.lhm.org).

### CONTACT US

We would love to connect to you. Call us at **1-855-JOHN316 (1-855-564-6316)** E-mail to [lhmresponse@lhm.org](mailto:lhmresponse@lhm.org).

# INTRODUCTION

*GodConnects: In a difficult and confusing world, God is connecting to you!*

## God, are You there?

Everyone, at some point, asks this question. It can come at moments of sterile reflection or in times of deep despair. "God, if You are there, why don't You show Yourself to me?" In this confusing world where authenticity is so elusive, it seems like we cannot connect to God.

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. The most direct way God connected to us is when He became one of us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was on this earth, He was the very revelation of God as He taught and healed and loved.

Then to restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sins—in His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and determined love the world could have ever imagined.

Now God connects to us by revealing Himself in the Bible. This God-given book has an amazing story. It tells of God's constant and compassionate work to restore our relationship with Him.

*GodConnects* wants to share that story with you. *GodConnects* is a course that tells this unique, unequalled story. Whether you do not believe in Christ as Savior or want to deepen your faith in Him, as you delve into *GodConnects* you will explore what the Bible says about this remarkably loving God, and how this love gives direction and meaning to your life today and forever.

On this website, you can explore these questions of faith. You will find videos and other up-to-date media that take advantage of today's technology.

**So let's get started ....**

# WHY THE BIBLE?

## Session 2: A Course on Christianity

**Opening Prayer:** Lord God, the Christian church has long taught the Holy Bible is Your Word to us. Even so, many voices claim it's full of errors and contradictions. Teach me how to think of the Bible so I may know where to find Your truth. I pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Every religion has its holy writings: Jews have the Torah; Muslims the Qur'an; Buddhists the Tripitaka, and Hindus the Rigveda. The Christian church has long held the Holy Bible to be its holy writing. But is the Bible really God's Word?

### 2.1. WHY IS IT CALLED THE BIBLE?

The word "Bible" comes from a Greek word meaning book. Thinking of the Bible as one big book is helpful in reminding us it ultimately has one Writer—God Himself. But it's also called the "Holy Scriptures" to remind us the Bible is actually a collection of texts—God used more than 40 people spanning 1,500 years to produce this remarkable book.

### 2.2 WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT THE BIBLE? ISN'T IT JUST AN ORDINARY BOOK?

There are many great books written by wise men and women. But of all the books in the world the Holy Bible is unique. It identifies itself as God's own Word, His message for all people, for all time.

*And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the Word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the Word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)*

### 2.3. WHY DID GOD USE HUMAN WRITERS?

God could have given us His Word directly, or through an angel. But instead He speaks to us through human writers. He gave them the thoughts they expressed and every single word they wrote. Through these widely varied writers over many centuries God was at work revealing and preserving His Word throughout the centuries.

*For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain. And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:16-21)*

#### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does it affect your view of the Bible when you realize God used human writers instead of angels?

### 2.4. AREN'T THERE MISTAKES AND CONTRADICTIONS IN THE BIBLE?

With so many different human writers over such a long span of time, shouldn't we expect the Bible to be filled with contradictions? Many people make that assumption, but they need to look a little closer. The accuracy of the Bible depends on how closely God oversaw its writing. Consider what Peter says about God's role in guiding the writers of the Bible:

*Knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21)*

God directed the choice of each and every word that was written. Though books from 40 different writers from different generations are found in the Bible, God was guiding what they wrote to ensure His Word would be free from error or contradiction.

It contains ancient expressions and Middle Eastern cultural descriptions, but it is God's Word of truth applying to every time and generation.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- How does God's direct involvement in carrying the writers along and giving them every word to write give the Bible more authority?

## 2.5. DO WE HAVE THE ORIGINAL WRITINGS?

The original writings (called "autographs") were handwritten on papyrus (plant stems smashed together and rolled up into scrolls) or on parchment or vellum (animal skins that were folded into a little booklet called a "codex"). Over time they were either lost or wore out, but other copies had been made. Some existing fragments of the New Testament were written just a few decades after the original, but the oldest copies of the Old Testament were written hundreds, even thousands of years after the original writings themselves.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why does this loss of the original documents cause some people to doubt the accuracy of the Bible we have today?

### DIGGING DEEPER

- How papyrus is made, <http://youtu.be/mBnEMUvINvl>
- How vellum and parchment are made: <http://youtu.be/O2BWc1N9Cqo>

## 2.6. HOW RELIABLE ARE THE COPIES OF THESE ORIGINAL WRITINGS?

The church approached the making of copies of the Bible with great care. The copyists were called "sopherim," a Hebrew word meaning counters. To double check each copy they counted each word and letter comparing it to a master list for what belonged on each page to ensure accuracy.

For many years, the oldest handwritten copy of the Old Testament we had was the Masoretic Text. It dates from 1006 A.D. In 1947 the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, including multiple copies of almost all the books of the Old Testament. These dated from around 200 years before Christ. Critics expected to find great discrepancies between the two texts because of the recopying that would have occurred over more than 1,000 years. However, there was remarkable agreement between the texts. In fact, any differences that did exist involved only minor, unimportant matters like the spelling of a name, or differing numbers.

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What personal or family documents would you take great care to preserve?
- How would counting letters and words or finding the center word on any page help a copyist ensure the accuracy of his work?

## 2.7. CAN WE FIND ANY DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE BIBLE'S DIVINE ORIGIN?

If the Bible was written by people without God's help, it could only record events they experienced in their lifetimes. It could never accurately predict or prophecy events that would occur hundreds of years after their deaths. But the Bible has hundreds of prophecies fulfilled long after the death of the writers.

For instance, in Isaiah's writings we find a vivid description of Jesus' sufferings, death and resurrection. It was written about 700 years before those events took place.

He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made His grave with the wicked and with a rich man in His death, although He had done no violence, and there was no deceit in His mouth.

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush Him; He has put Him to grief; when His soul makes an offering for guilt, He shall see His offspring; He shall prolong His days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. Out of the anguish of His soul He shall see and be satisfied; by His knowledge shall the Righteous One, My Servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and He shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:3-11).

The verse you just read is only one example of hundreds of Old Testament prophecies fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The following are other prophecies uttered hundreds of years before Jesus walked the earth:

## JESUS' BIRTH

Jesus born of the Virgin Mary: *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His Name Immanuel.* (Isaiah 7:14)

Jesus, the perfect Son of God, descended from David's family: *Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and He shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.* (Jeremiah 23:5)

Jesus born in the town of Bethlehem: *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for Me One who is to be Ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.* (Micah 5:2)

## JESUS' LIFE AND MINISTRY

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on a donkey the week of His crucifixion: *Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your King is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is He, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.* (Zechariah 9:9)

## JESUS' SUFFERING AND DEATH

The Crucifixion: *For dogs encompass Me; a company of evildoers encircles Me; they have pierced My hands and feet— I can count all My bones— they stare and gloat over Me; they divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.* (Psalm 22:16-18)

Drinking the wine-vinegar from a sponge after He cried out "I thirst" in the cross:

*They gave Me poison for food, and for My thirst they gave Me sour wine to drink.* (Psalm 69:21)

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why should the fulfillment of prophecies hundreds of years after their prediction strengthen the Bible's claim to be God's Word?
- If God had not inspired the writers, what are the odds they could have accurately predicted so many details about Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection?

## 2.8. WHAT IS THE MAIN PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

You will hear a variety of answers to this question:

- "It tells the history of God's people."
- "It teaches God's ways."
- "It shows right and wrong."
- "It tells about the life of Jesus."

The Bible is all about God's plan to send His Son Jesus to save us. John 20:30-31 says it simply and well:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; 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.*

*He [Jesus] said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. (Luke 24:25-27)*

*Then He [Jesus] said to them, "These are My words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. (Luke 24:44-45)*

## 2.9. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS?

Both the Old and New Testaments tell about Jesus Christ and His rescue mission. The Old Testament was written before Jesus' birth. It promises His coming and makes many predictions about His life. The New Testament tells of the Savior who came and details how He rescued us.

|                     |                     |                 |             |         |
|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------|-------------|---------|
| Old Testament Books | Genesis             | 2 Chronicles    | Daniel      |         |
|                     | Exodus              | Ezra            | Hosea       |         |
|                     | Leviticus           | Nehemiah        | Joel        |         |
|                     | Numbers             | Esther          | Amos        |         |
|                     | Deuteronomy         | Job             | Obadiah     |         |
|                     | Joshua              | Psalms          | Jonah       |         |
|                     | Judges              | Proverbs        | Micah       |         |
|                     | Ruth                | Ecclesiastes    | Nahum       |         |
|                     | 1 Samuel            | Song of Solomon | Habakkuk    |         |
|                     | 2 Samuel            | Isaiah          | Zephaniah   |         |
|                     | 1 Kings             | Jeremiah        | Haggai      |         |
|                     | 2 Kings             | Lamentations    | Zechariah   |         |
|                     | 1 Chronicles        | Ezekiel         | Malachi     |         |
|                     | New Testament Books | Matthew         | Ephesians   | Hebrews |
|                     |                     | Mark            | Philippians | James   |
| Luke                |                     | Colossians      | 1 Peter     |         |
| John                |                     | 1 Thessalonians | 2 Peter     |         |
| Acts                |                     | 2 Thessalonians | 1 John      |         |
| Romans              |                     | 1 Timothy       | 2 John      |         |
| 1 Corinthians       |                     | 2 Timothy       | 3 John      |         |
| 2 Corinthians       |                     | Titus           | Jude        |         |
| Galatians           |                     | Philemon        | Revelation  |         |

## 2.10. WHAT SHOULD I THINK WHEN THINGS IN THE BIBLE MAKE NO SENSE TO ME?

It is important to use the rules of grammar and language to understand the Scriptures. That being said, some things in the Bible still won't fit our understanding or experience of life in this world. In these cases we have to let God be God, remembering He has the power to do more than human reason can imagine.

*Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105)*

*For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

*We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ. (2 Corinthians 10:5)*

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What Bible teachings do you struggle with?

## 2.11. WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR WHEN I READ THE BIBLE?

The Bible's two primary messages are Law and Gospel.

The Law, God's rules of right and wrong, shows us the reason we needed Jesus to come to save us. It commands and teaches us how to live lives pleasing to God. Since we cannot live perfect lives, it reveals our sins—the ways we violate God's Law, and it shows the punishment we deserve for those sins.

*For the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23a)*

The Gospel is the dominant message of the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments. It speaks of what God did for us to fix the problems our sin has caused. It shows us God's love and compassion in sending His Son Jesus to be our Savior. It unfolds God's plan of salvation for us—a plan created and put into action from the time humans rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. It tells of the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, the Savior. It proclaims the forgiveness we receive as a gift from God. It declares God's promises of eternal life. It promises Jesus is coming again. It gives us hope as we journey through life this side of heaven.

*For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23)*

*For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. (John 1:17)*

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do you think so many world religions are based on what we do for salvation, rather than what God has done for us?
- Why is it so difficult for us to open up and admit we cannot save ourselves from our sin?
- What freedom does it bring knowing Jesus Christ kept all the Law's demands, suffering for our sins and wrong-doings, when He died on the cross?

### DIGGING DEEPER

- For a clear and comprehensive explanation of Law and Gospel, check out this book-sized collection of lectures delivered by C.F.W. Walther: <http://www.lutherantheology.com/uploads/works/walther/LG/>

## 2.12. IS THE BIBLE DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND?

While some parts of the Bible are certainly challenging to understand, God made sure the message of the Bible is clear and comprehensible to all.

*The unfolding of Your Words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. (Psalm 119:130)*

*At that time Jesus declared, "I thank You, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was Your gracious will." (Matthew 11:25-26)*

### THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- One of the most-loved verses in the Bible is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." What relation might the simple, understandable quality of this verse have with the deep love so many people have toward it?



## 2.13. WHICH IS THE BEST VERSION OF THE BIBLE FOR ME TO READ?

There are a number of different English translations or versions of the Bible: the King James Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version, the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Version—to name a few. All these versions give the Law and Gospel we need to understand for our salvation. But some are stronger than others in certain respects.

### DIGGING DEEPER

- The following articles can help guide you in searching for the best Bible for you to read.
- Dr. Jeffrey A. Gibbs of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri, wrote the following article, which suggests guidelines in choosing an understandable English Bible translation to use: “All Those Translations! How Are We to Decide which English Translation of the Bible to Use?” <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=518>
- Some Christians believe the King James Version is the best and most accurate translation, maintaining that all others have been corrupted by heretical manuscripts. In his article “Is Your Modern Translation Corrupt?” James R. White helps readers understand the process of building an English translation from thousands of manuscript copies: <http://www.equip.org/articles/is-your-modern-translation-corrupt/>
- Today some people question referencing God as “male” as well as other uses of masculine pronouns and word forms like “man” in the sense of “mankind.” The Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod prepared the report “Biblical Revelation and Inclusive Language” to address these concerns: <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=314>

## 2.14. HOW CAN I START READING THE BIBLE?

There is no doubt that God preserved His Word through centuries of copying for an amazing purpose! He wants you to know Him through it! If you’re interested in reading the Bible, consider this approach:

1. Start with one of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John). There you’ll learn about Jesus’ life.
2. Then read Galatians through Colossians. These are short letters to Christians full of great teachings for faith and daily life.
3. Next, go back to Acts. Here you’ll read the story of how Christianity began.
4. Now read Genesis. As the first book of the Bible, it has key teachings about life and gives a big-picture perspective of God’s work.
5. Then read Romans in the New Testament.
6. After that, keep going with the books of your choice. Be ready for an adventure and for blessing!

## 2.15. WHAT ARE ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE BIBLE?

To read the Bible online or to do detailed searches, go to <http://www.biblegateway.com/>  
*How We Got the Bible* - video Bible study: <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=12754>  
*The Bible on Trial: Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*: <http://www.lhm.org/men/studydetail.asp?id=16902>  
*The Bible—What? Where? Why?* booklet: <http://www.lhm.org/godconnects/diggingdeeper.asp#2.15>

**Closing Prayer:** Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word in the Holy Bible. Strengthen my confidence in that perfect revelation, so I may always put my faith in Jesus Christ my Savior. I pray in His Name. Amen.