

8 Old Testament Passages That Changed the World

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LEADER'S GUIDE



THE FOUNDRY
PUBLISHING®

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The Foundry Publishing®
PO Box 419527
Kansas City, MO 64141
thefoundrypublishing.com

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Introduction



This downloadable leader's guide offers two tools for group activity and discussion:

Questions of Influence: Because an important emphasis of *8 Old Testament Passages That Changed the World* is the impact these great passages have had on popular culture, literature, film, law, and other areas of life, one set of discussion questions for each chapter will explore the details of that cultural influence.

Questions of Application: These key passages of the Old Testament not only have influenced culture and history but also possess the power to change individual lives. Application questions for each chapter will allow your group members to come to terms with what these important portions of Scripture might mean for them.

How to Use This Leader's Guide

This leader's guide may be used in several ways. Some group leaders may want to use it solely for their own preparation, while others may choose to print out copies for each group member to reference during meetings.

The leader's guide divides the book into a ten-week study, but some groups may want to slow it down and spend more time on each chapter, while others may want to cover more than one chapter in a session.

Most groups will find more questions and suggested activities than they have time to cover, depending on the length of the meetings and the level of group participation. You may want to be selective about which questions and issues are most relevant to your group.

Individual readers will also find that this leader's guide serves as a helpful resource for deepening their study and reflection on the issues raised in the book.

About the Book

Commentators have lamented the diminishing influence of the Old Testament in the church and in the wider culture today. Fewer sermons cite it. People are less familiar with its stories and teachings than in earlier generations. Some readers find it hard to relate to, distant, and obscure. And yet, the Old Testament continues to shape our lives in ways beyond our awareness. If you hear the name "Goliath," what other name do you immediately want to pair it with? If someone says "Jonah," what animal pops into your head? If you hear the word "commandments," what number comes to mind?

Those and other Old Testament stories, poems, prophecies, and concepts continue to show up in places the original writers never could have imagined—television commercials, social media memes, movies, novels, children's books, laws, and so on. *8 Old Testament Passages That Changed the World* looks at the many ways culture has treated, mistreated, distorted, and brought to life the most well-known parts of the Old Testament. The book takes the passages that are inescapable and asks why those words and stories continue to have such a grip on every area of life. If these words have such holding power, what difference could they make in our own lives if we delved even deeper into them? Like its companion volume, *12 New Testament Passages That Changed the World*, this book carefully examines the Scripture passages so that readers can not only know them but also treat them faithfully and accurately.

Session 1



Book Portion

Chapter 1: The Old Testament—Who Needs It?

Questions of Influence

1. Ask group members to share aloud the words and phrases that first come to mind when they hear “Old Testament.” Write those on the board. Afterward, go a little deeper and discuss these first impressions.

- Do group members see any common themes?
- Where do those thoughts and stereotypes come from?
- Are people intimidated by the Old Testament? Confused? Inspired?

2. If your group is large enough, break into smaller groups and ask each group to construct a description of God as portrayed in the Old Testament (if your group is smaller, do this all together).

- Have group leaders write the various descriptions on the board. What do they have in common? What characteristics stand out?
- Discuss what passages and stories might have led to these ideas. Are some of these descriptions based more on ideas about God from popular culture than they are on the actual texts of the Old Testament? Is there anything about this way of thinking of God that should be challenged?

3. How does the portrayal of God in the Old Testament differ from how many people perceive him in the New Testament? In reality, should there be a difference?

4. In only a few minutes, ask your group to quickly list as many references in popular culture to Old Testament passages and stories as they can (films, songs, works of art, novels, poems, children's books, etc.). Write them on the board as people mention them.

- Discuss this list. Are people surprised at how many examples there are?
- Which stories and passages come up the most? Why? Which ones *never* come up? Why not?
- What does this list say about the continuing relevance of the Old Testament in our day?

5. Chapter 1 gives evidence that the Old Testament is used less often than it used to be in church services, sermons, and the Christian life in general.

- If you are part of a church, has that been your experience? How do you perceive your own congregation's attitudes and practices concerning the Old Testament? Is it ignored? Is it purposely avoided? Embraced? Handled selectively, with only the "most popular" stories and passages treated?
- If the Old Testament is neglected in various ways, why do you think that is?

6. The Old Testament has "heroes," but most of them are flawed, and some of them are *very* flawed. List some of the more flawed figures of the Old Testament.

- What impact do these less-than-admirable traits have on how you see those biblical figures?
- Why do you think the Old Testament texts give so much attention to those flaws?

Questions of Application

1. Ask your group members what they would most like to get out of this study of the Old Testament. Has the first session raised questions they would like to explore further?
2. Are your group members satisfied with the amount of time they spend reading and studying the Old Testament? Would they like to know it better? If so, what prevents them from doing that? What disciplines and practices could they put into effect to help make the Old Testament more a part of their lives?

Session 2



Book Portion

Chapter 2: David Slays a Giant—but Not All of Them

Questions of Influence

1. Why is the story of David and Goliath so popular with children?
 - Is it simply a matter of the little guy defeating the big bully, or are there other spiritual lessons kids might learn?
 - Is the violence of the story—smashing a man’s skull with a rock and then cutting off his head—problematic in presenting it to children?
2. Review what this chapter has to say about Malcolm Gladwell’s book *David and Goliath: Underdogs, Misfits, and the Art of Battling Giants*. He downplays the miraculous or spiritual elements of the story and contrasts David and Goliath as two different types of warriors. David is a projectile warrior, and Goliath is a heavy-infantry soldier. David wins because he uses a smarter strategy. How convincing and helpful do you find this nonspiritual interpretation of the story?
3. Ask your group to brainstorm a list of historical David and Goliath battles in various realms of life—business, sports, politics, and so on. Why do these kinds of stories grip people so powerfully? Why do people so rarely root for Goliath?

4. This chapter says, “David is a flawed man. He fascinates not only because he could kill a giant but also because his passions and actions run the gamut of human behavior. He killed. He loved. He betrayed. He led. He danced. He agonized. He had problems with women, with his children, with sin, with his government, with God, with himself, and with life. He was misunderstood, abused, praised, rebuked, and chased.”

- When you think of David, what stories stand out to you? Even though he is a complex man who could be described in many ways, both good and bad, how would you describe his legacy?
- How does David’s portrayal in the Bible compare to the way prominent people are thought of today? Do people have much sympathy for the complexity and contradictions of individuals, or are individuals defined by the worst thing they do? What examples come to mind? How *should* the legacy and reputation of individuals be determined?

5. This chapter mentions films, statues, cartoons, novels, paintings, and songs that depict episodes from the life of David. Individually or in small groups, come up with one portion of David’s life that you would like to portray in some genre of art or literature. What episode from his life would you choose, and why? How would you depict it? Share your ideas with each other.

Questions of Application

1. Review the story of David and Bathsheba.

- What is at the core of David’s sin in this story? Lust? Pride? An obsession with power? Self-centeredness?
- Much of the story is about David’s attempts to cover up his wrongdoing. How prominent a role does concealment usually play in people’s sin? What does this story teach about it?

- Why does Nathan's parable work better than a direct accusation would to confront David with his sin?
- This story obviously paints David in a bad light. Do you believe it is included in the Bible mainly to give a fuller picture of his life, or is it more useful as a tool for instructing readers on temptation, sin, repentance, and forgiveness?

2. Do you have any situations in your life right now in which you feel like the young David, with odds stacked against you by some Goliath-sized difficulty? Does this story offer hope or a fresh perspective?

Session 3



Book Portion

Chapter 3: Eve and Adam—Paradise, Sin, Cover-Up

Questions of Influence

1. Ask for three or four volunteers to come up to the board without telling them what they will be asked to do. Once they are assembled, give them a marker and tell them they have twenty seconds to depict the story of Adam and Eve in a way that anyone would be able to identify it. (If you are in a group that doesn't have a board to write on, this activity can be done on paper instead.)
 - Discuss the images they created. What do the drawings have in common, and how are they different?
 - What do these drawings show about what people see as the essence of the story?
2. This chapter shows a number of ways the Adam and Eve story has been used in advertising. Review those examples and discuss them. Can your group members think of any other advertising examples that depict this story?
 - Advertising twists the story, because in an ad or commercial, yielding to the temptation and buying the product being offered is seen as *success*, not moral failure. But in what ways do these ads also illustrate the spiritual lessons and truths about temptation and sin? How are the appeals the serpent makes to Eve similar to the ways advertisers appeal to readers and viewers?

- The chapter mentions the advertising campaign for Eve cigarettes in the 1970s. The company's slogan was, "There's a little Eve in every woman." What are the possible meanings of that sentence? What appeal is it making to women? Are cigarettes a particularly appropriate product for such an appeal?

3. Consider the Adam and Eve jokes and funny commercials mentioned in the chapter. If possible, watch one of the commercials based on the story, which you can find on YouTube or elsewhere.

- What impact do you think these kinds of jokes and commercials have on how people think of the biblical story of Adam and Eve? Do they trivialize the story? Make people more curious about it? Make it more relevant? Are they harmless fun, or are they offensive?

Questions of Application

1. Review the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis. If time permits, ask someone to read it out loud. Afterward, discuss this chapter's overview and commentary of it.

- Does the story have any surprises as you look at it closely? Are there ways that it differs from how it is usually summarized and portrayed? Do you think its purpose is mainly to tell the story of these two people, or does it contain crucial spiritual truths for readers as well?
- God does not create Eve until after he has Adam name all the animals. Why do you think he does it in that order?

2. God promises to create a "helper" for Adam. Discuss the meaning of that term and the chapter's commentary on it. Do you think that term is commonly misunderstood? If so, what are the implications and dangers of that misunderstanding?

3. The chapter notes that only four verses separate Eve's creation and the arrival of the serpent who tempts her to sin. Scripture is silent on the length of time between those events. This chapter poses the questions, "What was Eve like? What was her relationship with Adam like in the time before that turn of events? How did they spend their days? What was it like to live in Eden?"

- If your group is large enough to break into smaller groups of four or five people, ask the small groups to imagine life in Eden and come up with a description of what they think Eden looked like, what daily life was like, what Adam and Eve's relationship with God was like, and other details. Then have the groups share these descriptions with one another.
- When have you felt closest to that original Edenic life? Is this what you think eternity will be like?

4. This chapter spends time probing the temptation strategies of the serpent and Eve's response to them. Review those points together. Make a list of some "principles of temptation," or ways temptation and rationalization work, as revealed in this story.

- If those tactics of temptation are so easy to identify, then why are they so hard to resist? What have you found helpful in resisting temptation?

5. This chapter ends by showing how Adam and Eve are mentioned in the New Testament. Their story is about the fall of humanity, but what hope has also sprung from those events?

Session 4



Book Portion

Chapter 4: Noah and the Ark—Not Just Cute Animals on a Boat

Questions of Influence

1. As a group, skim through the thousands of Noah and the ark products on Etsy (etsy.com).
 - What's the strangest one you see? What's the most appealing?
 - What Noah products have you ever bought—books, toys, wallpaper? Why did those appeal to you?
 - Why do you think this biblical story is so popular with parents and kids?
2. Look at some examples of children's books that tell the story of Noah and the ark. These are readily available at libraries, or you can borrow some from parents with young children.
 - How does each book handle the disturbing parts of the story, such as the evil that leads to the need for the flood or the deaths of those left outside the ark? Does it handle it appropriately for children? How *should* books for children handle those issues?
 - What spiritual themes and lessons do these Noah and the ark books offer? Do they present those themes effectively? Are any important themes left out?

3. Review what chapter 4 says about several versions of the story in children's books.

- What stands out to you about those examples, both good and bad? Which one seems to capture the story best?
- If you were writing a children's book on Noah and the ark, what would you include in the narrative and illustrations? What themes would you emphasize?

4. The Bible gives the dimensions of Noah's ark but doesn't describe it in detail. What do you think it might have looked like? Show your group various depictions of it. One photo you could show is of the Ark Encounter in Kentucky, a full-size version of the ark based on biblical specifications. It is more than one and a half football fields long and is beautifully crafted.

A rougher version of the ark appears in the 2014 film *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe. It is a rough-timbered box, slathered in pitch. Photos of it are available online. The filmmakers purposely made it rustic because Noah would not have been a master boatbuilder, and the ark would not need to be steered. It would simply need to be big and stay afloat.

- Which version of the ark seems more likely to you? Or do you picture it differently?

5. Referring to the 2014 film *Noah*, starring Russell Crowe, chapter 4, says, "The film makes clear that the Noah story should not be viewed in isolation from what precedes it in Genesis. The movie opens with scenes and text from earlier parts of Genesis, including Adam and Eve and their fall to temptation, Cain's killing of his brother Abel, the spread of civilization, and the increasing corruption that festered in the following generations."

- If possible, watch that excerpt from the film with your group. Whether you are able to see it or not, discuss what you think of including those other stories in a movie about Noah. How important is that context in understanding why God brought the flood?

- Also read what chapter 4 says about that film’s depiction of the terrible violence and evil in Noah’s day. The Bible gives few specifics about the evil that God was responding to. Do you think the movie handles this appropriately and plausibly?

Questions of Application

1. Chapter 4 asks, “At its core, what *is* Noah’s story? An adventure tale? A children’s story? A disaster narrative? A horror story? Why is it in the Bible, and what should we do with it?”

- Ask your group members to write what they believe is the essence of the Noah story in a few sentences. Then ask for volunteers to read their responses out loud or write them on the board. Discuss these responses. Do they have elements in common? Can the group as a whole come to a consensus about the story’s core purpose and meaning?

2. God asks Noah to do outlandish things: build a huge boat, gather animals, and prepare for a flood of incredible proportions. As chapter 4 says, “Noah might have responded in many ways: fear, incredulity, anger, reluctance, hostility. He could have bargained, he could have procrastinated, and he could have told God to find someone else. Instead, the only response that Genesis records is this: ‘Noah did everything just as God commanded him’ (6:22).”

- What does this tell us about Noah and why God may have chosen him? Could he have had some of those negative reactions, but Scripture did not record them? How would you have responded if you were in Noah’s place?
- How does Noah’s quickness to respond set him apart from Moses, Abraham, and other biblical figures who confronted God with a few more questions? Is one approach better than the other?

3. Ask for a volunteer to read aloud God's covenant with Noah in Genesis 9:7-11, while others follow along.

- What does this covenant tell you about God and his intentions toward humanity, all other living creatures, and the earth itself?
- Are you surprised when the story turns negative just a few verses later? What does this reveal about human beings?
- Overall, does the Noah story offer hope, or does its aftermath drive hope away?

Session 5



Book Portion

Chapter 5: Ruth—Where You Go I Will Go

Questions of Influence

1. The author writes that many people urged him to include a chapter on Ruth in this book. It may be a “smaller” story than those about prominent biblical figures such as Abraham, Moses, and David, but it is still influential, especially in Global South regions such as Latin America, Africa, and Asia. It is also a favorite of many individual readers around the world. Do you agree that a chapter on the book of Ruth is important to include? What makes it stand out?
2. Review the stories of how readers in parts of Africa and Indonesia embraced the book of Ruth.
 - What are the reasons for its appeal?
 - For readers in other parts of the world, such as the United States, how might the book be seen differently?
 - What elements might one culture emphasize that another overlooks?
3. This chapter discusses various scenes from the book of Ruth that have inspired painters and musicians. If you were to paint a scene from the book of Ruth, what scene would you choose and how would you depict it? Why does that scene stand out more than others?

Questions of Application

1. Read and discuss Ruth 1:6-17, where Naomi tries to persuade her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to go back home to Moab rather than continue with her to Bethlehem, a place that was unfamiliar to them. Orpah takes her advice and goes home, but Ruth refuses to do the same.

- Consider what various commentators have said about Ruth's decision. What do you believe was her thinking process behind this risky and momentous choice? What rationale was at the core of her decision?
- Should Orpah be blamed for going home, or was that the right decision for her?

2. Ruth 1:20-21 says, "Don't call me Naomi,' she told them. 'Call me Mara [Bitter], because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'"

- As she arrives home in Bethlehem after many years in Moab, Naomi declares herself Bitter and believes God not only has abandoned her but is actively trying to undermine her. Have you ever felt this way? The author compares Naomi's words to some of the outcries to God found in the book of Psalms. Why is Naomi so bitter? In what ways is she justified? What is she overlooking in her despair? Is her situation as hopeless as she thinks?

3. Respond to this excerpt from the chapter:

There is a Cinderella element to this story. Is that one reason for its popularity? The hopelessness, the seeming impossibility of a good outcome, followed by the answer that no one could have seen coming? The good young Cinderella/Ruth saved by love, by the kinsman-redeemer prince/Boaz? If there is hope even for someone as bitter and despairing as Naomi and as seemingly powerless and overlooked as Ruth, then is there hope for us readers too? In that sense, this story asks some of the biggest questions of life: Who will rescue us? Who will acknowledge our plight? Who will redeem us?

4. One way to see the book of Ruth is that it is a story about the way God moves into a hopeless situation and causes it to work out well. Do you agree with that interpretation? What other biblical stories also follow that pattern? Invite people in your group to share a situation in which that has happened to them.

Session 6



Book Portion

Chapter 6: Abraham—a Legacy as Vast as the Stars

Questions of Influence

1. Divide your group in two. The two groups will consider Alan Dershowitz's argument that Abraham's lack of challenge to God's command to sacrifice Isaac is a failure on Abraham's part.
 - Assign one group to prepare arguments in support of Dershowitz's view, and assign the other to prepare arguments against it. Give the groups time to review the chapter and discuss this. Ask them to adopt the assigned view for this exercise regardless of their personal opinions.
 - Once they have had some time to brainstorm ideas (ten to fifteen minutes is usually plenty of time for this), ask the groups to face each other. With you, the main group leader, acting as moderator, let the two groups discuss and debate the issue. You may want to have someone write key points on the board as the discussion continues. At the end, give a chance for people to break out of their assigned roles and tell what they really think.
 - What is the biblical intent of this episode in Abraham's life?
2. Consider Elie Wiesel's treatment of the Abraham-Isaac story as presented in this chapter. Ask someone in the group to summarize Wiesel's interpretation as everyone reviews it. How does his view differ from Dershowitz's? Which view do you believe is a better interpretation, or are both flawed?

3. This chapter points out that although Abraham is a revered figure across the world and is key to the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic faiths, he has not attained the appeal in popular culture that some other biblical figures have enjoyed. Moses is portrayed in popular movies such as *The Ten Commandments* and *The Prince of Egypt*. David was sculpted by Michelangelo, and Joseph is celebrated in the Andrew Lloyd Webber musical, *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

- But what about Abraham? Why do you think his dramatic story has not been retold in similar kinds of popular entertainment and other art forms?
- This chapter does mention hundreds of other depictions of Abraham in medieval art in many cultures. Do you think artists and filmmakers of our day will pay more attention to Abraham eventually?

4. Imagine that you are a filmmaker who has been given a large budget to make a movie about Abraham. Brainstorm what scenes from his life you would include and why.

5. This chapter asks the question, “What was so special about Abraham that he should be such a dominant figure in the faiths of billions of people and be so blessed by God?”

- As you consider Abraham’s influence on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and as you consider the many mentions of Abraham by figures in the New Testament such as Jesus, Paul, Mary, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, how would you answer that question? What are the things that set Abraham apart? Why do you think God chose to bless him so extravagantly?

Questions of Application

1. One of the most famous treatments of the Abraham-Isaac sacrifice story is Søren Kierkegaard's classic work *Fear and Trembling*. What Kierkegaard admires about Abraham's faith is that he is willing to move beyond any human calculation that could possibly show how this situation that God has placed him in could turn out well. Abraham trusts the God of the impossible to work it out.

- Have you ever felt compelled to trust God in a situation that looked impossible in human terms? Have you experienced God working it out anyway? Invite group members to consider that question and share their experiences.
- Imagine yourself in Abraham's place, traveling with Isaac to the place of sacrifice. Do you picture yourself being able to trust God as much as Abraham did?

2. Abraham's story is a key part of the Old Testament, but he also shows up in a number of places in the New Testament. Review Abraham's appearances in the "faith chapter," Hebrews 11.

- What aspects of Abraham's faith does Hebrews 11 emphasize? What can we learn from those elements of faith to put into practice in our own lives?

Session 7



Book Portion

Chapter 7: Psalm 23—Trusting the Shepherd

Questions of Influence

1. This chapter gives many examples of the influence of the book of Psalms in Jewish and Christian congregations across the centuries. The psalms were sung in the temple that Solomon built, and they continue to be sung today in churches around the world in many languages. David sang them, and so did Jesus, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and millions of others.

- What is it about the psalms that has made them so universally beloved?
- When you read or sing them today, do you ever get a sense of this rich history, as your voice blends with those voices from the past who also lifted these words to God?
- Today, many psalms are turned into worship choruses. Ask someone to lead your group in singing one of these psalms.

2. Many people have favorite psalms they turn to when they are troubled, insecure, afraid, or happy. Ask people to read part or all of a favorite psalm and tell why it has been so meaningful to them.

3. Psalm 23 has been printed on posters, funeral programs, coffee mugs, and many other products. It has been quoted in countless films, TV shows, and church services. Most people have heard it so many times that they have memorized much or all of it without purposely trying to do so.

- Lead your group in a recitation of Psalm 23 without looking at it. Many people know it in the King James Version, so that may be the best version to try.
- Are there any other biblical chapters that people would know as well as this one?

Questions of Application

1. The psalms of lament are some of the most agonizing but meaningful chapters in the Bible. Read some out loud in your group, such as Psalms 31, 44, and 88.

- What responses do people have to the depth of anger, sadness, and complaint in these psalms? How much can the people in your group relate to this outcry against God? Have there been times in their own lives when they have cried out to God in this way?
- Why are these psalms often not as well known as the more positive, celebratory ones? What purpose do psalms like these serve?
- Some may think the tone and content of these psalms sound disrespectful to God. How would you respond to that?

2. Psalm 23 is often misunderstood as a sentimental, soothing poem.

- What does it say about the harshness of life? What does the shepherd do in response to those difficult elements of life?
- What stance does the speaker of the poem take toward life's difficulties and toward the shepherd who leads the sheep through them?

3. Discuss the insights on Psalm 23 that this chapter presents from W. Phillip Keller and Ray Vander Laan. According to them, what the term “green pastures” meant for shepherds in the Middle East of Bible times is very different from what it means for most of us today.

- What implications do their insights have for the spiritual application of this psalm?
- What other insights from them did you find helpful?

4. One significant theme in Psalm 23 is the sheep’s total dependence on the shepherd.

- Is it hard for many people to come to terms with the spiritual parallel, that we are totally dependent on God? In what ways do we try to pretend otherwise?
- Does total dependence on God mean passivity? Why or why not? How should such dependence be lived out?

5. This chapter ends by saying that many people are content to experience the psalms piecemeal, filtered through modern worship songs or sermons. Have you found a good method for immersing yourself in them more fully? Brainstorm ideas in your group.

Session 8



Book Portion

Chapter 8: Moses—“Who Am I . . . ?”

Questions of Influence

1. This chapter begins by asking the reader who the “real” Moses is. Ask your group to say what first comes to mind when they hear the name “Moses.” Make a list of their responses on the board.

Where do these images come from? Movies? Sunday school? The Bible itself?

- How might the full reality of Moses be distorted by these images? What aspects of his life and personality might get overlooked?

2. Review the descriptions of the “burning bush” scenes this chapter analyzes from three films about Moses: *The Ten Commandments*, *The Prince of Egypt*, and *Exodus: Gods and Kings*. If possible, show one or more of the scenes from the films to your group.

- Which of the three versions do you think does the best job of capturing the Moses of Scripture, and why? All of them veer from the Bible or add to it in certain ways, but do any take those changes too far?
- One reason the movies have to fill in some gaps about the burning-bush scene and other scenes in Moses’s life is that the Bible narrates those scenes so briefly, with only minimal details. Why do you think the biblical writers left out so many details that modern readers and moviegoers want to fill in?
- If you were a filmmaker, how would you present the burning-bush scene?

3. This chapter quotes a commentator who declares that the Ten Commandments, which God handed down to Moses, are the most influential law code ever given. But the chapter also gives details of a few of the many cases in which *displays* of the Ten Commandments in public places have led to court fights and political battles. Do the fights over the displays threaten to overshadow the attention given to the words themselves? Do you think these displays are important and justified?

4. This chapter observes that if a committee were formed today to come up with the ten commandments they thought God would want, they might imagine a very different list from the ones in the Bible. “Do not murder” and “Do not steal” might get in there, but would they think of including a prohibition against graven images? Would a commandment against taking the Lord’s name in vain make the list? Honoring one’s father and mother sounds nice, but would it crack the top ten commandments in today’s climate? Review what the chapter says about the Ten Commandments and the reasons why they are more fundamental to the rest of the law than they might appear to be at first glance. Why are these particular commandments needed?

Questions of Application

1. The chapter says this about the objections Moses gives when God calls him from the burning bush:

From a purely human perspective, Moses’s objections to his call make sense. He asks, Who am I to do this? He has a point. On his own, he has no special authority or abilities. He is not even living in Egypt anymore. He asks, What if they don’t believe that God has really called me? That’s a sensible question. He has no witnesses to this burning-bush encounter. Why *should* anyone believe him? Moses also objects that he is not eloquent. He is slow of speech and tongue. If God is choosing a spokesman, shouldn’t he choose someone who speaks well?

- What can we learn from those objections? Can you relate to this insecurity and excuse making when faced with an expectation from God that seems beyond you?
 - Review God's responses to those objections. How satisfying are they? Why does Moses ultimately obey?
2. Which aspect of Moses do you find yourself most drawn to, the historical national leader who frees his people, or the overwhelmed, humble follower of God who has some insecurities and isn't quite sure he is up to the task? Why does the Bible show both?
3. Moses's story shows that some situations call for bold and courageous action, such as when he confronts Pharaoh. Other situations, however, require him to be still and trust God, such as when Pharaoh's army is bearing down on Moses's people by the Red Sea. Exodus 14:13-14 says, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."
- Comment on this chapter's response to those verses:
Moses is acknowledging that this crisis is far beyond their ability to resolve it in their own strength. Without God's intervention, their defeat is assured. Their one hope is to trust in the Lord's deliverance. He will fight for them. So even though their instincts call for them to be terrified, and even though they may be tempted to lash out or run around frantically, what they really need to do is to be still and trust the God who has brought them through so much already. If they *really* believe he is fighting for them, then they need only to watch in gratitude to see how he will do it. They can't conceive of his solution on their own, nor can they bring it about. He will fight for them.
 - Ask people in your group to share experiences in which the dilemma they confronted was so beyond any solution they could imagine that all they could do was trust God to rescue them. What was the outcome? How can you tell the difference between situations that call for action and situations that call for stillness and trust?

Session 9



Book Portion

Chapter 9: Jonah—More Than a Fish Tale

Questions of Influence

1. Review this chapter's overview of the children's books about Jonah. Also show your group any other children's books about Jonah that you may have.
 - Some biblical stories are hard to retell in a children's version, but this story seems to work well for kids, even the youngest ones. Which of the versions described in the chapter do you think does the best job of capturing the essence and message of the story?
 - If you were writing a children's book about the story, what would you include and what would you leave out? What are the main themes children should draw from this story?
2. This chapter lists versions of Jonah's story retold in books, paintings, songs, and other forms. Most of those retellings include the "whale," or big fish. However, the biblical book of Jonah includes a number of other scenes that do not include the fish.
 - If your group is big enough, divide it into smaller groups of three to four people and ask them to imagine they have been asked to produce a painting that captures the essential message of Jonah but that does not include the fish. Afterward, ask each group to share its ideas with the larger group.

Questions of Application

1. The Jonah story has many spiritual messages packed into four short chapters. Review this list of themes found in Jonah. Then ask each member of your group to list on a piece of paper what he or she thinks the top three themes are. Discuss the responses to see if there is a consensus about the core messages of the book:

As we'll see, the story is about many things. It's about forgiveness. It's about "a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2). It's about God's concern not only for humanity but for all of creation. It's about how God uses strange and sometimes harsh wake-up calls to get us spiritually back on track. It illustrates the truth that if we would obey God to begin with, we would save ourselves lots of trouble. It shows that a force that looks as if it might destroy us may actually be a provision sent by God to rescue us. It's about the sovereignty of God. It's about the fact that just because we're angry doesn't mean we're right. It's about how running from God is futile. It's about God's belief in second chances, and it's about how he loves people that we can't stand.

2. It's easy to be tough on Jonah for not wanting the Ninevites to be saved, but as the chapter points out, the Assyrian Empire was well known for acts of grotesque cruelty, which they had carried out for many generations. Review what the chapter has to say about their heinous deeds. Does that change your response to Jonah? Can you relate to his desire to see the Ninevites get the punishment they deserved? Could that be seen as a desire for justice?

- Whatever your response to that may be, why did Jonah still need to obey God's command to go to Nineveh and prophesy a warning to the people?

3. Does Jonah really believe he can successfully flee from God? He admits to the sailors on the ship that he worships "the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land" (Jonah 1:9)—that is, the God who made and oversees *everything* and therefore is *inescapable*.

- In what ways do people flee from God today? How are they similar to the way Jonah did it? How do people convince themselves that God is not watching? What does it take to change their minds?

4. Jonah 1:17 says, “Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah.” Note the word “provided” in that verse. Being swallowed by the fish was terrifying and disgusting, but it was also *provision*. In what ways did it serve that purpose for Jonah?

- This chapter says, “Sometimes our worst ordeals are God’s ‘great fish’ sent to save us.” Ask your group members to share examples of that from their own lives. What bad things turned out to also be God’s provision?

5. God uses a vine at the end of this story to teach Jonah a lesson. Review that episode in Jonah 4:1-11. What is Jonah supposed to learn from this incident?

- This scene ends with God’s question to Jonah, but Jonah’s response is not recorded. What would you expect his response to be? Why do you think the story is left open ended?

Session 10



Book Portion

Chapter 10: And Yet, There Is So Much More!

Questions of Influence

1. If you were to add another chapter to this book examining the influence of Old Testament passages, what passage would you add and why?
2. As your group wraps up its study of this book, what Old Testament passage stands out the most?
 - In what ways do your group members think of the Old Testament differently now?
3. The opening chapter of this book discusses what some see as the diminishing influence of the Old Testament on our culture today. After studying these passages, do you believe the influence of the Old Testament will increase or decrease in the days and years ahead? What indications seem most persuasive to you?

Questions of Application

1. Ask your group members to think of biblical passages that once seemed incomprehensible, dull, or irrelevant to them at one point in their lives but that later burst forth with greater meaning and significance.

- Do you agree with this chapter's point that there are some passages of the Bible that we are not personally ready for yet?
2. The author discusses how *personal* the Old Testament texts are for him. They have had a huge impact on the wider culture, but he also thinks of them as necessary for spiritual survival. They have become a part of who he is.
- Ask your group to respond to that idea. What is your own *personal* connection to the Old Testament? What would you like it to be?
3. This chapter considers Glenn R. Paauw's idea of the "snacking Bible." What does that term mean? Review that section of the chapter and discuss it with your group. Do you struggle with treating Scripture that way? What can you do to avoid it?
4. Ezekiel 37 and Job 38 are chapters the author presents as passages he once overlooked but that eventually emerged as powerful portions of the Old Testament that captivated him for weeks. If time permits, read a significant portion of those chapters to your group members and allow them to respond to the meaning and beauty of the words. This might also be a good time to invite group members to read out loud their own favorite Old Testament passages and share why they are so meaningful.