

THE BIBLE I NEVER KNEW

INVESTIGATION, REFLECTION, AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

People can learn from *The Bible I Never Knew* in different ways. This guide provides suggestions for studying and reflecting on the entire book as well as its individual chapters. These study and reflection tasks can be undertaken individually or discussed collectively in a small or large group. This guide has far too many ideas for one study, so review all the possible tasks and decide which you (or your group) want to use.

The tasks in this guide are challenging and are written to help readers understand, analyze, apply, and wrestle with the text. Hence, this guide is meant for people who are at least 16 years old (the guide can also be simplified for younger children). Consider using other Bible study guides to supplement this guide—many are general enough to apply to the study of *The Bible I Never Knew*.

Book-Long Projects

The following studies apply to the entire book. Decide which ones you (or your group) want to address before you start reading.

1. **Journal** Keep a journal of your thoughts/reactions as you read. Include new insight, any characters that impress you and why, people or events in your life that come to mind, how the text relates to them, and what gives you insight into challenges you face now.
2. **Theme Analysis** Some themes noted in the book are mentioned in several chapters. Use highlighters of different colors to track a few general themes as you read. If necessary, look up the related verses in the complete Bible to get a more complete picture of the story.
 - a. Highlight sections in the book that discuss justice, generosity, and grace. Also note foreigners and those who are disadvantaged in some way, including those who are poor. What are the implications of these passages for your life?
 - b. Highlight themes and verses that are mentioned in both the Old and New Testaments.
 - c. Highlight verses you want to memorize.
3. **Event/Character Analysis** Identify key events and characters you want to know more about, then read the entire parts of the Bible where they are discussed. Record insights you gain in the process and how your reading and understanding of the context contributes to your understanding of the events or characters. Consider using other resources to deepen your study.
4. **Interpretation Analysis** Interpreting the Bible can be a challenge because different literary devices are used to make a point (e.g., symbolism, allegories, metaphors). Some teachings are meant to apply to *all* situations, while others are meant to apply to a *specific* situation or context. Identify and record

any texts you think should not be taken literally, as well as those meant to be specific to a particular time or audience (not universal truths that apply at all times).

5. Contemporary Equivalence Highlight terms and analogies that relate to an agrarian or ancient culture and convey a more general message. Think of what modern-day terms and analogies could be used to convey the same message to a contemporary audience.

6. Faith Vitality What relationships, events, and teachings contribute to the strengthening of one's faith? What factors can tear down one's faith or keep it from growing?

7. Spiritual Transformation How does the transformation of one's mind take place? In what ways has your mind been transformed—where was your mind and thinking when you were younger, and where is it now? What needs to happen for further transformation to occur in your life and in society? How does the transformation of one's mind relate to the transformation of one's heart and emotions? Does one precede the other? Does personal transformation always lead to positive growth and maturity? Is it steady and linear? What factors can accelerate the transformation and growth process?

8. Message Focus Some common themes and messages of the Bible are rarely discussed among some Christians, while other topics are discussed much more often, even though the Bible has little or nothing to say or is not specific about those topics. What Biblical themes are being neglected and what topics receive more attention than they deserve in today's discussions about religion and Christianity? Why do you think discussions have not focused on some of the core ideas of the Bible?

9. Chapter Title Analysis The chapters of this book have descriptive titles and subtitles. What are some other possible titles and subtitles for sections of the book? What are possible headlines that could be used to describe a journalist's story that covers the events and teachings discussed in this book?

10. Content Analysis Before reading this book, write down the main stories, characters, themes, and verses you think are essential to understanding the Bible and its messages. As you read, identify them when they surface in the text. Determine if your understanding of them is different from your original understanding, and record anything new you have learned based on what you read in this book. If the stories and messages you believe are essential don't appear in the book, consider why they might not have been included and where they could be included, either within one of the chapters or in a new chapter. Consider working with other people who are doing the same task and compare your efforts related to this activity.

11. Message Clarity Record any parts of this book that are confusing, or where you want more information to improve your understanding of the story or message. Research the passages in more depth on your own to see if you can improve your understanding.

12. Absence Identification For each chapter, identify other parts of the Bible that are not mentioned but apply to that topic. Explain why you think these parts should be included and what is gained by their inclusion.

13. Relevance Analysis Identify any parts of this book you think are not essential to the messages of the Bible. Say why you think they are not essential. What would be lost if they were not included?
14. Accuracy Analysis Identify any parts of the book you believe are inaccurate or incorrect. Study them in more detail using other sources to see if your beliefs are correct.
15. Personal Growth For each chapter, record anything new you learned and explain how what you learned may change your life, your thinking, and your insights about the Bible.
16. Reading Cited Verses Read each of the Bible passages that appear within each chapter. Consider using the references in Appendix I, which lists scripture references by topic, to aid you in this activity.

Chapter Study, Reflection, and Discussion

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Why do you think most people have never read the Bible? What are the reasons given by the author? Can you think of any others?
2. What makes it hard for people to understand the main messages of the Bible? What reasons does the author give for why people don't understand the Bible very well? What happens when people read the Bible but don't understand parts of it? What could be done to make it more understandable?
3. To what extent do you understand the entire Bible, from Genesis to Revelation? What do you think the book is all about?
4. What do you think are the Bible's main messages? What can a person do to reach a clear understanding of the Bible's main messages? How would you describe the learning process for a person to become a more knowledgeable and mature Christian? What are your goals for reading this book?
5. What are the hallmarks of a mature Christian? What helps Christians become more mature in their faith, and what hinders Christians' efforts to be more faithful followers of Jesus? Does having more knowledge and understanding of the Bible mean a person has a more mature faith? Rate your current level of Christian maturity, on a scale of 1 to 10, and explain the process of spiritual growth that has occurred during your life. What contributed most to your growth, and what factors have hindered your growth?

Chapter 2: Bible History and Structure

1. In what ways are the Old and New Testaments different?
2. Does information in this chapter affect your confidence in or understanding of the Bible in any way? If so, what has changed for you?
3. The Council of Carthage was very careful when selecting books it considered inspired and authoritative. Do you think they were too careful with their criteria? What do you think makes a book inspired and authoritative? Could other books be considered inspired by God, including those written

during the past centuries and more recently? If so, name some writings you consider to be inspired and why you think they are inspired.

4. What are your thoughts about the organization (order) of the 66 books in the Bible? What might be a better way to organize the books to improve the readability of the Bible?

5. What are the general characteristics of the Bible's known authors? Do these characteristics affect your views of the Bible? Does not knowing who wrote a book make it less reliable or affect your confidence in the truthfulness of the book or the Bible as a whole?

6. Some scholars don't think the authors named in this chapter are the true authors. Does knowing who the real author was affect how you view the truthfulness and reliability of the scriptures? If so, what difference does it make to you?

Chapter 3: Important Missing Details

1. List the reasons the author gives for why important details are missing from the Bible.

2. List the key facts about what happened during the 400 years after the last Old Testament book was written. How might have political changes in Palestine influenced what and how Jesus preached?

3. Many Bibles published today include other information and graphics to help readers understand the context, history, geography, and meanings of the Bible. Other books are published with similar information, but there are disagreements about some of the facts, and some of the information may mislead readers about the meanings of the Bible. What are good ways to include supplemental information in your study of the Bible? How does the source of the information matter?

4. In what ways does the information provided in the chapter help you understand the Bible better? What new insights do you have after reading about the cultural context of the Bible's stories?

Chapter 4: The Bible As Literature

1. List the different types of literature the author mentions in this chapter and write a brief definition of each. What types do you like best, and which are the most challenging to read?

2. What challenges do readers face when reading so many types of literature in one book? How should a reader address these challenges?

3. Do you agree with the author's view about the key themes centered on God and the conflict between good and evil? What are other possible key themes, elements, and plots that would help others understand the Bible story?

4. How is the Bible different from modern forms of literature?

Chapter 5: Understanding the Bible

1. In what ways does the information in the previous chapter about the forms of literature in the Bible relate to what is written in this chapter?

2. Interpreting the Bible can be challenging. What does the author say we should know to understand what a particular passage means? How do you know when a verse is using a metaphor or exaggeration to make a point?
3. After reading this chapter, what are your thoughts about taking what the Bible says literally? What is the best way to know when to take verses literally? What are examples of scripture that shouldn't be taken literally? What literal interpretations of scripture can you think of that have been misused? What scripture verses have some people interpreted figuratively or spiritually instead of taking them literally?
4. What are some Bible parables and teachings you don't understand or find confusing? What can you do to increase your understanding of them?
5. Think about any apparent contradictions that appear in the Bible. How do you reconcile or understand scriptures that seem to have different views about a subject? Are the views meant for a different or specific time or context? Give examples of them and what you think about how to interpret them correctly. What teachings are no longer relevant due to changes in time and culture, our understanding of the world based on scientific discoveries, or new insights into correct living?
6. The idea that all scripture is "inspired" and useful for teaching means God used people to communicate spiritual matters. This isn't the same as scripture being "inerrant" (without error). Do you think scripture should be viewed as having no errors? Why or why not?
7. Do you think a person needs to believe in the inspiration and inerrancy of all scriptures to be a Christian? Why or why not? How does the interpretation of the scriptures, including taking teachings literally and applying them to all situations at all times, affect your answer? How does your answer affect how you view others who say they are Christian but view scripture differently?

Chapter 6: The Nature of God

1. What are your thoughts and feelings about using only male pronouns when referring to the different "persons" of God? When might it make sense to use other pronouns or no gender-related terms when referring to any of the three forms of God?
2. God had many names in the Bible. What names are the most meaningful to you and why? Brainstorm other names that could be given to describe God.
3. Make a list of the unchanging characteristics of God, briefly define them, and say what they mean to you. What adjectives describe God's qualities? How is God different from other ancient deities? What do people trust in today, which could be considered one of their "gods"?
4. In what ways can God be unpredictable or show change? Do prayers change God's mind? What are the implications of these ideas?
5. If a person believes God is in control, why do they worry or have fear? What do you worry about, and what makes you afraid? What affect do your worries and fears have on your life? What would it take for you to give up your worries and fears?

6. The chapter lists many spiritual gifts and says there are others not listed in scripture. What are your thoughts about this idea? Do you think the descriptions of spiritual gifts are correct? What else could be said about each of the gifts listed? What are your gifts, and how are you using them for the body of Christ? How might you help others identify their spiritual gifts?

7. How are spiritual gifts different from the “fruits” of the spirit? To what extent do you exhibit each of the fruits? Could other “fruits” be added to the list, just as other gifts could be added? If so, what are they?

8. What reasons does the author give for why Jesus came to earth? Can you think of other reasons?

9. The Trinity is usually depicted in a triangle. Make other symbols or representations to capture the nature of the three forms of God and how they interact with each other and you.

Chapter 7: Communicating With God

1. How does God communicate with humans? How and when do you hear or feel God most clearly?

2. In what ways do you communicate with God? To what extent do quietness and listening play a role in the process? How would you characterize your prayer life? When and why do you pray? What is the focus of most of your prayers – praise, thanks, requests?

3. What and who are we told to pray for? Do you think people should pray for others to have faith in God? In what ways could your prayer life be different and better?

4. To what extent have you had your prayers answered? How do you respond when your prayers are not answered in the way you wanted? What do you think your response should be?

5. Have you experienced angels or their effects in any way? Do you know others who have experienced angels? If so, describe what happened.

Chapter 8: Science, Truth, and Miracles

1. In what ways are science and the scientific process useful in the world, and when can they be detrimental to life on earth?

2. Do you think science and Christianity (or any religion) are in conflict? How might science complement or enhance our understanding of God? Why do you think the church and Christians sometimes resist the findings of science and new discoveries?

3. In what ways has the truth been taught to you during your life, either directly or implicitly? Where do you get most of your information now? Do the sources you rely on for information reveal the whole truth or do they have a bias, which affects your ability to discern the truth? What are examples of lies and deceptive messages that occur today?

4. When in your life have you gained new insights or greater understandings that changed your life or decisions you now make? What prompted you to make the change? How difficult is it for you to make small or major changes in your life? (Chapter 14 includes a discussion about change.)

5. What habits do you have that help you stay focused on what is good and true? Who helps you in that process? What factors in your life tend to distract you from the ways of correct living and thinking?
6. How do you define a “miracle”? Do you believe miracles occur? Have you experienced or seen miracles in your life? If so, did they involve healing or special powers by a person? Was a person’s faith involved in the process? Was it an answer to prayer? Should answers to prayer and evidence of angels be considered miracles?
7. Make a list of the miracles that happened in the Bible, and think about miracles that have happened in your life or the life of others. Are there any patterns for when a miracle occurs? What insights do you gain from this analysis?
8. What is the relationship between faith and miracles? How do you interact with those who don’t believe miracles are possible, or have doubts about miracles? How do you react when somebody prays for something and it doesn’t happen?

Chapter 9: Love, The Bible’s Main Theme

1. What are your thoughts about the Bible being described as a love story? How would you describe the entire Bible to another person in a few words or a few sentences? How do you define love and all its complexities?
2. In what ways does perfect love drive out fear?
3. What and who does God love? What and who are humans to love?
4. The Bible says God is love. What does this mean to you? What does the Bible say is the most important sign that we love God?
5. How would you define and describe worship? Why is worshiping God important?
6. The author says a natural response when loving others is showing generosity and forgiveness. Read the parable found in Matthew 18:21–35 and think about how these two concepts – generosity and forgiveness – are woven together into one story. What are the implications for your life? (See chapters 5, 10, and 11 for more information about generosity.)
7. When should forgiveness end and judgement begin? Can both occur at the same time? What happens when we don’t forgive somebody? (Chapter 10 also discusses the topics of forgiveness and justice.)
8. The chapter discusses situational ethics, that the right thing to do depends on the situation. The author says love is the guiding principle that may sometimes take precedence over obeying a commandment or law. What do you think of this idea? Have you broken a law in the name of doing a loving act? If so, describe the circumstances. How flexible should you be when it comes to obeying the law? (Chapter 17 also discusses this topic.)

9. The text and footnote 21 discuss what the Bible says about abortion. What is the basis for your current position on abortion? What are your views about the author's discussion of this issue?
10. What are your thoughts on what the author says about a loving God and people who will go to hell? Who do you think will go to hell?

Chapter 10: Justice, Mercy, and Grace

1. Who is to provide justice, who should receive it, and when should it be applied? (Chapters 12 and 17 also discuss justice.)
2. What are the consequences to a society when it doesn't provide justice to its people?
3. What is your understanding of how justice, mercy, and grace are different, and when to apply each of them? How does your understanding affect your view of forgiveness? In what ways does your understanding affect what you do while you live in society?
4. What do you think is the correct Christian view about fighting injustice in the world? Do you think Christians should advocate for justice in countries other than their own? If so, how and when should that be done?

Chapter 11: Money, Possessions, and Prosperity

1. In most cultures, people believe those with intelligence, ingenuity, and perseverance achieve success and acquire wealth they deserve to keep. But the Bible says everything belongs to God and we are stewards. What are the implications of this teaching for how you and others live in the world?
2. In the Old Testament, laws were created to help the poor and reduce income disparities among the Israelites. What are your thoughts and feelings about how income disparities are being addressed in today's world? How might you be able to address these disparities?
3. This chapter and the two previous chapters discuss generosity. What are your thoughts and feelings about generosity now? Consider how you spend money and use your possessions. What are the implications of the Biblical passages that relate to generosity for your life, including how you tithe?
4. Reflect on the fact that money and prosperity are a mixed blessing. To what extent have you experienced positive and negative aspects of being prosperous? Do you consider yourself wealthy? Who do you compare yourself to when answering this question? How have you acquired wealth, and how have you used what God has given you?
5. When the Israelites experienced peace and a good economy, they developed an attitude of self-sufficiency and forgot about God. Jesus said he came to call sinners to repent, not the righteous, because healthy people don't need a doctor. In what ways is it difficult for a healthy and self-sufficient person with no significant struggles to enter the kingdom of God? What does this imply about the pursuit of monetary success and earthly comforts? What can a person do to prevent becoming complacent towards God when they are financially secure?

6. Most people who are poor are impoverished because of factors outside their control. List the ways concern for the poor was addressed in Old Testament times. How did Jesus view the poor? What has been your attitude towards those who are poor, and how should you view them now?

7. Few people follow the Biblical principles related to money. When you are asked for money by another person, to what extent do you consider your own wealth, the needs of the person, how the money will be spent, the interest to be charged, and the likelihood the money will be repaid? How will you respond when somebody in need asks for money, even if they are willing to pay it back with interest?

8. After reading this chapter, what are your views about debt, making investments, and accumulating wealth for yourself and your family? How do you view the economic systems that exist where you live?

Chapter 12: Life Is Not Fair

1. Do you agree that life is not fair? Do you feel it should be? Do you only feel that way when **you** have been treated unfairly in a harmful way? Why do we sometimes not get what we deserve?

2. In what ways has life been unfair to you, both when you got less than you deserved and when you got more than you deserved? How have you reacted to these “injustices”? How should you respond when you get less or more than you deserve?

3. When bad things happen to a person, some will say things to make them feel better. What are some of the things people say to others to comfort them? How helpful are these comments? What might you say to others that will provide comfort?

4. God can use bad things for good. When in your life has something bad happened to you and it turned out to be a blessing in disguise? Describe the details of the bad and the good. What can you learn from these experiences? How can these experiences help you cope with future disappointments?

5. What can we learn from the story of Job? (See footnote 9 in chapter 2 for some insights about its possible author.)

6. How do you react when people get a reward you think they don’t deserve? How do you feel when some people get more than others? Should everybody get what they deserve? Should we try to make sure everybody gets the same treatment? What does everybody deserve to have?

7. What are your thoughts about heaven – what happens when you die, what heaven is like, and when (or if) you will go to heaven? (Chapters 13 and 16 also discuss these issues.)

Chapter 13: Being Saved (Delivered)

1. What has been your understanding of the phrase “being saved,” and how has it changed (if it has) based on what you learned in this chapter?

2. Some people are sure they will go to heaven. What must happen for a person to be delivered from sin? What conditions must be met for this to happen? What are Christians supposed to do after they are saved? Why are people saved? (You may want to update or revise your answers after reading other chapters.)
3. The early apostles spread the good news to the entire world, not just to the Jews. The inclusive (universal) nature of the church means the Body of Christ is quite diverse. What are the implications for how you treat those who are different from you? How does this inform your thinking about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?
4. What are your thoughts on the three views about whether a person who was initially saved can lose their “saved” status? Have you held a position on this issue, and if so, how has it changed? Which of the views do you agree with the most and why? In what ways might this motivate you to change the way you live your life?
5. Jesus died as the final sacrifice to pay what is owed by all humans to have a relationship with God. That means ceremonial sacrifices are no longer needed. What is still required of humans? How do people still try to earn God’s approval?

Chapter 14: Living in the World

1. Satan and evil manifest themselves in many ways, yet their influence can be difficult to discern. What are the different ways evil influences people? How can a person identify evil, and how are we to respond to its influences?
2. The author presents three approaches to living in an evil world. In your own words, describe each approach and list their benefits and limitations. Which approach best describes your life?
3. In what ways are you involved in sharing the good news (evangelism) and efforts to make disciples? What holds you back from telling others about your faith?
4. To what extent do you agree with the six characteristics of effective evangelism described by the author? How would you rate yourself on each characteristic? What other factors can make evangelism efforts effective? How effective have your efforts been when telling others about your religious beliefs? How could your efforts be more effective?
5. The process of discipleship requires ongoing learning. How has your Christian walk matured and changed over time? In the parable of the soils, what keeps the seeds and plants from developing? What soil best describes you? How are you growing and maturing in your faith? What kind of fruit do you produce for others to see? What do you need to grow spiritually mature?
6. Paul’s letter to the immature believers in Corinth said he was only able to feed them “milk” rather than solid food. What do you think Paul meant by solid food? What does it take for Christians to be mature enough to be ready for solid food?

7. Changing your life is difficult. What holds us back from making changes? What factors force us to change? When should we change to embrace new ideas and adjust the views we previously had? What changes do you need to make? What will it take for you to make these changes?

8. What challenges do you face living in a world that doesn't share your values and beliefs? What are the advantages and disadvantages of living primarily among people who share your values and customs? What is your view about living among people who don't share your beliefs and values? Do you think the gospel is "counter-cultural?"

9. What new insights or perspectives about evangelism and discipleship do you have after reading this chapter?

10. In Revelation, John strongly admonished the churches in Asia Minor about how they made compromises in their Christian life. What challenges do believers face today as they live out their faith? What can be done to meet these challenges?

11. Only 120 people followed Jesus when he left the earth, yet thousands heard him preach and interacted with him. Why do you think he had so few followers at that point? What are the implications for the church today?

12. God created a good world, and people are to take care of it. What are sound Biblical views about how Christians should care for the physical world? How might this influence today's discussions about climate change?

13. Living in the world, as well as loving and saving the world, implies an understanding of the world. To what extent do you know about important world events and conditions that exist today outside your region and country? (This includes knowing about other cultures and religions, international relations and trade, and political and economic conditions elsewhere.) What responsibilities do Christians have to understand and act on what is happening in the world today?

Chapter 15: Unusual Perspectives

1. Jesus was a king but didn't act like one. Instead, his ways were "radical." Make a list of how Jesus was different from other kings. In what ways is his example of leadership similar and different from that of today's leaders? How does God want us to use what power we have?

2. Jesus was very different in ways that could be called "radical." How was his behavior different? What risks do people take when they are very different from what others expect? In what ways do you take risks? Are the risks worth it?

3. Make a list of the different and unusual perspectives mentioned in this chapter. What adjectives would people in today's cultures give to describe these perspectives? What aspects of Jesus' character, behavior, and teachings do you respect the most, and which perspectives are the hardest for you to embrace?

4. Some cultures highly value independence. What are the benefits of independence and interdependence? What makes it hard for people to be interdependent? How should we balance the two in our lives?

Chapter 16: The End of History

1. The early Christians were severely persecuted for their faith. How do you think you would act if revealing your beliefs jeopardized your life and family? To what extent would you “hide” or “reveal” the truth about your beliefs to others? Would you help others who are being persecuted in any way, even if it put your life at risk? If so, under what circumstances would you help them, and how?

2. Throughout history, some Christians believed they were living in the “end times.” Given current world events, many are preoccupied with these ideas. What do you believe about what will happen while you are still alive? What difference would it make to you if you knew the world would not end soon — would you do anything differently if you knew we will die before the world ends?

3. Apocalyptic texts are difficult to understand, yet many people believe they know what the symbolism means. Some churches and Christian institutions even require their members to have specific beliefs about the end times. What parts of the end times narrative are important for you to understand? To what extent do you need to know how all the predictions fit together in a specific order? What do you think of others who have different beliefs?

4. Do you know anybody who wants to speed up the process of having the world end? If so, what do you think motivates them, and what do you think of their efforts?

5. In what ways is life getting better on earth, and how are things getting worse? Are we in the best of times or the worst of times (or both)? How does your answer affect your view of the end times?

6. Does anything in the chapter change the way you think about the future? In what ways does the story of the final days of history affect you and how you live?

Chapter 17: Government, Politics, and Citizenship

1. What is the role of government in any society — what is it supposed to do? What role do laws and taxes play in running a society? How does this affect your views about taxes?

2. Describe the different forms (monarchy, democracy, autocracy, theocracy) and levels (local, state/province, national, and international) of government. How did living in a theocracy influence the Israelites’ relationships with other nations and peoples?

3. How are nationalism and patriotism similar and different? How does God’s command to love others, including those who are foreigners, relate to nationalism and patriotism? Is a theocracy something we should strive for at any level of government? If so, under what conditions?

4. Describe how government is different from politics.

5. How did other nations affect the nation of Israel as it developed over the centuries?

6. Make a list of Biblical characters and groups that had a major role in governing society. What did they do? What does this teach us about Biblical ideas related to government?
7. How would you characterize the Old Testament commands and laws? How would you define legalism? How did Jesus view the laws? How does his response to them affect your view of laws, rules, and the government?
8. What are the main Biblical principles related to government and its leaders, and how are we to respond to them? How do you reconcile the command to submit to earthly authorities with the idea of opposing authority? When is opposition justified? What do you think about what the author says to do when the government is not acting like it should? Are there other possible responses that are legitimate? What are examples of people opposing laws and government actions/policies, and how effective have they been?
9. What happens when people show their opposition to the government? Have you ever taken any action to oppose a government entity? If so, what happened afterwards? Do you have any regrets about doing what you did?
10. How does one's citizenship in heaven relate to one's earthly allegiances? How can a Christian be an ambassador of the Kingdom while living in the world? How does the concept of being an ambassador influence your thinking about your culture, patriotism, and allegiance to earthly authorities?
11. Summarize what this chapter says about freedom and choice. Explain what the verse "the truth will set you free" can mean. Review what chapter 8 says about truth.

Chapter 18: Women in the Bible

1. The author says the Bible was written in a patriarchal society and women were not often respected. To what extent do you agree with him? How do you think that ancient context affected what was written about women?
2. In what ways does the Bible say males and females are equal, and when were women described as needing to have a subservient or less important role? To what extent do you think restrictions on women's roles in society and the church are still valid or legitimate today? How does the Bible's emphasis on service-oriented love and equality ("there is neither Jew nor Greek, no male and female – all are one in Christ Jesus") affect your position? What are the implications for Christians and the church now?
3. Make a list of the women mentioned by the author in the chapter. List their roles and who they related to, what they did, and their impact. Analyze and summarize what you can conclude from your list.
4. What are the main theological issues related to women and their roles in society and the church? What is the Biblical basis for disagreements about these issues? Refer to the principles of interpreting the Bible described in chapter 5, then describe your position on these issues. How should you relate to those who hold a different position?

Chapter 19: Sex, Marriage, and Families

1. Make a list of any insights, ideas, facts, and stories that are new to you as you read the chapter. Explain why they are probably new to you.
2. The Background section has many definitions and statistics related to the topics discussed in the chapter. Do you disagree with anything the author wrote? If so, explain what you disagree with and why.
3. Marriages have had many forms over time. Polygamy was an accepted practice among Jews for centuries but gradually became less prevalent. What were the benefits of polygamy? How have views about marriage changed over time? Based on what the Bible says and doesn't say about marriages and families, what do you believe are valid and legitimate forms of Christian marriages and families?
4. Make a list of the scandals involving sex and marriages mentioned in the chapter and who were involved in them. List the Israelite leaders who married non-Jews. What can you conclude from this information?
5. Describe the characteristics of Jesus's family and what we know about them. Include information about his ancestors, parents and siblings, relatives and their vocations, and their living conditions. What insights can you get from this information about Jesus's personality, habits, and teachings?
6. What are the Bible's main teachings about sex and marriage? What teachings are *not* included in the Bible but are often cited today as Christian values? What are your views about sex when a person is single and married, and how have you come to hold these views?
7. After reading this chapter, describe how you view the valid and legitimate roles people play within a marriage and the church, and explain the basis for your views.
8. After reading what the author wrote about non-traditional relationships and changes in one's gender identity, explain your position on these issues. How do you think the church should deal with people in these relationships and situations? What would Jesus do? In what ways have you changed your identity during your life – who you say you are? How do you "identify" yourself?
9. To what extent has information in this chapter changed any of your views? Describe what has changed.

Epilogue and Appendixes

1. Explain any strong beliefs you have held that are at odds with what the Bible teaches or are not specifically addressed in the Bible. What will you believe and do now?
2. Understanding what a specific Bible verse *means* is more important than knowing what it *says*. The context also matters. Some instructions are meant for a specific culture, while others are less specific and involve generalizations that lack details. In addition, many topics aren't specifically addressed because they weren't relevant at the time. As a result, people have different views about what the Bible teaches. To what extent is having the "right theological position" important to you?

How should you relate to those who have different interpretations of scripture? Must you be “right”? What must you be certain about?

3. This book has discussed a number of controversial issues. How do you deal with controversial issues? Do you ignore or avoid them, or try to convince others of your point of view, or openly criticize or protest against those who hold different views? What do you think you should do in the future?

4. Controversial issues consume much of our energy and attention. Yet these issues are rarely as important as the Bible’s main ideas – loving others, providing justice, mercy, and grace, being generous, forgiving others – and are discussed less often. In other words, we often “focus on the trees and miss the forest” – we major on minor issues. Why do you think this happens?

5. Evaluate your spiritual maturity closely to see how well you measure up to being God’s ambassador on earth – what God wants you to do and be. Make a list of the areas where you need the most growth, then think about what you must do to grow in these areas.

6. The church has changed significantly in the past 2,000 years. How has it changed, and what are the main challenges it faces now? How should these challenges be addressed? What do you think are the most important things the church should do now to further the Kingdom of God on earth?

7. What do you think of the thematic approach of *The Bible I Never Knew*? Was it helpful? Would you recommend the book to others? Why or why not?

8. Has reading this book given you a fresh desire to learn more about the Bible? If so, how might you approach your future explorations?

9. If you had to write a book review of *The Bible I Never Knew*, what would it say? What are your thoughts about its clarity, readability, organization, range of content, biases, accuracy, analyses, and reference materials? Who should read this book? What essential parts are missing? Who will not like this book and why? (Consider sending the author your review so he can improve the next edition.)

10. If you had to summarize the Bible in a few pages, what parts are essential to tell the story? Write a short summary (one page) and/or a longer summary (4-6 pages, around 2,500 words) of the Bible.

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