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 SG 0701: Scripture and Its Witnesses I  
 Final Assignment

## **Digging Into the Bible: A Four-Lesson Youth Forum Series**

### I. Context

This series of four lesson plans is designed to be used with a high school youth group. The lessons explore the following questions: “What is the Bible?” “How did we get the Bible?” and “Why should we read the Bible?” I have chosen to address these questions because many youth seek answers to deeper questions about faith and spirituality. I want to invite youth to engage in exploring deeper questions about faith and how different spiritual practices can be applied to their daily lives, encouraging them to consider how our Christian (specifically, the Episcopal) tradition can form the way in which we seek God’s presence day to day.

For the purposes of this lesson plan, it is assumed that the youth have a working knowledge of the Bible. They are familiar with some stories in the Bible, as well as how to look up passages of Scripture. However, this lesson plan seeks to engage them with deeper questions about the origins, content, and purpose of reading and understanding Biblical texts.

### II. Learning Goals and Outcomes

The four lessons in this series will be broken into the following topics:

1. What is the Bible?
2. Creating the Bible: Scribes and Translators
3. Creating the Bible: Canon
4. So... Why Read the Bible?

Each lesson has specific learning goals and outcomes. They are the following:

**Lesson One:** By the end of the lesson, participants will *conclude that the Bible is a collection of stories and writings that help us recognize God’s active love in the world*. Specifically, participants will explore the historical and cultural influences that led to the writing of Scripture. Furthermore, participants will consider how our interpretation of Scripture is formed by our modern culture and context. In this lesson, I hope to move students past their basic understanding of the Bible as a collection of stories, and to help them see what these stories can tell us about God’s love and how it is present in the world around us.

**Lesson Two:** By the end of this lesson, participants will *identify the importance of scribes and translators in the creation of the Bible*. Lesson two begins to explore the question, “How did we get the Bible?” by inviting students to consider how these texts were written. This lesson will invite students to consider how the Bible is the inspired Word of God, permanently written by people who were influenced by culture, space, and time. Furthermore, I hope that students will understand that the Bible wasn’t just written in English, and that there are translators whose voices are evident in the text.

**Lesson Three:** By the end of this lesson, participants will *demonstrate an understanding of how the canon of the Bible was created*. Specifically, students will explore the process of canonization and how the different books of the Bible were picked and compiled to be the Scripture that we read today. Lesson three will continue to build on themes introduced in lesson two, once again showing that humans have great influence on the creation of the Bible.

**Lesson Four:** By the end of this lesson, participants will *conclude that although the Bible has been influenced by human hands, it speaks to us as the inspired Word of God*. This lesson will synthesize all of the knowledge taught in the first three lessons, inviting students to consider how they can engage in the texts of the Bible in daily life. Students will be asked to think critically about what they have learned in each lesson, and how this knowledge can be applied to their daily lives. Specifically, students will participate in the African Bible Study method of *lectio divina*<sup>1</sup>, engaging in a spiritual practice that can become a part of their faith life.

Overall, by the end of this series participants will *compare their new understanding to their old understanding of the Bible, its origins, and its importance to Christians*. This overall goal invites students to think critically about what they have learned in each lesson and put this learning into their own words. Furthermore, students will compare this new understanding they have created to the understandings and thoughts they may have previously had about this topic. Intentional time will be set aside during each of the four lessons for students to reflect on these new understandings and how these understandings are forming their faith.

These learning objectives and outcomes invite participants to think about how we can still experience God through a text that has evidence of humanity woven throughout it. The content of these lessons will also acknowledge the many questions that students may have as we work our way through the content of each lesson. For many students (and maybe even their parents, too), much of this content will be new and might challenge the preconceived notions they may have about the Bible. As they wrestle with the tough questions that arise as a result of the content of this lesson plan, it is important for students to recognize how God is still present in a text that has clearly been created as a result of human processes and understandings. It is important to remind the group that even with its deep human roots (and perhaps even because of these roots), we can still say that the Bible is the inspired Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the African Bible Study method is available in the Lesson Four plan, or by visiting the following link: <http://www.takomaparkpc.org/AfricanBibleStudy.html>

<sup>2</sup> These learning goals and outcomes will be explored through each lesson's structure. Lessons will be structured in the following ways: Opening (where participants will pray and consider what they already know about the day's topic), Digging Into the Bible (where participants will engage in a form of Bible study), Digging Deeper (an activity that further explores the themes of the lesson), and Closing (where participants will reflect on what they have learned and compare it to their previous understandings of the Bible).

## Lesson One: What is the Bible? (Approximately 60 minutes)

Learning Goal/Outcome: By the end of the lesson, participants will *conclude that the Bible is a collection of stories and writings that help us recognize God's active love in the world.*

*Introduction* (Approximately 15 minutes)

Open by praying the following Collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

***Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.***<sup>3</sup>

Welcome students to the session, and then split them into groups of three or four (depending on group size) to play the game below.

Activity: How Much Do You Know?

*Materials needed:* Paper and pen for each small group; timer or stopwatch

*Purpose of activity:* To engage students in a community building activity while inviting them to share what they already know about the Bible.

1. Say: **For the next four weeks we are going to learn about the Bible. First, I want us to think about what we already know!**
2. Hand each small group of three or four a sheet of paper and a pen. Instruct groups to segment the paper into four sections.
3. Instruct groups to label the first section: "Bible Verses and Stories." Then, give groups approximately one minute to write down all of the Bible verses and stories that they know. After a minute is up, have each group tally and share their answers. Groups get one point for each answer they list. If another group has the same answer on their list, neither group receives a point.
4. Then, instruct groups to label the second section: "People in the Bible." Then, give groups another minute to write down all the Bible characters they know. After one minute, have each group tally and share their answers. Again, groups get one point for each unique answer they list.
5. Next, instruct groups to label the third section: "Places in the Bible." Then, give groups another minute to write down all the places in the Bible they know. After one minute, have each group tally and share their answers. Again, groups get one point for each unique answer they list.
6. Finally, instruct groups to label the fourth section: "People who wrote the Bible." Then, give groups another minute to write down a list of who they think wrote the Bible. After one minute, have each group tally and share their answers. Groups get one point for each unique answer they list.
7. Invite groups to tally their points. Then, process the game by asking the following questions:

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<sup>3</sup> Collect for Proper 28 from the *Book of Common Prayer*. New York: Church Publishing Incorporated, 1979. Page 236. Henceforth referred to in this assignment as "BCP."

- a. **Do you think you know a lot about the Bible? Why or why not?** [*Answers will vary. Accept all answers.*]
- b. **How did you learn everything you know about the Bible?** [*Answers will vary, but may include: family, friends, Sunday school, Pastor/Priest, etc.*]
- c. **Are there any questions you have about the Bible that have never been answered? If so, what are they?** [*Answers will vary; accept all answers. Note these questions so you can refer to them throughout the series, as you are able.*]

Activity: What Is the Bible?

*Materials needed:* Newsprint and marker

*Purpose of activity:* To introduce students to the main question of this lesson by inviting them to share their knowledge of what the Bible is. The content of this discussion will also frame the discussion in the closing activity of this session.

*Before class:* Place newsprint in a place where students are able to see it.

1. **There might be a lot of questions that we have about the Bible. That's okay! Over the next four weeks, we might be able to answer some of these questions together. But first, I have a question for you: what is the Bible? What do you think?**
2. Invite students to share their answers to the question. Use their marker to record their answers on the newsprint.
3. **It looks like there are many different ways in which we can describe what exactly the Bible is! Today, we are going to identify a shared answer to this question by exploring some stories in the Bible.**

*Digging Into the Bible* (Approximately 25 minutes)

Activity: The World within the Text

*Materials needed:* Bible, pen, and copy of Lesson Sheet 1.1 <sup>4</sup>for each student; smartphone, tablet, or other device that can connect to the Internet (at least one per group)

*Purpose of activity:* To help students consider the cultural influences that led to the writing of a particular Biblical text.

*Before class:* Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 1.1 for each student. Fill out a sample Lesson Sheet for your own reference.

1. Begin by reviewing any basic Bible skills with students as needed. (i.e., how to find the table of contents, looking up a Scripture passage, using an index, etc.)
2. Divide students into three groups. Invite each group to find a place in the classroom where they can sit in a circle.
3. **Today, we are going to read the Bible in a different way. We aren't just going to read the text from the Bible. Instead, we are going to read the text while we consider the culture and context in which the text was written.**
4. Invite each student to open their Bibles to Isaiah 43:1-7. Ask groups to read the passage together.

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<sup>4</sup> For reference, a copy of Lesson Sheet 1.1 is included in Appendix A at the end of this assignment.

5. After groups are done reading, hand each student a copy of Lesson Sheet 1.1 and a pen. Encourage groups to complete the table on the Lesson Sheet by researching and filling in the information needed. Students may use the notes in their study Bibles for research, or they may do research by using a phone or other device.
6. After completing the table, groups should read the passage from Isaiah again, and answer the three questions at the bottom of the Lesson Sheet.
7. Give groups 15-20 minutes to complete this activity. Then, process the experience by asking the following questions:
  - a. **Did you read the passage from Isaiah differently after you understood some of its cultural and historical background? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
  - b. **Why do you think God's people needed to read and understand Isaiah's words?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: for hope, for comfort, to remember that God was always with them, etc.]*
  - c. **What might this passage tell us about the nature of God?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God is always with us, God provides us liberation, God loves us, etc.]*
8. **There are so many different stories in the Bible. We'll learn more next time about who wrote the Bible, but today we have seen that the authors of the Bible were influenced by the events and culture of their time. For example, today's passage from Isaiah was written to bring comfort and hope to God's people when they were exiled in Babylon. That's a specific time and context, but as we've seen today, we know that these texts can tell us about how God's love is in our world, too!**

*Digging Deeper* (Approximately 10 minutes)<sup>5</sup>

Activity: Piecing Together our Culture and Context

*Materials needed:* Blank puzzle pieces<sup>6</sup>, markers

*Purpose of activity:* Invite students to consider the story that the Bible tells us in our contemporary culture and context.

1. Give each student 3-5 puzzle pieces and markers.
2. **The Bible is a collection of stories that helped people at the time it was written understand how God's love was active in the world. Our contemporary context also influences how we read the Bible, and how we find evidence of God's love in it.**
3. Ask students to think about some factors of our culture that might influence how we read the Bible. Some examples are: where we live, nationality, childhood experiences, academic background, current events, etc.
4. Have students write or color these factors on their blank puzzle pieces.
5. **What are some of the things that you wrote on your puzzle pieces? One at a time, bring your pieces forward, share them with the group, and connect them to the puzzle.**
6. Invite students, one at a time to bring their pieces forward to a location where everyone can see the puzzle being pieced together. Invite them to share, as they feel comfortable doing so.

<sup>5</sup> Ideally, there will be time for the group to complete the Digging Deeper activity together. However, if time is limited, the activity may be adapted to allow the group ample time to learn by exploring the Bible itself.

<sup>6</sup> For reference, the following item would be used for this activity: [http://www.orientaltrading.com/diy-puzzles-x-puzzles-a2-57\\_6071.fltr?Ntt=puzzle](http://www.orientaltrading.com/diy-puzzles-x-puzzles-a2-57_6071.fltr?Ntt=puzzle)

7. **Just as there were many cultural factors that influenced the writers of the Bible, so too in our culture there are factors that influence our reading of Scripture. Some of these factors are similar to those the Biblical writers experienced, and some are very different. However, it's important for us to remember one thing: no matter how different the cultural influences are, the Bible is still relevant to us. The stories in the Bible still show us how God's love is active in the world around us!**

*Closing* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Looking Back

*Materials needed:* Small notebook or journal for each student, pens

*Purpose of activity:* To invite students to reflect on what they have learned by again asking them the question, "What is the Bible?"

1. Give each student a small notebook or journal and a pen.
2. **At the start of today's session, I asked you the question "What is the Bible?" Take a few minutes to look at the answers we brainstormed earlier.** Turn students' attention toward the newsprint from the beginning of the lesson. **Then, write in your journal a few sentences about what you learned today. After today's lesson, how would you answer the question "What is the Bible?"**
3. Give students about five minutes to re-visit the newsprint and to write their reflections. Then, process the experience with the following questions:
  - a. **Is your answer to the question, "What is the Bible?" different now than before? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Based on what we learned today, what is the Bible?** *[Answers will vary. Discussion points should focus on how the Bible is a collection of writings, influenced by history and culture, that tells the story of how God's love is active in the world.]*
4. Invite a student to lead the group in a closing prayer.
5. Collect students' journals to use in the next lesson.

## Lesson Two: Creating the Bible: Scribes and Translators (Approximately 60 minutes)

Learning Goal/Outcome: By the end of the lesson, participants will *identify the importance of scribes and translators in the creation of the Bible.*

*Introduction* (Approximately 5 minutes)

Welcome students to class. As with the last lesson, open by praying the following Collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

***Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.***<sup>7</sup>

Activity: Who Wrote the Bible?

*Materials needed:* Newsprint and marker

*Purpose of activity:* To introduce students to the main question of this lesson by inviting them to share their knowledge of how the Bible was written. The content of this discussion will also frame the discussion in the closing activity of this session.

*Before class:* Place newsprint in a place where students are able to see it.

1. **The last time we gathered, we tackled a question about the Bible. What was this question? [What is the Bible?] Yes, last time we talked about how the Bible is a collection of stories that show us how God's love is active in the world. Today I am going to ask you a new question: who wrote the Bible? What do you think?**
2. Invite students to share their answers to the question. Use their marker to record their answers on the newsprint. If they need guidance, ask students what they know about who wrote the Bible, when it was written, why it was written, and anything else they can think of.
3. **Great answers! Keep these ideas in mind as we go through our lesson today.**

*Digging Into the Bible* (Approximately 35 minutes)

Activity: Creation Stories

*Materials needed:* Bible for each student, sticky notes, and pens

*Purpose of activity:* Help students consider the role of scribes in creating the Bible by reading the creation stories in Genesis 1 and 2.

1. Invite students to open their Bibles to Genesis 1:1.

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<sup>7</sup> BCP, 236. The purpose of repeating this Collect is to provide a familiar start to the lesson, while using this prayer to center the group and help them focus on the main purpose of this series: to better understand the Bible as the Word of God.

2. **Did you know that there are two stories about creation in the Bible? Today we are going to read both of them. As we read, use sticky notes to mark the things that are unique to each of the two stories. How are they similar and how are they different?**
3. Read Genesis 1:1-2:24 aloud as a class. Invite students to write notes on the sticky notes and stick them in the margins of their Bible as you read the story.
4. After you read the story, process by asking the following questions:
  - a. **What are some similarities you noticed between the two creation stories?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: God creates earth, God creates animals and humans, etc.]*
  - b. **What are some differences you noticed between the two stories?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: one story is longer than the other, the second story has more detail about how God creates humans, etc.]*
  - c. **Is there something you learn from one story that you don't learn from the other? If so, what?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - d. **Why do you think there are two creation stories in the Bible?** *[Answers will vary. Accept all answers.]*
5. **It's pretty clear that there are two different stories of creation in the Bible. There are differences between the two stories. For example, in the first story we read that the world was created in seven days. But, in the second story there is no mention of time. The writing style in the second story is different, too. We know that the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament) was written by scribes, and that has probably contributed to the different versions of the story. But, why would different scribes write down different versions of the same story? Let's consider that next.**

Activity: Telephone Pictionary

*Materials needed:* paper, pens or pencils

*Purpose of activity:* Help students recognize the role of oral tradition and scribes in the creation of the Bible by playing a game that includes speaking and writing.

1. Invite the group to sit in a circle. Hand each student a sheet of paper and a pencil or pen.
2. Ask each person to write a short sentence at the top of their sheet of paper.
3. Have everyone pass their paper to the person on their left. The person on their left reads the sentence and draws a small picture illustrating it.
4. Then, the person folds the paper so that the sentence disappears and only the picture can be seen. Next, they pass the paper to the person on their left.
5. The next person looks at the picture and writes a one-sentence caption for the picture. Then, they fold the paper so only the caption is seen, and passes it to the person on their left.
6. The next person looks at the new caption and draws a picture that illustrates it.
7. Continue passing papers to the left, alternating writing captions and drawing pictures, until everyone receives their original sheet of paper.
8. Invite participants to look at their paper and compare the result to their original statement.
9. Process the game by asking the following questions:
  - a. **Is the final statement or picture different than the statement you wrote at the beginning of the game? If so, how?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Do you think that the beginning and ending statements are similar, or are they different? Why?** *[Answers will vary.]*

- c. **Scribes had many roles in creating the Bible. One of these roles was to write down stories that were first told orally. Do you think these stories would have changed at all while they were being written? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
10. **The stories that are in the Bible were, in many cases, oral traditions that were passed down for generations before they were written. Like in our game, these stories sometimes had some changes as they were being told. This is because sometimes people couldn't remember details to stories, or they adapted the story to fit their specific audience. In the case of the creation stories we read earlier, scribes probably did some adapting and integrating of various texts to create the stories we read today.**

*Digging Deeper* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Translators... Modern Scribes?

*Materials needed:* Genesis 1:6 in different translations

*Purpose of activity:* Further explore how the Bible was created by considering how translation may be described as modern scribal culture.

*Before class:* Find Genesis 1:6 in a minimum of five different translations. These translations should include older translations like the King James Version, as well as more contemporary versions. This may be done through an online search, or by finding copies of the Bible in different translations.

1. **Today we have learned a little about the scribes that wrote the Bible. However, it's important for us to remember that the Bible wasn't originally written in English. Instead, it was written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The words were then translated into English. Let's look at different Bible translations to see what this looks like.**
2. Hand each of the translations to a different volunteer. Invite the volunteers to read each translation aloud.
3. After reading the translations, unpack the experience by asking the following questions:
  - a. **Why do you think we have so many different translations of the Bible?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: people wanted to translate the Bible using different language, people thought that older translations may not have been readable, etc.]*
  - b. **Last week we talked about how culture influenced the original writers when they created the Bible. How do you think culture influenced translators of the Bible?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: vocabulary choice, use of images and symbols in a particular story or text, etc.]*
4. **Just as scribes were influenced by culture and oral traditions when they wrote down the stories that are in the Bible, so have translators been influenced by culture and these earlier written traditions. Translation is yet another step of the process that has created the Bible.**

*Closing* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Looking Back

*Materials needed:* Students' journals, pens

*Purpose of activity:* To invite students to reflect on what they have learned by again asking them the question, “Who wrote the Bible?”

1. Give each student a small notebook or journal and a pen.
2. **At the start of today’s session, I asked you the question “Who wrote the Bible?” Take a few minutes to look at the answers we brainstormed earlier.** Turn students’ attention toward the newsprint from the beginning of the lesson. **Then, write in your journal a few sentences about what you learned today. After today’s lesson, how would you answer the question “Who wrote the Bible?”**
3. Give students about five minutes to re-visit the newsprint and to write their reflections. Then, process the experience with the following questions:
  - a. **Is your answer to the question, “Who wrote the Bible?” different now than before? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Based on what we learned today, who wrote the Bible?** *[Answers will vary. Discussion points should focus on the influence of scribes and scribal culture, as well as the role of translators creating Scripture.]*
4. Invite a student to lead the group in a closing prayer.
5. Collect students’ journals to use in the next lesson.

## Lesson Three: Creating the Bible: Canon (Approximately 60 minutes)

Learning Goal/Outcome: By the end of the lesson, participants will *demonstrate an understanding of how the canon of the Bible was created.*

*Introduction* (Approximately 5 minutes)

Welcome students to class. As with the previous lessons, open by praying the following Collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*<sup>8</sup>

Activity: Why Do We Have Certain Books in the Bible?

*Materials needed:* Newsprint and marker

*Purpose of activity:* To introduce students to the main question of this lesson by inviting them to share their knowledge of how books of the Bible were selected. The content of this discussion will also frame the discussion in the closing activity of this session.

*Before class:* Place newsprint in a place where students are able to see it.

1. **What are some of the questions about the Bible we have explored? [What is the Bible? and Who wrote the Bible?] We have already considered what the Bible is and who wrote it. Today I am going to ask you a new question: why do we have certain books in the Bible? What do you think?**
2. Invite students to share their answers to the question. Use their marker to record their answers on the newsprint. **Great answers! Keep these ideas in mind as we go through our lesson today.**

*Digging Into the Bible* (Approximately 35 minutes)

Activity: 52 Card Pickup

*Materials:* Decks of standard playing cards (one for every group of 3-4 students)

*Purpose of activity:* Introduce the process of canonization by engaging students in a game.

1. Split students into small groups of three or four each. Give each group a deck of standard playing cards.
2. **Today we are going to play a game of 52-card pickup. However, we're going to play this game with a twist! At my signal, I want you to throw your cards on the ground. Then, your group will pick up the cards. But, as your group picks up the cards, you must sort them in some sort of arrangement. Decide with your group right now how you will sort your cards.** Give groups a moment to decide how to sort. Cards can be sorted in any way:

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<sup>8</sup> BCP, 236.

increasing value, decreasing value, by color, by suit, increasing value by color—invite them to get creative!

3. Once groups have decided how to sort their cards, give them the signal to start. Groups should throw down their cards and begin picking them up, sorting them in their chosen order.
4. The group that successfully sorts their cards first wins. Process the game by asking the following questions:
  - a. **In what order did you sort your cards? Why did you decide to sort them that way?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Do you think this order mattered? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - c. **How do you think this game is like the process of how the books of the Bible were compiled?** *[Answers will vary, but may include: the books of the Bible are all separate writings that have been compiled into one book, the books of the Bible are arranged in a particular order, people were involved in the process of compiling the books, etc.]*

#### Activity: Selecting Scripture

*Materials:* Bible, pen, and copy of Lesson Sheet 3.1<sup>9</sup> for each student; smartphones, tablets, or other devices that can access the Internet (optional—access to a good study Bible would also work well)

*Purpose of activity:* To help students critically think about how and why various texts in the Bible were selected.

*Before class:* Make a copy of Lesson Sheet 3.1 for each student. Complete a sheet of your own to help guide discussion.

1. **The texts that are in the Bible weren't randomly chosen. Instead, they were carefully selected using different criteria to form what we call the *canon*—the closed list of books that are considered to be the Holy Scriptures of the church. To be included in the canon, texts had to be considered sacred, needed to be written by a prophet (in the Old Testament) or an apostle (in the New Testament), and they had to follow the teachings of the church. In some cases, texts were also widely used in churches, too. So, why do you think certain texts were included in the Bible? Let's find out.**
2. Hand each student a Bible, pen, and copy of Lesson Sheet 3.1. Invite students to work in pairs to look up and research background information on each of the texts listed on the Lesson Sheet. Research can be done using a phone or other device as needed, or make available study Bibles or other resources.
3. Give students about 15 minutes to fill out as much of the Lesson Sheet as they can (they might not get through the whole worksheet; that is fine). Then, process the experience by asking the following questions:
  - a. **Was there anything that surprised you about your research? If so, what?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Do you agree with the criteria that were used to create the canon? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - c. **Do you agree that all of the texts we read today should be in the canon? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*

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<sup>9</sup> For reference, a copy of Lesson Sheet 3.1 is included in Appendix B at the end of this assignment.

*Digging Deeper* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: What Would You Include?

*Materials needed:* Newsprint, marker

*Purpose of activity:* Invite students to synthesize the information they have learned by exploring what might be included in an open canon.

1. **We have learned that the Bible is a collection of texts that helps us understand how God’s love is active in the world. The canon includes specific texts that were selected by people over a long period of time, many years ago. But I wonder: if the canon were open, meaning that we could add texts to our collection of Scripture, what would you include? What criteria would you use?**
2. Ask students to make a list of criteria that they might use in selecting new texts to be canon. Write these criteria on a sheet of newsprint.
3. Then, invite students to make a list of texts that they might include. Encourage them to think outside of the box. What historical documents, songs, works of art, or other things might they want to include? Write their ideas on another sheet of newsprint.
4. After you have created your lists, process the activity by answering the following questions:
  - a. **Do you think that the canon of the Bible should be open or closed? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **What do you think would be the most important criteria for us to consider, if we were to open the canon of Scripture? Why is this criterion so important?** *[Answers will vary.]*
5. **The canon of the Bible shows us another way in which people have influenced the creation of Scripture. The texts that are in the Bible were selected because they fit certain criteria set by people. Does this affect the way you think about the Bible as the Word of God? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*

*Closing* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Looking Back

*Materials needed:* Students’ journals, pens

*Purpose of activity:* To invite students to reflect on what they have learned by again asking them the question, “Why do we have certain texts in the Bible?”

1. Give each student a small notebook or journal and a pen.
2. **At the start of today’s session, I asked you the question “Why do we have certain in the Bible?” Take a few minutes to look at the answers we brainstormed earlier. Turn students’ attention toward the newsprint from the beginning of the lesson. Then, write in your journal a few sentences about what you learned today. After today’s lesson, how would you answer the question “Why do we have certain books the Bible?”**
3. Give students about five minutes to re-visit the newsprint and to write their reflections. Then, process the experience with the following questions:
  - a. **Is your answer to the question, “Why do we have certain books in the Bible?” different now than before? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*

**b. Based on what we learned today, why do we have certain books in the Bible?**

*[Answers will vary. Discussion points should focus on the canon as a closed collection of books in the Bible, the criteria used to select texts in the Bible, the fact that people picked the texts, etc.]*

4. Invite a student to lead the group in a closing prayer.
5. Collect students' journals to use in the next lesson.

## Lesson Four: So... Why Read the Bible? (Approximately 60 minutes)

Learning Goal/Outcome: By the end of the lesson, participants will *conclude that although the Bible has been influenced by human hands, it speaks to us as the inspired Word of God.*

*Introduction* (Approximately 5 minutes)

Welcome students to class. As with the previous lessons, open by praying the following Collect from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

*Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*<sup>10</sup>

Activity: Why Read the Bible?

*Materials needed:* Newsprint and marker

*Purpose of activity:* To introduce students to the main question of this lesson by inviting them to brainstorm reasons why Christians should read the Bible. The content of this discussion will also frame the discussion in the closing activity of this session.

*Before class:* Place newsprint in a place where students are able to see it.

3. **What are some of the questions about the Bible we have explored?** [*What is the Bible?, Who wrote the Bible?, and Why do we have certain books in the Bible?*] **We have already considered what the Bible is, who wrote it, and how different texts were chosen to be in the Bible. Today I am going to ask you a new question: why should we read the Bible? What do you think?**
4. Invite students to share their answers to the question. Use their marker to record their answers on the newsprint. **Great answers! Keep these ideas in mind as we go through our lesson today.**

*Digging Into the Bible* (Approximately 35 minutes)

Activity: African Bible Study

*Materials needed:* Candle, lighter, Luke 10:25-37 in three different translations.

*Purpose of activity:* To help students understand why it is important for Christians to read the Bible by engaging in a type of Bible study.

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<sup>10</sup> BCP, 236.

*Before class:* Find three different translations of Luke 10:25-37 to use in this activity. Read through the African Bible Study method so you are familiar with it.<sup>11</sup>

1. **Over the last three weeks, we have learned a lot about the Bible. We have learned about the factors that have influenced the writers of the Bible, and about the ways in which humans have taken part in the process of creating Scripture. But, many people wonder: why should we read the Bible, if human hands have made it? How is a text that was created by humans still called the Word of God? Let's think about that today as we study the Bible together.**
2. Instruct students to sit in a circle. Place a candle in the middle of the circle. Light the candle.
3. Begin by praying: **Be present with us, O God, and help us understand what is in your Word today. Amen.**
4. **In a moment, I am going to read you a passage from the Bible. As I read the passage, think of one word, phrase, or image that speaks to you while you hear the story.** Ask a volunteer to read the first translation of the passage aloud, slowly.
5. Give students one minute to reflect on a word, phrase, or image that stands out to them.
6. Go around the circle and invite each person to share the word, phrase, or image about which they thought. *Note: there should be no discussion about WHY they picked it—just have them state it!*
7. **Now, we are going to hear the story again. Think about what word, phrase, or image stands out to you this time.** Ask a different volunteer to read the passage in a second translation, slowly.
8. Give students one minute to think. Then, go around the circle and invite everyone to share their word, phrase, or image. Again: there should be no discussion; just sharing of words.
9. **Now, we are going to hear the story one final time. This time, think about how you would answer this question: "From what I have heard and shared, what do I believe God wants me to do or be? What is God saying to me?"** Invite another volunteer to read the passage in a third translation, slowly.
10. Give students a minute or two to think about their answers to the question. You may need to re-read the questions to them after hearing the story.
11. Go around the circle and invite each person the opportunity to share their answers to the question. Again, there should be no discussion.
12. After everyone has shared, ask each person to pray for the person on their right, naming what the person shared earlier in the activity.
13. Close by praying the Lord's Prayer together, and then with a moment of silence.

*Digging Deeper* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Tying It All Together

*Materials needed:* Book of Common Prayer (preferably one per student)

1. Begin by processing your Bible study experience with the following questions:

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<sup>11</sup> The African Bible Study method was first introduced at the Lambeth Conference, which is a gathering of bishops from across the Anglican Communion. This method of Bible study is similar to other methods of lectio divina. You can learn more about the African Bible Study method by visiting <http://www.takomaparkpc.org/AfricanBibleStudy.html>.

- a. **What did you like about the Bible study activity? What was difficult about it?**  
*[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **What did you learn about God from hearing this Bible story?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - c. **What did you learn about yourself from hearing this story?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - d. **What did you learn about the world from hearing this story?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - e. **Based on your experience today, what would you say it means for the Bible to be the Word of God?** *[Answers will vary.]*
2. **We know that humans have a huge influence on the Bible. We have influenced how it was created, and we continue to influence how it's read through our culture and the ways in which we interpret it. However, even though the Bible has been influenced by human hands, God still speaks to us when we read and study it.**
  3. Hand each student a Book of Common Prayer. Invite them to turn to page 853 in the prayer book.
  4. **At the back of our BCP there is a section called "An Outline of the Faith," also known as a Catechism. The Catechism gives us a basic understanding of the Christian faith and how we understand it from our Episcopal perspective. There is a section in the Catechism that is all about "The Holy Scriptures!" Let's read though it together.**<sup>12</sup>
  5. Read through the section of the Catechism together.
  6. **Now, there are things mentioned in this section that we haven't covered (for example, the Apocrypha), but I would like to re-read one sentence that is important to us today. Look at the bottom of page 853 where it asks the question, "Why do we call the Holy Scriptures the Word of God?"**
  7. Re-read the following sentence: **"We call them the Word of God because God inspired their human authors and because God still speaks to us through the Bible."**<sup>13</sup>
  8. **According to the Catechism, why is it important for us to read the Bible, even though it has elements of humanity within it?** *[Because God inspired and was involved in its creation, and God still speaks to us through it. Even with its human roots, we can still learn about God and what it means to be people of faith by reading the Bible.]*

*Closing* (Approximately 10 minutes)

Activity: Looking Back

*Materials needed:* Students' journals, pens

*Purpose of activity:* To invite students to reflect on what they have learned by again asking them the question, "Why should we read the Bible?" Today's closing activity will also help them reflect on what they have learned in other lessons and how their understanding of the Bible has changed.

1. Give each student a small notebook or journal and a pen.
2. **At the start of today's session, I asked you the question "Why should we read the Bible?" Take a few minutes to look at the answers we brainstormed earlier. Turn**

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<sup>12</sup> You can look up this section in the BCP online by visiting the Online Book of Common Prayer at <http://bcponline.org/>. Click on the link for "The Catechism" on the left hand side of the page, click on the link in the center of the page for the Catechism, and then scroll to the section titled "The Holy Scriptures." (For convenience, the page number is the same as in a hard copy of the BCP—page 853!)

<sup>13</sup> BCP, p. 853

students' attention toward the newsprint from the beginning of the lesson. **Then, write in your journal a few sentences about what you learned today. After today's lesson, how would you answer the question "Why should we read the Bible?"**

3. Give students about five minutes to re-visit the newsprint and to write their reflections. Then, process the experience with the following questions:
  - a. **Is your answer to the question, "Why should we read the Bible?" different now than before? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - b. **Think back to everything we have learned about the Bible over the last four weeks. Have you learned anything new? If so, what?** *[Answers will vary.]*
  - c. **Do you understand the Bible differently now that we have learned more about what it is, how it was created, and why we read it? Why or why not?** *[Answers will vary.]*
4. **We have learned a lot about the Bible in such a short amount of time! After we close in prayer, I invite you to take your journal home with you. As you learn new things about the Bible, continue to write notes in it. You can even use it to take notes as you read the Bible at home!**
5. Invite a student to lead the group in a closing prayer.
6. Invite students to take their journals home with them.

**Appendix A**  
Lesson Sheet 1.1

*Fill out the table below after you read Isaiah 43:1-7.*

<b>Who do we think wrote this passage?</b>	<b>When do we think this passage was written?</b>
<b>What was the Babylonian exile?</b>	<b>How did the Babylonian exile affect God's people?</b>
<b>When did the Babylonian exile take place?</b>	<b>Who were some people involved in the exile?</b>

## Appendix B

### Lesson Sheet 3.1

*Use this worksheet to consider why texts in the Bible were included in the canon.*

<b>Text</b>	<b>Who wrote it?</b>	<b>When was it written?</b>	<b>What does it say?</b>	<b>Who first read it?</b>
Genesis 1				
Leviticus 19:1-8				
Psalms 23				
Isaiah 40:1-5				
Luke 2:1-7				
1 Corinthians 13				