

Expect to Experience God Together in Community (*Approximately 30 minutes*)

If needed, invite brief introductions. Share check-ins and pray together, asking God to speak through the conversation and through his Word.

Icebreaker: “Who Gets to Update It?”

Setup: Read out loud: “Whenever an old belief conflicts with modern values, the old belief should be updated.”

Ask each person to choose one response:

- **Agree**
- **Disagree**
- **It depends**

Invite participants to explain their answers.

Then introduce several examples:

- A scientific belief overturned by new evidence
- A law that once denied certain people equal protection
- A moral conviction that remains unpopular
- A family tradition that no longer serves its purpose
- A biblical teaching that conflicts with current culture

Discuss:

- What makes an old belief outdated?
- Does being newer make an idea more accurate or moral?
- Who gets to determine which values need updating?
- How do you decide whether the problem is with an ancient text or with your present assumptions?
- Why are people often more willing to question Scripture than their culture?

Call it out: Every person trusts some authority for deciding what is true and good. The real question is whether Scripture must answer to us or we must answer to Scripture.

If you don’t want to do the icebreaker, choose one Conversation Starter:

1. Which parts of the Bible are most difficult for people today to accept, and why?
 2. Have you ever encountered a biblical passage that made you question the Bible’s reliability? What did you do with that question?
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Transition

“Doesn’t the Bible’s teaching about slavery and women make it unreliable and irrelevant today?”

That question deserves an honest answer. The Bible contains passages written within cultures marked by slavery, patriarchy, violence, and injustice. Ignoring those passages will not strengthen anyone’s faith. Neither will pretending they are simpler than they are.

The Bible does not hide the brokenness of the world it describes. It reveals God working within that world to redeem people and lead them toward his purposes.

Before deciding whether Scripture needs to be corrected, we must first ask how Jesus regarded it. Jesus knew its difficult history and challenging passages. Yet he treated Scripture as God’s true and enduring Word.

Expect to Encounter God in His Word Together *(Approximately 45–50 minutes)*

Background *Read in advance and share briefly as helpful.*

Jesus did not treat Scripture as a collection of outdated religious opinions. He recognized its authority, affirmed its truth, and understood its story as pointing toward him.

The Bible also requires careful reading. Some passages describe human behavior without approving it. Other passages regulated broken practices without presenting them as God’s ideal. Scripture recorded the world as it was while revealing the world God intended and is restoring through Jesus.

This distinction matters when discussing slavery, women, warfare, polygamy, or other difficult subjects. Description is not always endorsement, and regulation is not the same as celebration.

Jesus Affirmed the Authority of Scripture *(Approximately 12–15 minutes)*

Read Matthew 5:17–18 aloud. Discuss:

- What did Jesus say he came to fulfill?
- How did Jesus describe the lasting authority of Scripture?
- What is the difference between fulfilling Scripture and abolishing it?
- What does Jesus’ view of Scripture require from those who follow him?
- When are you most tempted to place your judgment above God’s Word?

Asking For a Friend – Is the Bible relevant today (Matthew, Genesis, Philemon)

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Jesus received Scripture as God's authoritative Word and brought its purpose to fulfillment, without submitting it to the changing standards of his culture.

Jesus Treated Scripture as Truthful History *(Approximately 10–12 minutes)*

Divide the following passages among participants and have each person read one aloud:

- Matthew 12:38–41
- Matthew 22:41–46
- Matthew 24:37–39

Discuss:

- Which Old Testament people or events did Jesus reference?
- How did Jesus use these passages to teach about himself, judgment, and faithfulness?
- What does his reasoning reveal about his confidence in Scripture?
- Why does Jesus' view of Scripture matter for someone deciding whether the Bible is reliable?
- What are the consequences of claiming to follow Jesus while rejecting his view of Scripture?

The central issue is larger than whether every difficult passage is immediately understandable. It is whether Jesus can be trusted. His resurrection validated his identity and his authority, including his confidence in God's Word.

Scripture Confronted a Broken World *(Approximately 18–20 minutes)*

Read Genesis 1:26–28 and Philemon 8–17 aloud. Discuss:

- What dignity, identity, and responsibility did God give both men and women?
- How did Paul instruct Philemon to receive Onesimus?
- How did describing Onesimus as a “beloved brother” challenge the master-slave relationship?
- Why might Scripture regulate a broken social practice while also planting truths that undermine it?
- What is lost when people judge biblical slavery as though every form were identical to American race-based chattel slavery?
- What is lost when Christians minimize the real exploitation that existed within ancient slavery?
- How do these passages move people toward God's intended relationships?

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Scripture must not be sanitized. Slavery involved real power imbalances and could involve severe exploitation. Yet the Bible condemned kidnapping people for enslavement, affirmed the full human dignity of enslaved people, and commanded Christian masters to receive enslaved believers as family.

The same pattern appears in Scripture's treatment of women. Within patriarchal cultures, God affirmed women as his image-bearers, entrusted them with leadership and prophetic ministry, and made women the first witnesses to Jesus' resurrection.

Bring It All Together

Choose two or three questions as time permits:

- What is the difference between questioning Scripture honestly and placing yourself in judgment over it?
- How can historical and literary context help you understand a difficult passage without explaining it away?
- Which difficult biblical subject do you need to study more carefully?
- Where are cultural assumptions shaping how you read Scripture?
- What would it mean for you to trust God's Word before every question has been resolved?

Expect to Experience God Through Faithful Response *(Approximately 10 minutes)*

The Bible does not need protection from honest questions. It has survived centuries of examination, criticism, cultural change, and human opposition.

But honest questions require honest investigation. Rejecting Scripture because of a troubling verse you have never studied is not careful thinking. Neither is using a quick explanation to avoid the weight of a difficult passage.

Jesus treated Scripture as God's true and enduring Word. Following Jesus therefore includes learning to receive Scripture as he did.

Invite each person to choose one faithful response for the coming week:

- **Study before concluding:** Examine the context of a difficult passage instead of reacting to an isolated sentence.
- **Submit before agreeing:** Ask God to correct your assumptions through his Word.

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- **Seek wise help:** Bring difficult questions to a mature believer who will take both Scripture and your concern seriously.
- **Read through Jesus:** Consider how each passage fits within the Bible's unfolding story that finds its fulfillment in him.
- **Obey what is clear:** Do not use difficult passages as an excuse to resist teachings you already understand.

Close by praying for humility, confidence in God's truth, and wisdom to handle difficult passages faithfully.

Before leaving, confirm the time, location, and preparation for the next gathering.