

# Lesson 6:

## The Bible, Part 2

**Key concept**  
God's Word

**Bible study**  
Isaiah 55:8-11

**Memory verses**  
2 Timothy 3:16-17

### Objectives

- ❖ Understand that the Bible has an authoritative role in the life of believers
- ❖ Understand that the Bible has the power to change people

### Bible Study

Because of the importance of the Bible in our journey with Jesus, we're going to take one more week to ponder its significance. This week we'll consider how the Bible will give you a coach for life and a catalyst for change.

#### (1) The Bible is a coach for your life

All of us want a coach in life. We want to be on a winning team, and we want to have someone who knows more than we do to come alongside of us and help us win in the game of life. Having grown up in Alabama, I grew up in the shadow of one of the greatest coaches of all time: Bear Bryant. I remember the day he died. They announced it over the loudspeaker at school and I cried. My mom checked me out of school because she knew I would take it hard.

Alabama struggled to find a replacement for the Bear because, well, who is going to fill those shoes, but they finally found their man in Nick Saban. His ability to recruit players is really unparalleled. Alabama was ranked either #1 or #2 in recruiting for three years in a row (2008 – 2011). Why do recruits flock to Coach Saban? First, they think, "If I go to Alabama, we're going to win and I want to win games and play for a national championship." Second, they believe that Coach Saban can help them get to the NFL. He knows how to develop players and he does so really well. Tradition, facilities – those factor in, but the two big reasons players cite for going to Alabama are winning and getting to the NFL.

We're all the same; we all want to win in life. It really isn't fun to get kicked around by life. And we know that we often don't know enough to get to the next level. We need a coach who can develop us into our full potential as image bearers of God. According to the Bible, you need God as your coach. Nick Saban, as good as he is as a football coach, won't cut it as a life-coach.

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Isaiah 55:8-9 says that God is the ultimate life-coach. *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the Lord. ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.’”*

God is saying: Listen, you don’t know how life works. You’re not smart enough to figure it out, but I am. My ways and my thoughts are higher than yours. I am the greatest life coach you will ever find.

And, here is the playbook. The way that you receive coaching from God is right here in the Bible. 2 Tim. 3:16-17 says this: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”* Isn’t that what a coach does? He or she teaches, rebukes, corrects and trains you in righteousness, right living, the way to walk in life.

Now, here is the deal. If God is your coach, then you must accept His authority (i.e. His rebuke, His teaching, in the Bible); otherwise, if not, He isn’t your coach and you’re not on His team. You are your own coach.

Imagine if a player at Alabama said, “Coach Saban, I like several of your defensive schemes. They look pretty good. But these last four coverages, they won’t work. I am not running them.” Coach Saban would probably completely flip his lid like he does on the sidelines when his players don’t do what they are supposed to do. He would say, “No, see, you aren’t the coach of this team. If you are playing for me, then you will do what I say or you won’t play and you won’t be on my team very long. I know more about football than you do, and I am responsible for making all of this come together.”

If that is true of Nick Saban and his players, imagine how much more true it is of an omniscient (all-knowing) God who is working His purposes out in the world. There will be times when we won’t understand it or won’t like what He says in the playbook. God says: That doesn’t matter. Run the play. My ways are higher than yours, my thoughts are higher than yours.

This is, admittedly, problematic for many. In fact, there are two major objections to accepting God’s authoritative coaching in the Bible. First, some people object because they don’t like what the Bible has to say. Second, some object because they don’t understand what the Bible has to say. Let’s consider both of these.

First, I don’t like what the Bible has to say. Mark Twain put it this way, “It ain’t those parts of the Bible that I can’t understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.” There are parts of the Bible that are very clear in terms of what it tells us to do and that bothered Mark Twain.

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In fact, he would have nightmares about the Bible, that it was a huge weight crushing him, making him constantly feel guilty. St. Augustine's famous prayer reflects this same sentiment, "God grant me chastity, but not yet." Augustine knew what God as coach was telling him about his sexuality, but he was a ladies' man and He just didn't want to change his life.

And, if we're honest, all of us have felt this way at some point. Why? Because we're sons of Adam and daughters of Eve. "Ah, God, it won't really hurt if I eat that fruit. Just one night of getting drunk with the guys. Just a little shading of the truth here. Just one more hit of that joint. Honey, giving 10% isn't practical right now because we have kids, let's just do what the average Christian does and give 2%. God, I can't really afford to take a Sabbath day for rest right now because we need the money and I need to get ahead in school." What we all say, in different ways, is this: "God, I think I know how to run my life." But God says, "No, you don't," in Is. 55:9: "*My ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.*" I'm the coach, you're the player, and here is the playbook. This is how we do things.

Now, especially for those that are not yet followers of Jesus, this can sound and feel oppressive to submit to an authority, but it really isn't. Think about it. We all submit to authority. Every one of us. As an employee, you submit to the authority of your boss. As an American, you submit to the authority of the American government – you can't just decide not to pay taxes because you don't feel like it. You don't get to pick and choose what parts of the Constitution you want to submit to. The Supreme Court doesn't issue recommendations; they issue rulings. If we willingly submit to bosses and to our governing authorities even when we don't like it, then how much more should we willingly submit to an all-knowing, all-powerful, all-loving, benevolent God.

I know this feels like a huge risk for some of you to take. But let me share a story with you that should help you submit to the coach (the Bible). There is a brilliant example of the way this works in Luke 19. Jesus is going to Jerusalem, and he actually ends up riding a donkey that had never been ridden before. Now, you try riding a donkey that has never been ridden before; it isn't a fun experience. In order to ride a donkey or horse it must first be broken. That is what it is called – breaking. For all other donkeys on Earth, the thought of having a man sit astride them strikes fear in their hearts. The donkey thinks, "But I won't be able to go where I want to go and do what I want to do. What will that man do to me?"

But, not this donkey. Jesus climbs aboard and there is no breaking required. When the rightful master sits astride this donkey, all is well. The created donkey meets its Creator and knows that it is in good hands. No need to buck his control, for he is a kind and good master who will take care of him and lead him beside the still waters.

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And there lies the crux of the matter. It isn't whether we will submit to authority, but the issue is whether the authority we submit to is worthy of our submission. Jesus Christ, according to the Bible, is the only one worthy of submitting to because in Jesus Christ we have an all-knowing and all-powerful God whose reign is kind and always for our good, even when it doesn't seem so.

The second objection is about submitting to the authority of our coach (the Bible) when we don't understand what the Bible has to say. For instance, should I baptize my kids or not? Many Christians read the Bible differently on this one. If we continue the coaching analogy – all Christians have the same coach but they think the coach is calling different plays on things like baptism.

A seminary professor of mine helped me address this question and others like it by giving me a framework to work through matters of uncertainty in the Bible. His name was Richard Pratt and he encouraged us to use what he calls the cone of certainty to address questions like this.

At the top of the cone of certainty we have very little room to disagree. The only issues at the top of the cone are those that are central to followers of Jesus. An example would be the divinity of Christ. That one is pretty clear and so there is great certainty. If you don't believe Jesus is God, well, you aren't a follower of Jesus. As we go down the cone, we have more room for disagreement because there is less certainty across different traditions, all of which would consider themselves followers of Jesus.

What this does is force us to read the Bible in community. We work out our theology (that is, what the Bible says about God) in community. We're shaped by what others in the group think; we're shaped by what the broader church thinks, the church universal. The Bible is an intensely personal book, but not a private book. It is meant to be read and lived together with other people.

**(2) The Bible is a catalyst for renewal**

Isaiah 55:10-11: *“As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”*

There are not many locations where you would get a better picture of what God is saying in this text than you do here in San Diego. We live in a dry, arid region where it almost never rains. Because we get so little rain, anywhere that isn't irrigated is brown and dead.

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But then, amazingly enough, once we get a really good rain, green grass and flowers start popping up everywhere, especially in the spring. Wildflowers grow up randomly, right by the side of the interstate. Just as rain grows flowers on the side of the 805, so God's word can grow the most unlikely people at the most unlikely times in the most unlikely places. There is no person too hard or rocky. There is no part of your life it can't touch. His word will not return empty. It will change you.

Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, Christian missionaries, are living examples of this truth. Jim Elliot believed that the word of God could change anyone, no matter how hard the person's heart. The Elliots moved to Ecuador, and Jim felt called to take the message of Jesus to the Auca tribe. These indigenous people were known for being very violent and dangerous. Jim and four other missionary men made several trips by airplane into the jungle and made contact with the Auca.

On their last trip, in January 1956, all five missionary men were slaughtered by Auca warriors. Not long after the men died, two Auca women came out of the jungle, and Elisabeth Elliot took them into her house to live with her. Remember, these are members of the tribe that killed her husband and friends. She grew to love the women, and they grew to love her. They lived with her for one year and taught Elisabeth the language of their people. Then, they asked her to return to the village with them, and she agreed to go. She was banking on two things: (1) Men were the fighters, but women were viewed by the Auca as weak and posing no threat; (2) The power of the word of God. It goes forth in weakness and yet doesn't return empty.

So, Elisabeth Elliot went into the jungle with her three-year-old daughter and lived there for two years. She did what many would have considered to be madness, sheer foolishness. Why? Because she wanted the Auca people to meet Jesus even more than she wanted to live herself.

In a documentary about these events, *Beyond the Gates of Splendor*, an anthropologist comments, "It is remarkable. Due to information" [he didn't use the word Bible but that is the information he means] "at least a five-generation cycle of violence was broken (and probably more) just before the tribe became extinct. They reduced the homicide rate by 90%. Nothing changed – technologically, sociologically – other than this information brought by Elisabeth."

And so, as this first tribe began to give up their vendettas against others, then others began to do the same thing, and the good news of the Bible, Jesus Christ, began to spread through the tribes in the jungle in Ecuador like wildfire. They began to see that they no longer had to seek vengeance

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for every wrong or alleged wrong – that Waegongi (what they called God) would right all the wrongs of the world, and they didn't have to. In fact, one of the Indians noted, "If Rachel and Elisabeth hadn't come, then we would exist no more because we were almost down to two males, and we would have killed each other off."

That is why Isaiah 55 says that the word of God doesn't come back empty, but it accomplishes what it sets out to do. And nowhere do we see this demonstrated better than in John 1:14: "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*" God, our coach, became a player and He won. He accomplished His purposes for us and the whole world on the cross. He redeemed us through His death and resurrection. And He comes to us now and says, "I'll give you the power you need to play the game by the book and for the glory of our coach. And even when you don't like it or understand it, I'll enable you to say as I did, 'Yet, not my will, but your will be done.'"

This is why we can submit to the Bible, to our coach, even when we don't like it or don't get it: because Jesus did. He certainly didn't lack intelligence or courage. But he lived in submission. After Jesus submitted to God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane and was crucified, there was a Resurrection. And, because of the Resurrection, Jesus now empowers us to do what He did. He gives us His Spirit to walk in His ways, ways that are higher than our ways, and to actually begin to think thoughts that are higher than ours because we submit. Not our will, but Your will be done.

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**Memory Verses**

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

-2 Timothy 3:16-17

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## Individual Study and Group Discussion

### Opening Question

Based upon the reading, what did you find most helpful? Was anything confusing? What was most challenging?

### Study and Discussion Questions

1. What is the meaning of Isaiah 55:8-9, where God says that His thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways?
2. In what areas of your life is it difficult for you to submit to the authority of God's word in the Bible?
3. In what ways is the word of God like the natural cycle described in Isaiah 55:10?
4. Describe a time when you experienced the word of God going out and producing growth in your life or the life of a loved one.
5. In your own words, what does John 1:14 mean?
6. Has your view of the significance of the Bible in the life of believers changed in any way as a result of these two lessons? If so, how?