



Wrestling with Scripture

In the first week of reading for Long Story Short, we encountered a worldwide catastrophic flood because God was ticked at human beings; a good man who lost everything because God removed His hand of protection; and a man who was instructed to sacrifice his son. In the first few pages of scripture, we are confronted with difficult questions:

- Why does a good God allow bad things to happen to good people?
- Was God really angry with people and why would he destroy his creation?
- Why would God ask someone to do something that is morally wrong?

And the questions won't go away.

What do you do when you encounter moments in the Bible that you don't like and don't understand? Philosophers and theologians have been wrestling with that question for hundreds of years. Here are a few ideas to help.

Keep the Big Story in Focus

One principle of biblical interpretation is “let scripture interpret scripture.” The story of God is complex and layered and His character is kaleidoscopic. He displays attributes of jealousy and love, wrath and grace, and justice and mercy. He is the both/and God, and those seemingly opposite dimensions of His character operate in harmony. In fact, they often seem to operate in unison. The greatness and mystery of God are found at the juxtaposition points of His character.

The story of God is always fueled by grace, moving towards redemption, and extending an invitation to relationship. Look for those elements in the individual stories that are problematic. It's important to interpret the Bible against the whole of God's character and the whole of His story. When you encounter a singular incident that is difficult to comprehend, take a big step back and try to understand how it fits into the whole story. When God's actions seem inexcusable, try to look at them through the lens of the entirety of His character.

Discuss in Community

Tackle the tricky parts of the Bible with others. Long Story Short was not meant to be engaged alone but within the context of community. As you navigate scripture together, you will learn from other perspectives and challenge one another with differing viewpoints. Studying the Bible together also ensures that we can challenge one another to activation and application; community provides built-in accountability that we don't leave the Scriptures as an academic and intellectual pursuit alone, but embrace its transformational power.



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Ask the Holy Spirit For Help

The same Holy Spirit who inspired the writers of Scripture is available to us today to illuminate the words of scripture to readers. Ask the Holy Spirit for help as you read. Ask questions like these:

“How does this reveal God’s character?”

“Where is His love, grace, mercy, and redemption?”

“Help me understand this!”

Sometimes, the revelation the Holy Spirit gives leads us to even more questions. That’s okay. Spiritual maturity has more to do with asking the right questions than having the right answers. It means we are constantly learning, exploring, and mining the depths of God’s character and ways. And we are stretching ourselves to be different people.

Call In the Experts

We have provided a list of resources on the Long Story Short website that can help you when you hit the tricky spots. Some books provide cultural and historical context that help connect the dots and bridge the gaps from ancient text to contemporary understanding. Some books help interpret scripture by linking individual passages and stories to related topics found elsewhere in the text, or by focusing on those passages and stories through the lens of a certain aspect of God’s character, or by viewing those passages and stores against the backdrop of the larger story. Some of the books are dictionaries, handbooks, and commentaries that fill the gaps or define the terms that the writers of Scripture assume the reader understands.

The first step towards helpful Bible study is to obtain a good study Bible. The *NIV Application Study Bible*, *Holman Christian Standard Study Bible*, and *ESV Study Bible* are good for understanding and personal application. *The Archaeological Study Bible* is good for cultural and historical context.

Keep Digging

We will never exhaust the truths of Scripture, and we will never answer every question. It’s encouraging to me that Peter mentioned that Paul’s writings were difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16). On days I’m trying to wrap my head around book of Romans, I’m comforted to know I’m in good company with Peter and reminded that the goal is relationship with Jesus, not to have all the answers.

Reading the Bible gives us an opportunity to see Jesus more clearly, to communicate with Him, and to put into practice His commands so we look more like Him. The ultimate goal isn’t to get through the Bible but to get the Bible. through us. When we read, more questions will come. And the more questions we answer, the more questions appear. Don’t give up. Keep digging to learn more about God, and you will discover more about yourself in the process.