

CORE

52

Student Edition

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CORE



Student Edition

A FIFTEEN-MINUTE DAILY GUIDE
TO BUILD YOUR BIBLE IQ IN A YEAR

MARK E. MOORE



WATERBROOK

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CORE 52 STUDENT EDITION

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To Larrie Fraley and Jason Beck

* * *

Though a man might prevail against one who is alone,
two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly
broken.

—ECCLESIASTES 4:12

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Introduction

From Curiosity to Confidence

If you're like most Christ followers, you want to know the Bible better. You keep hearing pastors and parents talk about its importance. But can we be honest? For many students the Bible seems boring or even irrelevant. Yet something in you knows that it matters to you. How else are you going to discover and live out God's purpose for you?

And then there's this little fact: the Bible is only the most influential piece of literature in all human history.

There's a good reason for that fact. Knowing the Bible better makes us better at life. It's true. People who read the Bible four times a week or more reduce loneliness by 30 percent and self-destructive thoughts by 32 percent and increase their ability to forgive by 31 percent.¹ That's huge! But realistically, how can you read and understand this big old book called the Bible?

Core 52 Student Edition offers a clear plan that can actually fit into your crazy schedule. If you can carve out fifteen minutes a day, five days a week, for one year, you can move from curiosity about God's Word to confidence in it. That sounds like a pretty bold claim, but this goal is well

within reach. You hold in your hands an encounter with fifty-two of the most powerful passages for Christians—kind of a SparkNotes to the Bible. By grasping these “vital few” verses, you’ll wrap your mind around the entire Bible with minimal time and effort.

Let me introduce myself. For twenty-two years, I was a New Testament professor at Ozark Christian College. My job was to train pastors. In 2012, I traded my Professor Moore title for that of Pastor Mark at Christ’s Church of the Valley in Phoenix. It’s one of those ridiculously large churches that are often more comfortable for those who’ve never been to church than for those who grew up in church. I serve as a teaching pastor, helping navigate that intimidating book called the Bible.

Core 52 Student Edition brings to the surface the freshest water from the deepest well. People’s buckets hold only so much, so I’ve chosen core passages with the highest impact. With this core, you can go further faster toward confidence in God and your own spiritual experience. Think of me as your personal trainer for spiritual growth. With the help of the Holy Spirit, you’ll make the most of your strategic investment in Scripture. And you’ll exponentially increase both your personal growth and your impact on our world.

So, here’s the plan:

- **Day 1:** *Read the essay.* Following the essay are three key points to check for comprehension. If any of them are unclear, reread those portions of the essay. (You may find it helpful to read the key points before reading the essay so you know what to look for.) You can also watch a brief teaching video each week at www.core52.org or find the Core52 playlist on YouTube.
- **Day 2:** *Memorize the core text,* and review verses from the previous two weeks.
- **Day 3:** *Read a story or other passage from the Bible* that illustrates the text of the week. By reading these stories in light of the core text, you’ll notice how key principles were expressed in the real lives of God’s people.

- **Day 4:** *Read through the three trajectory passages*, meditating on their implications and connections. You might begin by reviewing the core text from memory.
- **Day 5:** *Put key principles into practice* by scheduling a time for the action step. Most exercises should take no more than thirty minutes, and each should be accomplished that week. That's the best way to embed a new principle in practical application.

Welcome to the journey from curiosity to confidence. You can do this! By mastering the core of God's Word, you'll build a firm framework for becoming a Christ-centered difference maker in your own circle of influence.

God has designed you uniquely for such a time as this. You're needed more now than ever.



Why Am I Here?

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

—GENESIS 1:1

You and I are hurtling through an immense universe on a little blue ball called planet Earth. It's only natural to wonder, *Why am I here?*

You might think I'd have this figured out by now. I'm a father of two, a grandfather of eight, a pastor, and a professor with decades of life experience. Yet there are still days when I wrestle with the question. Maybe you can relate.

All I can tell you is that the best answer I've ever found is at the beginning of the Bible. And it starts not with *Why* but with *Who*.

Who Created This World?

We learn from the opening sentences of the Bible what our Creator is like (Genesis 1:1–3). All artists leave fingerprints. Their creations reveal their character. The same is true for God.

God the Father is the architect. Not only did he create the earth, but he also made matter itself. And that matters. You see, every other ancient religion thought matter was eternal and the gods merely shaped it into the world

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we know. It's basically the same idea as Darwinian evolution—matter has always somehow existed. The Bible says something different. It credits the one true God for both the shape of the world and the stuff it's made from.

The Holy Spirit is the engineer. As we read in verse 2, “The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.” The Hebrew word for “hovering” describes a vibration. The Spirit “quaked” to bring order out of chaos. It's kind of like your mother thirty minutes before dinner guests arrive.

More than that, the Spirit breathed life into Adam (2:7) just as he does for you. With every breath you take, the Spirit is coursing through you. (This is also true of animals, according to Psalm 104:30.) The Spirit is relentlessly, intimately, and perpetually involved in the fabric of our world.

When people ignore the Spirit's role in creation, the environment becomes a resource to be exploited rather than a gift to be nurtured. We miss the Spirit in the wind, the bloom of a flower, and the majesty of the mountains. Consequently, Christians often limit worship to a building on Sunday, rather than worshipping daily in the expanse of the universe. God the Father *created*; God the Spirit *creates*.

Jesus is the builder. He did the heavy lifting during the Creation. This fact is seen in Genesis 1:3: “God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Fast-forward to John 1:1–3: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.” This Word is none other than Jesus (verse 14). Before Jesus came to earth, he created the earth. When God gave the command, Jesus—the Word—turned the command into creation.

The apostle Paul described it this way:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (Colossians 1:15–16)

When we ignore the role of Jesus in creation, we focus on getting to heaven rather than bringing heaven to earth through social justice: care for people and their environment. Jesus cares about what happens on the earth he created!

So, there you have it: God is the architect, the Holy Spirit is the engineer, and Jesus is the builder. If we ignore any of these truths, we'll misunderstand not only the nature of creation but also our own nature and God's purpose for us here on earth.

Which gets us to *Why*.

Why Did God Create This World?

Psalm 102:18 provides the answer: “Let this be recorded for a generation to come, so that a people yet to be created may praise the LORD.” God created so his creation would bring him glory. We do the same thing. We dress to impress. We flaunt our swag. We perform on stage and on the field to please others and receive praise. God creates with the same impulse. He wants us to recognize and enjoy what he made for us.

Why not? What he made is praiseworthy, and it starts with our own bodies. Our fingerprints, the structure of our eyes, the electrical synapses of our brains—our bodies are works of art. From Olympic spectacles to ballet, from the NBA to National Geographic, we're stunned by God's handiwork. David expressed it well: “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb” (139:13). God's fingerprints are all over us!

And God made us to manage his creation: “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). We partner with God to carry on creation. God created the heavens and the earth—he leaves it up to us to make a world that's wonderful.

In many ways, we have. Think about human achievements in art, science, literature, music, athletics. In other ways, we've failed miserably! All around, we see the consequences of human brokenness. Yet the last chapter

of human history has yet to be written, although the end, of course, has begun in the story of Jesus: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come” (2 Corinthians 5:17). There’s not a quick fix or an easy solution. But someday we will see the beautiful restoration of Eden, and you can be part of that:

The creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. . . . We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. (Romans 8:19, 22)

Key Points

- The Father, Son, and Spirit each play a vital role in creation.
- God created for the same reasons we do: for others’ pleasure and our own praise.
- Just as God *created* the earth, we’re to continue to *re-create* a world reflecting his love.

MATTHEW 25:41-26. COMMISSION. MATTHEW 28:18-20 27. GOSPEL. MARK 11:28.1

This Week

- Day 1:** Read the essay. Then note in the margins something you learned about yourself.
- Day 2:** Memorize Genesis 1:1.
- Day 3:** Read Genesis 1–2. What does the record of our beginnings reveal about your life’s purpose?
- Day 4:** Write down the question “Why am I here?” Then see what answers you find in John 1:1–3, Ephesians 2:10, and Colossians 1:15–16.
- Day 5:** In what ways are you creative or talented? Art, music, poetry, encouragement, food, something else? Create something to give to someone, joining God in making a beautiful world.

MATTHEW 25:41-26. COMMISSION. MATTHEW 28:18-20 27. GOSPEL. MARK 11:28.1

2

Who Am I?

God said, “Let us make man in our image.”

—GENESIS 1:26

As a middle child, I remember feeling a bit overlooked. Like I didn’t matter. Maybe wasn’t even there. Nobody wants to feel that way! We want to know that we’re noticed and that we matter.

What if I told you that God takes a special interest in *you*? That *you* are his pride and joy? Well, that’s the truth!

God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26–27)

You and I are created in God’s own image. In his likeness. That does not mean humans are the same as God, but we do share many of his

qualities. This simple observation can change everything. So, let's jump into this week's core verse and discover who we really are.

The Power of "Us"

God said, "Let *us* make man in our image" (verse 26). Notice God is three in one: Father, Son, and Spirit. This is a mystery we'll never fully understand, but we, like God, experience community every day. You see, God created us *in* community and *for* community.

Our culture makes this truth difficult to accept. Our words reflect our radical individualism: "You do you!" "You gotta find what's right for you." "Who are you to tell me how to live?" This kind of individualism will leave us feeling lost and empty.

Even our language in church focuses on individuality. Consider these examples:

1. Jesus is called our *personal* Lord and Savior.
2. Bible reading is part of our *personal* devotions, even though the majority of the books in the Bible were written to communities, not individuals.
3. We think of prayer as primarily private. In Bible times, it was far more public (1 Timothy 2:8).

Radical individualism denies our true identity. We are part of something greater. God made us to reflect him by living *in* community and *for* community. In fact, your character and mine are nearly always forged in community.

In His Own Image

A second big idea from this week's core passage is God's *image*. But what does that mean? God is spirit, not flesh. So, how do we share his image?

Animals, humans, and God all share certain emotions: joy, affection,

sorrow, compassion, and so forth. Animals and humans share a number of attributes, such as bodies that have cravings and the ability to feel shame. So, there are some attributes only animals and humans share and some they share with God. Our divine character, however, lies in those attributes we share with God.

The image of God in humans makes us care about honor, time, beauty, language, love, and rule. Let's take a closer look.

Honor is the underlying driver for almost everything we do. It's why we dress up, work out, and brush our teeth. We *need* (I don't use this word lightly) to be honored. When this God-given desire goes bad, it's called pride and always results in idolatry.

Our awareness of *time*. Though he's eternal, God works *in* time. He knows the past and has his eye on the future. Therefore, when we plan parties, look at our watches, or count down till Christmas, we're exercising the divine nature in us.

Beauty! We're the only creatures that make art, post to Instagram, or dress up for prom. Not only do we create beauty, but we also *constantly* create it. New music releases weekly. Our favorite video games add new levels. Netflix, YouTube, and Disney+ exist! Since the beginning of time, humans have constantly created beauty. Why? Because we can't help exercising God's nature in us.

Language is uniquely human. From poetry to rap, mathematics to inside jokes, we use language. A child can speak to an imaginary friend! We tweet, text, and post. Our need for communication is a direct reflection of the divine spark in us.

Then there's *love*. Now, you might argue that animals love, and you wouldn't be wrong. Animals protect their young. Pets bond with people. But no animal would sacrifice its life for someone it has never met. No animal has ever given sacrificially to victims of an earthquake. The noblest feature God gave us is our capacity to love another simply because he or she is a person.

Finally, God created us to *rule*. King David composed a song about this fact:

You have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
and crowned him with glory and honor.

You have given him dominion over the works of your hands;
you have put all things under his feet. . . .

O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! (Psalm 8:5–6, 9)

We're caretakers of God's garden. Our purpose is to enhance what God made. Each of us has abilities to do so. Our every creative act, whether musical, architectural, athletic, or intellectual, is a partnership with God.

When we're ruled by the earth rather than being rulers of it, we fail as God's agents. When we give in to lust, greed, fear, and violence, the result is addiction, poverty, pain, and alienation. Through Jesus, the perfect man, God gave us a second chance to live up to our purpose (Hebrews 2:6–8).

Made for a Purpose

So, worship God as David did: "I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well" (Psalm 139:14). We were made *for a purpose* by God. And we were made for an incredible purpose—to care for others and the earth in partnership with God. That's our identity, which Jesus restored to us by becoming one of us.

Key Points

- Our true identity is found in community, not in individualism.
- God's divine nature in us is exercised in the simplest acts of conversation, art, planning, shared meals, etc.
- Our divine design enables and requires us to participate with God in the ongoing act of creation.

FOR THE CROSS, MATTHEW 10:26-27, 28; EXECUTION, MATTHEW 26:29-30; CHURCH
MATTHEW 25:41-26; COMMISSION, MATTHEW 28:18-20 27; GOSPEL, MARK 11:28-1

This Week

- ☐ **Day 1:** After reading the essay, jot down in the margin a few characteristics you have that reflect God in you.
- ☐ **Day 2:** Memorize Genesis 1:26.
- ☐ **Day 3:** Read Ephesians 1. What does it tell you about who you are that the Genesis story doesn't?
- ☐ **Day 4:** What do you learn about your identity from Psalm 8:5–6, Psalm 139:13–14, and Hebrews 2:6–8?
- ☐ **Day 5:** We claim an important part of our true identity when we take community seriously. Pick three friends and think about what abilities and characteristics they have that reflect God's nature. (Your friends don't need to be Christians, just humans.) Then share what you see with them. It will blow their minds.

FOR THE CROSS, MATTHEW 10:26-27, 28; EXECUTION, MATTHEW 26:29-30; CHURCH
MATTHEW 25:41-26; COMMISSION, MATTHEW 28:18-20 27; GOSPEL, MARK 11:28-1



What Is My Problem?

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

—GENESIS 3:6

I remember my visit to Auschwitz, the notorious Nazi concentration camp. I walked in thinking, *How could they?* But along with everyone else in our group, I walked out in stunned silence. Later, I pulled out my journal and wrote these chilling words: “After today, I can relate to the German soldiers.” They were just people like me.

In my more honest moments, I see my capacity to reject God and hurt other people. Badly. Sooner or later, we find that we are capable of more evil than we ever imagined.

It all started in a garden.

The story is told in Genesis 3. It begins with a careless woman, a checked-out husband, a talking snake, and forbidden fruit. Eve knew the fruit was off limits. Yet Satan tricked her. She took the bait in a bite while Adam stood by, silent. But afterward, Eve’s eyes were opened. She had lost her innocence. Adam had too. Can you relate?

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Adam and Eve's failure isn't foreign. They represent all of us—adult, teen, male, female. We've all experienced temptation, taken the bait, and suffered the consequences.

Obviously, every human at some point asks, *What is my problem?*

Irresistible Temptation

First, notice what captured Eve's attention, because it's the same thing that captures ours. It was Satan's promise "You will be like God" (verse 5). The prideful idea that we control our own lives.

Pride isn't merely *a* sin; it's *the* sin. Look behind every murder, theft, lie, and addiction. That's why the Bible warns against pride so often: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted" (Matthew 23:12). "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; paraphrasing Proverbs 3:34). Pride is a subplot of nearly every book of the Bible because it's the source of our broken human condition.

Then again, we probably don't need to read about it in a book. We see it in the mirror.

Society praises pride and independence, even though they are killing us as individuals and as a culture. That's why it's so important that we lay down pride and imitate Jesus by serving others. Self-improvement, self-respect, and self-management are all good, but they can never rescue us from the grip of sin. Why? Because we're still relying on ourselves.

Eve's story was summarized thousands of years later by Jesus's best friend, John:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. (1 John 2:15–16)

Deadly Deception

Satan lied to Eve. He said she wouldn't die if she ate the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:4). Did she die?

Technically, no—at least, not at that moment. Would she die? Absolutely. We all do—because our choices are just like Eve's. However, Satan's deception is not a bold-faced lie. It's half-true. Satan promises it'll feel good, give you a buzz, or satisfy a craving. He's not wrong! But the future pain far outweighs the momentary pleasure. There is always a price tag for cheating, viewing pornography, partying, or stealing. But Satan keeps that part secret. Besides, most of the time, we're pretty sure we can beat the odds. (There's that pride thing again.)

Like Eve, we focus on the promise of delight. But one surrender to temptation and we're stuck with the consequences, sometimes for a long time. This no-win situation is the curse of sin. The cost of sin is as high as our God is holy.

God's Reckoning

God cursed Adam and Eve because they were guilty of rebellion. Taking the fruit wasn't merely theft; it was mutiny—an attempt to become like God. Eve rejected God himself. She had (and we have) the audacity to challenge God's eternal wisdom, his perfect plan, and his moral authority.

When you think about it, that's outrageous! Are you God? Am I? The truth is, no human has the power to manage his or her own life without God's direction. But people try all the time. How many people's lives have spiraled out of control under the weight of their own arrogance?

Adam and Eve were kicked out of the garden, but—get this—it was *for their own good* (Genesis 3:22–24). How is exile good? Because the garden is not our goal; the heart of God is. It's useless to live in luxury if you lose your character and your connection to your Creator.

If you have sensed a void in your life, what you're really missing is con-

nection to your Creator. The curse calls us back to our original relationship. We return to God through repentance, retracing our steps to submission to our Creator.

Here's the good news. First, our Creator sent his own son, Jesus, to pay the price to remove the curse of sin. Second, the Son of God sent his Holy Spirit to support us so we could do better than Adam and Eve. And we have God's promise on that: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Key Points

- Pride says, "It's all about me." That's why pride is the root of every sin.
- Sin tempts with half truths, not blatant lies.
- From the first fall, God had a rescue plan. He sent his own son to bring us back to him.

MATTHEW 25:41-26. COMMISSION. MATTHEW 28:18-20 27. GOSPEL. MARK 11:28-17

This Week

- Day 1:** Read the essay. What is the worst thing you've ever done? (No need to write it down.)
- Day 2:** Memorize Genesis 3:6.
- Day 3:** Read Genesis 3:1–4:16. Do you see yourself anywhere in the story?
- Day 4:** What do Proverbs 16:18, James 4:6, and 1 John 2:15–16 have in common?
- Day 5:** You are only as sick as your secrets. Confess a hidden sin, preferably to a parent but at least to a trusted mentor. Not easy, sure, but you're worth it. If a face-to-face conversation is too difficult, start with a text: "Can we talk?"

MATTHEW 25:41-26. COMMISSION. MATTHEW 28:18-20 27. GOSPEL. MARK 11:28-17