



MEET ME IN THE BIBLE

COLOSSIANS & PHILEMON

AN 8-WEEK BIBLE STUDY

COLLEEN D. SEARCY

Foreword by Jen Wilkin

“Simple and straightforward, Meet Me in the Bible is a wonderful resource to gain foundational skills in studying the Bible. If you want to feel confident in mining Scripture for God’s truths and applying it to your life, this is an incredible guide.”

Laura Wifler, Cofounder, Risen Motherhood; coauthor, *Risen Motherhood: Gospel Hope for Everyday Moments*

“I was greeted by the bright smile of Colleen Searcy over thirty years ago when I walked into a youth group in West Texas as a freckle-faced, curly headed, unbelieving teenager. Over the last three decades, I have watched Colleen cling to God’s word, teach God’s word, sing God’s word, and live God’s word. If you are looking to *meet* God in the Scriptures, I can think of no better guide than my friend Colleen. She will help you taste and see that the Lord is good!”

Shane Barnard, singer-songwriter, Shane and Shane

“Colleen Searcy is one of my favorite Bible teachers. You will sense her open-armed ministry within the framework of her Meet Me in the Bible series, in which she’s thoughtfully prepared a table for women to feast on God’s word. Whether you are an individual hungry to know God more, a small group desiring an accessible way to study together, or a women’s ministry leader looking for a foundational resource for your teaching team, the Meet Me in the Bible series is a trustworthy guide.”

Caroline Saunders, author, *Come Home: Tracing God’s Promise of Home through Scripture*

“I’ve benefited from Colleen’s wisdom, teaching, and partnership in ministry for a number of years. She is a gifted Bible teacher who uses her skills to invite others into biblical literacy. In the Meet Me in the Bible series, she provides what few studies do—an opportunity for women to gather for both in-person teaching and discussion. You will be equipped to not only study for yourself but also cultivate teaching gifts in the lives of the women in your church. I can’t wait to recommend this to my ministry friends.”

Courtney Reissig, author, *Teach Me to Feel: Worshiping through the Psalms in Every Season of Life*

“As the CEO of a worldwide mission agency, I highly recommend Colleen Searcy’s Meet Me in the Bible series for anyone interested in going deeper in their study of the Bible. Colleen uses a structured approach with guiding prompts that are fully interactive and enhance your reflection on Scripture. These books are helpful resources for pursuing individual study or leading a Bible study group, and these studies are culturally relevant for all groups of people. Meet Me in the Bible is an excellent and well-rounded framework that can make studying the Bible a more engaging and enriching experience for anyone.”

Kurt Nelson, CEO, East-West Ministries

“I have seen firsthand the fruit of Meet Me in the Bible. Colleen’s accessible framework for studying the Scripture has had a large and lasting impact on our church. Many in our congregation are still reaping the benefits of her investment in our women’s ministry. If you are a seasoned student of the Scripture or are just getting started, Meet Me in the Bible will launch you into a greater exploration of the Bible and a deeper enjoyment of the God it reveals.”

JR Vassar, Lead Pastor, Church at the Cross, Grapevine, Texas; author,
Glory Hunger

COLOSSIANS
& PHILEMON

Meet Me in the Bible Studies

Colossians and Philemon

The Story of Abraham

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& PHILEMON

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 **CROSSWAY**[®]
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

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15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1

CONTENTS

Foreword by Jen Wilkin *ix*

Meet Me in the Bible: A Simple Framework for Reading the Bible and
Enjoying God *1*

Why Study Colossians and Philemon? *11*

Getting Started in Colossians and Philemon *13*

COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON

- 1 The Fruit of the Gospel (Colossians 1:1-14) *15*
- 2 The Heart of the Gospel (Colossians 1:15-23) *23*
- 3 The Riches of the Gospel (Colossians 1:24-2:7) *31*
- 4 Alive in Christ (Colossians 2:8-23) *39*
- 5 What to Put Off and What to Put On (Colossians 3:1-17) *47*
- 6 Whatever You Do, Part 1: Instructions to the Common Roman Household
(Colossians 3:18-4:6) *55*
- 7 Whatever You Do, Part 2: Serving the Body of Christ (Colossians 4:7-18) *63*
- 8 The Practice of the Gospel (Philemon 1-25) *71*

MEET ME IN THE BIBLE TOOL KIT

Tool 1: Bible Timeline *82*

Tool 2: Map: The Setting of Colossians and Philemon *85*

Tool 3: Bible Genres *87*

Tool 4: Attributes of God *89*

Tool 5: Bookmark Content *91*

Tool 6: Prayer Pages *93*

Tool 7: Questions for Further Thought and Discussion *101*

Notes *109*

FOREWORD

For the past twenty-five years, my primary place of ministry has been the local church, and my primary aim has been to build Bible literacy among women. So, naturally, any time I'm asked to endorse a resource, I ask myself how it will serve that context. That's why I'm particularly excited to bring to your attention the Meet Me in the Bible series.

When evaluating a resource, I hold two important questions in view: (1) Is this from a trustworthy voice? and (2) Does this challenge those who use it to grow in their ability to read and understand the Scriptures? I want to help answer both of those questions for you as you consider how the Meet Me in the Bible series might help you personally, or those you serve in your church.

In terms of the trustworthiness of the author, I can speak with confidence that Colleen Searcy is an excellent guide. I first met Colleen in 2008, about a year after moving to Dallas and joining a new church. I was looking for other women in the church who shared my desire to see women equipped with solid discipleship opportunities. Colleen and I went to coffee, and I knew I had found a like-minded partner. Since that time, we have together taught, written curriculum, led teams, and prayed—all from that desire to see God's daughters grounded in the Scriptures. Colleen is not only theologically and biblically solid; she is a gifted teacher, humble and kind, and a faithful friend.

In terms of the usefulness of the resource, Meet Me in the Bible so closely aligns with my own philosophy of teaching that I can recommend it eagerly. It's a brilliant combination of a Scripture journal and a guide for growing in Bible literacy. It encourages the user to practice the time-tested method of "observe, interpret, apply" in a way that allows understanding to grow gradually. It presses us to be active learners rather than passive consumers, not rushing to commentaries, but sitting with the text, patiently waiting for our own understanding to begin to emerge. For those who know my method and Bible studies, Meet Me in the Bible will feel familiar in the best ways.

It is a streamlined approach suitable for personal study as well as an excellent foundation for group discussion and teaching environments.

The skills taught in each Meet Me in the Bible study will help you understand a particular book of the Bible better. But they will also help you understand *any* book of the Bible better as you grow in your ability to use those skills. And because application focuses on relationship—with God, self, and others—these skills will help you to live and love like a Christ follower.

So it is my pleasure to commend to you both a trusted guide and a trustworthy resource. My guess is that if you had come to coffee with Colleen and me on that day some years ago, you would have shared our excitement to see women growing in their love of the Scriptures and of the God they proclaim. What we want for you is to be able to serve your local church, whether in a classroom or a living room, with good tools and the confidence to use them. My prayer is that you would take what Colleen has created and combine it with an invitation to the women God has placed in your sphere of influence—a simple invitation: Meet me in the Bible! No sweeter fellowship is found than in that meeting place. May your time spent there yield the richest of treasures.

JEN WILKIN

Bible teacher; author, *Women of the Word*;
None Like Him; and *In His Image*

MEET ME IN THE BIBLE

A Simple Framework for Reading the Bible and Enjoying God

God delights in revealing himself, and one of the primary ways he reveals himself is through the Bible. My deep desire is for people to know and enjoy God through the study of his word. I want people with all kinds of personalities and learning styles to grow in confidence that they can read and study their Bibles. This framework of Bible study was designed to provide helpful structure and a lot of freedom for the studier.

The *Why* behind Meet Me in the Bible

Meet Me in the Bible is a simple, five-step framework designed to help you read your Bible. It is not a fill-in-the-blank study. After numerous conversations with women over many years of ministry, I've found that countless women do Bible studies, yet few feel confident opening the Bible and reading it on their own. And although many women desire to lead a Bible study, few feel equipped to do so. Meet Me in the Bible offers a method to help you do both.

How to Use Meet Me in the Bible

This framework was designed for either individual or group Bible study, and it incorporates the time-tested stages of Bible reading: observation, interpretation, and application. Prompts are provided on your bookmark to help you observe, interpret, and apply the Scriptures. You will also be prompted to use simple and accessible tools as you study. You will grow in confidence and find your pace as you practice observing, interpreting, and applying the Scriptures again and again. You can use this framework to study any book of the Bible.

For Group Study

If you are doing this study as part of a group, you will want to complete each lesson before you meet. Each lesson is divided into five doable steps rather

than five assigned days, to allow flexibility. You can work through one step each day or the whole lesson in one sitting. Find the pace that works best for you. No matter how much of the lesson you are able to complete, please don't skip gathering with your Bible study group. You will benefit from your group, and your group will be encouraged by your presence.

Meet Me in the Bible studies are meant to be flexible. Group studies can opt to meet in small groups for discussion and a time of teaching or simply meet for discussion only.

TIPS FOR GROUPS THAT OPT TO MEET FOR BOTH A TIME OF DISCUSSION AND A TIME OF TEACHING

- If this is your group's first Meet Me in the Bible study, be sure each participant is familiar with how to use the Meet Me in the Bible framework before you meet. You can find my video on how to use the Meet Me in the Bible framework at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching. In this video, I demonstrate how to cross-reference, quickly check other translations, and more, using simple and free digital tools.
- For the first meeting, teachers will want to cover the Getting Started section before discussion. One of the greatest Bible study tools available is the historical context of the Bible book you are studying. To have the best chance of interpreting the Scriptures correctly, you need to know who the author was, whom he was writing to, the literary style he used, and what was happening in the world when he wrote it. I cover the answers to these questions in my "Getting Started" video, which you will find at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching.
- After answering those preliminary questions, move to small-group discussion. Spend some time getting to know one another by asking questions like, What brought you to this study? Why are you excited to study this content? What piqued your curiosity from the Getting Started questions?
- For all future meetings, you can gather for discussion before or after the teaching. I suggest that you gather *before* the teaching. You will

be amazed at the insights gained as each participant shares what was discovered during personal study. Confidence will grow as you learn from one another's discoveries. Tips for discussion:

- The prompts on your bookmark make good points of discussion. (What did you learn from the repeated words? What was hard to understand? What did you learn about people?)
- Content-specific discussion questions for each lesson can be found in Tool 7 of the Tool Kit.
- Additional historical context is given in the questions in Tool 7 of the Tool Kit.
- The bounce questions in Tool 7 of the Tool Kit are intended to jumpstart discussion and provide an easy transition to the content.
- Discussion leaders may use as many or as few discussion questions from Tool 7 as they'd like. These questions were written to help you think deeply about the text. Many of the questions do not have one right answer and are meant to encourage further thought and robust discussion. Questions with one correct answer (e.g., What did Paul say about sin in verse 12?) can feel like a quiz rather than an invitation into conversation.
- Discussion leaders *do* want to plan which questions they will cover and think through their own answers before the group meets. They *do not* need to feel pressure to answer every question that surfaces during Bible study. The purpose of Bible study is not to impress with our knowledge; it is to grow in our knowledge of and love for God as we get to know him better through the study of his word. Enjoy being a colearner with those you are studying alongside. If the questions that surface are not answered in the teaching time, you can circle back with your group after you've had time to think further about them.

- Use the prayer pages in Tool 6 of the Tool Kit to record personal prayer requests and the prayers of those you are studying alongside.

TIPS FOR GROUPS THAT OPT TO MEET FOR DISCUSSION ONLY

- If this is your group's first Meet Me in the Bible study, be sure each participant watches my video on how to use the Meet Me in the Bible framework before you meet. You can find it at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching. In this video, I demonstrate how to cross-reference, quickly check other translations, and more, using simple and free digital tools.
- For the first meeting, be prepared to discuss the Getting Started section. One of the greatest Bible study tools available is the historical context of the Bible book you are studying. To have the best chance of interpreting the Scriptures correctly, you need to know who the author was, whom he was writing to, the literary style he used, and what was happening in the world when he wrote it. I answer these questions in my "Getting Started" video at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching.
- Spend some time getting to know one another by asking questions like, What brought you to this study? Why are you excited to study this content? What piqued your curiosity from the Getting Started questions?
- For all future meetings:
 - The prompts on your bookmark make good points of discussion: What did you learn from the repeated words? What was hard to understand? What did you learn about people?
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- Discussion leaders *do* want to plan on which questions they will cover and think through their own answers before the group meets. They *do not* need to feel pressure to answer every question that surfaces during Bible study. The purpose of Bible study is not to impress with our knowledge; it is to grow in our knowledge of and love for God as we get to know him better through the study of his word. When stumped by a question, you can say something like, "That is a great question! I'd like to give that more thought and circle back next time we meet." Then have fun studying! Enjoy being a colearner with those you are studying alongside. Ask God to help you with the questions that surface. He is delighted to meet you in the Bible. What a great discussion you will have the next time you meet!
- Use the prayer pages in Tool 6 of the Tool Kit to record personal prayer requests and the prayers of those you are studying alongside.

For Individual Study

- If you are doing this study on your own, you will want to begin by watching my video on how to use the Meet Me in the Bible framework. You can find it at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching. In this video, I demonstrate how to cross-reference, quickly check other translations, and more, using simple and free digital tools.

- Be sure to complete the Getting Started section before diving in to study the passages of Scripture. One of the greatest Bible study tools available is the historical context of the Bible book you are studying. When you study a passage that is hard to understand, overlay the passage with the context. To have the best chance of interpreting the Scriptures correctly, we need to know who the author was, whom he was writing to, the literary style he used, and what was happening in the world when he wrote it. I answer these questions in my “Getting Started” video at colleensearcy.com/mmibteaching.
- After completing the Getting Started section, each lesson is divided into five doable steps rather than five assigned days, to allow flexibility. You can work through one step each day or work through the whole lesson in one sitting. Find the pace that works best for you.
- For a deeper dive, use the questions in Tool 7 of the Tool Kit. Additional historical context is also given within the questions. These questions were written to help you think deeply about the text.
- Use the prayer pages in Tool 6 of the Tool Kit to record your prayers while you study.

What’s Included in This Study

Bible Study Bookmark

All Meet Me in the Bible studies include a bookmark with the time-tested stages of Bible reading (Observe, Interpret, and Apply) on the front. You will see the five-step framework for reading the Bible on the back of the bookmark, including prompts to help you observe, interpret, and apply the Scriptures. You will also be prompted to pause in your study to listen to and enjoy God. He wants to meet you in your study of the Bible! Although the Bible study bookmark and the Bible study book were designed to work together, your bookmark can also be used alone. It was designed to help you study any book of the Bible, and my hope is that you will use your bookmark again and again.

Bible Study Book

The book includes word-for-word Bible text. Mark it up! If you love highlighters, highlight away! If you prefer to draw symbols, grab colored pencils and go for it. Or simply underline with your favorite pen. Your Bible study book also includes titles and designated spaces that correspond with the titles and prompts on your bookmark. Additionally, you will find blank note pages throughout your book to use as you wish. Draw a chart, sketch an image, or write the lyrics to a song. Each lesson concludes with an important wrap-up question to prompt you to consider what you discovered in the Scriptures.

Meet Me in the Bible Tool Kit

Tool 1: *Bible Timeline*. Place an *X* on the simple timeline of the Bible to indicate where the scriptures you are studying land in the whole story of the Bible.

Tool 2: *Map*. Referencing a map while studying is a helpful reminder that these are stories of real people in real places.

Tool 3: *Bible Genres*. Knowing the literary style of the book of the Bible you are studying is key to correct interpretation. Just as you would approach the poems of Wordsworth differently than you would approach a history book about World War II, there are nuances to different literary styles in the Bible that must be kept in mind while interpreting and applying the Scriptures. Use this resource to identify the literary style of the book you are studying.

Tool 4: *Attributes of God*. You will be prompted to use this tool each week. You may want to mark it with a paper clip so you can turn there easily. The ultimate goal of Bible study is to know and love God, and my prayer is that your hope will be further anchored in him as you are reminded of his attributes.

Tool 5: *Bookmark Content*. All the information on your bookmark is included here for your convenience.

Tool 6: *Prayer Pages*. Use these pages to record personal prayers and prayer requests of those studying alongside you.

Tool 7: *Questions for Further Thought and Discussion*. Use as many or as few of these questions as you'd like in your individual or group study. Additional historical context is included in the questions. The bounce questions are intended to jumpstart discussion and provide an easy transition to the content. The remaining questions were written to help you think deeply about the text.

Additional Tools for Your Study

1. *Different Bible translations*. Reading Scripture verses in different Bible translations can give helpful insight as you study. This book includes the ESV translation. Other translations I recommend are the New International Version (NIV), the New Living Translation (NLT), the Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and the New American Standard Bible (NASB). I use The Message as a commentary when I study.
2. *Dictionary and thesaurus*. Look up unfamiliar words as well as “church” words such as *atonement*, *propitiation*, and *covenant*. You will be surprised how much clarity can be gained by reading simple definitions and synonyms in a dictionary or thesaurus.¹
3. *Cross-references*. Cross-references are included in study Bibles, usually in the middle or at the bottom of a page. A cross-reference is a marker in the Bible pointing to other passages of Scripture with related words and themes. It is usually designated with a superscript (tiny, raised) letter. Cross-referencing is a way to use Scripture to rightly interpret Scripture. You can also use digital tools to cross-reference.²
4. *Study Bible footnotes*. If you have a study Bible, the provided footnotes give helpful insights.³ Wait to check footnotes until after you've observed the text and attempted interpretation using other translations, a dictionary, and cross-references. Resist the temptation to jump to someone else's thoughts before observing and interpreting on your own. Enjoy being curious and see what you discover!

5. *Commentaries.* Commentaries can be helpful in Bible study, but wait to use commentaries until after you've observed the text and attempted interpretation using other translations, a dictionary, and cross-references. Ask God for insight as you study, and be willing to wait to hear from him. Again, resist the temptation to jump to someone else's thoughts before observing and interpreting on your own. For help choosing commentaries, begin by asking trusted leaders about their favorites.⁴

The ultimate goal of Bible study is to know and love God. So observe, interpret, apply, and enjoy God! Stay in conversation with him, asking him to help you understand the Scriptures. Ask him your hard questions. Listen to him. He wants to meet you in your study of the Bible!

WHY STUDY COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON?

Colossians and Philemon are epistles, or letters, written by the apostle Paul. Paul wrote these letters while he was under house arrest in Rome. I included these letters in a single study because the Colossian church met in Philemon's house. What was it like to be a Colossian when Paul wrote this letter?

- *Colossae was a melting pot of cultures and belief systems.* It was located near the crossroads of two once-important and well-traveled highways, attributing to the diversity of the population. The Colossian church included converts from all sorts of religious, cultural, and philosophical backgrounds including Greeks, Romans, Jews, and Scythians.
- *There was confusion in the church about how to practice Christianity.* Syncretism, the blending of religious beliefs and traditions, was common in the Colossian church. Certain practices and regulations from different religious backgrounds were being added to the gospel. Although believers in Colossae had placed their faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation, they were in the early stages of learning to follow him and live according to his teachings. The man of the house was given almost limitless power over those in his household according to Roman law. Paul's instructions to every member of the Roman household—acknowledging women, children, and bondservants in the same way he acknowledged men—would have been shocking and full of hope. The story of Philemon and his bondservant Onesimus is especially powerful, demonstrating how the practice of the gospel makes right what is broken in the world.
- *Many Colossians lived in fear.* History informs us that Colossae was hit by a natural disaster—a devastating earthquake—about the same

time Paul wrote this letter. They were also afraid of the supernatural. Colossians were plagued with fear of the gods, evil spirits, and life beyond the grave. Many wore magical charms and practiced incantations, some even abusing their bodies in order to appease the gods and ward off evil spirits.

- Paul's words called for unity amid diversity.
- Paul's letter brought clarity where there was confusion.
- The gospel he preached introduced hope in the thick of fear.

There is much to learn from Paul's letters to this early church family. May we be reminded of the unity amid diversity, the clarity, and the hope that the gospel still calls us into. Enjoy getting to know God better and better as he meets you in your study of Colossians and Philemon.

Joyfully,
COLLEEN SEARCY

GETTING STARTED IN COLOSSIANS AND PHILEMON

We have our best chance of understanding Colossians and Philemon if we overlay the text in these epistles with important context. Below are context questions to address before you begin the study.⁵

1. Who wrote these books?

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2. When were these books written? Turn to Tool 1 in the Tool Kit. Place an *X* on the timeline to determine where the events recorded in these letters land in the whole story of the Bible.

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3. To whom were they written, and for what purpose?

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4. In what literary style were these books written? Turn to Tool 3 in the Tool Kit for help identifying the genre.⁶

5. What are the central themes of these books?



1

THE FRUIT OF THE GOSPEL

Colossians 1:1-14

THE FRUIT OF THE GOSPEL

Colossians 1:1–14

¹Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

²To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

³We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, ⁴since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, ⁶which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, ⁷just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf ⁸and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

⁹And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, ¹⁰so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; ¹¹being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; ¹²giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

OBSERVE: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE SAY?

Step 1: Setting and Summary

Key Characters and Locations

CHARACTERS:

- *Paul*. An apostle of Christ Jesus.
- *Timothy*. Coauthor of the letter.
- *The saints at Colossae*. Who Paul is writing to.
- *Epaphras*. A minister of Christ to the Colossians; he is from Colossae.

LOCATIONS:

- *Colossae*. City in modern-day Turkey close to Laodicea.

See if you can find the location(s) on the map in Tool 2 of the Tool Kit.

Summary of the Passage

What Stood Out to You or Piqued Your Curiosity?

Step 2: Key Words and Phrases

Remember to look at the prompts on your Bible study bookmark as you observe the text.

- *Saints (3 times)*. NIV translation: “God’s holy people, faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.”
- *Knowledge (2 times)*. Thinking back to the context, many religious backgrounds were represented in this new church and syncretism was a challenge. It makes sense that Paul prayed for them to increase in their knowledge of God.
- *Bearing fruit (2 times)*.

Remember to enjoy God and listen as you study. Move to a time of prayer after you observe, recording your prayer on the prayer pages in Tool 6 of the Tool Kit.

INTERPRET: WHAT DOES THE PASSAGE MEAN?

Step 3: What Was Hard to Understand?

Questions

- *What is an apostle, exactly?*
- *Who is Timothy and what is his role?*

Insights from Cross-References, Other Translations, and/or the Context

Remember that historical context is one of the greatest Bible study tools available. Keep asking the questions Who wrote this? When did he write it? Where does this land in the whole story of the Bible? How would these words land on the ears of the original hearers?

- *What is an apostle, exactly?* Dictionary definition: An apostle is one sent on a mission, such as “one of [the] authoritative New Testament group sent out to preach the gospel and made up especially of Christ’s 12 original disciples and Paul.”⁷
- *Who is Timothy and what is his role?* From cross-references 1 Thessalonians 3:2 and 1 Corinthians 4:17, Timothy is considered a brother and coworker in the gospel, sent out to exhort the saints in the faith. Paul referred to him as his beloved and faithful child in the Lord. Paul is a spiritual father to Timothy. We learn from cross-reference Acts 16:1 that Timothy’s mother was a Jewish believer and his father was Greek.

Remember to turn to the Questions for Further Thought and Discussion in Tool 7 for a deeper dive. Additional historical context is also given within the questions in Tool 7.

Step 4: What Did You Learn about God?

Refer to the attributes of God in Tool 4 if needed.

Remember to enjoy God and listen as you study. Move to a time of prayer after you interpret, recording your prayer on the prayer pages in Tool 6.

NOTES

APPLY: HOW WILL YOU APPLY THE PASSAGE?

Step 5: What Did You Learn about People?

Others

Remember to look at the prompts on your Bible study bookmark as you apply the text.

Yourself

- *Is there a command to obey? An example to follow? A sin to confess? A warning to heed? An encouragement to receive?*
- *What action step will you take?*

Wrap Up: What Did You Discover in the Scriptures That Was Important to You?

Remember to enjoy God and listen as you study. Move to a time of prayer after you apply, recording your prayer on the prayer pages in Tool 6.