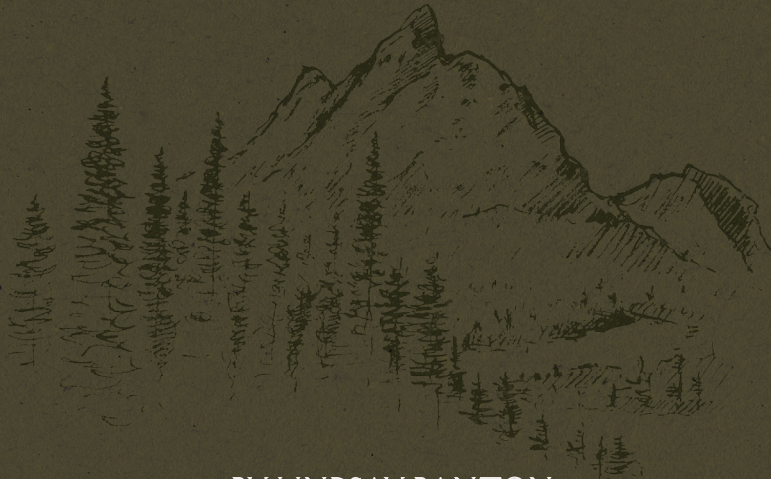


TRAIL GUIDE

A SIMPLE MANUAL FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE



BY LINDSAY BANTON

PRAISE FOR
TRAIL GUIDE: A SIMPLE MANUAL FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

“There is a lot to like in this book—it will set your feet firmly on a good path to reading the Bible productively.”

—JOHN H WALTON, PH.D., PROFESSOR OF OLD TESTAMENT,
WHEATON COLLEGE AND GRADUATE SCHOOL

“*Trail Guide* is a practical book that gives you the tools you need to navigate through the Bible. And if you’re outdoorsy, you’re in for a treat! The book is chock-full of hiking principles and stories that make Bible study come alive.”

—GLEN DAVIS, DIRECTOR OF CHI ALPHA AT STANFORD UNIVERSITY

“As both a Bible teacher and a parent of adolescents, I really appreciate this insightful and accessible resource. Lindsay winsomely brings together both personal stories and informed analysis to provide a helpful overview for anyone on the journey of engaging God’s Word. Whether you are brand new to the Bible or a seasoned veteran looking for fresh insights, you will find this book a welcome companion on your travels.”

—KEVIN BOYD, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF SCRIPTURE ENGAGEMENT–
BIBLICAL EDUCATION INTERVARSITY CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP/USA

“Lindsay combines her love for the outdoors and the Bible in an easy-to-use trail guide that will help anyone interested in reading or studying the Bible. She breaks the process down into clear and simple steps that help in navigating the biblical terrain. I encourage anyone who is curious about exploring the Bible to use this guide and discover what God is saying to you.”

—STEVE “FATHER TIME” HAWLEY / FOUNDER OF HIKER CHURCH

“In the midst of a culture of declining biblical literacy, Lindsay provides clear, time-tested strategies for reading, understanding and applying God’s word to your life. Her use of historical and personal anecdotes make *Trail Guide* an engaging read.”

—SCOTT THOMSON, TEAM LEADER FOR CRU AT THE UNIVERSITY OF
CONNECTICUT, INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP LEADER - AUSTRIA

TRAIL GUIDE

A SIMPLE MANUAL FOR
UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLE

BY LINDSAY BANTON

Published by CruPress®
crustore.org
Cru – Cru Store
7157 Narcoosee Rd., #1221
Orlando, FL 32822

Written by: Lindsay Banton
Edited by: Andy Allan
Copyedited by: Jason Weimer and Elisabeth Thoresen
Design and Layout by: Julie Plasse

CruPress is the publishing division of Cru®.

For additional copies or to browse more
of Cru's ministry resources, see:
crustore.org
1-800-827-2788

ISBN number: 978-1-57334-195-0

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright ©1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked (ESV) are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. The ESV text may not be quoted in any publication made available to the public by a Creative Commons license. The ESV may not be translated in whole or in part into any other language.

©2023 Lindsay Banton. Published by CruPress. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior permission of Lindsay Banton and CruPress.

To EMMA—
May you find God in all the
places you look for him.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	ix
1 KNOWING THE TRAIL	1
2 WHO'S ON YOUR BOOKSHELF?	5
3 EASY HIKES	11
4 HARDER HIKES	19
5 TOOLS	25
6 HIKING TOGETHER	31
7 STUMPED	37
8 WAIT? THERE'S MORE?	43
9 RETURNING HOME	51
APPENDIX	
Personal Perspective When Reading the Bible	56
Bible Study as Curriculum	57
Glossary	61
Real Life Example of Inductive Method (Luke 14)	62
Inductive Method Practice (Colossians 3)	63
Small Group Guidelines	64
Top 10 Items for Your (Literal) Hiking Backpack	64
List of Literary Devices	65
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	67
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	69

CHAPTER NO.	CHAPTER TITLE
1	Knowing the Trail

It's one of the most controversial books ever written. Governments forbid it. Dictators prevent its purchase. Scholars question it. Politicians twist it. It's been weaponized, distorted, misunderstood, hated, censored, and dismissed. By the standards we use to rate movies today, it would be R. It often raises more questions than provides answers.

But, more than five **billion** copies have been sold. It is adored and defended. Teachers spend years studying to understand and explain it. People give their lives to prove and protect it. Historians and archaeologists have spent decades digging up (literally) reliable resources to support it. Scholars devote their entire careers to it. The Bible often gives answers to questions we don't know to ask.

The Bible describes itself, too. Here are some of its own claims:

- It's sharper than the knives used in surgery.
- It's more nourishing than a feast.
- It gives understanding.
- It provides shelter.
- It asks questions.
- It is flawless.
- It is hopeful.
- It is good.
- It's a light to show us where to walk.



Consider this your guide to explore “the light which shows us where to walk.” I’d like to invite you on a journey to unpack the uniqueness, mystery, and drama that is the Bible. The path we take together won’t answer every question raised, but hopefully this field guide will assist you in surveying the landscape of the Bible. Welcome to the journey!

WHY IS KNOWING HOW TO READ THE BIBLE IMPORTANT?

Why take the time to learn how to study the Bible? A few reasons. First, in John 8:31, Jesus says, “If you hold to my teachings, you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Jesus says that if we “hold to” his teachings—if we hear them, believe them, and do what he instructs—then we are his disciples. How can a disciple “hold to” Jesus’ teaching if he or she does not understand what Jesus is saying? And, since Jesus talks constantly about the Old Testament of the Bible, how can a disciple understand Jesus’ teaching without knowing how to read the whole Bible?

Second, sometimes well-meaning Christians, or skeptics who have rejected the Bible, tell us things that they *think* are in the Bible, but actually aren’t. We need to be able to recognize when someone is telling us, “God said,” when God *didn’t* say it. And if we’re unsure, we need to know how to find the answers, look things up and check for ourselves. We need to be confident in our own ability to determine what the Bible says, instead of depending on others to tell us what to think. Knowing how to study the Bible is helpful because at some point you just might find yourself without someone else around to explain a difficult passage. What happens if you don’t know how to find those answers on your own? And likewise, what happens when a friend asks you to help them understand a tricky verse?

CAN I REALLY UNDERSTAND THE WHOLE BIBLE?

Most of what’s written in the Bible *can* be understood, and everything is there for a reason. The apostle Paul, a follower of Jesus with a crazy past, wrote to his friend, Timothy, saying “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). This means that everything in the Bible is there because God wants it there, so we should neither delete nor ignore the parts we don’t like. According to 2 Timothy, God has given us the Bible to equip us “for every good work.” The final part of Paul’s statement to Timothy about the Scriptures reminds us that, within the pages of the Bible, we will find the benefits promised and assured

to us. In other words, God has given us what we need so that we can know him and make him known to others.

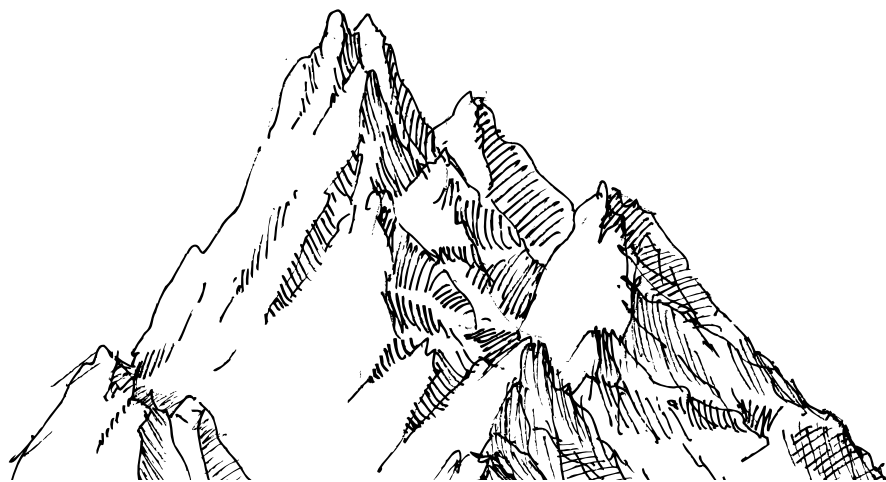
BEFORE YOU GO

THINGS TO KNOW: God wants us to know him and make him known to others. We can make him known to others by learning about him from the Bible. Each time you read the Bible, consider what those sentences reveal about God.

GIVE IT A TRY: Look up 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Read it out loud. Ask the following questions of the verse: What is the Bible good for? What is Scripture? What is it not good for?

DISCUSS TOGETHER: Tell about a time when you were lost. Where did you look for directions? What are the differences between reading and studying the Bible? Why is knowing how to study the Bible important? Can you think of a verse or story in the Bible that you don’t understand? If so, write down the reference and ask a few questions about it. You might be able to return to that passage later and discover a few things which you couldn’t before.

MORE INFO: Next, we will read about *genres* of the Bible. Look up the word *genre* before moving on. Try to guess how many genres we’ll find in the Bible.



CHAPTER NO.	CHAPTER TITLE
2	Who's on your bookshelf?

Recently our family visited Acadia National Park in Maine. I knew the park was big and was excited to explore it. Before we went, we received some helpful intel from people who had visited it already. We also downloaded the app for the National Parks before we left home. When we arrived, we bought a park map from the ranger station as planned. After we set up camp and began exploring, we quickly realized the map we bought wasn't providing all the information we needed. I was glad to know where the bathhouses were, but I also needed to know the distance from one point to another. It showed us the hiking trails, but didn't tell us how long they were. Our map covered the entire park, but we needed a closer, more detailed source of information. The map was thin paper, and with Acadia being on the coast of Maine, we needed something that would hold up to the moisture better. Thankfully, Gil knew there were probably other map options, so he went back to the park ranger station and bought a different one. It was more expensive, but it provided the information we needed. Our apps, maps, field guides, and the information we were given were all *about* Acadia National Park. But each one provided unique content and perspective. In a way, each of these were different **genres** of information about Acadia.

When you begin the journey of understanding the Bible, the first thing to know is that the Bible is a collection of books made up of different genres. **Genre** is a French word which means *kind*. Genres are the section labels you see

around a bookstore or library. There are both major and minor genres in the Bible. The major genres you'll find in the Bible are poetry, historical literature, gospels, letters to individuals and groups of people, and apocalyptic writings. Things like legal codes, genealogies, and lists are minor genres and there are dozens of them in the Bible. We'll focus on the major genres in this book. Learning what genre you are reading is a wise place to start your Bible journey because different types of literature are read differently. For instance, you'd never read a graphic novel the same way you'd read a history textbook, right? For now I'll just highlight the distinguishing features of the major genres found in the Bible, and in later chapters we'll dive into each one.



POETRY

I'm sure you're familiar with poetry. **Poetry** uses words to create pictures that convey emotions or feelings. Poetry does not follow typical grammar rules. This means that poetry may have incomplete or run-on sentences, or contain sentence fragments—basically, poets have permission to do just about

anything they want. Poetry is often used to communicate strong feelings, both positive and negative. The parts of the Bible that are considered poetry are Psalms, Song of Solomon, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations. We can also find poetry *within* other genres, but these are the poetic *books* of the Bible. It's helpful to know three poetic tactics: similes, metaphors, and personification.

A metaphor compares two things by using the word "is." "America is a melting pot," for example.

A simile compares things using the words "like" or "as:" "My friend sings like an angel."

Personification speaks of an object or idea as if it is a human. In Proverbs, for example, wisdom is described as a woman.

HISTORY

Historical literature gives facts and details about a particular event, group of people, nation, or time period. Biblical history helps us to create a mental picture of the times and places in the Bible. The books of the Bible that are

considered historical are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

These books are where you will find the major narrative portions of Scripture—accounts of God's work in the world and his interactions with people. There is a good bit of overlap between 1,2 Samuel, 1,2 Kings, and 1,2 Chronicles, so if you find something particularly interesting in one book, you can often read more about the same story in another.

GOSPELS

The **Gospels** are biographies of Jesus. A basic translation of the word "gospel" is "Good News," and the Gospels proclaim the good news of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection. There are four Gospels in the Bible, and they are found at the very beginning of the New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, named after the men who wrote them.

For simplicity, we are calling this the "gospel" genre, but technically, the Gospels belong to a broader genre known as "Greco-Roman biography." Generally speaking, ancient biographies start with the birth or public debut of the individual, end with the person's death, and contain selected stories, anecdotes, speeches, and sayings. The Gospels follow this same pattern.

You might come across the term "synoptic" when Gospels are the topic of a sermon or conversation. Matthew, Mark and Luke are often called the synoptic Gospels because they share much of the same stories and timeline. The word "synoptic" is built from two Greek parts: syn + optic. "Syn" means "with" or "together." "Optic" has to do with things that are seen with our eyes. So, "synoptic" means "able to be seen together." You will find a second definition of "synoptic" if you look it up in a dictionary. It can also mean an overview of something. Matthew, Mark, and Luke fit together like puzzle pieces because the writers provide a synopsis of Jesus' life and ministry.

If you read all four Gospels, you will find many of the same stories repeated, and you will find a few differences, too. Think about it like this—if I asked you and a family member to describe your Christmas tree, you might tell me about how tall and wide it is and how heavily decorated it is, while your family member might focus on the number of lights, it's pine tree smell, and the needles it drops on the ground. You both have accurately described the same Christmas tree, but you have told me two different perspectives. Also, each Gospel was written for a specific audience. So, each author determined the information most helpful for that particular group of readers.

¹ <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/synoptic-gospels>