



GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

Old Testament—The Writings



Community
Bible
Experience



DEAR GROUP LEADER,

We're delighted that you're a part of Community Bible Experience.

"Reading big" for eight weeks will stretch your group in powerful ways. This guide has everything you need to lead them through this eight-week journey.

Whether you find the prospect of reading the Old Testament exciting, daunting, or maybe a bit of both, we promise you this: it may not be easy, but when we immerse ourselves in the redemptive drama of God's Word, we'll discover our place in his story.

You don't have to have all the answers to be a great discussion group leader. Just think of your weekly gatherings more like a book club than a traditional Bible study, and come ready to explore the Bible with your fellow readers.

Thank you for sharing this journey with us.

CONTENTS

About this journey

A better Bible experience	4
How it works	4
The Books of the Bible	5

Preparing for the journey

The Writings reading plan	
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Weekly discussion guides

Week 1: Psalms
Week 2: Psalms
Week 3: Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Songs
Week 4: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes
Week 5: Job
Week 6: Chronicles
Week 7: Chronicles, Ezra
Week 8: Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel

After the journey

Four tips for finishing strong
Oakwood comments on CBE

ABOUT THIS JOURNEY

A better Bible experience

What would happen if we actually read the Bible? Not a verse here or there, but the whole Bible?

What if, instead of going it alone, we could have a real conversation about the Bible—one anyone can join, no matter where they are in their faith journey?

Community Bible Experience is about reading the Bible as it was meant to be read—whole books, in community. It will take your church beyond Bible study, beyond reading in fragments, and beyond reading in isolation.

Discover the complete story. For eight weeks, let's read big, read real, and read together.

READ BIG.
READ REAL.
READ TOGETHER.

How it works

1. **Read big.** You'll cover all that the Jewish Old Testament calls The Writings (Chronicles-Song of Songs, Daniel) in 8 weeks—reading 5 days a week, around 14 pages a day. The average day's reading takes 30 minutes or so to complete.
2. **Read real.** You'll use a groundbreaking presentation of the Scriptures, called *The Books of the Bible*. It's designed to feel more like reading the original.
3. **Read together.** Your group will meet once a week for a book club-style conversation about the Bible.



ABOUT THIS JOURNEY

The Books of the Bible

During Community Bible Experience, you'll read from a unique presentation of Scripture called *The Books of the Bible*.

When you open your copy, the first thing you'll notice is that this is no ordinary Bible. There are no chapter or verse numbers. No study notes or cross references. No red lettering.

That's because none of these features are original to the Scriptures. Most were added centuries later to help us find things. But the Bible isn't a reference book; first and foremost, it's a story. It's a collection of books, each of which was meant to be experienced as a whole. Modern Bible formatting imposes a different structure on the text, one that encourages us to read in fragments.

The Books of the Bible is designed to be read from beginning to end. We've stripped away centuries of added formatting, leaving behind nothing but pure Bible text in a presentation that's easier to read and understand.

We've formatted each book so you can see the natural section breaks put there by the authors.

The Books of the Bible features the complete text in the NIV®, the most widely read contemporary English translation of the Bible.

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Five tips for reading

1. **Read what you can.** Don't get discouraged if you fall behind. Keep at it, even if you don't make it all the way through each day's reading. If you have trouble keeping up, listening to the audio version can help.
2. **Read every day.** Plan on reading five days a week, Monday – Friday. The pace is a little intense, but reading large portions of Scripture is also incredibly rewarding. (And remember, you only have to keep this pace up for eight weeks.)
3. **Be fully present.** Avoid distraction while reading. (Turns out we're not that good at multitasking.) Instead, devote your full attention to the text.
4. **Read the book intros.** *The Books of the Bible* includes brief introductions or "invitations" to each book, unpacking the context and literary structure of what you're about to read. Trust us, they're well worth your time.
5. **Don't worry about the parts you don't understand.** The goal is to read big, not to catch every detail. You can always go back and study a specific passage in greater detail later. For now, take in the big picture; let that be your focus for the next eight weeks.

I really looked at the Bible differently by reading for the "big picture." It was good for me to put all the pieces in one "connected" story.

– an Oakwood participant

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Planning your weekly gatherings

Small groups/"book clubs" should meet once a week during Community Bible Experience. The next few pages cover some of the basics to help you make the most of your weekly gatherings.

When should we meet?

Any time during the week works—just jump in and discuss what you've read since your last time together. Weekends are most aligned with the sermon series. There are no readings assigned for Saturday and Sunday, which makes the weekend a good time to get together.

How often should we meet?

Plan on meeting eight times during your reading campaign. Some groups enjoy a final wrap-up celebration together after they've completed the eight weeks.

How much time should we spend together?

Most discussion groups meet for 60 – 90 minutes each week, but feel free to adjust this based on the needs of your group.

What will we cover?

Here's a general outline of each week's discussion time, which you can adapt as needed:

- Introduction (15-20 minutes, first week only)
- Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)
- Preparing for the week ahead (15-30 minutes)

See pages 14–21 for a week-by-week guide.

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Five conversation starters

Each week, participants will share their reflections on the text with their discussion groups, using these five simple prompts:

1. What's something you've noticed **for the first time**?
2. What **questions** did you have?
3. Was there anything that **bothered** you?
4. What did you learn about **loving God**?
5. What did you learn about **loving others**?

OK, these are a bit different from your average Bible study questions. Then again, this isn't your average Bible study. When people read whole books of the Bible, they notice things for the first time. They may have questions they never thought to ask before. They may even come across things that trouble them. These discussion prompts are meant to help readers navigate the text without giving them all the answers. They're an invitation to wrestle with the Bible and ponder its implications for how we live.

Encourage your group to treat weekly gatherings more like a book club than a Bible study, to allow the discussion to be free-flowing and wide-ranging.

I so enjoyed hearing
how fellow believers
wrestled with God's
Word and being
able to discuss our
struggles out loud.

– an Oakwood participant

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

Five tips for weekly gatherings

This may be one of the easiest discussion groups you've ever led. You don't have to have all the answers; you just need to get the ball rolling each week. Chances are, participants will come full of things to talk about. Here are five tips for a great book-club experience.

1. Don't stress.

You don't have to do any advance preparation to lead your group on this journey. Just do your best to keep up with each week's reading.

2. Think "book club."

Participants will come with different perspectives, backgrounds, and assumptions. Some may be new to the Bible; others may be lifelong students. Your job isn't to settle every debate or answer every question. Let the Bible speak for itself, and let each person absorb the story as it unfolds. Group members may come to each week's gathering with lots of specific questions. That's OK! Try to focus your conversation on the big picture—where the overall story is moving and the part we're invited to play in it. To help, you can suggest your group keeps a "parking lot" list of questions to explore further after your eight-week journey.

3. Give everyone a voice.

Encourage everyone to join the conversation, but don't pressure someone to share if they don't want to. Make sure no one inadvertently monopolizes the conversation. If they do, invite some of the quieter participants to chime in.

4. Share the reins.

Anyone can facilitate a Community Bible Experience discussion group. If you feel like a change of pace, give yourself the night off and invite another member to guide the conversation.

5. Watch the overview videos together.

There are overview videos for each book from [The Bible Project](#). (Select the video that aligns with the reading, or else view videos at the YouTube links provided on pp. 14-21). Take a few moments to watch these videos together, so you can prepare for what you're about to read, or are currently reading. We'll indicate in the weekly discussion guide when to view one of the videos.

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The Writings—Old Testament

Read five days a week, Monday through Friday. Most readings take around 30 minutes to complete. Some daily readings are longer or shorter, because each one ends at the close of a book or a natural section break within a book. Section breaks are indicated by line spaces—the bigger the space, the bigger the break.

Week 1: Psalms

As we begin the book of Psalms this week, we'll be reading different psalms (song lyrics) that describe the broad range of experiences the people of Israel had in their covenant journey with God.

Day 1	pages 1-16
Day 2	pages 17-31
Day 3	pages 23-48
Day 4	pages 49-57
Day 5	pages 58-70

Week 2: Psalms

This week, we'll continue to read the psalms. Note that the entirety of Psalms is divided into five "books," reminding us of the five books of the Torah. The bulk of our reading this week will be from the third book (chapters 73-89), which recalls the situation of the exile, and from the fourth book (chapters 90-106), which remind us the Lord still reigns.

Day 6	pages 71-85
Day 7	pages 85-99
Day 8	pages 99-108
Day 9	pages 108-130
Day 10	pages 130-142

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The Writings—Old Testament

Week 3: Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Songs

We'll begin this week with a reminder of just how incredible God's Word is and all the ways it delights us. Once we've finished the Psalms, we'll move to a series of lament-songs tied to when Babylon conquered Jerusalem, reminding us that expressing anguish over a broken, fallen world is a legitimate part of the biblical drama. And then we'll finish the week with a series of wedding songs.

Day 11	pages 143-152
Day 12	pages 152-164
Day 13	pages 164-175
Day 14	pages 177-194
Day 15	pages 195-208

Week 4: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

This week, we switch types of literature (genres) and move to the book of Proverbs: a collection of compact, memorable sayings that reflect the experience of living in God's orderly world and are expressed as proverbs, parables, sayings and riddles, with a focus on "the fear (reverence/awe) of the Lord." We'll then dive into Ecclesiastes, reading a series of individual reflections and conclusions about life from the point of the Teacher, alternating between poetry and prose, demonstrating a "crookedness" that has come into this good world.

Day 16	pages 209-225
Day 17	pages 225-237
Day 18	pages 237-249
Day 19	pages 250-268
Day 20	pages 269-288

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The Writings—Old Testament

Week 5: Job

The book of Job explores the suffering of righteous people using a literary form comprised of an extended conversation among people who take turns giving poetic speeches. Job speaks to a universal question of good and evil in a universe governed by a good God.

Day 21	pages 289-303
Day 22	pages 304-314
Day 23	pages 314-328
Day 24	pages 328-337
Day 25	pages 337-355

Week 6: Chronicles

The Chronicler is addressing post-exilic Israel and the question of continuity with the past: Is God still interested in us? Are His covenants still in force? Now that we have no Davidic king and are subject to Persia, do God's promises to David still have meaning for us? Take note of how the author of Chronicles writes to sustain Israel's hope for the promised Messiah.

Day 26	pages 357-371
Day 27	pages 371-382
Day 28	pages 382-394
Day 29	pages 394-409
Day 30	pages 409-412

PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY

The Writings—Old Testament

Week 7: Chronicles, Ezra

This week, we'll finish Chronicles and keep right on going into Ezra. Notice how the end of 2 Chronicles overlaps with the beginning of Ezra as we read about the experience of the returning exiles.

Day 31	pages 412-429
Day 32	pages 429-439
Day 33	pages 439-448
Day 34	pages 448-463
Day 35	pages 463-480

Week 8: Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel

This week, we'll wrap up the Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah narrative and move to the book of Esther, a fast-moving narrative of events that occurred to Jewish exiles in Persia. We end with Daniel, which employs two types of literature: narrative and apocalypse. The book served (and serves) to encourage God's people to persevere in their loyalty to the true Ruler over the earth and to His covenant.

Day 37	pages 480-490
Day 37	pages 490-502
Day 38	pages 503-515
Day 39	pages 517-531
Day 40	pages 531-541

WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 1: Psalms

Introduction (15-20 minutes)

Be sure to cover the following points at your first gathering:

- Introduce Community Bible Experience by sharing the information on pages 4-6 of this guide.
- Discuss the challenge of reading 14 pages a day. Remind participants that most readings take around 30 minutes to complete—about the same time it takes to watch a short TV show.
- Invite each group member to share what they hope to get from their journey through The Writings of the Old Testament.

Reflecting on the previous week (variable minutes)

Depending upon when you meet, there is either no prior reading to discuss this week or a portion. Plan accordingly! Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to the Psalms by watching the [video overview](#), part of the “Read Scripture Old Testament” series produced by The Bible Project.

Encourage your group to take the time to read the Invitation to the Psalms on pp. 1-2 in *The Books of the Bible—The Writings*.

Remind your group that each Sunday's sermon will preview the week's reading in advance.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 2: Psalms

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Lamentations and Song of Songs for next week by choosing one of these two video overviews to watch, encouraging your group to watch the other one on their own.

for [Lamentations](#), part of the “Read Scripture Old Testament” series produced by The Bible Project.

for [Song of Songs](#), part of the “Read Scripture Old Testament” series produced by The Bible Project.

Encourage your group to read the Invitations to Lamentations and Song of Songs on p. 177 and p. 195-196.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 3: Psalms, Lamentations, Song of Songs

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes by choosing one of these two video overviews to watch, encouraging your group to watch the other one on their own.

for **Proverbs**, part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

for **Ecclesiastes**, part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

Encourage your group to read the Invitations to Proverbs and Ecclesiastes on pp. 209-210 and pp. 269-270.



WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 4: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Job by watching [this video](#), part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

Encourage your group to read the Invitation to Job on pp. 289-290.



WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 5: Job

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Chronicles by watching [this video](#), part of the “Read Scripture Old Testament” series produced by The Bible Project.

Encourage your group to read the Invitation to Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah on pp. 357-359.



WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 6: Chronicles

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Ezra-Nehemiah by watching [this video](#), part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

If they haven't yet, encourage your group to read the Invitation to Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah on pp.357-359.



WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 7: Chronicles, Ezra

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Preparing for the week ahead (15-20 minutes)

Introduce your group to Esther and Daniel by choosing one of these two video overviews to watch, encouraging your group to watch the other one on their own.

for [Esther](#), part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

for [Daniel](#), part of the "Read Scripture Old Testament" series produced by The Bible Project.

WEEKLY DISCUSSION GUIDES

Week 8: Nehemiah, Esther, Daniel

Reflecting on the previous week (30-60 minutes)

Use the conversation prompts on page 8 of this guide, if needed.

Final Reflections (15-20 minutes)

Give each person a chance to verbally share how their journey through The Writings of the Old Testament has:

impacted them,

shaped their understanding of the Bible,

prompted change in their life,

caused them to love God more,

caused them to love others more.

Ask each person to also write down their responses to those same questions. As the leader, collect those responses in an envelope and give to the church office. Prayerfully rejoice!

Wrap up your study by watching this video on [“Literary Styles in the Bible,”](#) produced by The Bible Project.

And don't forget to CELEBRATE your achievement together! Reading through The Writings of the Old Testament in just eight weeks is a major accomplishment!

AFTER THE JOURNEY

Four tips for finishing strong

Here are four things you can do to finish your Torah journey as strong as you started it:

1. **Encourage everyone to finish.**
If some participants feel behind in their reading that's OK. Encourage everyone to keep reading through The Writings of the Old Testament, even if it takes an extra week or two.
2. **Take time to reflect.**
Try to meet one last time after the campaign is done, if possible, so everyone has a chance to reflect on their journey and celebrate.
3. **Share your story.**
Your experience can encourage others to try reading the Bible. Encourage members of your group to share their stories by emailing them to info@oakwoodnow.org. Be sure, as the leader, to get written responses to this prompt:

Here's how this journey through The Writings has

impacted me,

shaped my understanding of the Bible,

prompted change in my life,

caused me to love God more

caused me to love others more..

Oakwood comments on Community Bible Experience

"Doing it together as a group meant that we each got different things from it. It was helpful to meet together to discuss it because it let us fill in the gaps of the things that you didn't pick up on when you initially read it."

"I was consistently reading my Bible for the first time in my spiritual walk."

"CBE got me excited about reading the Bible again. I loved the daily emails as well as the audio reading. I liked taking a broad sweep without having to analyze things verse by verse."

"For me, it was the way that CBE was meant to be done in community. I feel we had a chance to experience the love for each other."

"Reading the Bible isn't scary and confusing any longer. It's enjoyable, way less confusing, addicting and wonderful!"

"Scripture is living and relevant. Following Jesus means to do so with others to appreciate fully what the Word says."

"Reminded me of the different angles and views...peering into God's Word and how He speaks from different angles. Wonderful to read in "community," sharing together what God is pressing on our hearts...learning and growing and encouraging each other. Thanks...it's a privilege to follow the King!"

"Not sure why, but the no-numbers, full lines of Scripture swept me up in the story...I commonly inadvertently read further than a particular day's reading! I was much more aware of the original readers and their situation than I've been in the past...and am all the more grateful that God loves us enough to give us His Word in written form."

"This has been an adventure. God's Word has been a feast!"

"The version was easy to read. It was a fresh way to hear and read the Word. Every day some section of Scripture would speak to my heart. I plan to read this version again and use it in devotional times."

This guide was adapted from Community Bible Experience™ *Group Leader's Guide, New Testament Reading Campaign*, along with portions of *The Books of the Bible—The Writings*.

