

LESSON

10

WHY IS THE BIBLE SO HARD TO UNDERSTAND?

TODAY'S

BIBLE BASE

Just for Teachers

Bold Bible Truth **THE BIBLE IS TRUE.**

(2 Timothy 3:16)

“Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ The man replied, ‘How can I, unless someone instructs me?’ ”

(Acts 8:30-31)

- **The disciples didn't fully understand Jesus' parables.**

Matthew 13:36

- **The Holy Spirit helps us experience the truth—including in the Bible.**

John 16:12-13

Create a Bold Classroom Environment

Part of being bold in relationships is staying flexible. As your preteens share what they're *really* thinking, feeling, and experiencing, you may need to set aside part of a lesson to respond to what you hear. Don't brush past a comment like “I'm afraid” or “Nothing matters anyway.” If a significant need is expressed in the room, hear it. Listen to it. Deal with it in the moment, or arrange a next step. You're in this together with your preteens; pay attention to and respond to what they tell you even if the timing is inconvenient.

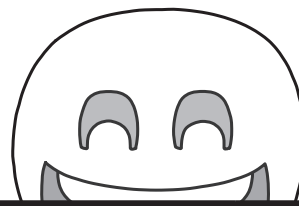
Pray for Your Preteens

Praying that you connect with your preteens in significant ways is a dangerous prayer—because God may well give you those opportunities.

But, if you're willing to walk through the doors God opens into the lives of your kids, ask God for the chance below:



It's easy to give up on reading the Bible. It's a brick of a book, usually more than 1,000 pages, packed with names kids (and most adults) can't pronounce and places that don't show up on Google Maps. It's hard to know where to even start. Today you'll help kids reconsider how they engage with the Bible and send kids home with some practical advice for how to approach God's Word.



THIS LESSON AT A GLANCE

Section	What Preteens Do	Supplies	Easy Prep
Begin Boldly (about 10 minutes)	Enjoy a snack, review BE BOLD Values, report on Mystery Missions, and add questions to the whiteboard/poster board.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BE BOLD Values poster• whiteboard or poster board• paper• markers• snacks	
Game (about 15 minutes)	Play Scrambled Instructions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3x5 cards• pens or pencils	
Question of the Week (about 20 minutes)	Play the Label Game and explore Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian treasurer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bold Action Student Books• pens• 2 chairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tear out pages 37-44 from Bold Action Student Books.
Bold Action (about 10 minutes)	Identify ways to make the Bible easier to understand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bold Action Student Books• pens• scissors• stapler• markers	
Bold Blessing (about 5 minutes)	Receive a prayer blessing and a Mystery Mission.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bible• Mystery Mission Cards• Mystery Mission Stickers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Open a Bible and place it where kids can gather around it.• Fold and seal a Mystery Mission Card for each preteen.



BEGIN BOLDLY (ABOUT 10 MINUTES)

Arrival Activity

Greet preteens with a high-five or handshake. Use each preteen's name.

Have healthy snack stuff on a table.

As kids come in, have paper and markers available. Ask preteens to draw things they use but they don't really understand how those things work. For example: They ride in cars, but they may not be able to draw a diagram showing how an engine works. Allow time for show and tell.

When it's time to move on, collect markers and paper and put them aside.

Welcome Kids

Ask a willing reader to read aloud the BE BOLD Values from the BE BOLD Values poster:

You're accepted just as you are.

We respect each other's thoughts and struggles.

We're all in this together.

God is here, ready to be your friend because you matter!

Say: **I'm glad this is a place where we can share our struggles because today we're talking about a struggle we probably all have—and it has to do with the Bible. We really are all in this together!**

Mystery Mission Reports

Say: **Before we jump into struggles, let's celebrate by seeing how things have been going in the Mystery Mission department. My last Mystery Mission was...**

Briefly share how your last Mystery Mission went, and then ask kids to partner up and report in with one another about their last Mystery Missions.

When they've finished talking, ask if anyone would like to share with the whole group what they talked about in their pairs.

Question Collection

Say: **Thank you! I love hearing about Mystery Missions because I know they stretch you. That you're willing to go out on a limb with Jesus is encouraging to me, so thanks for your example!**

Today we're tackling this question:

Write "Why is the Bible so hard to understand?" on the whiteboard.

Say: **Raise your hand if you've ever heard it's important to read the Bible.**
Pause.

Raise your hand if there's at least one part of the Bible you don't completely understand when you read it. Pause.

Me, too, so here's what we'll do: We'll come up with a list of questions we have about stuff that's hard to understand in the Bible, and I'll give that list to our pastor.

I'll ask our pastor to answer our questions, so ask whatever you want. We'll see how the pastor does!

One thing in the Bible I find hard to understand is...

Jot a question about something you don't understand that's in the Bible on the whiteboard, and then ask kids to call out their questions. Capture the questions on the board.

Say: **Thanks for sharing your questions. I'll pass them along!**

On the board are things in the Bible we don't understand. But there are a couple of things we *do* understand.

First, we know **THE BIBLE IS TRUE. We can trust what we read in the Bible.**



PRETEEN POINTER

Since not every preteen comes each week, let kids talk about their last Mystery Mission—no matter how long ago it was.

TIP

Follow through and give the list of kids' questions to your pastor. Ask the pastor to respond to at least a few of the questions in person at a future class session. If that's not possible, the pastor can shoot a brief smartphone video sharing some responses or send another church leader to your class.

And second, while some details are hard to figure out, we can totally understand the *purpose* of the Bible. It's the story of God's love for us, and the Bible helps us know him better so we can draw closer to him.

Like those things you drew when you first came in, you can use the Bible without having to understand how it all works.

Still, if the Bible is so important, why is it so hard to understand? What's up with that?

We'll explore the question—right after a quick game of Scrambled Instructions!



GAME (ABOUT 15 MINUTES)

Scrambled Instructions

Give each preteen a 3x5 card and pen or pencil. Ask kids to write:

- Two actions people can do in the room such as jumping jacks, running in place, or twirling.
- One number between 5 and 15.

Collect and quickly review the cards. Then explain: You'll mix and match instructions, which kids will then follow.

If kids' suggestions are tame, add spice by mixing in these big-fun actions: skipping around the room, dancing like a ballerina, impersonating a snake, barking like a dog, or reciting the alphabet in the voice of Mickey Mouse.

Have kids stand and spread out.

Say: **When I give you the signal, run in place while also doing jumping jacks for 11 seconds. Go!**

When 11 seconds have elapsed, signal kids to stop. Before they can fully catch their breath, give another set of instructions. Keep this moving fast!

Combine actions that are hard or impossible to do simultaneously. Skipping while doing pushups? That's tough!

After running through the deck of cards, have kids sit and, as a group, talk about this:

❓ **What—if anything—made understanding my instructions hard?**

Say: **Thanks for being good sports. You did great—especially since it was hard figuring out how to do what I asked you to do.**

Running in place while doing jumping jacks? That's a tough one!

Not understanding *me* wasn't a big deal. But what if you're trying to do a school assignment and don't understand the directions? Or you're setting up a new game system and the instruction manual is confusing?

Turn to a neighbor and tell that person about a time you didn't understand instructions so it was hard to do what you were asked to do. As for me,



PRETEEN POINTER

Do give cards a quick review. Pranking others is a preteen specialty; you don't want to call something out only to discover it was inappropriate!

one of those times was...

Briefly share a time you couldn't understand instructions. Share what the situation was and how you felt.

Say: **Your turn now. Tell your neighbor about a time like that for you. Try as you might, you couldn't understand what to do.**

Give kids time to talk, and then ask for a willing preteen or two to share his or her story with the whole group.

Say: **Thank you!**

When stuff is hard to understand, it can lead to confusion and making bad choices. I'll prove it to you!



**WHY IS THE
BIBLE SO
HARD TO
UNDERSTAND?**



QUESTION OF THE WEEK (ABOUT 20 MINUTES)

Distribute pens and page 37 from the Bold Action Student Books to each preteen.

Say: **These are the ingredient labels off four items people buy every day in grocery stores. Get with a new partner and see if the two of you can figure out what products these labels are from. Jot your guesses in the blank lines at the top of each label.**

Allow time for partners to guess, and then continue.

Say: **Now circle the one that you'd prefer to eat. When you've finished, I'll tell you what's for dinner!**

After kids finish, share this information:

Label #1: Campbell's chicken noodle soup

Label #2: Aveeno moisturizing lotion

Label #3: Lucky Charms cereal

Label #4: Purina dog treats

Ask kids to share how many labels they got right and to share what they picked to eat.

Say: **Food labels can be hard to understand, but it's important to know what they say. It's how you can tell what's healthy to eat—and what's not.**

People say the Bible is hard to understand, too, and it's even *more* important to know what it says. The Bible helps us know about God and how to grow in our friendship with him. It helps us be spiritually healthy.

But if you have trouble understanding the Bible, you're not alone.

Jesus' disciples didn't always understand what he was telling them, either, and had to ask for explanations. (Are your preteens curious? Point them to Matthew 13:36.)

And there was another guy who needed help, too.

Recruit three volunteer actors to join you in the front of the room: Philip, the Ethiopian treasurer, and an angel. Tell your actors they're not to speak but will act out actions you describe. Tell the rest of the kids they'll provide sound effects when you signal them to do so.

Have the Ethiopian treasurer stand near you; send Philip and the angel to the far side of the room. Place two chairs side by side so they face the audience, near you.

Say: **Philip was a follower of Jesus living in Jerusalem. One day an angel of the Lord appears to Philip. Make an appearance, angel.** Pause.

The angel says, "Go south down that desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza."

That's all the angel says, but it's enough for Philip, who starts walking toward Gaza. Start walking, Philip. Pause.

Philip's sandals make a "slap, slap" sound as he walks. Let's hear some sandal slapping, sound effects people! Pause.

Philip is sort of hungry, too, so let's hear his tummy grumble. Pause.

As he walks, Philip sees the official treasurer of Ethiopia sitting in a carriage. Sit down, Ethiopian treasurer. Pause.

The treasurer is an important man. Brush off your fancy clothes, treasurer. Adjust your sandals. Pause.

The treasurer had been to Jerusalem to worship, and he's reading aloud from the book of Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit tells Philip to walk beside the carriage, so Philip runs over to the treasurer, sandal-slapping as he goes. Run, Philip! Sandal-slap, sound effects people! Pause.

Philip asks the treasurer if he understands what he's reading.

The treasurer shakes his head, no. Shake, treasurer. Pause. **Shake some more because you *really* don't understand.** Pause.

The treasurer quits shaking and throws up his hands. Pause. **"How can I understand unless someone instructs me?" he asks.**

Then he invites Philip to join him in the carriage. Sit down, Philip. Pause.

Philip tells the treasurer that Isaiah was writing about Jesus. He tells the treasurer about Jesus. Keep talking, Philip. Pause.

When the carriage passes a body of water, the treasurer points to it. Pause.

Philip and the treasurer can hear water rippling in the river. Sound effects people, let's hear some rippling. Pause.

The treasurer tells Philip he wants to be baptized, so Philip and the treasurer wade out into the water—farther out in the water than that—and Philip baptizes the treasurer. Pause.

Lead your kids in giving themselves a hand, and then, as a group, talk about this:

- ❓ **The treasurer was an important, educated person. Why do you think even he didn't understand what he was reading?**
- ❓ **What was the solution to helping the treasurer understand?**

BOLD ACTION (ABOUT 10 MINUTES)

Say: **Thanks for your insights. Here's what I love about the treasurer: Once he understood what the Bible said, he acted on it. We can do the same thing. Instead of waiting until we understand everything about the Bible, we can do something with the parts we *do* understand.**

We talked earlier about what we *don't* understand in the Bible—let's flip that and talk about what we *do* understand.

- ❓ **What's something you understand in the Bible that can change how you think and act?**

Maybe, like the treasurer, if you understand Jesus loves you, you'll decide to be his friend. Maybe if you understand that God wants you to be loving, you can be nicer to your brother or sister.

Allow several responses.

Say: **Thank you for sharing!**

So it *is* possible for us to understand the Bible, at least some of it. Some parts are hard, but the Holy Spirit helps the parts we do understand change our lives.

Still, why *are* parts of the Bible so hard to understand? And what can you do to understand more of it?

One reason the Bible is hard to understand is that it was first written in other languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. People translated it to our language.

Sometimes they translated it using words that are easy to understand, and other times they used words we might not even know.

Give preteens page 39 from their Bold Action Student Books. Ask three willing readers to read aloud the three versions of Matthew 26:63-64 as other preteens follow along.

As a whole group, talk about this:

- ❓ **Which translation of these verses do you find easiest to understand? Why?**
- ❓ **In your own words, what was Jesus saying to the high priest? And what difference does what he said make to you?**

Say: **Thanks for sharing.**

Here's the thing: You've just let the Bible speak to you about something huge. Jesus told the high priest that he *is* the Messiah, the Savior. That



PRETEEN POINTER

When preteens share, affirm them for sharing. And the best affirmation isn't what you say to thank them; it's that you pay careful attention as kids speak.

he *will* again sit at the right hand of God in heaven. And that he *will* be coming back!

Your friend, Jesus, is *God*—and he wasn't just showing up once here on earth. He's returning—for you!

All of that truth in just two verses.

And here's some more good news for you: Jesus has sent someone to help you understand. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit helps us experience the truth—including the truth we find in the Bible.

Have a preteen read John 16:12-13 from the Bold Action Student Book page 39.

Say: ***That's* how much Jesus wants us to know him through his words: He sent a tutor!**

Emoji Book

Remind kids of what they've discovered so far about understanding the Bible:

- Like the treasurer, they can ask for help understanding what they find confusing. That's what your class has done in inviting the pastor or another church leader in to answer questions.
- Like the treasurer, they can act on what they *do* understand, rather than wait until they understand everything before letting the Bible inform their thoughts and actions.
- And they've seen how picking a clear, easy-to-understand translation of the Bible makes it easier to understand what's written.

Explain that they can turn to the Bible when facing hard choices or tough times, and they're about to create an easy-to-keep mini-booklet that will help them know where in the Bible to look.

Have your kids cut and fold pages 41-44 of their Bold Action Student Books to create their booklets. The cover will go on top, but the interior pages can go in any order. Preteens can staple the binding, and then draw an emoji of choice on each page.



PRETEEN POINTER

Many churches and ministries have a preferred version of the Bible. We've found the New Living Translation is age-appropriate for preteens. If you have the opportunity, be sure that every one of your kids has access to that or another age-appropriate translation.





BOLD BLESSING (ABOUT 5 MINUTES)

Pray

Ask preteens to gather around an open Bible and to place their right hands on it as you lead them in prayer.

Pause.

Pray: **God, thank you for the gift of the Bible.**

We want to understand it because we want to know you better.

Your friendship means everything to us, God.

You mean everything.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Send-Off Cheer

Have kids stay in a circle and join their hands, like a sports team. Tell them that when you finish the Bold Blessing, they'll raise their hands and shout "Let's be bold!"

Say this Bold Blessing: **You are loved by God. You are chosen by God to be his friends. You are empowered by God to act boldly, speak boldly, live boldly. I know this is true because it's in the Bible—and **THE BIBLE IS TRUE**. Now say it with me: *Let's be bold!***

Mystery Mission

Say: **We discovered today that **THE BIBLE IS TRUE** and we don't have to understand everything in the Bible to act on the parts that we do understand.**

There's life-changing truth in the Bible. Keep that in mind as you take on your mission this week.

I'll now give you a sealed card that contains your top-secret mission. Don't open it until you get home. Keep it with your Emoji Book. You'll need both of them.

We'll talk about what happened the next time we get together.

Distribute a Mystery Mission Card to each preteen. Take your own card home and complete the challenge, too!



