

# WHAT BETH MOORE CAN TEACH US ABOUT BIBLE STUDY

**What does Scripture say about her popular teaching, characterized by biblicism, spiritual warfare, mysticism, and pop psychology?**



**B**eth Moore has been a prominent and popular author of Bible studies and books for over a quarter of a century. Halee Gray Scott, a former atheist, was a new Christian who came under Moore's sway. "When I completed a Beth Moore Bible study at age 21, I was no more than two months into my new faith, a former atheist with a long history of living however I pleased," Scott writes in her article, "First Came the Bible" in *CHRISTIANITY TODAY*. "Moore's study had me searching the Scriptures at least five times a week. Her enthusiasm for God's Word convinced me that the seemingly stiff, impenetrable book had legs—that its insights could actually make a difference in my everyday life."

Scott points to four main themes that permeate Moore's work: biblicism, spiritual warfare, mysticism, and popular psychology. What place should they hold in our approach to Scripture and Bible study? Is Beth Moore on the right track? This Bible study's goal is to find the biblical foundations of these themes, with a view to responsible application in our Christian lives.

**Scripture:** Genesis 22:1–19; 32:22–30; Exodus 3:1–6; Acts 10:9–23; Ephesians 6:10–20; Colossians 3:1–17; 2 Timothy 3

**Based on:** "First Came the Bible," by Halee Gray Scott, *Christianity Today*, August 2010

# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE FOR A GROUP STUDY



This Bible study can be used for an individual or a group. If you intend to lead a group study, follow these simple suggestions.

- 1** Make enough copies of the article for everyone in the group. If you would like your group to have more information, feel free to copy the leader's guide for them as well.
- 2** Don't feel that you have to use all the material in the study. Almost all of our studies have more information than you can get through in one session, so feel free to pick and choose the teaching information and questions that will meet the needs of your group. Use the teaching content of the study in any of these ways: for your own background and information; to read aloud (or summarize) to the group; for the group to read silently.
- 3** Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting people to open up.
- 4** When working through the questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for your group to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
- 5** Begin and end the session in prayer.

## Part 1 IDENTIFY THE CURRENT ISSUE

*Note to leader: Provide each person with "First Came the Bible" from CHRISTIANITY TODAY, included at the end of this study.*

Beth Moore is a dynamic teacher and sincere servant of Jesus Christ. Scott notes, however, that her teachings and influence emerge from a particular set of circumstances and an individual context. "Writers, teachers, and leaders," Scott says, "share an understanding that we write, teach, and lead from who we are." Since evangelicals believe in the primacy of Scripture in setting our direction for life and faith, how are we to view Moore's four emphases? How do we study Scripture in light of them?

Moore's emphases admirably start with the Bible. What does the Bible say about itself (biblicism), our battle against demonic foes (spiritual warfare), the possibility and limits of personal encounters with and experience of God (mysticism), and human-centered, emotion-based coping strategies (pop psychology)? Can each of these emphases be found in Scripture? And if so, what are some potential pitfalls?

### Discussion Starters:

**[Q]** When you face a personal problem, to whom or to what do you turn for help? Why?

**[Q]** When it comes to evil, do you believe it is an active, personal force outside of ourselves, or is evil our own weakness and sin personified? Explain.

**[Q]** Have you ever experienced God personally in your mind or emotions? How did you know this experience was of God?

**[Q]** How much credence do you give to pop psychologists such as Dr. Phil, Dr. Ruth, Dr. Laura, or "Dear Abby"? How much wisdom is available from such people?

**Optional Activity:** *Leader—before your group meets, go to your church library or local Christian bookstore. Take an inventory of the books that cover biblicism, spiritual warfare, mysticism, and pop psychology. Discuss which emphases predominate, and why. What might your church community be missing out on?*

## Part 2 **DISCOVER THE ETERNAL PRINCIPLES**

### **Teaching Point One: God's Word is a trustworthy guide for our lives.**

Beth Moore's first teaching emphasis is biblicism, or a deep confidence in God's Word. "She uses commentaries and concordances when writing her studies," Scott reports, "but she relies primarily on her own intuition when interpreting and applying Scripture. In *Believing God*, she writes, 'In my personal research, I get a little worried when I can't get Scripture to teach Scripture. If I can find no other scriptural back-up, I tend to think I am better off accepting by faith what I cannot explain by reason and leaving it to God. I do not pretend to understand everything in the Bible, but many precepts are affirmed often enough to warrant deep roots in our belief systems.'"

Read 2 Timothy 3.

**[Q]** Paul lists character qualities and actions that reveal godlessness in the last days (vv. 1–9). Make a list of all that you can find here. How many of these characterize your life?

- What are we to do with such people (v. 5b)? What will happen to such people (v. 9)?
- What lack do the deceivers and the deceived share in common?

**Leader's Note:** *Lack of love for God and his Word.*

**[Q]** Make a new list of the things Timothy has seen in Paul (vv. 10–17). Give each item a modern-usage synonym.

**[Q]** Why does Paul ask Timothy to consider his personal example? Could we do the same?

**[Q]** What are believers promised (v. 12)? What are unbelievers promised (v. 13)? Which is worse? Why?

**[Q]** What is Timothy urged to do (v. 14)? Why? How might that apply to us?

**[Q]** How do the Scriptures produce wisdom for the faithful? Can you have faith without wisdom, or vice versa?

**[Q]** What makes Scripture different from all other sources of wisdom (v. 16)?

### **Teaching Point Two: We are in a spiritual battle and need spiritual weapons to fight it.**

Moore's commitment to the Bible has not led to a dry application of verses to the multitude of problems that confront us in life. She knows that personal and relational wholeness are not

simply a matter of good intentions and willpower, or even obedience (though that is always a good place to start). Sometimes the battle is waged not just in the heart but in the heavenlies.

“The publication of *Breaking Free* marked a critical change in the direction of Moore’s teaching,” Scott says. “In it she turned from teaching traditional Bible study classes to teaching believers how to find release from any bondage or ‘captivity that hinders the abundant and effective Spirit-filled life God planned for him or her.’ While she continues to write topical studies and profiles of biblical figures, generational strongholds and bondage are prominent themes in her work, particularly in *Breaking Free*, *Praying God’s Word*, and *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*.”

Read Ephesians 6:10–20.

**[Q]** We are told to be strong in the strength of the Lord (v. 10) and to put on his armor to protect us against the devil (v. 11). Why didn’t Paul tell us to put on our own armor? What might be examples of our own armor?

**[Q]** Who are our foes (v. 12)? Does this mean we are to look for “a demon under every bush” when facing psychological or emotional issues?

- What insight does this passage provide when our standard helping techniques fail?
- How do we balance the truths of demonic opposition and psychological need? Why do you think we tend to focus on one or the other?

**[Q]** Paul lists the elements of the armor of God (vv. 13–17). Discuss what each piece represents, and how to appropriate it in your own life. What elements of the Christian life does each cover?

- Which is the only offensive weapon listed (v. 17)?

**[Q]** Besides putting on the armor, what else are we to do (vv. 18–20)? What does this look like in your life?

### **Teaching Point Three: When God speaks to his people, the result is always greater faith and faithfulness.**

Moore has, in recent years, also focused on a form of Christian mysticism—the desire to receive extra-biblical revelations from God. Scott says, “Moore claims that God directly communicates with her, such as when she says in the *Believing God* video, ‘And this came as a direct revelation of the Spirit, because this would never have come to me. I know God

spoke this over me as he began turning through a concordance in my mind and I started thinking about one Scripture after another.' In almost every book or Bible study, Moore relates experiences of direct revelation from God or conversations with God."

Different branches of the Christian church view this subject—no surprise—differently. Some say that, with the completion of Scripture, such revelations are no longer necessary. Others say that God still communicates directly to his people, especially in areas where access to Scripture is restricted. Responsible commentators note that if God does still communicate through voices, visions, or dreams, he never contradicts his Word and directs people to it.

Read Genesis 22:1–19; Genesis 32:22–30; Exodus 3:1–6; and Acts 10:9–23.

**[Q]** In the first Genesis passage, the Lord tests Abraham's faith, calling him to sacrifice his son before providing a ram in Isaac's place. What was God seeking in this encounter?

**[Q]** In Genesis 32, Jacob wrestles with God's angel and receives God's blessing. What do you think that was about?

**[Q]** In Exodus 3, Moses is surprised by the presence of God, and it changes his life. How does sensing God's presence in the daily activities of life affect our priorities?

**[Q]** In Acts 10, God tells Peter it is time to receive Gentiles as full brothers and sisters in the faith. Why did God have to go to such "trouble" to convince Peter of this change in course? Has God ever used something dramatic to get your attention?

#### **Teaching Point Four: Christians are to live like who we are.**

Scott notes that Beth Moore has begun adding pop psychology to her pedagogical quiver. While pop psychology has undeniable (and culturally conditioned) limitations, there are lessons Moore has learned in her life that can be applied to others. "Moore's works have always been therapeutic in that she demonstrates a consistent concern for freedom and healing in her own life and the lives of her readers," Scott says. "But in these recent books, Moore focuses more on popular psychology and personal experience than on the Scriptures."

But personal experience can only take us so far in Bible study, as good as God may have been to us. We need to know not only that he can heal and deliver, but when and why. We need to grasp what he expects of us, in both words and pictures. This passage can help. Read Colossians 3:1–17.

**[Q]** Paul describes believers in two ways (vv. 1–4): dead to our old life, and raised with Christ. This status causes us to live differently. Such living begins in our mind. What verbs does Paul use to encourage us to think about our new condition? How do we do these things?

**[Q]** Though we have died with Christ, our sin lives on, at least partly; otherwise, we would not have to put it to death (vv. 5–11). List the things we are called to kill in our lives.

- Why is it so hard to do this? What might be some strategies to help us?

**[Q]** After speaking negatively, Paul switches to the positive, urging us to put on good things, to live in the resurrection we have already received (vv. 12–17). Which of these involve attitudes of the heart, and which involve actions? Why must we put on both?

### Part 3 **APPLY YOUR FINDINGS**

The Bible is the main source of our knowledge about God and the Christian life, as 2 Timothy 3:16 says. And yet it is not simply a textbook that we read and memorize to “get best results.” Some parts of Scripture are clearer than others, and people are complex, multifaceted beings created in the image of God. We live in a messy, oft-confusing world in which things are not always what they appear. So to some extent we must also look to non-scriptural (not necessarily unbiblical) sources for knowledge and growth.

This study looks at four such sources: the Bible, spiritual warfare, mysticism, and pop psychology. While the last three are subject to debate among Christians, the Bible gives us the context and guidelines we need to evaluate them critically. They are neither completely good nor completely bad if we keep God's Word in charge. May it, the community of God, and his Spirit guide us as we seek his wisdom and discernment and draw closer to the God of all comfort.


**Action Point:** *Draw up a list of examples from your own life following the outline Paul gives in 2 Timothy 3:10–11. Spend time in private prayer reflecting on how God has used you in areas where you see godliness in action, and ask for his help and forgiveness in those where you don't.*


— *Stan Guthrie is author of the forthcoming All That Jesus Asks: How His Questions Can Teach and Transform Us (Baker). A CT editor at large, he writes a monthly column for [BreakPoint.org](http://BreakPoint.org) and blogs at [stanguthrie.com](http://stanguthrie.com).*


## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES


### [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com)

- **Understanding and Applying the Bible:** This Spiritual Formation e-Booklet will help individuals learn how to get the most out of reading and studying the Bible with the goal of getting to know God better.
- **Become a Literate Christian:** Looks at the importance of understanding the Bible and classic texts to deepen your faith.
- **Can I Trust My Bible?:** Discusses inerrancy and truth in Scripture.
- **The Fascination with Secular Spirituality:** Compares trendy spirituality with the Bible and church tradition.
- **Spiritual Warfare:** This 6-session study looks at how we are to take up the “whole armor of God” so that we might stand and fight in the evil day.

 **Understanding and Applying the Bible**, by Robertson McQuilkin (Moody, 1992). A classic text on biblical hermeneutics and the Christian life.

 **Deep Wounds, Deep Healing: Discovering the Vital Link between Spiritual Warfare and Inner Healing**, by Charles H. Kraft (Vine Books, 2004). An expert on the demonic applies his knowledge to the problems Christians face.

 **The Pursuit of God**, by A. W. Tozer (CreateSpace, 2010). How do we not only know God, but experience him in our lives?

 **Inside Out**, by Larry Crabb (NavPress, 2007). A thoughtful exploration of the biblical basis for psychological insights.

 [www.lproof.org](http://www.lproof.org) is Beth Moore's website.





**Biblicism, Mysticism, and Moore:** Beth Moore's teachings are rooted in Scripture, though she's primarily self-taught.

# First Came the Bible

Four themes that characterize Beth Moore's teaching. By Halee Gray Scott

**I** WASN'T FAR ALONG in my Christian journey when I first came across the works of Beth Moore. When I completed a Beth Moore Bible study at age 21, I was no more than two months into my new faith, a former atheist with a long history of living however I pleased. Moore's study had me searching the Scriptures at least five times a week. Her enthusiasm for God's Word convinced me that the seemingly stiff, impenetrable book had legs—that its insights could actually make a difference in my everyday life.

In 1984, Moore began teaching an aerobics and Bible study class for women. Aerobics was eventually dropped, and women began asking her for homework "like all the other classes have." In response to their request, Moore wrote what would later become her first published Bible study, *A Woman's Heart, God's Dwelling Place*, which focuses on the construction of the Old Testament tabernacle.

Since then, Moore has become a prolific writer, composing more than 20 best-selling books and Bible studies ranging from profiles of heroic biblical figures to topical studies such as *Breaking Free*, *Believing God*, *Living Beyond Yourself*, and *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*. In addition to her Bible studies, Moore has written poetry and about

topics such as motherhood, insecurity, how to pray God's Word, and finding freedom from oppressive situations.

Four fundamental themes are threaded throughout Moore's various writing genres: biblicism, spiritual warfare, mysticism, and, more recently, popular psychology.

## **BIBLICISM**

Moore is truly a Bible teacher. Her teaching is rooted in her strong affinity for Scripture. She does not show much interest in theology or tradition, distrusting the way the academy has, at times, handled the Bible. "Godless philosophies have not been my temptation," Moore comments. "In my life experience, the most dangerously influential opinions have been those held by intellectuals and scholars who profess Christianity but deny the veracity and present power of Scripture." Although Moore believes that seminaries are necessary despite the "stunning arrogance" and "theological snobbery" that reside in them, she argues, "Psalm 131 reminds us that [the Scriptures] are not primarily for seminaries, dissertations, and theological treatments. They are primarily for everyday living on the third rock from the sun."

Moore is primarily self-taught. She uses commentaries and concordances when writing her studies, but she relies primarily on her own intuition when interpreting and applying Scripture. In *Believing God*, she writes, "In

my personal research, I get a little worried when I can't get Scripture to teach Scripture. If I can find no other scriptural back-up, I tend to think I am better off accepting by faith what I cannot explain by reason and leaving it to God. I do not pretend to understand everything in the Bible, but many precepts are affirmed often enough to warrant deep roots in our belief systems."

Moore's strict adherence to biblicism echoes the question Tertullian posed two centuries after the birth of Christ: "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What communion is there between the academy and the church?" Because of this, Moore is not able to draw, as much as she might, on the solid biblical and theological scholarship that emanates from trustworthy seminaries and universities, teaching that actually guards us against heresy and reminds us of the hard lessons of history. Then again, in a culture of disbelief, in a time when many seminaries and universities are indeed questioning the authority, infallibility, and inspiration of the Bible, Moore's passionate defense of God's Word is surely compelling.

## **SPIRITUAL WARFARE**

The publication of *Breaking Free* marked a critical change in the direction of Moore's teaching. In it she turned from teaching traditional Bible study classes to teaching believers how to find release from any bondage or "captivity that hinders the abundant and effective Spirit-filled life God planned for him or her." While she continues to write topical studies and profiles of biblical figures, generational strongholds and bondage are prominent themes in her work, particularly in *Breaking Free*, *Praying God's Word*, and *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things*.

Moore tends to portray humans as victims of sin either through generational strongholds, bondage from past sins, or increasing oppression by Satanic influences. Her primary claim in *When Godly People Do Ungodly Things* is that demonic assault on Christians has reached "a whole 'new' level" because we are in the last days and "must prepare ourselves to deal with the assault that is here and the one that is coming." According to Moore, "ignorance, spiritual passion that exceeds spiritual knowledge, a lack of discernment, and a lack of self-discernment" all lead Christians to sin

or to seasons of Satanic oppression.

Moore's strong emphasis on spiritual warfare sometimes threatens to eclipse the fullness of human fallenness: we are indeed victims trapped in sin, but we are also responsible for our moral choices. Still, plenty in her writings highlights the importance of confession of sin, and Scripture makes clear that spiritual warfare is a danger for Christians. And, as the popularity of Moore's teaching suggests, it is still something Christians wrestle with.

### MYSTICISM

In contrast with Moore's biblicism is her mysticism. By this I don't mean medieval mysticism or new age mysticism, but that which is more broadly understood as faith that includes direct encounters with God. Often, in her teaching and writings, Moore claims that God directly communicates with her, such as when she says in the *Believing God*

## **Writers, teachers, and leaders share an understanding that we write, teach, and lead from who we are, so Moore's trend toward popular psychology is understandable given her own story.**

video, "And this came as a direct revelation of the Spirit, because this would never have come to me. I know God spoke this over me as he began turning through a concordance in my mind and I started thinking about one Scripture after another." In almost every book or Bible study, Moore relates experiences of direct revelation from God or conversations with God.

Moore has been criticized for her involvement in a video titled *Be Still*, which describes the importance of contemplative prayer in the believer's life. According to the teachers in the video, contemplative prayer is slowing down and silencing yourself in the midst of a busy and noisy culture to not only talk to God but listen to him as well. Critics argue that contemplative prayer is rooted in Eastern mysticism and thus not a practice that Christians should engage in. This criticism is part of a larger debate about the nature and necessity of spiritual formation in light of Scripture's sufficiency for knowing and understanding God.

Naturally, repeated references to direct access to God can backfire. Readers may believe that direct revelation is normative,

that a lack of such experiences means something is wrong. And, as with many Bible teachers, it is often hard to discern if something is direct communication from God or simply Moore's thoughts on the matter. But no doubt Moore has a rich and personal relationship with God, and such comments do have a way of modeling what is in fact available to all of us in Christ.

### POPULAR PSYCHOLOGY

A more recent turn in Moore's writing is toward popular psychology, particularly in *Get Out of That Pit* and *So Long, Insecurity*. Moore's works have always been therapeutic in that she demonstrates a consistent concern for freedom and healing in her own life and the lives of her readers. But in these recent books, Moore focuses more on popular psychology and personal experience than on the Scriptures.

Although Moore claims *Get Out of That Pit* is a biblical analysis of the ways people get into "pits" and the ways they can get out, the book is primarily grounded in human experience, though reinforced with an initial word study and peppered with proof-texts.

"Oftentimes," writes Moore, "the precepts I feel the most urgency to teach are those lessons I learned the hard way." *Insecurity* has always been a looming issue throughout her life. In *So Long, Insecurity*, Moore claims that she completed "research" for the book, but the book is mainly composed of her own insights and anecdotes from friends and those who write to her on her blog. The first half of the book is devoted to seven factors that contribute to the insecurity of "the whole mess of us born with a pair of X chromosomes," while the remainder of the book is devoted to finding security in God. To be fair, this book includes a lot of wisdom, but it is long on anecdotes and short on theology and biblical analysis.

Writers, teachers, and leaders share an understanding that we write, teach, and lead from who we are. In this way, Moore's trend

toward popular psychology is understandable given her own story. Throughout her works, Moore is transparent about several traumatic experiences early in her life. She also affirms that she has found a great deal of freedom and healing. So it's not surprising that these experiences shape Moore's approach to the Scriptures and spiritual life in general, and may explain Moore's move toward psychological themes.


### LEADER IN BIBLICAL LITERACY

One hopes that Moore's foray into psychology is just that, a foray. Many professed biblical teachers rely more on popular psychology than on sound biblical analysis, but few can mine the riches of Scripture and apply them to everyday life with the giftedness that Moore has demonstrated over the past 26 years.

Early in her career, Moore said she believed her calling was to enhance the church's biblical literacy, specifically "guiding believers to live and to love God's Word." For many years, Moore remained focused and committed to that calling, and she led a well-ordered, disciplined life in order to do so.

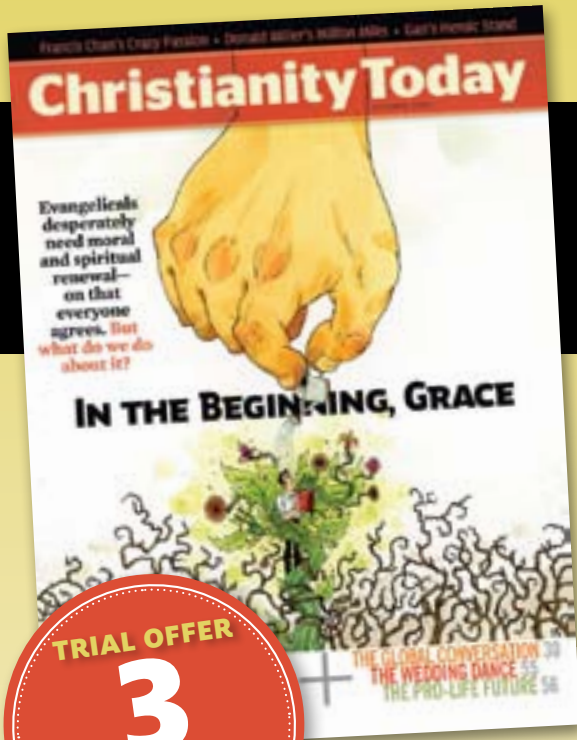
Moore has not only provided a level of biblical literacy for women in a time and place when it is scarce. She also continues to urge women to dig deeply into their Bibles every day, as she did for me as a young believer. She urges women to do their own research, and she has provided opportunities for women to fellowship with one another as they grow in God's Word.

Moore displays a humble heart. She is willing and eager to learn and admit where she errs. She avoids the prosperity gospel and, unlike many popular teachers, is honest about the presence of suffering in the Christian life.

We would do well in our churches to follow her lead, to allow and give women more opportunities to find their callings as teachers of God's Word, and, as Moore writes, to "persist in them." 

**Halee Gray Scott** is a writer and a faculty member at Wesley Seminary and A. W. Tozer Theological Seminary. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Talbot School of Theology, where her research interests include leadership development and spiritual formation.

**Go to** [ChristianBibleStudies.com](http://ChristianBibleStudies.com) for "What Beth Moore Can Teach Us about Bible Study," a Bible study based on this article.



TRIAL OFFER  
**3**  
Issues  
Free!

# WHY YOU NEED Christianity Today MORE THAN EVER

*Christianity Today* remains your indispensable companion as you intelligently engage and influence our world for Christ. With the addition of great new features and a bold, new design, *Christianity Today* is better than ever. Here's some of what you'll find in the new CT:

## **THE VILLAGE GREEN**

Three thought leaders discuss a crucial topic.

## **BRIEFING**

National and world news you need to know.

## **WHO'S NEXT**

Meet the people who shape the evangelical movement.

## **GROUNDBREAKING COLUMNS, ARTICLES, REVIEWS, & INTERVIEWS**

featuring Carolyn Arends, N.T. Wright, John Piper, Dinesh D'Souza, Tim Keller, and many more!



Hear from the men and women who are changing our world and  
**join the conversation.**

# TRY 3 ISSUES FREE!

[www.TryCT.com](http://www.TryCT.com)