

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

GENESIS

A history book, Genesis lends itself to a study based on time, geography, or any of the awesome personalities you'll encounter. Not only is Genesis a record of mankind's beginnings, you'll also find the genesis of most of the Bible's major themes.

GROUND COVERED:

Genesis takes us from Creation to Jacob's family move to Egypt.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

GENESIS 1-3

Dissect the anatomy of temptation, and track the consequences of sin. Have students put everything they learn on a pocket-sized card, and challenge them to not leave home without it (especially on Friday and Saturday nights).

GENESIS 1-11

Find the first mentions of subjects and themes that run throughout the entire Bible, such as obedience and disobedience, grace, covenant, and nations.

GENESIS 12-46

Keep a running list of everything God reveals about himself when he makes contact with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

GENESIS 39

As you follow Joseph's story, note the phrase that goes something like this: "The Lord was with him." Draw parallels between the circumstances around that phrase and the circumstances surrounding your students. Teach them to claim the same promises.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****EXODUS**

Here we catch our first glimpse of what it takes to be a holy people whom God can use. Embrace the details; draw what you see in Exodus, such as the tabernacle and priestly garments.

GROUND COVERED:

Exodus spans from Jacob's family (now the nation of Israel) in Egypt to God filling the movable tabernacle with his glory before the people head to the Promised Land.

EXODUS 6-8,10,14, 16, 29, 31

The purpose of all the incredible events in Exodus can be found in the little phrase, "Know that I am God." Find the various people this phrase was directed to and what actions will lead to our *knowing*. Challenge students to make their lives a tool God can use to help others know that he is God.

EXODUS 32-34

The golden calf incident was a watershed moment. Follow the dialogue between God (what he said and did) and Moses in this tense back-and-forth scene. Students will appreciate seeing God's softer side displayed.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****LEVITICUS**

Welcome to the book most often cited as "That's where I lost it" by those who've tried to read straight through the Bible. Here's the good news: Leviticus can take on new life when we simply track the key phrase (and its variations): "Be holy, because I am holy."

GROUND COVERED:

All of the action takes place at Mount Sinai.

LEVITICUS 11, 19-21

Instances where Israel is told to "be holy" serve as outline anchors for this difficult book. In fact, the difficulty of Leviticus can give students new appreciation for what Jesus has done for them and breathe new life into the "sanctify" verses of the New Testament.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

NUMBERS

What begins as the chronicle of an 11-day journey to the Promised Land becomes the chronicle of a 40-year sojourn in the wilderness brought about by a fateful decision in Numbers 14.

GROUND COVERED:

Numbers covers Israel's departure from Mount Sinai, her wilderness wanderings, and the final stop before the Promised Land.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

NUMBERS 13

Notice how the details of the spy scene give a window into human nature: How easily we suffer from a lack of faith despite God's promises. How easily we look backward when the way forward is laden with giants.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

DEUTERONOMY

This book sets up the remainder of the Old Testament, giving significant insight as to why Israel is either enjoying peace or enduring oppression for the rest of her days.

GROUND COVERED:

All of the action takes place on the plains of Moab in preparation for moving into the Promised Land.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

DEUTERONOMY 4-11, 28

This book's juxtaposition of blessing for obedience versus consequences for disobedience lays the groundwork for the rest of the Old Testament (and also for our lives).

DEUTERONOMY 28-31

Explore God's heart for the things "written in this book." Use this as a catalyst for taking God's Word more seriously in your student ministry.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****JOSHUA**

This book represents the pinnacle of Israel's obedience as they drive out the "-ites" (rather, *most* of the "-ites") and take possession of the Promised Land.

GROUND COVERED:

Joshua picks up just outside the Promised Land and ends with Israel enjoying peace within its borders as the reward for obeying God.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**COMPARE NUMBERS 33:51-56 WITH JOSHUA 9 AND 12-16**

Contrast what God told Israel to do with what Israel actually did. This vivid example of partial obedience will show your students that there's no such thing as "mostly obedient." It's all or nothing with God.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****JUDGES**

Israel cycles from defeat to victory to defeat again, their downfall explained by the key phrase, "Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25, NASB). Judges offers a great picture of the spiritual cycles in our own lives.

GROUND COVERED:

Judges covers roughly 335 years, approaching the time of Samuel, the last judge.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**JUDGES 2-4**

These chapters dramatically display the vicious cycle that runs throughout the book: falling away, oppression, repentance, restoration, and peace. Seeing this cycle can give students insight into their personal "commit-fail-commit" cycles. It can also spark a great evaluation of your student ministry as you find where you are in the cycle.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****RUTH**

Ruth is a love story that takes place during the time of the judges.

GROUND COVERED:

The action occurs during the period covered by the book of Judges.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**RUTH 1-4**

The contents of Ruth are like the stuff of a great movie. In fact, invite your students to make a digital short film of Ruth's story. This will help them live the plight of Naomi, the unselfishness of Ruth, and the redemption displayed in the acts of Boaz.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

1 SAMUEL

Chronicling the transition from the last judge of Israel, Samuel, to the first king, Saul, this book is a great lesson on the consequences that can result from a vacuum of godly spiritual leadership.

GROUND COVERED:

1 Samuel covers 94 years, from the birth of Samuel to the death of Saul.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

1 SAMUEL 8

This powerful chapter documents Israel's insistence on being like the other nations (talk about peer pressure!) and introduces one of the first documented substitutes for God—a king. God's people have been making substitutes ever since. Follow the dialogue between Israel, Samuel, and God in this chapter, and compare it to God's foretelling of this moment in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. Then discuss any substitutes for God that you and your students have locked in on.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 SAMUEL

Watch the rise, fall, and restoration of King David.

GROUND COVERED:

2 Samuel picks up just after David's reign begins and closes just before he dies.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 SAMUEL 6

The return of the Ark of the Covenant under David's reign is loaded with teachable moments, including the sacredness of the Ark, the importance of God's presence, and the value of celebration. And students will have a lot of fun with Michal's reaction to David's celebration.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

1 KINGS

This book begins with one kingdom and ends with two. Subtitle: Lessons on How *Not* to Lead a Kingdom.

GROUND COVERED:

The action extends from the reign of Solomon over one kingdom to the reigns of Jehoshaphat in Judah and Ahaziah in Israel.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

1 KINGS 3

Learn from King Solomon, shortly after he assumed his reign, why wisdom is always a good thing to ask for when you're requesting things from God. In the same chapter, see this wisdom in action as Solomon makes one of the gutsiest calls of all time.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****2 KINGS**

The consequences of disobedience outlined in Deuteronomy come to fruition in 2 Kings. The northern kingdom is conquered by Assyria; then the southern kingdom is conquered by Babylon.

GROUND COVERED:

The book opens with the two kingdoms divided and closes with the two kingdoms gone.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**2 KINGS**

It's amazing how many of Israel's and Judah's kings are described as doing evil in the sight of God. Spiritual leadership is no guarantee of immunity from temptation. Search the word *evil*, and track what each king did that was so bad in God's eyes.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****1 CHRONICLES**

1 and 2 Chronicles serve as a spiritual editorial on the events in 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, describing many of the same events from a more God-focused perspective.

GROUND COVERED:

With special emphasis on David's reign, 1 Chronicles includes a genealogy documenting the entire history of Israel (and the world), from Adam to the return of God's people from exile.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**1 CHRONICLES 17**

Track God's response to David when he expresses his desire to build him a house.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 CHRONICLES

This book parallels 1 and 2 Kings, with emphasis on Judah's few good kings who brought reform and revival to the land.

GROUND COVERED:

2 Chronicles opens during Solomon's reign, documents the kings of Judah through that nation's fall, and closes with Cyrus' announcement that the Jewish people can return to Jerusalem.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 CHRONICLES 14-20, 23, 27, 29-32, 34-35

These chapters document the handful of revivals Judah enjoyed. Look for the actions and prayers of the leaders, and process with your students how these reveal what God desires from us before he will bring spiritual revival and awakening.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

EZRA

Through the prophets, God told his people that they would return from Babylon to their land after 70 years. Ezra records how God made good on that promise.

GROUND COVERED:

The book begins with the first two waves of captives leaving Babylon and ends with God's people reestablishing life and spiritual order in the land.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

EZRA 9-10

After God's people returned to their land, their obedience to and reverence for God were high. These chapters provide a great model of what a group of people can do when they realize they've drifted from God's plan. Find the trespasses, the *uh-oh* moments, the response of the leaders, and the response of the people.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****NEHEMIAH**

Whereas Ezra was a catalyst for restoring life and spiritual order after the exile, Nehemiah was a catalyst for restoring physical order as he rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem.

GROUND COVERED:

The book takes place after the exile and records the final action in the Old Testament.

NEHEMIAH 7-10

These chapters provide a great how-to for those who have seriously blown it and want to recover lost ground with God. Note the attention to God's Word and appreciation for God's mercies.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****ESTHER**

One of two books without a direct reference to God (Song of Solomon is the other), Esther shows a great picture of God's providence. Meet a brave young woman who was at the right place at the right time to save God's people.

GROUND COVERED:

The entire book takes place during the time of Ezra.

ESTHER 4

Fear. Apprehension. Anxiety. These are just a few of the things we might feel when God calls us to a task. Chapter 4 of Esther offers a great example of someone who overcame these emotions.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****JOB**

Job begins with a strange conversation between God and Satan—a conversation that unexpectedly involves a man of integrity named Job.

GROUND COVERED:

Job likely lived prior to or around the time of Abraham, going by key references in the book, such as measuring wealth by livestock.

JOB 40-42

Explore the back-and-forth exchange between God and Job. See what you and your students can learn about God and how Job handled this test of his faith.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

PSALMS

So far God has been teaching us. Now it's our turn to write back to God. From anguish to praise, Psalms has every human emotion and a wealth of information about God.

GROUND COVERED:

The 150 psalms cover a span of roughly a thousand years, from the time of Moses (Psalm 90) to the return of the exiles (Psalm 126).

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

PSALM BY PSALM

Need an easy Bible study? Grab a psalm—any psalm—and look for these things:

1. What you learn about the writer of the psalm.
2. What you learn about God.
3. Any promises from God that speak to human needs or emotions.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

PROVERBS

Often called the most practical book in the Bible, Proverbs helps us see what righteous living is supposed to look like.

GROUND COVERED:

Most of the proverbs were written by Solomon, during the events covered in 1 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

PROVERBS BY THEME

Pick a topic—any topic—and Proverbs probably has a few practical verses about it. Here are a few words and phrases to get you going:

- wisdom/prudence/understanding
- integrity/honesty
- thoughts/motives
- righteousness
- work
- mouth/tongue
- dissension/temper/hatred
- rich/poor
- discipline/correction/instruction
- pride/humility

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****ECCLESIASTES**

Solomon's grand experiment of trying everything under the sun brought him back to what's really important: fearing and obeying God.

GROUND COVERED:

Ecclesiastes likely covers the late years of Solomon's life, recorded in 1 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**ECCLESIASTES 4**

The backdrop of hopelessness in this chapter offers a striking contrast to the hope we find in Christ. Compare the oppression, discontent, and loneliness of Ecclesiastes 4 with Jesus' messages of freedom (Luke 4:18-19), contentment (Luke 18:18-23), and unity (John 17:20-21).

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****SONG OF SOLOMON**

The only PG-13 book in the Bible, Song of Solomon is a great metaphor for the love between God and His people.

GROUND COVERED:

The action takes place during the reign of Solomon, recorded in 1 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**SONG OF SOLOMON**

This entire book can serve as a basis for your sex and dating series. Consider this breakdown:

Dating/courtship: Chapters 1-2

Marriage: Chapters 3-4

The give-and-take of love: Chapters 5-6

Deepening, adoring love: Chapters 7-8

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****ISAIAH**

The "mini-me" book of the Bible, Isaiah contains 66 chapters; its first 39 chapters prophesy justice and judgment, while the last 27 prophesy hope in the Messiah. Pretty cool!

GROUND COVERED:

Isaiah ministered during the era of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**ISAIAH 1, 11, 12**

Contrast the spiritual condition of God's people in Isaiah 1 with the restoration promised them in Isaiah 11-12. For some additional play-by-play on Isaiah the prophet, check out 2 Kings 19 and 20.

The word *salvation* shows up more in Isaiah than in all the other prophets combined. Search this word in Isaiah, and lead your students on a rich journey through passages that describe Christ in great detail.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

JEREMIAH

He didn't have a fun job, bringing an unpopular prophecy of judgment for which he was beaten and isolated from his people. But every word of Jeremiah's prophecy either came true...or will.

GROUND COVERED:

Jeremiah prophesied to Judah during the time of 2 Kings, just before and into the Babylonian exile.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

JEREMIAH 13, 18, 24

Through Jeremiah, God used an array of vivid object lessons to show Judah just how badly they had trashed their relationship with him. These object lessons are made-to-order studies that can help your students not only see the situation in Jeremiah's day, but also evaluate their relationship with God in the present day.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

LAMENTATIONS

Aptly named, this book is a lament from Jeremiah over Jerusalem's destruction.

GROUND COVERED:

The prophecy takes place during Judah's exile in Babylon, in the era of 2 Kings and Jeremiah.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

LAMENTATIONS 2-3

God's judgment on Jerusalem was so harsh that it looked like God was the enemy (which lines up with something said way back in Numbers 33:56). Watch as Jeremiah's astonishment at God's judgment morphs into gratitude for his faithfulness.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel was made famous by the dry bones analogy, but the book is more than a skeleton song. Ezekiel reiterates the judgment God's people had brought on themselves, but brings a message of hope and promised restoration.

GROUND COVERED:

The book takes place during the Babylonian exile, between the times of 2 Kings and Ezra.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

EZEKIEL 37

Use Ezekiel's most famous scene (the valley of the dry bones) as a portal into this great book. Explore the preceding chapter (Ezekiel 36) to determine Israel's spiritual condition. Discover just what God was saying through the picture of dry bones. Challenge students to examine areas where they could use similar restoration.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****DANIEL**

During the darkest days of the Jewish people—no land, no temple—God revealed his master plan for an eternal kingdom, bringing hope to those in exile.

GROUND COVERED:

The action takes place during the Babylonian exile, between the times of 2 Kings and Ezra.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**DANIEL 1-2**

Daniel's actions in these first two chapters model how youth can live godly lives in an ungodly culture. Daniel and his friends provide some practical approaches that can be easily imitated.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****HOSEA**

Hosea ministered during the days just before Assyrian captivity. His marriage to a harlot illustrates God's faithfulness in stark contrast to Israel's unfaithfulness.

GROUND COVERED:

Hosea ministered to Israel during the time leading up to the Assyrian captivity, which is covered in 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**HOSEA 1-2**

It's an incredible object lesson—Hosea's marriage to a harlot illustrates God's unconditional love for adulterous Israel. God drives his point further home through the naming of Hosea's children. Discover what God was saying through these names, and then look for the restoration in Hosea 2.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****JOEL**

Joel brings a "get right with God or get left to your enemies" message, using a recent plague of locusts to illustrate what Judah can expect if she doesn't get in step with God.

GROUND COVERED:

Joel's writings give no specific date references, but all signs point to a pre-exilic time period (during the time of 2 Kings).

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**JOEL 1-3**

Search for the phrase "day of the Lord" in Joel. Find out everything you can about that "day," and note what you learn about the traits of God that are found around that phrase in Joel.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

AMOS

Amos was on the scene during Israel's salad days, when the nation prospered. Unfortunately, these weren't her most spiritual days—a point Amos tried to get across.

GROUND COVERED:

The book takes place before the Assyrian captivity (during the time of 2 Kings).

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

AMOS 2

In Amos 1, Amos brings a word of judgment against some of Judah's and Israel's neighbors. In Amos 2, the sights are set on Judah and Israel. Make a list of the wrongs of God's people and draw parallels to how those might show up in our lives today.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

OBADIAH

What started as a scuffle between Esau and Jacob in Genesis became a theme that ran throughout the Old Testament as Israel continued to deal with Esau's descendants, the Edomites. Here Obadiah brings a word against them.

GROUND COVERED:

The action takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

OBADIAH 1

The reasons for Edom's judgment are great warnings for God's people today. The phrase "you should not" is a good clue to look for.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****JONAH**

We know the fish story, but that's often about it. Jonah is a story of faith, in that his message was intended to bring the Ninevites to repentance and salvation. Jonah didn't want their repentance; he wanted to see God destroy them.

GROUND COVERED:

The action takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**JONAH 3**

Once we get past the fish story, there's much more to learn from this book. Notice in Jonah 3 the response of a pagan people to an unpopular message from God. Let this serve as a reconnaissance mission to help your students understand the mindset of unbelievers around them.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****MICAH**

Prophesying mostly against Judah, Micah gave a few nods to Israel as well. Micah railed against the nation's rampant injustice, which stood in stark contrast to God's merciful justice.

GROUND COVERED:

Micah takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**MICAH 6-7**

Micah 6:8 may be the most famous verse from the minor prophets and can serve as a summary statement for following God. As you use this verse as a gateway into the back and forth dialogue between Micah and God, you'll see what really ticks God off.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****NAHUM**

Jonah's message to Nineveh 150 years earlier sparked reform, but it was long gone by Nahum's time. Another of the few prophecies in Scripture directed to the Gentile nations, Nahum decreed that Nineveh's time was up.

GROUND COVERED:

Nahum takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**NAHUM 1**

In this introduction to Nahum's message to Nineveh, we see key traits of God, as well as benefits for following him.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk must have been shocked (“You’re going to do what?!”) when he heard how God planned to deal with the wickedness of his people—by conquering them with people who were even more wicked!

GROUND COVERED:

Habakkuk takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

HABAKKUK 1-3

This prophecy is unique in that it doesn’t address a people, but instead records an exchange between Habakkuk and God. In asking God for an explanation, Habakkuk reflects the hearts of many believers today. This leads him to pray one of the most incredible prayers in Scripture, Habakkuk 3:17-19.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

ZEPHANIAH

The nation of Judah experienced occasional revival and reform. Zephaniah’s presence was likely a catalyst for one of these reforms.

GROUND COVERED:

Zephaniah takes place during the time of 2 Kings.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

ZEPHANIAH 3

As you dissect this chapter, notice how it’s a microcosm of nearly every message from an Old Testament prophet: judgment and then restoration.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

HAGGAI

We all need a Haggai—someone to encourage us to get rid of the distractions and persist in completing God’s work.

GROUND COVERED:

Haggai takes place during the time of Ezra, after the return of the exiles from Babylon.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

HAGGAI 1-2

As you explore these chapters, look for the parallels between the faith journeys of teenagers today and of the people then. Draw parallels between Haggai’s encouraging words and the encouragement needed today.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****ZECHARIAH**

This book is a lesson in how to give spiritual encouragement without sparking a guilt trip. Zechariah motivated the Jewish people to complete the temple for a bigger reason than themselves: The Messiah is coming!

GROUND COVERED:

Zechariah takes place during the time of Ezra, after the return of the exiles from Babylon.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**ZECHARIAH 14**

Explore this chapter with your students, looking for every detail about the new era Zechariah speaks of.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****MALACHI**

How soon they forget. Back from captivity for only a few years, God's people slide into the same patterns that sent them into captivity. Malachi is the last recorded word from God until those hopeful words from a voice in the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near."

GROUND COVERED:

Malachi takes place during the time of Nehemiah.

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**MALACHI 4**

Use this last chapter of the Old Testament to learn as much as you can about the benefits of the coming Messiah.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****MATTHEW**

To leave no doubt that Jesus is the King foretold in the Old Testament, Matthew opens with Jesus' Jewish lineage and continues the king theme throughout his Gospel.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 60s

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**MATTHEW 5-7**

- The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew could be one of the most effective studies you could do with your students. Each section of the sermon (beatitudes, salt/light, and so on) is a made-to-order session.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

MARK

Mark portrays the “serving” side of Jesus—the way he ministered to the needs of people as he preached and taught throughout the land.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 57-67 (the earliest Gospel)

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

MARK 7-8

Perhaps one of the most human pictures of Jesus is that of him sighing. Mark's is the only Gospel to record this. Find these instances in Mark 7 and 8, and explore everything going on in these scenes.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

LUKE

Detail was Luke's thing, in that he set out to give us an orderly account of Jesus' ministry. A Gentile, Luke wrote with Gentiles in mind, specifically Greeks.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 60-65

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

LUKE 15-16

These two chapters present parables that only Luke recorded for us. As you explore these with your students, keep track of *what* Jesus said about heaven and his Kingdom, as well as *who* he said it to.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

JOHN

In contrast to an orderly account, John takes a more thematic approach. His Gospel includes many details not found in the other three Gospels.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 85-95
(the latest Gospel)

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

JOHN 13-17

John's is the only Gospel to record what's known as Jesus' farewell address. Knowing that these are Jesus' final words to the guys who would carry on the work of the Kingdom, explore these words of Jesus with the same urgency that he conveyed when he first spoke them.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****ACTS**

A portrait of God's church in its purest form, Acts gives a great framework for understanding how God mobilizes his people in the era of his Spirit.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 61

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**ACTS 1-2, 8, 13**

These chapters reveal the growth of Christianity as foretold by Jesus: to Jerusalem, to Judea, to Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Use these chapters to show students what can happen when we operate with the power of the Holy Spirit, as promised in Acts 1:8.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****ROMANS**

The Bible's *tour de force* explanation of what faith in Christ is all about, Romans is the book where the New Testament pivots from *what* Jesus did (the Gospels) to *why* (the letters).

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 55-57

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**ROMANS 12**

This one makes the Top 5 Favorite Chapters list of many believers. Let your students experience why as you give them a chance to make it their fave, too.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****1 CORINTHIANS**

There's a lot we can learn from a letter to a church struggling with divisions on the inside and a pagan culture on the outside.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 54-56

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**1 CORINTHIANS 11**

Paul's instructions regarding the Lord's Supper contain details we should never neglect. Study these instructions with your students, and then put them into practice by experiencing the Lord's Supper together.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 CORINTHIANS

After his first letter to these folks, false teachers emerged seeking to discredit Paul and his message. This called for a follow-up letter from Paul and assurance of his calling as an apostle.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 55-56

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 CORINTHIANS 5

Paul's teaching on reconciliation in this chapter can serve as a portal to the larger message of reconciliation that runs throughout Scripture. Explore the who, *what*, *how*, and *why* of reconciliation with your students.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

GALATIANS

Paul reserved some of his strongest and most colorful words to denounce certain practices that had filtered into the Galatian churches—practices that put God's grace at risk.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 49 (ties with James for possible earliest New Testament book)

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

GALATIANS 3

Study with your students the very chapter that may have launched the Reformation, sparked by Martin Luther's study of it. Today's church may not sell indulgences, but we're still easily "bewitched" by the temptation to live by flesh and works, rather than grace and faith.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

EPHESIANS

Not only do you find most of the big themes of the Christian faith in this small book, you'll also find practical ways to live out the big themes.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 60-61

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

EPHESIANS 5

Many of Paul's letters follow a pattern that goes something like this: *Because Jesus has done this for us, here's what we need to do*. Ephesians is a classic example of this pattern. Observe Ephesians 1-3 (what Jesus has done for us) before exploring Ephesians 5 (what we need to do in response).

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PHILIPPIANS**

Peace. Unity. Affliction. Humility. Joy. In the middle of it all—the good and the bad—Paul learned to be content, and he explains to the Philippians just how to do it. (Hint: It has to do with Christ.)

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 61-62

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**PHILIPPIANS 2**

Paul's description of Jesus' actions captures the essence of what it means to follow Christ. As you unpack this passage with your students, explore ways to follow the instruction in Philippians 2:5: "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****COLOSSIANS**

As time went on and people tried to describe the Jesus phenomenon to those who hadn't heard, they sometimes added to or subtracted from the pure message of the gospel. Paul's letter makes it clear that Christ is all we need.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 60-61

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**COLOSSIANS 2**

This could be one of the most valuable Bible chapters for teenagers to "get," as it exhorts them to stay away from hollow worldly philosophies and empty religious rules.

Teach your group to memorize the order of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians once and for all with a mnemonic such as "Go Eat Pop Corn." It will save them hours of page flipping over the course of a lifetime.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****1 THESSALONIANS**

Paul loved these guys and hoped to see them again. Meanwhile, he wrote this letter to encourage them to continue in their steady growth and in their hope of Jesus' return.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 50-51

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY**1 THESSALONIANS 4**

A major theme of the New Testament is this: *Jesus is returning, so constantly do what you want to be caught doing when he returns!* This chapter captures the essence of this theme and offers some great instructions on how to live with one another until Jesus returns.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 THESSALONIANS

A misunderstanding regarding Jesus' return sparked this letter that gives great information and hope about that very return.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 50-51

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 THESSALONIANS 2

This chapter may raise more questions than it answers, which could be the start of an amazing journey as you explore Jesus' return with your students. Next stop, Revelation!

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

1 TIMOTHY

It's good for us that Timothy faced a few challenges in leading the church at Ephesus. It sparked this letter from Paul that provides a framework for church structure and leadership.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 62-63

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

1 TIMOTHY 4

1 Timothy 4:12 is the go-to youth leadership passage, which means your teenagers may be overly familiar with it. But use this verse as a gateway into the rest of the chapter, helping them see why this needed to be said and what Paul was asking of Timothy.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 TIMOTHY

There may not be a better manual for ministry than 2 Timothy. In this ministry manual, we see God's prime instruction to his ministers: Guard the gospel. Why? Because attacks will surely come.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 63-67

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 TIMOTHY 3

This chapter helps us see why the pastoral epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) were necessary. As you explore this chapter with your students, look for the spiritual atmosphere described, along with instructions regarding things learned.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****TITUS**

This small letter makes a huge contribution toward helping us understand what a biblically functioning faith community should look like.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 62-63

TITUS

Looking to establish (or grow) a student leadership team? Make this short book required reading. Work with students to apply the instructions in Titus to the student ministry setting.

The *T* collection: Have your students noticed that all of the New Testament books beginning with *T* are grouped together? Another nice flip-through time-saver.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****PHILEMON**

As Paul goes to bat for a runaway slave, we see a practical picture of grace.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 60-61

PHILEMON

As you explore this one-chapter book, list today's situations that parallel the subject of this letter.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****HEBREWS**

Jewish believers were feeling the heat for following Christ. This letter affirmed to them (and to us) why Jesus offers the better way and is worth the persecution.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 64-68

HEBREWS—*BETTER*

A great way to get a handle on Hebrews is to search for the key word *better* (in most English versions) and see what you learn whenever it shows up.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

JAMES

James is packed with practical instructions on how to live the Christian faith. By simply *doing* the instructions in James, you'll never have to ask what God's will is for your life.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 45-55 (ties with Galatians for possible earliest New Testament book)

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

JAMES 3

The Bible talks a lot about the tongue, but James 3 contains the biggest, most colorful collection of tongue-related instructions and descriptions. Explore every detail—analogies, warnings, commands, and teachings.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

1 PETER

Suffering shouldn't surprise us. In fact, describing persecution and suffering, Peter doesn't say if, but *when*. But he assures us that the blessings are worth the suffering.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 63-64

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

1 PETER 4

Have your students find and mark the *why* and *what* of suffering. This chapter does as good a job as any in the Bible at explaining why bad things happen to good people.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

2 PETER

Like many New Testament letters, this one was written to refute false teaching. Peter backed up the need to adhere to truth with the reminder that Jesus is coming soon.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 63-64

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

2 PETER 1

This first chapter is a great apologetic message from one of Jesus' closest followers—not only for the gospel but for the inspiration of the Scriptures. Explore with your students the list of spiritual virtues that are guaranteed to keep them spiritually fruitful.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****1 JOHN**

In this letter John elaborates on several of the themes he explored in his Gospel.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 85-95

1 JOHN 4

You'll notice that one word shows up more often than the number of verses in the chapter! That's good info to know—and to obey.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****2 JOHN**

Even the strongest and most resolute among us can fall if we don't follow one of the simplest of all commands from God: Love one another.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 85-95

2 JOHN

Compare the false teachings being put forth about Jesus with the false teachings about Jesus swirling around today. Students will see that there's not much difference, making the instructions in this book timelier than they may have thought.

GENRE**BOOK BASICS****PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY****3 JOHN**

This is the smallest book in the Bible, cut short due to high hopes of a face-to-face visit. It provides insight into the life of the early church.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 85-95

3 JOHN

For a short book, this letter mentions a lot of names. Doing a few short character sketches on these people will give you a window into early church life.

GENRE



JUDE

BOOK BASICS

JUDE

The threat from false teachers was so imminent that Jude changed the subject of his letter to warn his readers of teaching that had already slipped in.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 65-80

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

JUDE

Jude's imagery is similar to John's in Revelation. But one of the most striking characteristics of Jude's letter is his use of threes. Look for things grouped in sets of three as you explore this one-chapter book.

GENRE



BOOK BASICS

REVELATION

This prophecy from John comes in the form of a letter written to seven churches, offering the hope of incredible things to come.

DATE LIKELY WRITTEN:

AD 90-95

PORTALS FOR IN-DEPTH STUDY

REVELATION 1-3

Each message to one of the seven churches touches on a key aspect of church life. Every student ministry could benefit from the warnings and blessings in these messages.