



Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, © 2016, 2001, 2000, 1995 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (MEV) are taken from *The Holy Bible, Modern English Version*. Copyright © 2014 by Military Bible Association. Published and distributed by Charisma House. All rights reserved. Scripture quotations marked (NIV) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*®, NIV®, © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. [www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com). The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.® Scripture quotations marked (KJV) are taken from the King James Version of the Holy Bible.

Boldface type in the Scripture quotations indicates the authors’ emphasis.

## **THEOS STARTER PACK** **Toward a Recovery of Essential Christianity**

Edited by Nathan Finochio and Chris Palmer

[www.theosu.ca](http://www.theosu.ca)  
[www.instagram.com/theosuniversity](https://www.instagram.com/theosuniversity)  
[www.facebook.com/theosuniversity](https://www.facebook.com/theosuniversity)

ISBN: 979-8-88769-004-9  
eBook ISBN: 979-8-88769-005-6  
Printed in the United States of America  
© 2023 TheosU

Whitaker House  
1030 Hunt Valley Circle  
New Kensington, PA 15068  
[www.whitakerhouse.com](http://www.whitakerhouse.com)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023931882

No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical—including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system—without permission in writing from the publisher. Please direct your inquiries to [permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com](mailto:permissionseditor@whitakerhouse.com).

# CONTENTS

Introduction .....	7
1. Recovering the Big Story   <i>Nathan Finochio</i> .....	11
2. Recovering the Way We Teach   <i>Scott Bolin and Bryan Vos</i> .....	17
3. Recovering Dogma   <i>Gabriel Finochio</i> .....	27
4. Recovering the Gospel   <i>Thomas West</i> .....	37
5. Recovering Reconciliation   <i>Stephen Wesley</i> .....	47
6. Recovering Apocalyptic   <i>Chris Palmer</i> .....	57
7. Recovering Revelation   <i>David H. Campbell</i> .....	67
8. Recovering Worship   <i>Layla Nahavandi</i> .....	77
9. Recovering the Spirit   <i>John Finochio</i> .....	87
10. Recovering Our Language   <i>Elijah Lamb</i> .....	97
11. Recovering History   <i>Joshua Biedel</i> .....	107
12. Recovering Our Youth   <i>Austin Molt</i> .....	117
13. Recovering the Minor Prophets   <i>Landon MacDonald</i> .....	125
14. Recovering Creation   <i>Matt VanNorstran</i> .....	135
15. Recovering Justice: Doing Good for God's Glory   <i>Christina Crenshaw</i> .....	147
16. Recovering Our Care for the Persecuted   <i>Gia Chacón</i> .....	157
17. Recovering Our Battle Against Sin   <i>David H. Campbell</i> .....	167
18. Recovering the Way We Learn   <i>Corey O'Neill</i> .....	177

19. Recovering Christ as King   <i>Nathan Finochio</i> .....	187
20. Recovering Mystery   <i>Chris Palmer</i> .....	197
Last Words.....	209
About the Authors .....	211

# INTRODUCTION

**I**f you're on social media, you can't escape memes—those images or videos with captions designed to amuse or inform.

Starter packs take memes a few steps further. In its most primitive form, a starter pack is a collage of four images, although sophisticated starter packs can have more. The images serve as essential items that accurately describe the subject of the pack. If properly executed, the carefully chosen images not only point out what's obvious, but also what's ironic and uncomfortable.

At TheosU, we operate a meme page (@theosU\_memes) where we've specialized in starter packs since AD 2020. All our starter packs are hand-crafted using original material and natural components to ensure that our subscribers are getting the most accurate description possible. Our subscribers' favorites include:

- *The Assistant Pastor starter pack*: a 2004 Ford Taurus; a sale in the Kohl's men's department; a notice of overdraft fees from the bank; a pack of Marlboro cigarettes
- *End Time Prophecy Teacher starter pack*: a forty-foot wall chart on the eras of dispensation; a MAGA hat; a shofar; a dress shirt with armpit stains
- *Former Charismatic starter pack*: a John MacArthur study Bible; a flannel shirt; a podcast mic; a *Soli Deo Gloria* tattoo

Like art, they are open for interpretation:

- Assistant pastors are overworked and underpaid.

- ✦ End time prophecy teachers are so fixated on what happens to America and Israel that they lose their self-awareness.
- ✦ Former charismatics turn spiteful toward the movement, demonstrating, once again, the same extremism that got them in the hyper-charismatic ditch in the first place.

The starter pack prompts you to think, “So this is what it’s come to, has it?”

Welcome to *Theos Starter Pack*.

Only, this isn’t a meme. It’s a book.

Instead of an assortment of images, we’ve got an assortment of twenty essays.

In them, our authors discuss a variety of topics we feel are of utmost importance, well-deserving of attention, and essential to Christianity.

The aim of *this* starter pack is to prompt our readers to think about *why* they might think about these topics the way they do. Why are things the way they are? And how has it come this?

Some essays provoke. Some pry. They might make you chuckle with hilarity or cringe with discomfort. Maybe you’ll be consoled or encouraged. Or maybe you’ll take to the Amazon reviews and let your inner Karen rage.

A little backstory.

In 2021, TheosU organized an online conference and invited scholars, pastors, and professors to address theological topics with the local church in mind. For three days, the presenters shared their knowledge and experience. They addressed issues such as deconstruction, the adverse effects of post-modernity, poor hermeneutics, and trends among evangelicals that veer away from the wisdom of the historical church. These things have led to the devaluation and compromise of convention and orthodoxy within twenty-first century, Western evangelical circles.

The response was striking. But questions emerged. Namely, what does tradition say? How exactly has it been lost in local church teaching and practices? Can it be recovered, at least within our milieu?

*Theos Starter Pack* begins to answer those questions, not from self-interest, but from a point of view influenced by the historical church

throughout the millennia. By looking back to examples from early Christianity, each author takes up an issue, airs their grievance, and proposes a solution of sorts that contributes *first thoughts* toward recovering the essential aspect of Christianity they are discussing from out of the clutches of error, ignorance, and indifference.

All that to say, it's a start. A starter pack. The beginning of a discussion about God and theology by an interesting motley crew of Bible geeks and church practitioners—your friends here at TheosU.

The authors have chosen areas where they have already demonstrated competence either through ministry tenure, academic contribution, or professional experience. Some are scholars. Others are pastors. Some are missionaries. Some are teachers. They include social media influencers and Christian advocates. Some authors are funny. Others are earnest. You'll hear sarcasm and savagery, solemnness and sincerity, seriousness and silliness.

And yet they all have something in common: none of them are arm-chair thinkers, calling the plays from their living room couch. Everyone is active in ministry, serving the local church, which they love fervently, despite her imperfections. That love drives each author. Hopefully, it's felt on every page and within each word.

You can read this book however you'd like. March straight through it, like a standard piece of nonfiction, or hop around to essays that grab your interest. The only thing we do recommend is that you read each essay—if you want the total picture this starter pack offers.

Is *Theos Starter Pack* like Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*? John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*? Or perhaps Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*?

Nah. But you'll probably snicker more reading this book.

And who knows? Maybe after reading this, you might be inspired to begin reading works of real theological greatness. That's our hope, at least.

Good studying,

Nathan Finochio and Chris Palmer  
TheosU

# 1

## RECOVERING THE BIG STORY

NATHAN FINOCHIO

**I** was around fourteen years old the first time I heard Pastor Jude Fouquier preach. It was like hearing “Thriller” for the first time. I was in Utica, New York, at Generation Youth Conference hosted by Mike Servello Jr., in a room full of teens from all over the Northeastern United States and Canada. The room was heavy with sweat and carbon dioxide; we had just screamed praise songs at the top of our lungs for forty-five minutes. Now it was preaching time. Pastor Jude, then a forty-year-old Louisiana lightning rod, was loud, hilarious, and passionate. And he talked to us about reading the Bible.

He began his sermon by giving a comedic account of a recent accident he’d had at the gym in which he had managed to drop a fifty-pound weight on his big toe, fragmenting the bone like a well-marked clay pigeon. Upon having surgery to put the bone back together, he was forbidden by doctors to put any weight on it for three months. And being a man who has ants in his pants, he channeled all of his energy into reading the entire Bible in thirty days for three months.



I remember being impressed with the feat and making a mental note as a teenager that I would at some point in my adult years do that very thing, sans complete destruction of the hallux. And I kept that promise when I turned thirty-one—which felt like the right year to do something extreme and manly and daring. And to my surprise, I accomplished the task.

At the time, I lived in the East Village of Manhattan—in a 225-square-foot shack—with my young wife, Jasmine. And I routinely walked across the island every day to a studio owned by my friends in the West Village. I would prayer-walk down 12th Street every day that January and complete my Bible reading in the solitude of the studio. It took about one or two hours, depending on the day, and I quickly became addicted to the sense of momentum at finishing forty chapters a day. That momentum quickly snowballed into half the Bible in fifteen days—an uproarious thought for your average Christian.

It was invigorating.

I'd never been a very consistent Bible reader before, probably because I'm not a nine-to-five kind of guy; I'm more project based. It's how I'm wired—for sprints, not long distances. But I had read the Bible lots and knew the Bible very well as a Bible college grad. Yet I had never read it right through.

What I began to notice during this thirty-day experiment was my attention to things I had never seen collectively. All of my Bible reading and study had been a parsing—it was an examination of the leaves of the tree and not the tree itself. To put it colloquially, I was missing the forest for the tree.

The Bible is a book. And yes, it is also a collection of books. But it's a book—it's one big story.

And I was missing the big picture—not surprisingly, as big things have a way of hiding better than small things. Like the shape of the earth.

As I began to read the Bible quickly in that short amount of time, I began to see the topography of Scripture—the giant movements in salvation history—and couldn't help but note the recognition and repetition of themes that form a thread throughout holy writ. The theologians call this canonical thinking, and it's really helpful as someone trying to interpret Scripture.

Why? Because every verse in the Bible has an immediate context—which helps us determine what that author was trying to say in that specific instance—but also a much larger context, the context of the “*whole counsel of God*,” to borrow from Paul in Acts 20:27.

The Bible patterns itself this way also. David quotes Moses; the prophets quote Moses; Jesus quotes David, the prophets, and Moses; and Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers do the same. This is what scholars call intertextuality; these authors are not only thinking canonically but they are pulling specifically from other inspired sources verbatim and building upon previous Spirit revelation. This is particularly important for New Testament authors like Matthew, who continually employs the phrase “to fulfill what was spoken” as a proof that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. (See, for example, Matthew 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23.) Jesus Himself famously fights Satan with, “*It is written*” (Matthew 4:3–10) and quotes the Old Testament as an authoritative rebuke to Satan’s eisegetical prompts.

The Bible is so large and its genres so varied that the impatient modern reader can easily pass it off as a disjointed, unconnected scrapbook of ancient self-help axioms. And this type of lazy dismissal is at the expense of the reader, who fails to see it as a mosaic or puzzle that forms a large yet overt and clear portrait of a King who loves His people and won’t suffer their unraveling any further.

And reading the Bible in thirty days helps me see the big picture.

Before I started doing *the shred*, which is how I’ve cheekily branded the annual January ordeal online, I too was caught up in a great deal of theological minutiae. I always felt overwhelmed by complexity because in my estimation, there were a thousand hills that I needed to understand and then die upon. I suppose that’s the ideological gymnastic called Bible college in a nutshell. But the Bible is much simpler than that. And seeing the whole tree of redemption helps inform the many doctrines, answering the genesis of them, and giving us the invaluable *why*.

## A CRISIS

The Bible is like Shakespeare—oft quoted, seldom read. I cringe when I hear Jordan Peterson—perhaps one of the greatest Western intellectuals

alive—attempt to quote Scripture. I suppose paraphrasing means the content has actually sunk in, but when the paraphrase is nowhere near the meaning, we have a problem.

The Bible isn't read today—not by our greatest intellectuals and not by our churches. And when it is read, it's apportioned devotionally, as if it's a magic cookie that delivers all of its power in tiny bites. Reading the Bible in any portion is good and little is better than none. But I don't know if demanding that it be magic immediately in isolated, disjointed readings is where its true power lies.

“What does this mean to me?” is not the first question we should be asking of an isolated chapter every day.

At least Peterson thinks on a grand scale in his archetypal approach to the Bible, saying, “This is an ancient book, and if I read as a psychologist I will be able to pull universals from this book.” Some of these observations are fascinating and can be insightful regarding the relational dynamics and possible motivations of such-and-such a character in the narratives. But once again, if we miss the larger picture of Scripture that the authors are trying to paint, we've missed everything. There's no power in understanding Jacob's father wounds; there's power in the personal God of Jacob. The Bible can certainly give you wisdom for living, but to view it only in those terms is reductionistic at worst and self-help at best.

Swinging from the dialectical of Peterson, we grasp the vine of Friedrich Schleiermacher's “Abhängigkeit,” or in lay terms, *the feels*. Peterson doesn't care about the feels; he cares about the facts of reality—and believes Scripture illustrates cold hard truth in its many triumphs and tragedies. If you don't confront the chaos, slay the dragon, and take your pills, you'll end up like Samson.

But the German higher critics like Schleiermacher and Rudolf Bultmann really love the feels, and they believe that you can sense God in the preaching of the Bible even though the Bible is not historically true and is probably just myth. They put a big emphasis on the feelings we get from Scripture.

Enter Jacques Derrida, who believes that meaning is local to the reader. Combine Schleiermacher with Derrida, and you have what constitutes the

average evangelical Bible reader: “The Bible gives me the feels—particularly when I read it as a self-absorbed autocrat who wields all interpretive power injunctively. What this means to me in this exact moment of time, in the midst of my personal and interpersonal goings on, is deeply profound. I don’t care what it means—I care what it means to me.”

And of course, the Holy Spirit gets the credit for this hot mess.

This isn’t happening here and there; this is the dominant practice of biblical consumption, and not just because progressive Christians advocate for this, but because orthodox evangelicals practice this in their pulpits by never letting the meaning of a passage get in the way of a good reboot. The congregation is conditioned by this approach and takes creative liberties devotionally where the preacher exhibits creative liberties homiletically.

Now you might ask, “What exactly are you advocating for here, Nathan? That everyone become a biblical scholar?”

Would that all of God’s people prophesy! But no, that’s not what I’m saying either. Because lots of Scripture is accessible through *prima facie* readings. That being said, it’s also an ancient book, a large story, and we’ll need to be patient in our reading.

So, yes, we need to learn the grammatical, historical, canonical method. We should do our best to become aware of the author’s intent, the intended audience, and the context of every passage. But let’s not forget that the context of every book of the Bible is the Bible itself. And this is where I believe we have lost our way.

Reading the Bible as a whole book immediately decentralizes the individual reader quite organically, in the same way reading any great work of fiction deposes the self-consumed despot and immerses the reader in the world of the characters. We are transported to Canaan by Moses in the same way that we are translated to Narnia by C. S. Lewis—if we will read long enough.