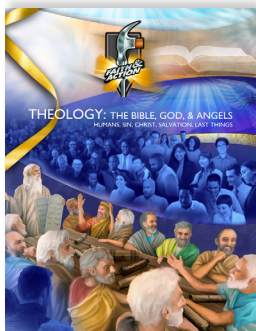
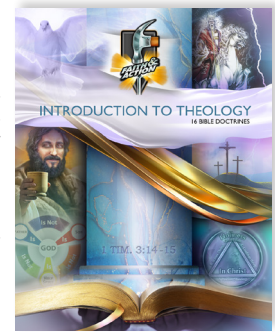


Dear Reader,

We are pleased to offer you this book as part of a series of 3 books on theology. **The first one, *Introduction to Theology*, is from the perspective of *Systematic Theology*.** You are likely familiar with this approach. This kind of theology is common and traditional. Systematic Theology presents summaries of beliefs that are organized by topics. It helps us see an overview of what the Bible teaches about things like salvation, the Church, the Holy Spirit, or angels. These topics often come from Greek words and end in “-ology,” like soteriology, ecclesiology, pneumatology, hamartiology, and eschatology. Systematic theology is logical and organized, focuses on the big picture, can address current issues in society, and can help harmonize different biblical texts. Systematic theology is *biblical* in the sense that it gathers Bible verses about each topic. However, the themes themselves come from outside the story of the Bible (from logic or philosophy).



The second theology book is called *Theology: The Bible, God, and Angels (Humans, Sin, Christ, Salvation, and Last Things)*. The approach is different in this book. It is what we are calling *Integrated Theology* (explained in Ch. 3). In addition to themes from Systematic Theology, this book incorporates *Biblical Theology* and *Narrative Theology*. Biblical Theology comes alongside Systematic Theology and looks at the Bible through a more organic (internal) and personal lens. It still covers the truths of Systematic Theology and doesn't replace it. However, at times, Systematic Theology cuts the spine off the Bible and rearranges its pages. That isn't how God gave us the Bible! Systematic Theology has many strengths, and we need it. But it is also good to look at God and what he has done from some other angles and perspectives.

In a sense, all Christian theology is biblical. It uses the Bible along with God's revelation in nature to present truth about God. But Biblical Theology uses themes and categories from the Bible itself. For example, Biblical Theology traces the development of *sacrifice* and *covenant*, not because society values them, but because these are the terms and agenda that the Bible itself gives us. Also, Biblical Theology better appreciates the unique points of view and interests of each author of Scripture. This is why the cover of the second theology book shows biblical authors having a discussion around a table. They are like members of a family. Even though they lived in different centuries and various cultural contexts, they share the same Father and the same beliefs. But just like in every family, each member is unique. Each one has his or her own knowledge, experiences, and interests. These family members—the biblical authors—don't contradict one another. We believe that because God inspired all of Scripture, it has a profound unity. However, not all the authors have the same point of view on every theme. The task of Biblical Theology is to listen to each of these family members, one by one, and describe how their points of view are similar and different. Finally, Biblical Theology allows each author to speak for himself in his own context. This is because biblical theology considers revelation as a *historical process*. Systematic theology doesn't show how God planted seeds that grew over time into large trees with clearer, fuller understanding. Systematic Theology is blind to the passage of time. Biblical Theology, on the other hand, examines the *process* and the *context*.

The third kind of theology that we use is called *Narrative Theology*. It studies God's character and actions through the Big Story and little stories of the Bible. In the book God gave us, we see that stories are one of God's favorite ways to reveal Himself. About 40% of the Old Testament and a large part of the New Testament are historical narrative (they tell real stories). These smaller stories are situated inside a Grand Narrative.

God put stories in the Bible because they are powerful and interesting. They captivate us and awaken our imagination. They stir our souls. As we hear a story, we experience its emotions and identify with some of its characters. Through stories, we do more than simply hear about truth—we experience it and participate in its application. So we rejoice that God chose to bless us with so many stories to help us learn about Him.

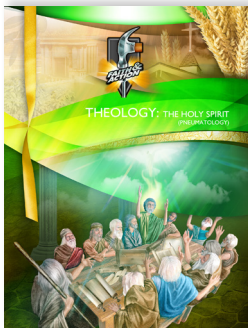


PUT YOUR FAITH TO WORK!

Narrative Theology pays attention to how the biblical authors wrote stories and included literary details. Some of these include plot, characters, conflict, irony, introductions and conclusions, themes, genres, and even humor. As we understand how God inspired the authors to skillfully shape their stories, we appreciate their meaning better. The fact that they are told from a person's unique perspective with some literary structure does not change their inspiration or historical accuracy.

Each of these three kinds of theology—Systematic, Biblical and Narrative—is useful and has strengths. We want to benefit from *all three of them*.

- In this book, Systematic Theology provides some of the themes. For example, when we look at God as Creator, we will cover Systematic Theology themes like *God, humans, angels, the fall, salvation, and judgment*.
- *Biblical Theology* guides us to appreciate themes and topics that are drawn *from the Bible*. Most importantly, we want to know who God is. So we trace 5 big themes—the 5 roles of God (Revealer, Creator, Father, Missionary, and King)—through the biblical story. Other characteristics of this book's structure reflect the approach of Biblical Theology. It emphasizes the voices of different family members. And remember that Biblical Theology shows *historical progression*. So as we trace themes, we focus on how God revealed Himself *more clearly over time*.
- Finally, in this book, Narrative Theology guides us to respect the *story nature* of the Bible. This aids us in locating a smaller story of the Bible inside the Big Story—the Grand Narrative of salvation. As we include Narrative Theology, we can understand the development of a theme from its introduction to its climax and conclusion.



The third book is not finished yet, but it will be about the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology).

This is also Integrated Theology. The topic comes from Systematic Theology. But we will look at what each biblical author teaches about the Holy Spirit (Biblical Theology). In addition, Narrative Theology will reveal the Holy Spirit in the Big Story of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation. This integrated approach to theology will deepen our theology of the Holy Spirit. Throughout this study, we will see that human understanding of the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers has grown over time.

It is our hope that as you study these books, you will benefit from the *content*. But also, we hope that you will learn from the *process*. As you preach, teach and study the Bible, this threefold *process* will help you connect all the little stories and insights about God and know Him in the Big Story of the whole Bible. You will be able to summarize what you believe (Systematic Theology). You will value the voices of different family members and demonstrate the progressive nature of revelation (Biblical Theology). And you will capture people's imagination as you show how God has revealed Himself in the Big Story and little stories of the Bible (Narrative Theology).

May the Lord bless you in your studies of His Word.

Dr. Faith Elizabeth McGhee Lund