

Following Jesus.

A Four-Week Course helping disciples to read the Bible, pray, belong, and proclaim.



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The Bible ... so what is it?

Handy paper weight? Unread book? A gift from a distant relative?
Or could it answer some of our biggest questions about life?

What has been your experience of the Bible?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ak06MSETeo4>

Quick facts & background (covered in the video)

- One of the most influential books in human history.
- Explores the big questions of why we exist, death, life and human struggle.
- Library of 66 books, written by 40 different authors over 2000 years, in mostly Hebrew or Greek.
- Different genres: historical narrative, songs, letters, biographies (i.e., gospels), law, parables, and poetry.
- Contains the Old & New Testament.
- Old Testament centres on the story of Ancient Israel, how God worked through those people for all humanity.
- New Testament introduces our long awaited leader and Saviour - Jesus.

What is the Bible?

 Read: 2 Timothy 3:14-16

1. While there are many human authors, who inspired the Bible?
2. What authority then should the Bible have for Christians?
3. What is the Bible useful for? How does it relate to Jesus?

Why Read the Bible?

 Read: 1 John 1:1-4

4. A popular claim is that the Bible is a myth that has evolved over time. Is that is what is described here? Why not?
5. Who is the “Word of Life”?
6. In what physical ways did people who wrote this letter know about the “Word of Life”?
7. Why were these words written?

The Bible is about God, and God revealed in Jesus Christ. It reveals God’s unfolding plan across history with real people. Written so that we might believe, the Bible reveals God’s character and how we might know and follow him.

How do I read the Bible?

The Bible is more like a library than a single book, so before you start it is good to understand what genre you are reading. A Study Bible is a helpful resource that offers additional information about the book, author, theme and possible meaning of difficult passages.

How to read the Bible

Here is one method you might find helpful to read the Bible:

- 1. Pray & Read:** Pray that God will show you more about who he is and what he has done. Select a book and read from the start. Read as little or as much as you like. Don't be afraid to read it through a few times or even listen to an audio version.
- 2. Observe:** What does the passage say? Who is involved, what is the context, are there repeated words or phrases?
- 3. Interpret:** What does the passage mean? Are there words with particular meanings? What is it saying about Jesus? What is it saying about his mission to the world? What is the main point?
- 4. Apply:** How does this apply to you? How does it challenge, shape or encourage you, and the whole church, to follow Jesus?
- 5. Pray:** Pray about what you have read and that the Holy Spirit would help you to follow God.

How to navigate what to read

Bible reading plans are useful in mapping out how to read through the Bible. They have different approaches, reading through both the Old Testament and New Testament concurrently, or reading chronologically or thematically. Two useful plans to start with are:

- *Bible in One Year* (book, app, website)

This is a great introduction to reading the Bible and makes it easy to track your progress. Each day consists of three readings (Old Testament, New Testament, and a Psalm), with a short reflection for each.

<https://www.bibleinoneyear.org>

- *Read Scripture* (App)

Read through the whole biblical narrative, with engaging videos covering major themes and book introductions.

<https://www.readscripture.org>

Where to start?

Find a Bible: The Bible is written to be understood, so find a Bible in a readable translation. The New International Version (NIV) is a great option or New International Readers Version (NIRV) for children. Either download a free Bible app or buy a copy.

Start with a Gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John): The Gospels are narrative accounts of the life of Jesus. They are a form of ancient biography. They are a great place to start because they provide eye witness accounts to what Jesus said and did.

Read and discuss with a friend: Make a time to weekly or fortnightly catchup with a friend to discuss what you are reading or read together. This is a helpful way to ask questions and grow in your understanding of God.

Next steps this week



Read through Luke Chapter 1, applying the method. Write down all your questions.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to discuss.

Going deeper

Select a Bible reading plan. Two great apps are *Bible in One Year* and *Read Scripture*.

Prayer ... so what is it?

Is it the same as wishing? Or only for the 'holy' people? Or is it just reserved for times of fear and tragedy?

What do you think about prayer?



Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LG_3pX88fM

What is prayer? (covered in the video)

- Is prayer a stale tradition, ritual, good luck charm, religious checklist? Or just a way to avoid lightning bolts?
- At its essence, prayer is simply talking to God.
- We can draw near to the creator of the earth. God has made himself available and wants us to talk to him - to trust him, to thank him, cry out in our fear, ask for forgiveness or question where our next meal is from. This is a relationship with our Lord.
- Could any posture or well chosen word impress the author of time and space?

Start with prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you know all things and yet invite us into a personal relationship with you. Help us today to learn about the incredible privilege and joy of praying to you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

What is prayer?



Read: Matthew 6:5-8

- 1. Who do we pray to? What does that relationship look like?**
- 2. Is Jesus impressed by public performances? How does he want us to approach God?**
- 3. Is prayer just a special combination of words? Should we be scared of not saying the right things to God?**
- 4. How does the Lord's Prayer offer a pattern to approach God? Read through line by line.**



Read: Galatians 4:4-7

- 5. How do we know we can approach God?**
- 6. How is this different to a transaction?**

Why do you need to pray?



Read: Psalm 145:13-21

- 7. What aspect of the world is God not in control of?**
- 8. How does God respond to those who call to him?**
- 9. What aspect of your life do you not need God?**



Read: John 17:20-23

- 10. How are our prayers and life used by God?**
- 11. How are we involved in people coming to believe in Jesus?**

How can I pray?

From hiding away in a room to praying in the car on your way to work, prayer can come in many different forms.

Developing a habit of prayer is fruitful in knowing God deeper, and growing an awareness for how he is at work in the world, in you and through you. Like any new skill, discipline and structure is a helpful start. Thankfully, God doesn't leave us alone but equips us with the Holy Spirit.

The **ACTS** approach is one method that is helpful to guide prayers:

A - Adoration: Praise God for who he is and what he has done in Jesus. Reading a Psalm, listening to worship music or thinking about his character might be a helpful way to start.

Read Psalm 103

C - Confession: Say sorry for the ways you have turned away from God, ask him to reveal to you areas in your life that need to change and ask for the Holy Spirit to help you change.

Read 1 John 1:8-10

T - Thanksgiving: Thank God for the things he has given you, whether simple or big, e.g.. family, friends, work or study, help from someone, answered prayer, challenges, health.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

S - Supplication: Ask God for what you need. You can pray specifically for others, your community, the places you spend your time, the church and the world.

Read Philippians 4:6-7

Where to start?

Start now: Gracious God, thank you that you want to know us, and that through Jesus we can come to you as your children. Help us not to see pray as a transaction, but be amazed at how generous you have been to us in Christ. Help us to be honest with you, listen to you and see our need for your presence in every aspect of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Set aside a time daily to pray: Regular rhythms help us grow in our knowledge and love of God. Find the quietest time in the day, maybe early morning, to pray to God. Make this regular, setting aside even just 10 minutes to pray each day.

Pray with others: Praying for and with others is a helpful way to be reminded how God is at work. Come along to one of our "All Church Prayer Nights", held each term, to see the variety of creative ways we can pray together.

Next steps this week



Pray the Lord's prayer every day at the same time. Think after each line what it means and tells us how we can approach God.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to ask them any questions you have about the Lord's prayer.

Going deeper

Use the ACTS model to guide your prayers. Set aside a time each day to pray to God.

Church ... why bother?

If I can listen to a sermon online, play my favourite worship playlist, and text my Christian friends, do I need to belong to a church?

What has been your experience with church?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UA0dbBgosJA>

What is the church? (covered in the video)

- Not a special building that grants access to God or houses God.
- Aim is not to get people into the building.
- The church is God's people, the body of Jesus, engaging with the world.
- The people of God point to Jesus. Connected by the Holy Spirit, bringing people of all backgrounds to know God.
- Church buildings are practical places to gather together, but the church (body of Jesus) is so much bigger than that!

Start with prayer: Gracious God, thank you that you have called us to be your people. Please help us to understand what that looks like to be part of your church where Jesus is our cornerstone and please remove any barriers that are preventing us from belonging. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What is the church?



Read: Ephesians 2:11-13, 17-22

- 1. How is the church more than a human institution?**
- 2. Who does God call to be his people?**
- 3. What is the church founded on? What holds it together?**
- 4. How does the church have access to God?**



Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

- 5. How is the church a body? Whose body is it?**
- 6. Which parts are required for the body to function well?**

Why should you belong to a church?



Read: Colossians 1:15-20, 28

- 7. What has Jesus redeemed? How is he more than our personal saviour?**
- 8. Is there any area of your life that you believe is off limits to Jesus?**



Read: Acts 2:42-47

- 9. What activities did the early Church devote themselves to?**
- 10. What was the outcome?**
- 11. How are the priorities of being a learning, loving, worshipping, and telling church relevant today?**

Where to start?

Attend a service regularly: Connect and commit to coming to a service regularly. Together we learn, worship, pray & share our lives.

Serve: Joining a team to serve the Church is a practical way to use our gifts and time as part of the body of Christ. Ask someone about the different opportunities to serve the Church.

Join a Small Group: Small Groups are an amazing opportunity to explore the Bible, pray for and support one another, deepen friendships, and help each other grow in our trust in Jesus.

Pray: Churches are broken, messy people coming together because of Jesus. Pray that there would be mercy, grace and forgiveness where there has been past hurt or when things are not perfect.

Partner Financially: Investing your resources deepens engagement and enables the mission of the church. The finances of the church is dependent on the sacrificial generosity of members.

Next steps



Consider and pray about what next step you can take to belong more deeply to Christ's church.



Meet up with a trusted Christian to discuss your next step and ask them to keep you accountable and pray together.

Talking about God... that sounds scary!

Is telling others about Jesus only the job of ministers and super extraverted people? Or does God use everyday people to tell of the amazing good news of Jesus?

What has been your experience of telling others about Jesus?



Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVKbvE-HQel>

Where could God use me in my ordinary life? (covered in the video)

- Like Anne, we are placed in lots of different places - in families, with friends, in workplaces, in places we exercise or relax.
- Serving God is more than Sunday mornings - he involves our whole life, and every aspect of it.
- God has strategically placed us where we are, with a particular mix of people. He wants us to be used there.
- We don't live ordinary lives, but with Jesus we have the opportunity to show unnatural forgiveness, grace, mercy. We are used by God to answer people's deep and big questions.

Start with prayer: Loving God, thank you that you made yourself known to us in Jesus. Through your Holy Spirit, please help us as we tell others about you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

What are we actually proclaiming?



Read: 1 Corinthians 15:1-5

- 1. What is the Gospel?**



Read: Revelation 21:1-7

- 2. What does the future with Jesus look like?**
- 3. How does the identity and actions of Jesus affect everyone, not just individuals?**

Why should we tell others about Jesus?



Read: Romans 3:22-24

- 4. Through our own efforts, can we meet God's standards? Are people naturally good?**
- 5. Whose efforts are enough? What is the price to believe in him?**



Read: Romans 10:9-15

- 6. What is the result of people believing in their heart and confessing that Jesus is Lord?**
- 7. What needs to happen for people to hear about Jesus?**
- 8. Think about the people you know on your front lines who don't trust in Jesus. Who in their lives knows and loves God, and shares with them that hope?**

 **Read: Matthew 28:16-20**

- 9. When Jesus finished his work on earth, what was his plan for people to know him?**
- 10. Who goes with us?**

How do I share about Jesus?

Sharing about Jesus isn't a diagram you need to remember (although these might be helpful) or a once off activity. Proclaiming the Gospel involves our whole lives, both our words and actions. Often it will involve people we spend the most time with: our friends, team mates, neighbours, craft group, family or colleagues.

1. Lives Reflecting Jesus (Galatians 5:22-25)

We show who we love and what we value by how we live. In each place we spend time, we have an opportunity to point to Jesus through how we navigate challenges, uphold truth and justice, handle disappoint, show patience and grace, and how we love those who are both kind and difficult.

2. Using Words (1 Peter 3:15-16)

We should always be expecting Gospel conversations with our friends, family or colleagues. We might not feel prepared in the moment, but it is important that we can explain who Jesus is and why he matters. You can start by writing down how Jesus makes a difference in your life as a way to collect your thoughts, or practice explaining your favourite story or parable of Jesus.

3. Generous Community (1 Thessalonians 1:4-5)

If we want people to see what a difference Jesus makes, we should generously invite people into our lives. This might look like inviting a friend over for a family dinner, intentionally asking deeper questions, listening to their perspective and looking for opportunities to share about Jesus, and how following him changes how you act and live.

Where to start?

Pray for people: It is the Holy Spirit who changes hearts to believe in God's Gospel. Pray that the people you know would come to accept Jesus as their Lord, and for Gospel opportunities for you to share your hope through word and action.

Introduce your Christian friends and non-Christian friends:

Invite a few friends together who haven't met before. This is a simple way to show what following Jesus can look like.

Introducing Jesus: If you know someone who has questions about Christianity, be they curious or skeptical, encourage them to consider who Jesus is. *Introducing Jesus* is a four-week course introducing Jesus' life, message, death and invitation that you (or someone else) could do over coffee or lunch.

Next steps



Think of one person in your life that does not know Jesus. Pray each day that the Holy Spirit would enable them to hear and accept the Gospel. Pray for opportunities to share your life and reasons for your hope with them.

Going deeper

Join a workshop on how to run an *Introducing Jesus* course. This is a simple, accessible course that points people to Jesus' life, message, death and invitation.