

A person is sitting on a grey tufted sofa, reading an open Bible. They are wearing a light-colored denim jacket over a dark top and dark trousers. The Bible is open on their lap, and their hands are visible on the pages. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

THE BIBLE SERIES

COMMUNITY AND HOME GROUP GUIDE

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THE BIBLE SERIES

Week 1



WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND WHY READ IT?

OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP (5-10MINS)

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship songs together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

SUNDAY RECAP (5-10 MINS)

Spend a few minutes catching up together and then discuss the weekend's teaching.

1. What struck you about the teaching? Was there anything you resonated with or disagreed with? Why?

READ THIS INTRO. (5 MINS)

The Bible is one of the best-selling books in the world and has been translated into over 700 languages. It's one of the few books that, up until the past couple of decades, would have been in most households across our country. Yet, if we're honest, many of us either don't understand what it's for, how to read it well or maybe what to do when we come across some of the seemingly strange or controversial things that it says.

Some of us find it boring. Some of us find parts of it terrifying (book of Revelation anybody?). It contains huge lists of names, commands and instructions. It contains narratives that would easily find their way into a Stephen King novel. It can be downright confusing and worrying. Are we really able to rely on writings that were written millennia ago in a world of i-phones, Wifi and a world of terabytes of data at our fingertips?

On the other hand, for those of us who are interested in the life of and more so, want to apprentice ourselves to, Jesus, we need to grapple with the reality that Jesus' life was saturated in and deeply nourished by the Bible. He seemed to think of it as having a very special authority and place within God's people, as have his followers for the past 2000 years. Jesus quoted it, prayed it, even claimed that he had come to fulfil it. We begin this series then with the tension that it's apparently an important part of the life of an apprentice of Jesus and that we all come to it with the baggage, questions, concerns, stories of our lives. And that's ok.

Today, we would like to encourage you to have a time of sharing what your relationship to the Bible has been up to this point. Maybe you've studied it for decades. Maybe this is your first time opening up a Bible. Maybe you're coming as a skeptic, a cynic, or deeply confused about how to reconcile the Bible's claims with what you see in the world around you. Maybe you think you know exactly what it means. Wherever you are on the journey, we invite you to share in the questions below with a posture of openness and honesty. You will always be an apprentice, so know that God has fresh things to say to you if you are willing to hear.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (20-30 MINS)

There are a couple of things you could do this session which might be helpful for you to come back to as the series progresses. Leaders may want to encourage people to write down any questions, concerns, comments, wisdom about the Bible that people in their group have and refer to these things each week to see if any of these get addressed over the weeks.

1. What is your current relationship with the Bible? Would you even use that word 'relationship?' If not, how would you describe your take on the Bible?
2. What are the things (if any) that you most enjoy about the reading the Bible? Why?
3. What are the things (if any) that cause you the greatest concern about the Bible? Why?
4. What questions about the Bible do you have that you would love to see answered over this series?

CLOSING PRAYER (5-10 MINS)

Next session onwards there will be specific practices to have a go at in relation to reading the Bible. Today, you may want to finish the session by getting into smaller groups and praying for each other as you seek to engage with God and the Bible in a deeper way than ever before.

THE BIBLE SERIES

Week 2



AN ALTERNATIVE STORY / READING HUGE CHUNKS

OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP (5-10MINS)

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together

SUNDAY RECAP (5-10 MINS)

Spend a few minutes discussing Sunday's teaching.

1. What struck you about the teaching? Was there anything you resonated with or disagreed with? Why?
2. What do you think about seeing the Bible as an alternative story? Is this something that makes sense to you? Why?
3. We're going to look at reading the Bible in 'huge chunks' today. Is there anyone here who has done this before? If so, what are your reflections?

READ THIS INTRO. (5 MINS)

There are many ways to access the Bible in the Western World. We have physical Bibles, Bible 'apps', Bible verses on our walls and in paintings, to name a few ways. It may still shock us to realise that many places in the world, however, can't get access to a Bible because it's illegal to have one. There are 'Bible smugglers' who risk their lives to provide access to communities where Bibles aren't available or allowed. Many communities have to secretly huddle together to quietly hear the Bible or parts of the Bible being read to them, especially if they can't read themselves. There are stories of some communities literally swapping whatever scraps of Bible pages that they have so that their village can read what happens next.

In a world before the printing press, apps, and even wide scale literacy, many church communities would huddle together to hear the Bible being read out loud. The Bible was often read in huge chunks - whole books, or large portions were read in one sitting. There was an oral culture, which meant that their memories were adapted to retain information that was spoken aloud. This is a hard practice for us in our digital age, because our minds are literally being shaped to hold memories differently. Who needs to remember directions spoken out loud when you have a SAT NAV, for example?!

Although the sound of either reading or listening to huge chunks of the Bible may seem like a hard, even boring practice, we believe it can be incredibly powerful. If the Bible is largely a story, a narrative, then hearing it spoken in huge chunks can help us make sense of the context of the 'bigger picture', rather than just snippets of the story. Remember: God can often surprise us through reading the Bible in ways that are not 'normal' for us. If you are the one listening to the reading today, get into a comfortable position and open yourself up to the Spirit who wants to form you through what you hear today.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (15-20 MINS)

There's no time like the present! Let's practice this together today. Your leader(s) will pick someone to read a portion of the Bible around. We'll quickly walk out the process now with you and then over to you!

1. Find a comfortable position. You're going to be listening for around 20 mins so pick a posture that will be helpful to you. If you do need to have a shift in your sitting/standing position, that's ok!
2. Pick a passage. Below are a few examples that you may want to pick from. Remember, they are deliberately of a certain longer length today!

- Ruth 1-4
- Jonah 1-4
- Psalm 119
- Matthew 5-7
- Philippians 1-4
- James 1-5
- 1 John 1-5

3. Pick reader(s). Decide whether one person will read everything or whether you would like to split the reading up between a few people.
4. Invite the Holy Spirit. As people are now comfortable and ready, have someone to invite the Holy Spirit to speak and open up hearts to receive from Him.
5. Read the chosen passage from beginning to end.
6. Have a moment of silence/stillness after the reading. When ready to move on close this time in thanksgiving to God for the experience.

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK(S) AHEAD - (1 MIN)

We invite you this following week to go through the process of reading aloud or listening aloud to another of the above passages, or another one of your choice, in a huge chunk. Feel free to do it alone or with members of the community here. You will find it helpful to pick a time or times where you can be focussed, without distractions, putting your phone or device away if not needing it for the reading. Try and leave time at the end to pause, reflect and give thanks for what you've read.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE WE FINISH (5-10 MINS)

Discuss with the group:

1. What was it like for you to listen to a chunk of the Bible in this way as opposed to any other ways you usually read?
2. To get the best from the upcoming practice this week, what might you need to be mindful of (time/space/focus) etc? How could your community help you with this?

CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINS)

THE BIBLE SERIES

Week 3



THE BIBLE AND AUTHORITY / BIBLE STUDY

OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP (5-10MINS)

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together.

HOW DID IT GO? (5-10 MINS)

1. Did you manage to do the practice of reading huge chunks? How did it go?
2. What struck you about Sunday's teaching of authority and the Bible? Was there anything you resonated it or disagreed with? Why?

READ THIS INTRO. (5 MINS)

One of the reasons we read the Bible is because this is what our Teacher Jesus also did. His whole life on earth was shaped by understanding, teaching, living out and fulfilling God's authoritative words found within the Bible. The Bible is a library of books that have a special place within the Christian community because we believe it is 'God-breathed' (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, God's Spirit has spoken through the writers and even editors and compilers of the Bible to put across the life-shaping, life-changing words that he wants us to both know, teach and live by. The 66 books that make up the Bible, however, are not all one genre, style, type, age or written by one single author. God partnered with human authors who used various styles and frames of reference which can be confusing for us in the 21st century! Coupled with being written in different languages, thousands of years ago, it can be hard to work out what the Bible means as we read!

Bible study can help us with this. There are many ways to study the Bible: studies of the original languages the Bible was written in (Hebrew and Greek), word studies, book studies, historical, literary studies, to name a few. DON'T WORRY! We are not going tackle all of these in one session! At the end there will be some suggested resources to help you go about studying the Bible, if that is helpful for you.

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (30 MINS)

If you can, please watch the Bible Project Video (What is the Bible?) You may need to have prepared a laptop, or device that people can watch the video on. If you don't have this facility at the session, encourage people to watch it before you gather today. Here's the link: <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/what-is-the-bible/> You can download this if that is helpful.

- What jumped out to you from this video?
- What ways have you studied the Bible in the past that have been helpful?
- What are the challenges that you have faced in seeing the Bible as authoritative?

You now get a chance to do a Bible study together. Feel free to pick one of these passages or any others:

- Psalms 1
- Luke 15:1-7
- James 3:1-12
- 1 John 3:11-23

Then use ONE of the below methods:

1. Context/Theme/summary method - Feel free to use your shared knowledge, tools, google, if you need help! Learn from each other!

- i. Who wrote this passage?
- ii. Do you know when it was written?
- iii. Who were they writing to and why?
- iv. What are the themes coming through the passage?
- v. How do these themes relate to the rest of the book?
- vi. Are there any characters/stories/themes from other parts of the Bible that they are drawing from?
- vii. How would you summarise the passage in your own words? You could even write down your summary and 'present' it to each other.
- viii. What is challenging you about this passage? Anything you want to apply this week?

2. Discovery Bible Study Method - Four simple but profound questions for you to discuss:

1. What does this passage tell me about God?
2. What does this passage tell me about people or myself?
3. If this is God's word for my life, how will I obey it?
4. Who will I tell this week?

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK(S) AHEAD - (3 MINS)

We invite you this following week use one of the above study methods, or alternatively commit to one of these below:

Read a Bible commentary:

(Tom Wright's 'For everyone' Series are short and accessible)

English Bible translations:

The Bible wasn't written in English, so different translations can bring out different flavours or emphases. On your Bible App or a website like www.biblegateway.com or different physical Bibles, read the same passage in those different translations and write out any differences that you notice. You could read, for example.

Online study: Go on to the Bible Project website and have a go at starting one of their many excellent studies. See how you get on! There are podcasts, images, video classes galore!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE WE FINISH (5-10 MINS)

Discuss with the group:

1. Which of these studies will you commit to this week?
2. What do you feel about studying the Bible? Worried, excited, bored?

CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINS)

THE BIBLE SERIES

Week 4



HOW IT SHAPES COMMUNITIES / LECTIO DIVINA

OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP (5-10MINS)

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together

SUNDAY RECAP (5-10 MINS)

Spend a few minutes discussing Sunday's teaching.

1. What struck you about the teaching? Was there anything you resonated it or disagreed with? Why?
2. What do you think about the Bible as a community shaper? Is this something you see in your own church, home group or community? If so, how?
3. What are the other community shapers in our world that can counteract or oppose the Bible's message to us?

READ THIS INTRO. (5 MINS)

It is a huge gift to be in a country where we have freedom to read the Bible on our own, in a language we can understand, at any time that we want. However, God's people have also always recognised the incredible power and importance of reading the Bible together, meditating on it, absorbing it's message and truth to see what God might be saying to their communities as well as individual lives. When we say 'meditation' don't think an Eastern religious way of 'emptying the mind', rather the opposite. There is power in slowly chewing over smaller portions of the Bible together, filling our mind with whatever words, phrases, prayers come up. There is power in slowing down our reading, sitting with the passage until we think we know what God is saying to us and what we'll do about it.

Today we'll do this through a practice that has a fancy latin name, 'Lectio Divina'. Don't let that put you off! Lectio Divina means, 'divine' or 'sacred reading' and is a great way to slowly 'digest' a passage through meditating on it a number of times. Here's the process below:

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (15-20 MINS)

- Find a comfortable position. You're going to be listening/reading for around 20 mins so pick a posture that will be helpful to you. If you do need to have a shift in your sitting/standing position, that's ok!
- Pick a passage. Below are a few examples that you may want to pick from. Leaders can either invite people to pick their own passage from this list and meditate on their own or you can do this as a group practice with one person reading one of the passages and everyone walking through the process together.

- Psalm 23
- Psalm 62:5-8
- Isaiah 43:1-2
- Mark 1:9-11
- John 15:20-23
- Ephesians 3:14-19
- Revelation 22:1-5

Once you have picked your passage here is the process to go through either on your own or together - Remember, today the the emphasis is on what you think God might be saying to the church or the group you are gathered with today. Have a go!

1. READ: Invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you before you read. Now slowly read the passage through from beginning to end, pausing on any words or sentences that 'shimmer' or stand out to you. If you have a journal/paper and pen, write these down.
2. REFLECT: Slowly read the same passage again, this time silently asking God, 'What do you want to say to me?' Do any images come to mind? Any feelings or emotions? If so, right these down.
3. RESPOND: In the silence, chat to God about what you've read, write up any questions or things that stirred you or confused you. If you don't have anything, or don't feel anything in particular, that's ok! God works gently and quietly so it's not always obvious.
4. REST: Finish the time soaking up the time you've just had. Does anything come to mind in your resting? If you are able, thank God for meeting with you in this time. When you are finished, spend just no more than one minute each sharing what you think God might be saying to the community (if you would like to). Maybe the leader or someone else would like to write these things up for a future time.

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK(S) AHEAD - (1 MIN)

We invite you this following week to go through the process of Lectio Divina. Feel free to do it alone or with members of the community here. You will find it helpful to pick a time or times where you can be focussed, without distractions, putting your phone or device away if not needing it for the reading. Try and leave time at the end to pause, reflect and give thanks for what you've read.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE WE FINISH (5-10 MINS)

Discuss with the group:

1. What was it like for you to listen meditate on the Bible in this way? Helpful? Strange? Uncomfortable? Why?
2. To get the best from the upcoming practice this week, what might you need to be mindful of (time/space/focus) etc? How could your community help you with this?

CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINS)

THE BIBLE SERIES

Week 5



HOW WE READ IT AND HOW IT READS US / MEMORISATION

OPENING PRAYER/WORSHIP (5-10MINS)

Gather around in a comfortable space to pray and worship. You may want to start in silence, listen to a worship track or sing some worship together. Pray that the Holy Spirit would lead your time together

SUNDAY RECAP (5-10 MINS)

Spend a few minutes discussing Sunday's teaching.

1. What struck you about the teaching? Was there anything you resonated it or disagreed with? Why?
2. How did you get on with the Lectio Divina Practice from last week?

READ THIS INTRO. (5 MINS)

This, our final week, we turn to the practice that will probably be the most unpopular! What a great way to end! We're talking of the practice of bible memorisation. Why bother memorising verses or passages from the Bible? One reason is that Jesus, our Teacher, did. The gospels tell us that when the devil tempted Jesus, trying to undermine his identity and get him to take the easy road towards his vocation, Jesus' weapon against his Enemy was the Bible. It wasn't just the fact that he quoted verses off the top of his head, it was that he had obviously been soaked in the words and truth of the scriptures enough throughout his life to bring to mind and speak out against the lies. He knew what to bring up on the spot through memorising and internally absorbing God's life-giving words over a life-time.

In a world where we are also bombarded by images, words, feelings, ideas that are ultimately not life-giving and can be very harmful, there is something powerful about so internally having absorbed portions of the Bible that we can bring it to mind when needed. A mind occupied by the written words of the life-giving God, eventually becomes shaped by it rather than lies. It's transformational!

Your first reaction may be, 'I can't memorise anything! I've got a terrible memory!' That may be the case, there is no pressure here. However, if you think about it, you memorise things all the time. You've memorised words, sentences, instructions, song lyrics, quotes from books and poetry. A number of you can recite the Lord's prayer, or John 3:16. Maybe your memory is not quite how it used to be, but in this below practice, there's every chance you'll be able to bring to mind a verse or two in the future through memorisation! We encourage you to have a go! You may surprise yourself!

PUTTING INTO PRACTICE (15-20 MINS)

Below are a number of methods that you could try over the course of the week to memorise passages from the Bible. Discuss with your group which of these you have tried, are interested in, seem too hard or would like to simply have a go. Make sure everyone has a copy of this guide, or at least the ideas that are suggested below, so that they can take them home. Our suggestion is that if you have never done anything like this before, always start off small. A few small wins will boost your confidence and give you a vision to tackle something a bit longer. Below is not a full list of suggestions but a few examples to get you thinking about what verses you may want to pick.

Beginners may want to start with a short passage such as Matthew 6:33 or John 15:9 (maybe get people to read these out). For those who want a longer challenge, a longer passage such as the whole of Psalm 23 or 1 Corinthians 13 could be a great place to start.

The key now is repetition, repetition, repetition! Consider one or a few of the following:

Record yourself reading: Listen back to yourself reading the passage as you go about the day - cleaning, working, relaxing, driving (unless this would distract you whilst driving - always be safe).

Write it out (or colour): Again and again, write out the passage. After a while see if you can write out a verse or the opening sentence or words, without looking at your Bible. Check and then try again until you can get it all down. You could print off a colouring page with the passage or verse on and recite as you slowly colour and fill it in.

Stick it somewhere visible: Either write up on paper or card and stick it where you'll see it, a mirror, doors, windows, wardrobe etc. If you are allowed, maybe write on the mirror with a wipeable glass pen (always ask permission to stick things up in the house if you share it with someone else!).

Flash Cards: If you wanted to memorise a couple of different verses, you could always write or print off some flash cards - write on one side the passage and on the other side the reference. See if you can get to a point where by seeing the reference you can recite the verse.!

PRACTICE FOR THE WEEK(S) AHEAD - (1 MIN)

We invite you this following week to go try one of the above methods of bible memorisation. If you memorise just one verse, that's one verse more than you knew before you tried! You may need to purchase some resources to help you with this, so where possible, plan out what you'll need to give you the best chance of succeeding this week/fortnight.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS BEFORE WE FINISH (5-10 MINS)

Discuss with the group:

1. What are your initial thoughts about Bible memorisation? Has anyone tried this before? If so, what helped you? What advice could you give?
2. Does anyone else have any other ideas, questions, comments, advice or suggestions that could help the group give this a good shot this week?

CLOSING PRAYER (5 MINS)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The material for this series has been adapted and reworked from the 'Scripture Series' from Practicingtheway.org, a non-profit organisation that provides followers of Jesus with free resources for spiritual transformation. Please do check out their website <https://practicingthewayarchives.org/scripture-practice>, for more information and resources.

FURTHER RESOURCES FOR GOING DEEPER

Helpful websites and apps:

Bible in One Year App

The classic app that helps you navigate through the entire Bible in one year - with helpful commentary from Alpha founder Nicky Gumbel

<https://bibleproject.com>

If there's one go to resource we'd recommend it's this one. Incredible videos, podcasts, images, articles and podcasts all under one website. All free as well! Also check out the App.

<https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/resources/collections/new-to-bible/>

Great website for whether you are new to the Bible or have been reading for years.

<https://www.blueletterbible.org>

Not the best website, but has a good range of tools such as comparing translations, looking up greek and hebrew words etc.

Lectio 365

Fantastic resource from the 24-7 Prayer people, to encourage meditating on passages, lectio divina-style.

<https://www.solas-cpc.org/?s=bible>

Help videos and articles for making sense of the Bible

Youversion

Check out this app for reading plans, images and lots of different bible translations to try for size.

Helpful Books:

Can We Trust the Gospels? (Peter Williams)

Short, slightly technical book that explores how trustworthy the accounts of Jesus are as historical documents.

God Stories (Andrew Wilson)

Helpful book that goes through the big picture of the Bible in a fun and accessible way. Great for beginners

How to Read the Bible for all it's Worth (Gordon Fee & Douglas Stuart)

Great primer for how to read the different genres, styles and context of the Bible

[Read the Bible for a Change \(Ray Lubeck\)](#)

Pricey, but really great book about how to read the Bible in context, literary style, hear God's voice and enjoy obeying God's Word.

[Scripture and the Authority of God \(N.T. Wright\)](#)

Short and slightly more academic treatment of the big picture of the Bible by one of the world's leading New Testament experts.

[Shaped by the Word \(M. Robert Mulholland Jr\)](#)

Does a great job of emphasising how transformation comes through reading the Bible and some skills to put into practice.

[Storylines \(Andy Croft & Mike Pilavachi\)](#)

Humourous but insightful book that helps readers trace some of the big themes that run throughout the Bible. Great for beginners

[Unbreakable: What the Son of God said about the Word of God \(Andrew Wilson\)](#)

Very short and accessible book that unpacks the relationship between Jesus and the Bible. Great for beginners.

Bible Commentaries:

[For Everyone Series \(Old Testament - John Goldingay\)](#)

A great, short series of commentaries written by an leading Old Testament expert. Great for beginners.

[For Everyone Series \(New Testament - Tom Wright\)](#)

A great, short series of commentaries written by an leading New Testament expert. Great for beginners.

[NIV Application Commentaries](#)

Great beginner-level book-by-book commentaries that go a bit deeper than the For Everyone Series.

[Word Biblical Commentaries](#)

These are for the confident or advanced Bible reader. Helpful and detailed and brilliant for those who preach regularly, but don't get if you are a beginner! Also VERY pricey.

Bibles

There are LOTS of different Bible out there and a lot of different translations. Before you purchase you may want to check out the different translations on the youversion app or biblegateway.com to see which fits well with you. A few below for consideration which are great for beginners.:

[English Standard Version Study Bible](#)

[Hands On Bible \(Great for primary-aged kids\)](#)

[My First Hands On Bible \(Great for smaller kids\)](#)

[NIV Journaling Bible in One Year](#)

[NLT Teen Life Application Bible](#)

Other Great Bible Resources for Kids and Young People

Defined: Who God Says you Are (Stephen Kendrick and Alex Kendrick)

How Great is Our God (Louie Giglio)

I Am: 40 Reasons To Trust God (Diane Start)

Jesus Storybook Bible (Sally Lloyd-Jones)

Soul Fuel: Young Explorers (Bear Gryls)

Thoughts to Make Your Heart Sing (Sally Lloyd-Jones)