



## READING THE BIBLE A SIMPLE GUIDE

Bible reading is one of the building blocks of our 'Journey IN', and the core text through which Christians encounter God's wisdom and guidance. Bible reading and study, alone or in groups, leads to growth and maturity in a Christian's life. It has to be said, however, that the Bible is the most popular, un-read book in the world! Here are some ideas to help bring this great book alive.

### PRAYER

*Lord, inspire us to read your Scriptures  
and to meditate upon them day and night.  
We beg you to give us real understanding  
of what we need, that we in turn may put its  
precepts into practice.*

*Yet we know that understanding  
and good intentions are worthless,  
unless rooted in your graceful love.*

*So we ask that the words of Scripture  
may also be not just signs on a page,  
but channels of grace into our hearts.*

*Amen*

*(Attributed to Origen)*



DIOCESE OF TRURO  
DISCOVERING GOD'S KINGDOM  
GROWING THE CHURCH

## APPROACHING THE TEXT OF THE BIBLE

Whether you're reading alone or with others in a small group, asking the following questions will help to make sense of what you read:

### What, why, how?

- **What?** What is this passage actually about? Who is saying what to whom? Who else is around and what are they doing? Where is this happening?
- **Why?** Why is this passage saying what it does? What's going on behind the scenes? Why has the author written this and what would the first readers have made of it?
- **How?** How does this passage apply to the world I know? How would the wisdom of this story work out in my context? What are the links here between the Word and the world?

OR

### Text and context

- **The text itself:** What is the text saying? What kind of material is this?
- **The context:** What is the world behind the text, the customs, politics, economic relationships, religious rituals behind the story?
- **The subtext:** What is the author's intent in writing this, in this way? What is the writer's main theme? e.g. Mark – the mystery and power of Jesus; Matthew – the giver of the new Law; Luke – the man for others; John – the cosmic Christ.
- **The pretext:** What is in front of the text, i.e. our own context as we read and encounter this passage? How might it work out in our own lives? What has it said and what does it say now?

“ The Bible isn't a book to be read and put down. It's God's invitation to join the conversation between heaven and earth. ”

*Jonathan Sacks*

# SUGGESTIONS FOR WAYS OF REGULAR BIBLE READING BEFORE YOU START

- **Pray** for the guidance of the Holy Spirit
- **Read the passage** slowly and carefully
- **Read the Bible** reading notes if you're using them, for wisdom or insight
- **Think** what this passage means for you now
- **Pray again**

Don't be legalistic about reading every day if that's not you. Don't let guilt creep in!

## 1. BIBLE READING NOTES

From publishers such as Bible Reading Fellowship ([www.brf.org.uk](http://www.brf.org.uk))

Scripture Union ([www.scriptureunion.org.uk](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk)) There are also online resources see [www.wordlive.org](http://www.wordlive.org) and [www.UCB.co.uk](http://www.UCB.co.uk) amongst others. Bible Reading apps for phones and tablets are also available.

## 2. BIBLE READING WITHOUT NOTES

- Use the lectionary [www.chpublishing.co.uk](http://www.chpublishing.co.uk)
- Use one of the sets of questions listed under 'Approaching the Text of the Bible'

## 3. READ A GOSPEL, THEN A LETTER

Don't try and read the Bible like a normal book, starting at Genesis. You'll grind to a halt somewhere in Leviticus! Start with Mark's gospel and read it straight through. Get the whole picture. Then read the Acts of the Apostles (perhaps one or two chapters a day). Then read Paul's letter to the Philippians at one sitting. And so on.

After each reading, think:

*What have I learned from this? What could I do differently?*



#### 4. HOLY READING (LECTIO DIVINA)

This is a Benedictine way of feeding and meditating on the Bible so that we read it not so much for *information* as for *transformation*. Lectio divina sees the text as a gift, it is about slow reading, circular re-reading and listening for God.

- **Read** Take a passage and start to read slowly until a word or phrase captures your attention.
- **Reflect** Chew the phrase carefully, drawing the goodness out of it. Repeat it, roll it around your mind, suck it slowly for its meaning.
- **Respond** Pray about the thoughts and feelings that have emerged.
- **Rest** You may just want to stay in silence for a while.
- **Repeat** Carry on with the passage for as long as you want.

This approach works well with the letters (epistles) and with the teaching of Jesus.

#### 5. IGNATIAN MEDITATION

This is a way of entering a gospel event through the imagination, employing the senses of sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. It may feel strange at first, and it may not be something for every day, but it's worth persevering because it enables us to encounter Christ in a more vivid way than almost any other.

- **Read the passage** slowly and attentively. Put the Bible down.
- **Close your eyes and re-run the story**, using the senses to enter it imaginatively (see the people, smell the sea air, listen to the voices, feel the stones underfoot...). Watch the story unfold. Don't rush.
- **Move closer to Jesus**, get into conversation with him about what has just happened. Let that conversation (prayer) go on as long as necessary.
- **Move away, return to the present, and reflect** on what you've learned. And give thanks. This approach works well with the stories of Jesus in Matthew, Mark and Luke. You could start at Mark 1.16.

## Remember; the Bible is unlike any other book, it is:

- **A long term project** – written over more than a thousand years.
- **A book of many authors.**
- **A library of 66 books** (39 Old Testament; 27 New Testament).
- **A book of many genres** – law, history, poetry, wisdom, dreams and visions, gospel, letters, apocalyptic. Don't read it as if it's all the same sort of literature.
- **A book of complex simplicity** – it's overarching story is one of love, telling how God pursues his wayward people to give them back their birth-right: 'life in all its fullness'.
- **An emerging book** – reflecting the writers' developing understanding of God, but containing shafts of 'gospel love' throughout.
- **An authoritative book** – God's word for us and our word about God. It's not 'dictated' but inspired ('God-breathed'). The authority of the Bible rests on the authority of God. Moreover, in the New Testament, the writers are the earliest and most authentic witnesses to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

## The Bible is not:

- **Magic** – you can't open it randomly and stick a finger on a text.
- **A code book** – whatever the 'Da Vinci Code' suggests.
- **Omniscient** – because only God knows everything.
- **A book of even texture** – some passages (such as the cruelty and the legal codes in the Old Testament) are of their own time.

## GETTING STARTED

There are many different translations of the Bible. You may need to try different versions to find the one you're most comfortable with.

- **King James Version:** 400 years old. Beautiful and resonant.  
An acquired taste for modern readers.
- **New International Version (NIV):** Evangelical origin. Well trusted.
- **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV):** Widely used in churches.  
Reliable. More inclusive in language.
- **The Message:** A lively paraphrase.

“ We present you with this book, the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is wisdom; this is the royal law. These are the lively oracles of God. ”

*Words used at the coronation when the new Sovereign is presented with a Bible*

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## Resources to help:

'Aids to help your Bible reading' is a leaflet pointing to various Bible Reading resources, which has been produced by the Diocese. It can be downloaded from our web pages under the heading Personal Discipleship.

“ The Bible... is to be befriended as the companion to faith that it is. Friends are loved, debated with, sometimes disagreed with, and are the ones we enjoy spending time with because of what we learn about ourselves, and them, in this dialogue of trustful exchange. ”

*Priest-writer Mark Oakley*



The Simple Guide series were inspired by the 'Living Faith' materials produced by the Diocese of Oxford – *with thanks.*

