

## RESOURCES FOR CHRIST-LIKE LIVING

# the bible

“When we come to the Bible we are not just reading a story; we are being dealt with by God. In this book we are encountering the living word of a lively God, and our task is not to stand in judgement on it but to stand under its judgement on us. We find however that it’s judgement is full of mercy for, in fact, this is a glorious love story-the story of a loving God pursuing his wayward people to give them back their birthright, which is ‘life in all its fullness’ (John 10: 10).” (*John Pritchard, “Beginning Again”, 2000, SPCK - a glorious book of terrific advice for any Christian*).

### get a good Bible!

Getting a good version of the Bible is essential! If you’re happy with the 17th century Authorized Version that’s fine, but most of us simply can’t understand it all. If you want to find a new Bible try a bookshop with a good range (e.g.: St Andrew’s Bookshop, 97-99 London Road, St Albans, 01727-834236). Compare the same passage in each version to get a feel for the style. Check out: GOOD NEWS BIBLE (easy and readable); NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION (modern, classic style); NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION (inclusive language); NEW LIVING TRANSLATION (lively modern style); THE MESSAGE (fabulously readable and brand new).

### get the background

Most modern Bibles have introductions to each book and helpful background stuff. A good general introduction is “The Lion Handbook to the Bible.” Knowing a little about how the Bible fits together goes a long way to making this big book far less intimidating! Commentaries are always being published on the whole Bible and its individual books. Check them out in the bookshops. Many are



written specifically for “ordinary church goers”!  
**get reading**

Very few of us can start with Genesis and read avidly to Revelation! Bearing in mind that the Bible was written over something like 1,400 years by over 60 writers it may be a good idea to make some choices about what to read, especially if we’ve not read lots of the Bible or not read it for some time.

But wherever you read, try to keep coming back to the four Gospels for their vivid portraits of Jesus. Why not read a Gospel right through in one sitting (Mark takes about an hour)? Do the same with one of Paul’s letters. On Sunday’s we can only ever study a few verses, so enjoy the whole piece.

Perhaps we read the Bible in different ways at different times. We may just want to grasp the story. It matters that we know the basic flow of the Bible because that’s our basic picture of God’s activity. We may read to study, exploring how a book was written and teasing out the nuances of each line and word. We may read it to be transformed, allowing a few verses to soak deep into our souls each day to draw us to God and to godly living.

### how might we read the bible?

We’re all different. Some of us will find a daily slot easy to create. Some of us will find other ways. But regular Bible reading matters. This is where we fuel our faith, fund our imaginations and form our discipleship. Christianity without the Bible can only ever be a pale reflection of the riches God is offering us. Here are some ideas for living with the Bible. Some will appeal to us if we love to think a lot about things. Others will appeal if we prefer a more emotional approach. Taste and see!

### DAILY BIBLE READING NOTES

Excellent and inexpensive (even free!), many notes are published that offer a page for each day with prayer, a Bible passage, reflections on the passage, something to think about and ways to put it into practice. Some now also come as daily emails. Don’t worry if you miss a week or ten, just move on to today’s page and

carry on. It isn't meant to make you feel guilty! Try the following publishers:

- The Bible Reading Fellowship, Elsfield Hall, 15-17 Elsfield Way, Oxford, OX2 8FG (01865-319700, [www.brf.org.uk](http://www.brf.org.uk)).
- "Every Day With Jesus", by Crusade for World Revival, Waverley Abbey House, Waverley Lane, Farnham, Surrey, GU9 8EP (01252-784710, [www.cwr.org.uk](http://www.cwr.org.uk)).
- Scripture Union, 207-209 Queensway, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Buckinghamshire, MK2 2EB (01908-856000, [www.scriptureunion.org.uk](http://www.scriptureunion.org.uk)).
- "The Word for Today", by United Christian Broadcasters, PO Box 255, Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 8YY (01782-642000, [www.ucb.co.uk](http://www.ucb.co.uk)).

### DAILY READING WITHOUT NOTES

Someone else's Bible notes may make you potty. You can do your own thing of course. A simple process can help. Try:

- Prayer first—asking for the Spirit's wisdom.
- Read—take a whole book or section and work through it steadily at your own pace. Try to cover Old and New Testaments.
- Think—What did this passage mean when it was written? What does it mean today? What should I do as a result? You may find it helpful to keep a diary of thoughts. Or writing it down may be the last thing you want to do!
- Pray last—allowing the passage to influence what you pray.

### THE BENEDICTINE METHOD (LECTIO DIVINA = SPIRITUAL READING)

Benedict (6th century) refined this method and it can be a wonderful way to really dwell on just a short bit of the Bible. It's also simple! There are just 4 steps:

- Read—a short passage leisurely and thoughtfully. Reread it several times. Allow one sentence, phrase or word to draw your attention.
- Think—turn that phrase over and over in your heart and mind. Repeat it many times. Allow it to touch you and spark your imagination. Imagine what God is saying to you through these words.



- Pray—allowing your thinking to turn into a conversation with God. Focus more intentionally upon God and allow God to be part of your conversation.
- Live—out what God has shared with you. Let what you've read become part of how you live. Let the insights and feelings you've had flow through your day. Return to them throughout the day and continue to reflect upon how this bit of the Bible is coming alive within and through you. Just as Jesus was God in the flesh, so you become this bit of the Bible in the flesh.

### THE IGNATIAN METHOD

This is about entering imaginatively into the heart of a Bible story. It was developed by Ignatius (16th century) and you'll find plenty of books about it at the bookshop. It works thus:

- Choose a passage, say one of the stories about Jesus.
- Read the story slowly and carefully. Close your eyes, and let the story unfold in your imagination.
- As it unfolds, imagine that you are there. Use all your senses. What can you see, hear, feel, smell, taste, touch? How are people dressed? What's the emotional atmosphere? Where are you in relation to the key characters?
- Let the story continue in your mind. As things are said how do you react? How do people around you react? As action takes place how do you respond to it? All the time keep asking yourself how you feel. Let the story's action draw you in so that you get caught up within it.
- Gradually let the story reach its conclusion. Then let yourself simply be still with God. Enjoy the moment and the space. Turn what you've experienced into prayerful conversation with God.

### BIBLE STUDY IN GROUPS

Remember that we always offer these at the Free Church. We've got House Groups running Tuesday afternoons and evenings. Open To Question every other Thursday afternoon is a look back at that Sunday's readings and chance to explore them more fully. Come the autumn we'll be running The Y Course which looks at Christian basics. Just