



How to read the Bible for all it's worth

*If you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day.
If you teach him to fish, you feed him for life.*



Outline of course

Week 1 – Introducing the Bible

- Outline of course
- Group discussion – what do you want to get out of the course
- Dispelling myths of the Bible
- Student survey of Bible skills
- Bible Course Video 1
- Different schools of interpretation

Week 2 – How is the Bible formed?

- Bible Course Video 2
- Discussion around 2 Tim 3:16 – What does ‘inspiration / inspired’ really mean?
- Barriers to hearing from God
- Literary styles in the Bible
- Translations – which one should I use?

Week 3 – The Habit of daily time with God.

- The importance of a daily time with God
- The purpose of a daily time with God
- Things to do in your daily time with God
- How to begin a quiet time
- 15 minutes with God
- Overcoming distractions

Week 4 – Applying the Bible correctly

- 3 questions – What? So what? Now what?
- What is application?
- Exegesis & Hermeneutics
- The pyramid of application – Going up
- Climbing up Acts 27:27-44

Week 5 – Applying the Bible correctly Part 2

- The pyramid of application – Coming down
- Climbing down Acts 27:27-44
- Studying the Gospels vertically and horizontally

Week 6 – Discipline of Study

- Why studying could be the most transforming way of becoming Christ like
- The 4 steps of study – repetition, concentration, comprehension and reflection
- Devotions vs. Studying
- Over to you – Students presentation
- Evaluation of course

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Getting started with the Bible

You've decided that you'd like to read the Bible, but where do you begin?

Sometimes finding a Bible to read is the easiest part. The Bible contains over 750,000 words. Most printed Bibles are over 1000 pages long. Faced with the sheer size of the book you are looking at you would be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed, putting it back down again and walking away. There are, however, a few facts, hints and tips that will help you as you begin to read the Bible. Here are three things to bear in mind...

1. The Bible isn't a single book

It is a collection of 66 books (all Christians share the same 66 books of the Bible, though some traditions include more books within their Bibles) and probably the most important thing to remember when you begin reading the Bible is that it is not one book but lots of books. These books were written at different times by different people, and are often very different from each other. In the Bible you will find all sorts of different types of writing: laws, stories, history, poetry, short sayings and proverbs, letters, visions, hymns and prayers, to name but a few.



The Bible isn't just one book. It's actually a bit of a library...

Knowing what kind of book we are reading changes how we read

One of the most important things to do when you start reading a book of the Bible is to ask yourself what kind of writing you think it is. This will help you to understand what you are reading. We don't read the Highway Code like we read a novel; or an instruction manual like a blogpost. Knowing what kind of book we are reading changes how we read, the same is true in the Bible.

2. The Bible isn't in chronological order

It is also important to remember that the Bible is not organised according to when the books were written or when the events in them are set. The books of the Bible are ordered according to what type of book they are. So the books that contain laws are grouped together; the books that tell the history of Israel are in one place; the Gospels are found next to each other, and so are the letters.

The books of the Bible are ordered according to what type of book they are

This can be confusing because when you read through the Bible, the time jumps around. One minute you can be reading a book set in the 700s BC and the next, one set two hundred years later; one minute a book will be looking forward to a terrible disaster, the next looking back at it. It is worth remembering that this is because they are ordered by subject, not by historical date.

3. The Bible was written a long time ago



On one level this is a very obvious thing to say, on another worth saying regularly. The world of the Bible is a very different world to the one we live in: the houses looked different; travelling was complex (though they seemed to do a lot of it); slavery was widely accepted; armies fought with swords not guns; people often died much younger than now; the laws were different and so on...

The context of the Bible was very different from ours

Remembering that the context of the Bible was very different from ours is very important when you read the Bible. It doesn't explain everything but it can help to make sense of some of the more confusing parts.

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What do you want to get out of the next 6 weeks?

Let's be honest, not many of us of biblical scholars and you don't need to have spent 3 years at university studying Theology to hear from God, but it does help if you learn some basic skills to help you read the Bible for all it's worth. But before we start, read the questions below and answer them honestly.

What's your current relationship with God's word?

READ – I can read a passage in the Bible and get a general idea of the story. In *reading* the Bible I am:

- Bad
- Poor
- Alright
- Good
- Very good

I think I can improve my Bible reading by:

UNDERSTAND – When I read the Bible, I can figure out what the words mean, learn the facts, and see the concepts. In *understanding* the Bible, I am:

- Bad
- Poor
- Alright
- Good
- Very good

I can probably improve my Bible understanding by:

COMPREHEND – As I study the Bible, I can find biblical principles, the timeless truths that God is trying to communicate. In *comprehending* the Bible, my skill level is:

- Bad
- Poor
- Alright
- Good
- Very good

My Bible comprehension probably could be improved by:

APPLY – When I read the and study the Bible, I can see myself in the story; I can see how the biblical principles relate to my life, and I can see what God wants me to do. My skill in applying the Bible truths to my life is:

- Bad
- Poor
- Alright
- Good
- Very good

I think I can improve my *application* skills by:

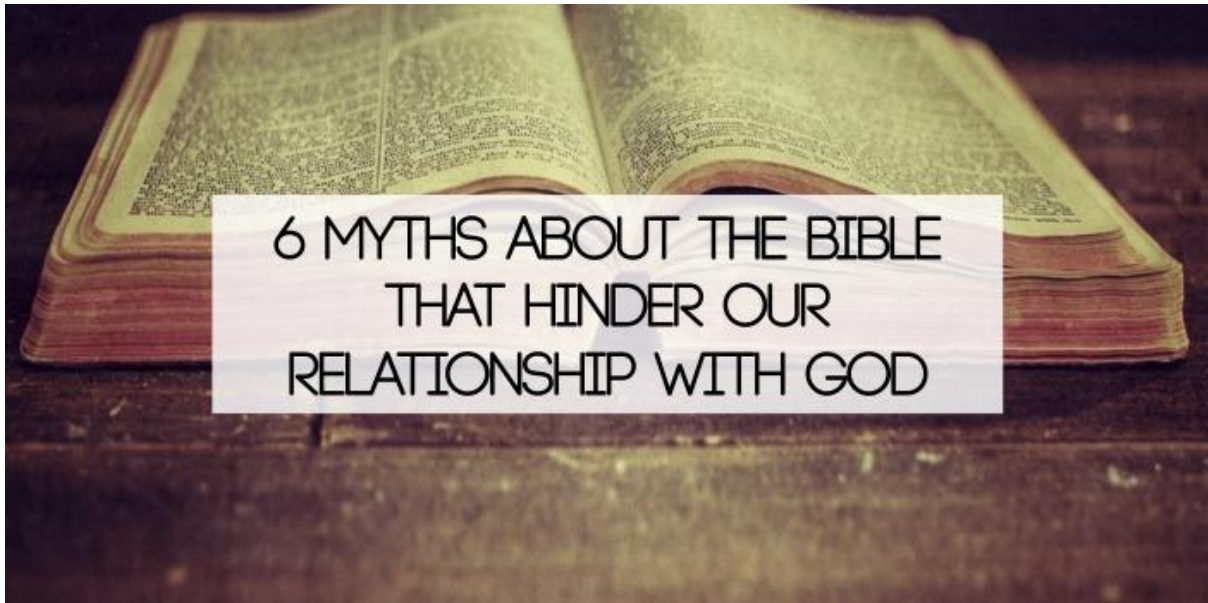
DO – Based on my study of the Bible, I can design an action plan to obey God and put into practice *now* what he has taught me in His Word. In *doing* what I learn from God’s Word I am:

- Bad
- Poor
- Alright
- Good
- Very good

I’m pretty sure that I could improve my doing skills by:

AND FINALLY – I need to apply God’s Word to my life because...





6 MYTHS ABOUT THE BIBLE THAT HINDER OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

1. It's written in weird language

You said to yourself, 'I really should read the Bible.' You knew there was one in the house somewhere. Eventually you found it - hidden at the back of the bookcase, behind some photographs of your great-aunt and some old Agatha Christie novels. You blew the dust off it, opened the black covers with a creak and read, 'Yea, verily, I say unto thee...'

Lovely language, but completely incomprehensible to anyone without a degree in English. What's happened is that you are using an old translation. Unless you are fluent in ancient Hebrew or first-century Greek, then you will read the Bible in translation. First, then, you need to buy a modern version. Find one that you can read easily - which means not just one where the language is modern, but one that is well-designed and laid out.

2. Only the experts can understand it

There are, of course, tricky bits. There are bits of the Bible that no one understands, where even the experts are baffled. Similarly, there are many passages on which people hold different views. But despite these 'problem areas', the vast majority of the Bible is really very straightforward.

Jesus, for example, boiled the Old Testament Law down to two commandments: 'Love the Lord your God with all your

For your notes

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heart and mind and soul' and 'love your neighbour as yourself'. That's not exactly complicated. It's not brain surgery. (It might be hard to do, but that's another issue.)

So there will be bits that you don't understand. There will be far more numerous bits where the meaning is plain and clear and where you can put it into action.

3. It takes too much time

The Bible has been arranged to allow you to read it in bits, so you can read as little, or as much, as you like. I wouldn't necessarily recommend that you only read one verse a day, but neither do you have to tackle all of Genesis at one sitting. What is important is that you make some time to read it and think about it. Time is always a problem, but if an activity is worthwhile, you can make the space for it.

4. It's boring

The Bible undoubtedly has its dull parts such as dimensions of buildings, complicated family trees, lists of numbers, and detailed descriptions of ancient religious ritual. (By the way, some cultures find these exciting they're just not our kind of 'thing'.) But it also has fascinating history, stirring stories, moving poetry, thought-provoking wisdom, and life-changing insights. So if you find a passage that you consider dull, simply move on. There is something exciting just around the corner.

5. It's too big

The Bible contains a lot of writing, it is true - around 750,000 words but the people who put it together broke it down into bite-sized chunks. So we can read as little, or as much, as we like. And there are good reasons why it's so big. For a start, it's a lot of books joined together. The Bible contains some 66 books, split into 1,189 chapters and written by at least 40 authors. It took 1000 years to compile.

Most importantly, it's about life, death and everything between. You'd expect more than 32 pages and a few cartoons.

For your notes

6. It's irrelevant

It's about you and me

The people in the Bible are very like us. They may dress differently, they may act in unusual ways, but the issues they wrestle with are the same issues that face us all. The Bible talks about love, peace, war, happiness, freedom, greed, forgiveness, sex, possessions, truth and a whole lot more. All these issues are just as relevant today.

It's historically important

Historically speaking, the Bible is the most important book ever published. It has influenced the actions of more people around the world than any other book; in the western world it has inspired most of the great art, poetry and literature of the past centuries. Its influence on politicians, writers, artists, revolutionaries, visionaries and religious leaders is unmistakable. Its laws — the famous Ten Commandments — are at the basis of most judicial systems. Many of the everyday proverbs and phrases we use are to be found in the Bible.

It addresses the big questions

Many believe the Bible gives us the answers to the big questions. It tells us why we are here, what we are supposed to do on earth, and where we are going to end up in the future. It tells us about God. If the Bible is true, then it changes everything: how we look at the world, how we treat each other, the way we should live our lives. You might disagree with that, but shouldn't you find out first?

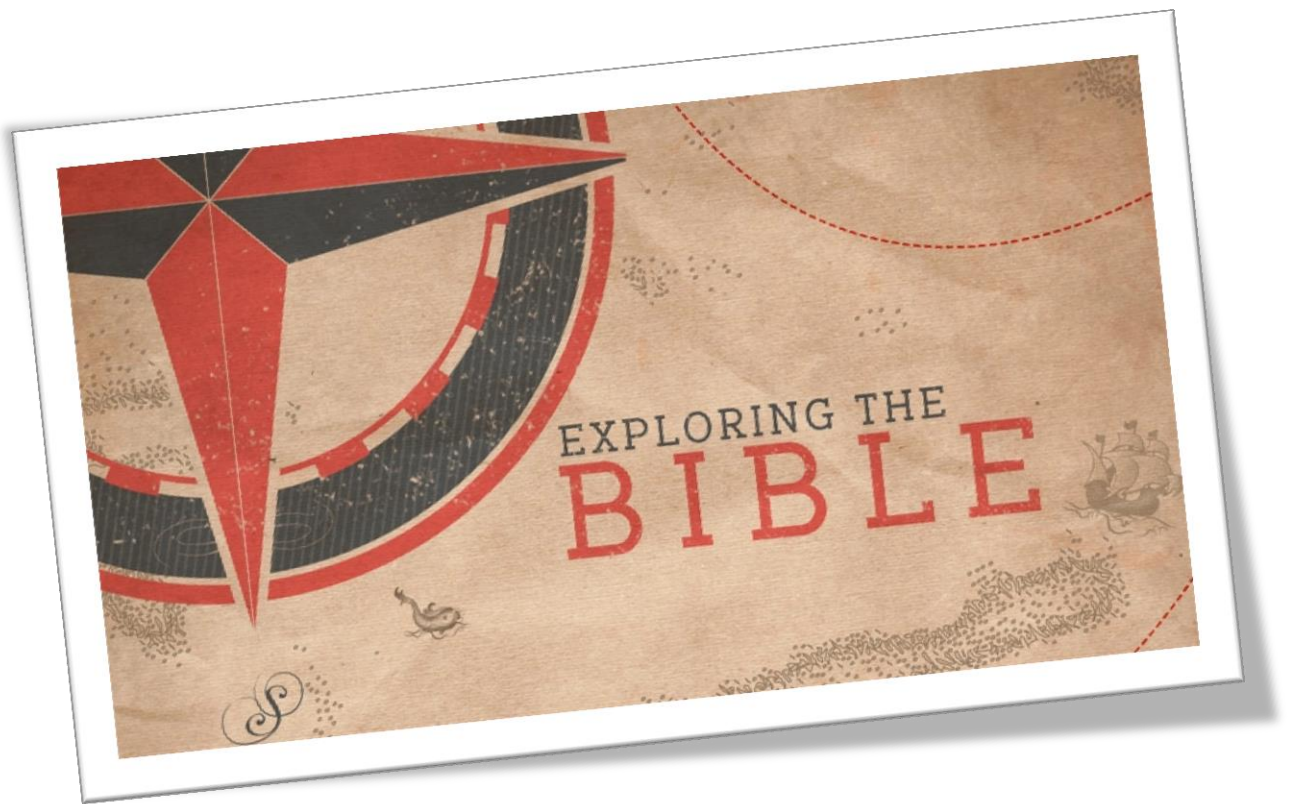
It's the Word of God

For Christians, the Bible is more than just another book. Christians talk about the Bible as 'the Word of God'. It is a book through which God speaks to his people. Just as Christians believe that God speaks to us through prayer, we also believe that God speaks to us through the Bible. That is why the Bible is often referred to as the 'living' Word of God. The Bible is a truly interactive book. It challenges, inspires, thrills, excites and changes all those who read it.

For your notes

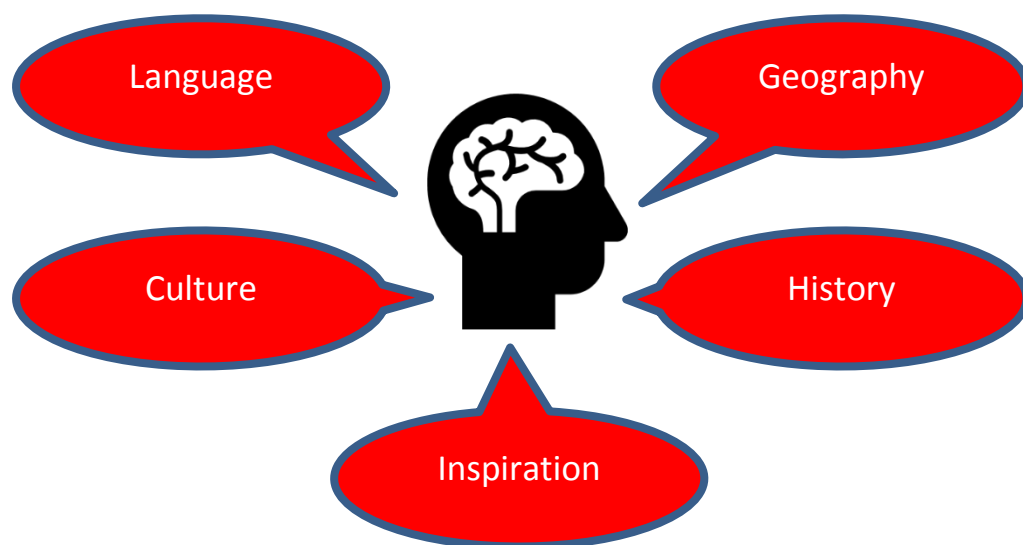
Why should you read the Bible?

Because it's more than another book. It's a marvellous country to explore



Schools of interpretation

There are several difficulties we all face when we begin to interpret the Bible.



Discuss what difficulties you might face when you begin to try and interpret the Bible

The difficulty with **language** is...

The difficulty with **culture** is...

The difficulty with **geography** is...

The difficulty with **history** is...

The difficulty with **inspiration** is ...

Along with all these difficulties, every reader contains a bias. When we seek to interpret the Bible, we contribute our pre-conceived ideas, theological beliefs, education, culture and personal experience. Without being aware of it, we each have a bias and bring to our reading a number of assumptions. This is particularly true of how past experiences can influence our interpreting of the Bible.



**Scripture must interpret my experience, rather than my
experience interpreting Scripture**

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There are four main methods of interpretation. They are;

1. The Allegorical Method
2. The Devotional Method
3. The Rationalistic Method
4. The Literalistic Method

The Allegorical Method

This method of understanding the Bible identifies two levels of meaning, the surface text and the secret, hidden message below. It considers that the plain meaning of the surface text is not what God intended as the mature person will see the spiritual message that is hidden behind the actual text. The weakness of this method is that the focus of Scripture becomes the reader who determines the meaning of the text. Because Scripture becomes reader focused no consistent guidelines can be established for interpreting the Bible

The Devotional method

This method places an emphasis on the personal edification of the reader who interprets scripture in the light of the own personal experience. The danger with this method is that it ignores what God was saying to the original recipients, and then makes selective and subjective applications that God had never intended.

The Rationalistic method

This method considers the Bible to be a valuable book but not the inspired word of God. This considers the Bible as a human document to be interpreted in the light of human reason. The rationalist would view that the Bible contains the word of God or may become the word of God to us as we read it.

The Literalistic Method

This method considers that God uses the normal principles of communication to reveal himself through Scripture. This assumes that to find the plain meaning of the text is a reliable way to interpret scripture; that the Bible is God's word; that God intended his word to be clearly understood by all who read; and that the words of Scripture communicate all that God wants them to know.

For the person who follows the literalistic method, the first task of interpretation is to correctly determine the meaning of the text to the original recipients. This is referred to as EXEGESIS.

For your notes

The second task is to apply the meaning of the text of today, this is referred to as HERMENEUTICS. The basic rule of hermeneutics is...



A text cannot mean what it could never mean to its original authors and readers.

Next week we will delve a bit deeper into literary styles, translations and barriers that we may experience when reading and interpreting the Bible. In preparation for next week, have a go at the quiz below.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. To be inspired is to be in-breathed | T | F |
| 2. The spirit always overpowered the personality of the writer | T | F |
| 3. The inspiration of the writers was temporary | T | F |
| 4. Inspiration removed by the need for investigation | T | F |
| 5. We all have an inbuilt bias when reading the Bible | T | F |
| 6. The Bible contains the word of God | T | F |



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