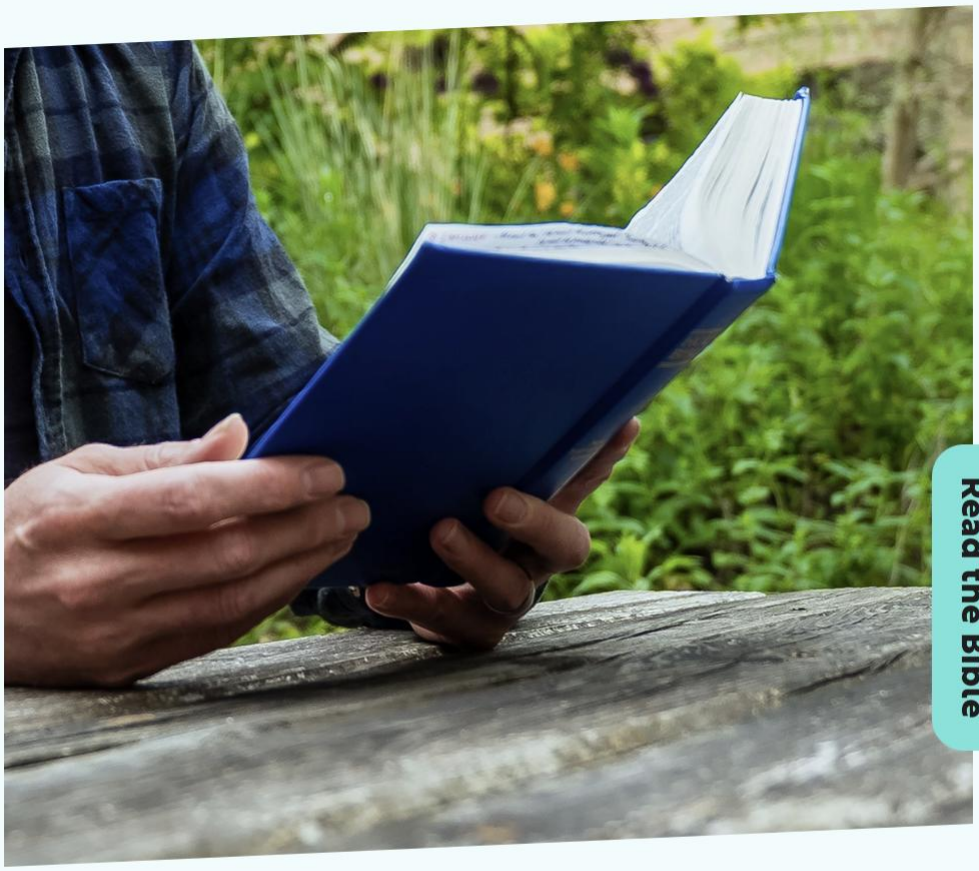

Read the Bible

Daily Bible Plan

Whether you read or listen to the Bible, dive into the suggested daily passages each week to help you prepare for the next session of *The Bible Course*. This can also be found in your *Guidebook*.

This plan is designed to help you read the Bible for yourself. As you read the passages you'll discover key stories, people and events that track the content of The Bible Course and help you prepare for each session.

We suggest you set aside around 15 minutes each day to read the passages and the accompanying reflection. If possible, try to find a regular time and a quiet space to do this. Ask God to help you understand his word and take notes if you are able to.

As you work through this plan, you'll maximise your experience of The Bible Course and develop a regular habit of reading the Bible at the same time.

Day 1: Entering the story – quenching our thirst for meaning

Read: Psalm 139.1–18

Reflect:

The popularity of film franchises like Marvel and Star Wars stems from their capacity to open us up to beautiful and strange new worlds. Entering them feels like an escape. We forget our troubles and let ourselves (for a couple of hours) believe in better. The Bible does this too. It opens us up to a whole new world.

When we open the Bible, says Eugene Peterson, 'we enter the totally unfamiliar world of God, a world of creation and salvation stretching endlessly above and beyond us'.

But the biggest difference between the Bible story and all other stories is that it doesn't take us out of the world but places us right in it. It's God's story, written to help us make sense of the world and give us a hope that is sure.

Life has never felt frailer. Neither have our own stories. Yes, reading the Bible means stepping into an unfamiliar world, but stick at it! Because God, the author, invites everyone to anchor their own frail story in his story.

Could the Bible and the beautiful story it tells be the very thing we need to navigate life and its challenges well? Hold on then – this could get life-changing.

What does our reading say about the story we live in?

We see a world that was made by a master-sculptor who crammed creation with traces of his character. The world bursts with evidence of God and when we see this it changes everything. When we realise our human story has an author, the world goes from being an unfortunate accident or a sick joke to being a beautiful design. Everything has been made on purpose and for purpose.

What is our purpose?

We are made for worship and relationship.

God crafted you into being. You're not random or insignificant. You have been fearfully and wonderfully made. He willed all this for you to know him and worship him (Psalm 139.14).

See how we all belong to this larger story? We all have an author, who has written the days of our lives with meaning. If your life seems devoid of meaning and true relationship, buying more stuff or seeking new experiences won't help. We were made on purpose, for purpose and it's only when we see our true purpose in the one true story of the world that we enter into the life we long for.

Respond

Pause and ask God to make this journey through the Bible story one that is life-changing.

Day 2: Creation, beauty and humanity – the origins of everything

Read: Genesis 1.1—2.3

Reflect:

How's your sight? When you look around, do you see things clearly? I'm not talking about whether you're short-sighted or have 20/20 vision. I mean, when you see the world, do you truly see? Elizabeth Barrett Browning famously penned these words:

Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God;
But only he who sees, takes off his shoes,
The rest sit round and pluck blackberries ...

They're haunting words. We can be fully present here on earth and yet fail to see; surrounded by the divine, but plucking blackberries.

What do we learn about God and creation from Genesis 1?

Genesis 1 provides a snapshot of God forming and filling the earth. God brings order and life out of darkness and chaos. He populates the earth with people, made in his image to rule it, and to know and love him.

This is our true normal; a shared living space with God himself.

The creation account closes with God surveying all that he made, revelling in how 'good' (verse 31) creation is, and then resting. The end goal of God's creation is rest – sabbath (Genesis 2.2–3). There is no more to do, only to rest. Could this be why the best rest is after a full and fulfilling day's work?

Perfect peace existed between God and human beings, between humanity and creation. There was so much good on display! God made a beautiful world, and we were made to steward and cultivate it for greater growth (verses 28–30).

Echoes of our true normal are seen today. Splendour-filled sunsets, awe-inspiring mountain views and heroically sacrificial acts from human beings. All of them tell of the beauty and goodness of our creator God.

What does this mean for us today?

Survey our world today and you see anxiety, hurry and much darkness. Why? Have we have lost our sight? In our search for joy and satisfaction, have we run to created things rather than to the creator himself?

St Augustine famously wrote, 'You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you.'

May God give us fresh sight.

Respond

God is relational and creative. Take time to enjoy him and his creation. Cook a favourite meal, go for a walk outside without your phone, enjoy early morning coffee with a friend or just simply breathe. Taste his goodness in the everyday.

Day 3: Temptation, the fall and evil – where it all went wrong

Read: Genesis 3.1–24

Reflect:

What's wrong with the world? You only have to venture onto social media to find a million different and compelling answers to that question. There's so much disagreement around the 'why' but many agree on the 'what'. The bottom line is that the world isn't as it should be.

The ancient text of Genesis still provides us with the most compelling explanation for why there's so much beauty and brokenness in this crazy, complex world of ours. Genesis 1 and 2 provide us with the pattern, the design woven into creation for our flourishing. Like the grain in a piece of wood, there is an integral pattern. We were made for God, but we've also been made with the ability to make choices: to go with the grain of creation or to go against it and be left in a mess.

It all begins with a question: 'Did God REALLY say?' (verse 1).

What does this question tell us about the origins of evil?

Evil originates when the authority and goodness of God's word are questioned. God's word is perfect; it was given for the flourishing of humanity. God is no kill-joy – he's the joy-giver! The serpent's question causes humanity to doubt the goodness of God and focus on the restrictions he set rather than the blessings he poured out. The promises of rebellion are great but deliver so little. Sin (rebellion) is a sickness we all bear.

What are the consequences of rebellion?

God is too holy, too good and too just to leave sin unpunished, and so he banishes humanity from its true home (verse 23). The flaming sword and cherubim are symbols of the impossibility of return (verse 24). The perfect peace of creation is lost for good – or so it seems.

Where are there signs of hope in the story?

Sin stains the story but God's mercy still triumphs, through an 'offspring of a woman' (verse 15) who will crush the head of evil. He will be hurt in the process, but he will triumph. Do you hear the echoes of Jesus?

God refuses to give up on his creation and that means he refuses to give up on you.

Respond

Spend some time reflecting on how we are implicated in this rebellion.

Understanding our need of rescue fuels our wonder when we realise God has not given up on us.

Day 4: The flood, the ark and the rainbow – time for a new start

Read: Genesis 6.5–8; 8.1–22; 9.1–29

Reflect:

'Why can't I change?' Have you ever asked yourself this question? You may have resolved to change your lifestyle, break a bad habit, or listen more and speak less. The Bible continues to give us the most compelling explanation for the complexities of our human nature. Within us all there is a deeper problem, and until it's dealt with it will always be there. This is why true change is so hard.

Once out of Eden, the story portrays the expansion of the human race. With its expansion comes a spreading darkness. No wonder God's 'heart was deeply troubled' (Genesis 6.5).

How is the God of the Bible different from how we might think?

God is not a robot. He's tender-hearted and feels deeply. Sin saddens him and forces him to act decisively. He recognises a need for a new start: the whole human race will be wiped out through a mighty flood, except for one family.

What does the flood reveal to us about God's nature and ours?

There's more here than extreme weather fronts. Sin requires judgement. The ark here is a symbol of mercy triumphing over judgement. One family is chosen to be saved, not because Noah was perfect but because God is perfect, and he's set on restoration not destruction. Noah's rescue can be our rescue. We deserve judgement too, but God has made a way of escape.

God saves Noah's family from judgement, for a purpose. Using virtually the same words he spoke to Adam, God commissions Noah as the new Adam to 'be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth'. The rainbow is the sign of God's promise (Genesis 9.13). It symbolises the hanging up of his war bow, meaning he will not give up on his people.

But our condition is revealed by what happens next. Noah gets drunk, passes out naked in his tent and is humiliated. The world has been given a wash, but something's gone wrong on the inside. The heart of the problem is the problem of the human heart. That's the message of the flood.

Respond

God longs to restore you and he often uses other people to show us this. Today, take a first step towards restoration by sharing with a friend an area of your life that you know needs to change but is proving to be difficult. Ask them toencourage and pray for you.

Day 5: The tower, the promise and Abraham – God's got a plan

Read: Genesis 11.1–9; 12.1–9

Reflect:

Pride often comes before a fall. Can you think of an example in your own life?

How is this reflected in Genesis 11?

In Genesis 11 humans gather to build the Tower of Babel, declaring 'we will make a name for ourselves' (verse 4). These are outrageous words. The aim? To reach God. To be like him. To be independent of him. This is our human nature. We always want more; we're always building towers.

Rarely are we content with who we are and where we are. No amount of money, career success, or dream realisation brings us to a point of 'enough'. So we constantly seek 'to make a name for ourselves'. But God towers above our towers. Note how he has to come 'down' just to see what they built. God confuses the people's language and scatters the humans who were competing with him.

Note all the promises God makes in Genesis 12. What does this mean for us today?

With the world falling apart, Genesis 12 cuts to one man, Abram, who's minding his own business in Mesopotamia. In verses 1–3 God tells Abram that through him and his descendants, God will initiate and carry out his plan to fix creation. God promises to gather a people (a great nation) into a place (the promised land) and through them he will bless the world (global blessing).

The Lord tells Abram to set out for the land he's been promised. Filled with doubts and fear, he falters along the way, but God is faithful. We also struggle on the road we call life. Temptation and fear can easily derail us, but rescue relies on God and not on Abram. So it is for us today.

The God of the Bible is a promise initiator and a promise keeper. God has a plan for the whole of creation. It's no exaggeration to say that the whole of the rest of the Bible is an outworking of these promises that God made to Abram. They find their fulfilment in Jesus. His entry into the story changes everything.

Respond:

Whose name do you want to make great? Ask God to help you glorify his name in your life today.

Day 6: Isaac, the sacrifice and the substitute – a big test of faith
Read: Genesis 22.1–19

Reflect:

'Because I told you ...' Few responses are more frustrating to hear as a child. Why can't we have more sweet treats, visit the toy store or spend extra hours on the iPad? Many a longing has been denied with this favourite parenting phrase. A parent can see the end result (probably vomit or tears!) when the child cannot and sets a restraint for their own good. The child obeys, not because they can see the end but because they know the person in command can see it for them and they're learning to trust their judgement.

Why would God's request to Abraham have been so shocking to him?

Genesis 22 is crunch point for Abraham and his faith in the promises of God. The story would have felt shocking then, as it does for us now. God asks Abraham to take his 'only son' (verse 2) and sacrifice him in the 'land of Moriah'. Why would he do this? After all, God's promises all hinged on Isaac, the miracle child! But Abraham trusted that God had a good purpose behind the tough ask, so he went fully prepared to obey.

How does God rescue?

At the very last moment, God intervenes (verse 11). With Abraham's knife poised mid-air to sacrifice Isaac, God provides a substitute. A ram dies in place of Isaac. Abraham's faith in God comes through. God is never going to go back on his promises.

Today, the land of Moriah is thought to include Jerusalem. In some traditions, this rocky outcrop was known as Golgotha, or Calvary – the very place where Jesus the Messiah was crucified. Abraham did not have to sacrifice his only son because centuries later God sacrificed his. The story of Abraham and Isaac points us to God the Father and Jesus the Son.

When we can't see or understand what God is doing, we can trust him. Our faith holds up because we trust a faithful God. Our fickle world gives us enough reason to have trust issues. We're accustomed to being let down, but we can have deep confidence that God has and will come through for us: 'He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all' (Romans 8.32).

Respond:

What is going on in your life that you don't understand or can't see God at work in? Fall back on the promises of God and speak them over your struggles.

Day 7: Joseph, the coat and the dreams – down to Egypt

Read: Genesis 37.1–36

Reflect:

There's a beautiful, ancient Japanese art called 'Kintsugi' that involves piecing broken pottery back together using liquid gold or silver. What was broken is made more valuable and more beautiful because of its 'scars'.

The book of Genesis has taken us from the cosmic view of the creation and the catastrophic fall of humanity, to a close-up view of one chosen family. Hand-picked by God, this family would bring blessing, restoration and reconciliation to the world. But this family probably isn't like what you would expect.

Observe the examples of dysfunction in the family of Joseph

The whole story of Abraham's lineage is messy. And this is no ordinary family mess: this is deep, distorted, disgraceful mess. Jacob's clear favouritism towards Joseph, fused with Joseph's arrogance and the jealousy of his brothers, leads to a plot to kill him. To save having blood on their hands, they decide to sell him into slavery 'down to Egypt' (verse 28) – and make a profit on the deal.

The golden boy turns slave boy. But God had a plan. In every twist, every disappointment, every long wait, God was working. Joseph's story is a kintsugi story. God was putting back the pieces to create something of greater worth. He was writing a better story all along: Joseph ended up as prime minister, becoming a saviour figure during a huge crisis.

'When the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians ... Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt, to Joseph, to buy grain because the famine was severe' (Genesis 41.56–57).

When Joseph's brothers fear that Joseph will take revenge against them for selling him into slavery, Joseph says: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives' (Genesis 50.20). He's able to forgive them because he's seen that was God at work, even in the mess.

What does this mean for us today?

We may not be able to see it right now, but God is always at work in the mess. God is the master of kintsugi. He's into recycling! He can take the rubbish in our lives and make something beautiful out of it again. TODAY, he is working all things for good (Romans 8.28).

Respond

These days, we don't often stop to reflect. Take a moment to look back and trace the careful hand of God in your life.