

Notes for our Sandbach Baptist Church BIBLE READING WEEK 2024

(Sunday February 4th to Saturday February 10th — or any later week)

'Sir: to keep you ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, receive 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.'

[—said to King Charles III on the presentation to him of the Bible at his Coronation]

As Christians we at SBC encourage you all to put your roots deep into God's Word, the Bible. If you have attended church for some years, you will hopefully have many Bible verses (probably more than you realise) treasured in your memory. One verse that you may know is Acts chapter 17 verse 11. The apostle Paul had been telling the Good News of Jesus to the people of Thessalonica, until some troublemakers forced him to flee. By night Paul arrived in the neighbouring town of Berea, where he started again to preach. Luke, the author of the Book of Acts records what happened next:

'Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.'

[Acts 17:11 (NIV)]

In the warm spirit of the Bereans, we invite you to choose and read at least one from the list of six Bible passages we offer daily for our Sandbach Baptist Church 'Bible Reading Week.'

Thus, on each day you can choose from any (or all!) of:

- 1) **One chapter from the Gospels.**
- 2) **One chapter from elsewhere in the New Testament.**
- 3) **One Old Testament chapter.**
- 4) **One Psalm or Proverbs chapter.**
- 5) **One famous passage (probably a familiar one).**
- 6) **One entire Bible book (usually a very short one!)—to be read all in one go.**

By the end of the Week, you will thus have read some great passages of Scripture. We pray these will bless your heart and encourage you to dive deeper. We recommend that you explore readings beyond those very familiar to you—although you can choose ones you love, if you prefer.

Other suggestions . . .

- Try reading your Bible passage out loud! That's a great way to discover statements in the Bible that you have previously glossed over, or not noticed.
- Listen to your chapter on an audio Bible (e.g., by googling 'Bible Gateway Audio Free Online').
- I have also recorded a few chapters myself, as MP3 files, for folks with poor eyesight—please ask me.
- A Bible handbook, commentary, reading system or daily thought can illuminate Scripture for us—but first, let us make sure like the Psalmist that **'I have hidden your word in my heart...'** [Psalm 119:11 (NIV)]. And let us *depend on the Holy Spirit* to bring it to life, for and in us.
- Later, set up a 'Verse of the Day' on your phone, or a reading plan. (I use the YouVersion app).

I hope that the following Bible passages chosen for this SBC Bible Reading Week will enrich God's Word for you. They have done for me! Many blessings in Christ.

George Hill

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BIBLE

It also helps to understand the structure of the Bible. Its 66 books can helpfully be divided as shown below. (NB—we count ‘double’ books such as 1 and 2 Samuel as two books, not one):

OLD TESTAMENT — 39 books in total, containing:

5 books of LAW	- <i>the first is Genesis.</i>	Also called ‘The books of Moses.’
12 books of HISTORY	- <i>the first is Joshua.</i>	There is history elsewhere, of course.
5 books of POETRY	- <i>the first is Job.</i>	But they don’t rhyme in English!
5 books of the MAJOR PROPHETS	- <i>the first is Isaiah.</i>	There’s no prophet called Lamentations!
12 books of the MINOR PROPHETS	- <i>the first is Hosea.</i>	Minor in length, but not in value!

NEW TESTAMENT — 27 books in total, containing:

4 Gospels		By Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
1 book of ACTS		Another book by Luke.
13 letters by Paul	- <i>the first is Romans.</i>	To churches or to friends.
8 letters by other people	- <i>the first is Hebrews.</i>	Also by James, Peter, John and Jude.
1 book of REVELATION		The author’s name is John.

In each of the NT sections (e.g., in John 1, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1 and Revelation 1) you will find great statements presenting Jesus as God. And the New Testament starts, and ends, with verses about JESUS.

Some rich thoughts . . . !

- *Try to read a Bible ‘Verse of the Day’. You can read one, or listen to one, on the YouVersion Bible app; or you can have one emailed to you daily by the Bible Gateway website.*
- *‘The Bible is a rock of diamonds, a chain of pearls, the sword of the Spirit, a chart by which the Christian sails to eternity, the map by which he daily walks, the sundial by which he sets his life, and the balance in which he weighs his actions.’ [Thomas Watson]*
- *‘I cannot find one single example in Scripture where God rebukes His people without afterwards encouraging them.’ [Geoff Willetts]*
- *The word “mercy” appears over four times as often in the Old Testament as it does in the New.*
- *There’s no point going through your Bible if your Bible doesn’t go through you!*
- *Don’t say to yourself, “When all else fails, read the Master’s instructions...”!*
- *Many Christians expect the world to respect a book that they themselves neglect.*
- *Who was the straightest man in the Bible? Joseph, when Pharaoh made him a ruler!*

BIBLE VERSIONS

At SBC, we use the New International Version (NIV), 2011 version (some still use the 1983 version). The 2011 version is gender neutral (it uses gender pronouns only when they are *in the original text*). Also for a vivid reading, try The Message or the Living Bible; for study, try the Amplified; for beauty, try the NKJV or KJV; for simplified language, try the Good News (TEV); for young people, any good youth Bible. And all are free online—search for Bible Gateway or YouVersion Bible app.

7 days to read . . .

Before you read each day, pray for God's Holy Spirit to open His Word afresh for you, to speak to you anew about Jesus, and to reveal His Father's love that sent Him into the world that God has lent us.

SUNDAY of Bible Reading Week—choose one on the theme of GOD'S PLAN THROUGHOUT HISTORY:

- 1) **Matthew 1-2.** [The greatest story begins! (Start at 1 verse 18 to omit the names.)]
- 2) **Romans 8.** [If we are in Christ nothing can separate us from Him.]
- 3) **Genesis 1.** [The story of Creation; add chapter 3 to hear how sin spoiled our world.]
- 4) **Psalms 121.** [The Lord watches over us from beginning to end.]
- 5) **Revelation 20-21.** [The Day of Judgement (starts at 20 verse 11); God's amazing Holy City.]
- 6) **Philemon.** [God has plans for individuals too, even a runaway slave! Key verse: 6.]

MONDAY of Bible Reading Week—choose one on the theme of GODLY WISDOM & WISE LIVING:

- 1) **Mark 4.** [Parables of seeds; revealing the kingdom of God.]
- 2) **James 3.** [Using our tongues wisely; wisdom from above.]
- 3) **1 Samuel 25.** [David discovers his smart future wife, Abigail. (Smarter than him?!)]
- 4) **Psalms 1.** [How to walk in a spiritual life that avoids evil and scorn.]
- 5) **Deuteronomy 5.** [Ten Commandments to obey: 4 about God and 6 about people.]
- 6) **3 John.** [A wise greeting to an old friend. Key verse: 3 John 11.]

TUESDAY of Bible Reading Week—choose one on the theme of PERSONAL EXAMPLES:

- 1) **Luke 1.** [Important Zechariah had doubts; but humble Mary had none.]
- 2) **Acts 9.** [Saul (Paul) is converted, helped by faithful & brave Ananias.]
- 3) **Exodus 18.** [God's great leader Moses is not too proud to take advice!]
- 4) **Psalms 15.** [Traditionally known as 'The Gentleman's Psalm'; how to live!]
- 5) **Psalms 23.** [The Good Shepherd. What better example have we than Jesus?]
- 6) **Ruth.** [The great love story of Ruth and Boaz. Key verse: Ruth 2:12.]

WEDNESDAY of Bible Reading Week—choose one on the theme of TESTING & GROWING:

- 1) **Mark 14.** [Peter goes from the Last Supper's confidence to his denial . . .]
- 2) **Hebrews 12** [Running the race faithfully and accepting discipline.]
- 3) **Isaiah 58.** [Do we serve God deceiving ourselves, or loving His goodness?]
- 4) **Psalms 51.** [David's confession of sin and his plea for forgiveness.]
- 5) **Psalms 139.** [We are never away from God's presence (whether we like it or not . . .).]
- 6) **Haggai.** [God's people struggle but finally get their priorities right! Key verse: Haggai 2:4.]

THURSDAY of Bible Reading Week— choose one on the theme of THE CROSS; FOLLOWING CHRIST:

- 1) **Luke 23.** [The fickle crowd condemn Jesus; the criminals split about Him.]
- 2) **Romans 6.** [Don't live as your old self but in your new life in Christ Jesus.]
- 3) **Isaiah 53** [The suffering servant; Isaiah prophesies about Jesus (around 700BC).]
- 4) **Psalms 42.** [Longing for God even through dark times of suffering.]
- 5) **John 13-14.** [The Last Supper; Jesus, the only Way; and the Holy Spirit's assurance].
- 6) **Philippians.** [Christ's humility and suffering; Paul's longing to be like Him.]

FRIDAY of Bible Reading Week— choose one on the theme of GOOD NEWS IN JESUS, & PRAISE:

- 1) **Matthew 28.** [The Resurrection; Christ has risen! And He commissions us!]
- 2) **Ephesians 1.** [*'Ephesians is the letter of the rich things'*—Jim Packer.]
- 3) **Daniel 6.** [Prayer costs! But the lions in the den show that God answers it!]
- 4) **Psalms 150.** [Let's praise God with everything we have!]
- 5) **Acts 2.** [The Holy Spirit came to remain with them all—and with us.]
- 6) **Colossians.** [An unimportant church receives a Christ-filled letter. Key verses: Colossians 1:15, 2:6 and 3:23-4]

SATURDAY of Bible Reading Week— choose one on the theme of CHALLENGE & COMMITMENT:

- 1) **John 7.** [Jesus reveals Himself; the people divide, for and against Him.]
- 2) **2 Peter 3.** [The Lord's return: are we looking forward urgently to it?]
- 3) **2 Chronicles 30.** [Hezekiah calls all who are willing, to celebrate the Passover.]
- 4) **Psalms 67** [We pray that God will bless us so that we can make Him known.]
- 5) **Matthew 7.** [Recognising the duties and rewards of following Jesus.]
- 6) **2 Timothy.** [Paul's poignant last letter is to Timothy. Key verses: 1:7, 2:2, 2:15, 3:16].

- *And two final challenges! First, finish your journey by reading Revelation 22. Then, have you ever read an entire Gospel in one sitting? Mark is the shortest of the four. Read Mark, learn and inwardly digest . . .*

Reading Scripture is a mighty foundation. (Reading and meditating on Romans transformed Martin Luther; and the Chinese Bible teacher Watchman Nee used to read through the whole New Testament each month!)

We need also to study Scripture. After reading a passage, if you want the Holy Spirit to reveal further rich treasures to you than the plain text has done, begin by praying for His further guidance. Then you should ask yourself the following questions about the passage:

1. **Observation** — what does the passage actually say? Do I understand it all? How does it fit in with the rest of the Bible? (A study Bible or a Bible handbook can be helpful.)
2. **Interpretation** — what does the passage mean? What does the human author hope I will learn? Even more importantly, what is the Holy Spirit saying to me through it? How does it point to Jesus?
3. **Application** — how should I apply its message in my life and what light does it shine onto me? What actions ought I to take, in order that God's written Word has the effect on me that God intends?

HOW TO USE THE BIBLE

We may need to reach for our Bible in particular circumstances. In that case, you would do well to keep this handy guide nearby:

- When in sorrow, read John chapter 14.
- When people fail you, read Psalm 27.
- When you have done wrong, read Psalm 51.
- When you worry, read Matthew chapter 6 verses 19-34.
- When you are depressed, read Psalm 34.
- When God seems far away, read Psalm 139.
- When you are discouraged, read Isaiah chapter 40.
- When doubts trouble you, try John chapter 7 verse 17.
- When you are lonely or fearful, read Psalm 23.
- When you forget your blessings, read Psalm 103.
- When your faith needs stirring, read Hebrews chapter 11.
- When you are in danger, read Psalm 91.
- When you feel down and out, read Romans chapter 8 verses 31-39.
- When you want courage for your task, read Joshua chapter 1.
- When the world seems bigger than God, read Psalm 90.
- When you want rest and peace, read Matthew 11 verses 25-30.
- When your Christian faith feels weak, read Romans 8 verses 1-30.
- When you leave home, read Psalm 121.
- When you grow bitter or critical, read 1 Corinthians chapter 13.
- When your prayers grow selfish, read Psalm 67.
- When you think too much of money, read Mark 10 verses 17-31.
- If you want to be fruitful, read John chapter 15.
- For Paul's secret of happiness, read Colossians 3 verses 12-17.
- For Paul's idea of Christianity, read 2 Corinthians 5 verses 15-19.
- For Paul's rules for daily life, read Romans chapter 12.
- For a great invitation and opportunity, read Isaiah chapter 55.
- For Jesus' idea of a Christian, read Matthew chapter 5.
- For James' idea of religion, read James chapter 1 verses 19-27.
- For Jesus' idea of prayer, read Luke chapter 11 verses 1-13.
- For a picture of worship, read Isaiah chapter 58 verses 1-12.
- For the prophet's idea of religion, read Isaiah 1 verses 10-18.