

Some first thoughts on How to Begin to Pray and Read the Bible

It would be great to have a go at reading the Bible and praying. If anything that follows is helpful, brilliant. If it's a bit of an overload, please forget it!

The great thing is to do it in a way that works for you. Little and often might be better than a heroic effort to set the alarm early, which lasts two days. Why not start small and maybe build from there? You could do something really worthwhile if you could spare maybe 15 minutes most days.

Many people find that a regular time, perhaps a regular place, are helpful. Could this be part of your morning or bedtime routine, or tagged on to lunch or...? Habits and getting ready, say the night before (where's the Bible and my glasses and biro? Coffee cup out, chair available...), can really help us.

For all sorts of reasons, sometimes it can be tricky to fit this in or settle down to it. Not to worry. There's always tomorrow!

You may want to experiment, find what works for you and mix it up from time to time.

Praying and reading the Bible are not mainly matters of technique. The attitude of our hearts is most important. Perhaps pausing to take a moment to remember what we are about – the wonder and privilege of it – is as important as anything.

I'd love to hear how you're getting on and chat about any triumphs or challenges. If you've got any tips, I'd love to hear them. There's lots more I could say!

Reading The Bible

The Bible is God speaking to us today by his Holy Spirit. It is God's Word to his whole church down the ages. All of it is good and true and useful. Some bits are clearer than others. Some bits are more important. The great heart of it is the good news of Jesus: God's love for a broken world, his plan to rescue and transform us. Focus on God revealed in Jesus. He and his creation and salvation have infinite implications. The Bible is not primarily God's word directly privately to me about my circumstances - a How To Guide for me to have a happy successful day, or to tell me what job to do or.... But if we can really grasp the big truths of the big picture, it changes everything and is relevant to every aspect of life.

Choose a good translation. Perhaps try the New International Version for readability. The Good News Bible could be an option if you're a less keen reader. There are also good free audio Bibles available – I like David Suchet, the actor who played *Agatha Christie's Poirot* – reading the NIVUK. See <https://www.biblegateway.com/>

If I were beginning, I might start with a Gospel from the New Testament because of the immediate focus on Jesus – maybe Mark, which is the shortest and has a direct style. (Ask me for some separate notes on reading Mark).

Some kind of plan and pattern is much better than random opening of the Bible. Generally it is sensible to read through Bible books and to ask yourself why the writer has said it like this, and what he is trying to say. Often there is a logic to the argument or to what the writer has placed together. Thinking about the context of a passage can be informative.

Over time, eventually, I would try to read the whole Bible. I might use a Bible reading plan sometimes (e.g. Bible in a year) or get a list of the Bible books and tick off the ones I had read. Reading cover to cover, Genesis to Revelation, can get a bit hard going e.g. in Leviticus and Numbers.

There is great merit in dwelling on a single verse, or reading big chunks. Most of the time we might settle on a chapter or part of a chapter. Probably most of us would do well to slow down a bit most of the time.

Read prayerfully and thoughtfully. Ask God to help you hear his voice. And to believe, understand and obey. Pray to meet Jesus and be transformed by him. Ask God to help you put in to practice what you are learning.

Don't worry too much about what you don't understand or don't remember.

There's a whole load more stuff we could say about Bible Study (again, have some notes I could give you on that sometime if you like). You could move your Bible reading a little in the direction of Bible Study by writing on the text / highlighting (either in a Bible – perhaps a special edition with wide margins – or on a print out). You might like to use a notebook perhaps to try to crystallise one thing you want to hold on to, or to jot down questions to follow up.

Some people find Bible reading notes helpful. These might give a brief passage to read with some questions and comments and a prayer. You might try the Explore notes or something else from here: <https://www.thegoodbook.co.uk/bible-study-and-devotions/daily-bible-reading/>

People sometimes benefit from meeting up with someone to read the Bible from time to time, perhaps using a resource like <https://www.theword121.com//> We also have home groups and Bible study groups you might be interested in.

Perhaps a mid-point between Bible reading and prayer is something like meditation or contemplation. Try not only to read but to think about what you are reading. Reflect on it. Is there something that moves you to thanks or praise or that you want to ask for God's help with?

Praying

In the Bible, prayer seems to be talking to God (with words), though we might sometimes want to spend some time just enjoying his presence. We don't have to talk all the time. And Jesus told us not to think we will be heard by God because our prayers are long or impressive.

Typically we pray to God the Father, through God the Son, the Lord Jesus, depending on him, with the help of God the Holy Spirit.

We pray in Jesus' name. Because of what Jesus has done for us, we have the wonderful privilege of access to God as our loving heavenly Father. We are his forgiven sons and daughters by faith in Jesus, and he delights to hear our honest requests. God knows us better than we know ourselves. And he knows our needs before we ask them. So we don't need to pretend with him. Or worry that we can't express ourselves perfectly.

Praying in Jesus' name suggests that we pray for things which conform to his will and purposes, in the light of what he has done. "Please help me to be more like Jesus and forgive those who wrong me" is a much better prayer than, "God, I could really use a few million quid" – but by all means we should pray about all our real concerns. Give me today my daily bread is a great prayer and we needn't be super spiritual about it all. Be open and honest with God.

The Lord's Prayer is a great pattern which we can pray, and which can inspire our praying. (I can give you some further notes on that). We might sometimes use prayers or hymns which others have written, and sometimes our own words. (Again, I could point you to some pre-written prayers. See the Church of England website for *Common Worship* and *The Book of Common Prayer* text and audio).

Our Bible reading might throw up things we want to pray about.

Sometimes people use acronyms to remind them of different types of prayer. For example, we might STOP and pray. Say SORRY, THANK YOU, pray for OTHERS and PLEASE Lord help me with...

A simple list of some things or people you want to pray for on each of the days of the week might help you e.g. Monday, family; Tuesday, friends; Wednesday, church life; Thursday, the nation and government; Friday, the world. Or whatever.

Enjoy!

Resources

Do ask me for ideas. In addition to Bible Gateway and The Good Book Company linked above, you could find Bibles, devotional literature, stuff on prayer and Bible reading here:

<https://uk.10ofthose.com/>