

ALOVE⁺



The Salvation Army for a new generation

Hey, what's Shelf Life?



it's a guide to getting your bible off the shelf and brought to life!



welcome to shelf life...

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This is your Bible discovery guide to help you get your Bible off your shelf and into your life!

Contained within this guide you will find

- **info and facts** about the most amazing book that ever was... and still is!
- **clear info** about resources that will specifically help you, as a young person, connect with the Bible in a relevant, fresh way.
- **tips** on how to read between the lines, uncover the story of the Bible and get to grips with its meaning.

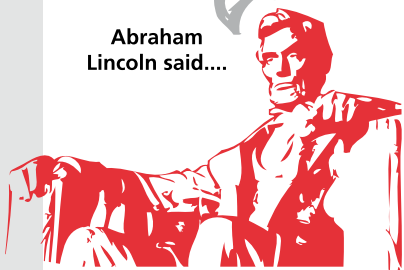
- **ideas** to bring the words to life and enable you to meet with God.
- **six 'apps'** to guide your Bible reading experience and steps into action.
- **suggestions** for ways of studying the Bible on your own or with a group.

Our hope is that once you get to the end of Shelf Life, you won't be complaining that the Bible is too boring or not relevant to you!

We want Shelf Life to help you...
read, understand, explore, and
action the Bible,...and tell others they need to
get into it too!!

*'The Bible is the
greatest book
ever written.'*

**Abraham
Lincoln** said....



Charles Dickens
said....

*'It is the very best
book that ever was or
ever will be known in
the world.'*



*'You Christians look after a
document containing enough
dynamite to blow all of civilisation
to pieces, turn the world upside
down and bring peace to a battle-
torn planet. But you treat it as
though it is nothing more than a
piece of literature.'*

*The Bible is no mere
book, but a Living
Creature.'*

Even Napoleon
said...



Mahatma Gandhi once
remarked to a group of
missionaries'...



¹ David Pyches Upside Down

The Bible is God's living word – it's what God wants to say to us right now and in the future. It's not full of ancient text with no relevance to us living in the 21st century; these are 'living words'... inspiring, exciting, challenging, informing and comforting. Through the words in the Bible God tells us about who we are, who he wants us to become, his dreams for his world, and his love for his people. Reading the Bible is not simply reading – it's getting together with God!

As Christians we should read the Bible, not because we have been told to or because we feel guilty if we don't... and not to do well in Bible quizzes on Sunday! The Bible is the story of God... past, present and future. We spend time with the Bible because we want to get to know the author of the book for ourselves – that's God! We will soon discover that through the Bible God speaks to us clearly and personally. God will not love us more because we read the Bible, or disown us if we don't. However, getting into the Bible means we can grow spiritually, be able to dig deeper into our discipleship and start to become more like Jesus.

'Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see - more to everything! - than we had ever dreamed. And this 'more' has to do with God. As we read we find ourselves in on a conversation... and the longer we read, we begin to 'get it' - we are in a conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us; who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and - most of all - the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.'

(Eugene Peterson: Introduction to The Message)

1. Find a time when you can read the Bible on a regular basis.
2. Find a space where you are comfortable and can concentrate.
3. Get your Bible, a pen or a pencil and a notebook (journal).
4. Ask God to help you understand what you read.
5. Read your Bible passage.
6. Think and pray about what you have learned.
7. Jot down any insights, prayer requests or actions to take in your journal.

Choosing Your Bible...

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So, first things first... have you got a Bible? We don't mean any old Bible; we mean a Bible that is specifically yours. (It is probably best to avoid digging out an old Bible from your grandparents' garage, blowing the dust off the gilt-edged pages and reading with the smell of must and damp in your nostrils!) Your choice of Bible is vitally important and full of meaning; many people discover that the first ever Bible they choose for themselves stays with them well into their adulthood – it becomes a familiar and trusted companion on their journey as a disciple!

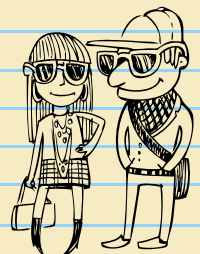
The first thing you must consider when choosing a Bible is which translation of the Bible you prefer. There are many different translations of the Bible. Some are literal word for word translations. These are generally what would be viewed as older English language, such as the New King James Version or the New Revised Standard Version. Other versions aim for translating the meaning of the text in more modern language and are often easier for people to understand. One of the most common translations is the New International Version or NIV. Other translations are written as a paraphrase of the text, such as The Message. These bring the Scriptures to life in a way relevant for today, but it is always

useful to cross-check with another translation to make sure you get a broad view of what the passage is saying. You can even get a Bible now that sets The Message and Today's New International Version side by side so you can do this.

Bibles come in all shapes and sizes. You can get Bibles specifically prepared for children, young people and students. In 2011 a brand new version of the Youth Bible is being released and there are Bibles that you can read online or download on to phones, tablets or e-readers.

Bibles can come with just the Bible text, or with in-depth footnotes to help you understand each verse. A quick search on the Wesley Owen online store (a well known Christian bookshop) reveals 918 different Bibles! You can buy a Bible at your local Christian bookstore, or via online bookstores such as Wesley Owen, as mentioned above, or Eden Christian Bookstore. The choice can be overwhelming, so ask for advice from your parents / corps officer or youth worker and make sure you are reading a Bible that is the right one for you.

Jot down your thoughts as to what you feel you are looking for in a Bible, then discuss this with a trusted friend who can advise you on the right Bible to purchase.



1. About the Bible

Bible Facts...

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Try this quick 'true or false' quiz to test out your knowledge of facts about the great book!

The Bible is, in fact, not just one book but a collection of 66 books.

There are approximately 750,000 words in the Bible.

The Bible was first written in English.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time.

There are more than 80,000 versions of the Bible.

The Bible is approximately 2,000 years old.

The Bible took around 1,400 years to write.

The Bible is the most easily obtained book in the world.



The Bible is, in fact, not just one book but a collection of 66 books. TRUE

The word 'Bible' comes from the Greek word *biblia*, which literally means 'books'. So, reading the Bible is like reading 66 books. The Bible was written by over 40 different authors at least. It contains stories, history lessons, laws, poems, letters, prophecies and much more!

There are approximately 750,000 words in the Bible. TRUE

In fact there are exactly 773,692 words in one particular version. It would take you approximately 70 hours to read the whole Bible out loud.

The Bible was first written in English. FALSE

The Old Testament was written in Hebrew. The New Testament was written in Greek. Now the Bible has been translated into over 2,000 different languages around the world.

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time. TRUE

Estimates are that somewhere in the region of at least 2.5 billion have been sold, maybe as high as 6 billion. About 50 Bibles are sold every

minute.

In comparison, the best-selling fiction is probably Charles Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* with 200 million copies sold. The latest Harry Potter novel had sold about 75 million copies to date.

There are more than 80,000 versions of the Bible. TRUE

New versions of the Bible continue to be added or updated. Look out for the brand new Youth Bible to be released later in 2011.

The Bible is approximately 2,000 years old. FALSE

Parts of the Bible are thousands of years old. The first canonical complete Bible is from the time of the Council of Rome (382 AD). In the earliest days of English Christianity the only known Bible was the Latin Vulgate, made by Jerome between AD 383 and 405. This version of the Bible could only be read by the clergy.

The Bible took around 1,400 years to write. TRUE

Although the Bible was written over a period of about 1,400 years, its text has come to us in a unexpectedly good state of preservation. This preservation was possible because of

the large number of manuscripts found. The New Testament evidence for reliability is incredibly large. It includes about 4,500 Greek manuscripts beginning about AD 125.

The Bible is the most easily obtained book in the world. FALSE

There are over 2,000 language groups yet to have a Bible in their own language – that's over 200 million people! Bibles are also scarce in places where Christians suffer some of the harshest persecution. For example: In North Korea possessing even just one Bible is grounds for execution. In China the Government has

confiscated and burned Bibles and prohibited them from being printed. In Turkey those who import, print and/or distribute Bibles are at risk of being threatened, beaten, bombed and/or killed by mobs and criminals who are rarely arrested or prosecuted. With all that in mind it's amazing how often we take our Bibles for granted. A good way to remind ourselves of this is to thank God every time we lift our Bible that we are free to do so and to pray for those Christians.

(Statistics adapted from from billionbibles.org)

Reasons My Bible Stays on the Shelf!

I don't understand it!

I never get anything out of it!

It seems irrelevant to my life!

My friends / parents will think I'm weird if I read the Bible!

It's so big, I don't know where to start!

How do I know it's true!

I just don't have the time!

I find it boring.

The Bible says things I don't like!

Add your own reasons here!

HOLY BIBLE



Hmmm... there's a lot of excuses we give for not reading the Bible and these are just some of them! Let's examine these in more detail...

It is true that some Bibles are written in a language that is hard to understand. These are mainly the more traditional translations of the Bible such as the *King James Version*. If you choose a more modern translation, such as the *NIV*, the *Good News Bible* or the *Youth Bible*, you will find it easier to read and understand.

However, there are of course going to be tricky bits in the Bible, where the words might not make sense to you straight away. There are some parts where even the experts still debate the meaning of the text. But don't let

that put you off... if you come across something you don't understand, make a

I don't understand it!

note to yourself to look into it in more detail when you have time. Using a Bible commentary or study Bible will help here (see page 13) but the simplest thing to do is to ASK someone who does understand to explain it to you! **And don't forget, there is loads of the Bible where the meaning is plain and simple and where you can put it into action.**

I find it boring.

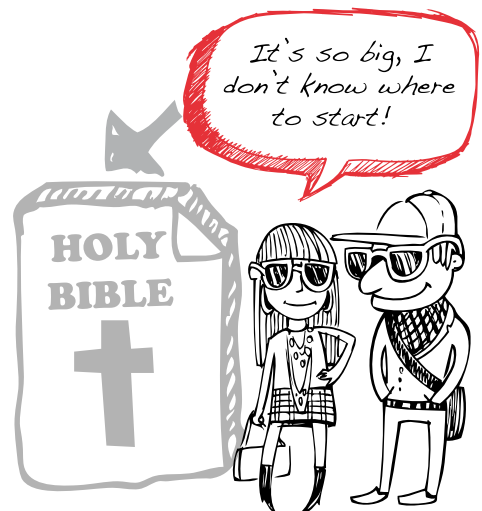
In such a big book there are inevitably going to be some boring bits – isn't that the same in any book we read? The Bible does contain sections describing lengthy family trees, dimensions of buildings, lists of numbers and detailed laws which may not immediately make for thrilling reading.

BUT... what about the emotional love stories, the brave action heroes, the bloody battles, the inspirational friendships, the supernatural happenings, the fascinating history, the moving poems, the life-changing wisdom? **Don't get bogged down in a passage that you consider dull when there are many more exciting parts just over the page!**

The Bible does contain a lot of writing – after all, it is 66 books in one, and has around 750,000 words. But it has been broken down in to bite-sized chunks – Old Testament and New Testament; books, chapters and verses – to make it more manageable to read as much or as little as you would like at a time. And wouldn't you expect the story of God and his people to feature more than just a few glossy magazine style pages and some cartoons!? Let's put it into perspective... book five of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series has approx 255,000 words in it, whereas the New Testament of the Bible only has around 181,000.

(And if your Bible is literally too big – so big that you can't lift it or easily turn the pages – buy a smaller one!)

It's so big, I don't know where to start!



I just don't have the 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.

Many Bible reading plans suggest you read a couple of chapters a day, which usually only takes about 15 minutes!



If you only go to the Bible to 'get something', you are probably missing the point! The Bible

I never get anything out of it!

is all about Jesus... so take your eyes off yourself and look for him!

The Bible isn't just there to tell us the rights and wrongs about living as a Christian. It is given to us so that we can get to know Jesus personally and intimately. **Reading the Bible is an encounter and a conversation with God, not reading a manual of instructions on how to build a successful life.**

Many people do wonder how such an ancient book can be relevant to today's 21st-century culture. After all, it was written thousands of years ago, to people living in a different country, with a vastly different culture, even speaking different languages. But despite this, you will find that the people in the Bible are startlingly similar to us in the things that really matter, such as life and death, love, peace, happiness, freedom and relationships. Many people believe that the Bible gives us the answers to the big questions that humans have been asking

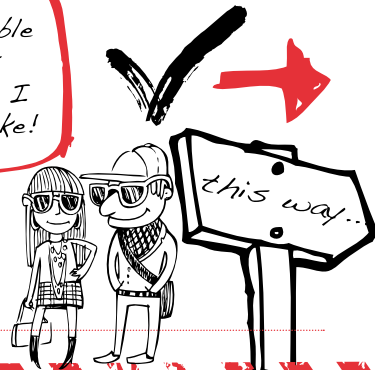
throughout the ages, such as why are we here, what are we supposed to do, and where will end up in the future.

It seems irrelevant to my life!

We will see later on in Shelf Life how to make sense of the context in which the Bible was written so as to draw out the principles that are still vitally relevant to us today.

There is no denying that the Bible is challenging. It can say some things that make us feel uncomfortable in an area of our life. **The Bible is God's living word and sometimes God needs to challenge us, correct us or direct us as we continue on our journey of becoming more like Jesus.**

The Bible says things I don't like!



Well, some people might... but anyone who is a true friend will respect your beliefs and encourage you in them... especially if they start seeing some positive changes in your life! You have to decide if it is more important to you to grow in your relationship with Jesus, or

worry about what others may or may not think of you!

Other people will think I'm weird if I read the Bible!

This is an excellent question and one which many people ask of the Bible. There have been hundreds of books written on the subject of the evidences of the authenticity and truth of the Bible that all come to the conclusion that

How do I know it's true!

the Bible most definitely is the divine word of God. The evidence cited is many and varied. For example, the many fulfilled prophecies written in the Bible, the unique historical and scientific accuracy, the incredible consistency throughout the Bible even though it was written by many different authors over 2,000 years, and the personal testimony of the effect on people's lives.

Notes...



Let's use the space to make some notes....



Bible Images...

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The Bible talks about itself a lot! There are numerous verses that declare the importance and benefit of reading God's word for those who desire to grow as disciples of Jesus. The Bible often uses the terms like 'God's word', 'the Law', 'Scriptures' to describe itself. Read the following verses (taken from all different translations) and let the Bible speak!

John 8:31-32 (RSV)

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.'

Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Hebrews 4:12 (NCV)

God's word is alive and working and is sharper than a double-edged sword. It cuts all the way into us, where the soul and the spirit are joined, to the centre of our joints and bones. And it judges the thoughts and feelings in our hearts.

Acts 20:32 (NLT)

And now I entrust you to God and the message of his grace that is able to build you up and give you an inheritance with all those he has set apart for himself.

Matthew 4:4 (NLT)

But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, "People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."'

Romans 15:4 (NCV)

Everything that was written in the past was written to teach us. The Scriptures give us patience and encouragement so that we can have hope.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realise what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people To do every good work.

Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

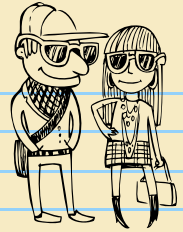
Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:11 (NIV)

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Try reading through the above verses again. This time jot down all the blessings and benefits that people who read God's word regularly receive!

The Bible also uses many different images to describe God's word, some of which we have seen above. Check out the following list:



- **Fire** Deuteronomy 5:23-26; Jeremiah 23:29
- **Hammer** Jeremiah 23:29
- **Lamp** Psalm 119:105
- **Light** 2 Peter 1:19
- **Mirror** James 1:22-26
- **Rod and staff** Psalm 23:4
- **Sword** Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12; Revelation 1:16
- **Seed** Luke 8:11; 1 Peter 1:23
- **Food** Psalm 119:103
- **Counsellor** Psalm 119:24

jot down your thoughts here:



Try reading a familiar passage again and again over a period of days. But each time you read it, approach it with a different word picture in your mind. Note what different things you notice about the passage depending on whether you are reading it as a 'mirror', 'hammer', 'sword' and so on.



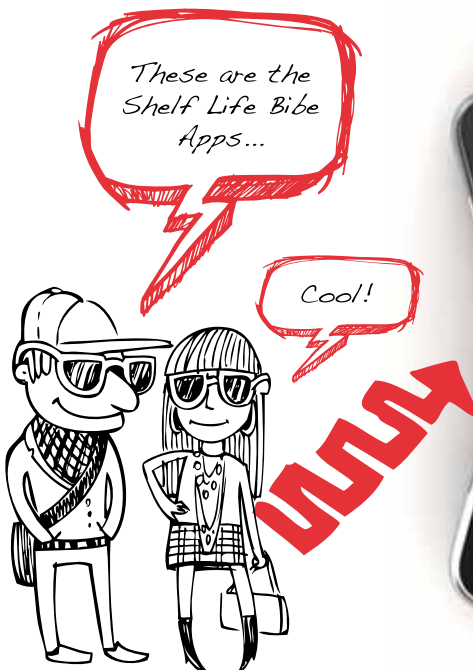
Shelf Life Bible Apps...

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We wanted to find a way of helping to guide you through your Bible study and enhance your Bible reading experience. We came up with six ways of doing this – they're a bit like apps on a smartphone or tablet so we've called them our Shelf Life Bible apps.

Each app outlines a specific element that is a vital part of quality Bible study and which we hope will help you access the Bible as never before! You can follow these apps through step by step, or pick and mix according to the passage you are reading or the context in which you are studying.

- ✓ PRAY
- ✓ READ
- ✓ EXPLORE
- ✓ QUESTION
- ✓ DIG
- ✓ LIVE



Pray...

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This app encourages
you to pray as you
read!

✓ PRAY



Reading the Bible is more than just reading text. The words in the Bible are God's living words and are one way that God uses to speak clearly and dynamically into our lives.

As you read the Bible, take time to pray and talk to God about his words on those pages. As you hear him speaking to you, it's natural to speak back, having a conversation with God! That's what God longs to do as you read his words. You can pray before, during and after your reading.

Before you open the book:

- **ask God to be with you** as you read his word
- **ask that he will guide you** to the right passage
- **ask that he will make** the words come alive to you
- **and help you to understand** what you are reading

During your reading:

- **say short prayers like**
 'Wow!'
 'That's amazing!'
 'I never knew that'
 'I don't get it'
 'This is really challenging me'

After you have finished reading:

- **ask God how** his words apply to you right now
- **ask for help** if you haven't understood
- **commit** to the challenge or change
- **accept** God's words of love, comfort and encouragement
- **thank God** for his wisdom

One ancient way of using Scripture to fuel our prayers and allow God to speak to us is called 'Lectio Divina' ... praying the Bible. The practice of Lectio Divina is a slow, contemplative,

prayerful reading of the Scriptures. Lectio Divina is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading or 'holy reading'. Here's how you do it:

Before you open the book:

- **Step one:** Read the Bible passage in complete silence, very slowly, contemplatively and attentively, all the while listening for the still small voice of God within the words.
- **Step two:** 'Ruminate' on the words. Ruminate means to 'chew over', slowly and thoughtfully, the words in our hearts, letting the words interact with our thoughts, feelings, memories and hopes; allowing the words on the pages to become God's living words in our hearts.
- **Step three:** Pray, thanking God for his words, and asking God that his words would change us, heal us, comfort us, encourage us.
- **Finally,** rest quietly in the loving presence of God – no need to chat, just enjoying being with your loving heavenly Father!

more resources...

Try it out with this interactive YouTube clip



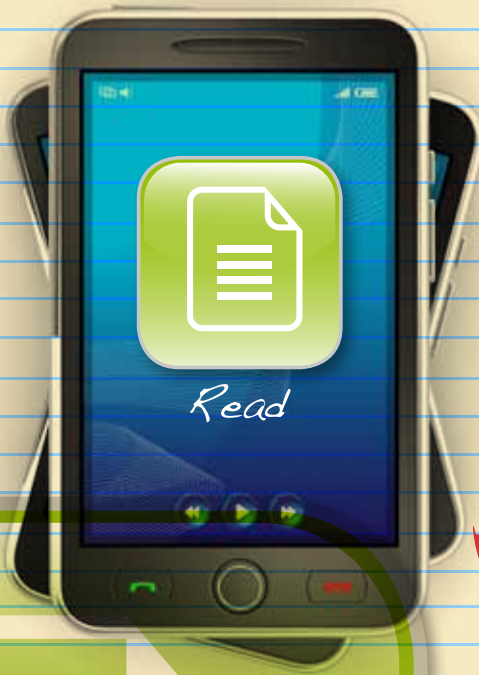
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jqqWZuo5cg> or search for 'Lectio Divina (hopechapelsantarosa)' on YouTube.

Read...

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The 'read' app
offers a myriad of
suggestions...

✓ READ



The 'read' app offers a myriad of suggestions to help you with the practicalities of reading and understanding the Bible text... from using Bible commentaries to where to getting hold of audio Bibles!

Which translation?

As we discussed at the beginning, it is important that you pick a Bible translation that works for you. Take time over this, and seek advice. Your Bible may be with you for many years to come!

Bible commentaries

A Bible commentary is something that you would use if you want to understand a particular Scripture in more depth. Perhaps you want to know more about the history, the context, or what different theologians think it means. You can get Bible commentaries that cover the whole of the Bible, or those that just look at one book. Tom Wright writes some excellent commentaries in his 'For Everyone' series.

Concordance

A Bible concordance is a verbal index to the Bible. It contains a long list of biblical words alphabetically, and tells you all the passages of the Bible where the words occur. This is useful if you can remember a few words of a passage but can't remember where to find it. A concordance is also essential if you want to research on a particular biblical topic – for example, forgiveness.

Daily Bible reading notes

Daily Bible reading notes are usually small booklets that provide you with a daily Scripture reading, plus an explanation, questions, thoughts and/or stories to help you apply the passage to your day. There must be hundreds out there to choose from! Some are aimed specifically at young people. These are well worth investing in as it is an easy step into the habit of daily Bible reading.

Some other recommended daily Bible reading plans are:

- **The Word For You Today**
UCB (11- to 17-year-olds). Available free from <http://www.ucb.co.uk/biblehelps>
- **Submerge**
(11- to 14- or 12- to 16-year-olds)
- **YP's – CWR**
Scripture Union (11- to 14-year-olds)
- **Discover**
The Good Book Company
(11- to 13-year-olds)
- **Engage**
The Good Book Company
(14- to 18-year-olds)
- **Mettle Bible Reading Notes**
(YFC/CWR)

Slightly more advanced notes:

- **The Word For Today**
UCB
- **Every Day With Jesus**
Selwyn Hughes (CWR)
- **Lucas On Life**
Jeff Lucas (CWR)
- **Explore**
The Good Book Company

Read The Bible In A Year

If you want more of a challenge then get hold of a Bible planner or Bible that will take you through the whole Bible in a year. For example:

- **Cover to Cover Complete:**
Through the Bible as It Happened by Hughes & Partridge
- **Daily Message Bible-MS:**
Through the Bible in One Year by Eugene H Peterson

Online Resources

The Word For You Today produced by UCB is available as a download, an ebook, a daily email, an audio podcast or a daily reading online.

Visit <http://www.ucb.co.uk/biblehelps> for this excellent resource.

One Year Daily Audio Bible

Produced by Brian Hardin provides you with a daily iTunes podcast that take you through the whole Bible in one year.

www.dailyaudiobible.com/

Bible Gateway

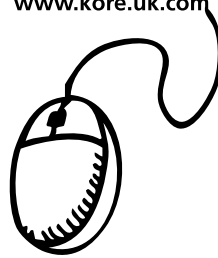
The Bible Gateway website is a tool for reading and researching Scripture online – all in the language or translation of your choice! It provides advanced searching capabilities, which allow readers to find and compare particular passages in Scripture based on keywords, phrases or Scripture reference.

www.biblegateway.com

Bible Apps

There are even Bible apps available. One of our favourites is Red Letter Days from KORE UK. This gives you different words of Jesus every day and also has the ability to email these words to a friend or someone you think would appreciate them with one touch. If you're after more, there's a random 'words of Jesus' generator; and if you want even more you shake your device and it generates another one. Don't worry if you don't have an app-enabled phone or tablet, you can also sign up for the Red Letter Days as an email that gets sent to you every day. Find out more at

www.kore.uk.com



Online resources...

Use the internet
to help you
explore the
bible...



Explore...

ALOVE⁺

The 'explore' app
is just that...



EXPLORE



The 'explore' app is just that...exploring the Bible text in more detail, such as the context, timeline and principles underpinning the writing.

Explore the timeline

We also need to understand how any individual Bible passage or story fits into the whole biblical story – how is it part of the overall plan. Some of the books are not presented in chronological order so it is very useful to have a timeline of the Bible. If you Google image search 'Bible timeline' you will find many various diagrams that lay out the Bible in the correct order. Or get hold of Nick Page's The Big Story that takes you through the whole of the Bible in a unique and fresh way, and in only 120 pages! Another useful introduction is The Bible from Scratch by Simon Jenkins.

Explore the language

The Bible was not written in English! When people translated it from Hebrew or Greek into English they had to find the English words that best corresponded to the original meaning. Sometimes there simply isn't an English word that does this, so looking at different Bible translations, or even researching back to the original language, can help make sense of the Bible.

Explore the principles

Although the world has changed since the Bible was written, God hasn't! Sometimes we

have to delve beneath the face value of the text to draw out the principles of God and his word. There may be times that the Bible doesn't appear to relate to us in our culture today, but we must be careful not to dismiss it as irrelevant. If we dig deep enough we will uncover principles that can still guide, inform and bless us in many ways today.

Explore the context

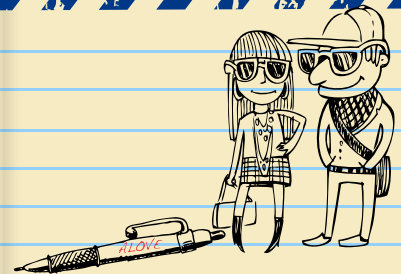
To get the real meaning behind the Bible text we need to look into what the life was like at the time the authors were writing – the context. For example, Jesus told lots of stories using everyday analogies, but to understand the full purpose/meaning of the stories we need to think about what the world was like at the time and what those words would have meant to the people who were hearing them.

Let's look at an example:

Start by reading John 4:1-26 – the story of Jesus meeting the Samaritan woman at a well in Samaria. Jot down your thoughts as to what you feel this text is saying;

- say short prayers like
 'Wow!'
 'That's amazing!'
 'I never knew that'
 'I don't get it'
 'This is really challenging me'

Jot down your thoughts here:



Now, this is such a familiar story for many of us, and on the surface it appears quite straightforward. It's not particularly revolutionary or shocking... and why should it be? But for those who witnessed this encounter, it was nothing short of extraordinary. Let's discover why!

In verse 4 the text says that Jesus had to go through Samaria.

In fact, when travelling from Judea to Galilee, as Jesus and his disciples were, it was not geographically necessary to go through Samaria. Actually Jewish travellers normally travelled around Samaria, making a detour of several days, out of an intense dislike of the Samaritans. But Jesus elected to journey directly through that very region, thereby not behaving as an 'upright' Jew would!

Verses 6 and 7 tell us that around midday Jesus rested by a well, and a woman came to the well to draw water.

This is unusual because mostly the women would go to collect their water either early in the morning or later in the evening, when the sun was coolest. Why was this woman on her own at the hottest part of the day? Perhaps she didn't want to meet with the other women, perhaps she was shunned by them or gossiped about because of her past (which we learn about later on in this passage). She appears as a solitary, possibly lonely figure, an outcast from her community, with no one else in the family to draw the water for her.

In verses 7 to 14 we read about the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman.

Nothing remarkable about that perhaps; Jesus talked to people all the time, didn't he? But during the time of Jesus, women were looked down on and seen as inferior to men, they had no rights, and a Jewish man did not talk with women in the street – not even with his mother, sister, daughter or wife!

In addition, for various reasons going way back in history, there was much animosity between Jews and Samaritans. Jewish people did not associate with Samaritan people, who were viewed as outcasts and unclean people.

Now we begin to understand why what Jesus did here was so shocking to those around him... even to the woman herself. He did something that was a cultural taboo: he spoke to a woman in public; and not just any woman, but a Samaritan woman. She was twice an outcast in Jewish thought, and possibly even an outcast in her own society. Jesus asked her for a drink of water. She was understandably shocked; a Jewish man was speaking to her, a Samaritan woman? He also should not have wanted to share a cup with her for drinking water, since it would be considered unclean.

The conversation continues and in verse 26 Jesus told the woman who he was.

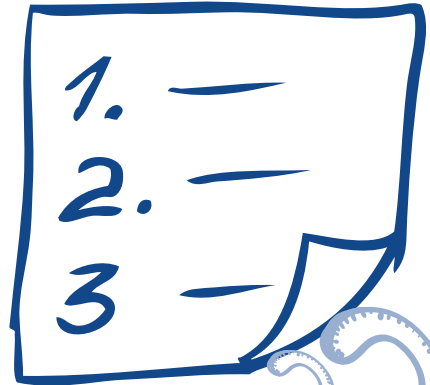
Did you realise that this Samaritan woman is the first person to whom Jesus openly reveals himself as Messiah? She then became the first evangelist in the Gospel of John. She went and told her people about Jesus and brought them to him, so they could see and hear for themselves.



ALOVE⁺

Look back at the notes you made above. Now that you understand so much more of the context behind this story, how have your thoughts changed or expanded?

- Do you understand why this seemingly straightforward story speaks so greatly of Jesus' love for the outcast, the poor and the oppressed?
- What does this story tell you about Jesus' regard for rules and traditions?
- How do you feel about Jesus entrusting the most important of spiritual concepts to a woman that his people would have shunned?



Not down your thoughts here:



Let's use the space to make some notes....



Question...

ALOVE⁺

This app is all about
investigating ✓
Scripture through
asking questions!...

QUESTION



This app is all about investigating Scripture through asking questions! Like a detective – take a look beneath the surface; What's going on? What stands out? Who's who?

Generally there are three types of questions to be asked of the Bible text:

- **Observation:** searching for facts such as who, what, when, why and where? These questions are useful when looking into the context of the passage.
- **Understanding:** what do the words and phrases actually mean and how do I understand what it says?
- **Action:** what actions should I take? What commands are there to obey? What promises are there to remember?

One well-known method of studying a Bible text is by using the following six symbols. Simply write or draw the symbols down the side of a piece of paper and ask yourself the corresponding questions about the Bible passage you are reading. Jot down your thoughts as you go along. This method works well for your own personal times reading the Bible, or for a group Bible study where you can discuss the questions together.



What do these verses tell us about God/Jesus?



What do these verses tell us about human nature, about people?



Write down any new discovery you have made through reading these verses.



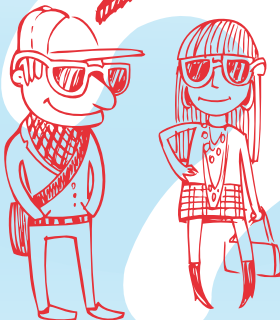
Write down the most exciting verse in your opinion and give a reason.



Write down anything you don't understand or want to ask about.



How do these verses affect my life today? Write down something the verse says I should do or change in my life.



Let's give it a try: Read Mark 10:46–52 where Blind Bartimaeus receives his sight.



What do these verses tell us about God/Jesus?

These verses tell us so many things about Jesus: his compassion, his power, his authority. He recognised real faith and a deep longing in Bartimaeus and took time to respond to that need – and that changed Bartimaeus's life for ever!



What do these verses tell us about human nature, about people?

People all respond to God in different ways yet no one with real faith is ever excluded.



Write down any new discovery you have made through reading these verses.

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus always offers us a choice in the way we respond to him. In this way he can be sure that we trust him and really desire to live for him.



Write down the most exciting verse in your opinion and why.

V52: *"Go," said Jesus, "your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.'*

Jesus can heal us and save us, whether that's physically or spiritually. We simply need to come to him, put our trust in him.



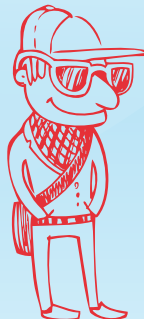
Write down anything you don't understand or want to ask about.

Why did the crowd want to stop Bartimaeus from shouting to Jesus?



How do these verses affect my life today? Write down something the verse says I should do or change in my life.

Bartimaeus was a man of faith who knew who Jesus was and recognised that Jesus was the only one who could save him... even more so than the disciples. He desperately wanted a new life, he cast aside his cloak (a symbol of his old life) and followed Jesus wholeheartedly. This is how we too should respond to Jesus – persistently and completely.



Now you try! Read Mark 5:21-43 and, either on your own or in a group, think through the passage in the same way as discussed above. Discuss / write down your thoughts below!



What do these verses tell us about God/Jesus?



What do these verses tell us about human nature, about people?



Write down any new discovery you have made through reading these verses.



Write down the most exciting verse in your opinion and why.



Write down anything you don't understand or want to ask about.

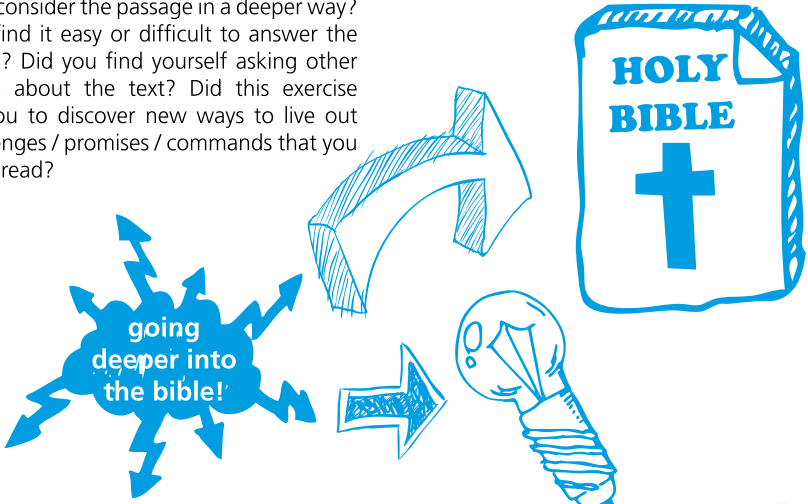


How do these verses affect my life today? Write down something the verse says I should do or change in my life.

*I Like it!
What do you
think?*



Now jot down your thoughts about this method of Bible study. Did the questions help you consider the passage in a deeper way? Did you find it easy or difficult to answer the questions? Did you find yourself asking other questions about the text? Did this exercise enable you to discover new ways to live out the challenges / promises / commands that you have just read?



Jot down your thoughts here:



Let's use the space to make some notes....



Another set of questions you may find useful, especially when reading in the Gospels² about Jesus, are given below. These questions are all about Jesus and are designed to help you think about and meet Jesus in new ways. You should be able to get inside the text and consider what it would have been like to be there with Jesus at the time. You can use these questions in conjunction with the questions given above, on your own or with a group.

- **Where is Jesus?**
- **Where was Jesus before this event?**
- **Who is Jesus talking to?**
(crowds, disciples, Gentiles or Jews etc)
- **Summarise or quote everything Jesus says.** Note Jesus' feeling, tone, and attitude. Note what Jesus does not say.

- **What are others saying about Jesus?**
- **How do they feel about him?**
- **How do people respond to Jesus?**
- **What are my impressions of Jesus?**
- **What is Jesus saying in this passage that could change my life?**
- **What characteristics of Jesus would I like to see in my own life?**
- **How can I work with Jesus to make it happen?**³

Try these questions with any of the following Bible passages:

- **Mark 6:30–44**
- **Mark 11:1–11**
- **Mark 11:12–19**
- **Mark 14:1–11**

² The Gospels are the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, which tell us about the life and message of Jesus.

³ Questions taken from http://www.insight.typepad.co.uk/bible_study_methods.pdf

Dig...

ALOVE⁺

The 'dig' app is about getting a part of the Bible inside you...

✓ DIG



The 'dig' app is about getting a part of the Bible inside you. It could be a single word, a whole verse, the meaning of a story or even the attitude of a character. This app presents several different tools, such as paraphrasing, memorising and storytelling, to bring the Bible text to life in your life!

Paraphrasing

Paraphrasing can be really useful to help get behind the meaning of the words. In paraphrasing, you use your own words to express the essence of the passage. Be careful not to change the meaning; just communicate it in a different manner, using words and contexts that are more familiar to you. The Message translation or The Living Bible are good examples of a paraphrase.

For example:

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NIV)

'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.'

This could be paraphrased as follows:

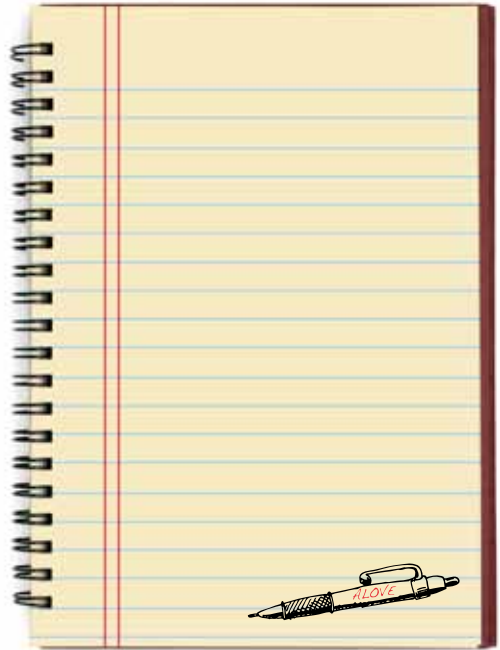
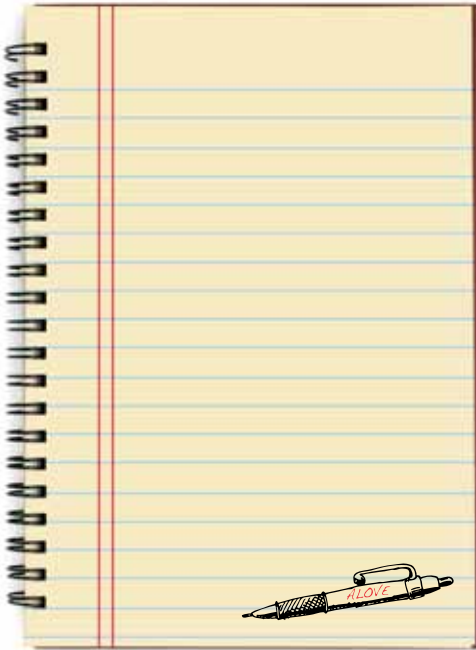
'The whole Bible is inspired by God and is important to teach us the truth and help us to understand where we are going wrong in our lives. It shows us how to live holy lives. It builds us up and gets us ready to do whatever it is that God has planned for us.'

Try the following verses from the NIV yourself:

Joshua 1:8

'Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.'





Psalm 139:13-14

'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.'

Romans 8:1-3

'Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.'

write your comments down the side of the page

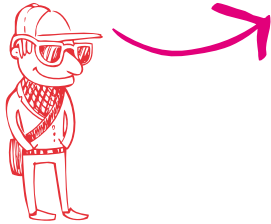
Scribblestorm

If you **prefer words**, print out a **large sheet** of the text (you could get this from the Bible Gateway website if you don't want to type it out yourself) and **read it again and again**. As you notice repeated words or themes, link phrases together with coloured pens or highlighters, make notes to help you understand the purpose, jot down comments along the side about how it makes you feel (eg, 'Wow!', 'Amazing!', 'Gulp!')

write your comments down the side of the page

Meditation

Christian meditation is a way of allowing God and Scripture to fill our mind, of hearing God speak to us, especially through the Bible. It is not some dodgy practice associated with Eastern mysticism or the New Age movement! Meditation demands discipline as our minds are apt to wander off the topic. The Bible has many references to meditation, such as Genesis 24:63; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 48:9 and Psalm 119:148. Read these step-by-step instructions on how to meditate on Scripture.⁴



1. **Relax** – it's very easy, so don't get uptight or anxious about it.
2. **Look up** the suggested Scripture.
3. **Read** it slowly.
4. **Pray and ask God** to speak to you through it.
5. **Read it again** several times.
6. **Spent time thinking** about what the verse says.
7. **Perhaps dwell** on a phrase or section of the verse, or even just one word.
8. **Allow yourself to follow a train of thought**, until you see something in the verse you have never seen before.
9. **Write down** what your thoughts are.
10. **If your mind** begins to wander totally off the subject, then start again.

Now put on some reflective music (try the SPIRE album from ALOVE!), find a space and meditate on Psalm 23. Take about five minutes and then write your thoughts below.

The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul.

He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

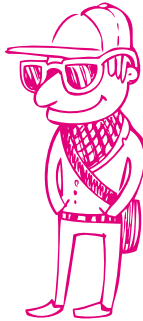
You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

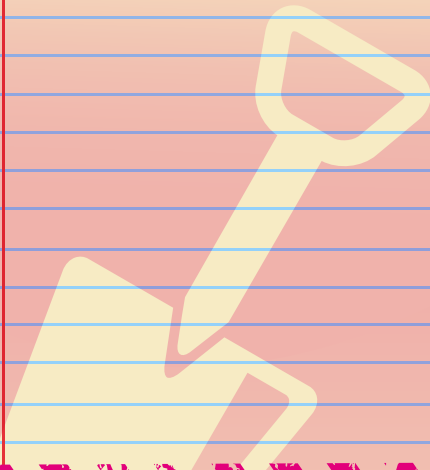


⁴Nancy Goudie's Spiritual Health Workout. Kingsway 2001.

Let's meditate
on Psalm 23....



Meditation on Psalm 23: notes



Memorising

Memorising Scripture fills your mind and heart with the truths of the Bible, gets them right inside you! Then they are immediately accessible when you (or a friend) need comfort, encouragement, help, guidance... or just can't find the words to praise God. Even if you have a terrible memory you can still train yourself to memorise verses of the Bible.

Memorising Scripture is a practice as old as the Bible itself. Jewish children would be taught to memorise great quantities of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible as we know it today: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy). By the time they were ten years old they could recite all five books by heart! By the age of 14 the best students would have memorised the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures – that's 39 books – from Genesis to Malachi!

The best way to memorise is to break the verse into portions. Say each portion out loud so that you can hear it as well as see it and think it. When you have got the first portion, learn the second bit, and then try to recite the first and second parts together, and so on until you have remembered the whole Scripture. Say it the same way each time. If you are musical or creative, sing the verse, or rap it... or even act it out!

Remember, though – just because you can say something once or twice doesn't necessarily mean you have memorised it. You need to keep it on your mind! Quote the verses often, asking God for deep understanding and seeking to apply each verse to your life.

Now have a go at memorising

1 Thessalonians 5:16–18

'Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.'

more resources...

Look at this guy for some inspiration!



Ryan Ferguson recites Psalm 145

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdMMPkZl--c>

Ryan Ferguson recites Psalm 22

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF5vm0b8dWY>

Ryan Ferguson recites Psalm 25

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n5t1nZhB8bw>



Use Your Imagination

When you have read a passage of the Bible, take some time to use your imagination to get beyond the words. Imagine you are there in the scene, as a bystander or one of the principal characters. What can you hear, see and smell? How do you feel? What are you thinking about? How would you respond to the situation going on around you? What do you learn about yourself, about others and about God or Jesus?

If you try this in a group, each person could focus on a different character from the text you are reading and then describe to the other group members what it was like being that person.

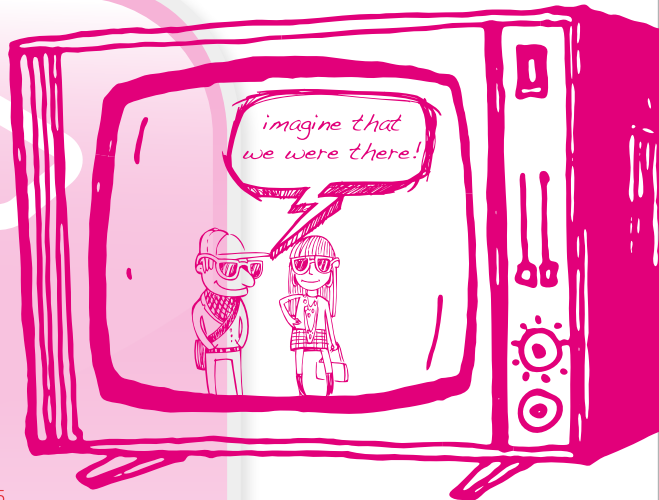
Try this with the passage from Mark we discussed earlier, the healing of Blind Bartimaeus

(Mark 10:46–52)

Take some time and imagine yourself in the crowd that day in Jericho. It's hot, dry and dusty (it almost always is there). You're excited, you're with Jesus; you're going up to Jerusalem. And here is someone shouting from

the roadside. It's a nuisance. It's possibly even dangerous (if enough people call him 'Son of David', someone in authority is going to get alarmed). Examine your own feelings. Try to remember other times when you've felt like that. Then watch as Jesus, never put out by what annoys his followers, turns to speak to the blind man. How do you feel about that? Do you want this beggar in the party? How about when Jesus speaks warm and welcoming words to him? Has he ever spoken to you like that? How do you feel as you set off together up the hill to Jerusalem?

Now imagine yourself as the blind man. We all have something, by no means a physical ailment, that we know is getting in the way of our being the people we believe God wants us and made us to be. Sit by the roadside and listen to the crowd. Examine your own feelings when you discover it's Jesus coming by. Call out to him, and when he summons you, put everything aside and go to him. And when he asks you what you want him to do, go for it. Don't look back at the small, selfish comforts of victimhood. Ask for freedom, for salvation. And when you get it be prepared to follow Jesus wherever he goes next.⁵



⁵Tom Wright, Mark For Everyone, pp144–145

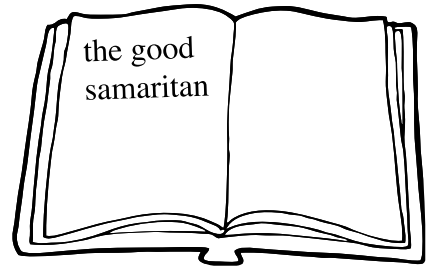
Storytelling

Storytelling is one way to stimulate our imagination and help us connect to the Bible text and make it relevant in our lives today. A story creates memorable pictures and brings to life the emotions of the words, allowing the purpose of the writer to jump out from the pages and come to life! Jesus used storytelling in his teaching all the time – these stories we now call parables.

Try to rewrite a parable from Jesus in your own words, either in its original setting or putting it into a 21st-century context. Use modern words and phrases but be sure not to change the meaning. You could take your story out to read in the environment in which it was written, eg, the seashore, a hillside, a streamside path, a dirt track.

Have a go with the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:23–35) or Jesus Walking on the Water (Mark 6:45–56).

You might want to read *The Orthodox Heretic* by Peter Rollins. It's a book of modern-day parables that really help bring storytelling to life.



Rewrite a parable from Jesus in your own words here...



Image and Art

If you like to paint or draw or model, use these skills to create images about the verses you have read. Create something that integrates the action in the text along with the meaning behind it. Or compose a piece relating to your feelings on reading the words, or the emotions of someone involved in the story. Share your works of art with others as it will definitely speak to them about God in exciting new ways.

If you can't draw yourself, try a Google Image search about the passage you are reading. You will find some surprising results! For example, typing in 'The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus' yields around 2,500 images! Clearly not all of these images will be appropriate or what you are looking for and you will have to sift through to find images that mean anything to you. Take a look at the following two images. Do they illustrate anything to you of the healing of Blind Bartimaeus? Do they draw out different thoughts and feelings from you than simply reading the Bible text? How and why?

If you like photos try creating a photo storyboard by taking or creating several images that represents 'stills' of the Bible text. Use these images to meditate and pray through the text and allow God to speak to you about its meaning for you today.

And one final idea: look on YouTube for someone else's visual interpretation of what you are reading. You will probably find a very diverse offering, from text simply set to music, animations, short homemade films, children reading the Scriptures, the Bible in other languages. You could even create your own!

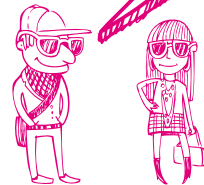


haward-carter.blogspot.com



thefullwiki.org

We could use images to meditate and pray



Live...

ALOVE⁺

The 'Live' app is about living out the words of the Bible in your life.

✓ LIVE



The final Shelf Life Bible app asks you to live out the words of the Bible in your life. This means finding ways to action the truths of the Scriptures on a daily basis.

Putting into action the words of the Bible means thinking about how the words you have read, explored, questioned and meditated on affect your normal life. Are there any changes that you need to make? Are there any actions that you need to take?

Reading the Bible inspires us to dream big dreams. We see the amazing way that God can use ordinary people like us who give our lives in obedience and passion for him! Big dreams are usually accomplished by small steps, and putting to work the principles that we read in Scripture enables us to make changes one at a time, heading towards our final goal.

The key thing in living the Bible is to be real in your application. It's great to think of massive ideas such as 'I need to love everyone I meet', but how will you know if you have achieved it? Try this instead: 'I will show my little brother something of Jesus' love this week by being nice to him and helping him with his homework!' You need to have a clear idea of what action you are going to take from the minute you put down your Bible. And don't forget to write down what actions you are going to make and keep yourself accountable!

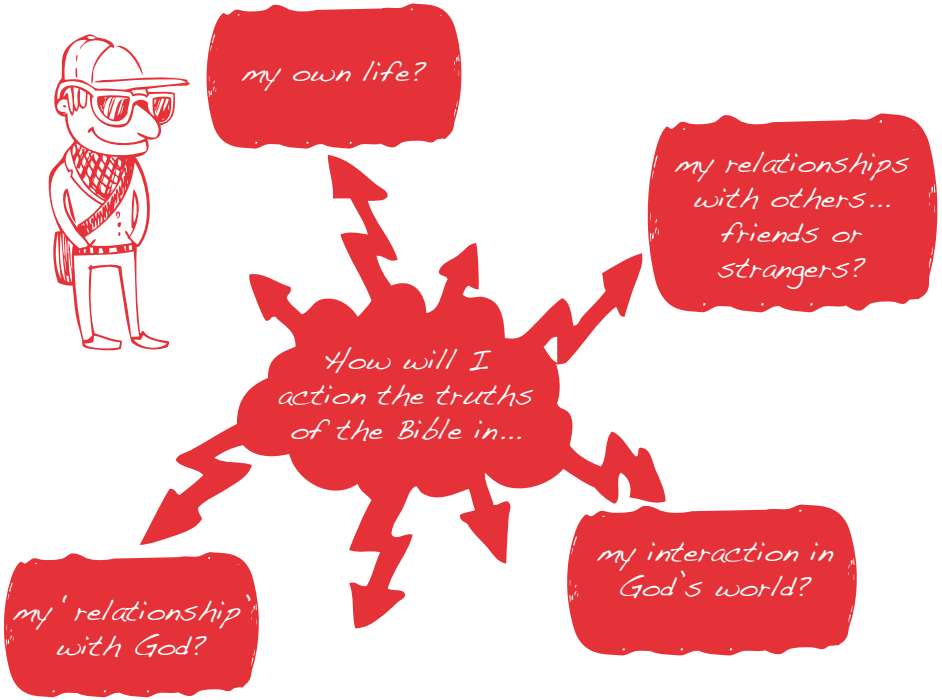
Try thinking about the following questions:

- **What promises** are there for me to believe?
- **What examples** are there for me to follow?
- **What commands** are there for me to obey?
- **What warnings** are there for me to take note of?
- **What changes** do I need to make?
- **What actions** do I need to take?

Look at the following diagram. Perhaps this may help you to visualise the areas of your life in which the words of God can and should make a difference. You don't have to write something in each circle every time. As we said before, both small changes and big dreams are worth going after.

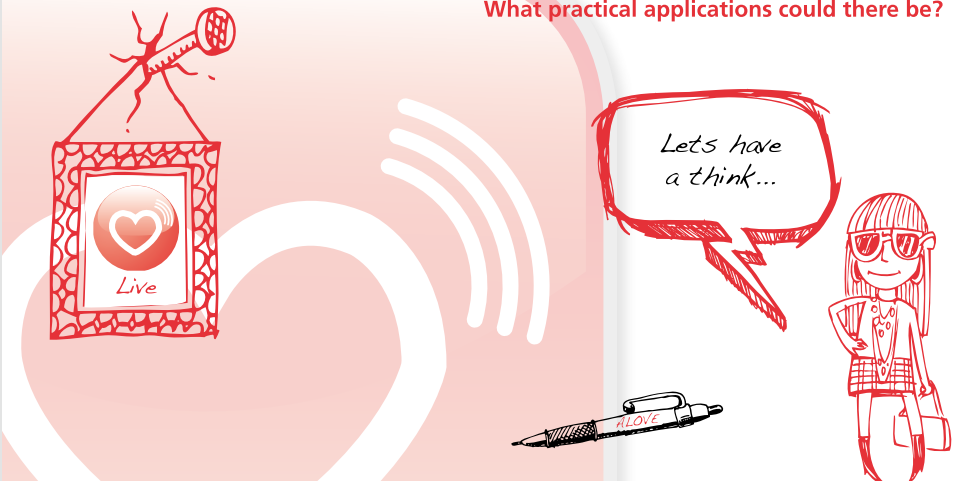
Shall we have a look at this diagram?...





Let's think about the story of the healing of Blind Bartimaeus, as already discussed.

What practical applications could there be?



Let's think about the story of the healing of Blind Bartimaeus, as already discussed.

What practical applications could there be?

my own life?

When I feel a bit like Blind Bartimaeus; alone or rejected I will remind myself that Jesus loves me, has time for me and will provide everything I need. I will memorise vs 49 & 50 where Jesus asks Bartimaeus to come and be with him.

my relationships with others?

God values each individual. Tomorrow I will say hello to the kid at school that no one usually talks to.

How will I action the truths of the Bible in...

my 'relationship' with God?

There is that one thing that God promised me that I haven't yet seen fulfilled. I will start to pray about this again and trust God that he will do all that he has promised.

my interaction in God's world?

Nothing this time!



3. Shelf Life

Bible Studies...

ALOVE⁺

One of the great ways to get into the Bible is to do it with friends! Chatting with other people about the Bible can really inspire and encourage you, and refresh your Bible experience! Meeting with other people to study the Bible can really help you discover God in new ways, and help you grow as a disciple of Jesus. A small group of you can read the same bit from the Bible, and you may all come up with different thoughts or opinions. Other people may notice something about the passage that you wouldn't have thought about. Or they may have questions that you can help answer!

This final part of Shelf Life contains three Bible studies that you can do with your friends, using the Shelf Life apps you have already read about. It shouldn't need too much preparation; just grab your friends, find a place without distraction, bring your Mark's Gospel and some pens and paper. Or, if you want to, you could ask your youth leader to help you run a Bible study group for some of your youth group members.

Before we get into the Bible studies, we begin with an overview of the Gospel of Mark: who was Mark and why did he write this book that is now an essential part of the Bible? It would be good to read this overview before you begin your Bible studies.



Shall we get all the group together for a bible study?

Yeah, sounds like a plan!



Bible Study One:

Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

Using this well-known story we will look at how Jesus takes whatever we offer to him and uses us in his Kingdom story. We will use the questions about Jesus from page 7 to help us explore this Bible passage.

Bible Study Two:

Jesus Heals A Paralysed Man

Four men who persevered to bring their sick friend to Jesus demonstrate faith in action. We will use the questions with the six symbols from page 7 to help us explore this Bible passage.

Bible Study Three:

The Rich Young Man

The rich young man we read about in this Bible passage turned down an invitation to follow Jesus because the cost for him was too high. He had something in his life that meant more to him and he wouldn't leave it behind. How can we be sure we are not the same? We will use the model on page 7 of Shelf Life to action the principles we discover in this story in our own lives.

Extra Notes

Each Bible study has some 'Extra Notes' which will help you to get to grips with the context and some of the deeper truths raised in the text. It is recommended that you take some time to read these notes to enhance your discussion.

ALOVE Cell Notes

If you enjoy doing these three Bible studies with your friends, you can find loads more on the ALOVE website. Every month we post a four-week group study outline, called Cell Notes, on a wide variety of different topics. So don't stop your Bible study group after these three. We would love you to keep putting into action all you have discovered through Shelf Life! Your youth leader can help you too!

Online resources...

Why not visit the ALOVE website, it's updated monthly with new cell outlines...



Like ALOVE UK on Facebook
www.salvationarmy.org.uk/love



Notes



Overview of the Gospel of Mark...



Why was it written?

To present the person, work and teachings of Jesus.

Who wrote it?

John Mark. Mark lived in Jerusalem and his home was one of the first meeting places for the Early Church. Mark was the nephew of Barnabas and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12 and 13). Paul even called for Mark to come to him as he was nearing death at the end of his life.

Who was it written for?

The Christians in Rome, from where he wrote the Gospel.

When was it written?

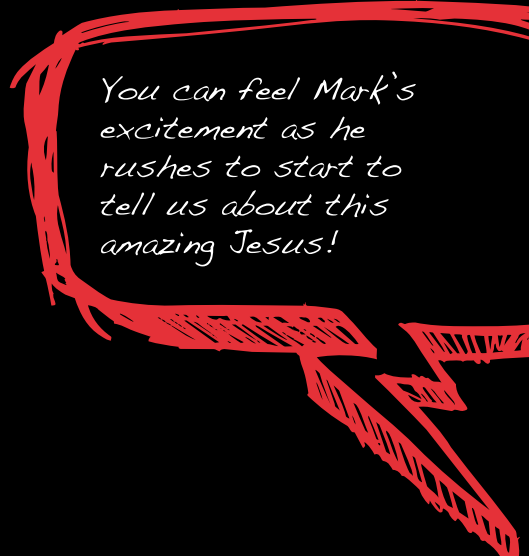
Between AD 55 and 65.

The Gospel of Mark is the earliest written document on the life of Jesus that is preserved for us today and was probably the first Gospel⁶ written. When we look closely we discover that most of Matthew and Luke appear to be based on the book of Mark. There are only 24 verses in Mark that are not reproduced somewhere in either Matthew or Luke. It is highly likely that Mark sourced much of his information about Jesus from the disciple Peter himself, and thus the Gospel of Mark is probably the nearest approach we will ever possess to an eyewitness account of the life of Jesus.⁷

What's the story?

Mark wrote his Gospel in the form of a fast-paced novel; he wastes no time getting started with the story. You can feel Mark's excitement as he rushes to start to tell us about this amazing Jesus! He portrays Jesus as completely human, sharing our emotions and passions, but at the same time never lets us forget that Jesus was the Son of God.

Mark records more miracles than does any other Gospel. But Mark is more than a historical account or an attempt at objective biography. It is a story that seeks to draw readers into its world, to lead them to a faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God, and to motivate them to a more authentic life of discipleship.



You can feel Mark's excitement as he rushes to start to tell us about this amazing Jesus!

⁶The books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are known as the 'Gospels'; meaning they tell us about the life and good news message of Jesus. Matthew, Mark and Luke are always known as the synoptic Gospels, from the Greek meaning 'to see together', as they tell very similar stories and message as each other.

⁷William Barclay: The Gospel Of Mark

Group Bible Study One...

ALOVE⁺

Mark 6: 30–44: Jesus Feeds Five Thousand

You will need:

- Mark's Gospel
- Large piece of paper and pens
- Loaf of bread

Extras it would be good to have but not essential

- Study Bible
- Reflective music (try ALOVE's Spire CD!)



Introduction

The feeding of the five thousand is the only story of Jesus that is told in all four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each author presents a slightly different version of the story... John is the only author who mentions the little boy that we associate with the five loaves and two fish. In Mark's story we can really begin to imagine ourselves on the 'green grass' of the hillside with the crowd of people listening avidly to Jesus' teaching. We can sense the surprise and frustration of the disciples when Jesus told them to find some way of feeding over five thousand people out of nothing, and we can feel the astonishment when that small lunch went so far! In this Bible study we will have the opportunity to witness again this amazing miracle and discover what we have in our lives that we can offer to Jesus.



Ask one group member to pray as you begin your Bible study. Ask God to be with you and help you to understand what you are reading.

Icebreaker

Ask each group member to share about the biggest gathering of people they have ever been part of, eg, a music event, sporting fixture, family gathering. Can each person estimate how many people were there? How did it feel to be part of such a large number of people? How does this compare to the number of people present at Jesus' picnic on the mountain?!

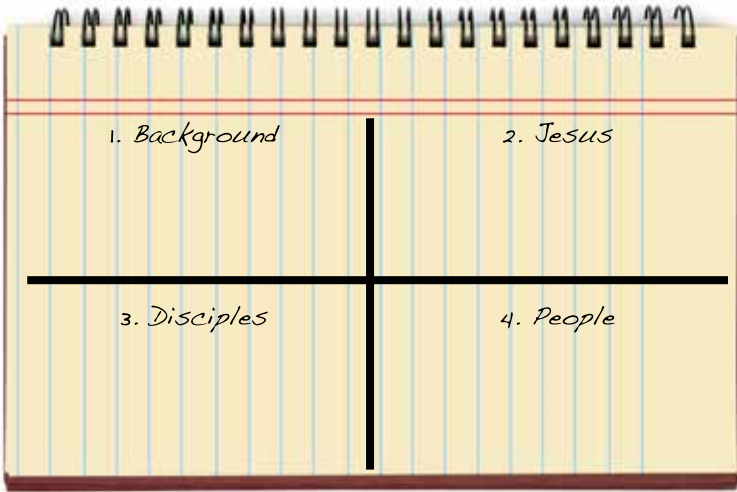
Study the Word



Ask each group member to turn to Mark 6:30–44 in their Bibles and ask for one person to read it aloud to the group.

Put a large piece of paper (eg, flipchart paper, wallpaper) out in the floor in the middle of the group. Appoint one person to be the scribe. Draw two lines to create four equal boxes, as below, and write the titles in each of the boxes.





Now discuss the following four aspects of this passage as detailed below. As you discuss, the person who is the scribe notes down your thoughts, words and phrases into the appropriate corner of the paper. Think about the practical nature of the events taking place, the emotions that you read about (and the emotions that you imagine the people involved must have been feeling). If there is anything you are not sure about, ask the scribe to note it down with a question mark. Don't get bogged down in questions that you can't answer at this stage. The key thing in this discussion is to get below the surface of the Bible text, read between the lines a little. If any of your group has a study Bible it may contain some interesting footnotes. Similarly you could look at the account of this story written by Matthew, Luke and John (Matthew 14:13-21; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15).

1. Explore the context of this story by looking at the following questions:



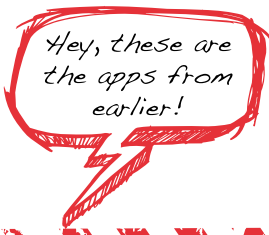
- Where is Jesus?
- Where was Jesus before this event?
- Who is Jesus talking to?

You may need to look back a few verses in Mark to answer some of these questions. If you have other Bibles you could also look at Matthew 14:6-13 for some more insight. Look at the 'extra notes' for more info too!

2. Now look closely at Jesus. Pick out of the passage some of the things he is saying and doing. What emotions do you see Jesus display or think he must have been feeling?



- Note Jesus' feeling, tone, and attitude.
- Note what Jesus does not say.



3. Turn your attention to the disciples. What do you see them saying, doing and feeling in this passage? How are they responding to Jesus?

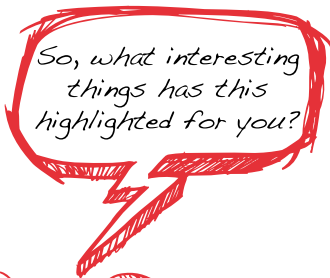
- What are others saying about Jesus?
- How do they feel about him?

4. Now look at the crowds of people. Consider why they have come, how long they have been there, what they are feeling (definitely hungry!).

- What are others saying about Jesus?
- How do they feel about him?
- How do people respond to Jesus?

Now sit back and look at all your words and phrases on the paper. Take different coloured markers and highlight similar words that appear in different boxes (eg, perhaps you wrote that Jesus and the disciples both felt tired), or link themes that appear more than once (eg, perhaps the disciples and the people were concerned about how hungry they were, the disciples were shocked when Jesus asked them to feed the people and shocked when Jesus actually achieved this through them!).

Discuss anything interesting that this exercise highlights.



Digging Deeper

- Did it matter exactly how much the little boy gave? Would the story be any less remarkable if he wasn't a poor child who gave all he had, but a rich child with plenty more bread at home?
- Is this story saying that it is OK for us just to give Jesus a little of what we have?
- What does this story tell us about God's provision for our needs?

Make A Response

On page ?? of Shelf Life we looked at how using your imagination can get you right into the heart of a Bible story and reveal things that you may never have seen before. Let's have a go! You will need one person in the group who is a good reader to read the following meditation slowly and carefully, perhaps with some quiet reflective music playing in the background. Everyone else should find a comfortable position where they can concentrate on the words without distraction.

Imagine that you are the boy with the loaves and fish in the story of the feeding of the five thousand. You are playing near your home when you hear that the teacher and miracle worker has come to town. The place suddenly becomes deserted as everyone leaves their houses and climbs up the hill to hear him speak. You quickly pop into your home, asking your mother if you can go and hear for yourself. She agrees and gives you a little food for the journey.



You reach the crowd, and there seem to be thousands of people sitting, listening to the teacher. The reports you have heard about his understanding are true – he really has new revelation about how the world is. You listen intently. There is no murmur from the crowd who are captivated. Time passes without anyone really noticing. You realise that you are feeling hungry. The sun is setting, it is beginning to get chilly and you are a fair distance from home. You are grateful that your mum gave you something to eat and a made you bring a warm cloak.

There seems to be something else going on now around the teacher. His friends are getting agitated. They look tired and frustrated. You see them fan out around the crowd asking people for something. As one of them comes nearer to where you are sitting you realise what they are asking. They are looking for anyone with food. Perhaps there are some people literally fainting with hunger and the teacher needs food quickly to assist them. There is no way they could be trying to gather enough food to feed everyone – is there?

You remember the packed tea that your mum gave you. There is only a small amount, just enough to keep you going until you get home for your evening supper, if there is any today. If you give your rolls away you will have nothing left for yourself, you will have a long cold walk on an empty stomach. What should you do? You draw your small food basket underneath your cloak to hide it; what difference would it make anyway? You see one of the teacher's friends coming towards you, still asking for food. No one seems to have any. You are still undecided. Your mother has always taught you to be generous with the little you have, and she always says you will receive many blessings from a giving heart. You make your decision.

As the teacher's friend passes by you stand and shyly hold out your food basket. 'This is all I have,' you say. 'It's only five small barley loaves with two fish.' You are surprised to find

yourself ushered up the hill until you are face to face with the teacher. 'This boy has some food,' the man tells the teacher. The teacher smiles right at you and instantly you know you made the right decision. The teacher's 12 friends gather round and you have a front row view as the teacher gives thanks for the food and begins to break up the loaves. He puts the bread into one man's basket, who heads out into the crowd to serve the people. As you watch, the teacher breaks some more bread, and some more, and some more. In fact, he continues to fill the baskets with bread and fish for his friends to distribute around the crowd. You watched, open-mouthed in amazement. The teacher passes out bread continually for ages, until his friends report back that everyone has eaten all they need. They too are stunned – what just happened?!

Then the crowd leave and the teacher seems to depart. You are left alone. You sit on a rock overlooking the water re-experiencing the events of the day. You become quiet, and after a little while you notice someone else sitting with you on a nearby rock. At first you don't recognise the figure, but then you spot that it is the teacher.

For a time you are both silent, looking out over the countryside perhaps, and enjoying one another's presence. After a bit, the teacher turns to you and says, 'You have done well today. You gave me all you had, and even though it seemed such a small and inadequate offering to you, I know that it cost you. In a small way you became part of my big plan, and I hope you always will be.'

Now, in the quietness, take a few moments to reflect in your heart:

- What did it feel like to be that little boy who through the giving of his small tea to Jesus made such a huge impact on the lives of many people?

(PAUSE)

- What do you have that you can offer to Jesus? Do you have skills, gifts, money, time, possessions that Jesus can use in his big story for the world?



Take some time in quiet for each person to write down their own response to these questions.

Then get back together in a group and share what you saw, thought, felt and heard through the

meditation. What things came to life for you in the story?

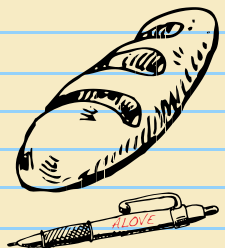
- What response do you feel you should make to Jesus?

Pray Together

Place a hollowed-out loaf of bread in the centre of the group. Ask each person to write on a slip of paper one 'item' you want to offer to Jesus, one thing God has provided for you that you want to thank him for, and one area of need (either personally or in the world around you) that you would like to ask him to meet. Go round the group and one at a time say a short prayer out loud including the things you have written down and place your paper inside the bread. Ask one person at the end to pray and offer your 'loaf' to Jesus for him to use in his big Kingdom story!



Write your responses to the questions here...



Extra notes...

ALOVE⁺

At the beginning of this story we see that Jesus and his disciples were tired. The disciples had just finished an exhausting trip preaching and healing (Mark 6:6-12) and had come back to report to Jesus all the exciting things they'd been up to... they hadn't even stopped for dinner! Not only that, in Matthew it also tells us that they had received some bad news – Jesus' cousin John the Baptist had been killed by Herod. Jesus felt it was time for them all to go to the other side of the lake for some peace and quiet and rest time. However, the crowds saw Jesus and the disciples heading off in a boat. The lonely place where the boat was going was four miles across the lake. On a windless day a fit and energetic person could probably just make the ten miles around the lake on foot to the same point before the boat arrived. This is exactly what happened. When Jesus and his disciples stepped out of the boat the crowd were there waiting for them again! What would you have done at this point?

The Bible text says that Jesus had compassion on the people. As he looked at them he saw they so desperately wanted to be with him, to learn from him, to have him pray for them and their sick. Jesus thought they were like sheep without a shepherd. So, instead of telling them 'Come back tomorrow after I've rested up', he began to teach them. Even though he is grieving inwardly over his cousin John's death, and his disciples are tired and need a rest, Jesus has compassion. He sees the needs of others and gives over and above what he has planned.

After some time has passed the disciples come to Jesus and ask him to close the meeting so the people can get something to eat before they begin the long journey back to their homes. This wasn't a planned gathering so no one has come prepared with provisions or given any thought to the distance they are from home. We know there are five thousand men, but in Matthew it is five thousand men 'besides women and children' (Matthew 14:21). How many people will that be altogether if we assume that even only half of the men had a

wife and three children with them?!

We can understand, then, why the disciples were so shocked when Jesus asked them to find food enough for everyone! (What would you have thought if you had to feed all the people at the gathering you discussed at the beginning... even with plenty of warning?)

We can see a real contrast between the action of Jesus and the attitude of the disciples. They wanted the people sent home to find their own food, to let someone else concern themselves with the problem of their hunger. Jesus says, in effect, 'These people are tired and hungry; we must do something about it.'

The disciples remonstrated with Jesus; to feed all these people would cost thousands of pounds, at least eight months of a working man's wages! Jesus says, 'So you don't have that much money – but what have you got?' They scabbled around and all they could come up with were five small loaves and two small fish. Perhaps no one else had any food with them, or perhaps there was no one else willing to share their own tea with over five thousand people! In John's account we read that the loaves and fish were given by a small boy. Barley loaves were like the small rolls we have today, but it was the cheapest bread and usually the food of the poorest people. The fish would have been about the size of sardines. Not enough for everyone to have even so much as a mouthful!

It may not have seemed much, but in the hands of Jesus it was enough. Those five small loaves and two tiny fish fed everyone present, with twelve basketfuls left over! Sometimes we can feel that we don't have anything much to offer to Jesus in the face of the huge problems of the world or the numbers of people that don't yet know him. But in Jesus' hands little becomes much. The small boy gave all of his lunch to Jesus in an extravagant act of generosity that could very well have left him as hungry as the next man. But Jesus was faithful and provided, not just for the boy but for many other people as well.

Group Bible Study Two...

ALOVE⁺

Mark 2:1–6: Jesus Heals A Paralytic

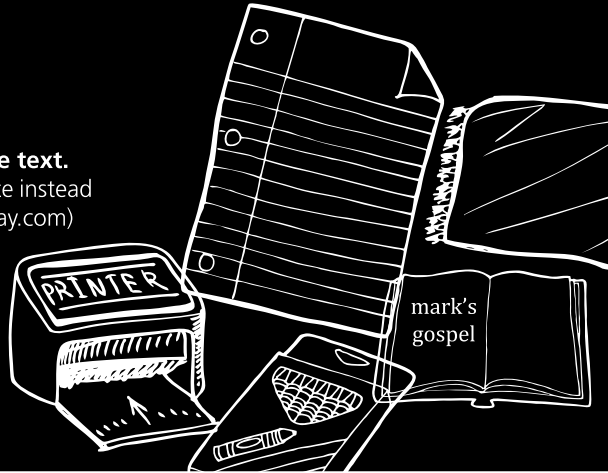
You will need:

- **Mark's Gospel**
- **Printout of Mark 2:1-6 in very large text.**
(Go to Bible Gateway to copy and paste instead of typing it all out – www.biblegateway.com)

- **Large piece of paper and pens**
- **Blanket or mat**

Extras it would be good to have but not essential

- **Study Bible**



Introduction

This is one of the Bible stories that we often enjoy hearing as children in Sunday school. Four caring friends, desperate to get their paralysed friend to Jesus, dig a hole in the clay roof of someone's home and lower their friend right down at Jesus' feet! Can you imagine that happening at your church meeting? Picture this: a visiting speaker, who has drawn in a crowd that packs the venue to capacity, is half way through his sermon when rubble starts falling from the roof and a face peers in at you all, quickly followed by a whole body! In this Bible study we are going to look again at this 'faith in action' story and inspire each other to action our faith.



Ask one group member to pray as you begin your Bible study. Ask God to be with you and help you to understand what you are reading.

Icebreaker

What is the craziest thing a friend has ever done for you – or you have ever done for a friend? Share your stories with each other! (If you can't think of anything, how about the craziest thing you have ever witnessed?)

Study the Word



Ask each group member to turn to Mark 2:1–12 in their Bibles and ask for one person to read it aloud to the group.



Give everyone a printout of the verses, ideally in very large text! Spend a few minutes each reading through the passage individually, marking, highlighting, scribbling and underlining on the printout anything you notice, find interesting, question etc. (See example that has been started on the following page.) This should help you prepare some of your thoughts before you begin your group discussion.



ALOVE⁺

Whose house was this - and how big?

1 A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come **home**.

2 So many gathered that there was **no room left**, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. **3** Some men came bringing

to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. **4** Since they

could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on.

5 When **Jesus saw their faith**, he said to the paralytic,

"Son, your sins are forgiven." **6** Now some **teachers of the law** were sitting there, thinking to themselves,

7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming!

Who can forgive sins but God alone?" **8** Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things?

9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? **10** But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins ..."

He said to the paralytic, **11** "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." **12** He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view

of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Wow!

Nor me!

So, did they also end up praising God?

Must have been squashed!

Jesus' words bring miraculous healing... he didn't even have to touch the man!

The friends demonstrated their faith in a practical way

These guys were here to test Jesus or maybe try to catch him out

On page 7 of Shelf Life there are six symbols representing six questions that you can ask to help you look at a Bible passage in more depth. Let's try discussing these questions together in the group about Mark 2:1-12 and see what we discover!



(You can read the 'extra notes' at any stage if you need more background information.)

Put a large piece of paper (eg, flipchart paper, wallpaper) in the middle of the group and have one person draw the first five symbols down the side of the paper; use two pieces if needed. For each question, go round the group in turn and have each person give a short answer (even one-word answers are OK!). Someone else can note down their thoughts on the paper by the appropriate symbol. Continue around the group, more than once if needed, until everyone has said all they want to. Then move to the next question and repeat.

Notes...





What do these verses tell us about God/Jesus?

Think about: Where is Jesus in this story and where had he been before? What is he doing? What is he saying? What do you think he is feeling? How are other people responding to him? Who is Jesus claiming to be? How does he respond to others? What does Jesus tell us / show us about God?



What do these verses tell us about human nature, about people?

Think about: Who else beside Jesus is present in this story? What different responses to Jesus do you notice? Do you identify with any of the people?



Write down any new discovery you have made through reading these verses.

Think about: Have you noticed something that you have not seen before, learnt something that you didn't know before, or accepted something you have previously resisted?



Write down the most exciting verse in your opinion and why.



Write down anything you don't understand or want to ask about.

Can anyone else in the group answer your question? If not, who will you go to for help?





Digging Deeper

• How would this story be different if it was Jesus' own house the friends were dismantling?

- How would you respond if it were your house?
- What does this story teach us about being persistent in our prayers?

Make a Response

Use the final symbol of the six questions to think about what individual response you want to make and the actions you want to implement. Share your thoughts with the group if you want to.



How do these verses affect my life today? Write down something I would like to do or change in my life in response.

This is a mat that we can use when we pray...



Pray Together

Spread a blanket or mat out in the middle of the group. Imagine the mat is going to be bought before Jesus. Take it in turns for one member of the group to sit on the mat and for everyone else to pray for them. The person on the mat could share any particular issue that they would like prayer for beforehand if they wanted to, but don't have to.



Extra notes...

ALOVE⁺

Before this story begins Jesus had been on a tour of the synagogues throughout Galilee. He had just returned home to Capernaum, perhaps eager for some rest time, and word spread quickly in the town that he was back. (Matthew 4:13 tells us that Jesus had decided to live in Capernaum and it was from this town that he chose his first four disciples – Peter, Andrew, James and John). Some writers⁸ suggest that the house in this story was in fact Jesus' own house. Others think it could have been Peter's family home. (See Luke 4:38.)

Many people flocked to this house and crammed in through the door that probably opened directly into the main room of the house. They were all listening intently to what Jesus had to say. We aren't told any of the background of the four men with their paralysed friend. Did they come from Capernaum? Did Jesus already know them? Or had they travelled a long way to bring their friend to Jesus? What we do know is that when they arrived the house was so full they realised there was just no way they could get their paralysed friend through the crowded house to Jesus. What would you have done at this point? Sat and waited for Jesus to finish and the crowds to disperse? Turned around and headed home – perhaps to try again tomorrow? Maybe the paralysed man's condition was so urgent that the friends just couldn't wait.

So they scabbled up on to the roof of the house. The roof of a Palestinian house was flat. It would have regularly been used as a quiet place for people to rest so there was usually an outside stair which led up to it. The roof consisted of flat beams laid across from wall to wall. The space in between the beams was filled with straw packed tight with clay and earth. Often grass grew on the roof as well! It would not have been too difficult to dig out the filling between two of the beams, without damaging the main structure of the roof. Once the four men had created a large enough hole they lowered their friend down and landed

him right at Jesus' feet!

What can be inferred from these four men's actions? They were good friends to the paralysed man, they cared deeply for him, and his needs moved them to compassionate action. They showed amazing faith and did not give up. They were sure that if somehow they could get him to Jesus, he would be healed. The paralytic man on his part showed amazing trust in his friends. (What did he feel when he started being lowered down through the roof?!) Do you have friends you can trust like this? Do you have friends that support you in your times of difficulty and need? Are you a good friend in this way to those around you? Are you concerned enough to want to bring your friends to Jesus, whatever the cost?

Jesus saw the faith of the man's friends and responded to it. He first said to the paralysed man, 'Your sins are forgiven.' The Jews at this time always connected sin and suffering together. In other words, if you were ill or suffering in some way, it was most likely because of some sin or wrongdoing in your life. If you were to be cured, the forgiveness of your sin had to come first. Perhaps this paralyzed man did have some sin in his life, perhaps it was the thought of this sin that had brought about the illness that he believed was the inevitable consequence of his sin. Imagine in this situation the relief, joy and freedom the man would have experienced when he heard those first words of Jesus! It was like he was saying, 'It's OK, God's not angry with you. Stop being afraid.' Perhaps this lifted a huge burden of worry and guilt from the man so he could respond quickly to Jesus' next words: 'Get up, take your mat, and go home!'

Of course, the Jewish religious leaders that were present could not accept Jesus saying 'Your sins are forgiven'. In their eyes, only God could forgive sins, so this was a blasphemous statement, punishable by death. Jesus was claiming that he could do something that only God could do. They hadn't yet understood that

Jesus is God and he has God's power to heal both the body and the soul. Jesus proved his claim to have power to forgive sins, by healing the man physically as well.

⁸ Tom Wright, Mark For Everyone



*Healing Power,
both physically &
spiritually...*



Notes...

Group Bible Study Three...

ALOVE⁺

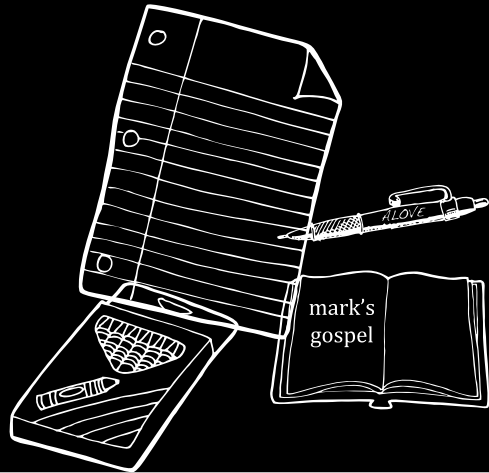
Mark 10:17–25: The Rich Young Man

You will need:

- Mark's Gospel
- Paper and pens

Extras it would be good to have but not essential

- Study Bible



Introduction

This can sometimes be a troubling story for many Christians. We may have been taught that Jesus' message to us through this text is that Christians must not have (or desire) lots of money or nice possessions, or that we should sell everything we own and give it all to the poor. For this reason we may often try to skip over this text when we read Mark's Gospel. In this passage we meet a rich man who is given the invitation of his life: to be with Jesus and follow him. The man desperately wants to, but when it comes to the crunch he walks away. The reason? He has something in his life that he loves more than Jesus and he is not prepared to leave it behind to serve God. In this Bible study we will take time to consider our reaction to Jesus' call to follow him and be sure that he has first place in our lives.



Ask one group member to pray as you begin your Bible study. Ask God to be with you and help you to understand what you are reading.

Icebreaker

In this game you have to make a fun choice between two options. Allocate one side of the room as A and one as B. One person reads out the choices and the rest of the group move to the correct side according to their choice.

A		B
Blackberry	or	iPhone
Wealth	or	Purpose
Mac	or	PC
Xbox	or	Wii
Fame	or	Obscurity
Holister	or	George
Consumerism	or	Contentment
Facebook	or	Twitter

If they don't want to move around the room, create A and B cards and let them hold up each one according to their choice!



Study the Word



Ask each group member to turn to Mark 10:17–25 in their Bibles and ask for one person to read it aloud to the group.



Discuss the following true or false statements about this Bible passage in turn. Allow each person to outline their point of view and decide whether they agree or disagree with the statement. Take a vote after your discussion of each statement to see whether the majority of your group agree or disagree. Make a note of anything that comes up in your discussion that you are not sure about and remember to ask a wiser person about it as soon as you can.



(It is recommended that you read the 'extra notes' either before, during or after your discussion for additional background information.)

Do you agree or disagree that through this passage we can conclude that:

1. *It is a sin to be rich A/D*
2. *God provides everything we have. A/D*
3. *Keeping God's commandments is enough to earn his blessing. A/D*
4. *We can spend our money on whatever we want. A/D*
5. *Riches are always a sign God is pleased with someone. A/D*
6. *It can be hard to be rich and still please God. A/D*
7. *God knows whether we trust in him or whether we trust in our money. A/D*
8. *Sometimes we place our security in the things around us rather than in God. A/D*
9. *Nothing, not money, possessions or even other people, should take the place of God in our hearts and lives. A/D*

Notes...



Read verse 21 again and ask each person to have a go at paraphrasing it –that is, re-writing it in their own words. Write your paraphrase on small pieces of card and share them with each other. Do you discover anything new through this exercise?

(Look back at page ? of Shelf Life to remind yourself how to paraphrase a verse from the Bible if you need to.)



Digging Deeper

- **Could the man have followed Jesus without laying down everything he held dear? Can you?**
- **Why do you think Jesus designated the poor to be the recipients of the man's wealth?**
- **If we agree that not everyone has to literally sell all their possessions to follow Jesus, in what other ways can we apply this passage to our lives?**

- **Create a picture using colour to interpret how the rich young man must have felt after speaking with Jesus.**

Make a Response

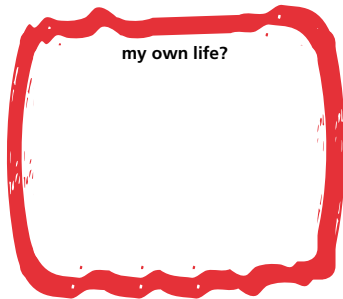
The following diagram is taken from page ? of Shelf Life where we looked at how to action in our lives and live out what we discover in the Bible text. Have a go at this with reference to the story of the Rich Young Ruler. You will see that there are hints on the diagram to help you out!



Notes...



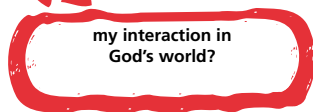
Hint: Where am I placing my security - in life with Jesus or in possessions, money and other such things?



Hint: In what ways could I use the many things (not necessarily money or possessions) God has blessed me with to encourage, help and bless other people?



How will I action the truths of the Bible in...



Hint: Is there anything I own or desire that has become more important than God?



Hint: How can I ensure that the way I live my life and spend my money show respect for God's world?



Pray Together



Read Mark 10:29-31

Jesus said, "Mark my words, no one who sacrifices house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children, land — whatever — because of me and the Message will lose out. They'll get it all back, but multiplied many times..... (The Message)

Take some time in quiet to think about the things / people that you treasure. Write them down and then, in your heart, offer them to Jesus.

Take turns to pray and thank Jesus that, with him as number one in our life, although things may not always go smoothly, we are assured of his love, commitment and blessing.... and have the opportunity to live life in all its fullness!

$$\begin{array}{l} \therefore 80 \quad 4-1=3 \quad 4:2= \\ 7+2= \quad 6+4=10 \\ 9 \quad ((\quad)) \quad 7-1= \\ 5+2 \quad 1+1= \quad 3+3= \end{array}$$



Notes...



Extra notes...

ALOVE⁺

We start this story with the sound of running feet. A man is running after Jesus, trying to catch him before he leaves town. It is the man's last chance to ask his question, to meet Jesus face-to-face. And so he runs up to him and falls on his knees before him. Look more closely and you will see that this man, although young, is very wealthy. He is wearing fine clothes, lives a comfortable lifestyle and is clearly a well respected leader with power and prestige.

But here he is, flung at the feet of Jesus on the dusty road out of this Judean town. It is a picture of urgency and earnestness and humility. You get the sense that this man, despite his wealth and power, is somehow feeling inadequate in his spiritual preparation for eternal life, or he probably wouldn't ask this question. He believes, as most Jews of the time had been taught, that eternal life is something that one earns or merits by what he does, specifically keeping all the Jewish laws to the letter (all 613 of them!). This man was respectable; he had so far lived a decent life, not stepped outside the boundaries of upright Jewish living. But we wonder – what good had he done? For a man with so much wealth and material possessions, how many lives had he changed, how many people around him had he helped, strengthened and blessed? Perhaps this was where he sensed he had gone wrong? Jesus affirms the young man's sense of need. But his answer to the question didn't go down well. When Jesus told him to sell everything he owned, the man turned away. He wanted to be with Jesus, but not enough to do what Jesus was asking him. Jesus was touching the very basis of his security and identity. The man did not understand that he would be even more secure if he followed Jesus than he was with all his wealth.

Jesus looked at this man and loved him, and then extended an invitation to the man that was perhaps more than just figurative. When Jesus said 'Come, follow me' (where have we

heard that before?) he may have been literally inviting him to come with him on the journey, to become one of the disciples, to enjoy being with Jesus every day. What an invitation! But this rich young man turned down this invitation. His face stricken with grief, he rises from his knees. He takes his eyes off Jesus, turns slowly, and moves away from the group of disciples. He can't go with them. He can't go with Jesus, as much as he would love to. Because he loves one thing more, and he cannot leave that to serve God.

This man was a righteous man. He obeyed God's Law. He wanted eternal life. But he was surprised at the cost – his possessions. The disciples were also surprised. They, like many people at the time, thought wealth was a sign of approval from God; that the richer a person was, the better, more powerful, more righteous he was. That's why they asked, 'Who then can be saved?' (v26). But Jesus knew that rich men are tempted to love and trust their wealth more than God. He looked in to this man's heart and saw that the only thing this man loved more than God was his possessions. He would have to learn to love others and not wealth before he could please God.

So, is it sinful to be rich? No. Should all believers sell everything they own? Probably not. We are responsible to care for our own needs and those of our families so as not to be a burden on others. Jesus' command to this man was not a universal command to everyone. What we must ensure is that we don't have anything that we love more than God. This could be popularity, friends, comfort, entertainment, money, or any number of things. Whatever we put first in our life is what we worship. God must be first in our life, as the First Commandment tells us. We should ensure that we are willing to give up anything if God asks us to. This kind of attitude allows nothing to come between us and God and keeps us from using our God-given wealth selfishly.

Jesus loved the rich young man for his question and zeal. (Mark 10:21). But he did not call him back or lower his demands for discipleship. The call to discipleship demands that we give up everything to follow Jesus. But the rewards, both now and in the future, will be too numerous to count! Check out Mark 8:34-36!

Notes...



Conclusion...

ALOVE⁺

Have you ever read the children's story 'Once Upon An Ordinary School Day'? In this short story an ordinary boy is pictured in his ordinary life, attending his ordinary school, expecting to be bored by his ordinary teachers. But, totally unexpectedly, into his life comes someone quite extraordinary – a new teacher by the name of Mr Gee. Mr Gee proceeds to teach the class in a new and truly inspirational way, and something out of the ordinary happens! The children are transported to worlds beyond their wildest imagination. They see pictures of rivers and valleys and vast oceans and whales and mountains and magical things they could not speak about! They wrote stories of giants and heroes and villains and flying and diving! Their day was transformed, their imagination ran free, their perspective was blown right open and they were inspired to dream extraordinary dreams!

Once Upon An Ordinary School Day by Colin McNaughton, illustrated by Satoshi Kitamura. Andersen Press Ltd. Available at amazon.co.uk

We hope that, now that you have reached the end of Shelf Life, you have discovered that when we pick up the Bible, when we read the

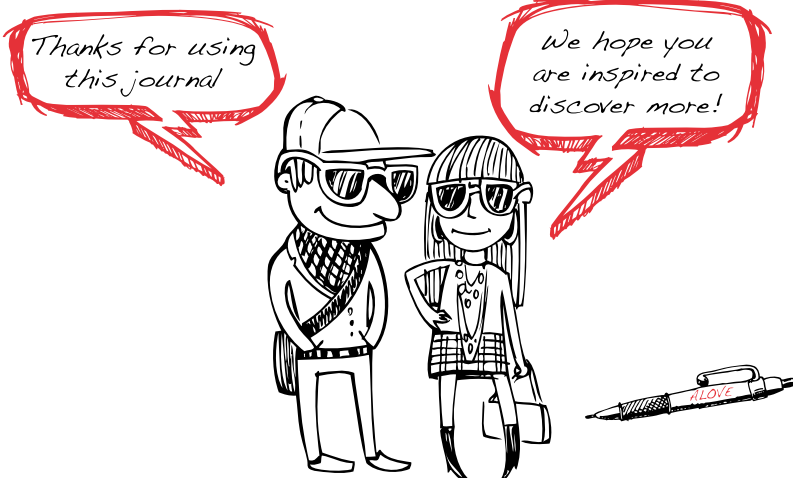
stories and read about God's work, things that were ordinary become extraordinary!

When we take the Bible off the shelf and into our lives, words that may have had no relevance become inspirational, exciting, moving, challenging and comforting.

When we read the stories in the Bible of people who responded to God's invitation – people like Moses, David and Esther, to name a few – we catch a glimpse of how ordinary people became extraordinary simply by living life with God.

When we read about Jesus – his words, his stories, the things he did, the people he met – we realise that our ordinary lives can never be the same again. We are invited on an adventure beyond our wildest dreams!

The Bible is an extraordinary book, God is an extraordinary author, Jesus is an extraordinary teacher, and those who live life immersed in the Holy Scriptures become extraordinary too!



Notes...



Let's use the
space to put our
thoughts down

Yeah,
good idea!

