



How to Read the Bible – Free Beginner's Bible Guide PDF

A friendly, practical starting point for exploring Scripture, one passage at a time. You do not need to know everything before you begin. Bring your curiosity, take things at a gentle pace and let understanding grow.

READ • NOTICE • REFLECT • RESPOND

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com

Start with a story: the Gospel of John

If you are not sure where to begin, try the Gospel of John. It introduces Jesus through stories, conversations and signs, and returns to the central question of who he is. John explains his purpose near the end of the book: that readers may believe Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and have life in his name (John 20:30–31).

Why John can be a helpful first book

John is one of the four Gospels, the New Testament books that tell about Jesus' life and ministry. Its opening introduces Jesus as the Word who became flesh (John 1:1–18), while later chapters show him teaching, meeting people and responding to their questions. You can read one short section at a time and follow the people, ideas and questions that appear.

Your first 10-minute practice

1. Find John 1:1–18 in a printed Bible or a Bible app. The number before the colon is the chapter; the number after it is the verse.
2. Read the passage slowly once. If a sentence feels unfamiliar, read it again without rushing.
3. Write one thing you notice about Jesus, one question you have and one phrase you want to remember.
4. Finish with a simple prayer, if that is part of your practice. You might ask for help understanding what you have read.

PAUSE & REFLECT What would make reading feel welcoming and manageable for you: a quiet moment, a notebook, an audio Bible or a reading partner?

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com

A simple map of the Bible

The Christian Bible is a collection of books written in different times and styles. Its two main parts are the Old Testament and the New Testament. The books are grouped by type, which can help you recognise what you are reading and what kind of writing to expect.

The Old Testament

The Old Testament contains Israel's Scriptures, which Christians also read as part of the Bible. It includes accounts of beginnings, covenant, community, worship, wisdom and the words of prophets. Christians understand its relationship to the New Testament in light of Jesus, while taking care to read each passage in its own setting and literary form.

The New Testament

The New Testament focuses on Jesus and the early Christian communities. It opens with the four Gospels, then includes Acts, letters to churches and individuals, and Revelation. Together, these books tell of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, the growth of the early church, and encouragement and instruction for Christian communities.

Common kinds of books

- Law and covenant: foundational instruction and agreements, especially in the first five books (for example, Genesis and Exodus).
- History and narrative: accounts of people and events in Israel's story (for example, Joshua, Samuel and Kings).
- Poetry and wisdom: prayers, songs and reflections on faithful living (for example, Psalms, Proverbs and Job).
- Prophets: messages calling people back to God and speaking into their times (for example, Isaiah and Micah).
- Gospels: four accounts centred on Jesus: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
- Letters: writings that teach and encourage early Christian communities and individuals (for example, Romans and Philippians).
- Acts tells the story of the early church; Revelation uses vivid imagery and letters to address its first readers.

TRY THIS Pick one type above. Which example book have you heard of, and what would you like to learn about it?

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com

A simple way to read any passage

Try this four-part rhythm whenever you open the Bible. It is a guide, not a test. Spend a few minutes on each step, and stay with the part that helps you pay attention.

1. Read

Choose a short passage, perhaps a paragraph or a scene. Read it once to hear the whole thought. Read it again more slowly. If it helps, read aloud or listen to an audio version.

2. Notice

Look for repeated words, a change in mood, a person's response, or a question the passage raises. Notice what is actually said before deciding what it means. Write down details that stand out, even if you are not sure why yet.

3. Reflect

Ask what the first readers might have heard, and how this passage fits with the paragraphs around it. What does it show about God, people or the situation? What remains unclear? Reflection is careful attention, not a demand to find a hidden message in every detail.

4. Respond

Choose a small, thoughtful response. You might carry a phrase with you, ask someone a question, practise kindness, or pray about what you have read. A response should grow from the passage, rather than from pressure to do something impressive.

A worked example: John 1:1–5

Read the five verses in context. Notice the repeated language about the Word, life and light. Reflect on how John introduces the Word before describing the Word becoming flesh later in the chapter (John 1:14). Respond by noting one question about this image of light, then continue reading to see how the passage develops.

JOURNAL PROMPT What did you notice? What do you want to ask? What is one gentle, practical response for today?

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com

When a passage feels difficult

It is normal to meet unfamiliar customs, names, poetry or ideas. Understanding often comes gradually. These simple checks can help you read with care without expecting yourself to solve every question at once.

1. Read the context

Read the paragraph before and after your chosen verses. Ask who is speaking, who is being addressed, what is happening and what kind of writing this is. A poem, a letter and a story communicate in different ways. Context helps keep one sentence connected to the larger passage.

2. Look up unfamiliar words

Use a reputable Bible dictionary, study note or glossary when a name, place or term is new to you. Check that an explanation fits the passage rather than forcing a modern meaning onto an older word. If you cannot check it now, mark the question and keep reading.

3. Choose a translation that you can follow

Bible translations make careful choices about how to express ancient-language texts in English. Some aim to stay closer to the wording; others use more contemporary phrasing. If a verse is puzzling, compare it in two or three translations and consult notes from a trusted study resource. A different wording can clarify a phrase, but it is not a reason to ignore the surrounding passage.

4. Keep your questions

Write questions in a notebook instead of feeling you must answer them immediately. You could ask a knowledgeable, trusted Christian, compare a study Bible's notes, or return to the passage later. Different Christian traditions sometimes interpret passages differently, so note whose explanation you are reading and consider more than one thoughtful perspective.

5. Make room for prayer and patience

If prayer is part of your faith, you might ask God for wisdom, attention and help living well with what you learn. Some passages become clearer over time, and some questions remain open. You do not need to understand the whole Bible in one sitting.

PRACTISE Return to a passage you found confusing. Read the full paragraph, identify who is speaking, then write one question you would like to explore. There is no need to force an answer today.

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com

Build a gentle, steady habit

A small routine you can return to is often more useful than an ambitious plan that feels hard to keep. Choose a time and place that fit your life. A few attentive minutes with one paragraph is a meaningful beginning.

Practical tips for making it stick

- Pick a realistic rhythm: daily, a few times a week, or another pattern you can sustain.
- Keep a Bible, app or reading plan somewhere easy to reach. Audio can be helpful if reading on a screen or page is difficult.
- Use a notebook for observations, questions and phrases you want to revisit.
- If you miss a day, simply begin again. You have not failed a test or lost your place.
- Read whole sections when you can, and ask a trusted person or group about questions you want to explore.

A gentle seven-day start in John

- Day 1: John 1:1–18. Notice the images John uses to introduce Jesus.
- Day 2: John 1:19–34. Notice what John the Baptist says and does.
- Day 3: John 1:35–51. Follow how the first disciples meet Jesus.
- Day 4: John 2:1–12. Notice the setting and what the people do.
- Day 5: John 3:1–21. Write down a question about the conversation.
- Day 6: John 4:1–26. Notice how the conversation develops.
- Day 7: Revisit one passage from the week. Read it again and reflect on what you would like to explore next.

BEFORE YOU FINISH What is one thing you noticed this week? What question will you carry forward? Choose a next passage, and give yourself permission to learn at your own pace.

Scripture references

References in this guide point to the biblical passages discussed: John 1:1–18, John 1:14, John 1:19–34, John 1:35–51, John 2:1–12, John 3:1–21, John 4:1–26 and John 20:30–31. Chapter and verse wording can vary slightly between Bible translations. Book groupings and descriptions are introductory summaries, not a substitute for reading each book in its own context.

Free resource from Jesus Light Studio – jesuslightstudio.com