

Week one

The Rhythm of Scripture

“They devoted themselves
to the apostles’ teaching...”

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps your Bible is your most treasured possession.

It has become tatty and dog-eared from years of study. The spine is broken and fixed with sellotape. There are notes scribbled down the side of every page, and your favourite verses are highlighted and underlined in pencil. You take it everywhere you go, and you feel almost lost without it.

Or perhaps your relationship with the Bible is a bit more complicated. You have a copy or two somewhere in your home (although you're not entirely sure where) or a Bible app on your phone, but really... it's been a while. Maybe there are times when the Bible seems relevant, but other times when it seems like it's written for another people in another time.

Or maybe you don't believe the Bible at all. Perhaps you think it's a book of harmless fairytales – useful for others maybe, but certainly not for you. Or worse, a book that is responsible for doing more harm in the world than good.

We believe the Bible is the word of God. That, although it was written by different authors over a number of years, it is inspired – spoken – by God himself. And that it tells a story everyone needs to hear.

On the next pages are the passages for you to read this week, followed by a simple devotional for each. I'm praying that as you spend time in scripture, you'll grow in your understanding of the Bible, and develop a rhythm of reading it that is disciplined, sustainable, and life-giving.

BIBLE PASSAGES

Use the notes on 'How to read the Bible' to reflect on or study one of these passages each day in the week leading up to small group session.

Day one

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Day two

Reading: Genesis 1:1-25

Day three

Reading: Genesis 1:26-31

Day four

Reading: Genesis 3:1-19

Day five

Reading: John 3:16-18

1 Rhythm of Scripture | God-breathed and useful

Reading: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

DEVOTIONAL

Walk into any bookshop, and you'll find whole sections of books that promise to help you to live well:

Books that help you to follow your dreams. Books that help you to sleep. Books that promise to make you happy, make you healthy and make you rich. But with so many books offering so much wisdom, how do we separate what's important from what's not?

The Bible is the world's most popular book. Each year, more than a hundred million Bibles are either sold or given away. It's the best-selling book of the year, **every** year.

But more than being just another book, in today's passage, the writer, Paul, makes two astonishing claims: that the Bible is both 'God-breathed' and 'useful'.

First, the Bible is **God-breathed**. The claim is that this book, written over a period of around 1,600 years by at least 40 human authors, is inspired – or 'breathed-out' – by one author: God himself.

Through many different kinds of literature (history, poetry, prophecy, letters...), He reveals to us the single, coherent story of a Father who goes to remarkable lengths to rescue the people he loves. A story with one central character: Jesus Christ.

The second claim is that the Bible is **useful**, for every human being. Useful in teaching us what's true, and in helping us to understand what's wrong. Useful in helping us to live well – in how we relate to others, how we bring up children, how we handle money.

The lived experience of millions of Christians, all over the world, is that things written hundreds of years ago in this book speak into the reality of their lives today. This is God communicating with the people he has made, about how to live in the world he has created.

The Bible isn't simply a book of rules – its purpose is to bring us into relationship with Jesus. **More precious than gold, it has the power to change lives.**

Over the next four days, we'll look at the life-changing story of the Gospel that Scripture reveals.

RESPONSE

What are your own experiences, if any, of reading the Bible? Do you believe God has ever spoken to you as you've read the Bible? Do you believe the Bible is relevant today? Why?

NOTES

2 Rhythm of Scripture | The world the Father made

Reading: Genesis 1:1-25

DEVOTIONAL

Surely no sentence that has ever been written is so powerful – and so full of meaning, and so understated – as the opening line of the Bible. *‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’.*

The Bible never argues for God’s existence, it **assumes** it. In the Bible’s story of creation, we see the power of God in action. God speaks, and the universe **is**.

Light appears, and waters shift. And where there was formlessness and emptiness and disorder, He brings shape and structure and colour. God’s intelligence, majesty, creativity and joy are poured into the things He creates.

Stars so bright they can be seen from millions of light years away. Seas capable of roaring with majesty and power one minute, and lying tranquil and still the next. And the whole thing teems with life.

Creatures that fly and swim and crawl and stalk – some wild and powerful and terrifying, others fragile and delicate and vulnerable. All of them whispering something about the character of their creator.

Most of it goes unseen, or unnoticed, by human eyes – but all of it is watched over, known and enjoyed by Father, Son and Spirit. **And everything about it was good.**

It’s important that we start here. Often the church begins with the story of sin and fallen humanity – of our desperate state and our need for rescue – but this is not where the Bible story begins.

The Bible begins with a loving, holy creator who personally designs and crafts a universe to reflect His glory.

So when you look around the world today, stop and look for the detail. Pause for a moment. Notice the small things.

And when you find them, don’t just marvel at the detail... celebrate the unseen Creator. The heavens and the earth – from the tiniest creature to the grandest mountain – declare His glory.

RESPONSE

Take some time today to slow down and notice the intricate detail in creation. Who or what do you believe is responsible for creation? If you believe in the Creator, take some time to thank Him.

NOTES

3 Rhythm of Scripture | His masterpiece

Reading: Genesis 1:26–31

DEVOTIONAL

Imagine you're a great, prolific artist. You're used to sitting back and looking at your work, pleased with what you've made. But of all your wonderful works of art, this **one** creation gives you your greatest pleasure. **It's your masterpiece.**

The creation of human beings gets an extended focus in the Genesis account of creation. When God created the world – the stars, the planets, the sea, the animals – He said, “it is good”. But when He made people, He said, “it is **very** good.”

That's you and me – and every person you'll come into contact with today. The friend who knows you better than anyone. The neighbour you nod to when you leave your house. The person in your workplace or school or uni that you just can't get on with.

The unborn girl being knitted together in her mother's womb to the dying man at the end of his earthly life. All of them handmade lovingly and deliberately by the master craftsman. There is no person who has ever existed who came about by accident.

He made them – and you – on purpose.

He made you **for** purpose, too. You were made in the image of God – which means there are things about Him that are true of you. Just as God has will and emotions and intelligence and creativity, so do you. Just as God exists in community – Father, Son and Spirit – so **you** were made for community.

And you were made to be **His** image on the earth – to reflect the goodness and kindness and glory of God to the world.

There are moments in everyone's life where we ask questions like why am I here? What's the point? What's my purpose? When you know you were made deliberately by a loving God with plans and purposes, it changes everything.

RESPONSE

'God made mankind in his own image, in the image of God, he created them.' When you get time today, take a moment to dwell on this line, and to ask God what it means for you.

NOTES

4 Rhythm of Scripture | What went wrong

Reading: Genesis 3:1-19

DEVOTIONAL

We've talked, over the last couple of days, about the perfect world God created. But you don't have to look too far to know that something has gone horribly wrong.

Turn on the TV, connect on social media, have a chat with a friend, and you soon come across hurt and pain. People may disagree on the reason, but one thing is for sure...

our world is broken.

The Bible paints a clear picture of what went wrong, and where the problem began. The first human beings were given a choice – to trust God, or to turn from Him and go their own way. We know what they chose, and their decision ripples through all of creation.

Now, instead of the unity and intimacy that God designed us for, people experience shame, hurt and struggles for power. There's not one aspect of human life that hasn't been affected by sin. And the Bible says that even creation itself is groaning.

You and I are given the same choice as Adam and Eve today – submit to our loving Father or go our own way. And time after time, we choose rebellion. Reckless decisions and selfish choices. The harm we cause to ourselves and to others is destructive.

But bigger still, is how sin affects our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Simply and bluntly, each sin is an act of war against a Holy God. And instead of intimacy with Him, we experience fear and hiding. Not only do we miss out on the wonderful things He has for our lives, but our rebellion earns the **wages** of sin: death and separation from our Father forever.

That's the heart of our brokenness. We are, all of us, marred masterpieces, in the hands of a holy God. And none of us, in our own strength is able to repair the damage. But graciously, as we'll reflect on tomorrow, this isn't the end of the story...

RESPONSE

What evidence of brokenness do you see in the world around you? What signs do you see in your own life – in the feelings you experience, in the things that stir your heart?

NOTES

5 Rhythm of Scripture | What Jesus did

Reading: John 3:16-18

DEVOTIONAL

We saw yesterday how our sin separates us from God. We have a debt against Him that we cannot pay. Our situation is more desperate than we think, but our God is kinder than we can imagine.

Motivated by love, Jesus takes the initiative. Far from standing back and watching us mess up, God himself chooses to join us in our filth, so we can join Him in his family. The eternal God is born into the confines of a human body. With hands and arms and feet. Fully God and yet fully man.

God comes close, in a human body like ours, so we can identify with Him. And we find out He's nothing like we thought he was. He's unspeakably holy and yet he's unimaginably kind.

He hangs out with sinners and nobodies. He heals the sick, He raises the dead. He lives the perfect life that we don't get close to, obedient to the Father, never once sinning.

And then He **chooses** the cross.

And on the cross, he willingly takes all our sin and shame on himself – everything we've ever done, and said and thought that's wrong. **He** takes the punishment that **we** justly deserve. **Our debt against God is paid... by God himself.**

And on the third day, Jesus walks away from the grave. What looked like defeat is uncompromising victory. Death and the power of hell are beaten. And the path back to God is open to all – regardless of our guilt and background – **all because of Jesus.**

That's the Gospel. It's the best news we could possibly hear.

But we each have a response to make. It involves admitting we've done wrong, believing that Jesus died on our behalf, and making a decision to follow Him. Have you done that? Would you like to?

RESPONSE

If the things you've reflected on this week have struck you as true, and you'd like to accept Jesus as your saviour for the first time, here's a prayer you might like to pray:

"Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for going my own way instead of your way. I acknowledge there's nothing I can do to save myself. I take you at your word. I believe you are the Son of God who died to forgive my sin. From now on, please take first place in my life. Fill me with your Spirit, and help me to be the person you made me to be. Amen."

If you're already a Christian, ask the Lord to excite you and stir you again with the wonder of the Gospel.

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