



Bible Study

A 5 week Bible study series.

It focuses on the basics – an overview of what the Bible is, what it contains and the benefits of studying it.

Kidderminster East Parish
Five Churches
One Parish
One Lord

What is the Bible ?



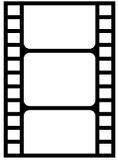
What is the Bible?

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Session 1 - Why Bother with the Bible?

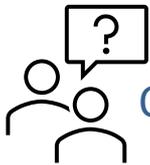


Introductory Video Clip

<https://www.gotquestions.org/why-read-Bible.html>

“The book to read is not the one which thinks for you, but the one which makes you think. No book in the world equals the Bible for that.”

James McCosh (C.19 Scottish Philosopher)



Opening questions for discussion.

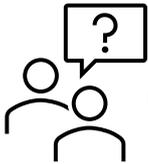
1. **What is your favourite book in the Bible?**
2. **What is it about that book that makes it your favourite book?**

My guess is that you do not see your favourite book in the Bible as dull, boring or irrelevant.

However, many people see the Bible as a whole as exactly that. Yet it is still one of the world’s most **popular** books. According to *The Economist* (2019) 100 million copies are sold worldwide each year (not including online Bibles) and it has been translated into over 2,000 languages. In an increasingly godless age where more and more literary genres come into being, the Bible is still the world's bestseller.

The Bible is also a **powerful** book. It has the power to change both individuals and societies. For example, many of the social reformers of the 19th century in Great Britain were Christians who saw much wrong in their society from reading the Bible.

In the 20th century some German Christian pastors stood up against Hitler and the Third Reich because of what they read in the Bible and in the 1960s Martin Luther King fought non-violently against the evils of segregation in the United States based on his strong Christian convictions which he got from reading the Bible.



Questions - 1

Can you think of any other examples when the Bible has had a major influence either in world, national or local events?

The three examples mentioned above concern world-changing events so let's bring the story of the Bible down to a local level!



Questions - 2

What is your earliest recollection of the Bible?

Can you recollect a time where you had to make a decision or were struggling with a specific issue in your life and you received guidance from the Bible? How did it make you feel?

The Bible is also a **precious** book. The psalmist says about the scriptures that they are:

“Flawless, like silver refined in a furnace of clay, purified seven times.”

Psalms 12:6

And Matthew, the writer of the Gospel of Matthew, states:

“People do not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Matthew 4:4

Many Christians down through the centuries have faced imprisonment, or even worse by smuggling Bibles into countries where the Bible is forbidden.



Further Questions

- **To say that the Bible is popular, powerful and precious is not the same thing as to say that it is well read. Why do you think that some Christians know so little about the Bible?**
- **What do you like about reading the Bible and what do you not like about reading the Bible?**

Conclusion

The one thing I have learned from this session is

The one thing I have been challenged by this session is

Session 2 - Overview of the Bible

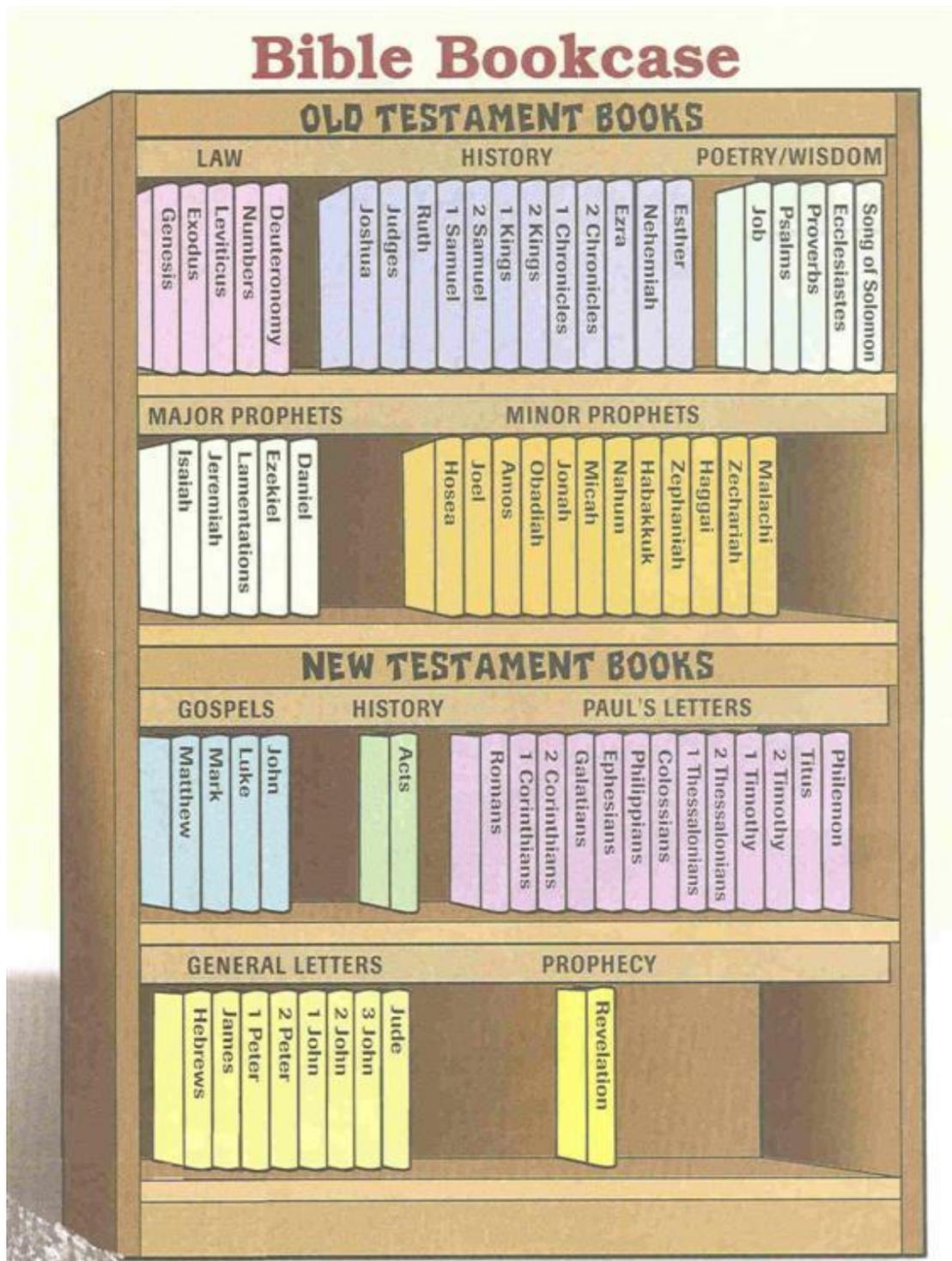
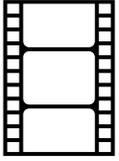


Figure 1 The Bible: 66 Books 40 writers



Introductory Video Clip

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/showing-kids-how-the-bible-points-to-jesus/>

Supposing you wanted to become an expert on World War 1. How would you go about it? It would be impossible to speak to those soldiers who fought in the trenches as they have all died, so where do you begin?

Actually, there is a number of things that you could do for example you could:

- Read history books by experts on the subject.
- Read the war poetry of people like Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon.
- Look through old newspapers.
- Listen to old recordings and interviews given by participants when they were alive.
- Listen to some of the songs that were about in those days. many of them made reference to the war.

Please notice one thing, however, that the sources mentioned above are all very different from one another. Poetry is different from prose, newspapers are different from recordings and history is different from song. In other words, as you engage with any given source you have to keep in mind the type of material you are accessing and when you do so, all of the different types of material fit together to provide a comprehensive account of World War I.



- **What types or genres do you find easiest or hardest to read and understand in the Bible? Why do you think that is the case?**
- **Can you think of a way in which the message of the Bible could be misunderstood by not recognising the type of genre of the passage in question?**
- **Some people say that they like to read the New Testament but that the Old Testament is a different matter altogether! Why do you think that is and why should we even bother with the Old Testament?**

An understanding of the genres of scripture is vital to the Bible student. If the wrong genre is assumed for a passage, it can easily be misunderstood or misconstrued, leading to an incomplete and fallacious understanding of what God desires to communicate. God is not the author of confusion (see 1 Corinthians 14:33), and He wants us to “correctly [handle] the word of truth” (see 2 Timothy 2:15). Also, God wants us to know His plan for the world and for us as individuals. How fulfilling it is to come to “grasp how wide and long and high and deep” (see Ephesians 3:18) is the love of God for us!

Therefore, when it comes to reading the Bible, the first question we have to ask ourselves is “What type (or genre) of material are we looking at?” The outlines below hopefully help us to answer that.



These books tell us about God and His developing relationship with His chosen people the Israelites. Some of the great biblical heroes that we know so well belong to this era such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, etc. We hear about God's goodness

and the people's disobedience and how God has to keep bringing them back to Himself as He both punishes and forgives them.

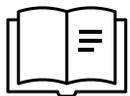


History (Joshua - Esther)

Historical narrative is scripture that gives factual retellings of real events. These books of the Bible are not based in myth, they are based in fact. As we read, it is important for us to pause and reflect on the fact that these events actually happened! Historical narrative comprises 43% of the Bible. God loves to tell stories of His faithfulness.

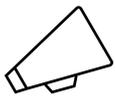
Old Testament narrative is found in: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther.

New Testament narrative is found in: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts.



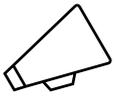
Poetry/Wisdom (Job - Song of Solomon)

In this section we are introduced to prayer, praise, love and joy, despair, doubts, anger and the emptiness of life without God. By comparison we also see triumphant faith when God is included in, and becomes the centre of, day-to-day life. This poetry and wisdom covers every gamut of human existence and experience.



Major Prophets (Isaiah - Daniel)

The 'Major Prophets' are described as "major" because their books are longer and the content has broad, even global implications. In order of occurrence, the 'Major Prophets' are: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, and Daniel.



Minor Prophets (Hosea - Malachi)

The 'Minor Prophets' are described as "minor" because their books are shorter (although Hosea and Zechariah are almost as long as Daniel) and the content is more narrowly focused. That does not mean the 'Minor Prophets' are any less inspired than the 'Major Prophets'. It is simply a matter of God choosing to reveal more to the 'Major Prophets' than He did to the 'Minor Prophets'.

Both the 'Major' and 'Minor Prophets' are usually among the least popular books of the Bible for Christians to read. This is understandable with the often unusual prophetic language and the seemingly constant warnings and condemnations recorded in the prophecies. Still, there is much valuable content to be studied in the 'Major' and 'Minor Prophets'. We read of Christ's birth in Isaiah and Micah. We learn of Christ's atoning sacrifice in Isaiah. We read of Christ's return in Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. We learn of God's holiness, wrath, grace, and mercy in all of the 'Major' and 'Minor Prophets'. For that, they are most worthy of our attention and study.



Gospels/ History (Matthew - John)

The four gospels tell us of Jesus' life and its significance to the world. They talk about His birth, life, death and resurrection and leads us to see that only in Jesus is there hope for fallen humanity. Each gospel is written with a specific audience and purpose in mind.

The four gospels are written on the same subject. They are biographies of the life of Jesus Christ, and even though they contain much of the same material they are different because they were written for different purposes and different audiences.

Matthew was writing for a Jewish audience who would have been familiar with the Jewish scriptures. He begins with Jesus' pedigree, his ancestry, tracing it all the way back to Abraham. On his human side, Jesus could trace His ancestry through all of the Jewish heroes. Matthew often quotes Old Testament scriptures and points out that specific events in Christ's life were the fulfilment of the prophecies made when these were written. Matthew groups specific teachings of Jesus together so that one has a good understanding of a given subject. Thus, Matthew was written so that the Jews could plainly see that Jesus was 'The One' promised by the Old Testament prophets.

Mark was written to the Gentiles and specifically the Roman world. Jesus is presented as being a man on the move with the word "immediately" being used often. He is portrayed as the Son of God and is confirmed by miracles and powerful teachings. The first half of the book emphasises His ministry and the last half tells about the events leading up to and including His crucifixion. The crucifixion ends with the Roman soldier declaring, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark 15:39). Mark's gospel served the purpose of helping the Gentile world understand that Jesus was truly the Son of God!

Luke is clear about what he was attempting to do in his gospel since he begins by declaring:

"Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile a narrative of the things that have been accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word have delivered them to us, it seemed good to me also, having followed all things closely for some time past, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught."

Luke 1:1-4

Luke wanted his biography to be an orderly account of the events in the life of Christ and therefore one will find events much closer to a “first this happened, then this happened, then this happened” approach than the others. If one wants to read an orderly account of the life of Christ, Luke is the place to go.

John waits until the end of his book to reveal his purpose unlike Luke who reveals his purpose at the beginning:

“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.”

John 20:30-31

As we read the gospel of John, we are struck by the fact that John begins with the proposition that Jesus is God and that He came in the flesh to give grace and truth to mankind (see John 1:1-18, John 1:1, 14 and 16-17). Seven specific signs follow – things Jesus did – to show why we know this is true. Interspersed throughout the book are seven “I Am” statements from Jesus to let us know who He claimed to be.

Each gospel is written for a different purpose and the four of them together give us an accurate picture as to whom Jesus Christ was. By reading them and understanding their purpose we can better understand Jesus, His life, purpose and teachings. The four gospels offer a complete picture of who the Son of God really was.



History (Acts of the Apostles)

The Acts of the Apostles is a historical account of the amazing spread of the Christian faith as well as its persecution and troubles faced by the earliest followers of Jesus. Perhaps the central character in the Acts of the Apostles is Paul who went on to write many of the letters which follow.



Letters or Epistles (Romans - Jude)

An epistle is a letter, usually in a formal style. There are 21 letters in the New Testament from the apostles to various churches or individuals. These letters have a style very similar to modern letters, with an opening, a greeting, a body, and a closing. The content of the epistles involves clarification of prior teaching, rebuke, explanation, correction of false teaching and a deeper dive into the teachings of Jesus. The reader would do well to understand the cultural, historical and social situation of the original recipients in order to get the most out of an analysis of these books. The most prolific writer is Paul, however, we also have letters by James, Peter, John and Jude.



Apocalyptic (Revelation)

The book of Revelation (also called *The Revelation of John* or *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*) is an example of "apocalyptic" writing - a form that delivers a message using symbols, images and numbers. Parts of the Old Testament, particularly in the book of Daniel, are also written in the apocalyptic genre. Many of the symbols and images in Revelation have parallels in the Old Testament.

Apocalyptic writing is characteristic of times of persecution. Some of the symbols and images in Revelation equate the Roman emperor with Satan and depict the ancient Roman Empire as the ultimate evil. As a prisoner of the Romans, John could not communicate that message in plain language, but the apocalyptic form was ideal for recording John's heavenly vision. John's writing would have been just nonsense to his Roman captors. But the Christians of Asia Minor were familiar with the Old Testament and the apocalyptic writings and would be able to understand it.



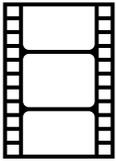
- **What is the primary purpose of these types or genres?**
- **How does the Old Testament impact on the New Testament and what is the relationship between the two?**
- **Perhaps one of the ways that we might answer the questions above might be that in the Old Testament we see the foretelling of the coming of Jesus as Messiah and Saviour. Can you think of any Old Testament verses or prophecies that fulfil this role?**
- **Based upon what we have looked at in this session how will your reading of the Bible be any different in the future?**

Conclusion

The one thing I have learned from this session is

The one thing I have been challenged by this session is

Session 3 - God has spoken: Revelation

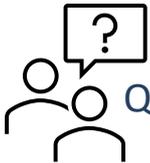


Introductory Video Clip – How God reveals himself - Explainer

https://www.google.com/search?q=bible+revealing+who+God+is&safe=strict&source=lnms&tbm=vid&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjhXNWx8LnuAhU8URUIHRjvAOAQ_AUoA3oECBQQBQ&biw=1304&bih=897

I guess we do not use the word “revelation” very often these days but when we do it’s usually in the context of something like:

“Well THAT was a revelation!”



Question 1

Can you think of a time or a situation where you said that in your life (you may have to change names to protect the innocent!)?

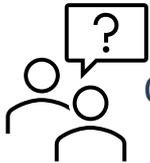
What do you understand by the word “revelation?”

The implication seems to be that something happened or you saw something that you could not have worked out for yourself as it was so unexpected and I think this is a good way of thinking about God’s self revelation. God’s character, His love, His personality is so unlike what we could have come up with ourselves that we could not in our own way have worked Him out; He had to reveal His character and His love to us.

God speaks to us in different ways; He speaks to us through His created World - what we sometimes call “General revelation” - however, He speaks to us primarily through the Bible – “Specific revelation”. In the same way Jesus is God's ultimate revelation, however, the main way we know about Jesus is through the specific written revelation i.e. the Bible.

I wonder if you have kept your old love letters or letters from friends at university or school friends over the years? My guess is that many of you did and when you first received these letters you probably read them over and over again. As you did, you discovered more and more about the person who wrote them. That is why Christians are encouraged to study the scriptures; the more they read them the more they understand the mind and character of God.

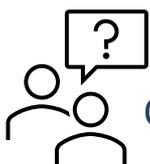
Of course, some people today would claim that the best way to know God is through the natural world. While it is true that the existence and the power of the world suggests the existence and the power and majesty of God, nevertheless it does not tell you very much about what God is like. Science is an exploration of the way in which God has revealed Himself in creation and biblical theology is an explanation of how God has revealed himself in the Bible.



Question 2

In the light of this do you think that there is a contradiction between science and the Bible?

Sometimes people ask the question "Did God write the Bible, or did men write the Bible"? As we saw in our last session Christians believe that over a period of around 1500 years various human authors wrote different types of literature which make up our modern Bible. However, they also believe that is inspired by God.



Question 3

What do we mean when we say that human beings wrote the Bible but God inspired it?

Christians often say that the Bible is without error. What do you think they mean by that and do you agree or disagree?

It would be wrong to say that there are no difficulties in the Bible, there are! **Can you give some examples? Three obvious ones are:**

- **Historical difficulties (Luke 3:1-2)**

To quote one example we know that the fifteenth year of Tiberius was 27 AD. It was once said that Lysanias of Abilene was executed by Mark Antony in BC 34 and therefore Luke must have got it wrong. But more recently inscriptions have been found of a later Lysanias who was tetrarch of Abilene exactly when Luke said he was. Not all difficulties can be explained away so easily, however, careful study and reflection can often resolve these difficulties.

- **Moral difficulties**

It is here that we must wrestle with the Bible i.e. suffering, creation, sexuality, modern medical ethics, etc.

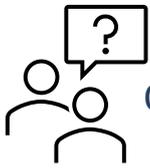
- **Doctrinal difficulties**

Sometimes people make a distinction between “primary” and “secondary” issues in the Bible.

Primary issues are points of division between Christians and non-Christians; to these we should take a closed hand approach, meaning we cannot compromise.

Some examples of primary issues would be that Jesus is the Son of God, God is Triune, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, salvation is to be found in Christ alone, the Bible is the word of God; there is NO wiggle room there.

Then there are **secondary issues** which serve as points of distinction between Christians; with these, we need to take an open hand approach; meaning we will not fight or separate over them.



Question 4

- **Can you think of any points of disagreement between Christians that might be regarded as being secondary issues?**

Secondary issues call for debate, discussion, and distinction but never division. When a secondary issue gets in the way of a primary issue, it is really a sin issue of pride that needs to be repented of.

“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”

St. Augustine



Further Questions

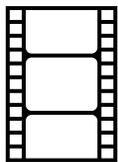
- **Can you recall a time when you were reading the Bible and suddenly some aspect of God’s character seemed to jump out at you? How did it make you feel and what did you do about it?**
- **Once God has revealed something to us in the Bible what is the next step from our point of view?**

Conclusion

The one thing I have learned from this session is

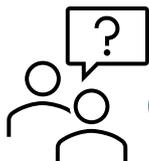
The one thing I have been challenged by this session is

Session 4 - God Is speaking: Relationship



Introductory Video Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wTUKbR9GWB0>



Questions 1

What do you think would be a good definition of the word “relationship”?

Last week you were encouraged to think about reading people’s letters in order to find out more about them, however, let me ask you this question. If you had had a choice between reading their letters from a distance and meeting up with them which would you have chosen? My guess is that for most of you, you would have preferred to meet up with them face-to-face.

In the same way it is not enough just to read the Bible as merely a book, God is speaking to us today because he wants to have a relationship with us. Reading the Bible without being in a relationship with God is like reading a love letter where you have no intention or desire of ever wanting to meet the person who wrote it.

"The Bible does nothing but speak of God's love for us."

St. Augustine

The Bible works for Christians *only* in the context of relationship with God. When I read a biography, I get to know more about the central character. When I read the Bible, I get to know the central character Jesus.

Think of somebody really famous that you would like to get to know. You read every book and article about them, you read what they have written, you watch them on television and on YouTube, and you listen to their music. Then all at once one day out of the blue you get a chance to spend some good quality time with them, just the two of you.

Do you accept the offer? Why or why not?

Are there advantages and disadvantages in meeting such people?

Unless we have that relationship with Jesus, we have missed the point. The Holy Spirit speaks, not spoke! It is no use studying the Bible or going to church or reading books or watching films without coming to Jesus personally. This is where the Bible is not just for Christians. It is also for non-Christians as they read it and come to know Jesus.



Questions 2

- **Think of a relationship you have with someone. In what way is your relationship with God similar and in what way is it different?**
- **If you read the Bible (both the Old and New Testaments) you will discover characters and personalities that God uses mightily and yet they also come across as very fallible broken human beings. Can you think of any specific examples? What do their lives teach you?**

As you read through the gospels you discover that Jesus wants to have a relationship with the strangest of people e.g. centurions, women, lepers etc. and both Jesus and Paul make some comments about those who will inherit the Kingdom Of God and who won't.

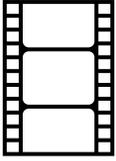
- **What sort of things can put pressure on your continuing relationship with God? How can you alleviate this pressure?**

Conclusion

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Session 5 - So What?



Introductory Video Clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuLz-IAAXFA>

So how do we read the Bible? Perhaps the first things that we need to get clear before we begin are to be found in the answers to the following two questions:

- **What decisions do we have to make when it comes to reading the Bible?**
- **How do we actually make these decisions?**

You might want to try reading the whole Bible cover to cover in 1 year however you might think that is a bit too much!

Just to put the time into context - someone has recently worked out that if you were to read the Bible at average talking speed you could read it from cover to cover in around 80 hours.



Questions

1. What issues, questions and problems do you have in reading the Bible?

Some answers might include:

- God in the Old Testament seems very different from God in the New Testament. Did He change?
- Can we trust a book that was written so long ago?
- Most of the Bible consists of story, poetry and history than commandment. What are the implications for us as we read it?
- How do we interpret the Bible?
- Do we need to “get” the whole message of the Bible before we can truly understand it?
- Are there any hidden messages or codes in it that we miss?
- What about other holy books?

2. So how do you read the Bible? Do not just think theologically, be practical!

Top Tips	
Find a quiet place to read.	Use helpful Bible notes or commentaries.
Turn off all phones and mechanical devices.	Keep a notebook to write down promises or challenges or difficult questions.
Try the same time each day. (Difficult in our modern times!)	Ask questions of others and don't be afraid to do so.
Pray before you read that the Holy Spirit will show you the truths of the Bible passage as you are reading.	Use a translation that you can understand.
Bear in mind what "genre" of book you are reading.	Look up different passages in different translations.
Remember that the Bible is a book of checks and balances, do not read out of context and try to squeeze the passage in question into what you want it to say.	Keep asking "What did this passage mean then and what does it mean now?"
Quite often when people have difficulties in explaining something in the Bible the answer can be found in another part of the Bible. "Let scripture explain scripture" is a good principle.	When you have finished, pray that God, through His Spirit, will guide you as to what you must do with the insights you have been given. Act upon what you have read and learned.
Either study a specific book of the Bible or else study a Bible theme.	

4 Four Questions for Interpretation

1. What do I learn about God?
2. What do I learn about people?
3. What do I learn about relating to God?
4. What do I learn about relating to others?

4 Four Questions for Application

1. What does God want me to understand/think?
2. What does God want me to believe?
3. What does God want me to desire?
4. What does God want me to do?

4 Four “Is there? questions”

1. Is there a promise to be believed?
2. Is there a challenge to be accepted?
3. Is there a sin to be acknowledged?
4. Is there a relationship to be mended?

Conclusion

The one thing I have learned from this session is

The one thing I have been challenged by this session is