

Conclusion:

Sometimes Christianity feels complicated. It can be hard to keep track of the people, stories, signs, symbols, laws, rules, and practices. The church itself, around the world, understands and applies passages of the Bible in different ways. It even accuses one another, sometimes, of belonging to the evil one.

Sometimes Christianity feels too simple - like a crutch for the weak, helping to make sense of senseless pain by escaping through fairytale-like hope. It can become a way to confront gray areas of life by rejecting and judging people and ideas that make us feel uncomfortable or unsafe.

True Christianity, though, begins and ends with faith in God and the desire to know and be aligned with him. It is the acknowledgment that there is good and evil, that good comes from God and that evil is meant to be conquered through human choice and the power of God.

As much as you are able, do not let the overly complex or overly simple expressions of Christianity distract you from truly knowing God.

He has preserved for us in his word a story that is both followable and compelling. What he was doing thousands of years ago is what he is still doing today – showing himself to people, teaching us his good way, and allowing us the choice to believe and follow him (or not).

The next Bible reading plan will continue this story.
I hope you make yourself a part of it.

A Walk Through the Bible

Bible Reading Plan

Part 1
(12 weeks)

Introduction: Why the Bible?

Christians are a community of people who want to know who God is. They are committed to knowing and following him together. They believe that there is one God and that he is real. He has made everything that exists. He himself is the beginning of all things.

Christians believe that the one, real God, who made everything, made everything for himself, and that he has never abandoned his relationship with (all) creation. Therefore, everything and everyone that exists is in relationship to him. Christians want to know who he is and what that relationship is. They also want to participate in the relationship as he defines it.

Christians believe that God himself used people to write down some of the true things they witnessed and experienced about knowing him. He has used human processes to preserve a collection of these writings so that people can keep knowing him. Because they believe that God inspired the writers and preserved the collection, Christians believe that the Bible is a special book in our time. It is God's word" to the world for knowing him.

The Bible holds all Christians accountable to each other and to the world. It's not easy for millions of people to practice a common faith – yet Christians understand that that is exactly what God asks them to do. The Bible contains God's story and God's ways. Christians are meant to understand the Bible so that they can know God and show him to the world by the way that they live.

The Bible can be tricky to use as a Christian. The writing comes from times and cultures that we are far removed from. Not only that, but the further back in time you travel, the more partial the understanding of God's story was. Sometimes the way that God shows up in the Bible doesn't seem right to us. Sometimes Christians disagree about what the words and stories of the Bible mean about who God is.

But Christians stay committed to who they are – a community of people who want to know God. So, they pray. They learn from each other. They keep reading the Bible.

This Bible reading plan is meant for knowing God. If you are looking for him, he will surely find you.

The result of disbelieving God is death. Evil is responsible for the deterioration of all living things. Its aim is the destruction of life – relational, emotional, intellectual, and eventually for everyone, physical. God had chosen to keep the power of healing barred from us, knowing that an eternal life spent mingled with the power of evil would be hell itself.

But God did not give up on real life for humanity- one in which humanity chose to reject and overcome evil and be saved.

It would take thousands of more years to understand, but through Moses, God gave Israel a powerful miracle and symbol (Passover) of the way for humanity to be spared from the death caused by evil: to believe him again.

The practice of Passover was available to all who simply believed their life could be spared by aligning themselves with God. The requirements of alignment were: 1) Listen to God and remain in a home marked with the blood of a (perfect) sacrifice until the time of death had passed. 2) Carry the sign of belief in God in your family through male circumcision.

SOAP Prompts:

Is there any way your life could better show alignment with God, listening to what he has asked people to do as a sign of belief in him?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 12 (The Passover Lamb)

Exodus 12:21-51

John 1:29-37

Luke 22:1-13

John 19:14-15 + 31-37

1 Corinthians 5:6-13

By the days of Moses, the line of Abraham had become the beginning of the promised multitude. All that they knew of God, however, were the stories of their forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They knew their 12 tribes and how they had come to be in Egypt during the years of famine and the rule of Joseph. But their reality was the culture of the Egyptians and the ways of the people who followed Egyptian gods/spiritual powers.

In order for the descendants of Jacob (Israel) to learn to believe God and to follow him, God needed to bring them out of the place they called home (a place of slavery) and teach them new ways. New ways are incredibly difficult for people to learn and accept. God would use the hardness of Pharaoh (who refused to let the Israelites go) to show he was more powerful than the gods and ways of the people of Egypt. In order to become the people of God, Jacob's descendants needed to willingly leave their familiar life and slavery behind. Despite many miracles, it would prove to be a difficult feat for Israel – impossible, in fact, without faith.

SOAP Prompts:

Are there any “new ways” you are trying to learn because of your faith in God?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 11 (Moses)

- Genesis 15:12-15 + Exodus 1
- Exodus 2
- Exodus 3
- Exodus 11
- Exodus 12:1-20

Get a VIDEO introduction to SOAP



Use the SOAP method of reading your Bible

- s: scripture
- o: observations
- a: application
- p: prayer

S

In every passage of scripture that you read, anticipate and look for words, phrases, or verses that stand out to you. They may be “illuminated” to you or jumping off the page. You may or may not know why. They may interest you, cause confusion, or stir emotions that were not present to you before reading them. Finish reading the passage. Copy down the words, phrase(s), or verse(s) that most capture your attention.

O

What do you notice? What strikes you? What do you find meaningful? What do you find confusing? What do the words remind you of/make you think of? What do you find interesting? What questions do you have? Write down as many thoughts as you have about why the words, phrase(s), or verse(s) stood out to you today. You can also make note of anything you notice about the surrounding context of the verse.

A

What is one area, circumstance, or relationship in your life that these words have meaning for? Resist thoughts about what they can or should mean for people in your life or people in your society/culture. How can/should/will your life and relationships be different because of these words, with the help of God?

P

Talk to God about all that you wrote. Ask him to speak to you, help you, forgive you, and provide the direction that you need. Thank him for his word and for all that you have.

The Bible begins with God making everything and establishing time as we know it. When God made humans, he made them completely apart from evil. Evil only existed outside of God and outside of man. We do not know how God "intended" to teach humans about evil (or if he intended to teach them about evil at all). But we do know that he did not shield them from evil. He allowed evil an opportunity to tempt humans with mistrusting God, changing their relationship with him, and opening their eyes to evil itself, of which they previously had no knowledge. They did not resist the temptation. It changed the world.

The Bible says that Jesus is the son of God – that he is God. It says that Jesus came into the world to show the world God. But the world is so changed by evil, that God is not easily believed or received.

SOAP Prompts:

In your life, is there an area, circumstance, or relationship in which you are tempted to mistrust God? What does mistrust look like in your life?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or

relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray: "God, _____ is on my mind right now. I feel _____ about it. I am wondering if you have anything to say to me about it. For better or worse, I want to know you. I want to hear your voice. I invite you to speak to me."

Week 1 (Who is Jesus?)

- John 1:1-18
- Philippians 2:1-11
- Colossians 1:15-23
- Hebrews 1:1-4
- Romans 5:1-11

All those who believe God have an incredible spiritual ancestry in Jacob. God took a young man with nothing (including unexemplary character) and demonstrated life-changing faithfulness.

Jacob begins his life seeing God as the god of his father Isaac and not his own (Genesis 27:20-21). He says, "If God will be with me and keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God." How little he knew about all that God planned to do!

Because of evil, the world is a scary place. In our fear, we often ask God to show us he is real in ways that are so small compared to all that he is able and wants to do in our lives. To our advantage, the way of God is to accept faith that is even the size of a mustard seed.

SOAP Prompts:

What is the smallest thing you could ask God to do to show you he is real this week? Would you believe him if he did it? If not, think of something a little

bigger...

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 10 (Jacob)

- Genesis 29
- Genesis 30:1-24
- Genesis 31:1-3 + Genesis 32
- Genesis 33
- Genesis 35

God chose Abraham to begin to show himself to the world again through people. Because of the knowledge of evil, the world did not know God or his ways. Abraham barely knew God or his ways. God wanted there to be a multitude of people who knew him and who chose to believe him - doing well and choosing what was good. He began with just one man, making a way for him and his descendants to learn to know and believe God. It would take time.

It would take time and it would take a promise from God to continue a lineage of faith. That lineage was not promised to the obvious. It didn't come to the firstborn by right of birth. It also did not come to the ones who demonstrated the best character or righteousness.

The Bible shows that the promise was given through those whom God chose to fulfill it. The point being there was nothing earned. There was nothing especially virtuous or attractive about those who became God's people. They became God's people through faith and by God fulfilling what he told them he would do.

SOAP Prompts:

What areas of your life or history make it seem like good standing with God is not likely? What is your faith like?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 9 (Isaac + Jacob)

- Romans 9: 8-13
- Gen 24:1-28 + 50-67
- Gen 25:19-34
- Gen 27:1-45
- Gen 28:10-22

God told humanity that if they chose to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, they would die. Satan told them that this was not true.

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil did not cause humans to die on the spot. But God did block man and woman's access to the Tree of Life, "lest they eat and live forever" (you will read the story this week). What an "extreme" consequence! People eat fruit from a tree. God takes away eternal life. Hmmm...

If God's way and God's plan were done there, that'd be a tough pill to swallow. But God has told us about a future that includes the Tree of Life in a time and place that is once again separate from evil. What if God had not blocked access to the Tree of Life? What if humans were allowed to live in their new, changed world forever? What would our world and life look like?

SOAP Prompts:

Have any of your recent choices meant "death" (big or small) in your life or relationships? What would it look like to choose life instead?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 2 (The Tree of Life)

- Genesis 2:4-16
- Genesis 3:1-13
- Genesis 3:20-24
- Proverbs 3:13-35 + 15:4
- Revelation 22

Humanity's primary battle in life is to do well and to do what is right: in a world with knowledge of good and evil, it can be hard to determine what it means to do well, good, and right. Trusting a standard outside of ourselves feels illogical and unsafe. Isn't it best to look out for myself and the people I love with the best judgment I gain over years of experience and suffering? This is the way of the world. It makes preservation the highest aim.

God asks us to do well by having a higher aim: evil desires to have you, but you must rule over it (Genesis 4:7).

Anger has become a primary doorway for evil to permeate the world. There are very many things in the world that will get you to anger: injustice, shame or embarrassment, ego, being in want, deception, betrayal, dishonor, mistreatment or wrongful use of power. Sin lies in wait for men and women to become vulnerable in their anger, and to express evil in its most ready form: the turning of one human being against another. But this is not the way of God.

SOAP Prompts:

What is one area or relationship in your life today that feels vulnerable to opportunities to sin? What is one step you could take to learn to rule over evil in your life?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

- Genesis 4:1-10
- Matthew 5:21-24
- 1 John 3:11-18
- Ephesians 4:25-32
- James 1:19-27, 4:1-3

Week 3 (Anger, Death, and the Heart)

Our hearts know that the physical world only accounts for a fraction of what is real. Ask a parent who has just experienced the birth of their child to show you what is real in that moment. He or she will not be able to point to anything you can see, touch, or smell. Even the baby in their arms will not actually be what is most real to them. The things that are most real are what will sustain them over the next several months of cradling, feeding, dressing, cleaning, and calming – all at cost to themselves.

And yet, without the baby...

All that a parent knows is real means nothing apart from the baby himself. The two cannot be separated from one another. What we do, have, hold onto, and act out, cannot be separated from meaning...what we believe...our faith.

Demonstrating that God is real requires so much and so little of us all at the same time. It requires faith that makes God's realness more important than any other reality.

SOAP Prompts:

Is there something in your life that is very important to you – maybe even more important than the reality of God? What is it? What makes it so important?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

- Genesis 21:1-21
- Genesis 22:1-19
- James 2:14-26
- Hebrews 11:1-19
- John 8:31-59

Week 8 (Saving Faith)

God is spirit. He exists in a realm that is not our own- a world that is beyond the dimension of space and time that we understand. It puts God in a place that is outside of what we can see in the physical world. To believe God, we are required to overcome this difficulty.

If there is a God, how would he show himself in a world where he cannot be seen? The Bible tells us that God has always made our physical world an important part of demonstrating his realness. Over time, in measure to their need, God has given humanity signs, symbols, miracles, land, buildings, and rituals, all as a way of pointing to what exists beyond these things – primarily, himself and his ways.

God's plan is to show himself through people who act like him – a multitude of people who believe God and rule over evil. Circumcision was one of the first physical signs given by God to show his realness through people. It was also a simple call to people to show belief through obedience.

SOAP Prompts:

What are some of the ways today that you can show God to the world and demonstrate your belief in him?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 7 (Circumcision)

- Joshua 5:1-8
- Jeremiah 9:23-26
- Romans 4:7-25
- Acts 15:1-12
- Galatians 5

As we encounter evil in the world, it can be incredibly difficult to believe in the reality of a good and loving God. The more egregious and closer to home the evil, the more difficult it is to believe. Our reason says, "If I had all of the power of God, I would NEVER allow this [specific] evil to happen."

The Bible says that God reasoned that way himself once: "The Lord saw the wickedness of humans was great on the earth...and the Lord regretted that he had made man...and it grieved him in his heart." It so grieved him, that he decided to not allow it to continue anymore (you will read the story this week).

God was not willing to destroy all of life in the eradication of evil (which is what it would have taken). That is not God's way. He desires to sustain life. Since that time, it is hard to fathom the amount and depth of evil God has had to stomach, staying true to his promises to sustain life, time, and seasons.

The Bible says that a second end of the earth is coming. Only good will be spared, and evil will come to a complete end.

SOAP Prompts:

Is there any sin in your life that you tend to find tolerable? Is there a step you can take to eradicate it from your life?

Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 4 (Noah)

- Genesis 6:5-22
- Genesis 8:13-22
- Isaiah 54:9-17
- 1 Peter 3:13-22
- Matthew 24:36-51

Most of humanity, throughout all of time, has not chosen the way of God. We have not taken it upon ourselves to rule over evil as one of our highest aims. Yet, wherever humans have been spared from destruction, they have continued to learn, advance, progress, and achieve.

What would it mean for a society that has been given the ability to progress, learn, and achieve but had NOT made it their aim to rule over evil? How could they ever survive without destroying one another?

God saw reason early on in the life of humanity to significantly complicate their ability to work in unity, yet without causing them to turn against one another (you will read this story this week).

God desires that all people do well, right, and good. He is not partial to any race, tribe, language, or color. He desires the unity of all people, living and working together for the good of one another in peace.

SOAP Prompts:

What is the most complex relationship in your life? Are there people in your life who just don't seem to "speak the same language" as you? Is there a way that you can lead in the relationship to seek unity together around what is good? Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 5 (The Nations)

- Genesis 11:1-9
- Psalm 36
- Daniel 7:13-14
- Isaiah 45:18-25
- Revelation 7:9-17

In the days of Abraham, God initiated his plan to use a nation to show the world himself again. Humans have always been made to show one another God, as they lived in perfection towards one another and were sustained by knowledge of him.

By the time of Abraham, evil had infiltrated the world and true knowledge of God had seemingly come to be hanging by a thread. Even in the life of Abraham himself, it will be easy to see how little was understood about God's character and ways. Thankfully, God has never been stingy with his plans.

Through Abraham, God began to establish the basic parameter for any human to be considered "righteous" in the eyes of God. We tend to think of righteousness as having to do with being good.

But before God shows humanity about being good, he re-establishes the foundation that was lost at the beginning – the necessity to believe God.

SOAP Prompts:

Think of a way that you fell short in your character this week. What were you trying to achieve, accomplish, protect, or defend? Is there any way that believing God could have led to a different result? Close your eyes for 30 – 90 seconds. Is there a thought, feeling, problem, or relationship that emerges or presents itself most in that time?

Pray before you read, asking God to speak to you about your life.

Week 6 (Father Abraham)

- Genesis 11:27-12:9
- Genesis 13
- Genesis 15:1-6
- Genesis 16
- Genesis 17