

## **EXPLORING CHRISTIAN LIFE**

### **THE BIBLE**

#### **BEFORE THE TALK**

*If you have arranged for someone to begin this session by sharing his or her testimony, introduce that person at this point. Ideally, their testimony should last no more than 3 minutes.*

*Give a brief introduction – the wording below is intended only as a general guide.*

We've seen that the church, the Holy Spirit and prayer are all important sources of support for the Christian. Now lastly we're going to look at the importance of the Bible. Remember that all of these things work together to feed your spiritual life.

#### **THE TALK**

*Deliver the talk. The wording below is intended only as a general guide. The aim of the talk is to emphasize the importance of reading the Bible regularly.*

By way of introduction, let's try answering some simple questions about the Bible: Who wrote it? What's it about? What's it for?

Turn to 2 Timothy chapter 3, and we'll read verses 14–17.

*Read aloud 2 Timothy 3:14–17.*

So, who actually wrote the Bible? Verse 16 puts it like this: "All Scripture is God-breathed" and 2 Peter chapter 1, verse 21 adds that the Bible "never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." God decided what would go into the Bible and then he breathed it out, by his Spirit, through the authors.

Question two: What is the Bible about? Well, the Bible contains all kinds of writing. There's history in here, biography, poetry, songs, predictions about the future. But whatever the style, the message is the same. The Bible is about being rescued from what it calls our "sin." It tells us that this sin has broken our relationship with God. It also explains how that relationship can be re-established because of Jesus' death on a cross.

The start of the book, Genesis chapters 1 and 2, tell us that God made the world, entrusted us with everything in it, and intended that we would live in relationship with him. The Bible goes on to explain that, sadly, we turned our backs on him. Wonderfully, however, God doesn't turn his back on us. Ultimately, he sends his Son to die so that we can be forgiven our sin. We read that Jesus overcame death, and the Bible makes it clear that this resurrection ensures eternal life for those who put their trust in him. The Bible also promises that Jesus will return again, next time as judge of the whole world.

On to our last question: what's the Bible for? Well, put simply, it enables us to know God. Please turn with me to Psalm 1.

*Read aloud Psalm 1.*

Now, this psalm gives us some great advice on how to get to know God.

The first verse is very striking: "Blessed is the man who does not *walk* in the counsel of the *wicked* or *stand* in the way of *sinners* or *sit* in the seat of *mockers*." The psalmist makes it clear that the person who is "blessed" – that is the person of whom God approves – is the person who watches what advice they take, what example they follow and what company they keep. Christians are not to be influenced by the "wicked," "sinners," or "mockers" – those who reject God.

Notice also the three stages of influence: walking with these people; then standing; and finally sitting. Each is more dangerous than the last. The least influential is just walking along listening; a little more influential is standing and discussing in more detail; and most influential of all is actually sitting with these people, taking on board attitudes and ideas.

We're only human, so we want to please those around us. We're influenced by those we admire. But the psalm says that the Christian's "delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night." So Christians are to take their lead not from the people around them, but from God's law, the Bible. If I want to know how to please God in my marriage, in my family, as a friend or in the workplace, then all the principles I need are here.

*Hold up a Bible.*

And that's not an imposition, that's a joy. Because having seen God's character through Christ, having understood his love for me, I know he wants what is best for me.

Psalm 1 makes it clear that we should be passionate about the Bible, reading it and reflecting upon it continually. The person who does this is described in verse 3 as being "like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither." Just as the tree draws constant nourishment from the nearby stream, so the Christian is refreshed and replenished by reading the Bible.

Remember that Christianity is all about a relationship. God wrote the Bible because he wants to know us. The more we read it, the more we know of God, the more we learn to admire and adore the God who so longs to be in relationship with us.

William Wilberforce, the man who gave his life to putting an end to the slave trade, used to say Psalm 119 to himself from memory when he was most under pressure. This is quite impressive, because it's 176 verses long. Wilberforce chose that particular psalm because it's about the importance of relying on God's word.

*At this point, you might want to ask one of the group leaders to give a testimony illustrating how the Bible has enabled them to know God.*

However, did you notice the contrast in Psalm 1? There are those whose focus is on the Bible who are like strong, thriving trees, planted by fresh water. But, on the other hand, there are those who mock the Bible, and decide to live life their own way. What are they like? Look again at verse 4: “They are like chaff that the wind blows away.” It’s an image of a threshing floor after harvest, when great shovels lift the wheat and toss it into the air. The precious grain falls to the floor, but the chaff – the husks and the useless bits of straw – are scattered in the wind. And look at how the psalm continues in verses 5 and 6.

*Read aloud Psalm 1:5–6.*

And that’s what the wicked are said to be like: because they ignore the words of the One who made them, they have no future and they will perish.

That’s the stark choice the psalm sets before us. Will we be like chaff, without roots, with no stability and no future? Or will we be like the tree, firmly grounded and nourished by what we read in the Bible?

Our destinies are determined by our choices.

In Luke chapter 10, there’s a description of two sisters. Jesus has come to their house to visit, and the reactions of the two sisters are very different. Turn with me to Luke 10, and we’ll read from verse 38.

*Read aloud Luke 10:38–42.*

As Jesus teaches, Martha is occupied with preparing a meal for him. Mary – on the other hand – just sits down and listens. Martha seethes. She says, “Lord, don’t you care ...?” Because Martha is so busy, because she’s trying to do so much, she is worried and upset, and that has a detrimental effect on three relationships: her relationship with herself; her relationship with her sister; her relationship with her Lord.

Jesus very gently reminds her that she has a choice to make here. Whereas Martha has chosen to attend to details that keep her from hearing Jesus’ teaching, Mary has chosen to listen. For her, that’s the most important thing.

We always make time for the things that are most important to us. Martha wants to produce a wonderful meal for Jesus, *then* sit down and listen to him. There’s nothing wrong with what Martha is doing. She wants to make Jesus feel comfortable and welcome. However, Jesus tells Martha that by making time to hear God’s word, “Mary has chosen what is better.”

The challenge for us in the midst of busy lives is the same: will we become caught up with social engagements, business responsibilities, travel plans and domestic chores – or will we choose to spend time listening to God’s word?

Will we continue to live as the world lives, or will we choose what is better?

## **AT THE END OF THE TALK**

Let me leave you with the following questions for your groups:

*Display the following questions and read them aloud.*

- “Mary has chosen what is better” (Luke 10:42). What choices do *you* need to make to hear God’s word?
- The person who delights in God’s word is “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season” (Psalm 1:3). Do you think the Bible could play this role in your life?

*Allow 30 minutes for groups to work together through the Study Guide section called **GROUP DISCUSSION**.*

*It may be useful to have Bible reading notes available to help participants who want to begin reading the Bible for themselves. You (and any other leaders) might also want to share with participants how and when you do your own personal study of the Bible.*