

# explore

Time with God



## In this issue

This introductory issue of *Explore* is designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it daily. Sections in this sample include readings on the nature of the Bible, part of the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew's Gospel, an overview of the whole of the Bible and readings from the book of Jonah.

## It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring His word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

## We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.

## Contributors to this issue

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For details of our church subscription scheme, and our other Bible-teaching and training materials, please visit:

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## How to use *Explore*

**Find a time you can read the Bible each day**



**Find a place where you can be quiet and think**



**Ask God to help you understand**



**Carefully read through the Bible passage for today**



**Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think**



**Pray about what you have read**



# Spending time with God

How to have a regular 'Quiet Time'

**W**elcome to this introductory issue of *Explore*—a resource to help you dig into, understand and apply the timeless truths of God's word to your everyday life.

Many people have found that setting aside a regular time each day to read and think about God's word, and to spend time in prayer, has been the power-house of their spiritual life and growth. *Explore* is designed to encourage, help and support you in this daily joy and discipline, sometimes referred to as a 'Quiet Time'.

It is often a struggle to be consistent in finding a daily time to spend with God. Children, the busyness of life, special nights out, holidays, or just sheer exhaustion can all conspire to get in the way. However, there is no substitute for just getting into a good habit. There are many patterns that suit different people, and yours may change over time. Whatever you choose to do, guard your time with God jealously. If you come to it hungry to learn from the Lord, and to feed on the truth, it will be a place of nurture and

growth, and a source of direction and strength for your daily life.

► **TIME:** Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time, as it sets you up for the day.

As C.S. Lewis said: *'The moment you wake up each morning, all your wishes and hopes for the day rush at you like wild animals. And the first job of each morning consists in shoving them all back; in listening to that other voice... letting that other, larger, stronger, quieter life come flowing in.'*

But you may not be a 'morning person' so last thing at night, or, if you're free, a mid-morning break. Whatever suits you.

► **PLACE:** Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see Matthew 6 v 5-6), but rather pray with the door to our room shut. So, anywhere you can be quiet and private is the key, which makes your bedroom the top choice for many. Some people who commute plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office, or some other quiet corner. Some like to sit in a favourite armchair with a cup of tea at hand. Others find sitting at a table or desk more productive. The rule is that there's no rule—whatever works for you!



🕒 **PRAYER:** Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, you should try to develop your own lists to pray through. Perhaps you could pray each day for one family member, one friend, and a fellow believer? And how about keeping a prayer diary where you record your prayer requests, and also how God has answered them. Often our problem is not so much 'who to pray for', as *what to pray for them!* That's why Bible reading and prayer are inseparable. We are reminded from God's word what is truly important, and it will shape the nature of our prayers for ourselves, the world and others.

🗨️ **SHARE:** As the saying goes: *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with other believers the things you have learned from your reading. It will encourage both them and you. Using the same notes as a friend will help you encourage each other to keep going.

## WHAT'S IN THIS ISSUE?

If the Bible is God's word to us, then it stands to reason that our experience of reading it will be surprising, uplifting and, at times, deeply disturbing to us. So the 28 days of daily readings in this introduction start by looking carefully at the claims the Bible makes about itself.

After the first few days, where we think about the nature of the Bible from a range of passages, we'll look over a section of Jesus' teaching from Matthew.

Then, on day 15, we begin a short overview of all the different types of writing to be found in the Bible, and finish by working our way through the OT book of Jonah.

We hope that this month of readings will give you a taste for reading the Bible regularly with *Explore*, and that, as a result, you will grow in the knowledge and love of God. You'll find details of how you can order a subscription to *Explore* inside the back cover.

Remember!

- **It's quality, not quantity, that counts.** Better a few minutes thinking about a few verses, than to skim through pages without absorbing anything.
- **Falling behind:** It's inevitable that you will occasionally miss a day. Don't be paralysed by guilt. Just start again.
- **It's about developing a love relationship, not a law relationship.** Don't fall into the trap of thinking that 'doing your quiet time' is an end in itself. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love Him more and serve more wholeheartedly.

# THE BIBLE: Look who's talking!

▶ Reading: 2 Peter 1 v 16-21

**S**tand by for the ride of your life!  
Because, if the Bible really is God's Word, then it's not just a book about God, but a book **by** God. In other words, as you open the pages of your Bible and read today's passage, you will actually be listening to God speaking to you!

## GOD SPOKE THROUGH MEN

▶ Read 2 Peter 1 v 20-21

You often hear it said that the Bible was written by men whose understanding was limited by their own times and circumstances—and so it doesn't really apply to how we live and think today.

❓ *What do these verses say about that?*

It's a great word picture in v 21. The idea is of a sailing ship being blown along by the wind. Scripture isn't simply man's ideas, or man's 'spin' on God's ideas. It is God (the Holy Spirit) *breathing out* His own words through man. Until God 'blew', the men who wrote down the Bible had nothing to say; they were like sailing yachts without wind.

Some people say we hear God as we pray, or are silent. But really it is when we open the Bible that we listen to God, for it is here that God speaks definitively.

• *'But doesn't God speak in lots of ways?'*

Yes, He speaks through creation, through our conscience, through experiences we have, even through dreams sometimes—but these are more like the teacher clap-

ping to get the children's attention. The Bible contains the clear, undisputed words that God is speaking to us today. So we must come, bowing in our hearts as we read, to receive everything God says.

## MEN SPOKE FROM GOD

▶ read 2 Peter 1 v 16-19

Yes, God is speaking, but not in a vacuum! A real man, an apostle called Peter, has real concern and is writing a real letter to real Christians. To hear God's words to us now, we need to understand what God was saying through Peter to the people then.

❓ *What is it that Peter wants his readers to be sure about (v 16)?*

And what is the reliable truth that Peter is telling us about Jesus? That, far from there being uncertainty about who He was, they should see He was the very person all the Old Testament was pointing to (v 19). Jesus is God's final revelation, His last word to mankind. If they believed the Old Testament scriptures, how much more should they now receive the truth about Jesus.

❗ *That's Peter's word as a faithful witness—and it's also God's word.*

pray thru'

- Thank God that He has not left us groping around in the dark on the important issues in life.
- Praise God for the Bible, and ask Him to help you come to it humbly, ready to hear, and glad to obey.

# Sure thing

2

▶ Reading: 1 Peter 1 v 22 – 2 v 3

A double-glazing salesman calls at the door offering to replace all your windows for free. The doctor looks seriously into your eyes as he tells you the results of your test. Whose word do you trust?

*I wonder how many years it will be before people look back to the 'old days' at the beginning of the 21st century and laugh at the way we believed the kind of world view the media churned out. And yet now people look at you as if you are mad if you dare to suggest God's words in the Bible are a safer guide...*

## NEW IS TRUE?

▶ Read 1 Peter 1 v 24

Peter isn't ashamed to quote words that were already 700 years old when he wrote. Now you can add on another 2,000. But they're as fresh as today's bread from the baker's. Every day humans fade and die, and their ideas get buried with them. And every day is a new testimony to the unchanging truth of God's words. Everything God has said has proved true; everything God has said is still proving true.

time out

- ❓ What are we doing to God's unchanging truth if we tweak it to 'bring it up to date'?
- ❓ In practice, what can we do to help ourselves rely on God's truth when all the pressure is to go with what everyone else is saying?

## OLD IS DEAD?

▶ Read v 22, 23

❓ What is Peter's argument in these verses?

You see just how new God's ancient word is? Peter is saying that God's word is the key to living a life of genuine love towards others. It's not that it simply *contains* truth which will help us love one another—it's actually alive in us if we've been born anew through it! God's living word is giving us life and love as we trust and obey what He says.

*So of course we will be hungry for what gives us life...*

## THE BIBLE—BORING?

▶ Read 2 v 1-3

At last we find words that we can rely on, answers that satisfy, truth that never shifts ground, promises that will certainly be kept. And a sign that God is at work in us is that we are hungry for it. Like wailing newborn babies crying out in distress until we are happily and contentedly feeding on God's life-sustaining truth.

❓ Is that you? Or do you still have a 'take it or leave it' attitude to reading the Bible. If so, it might say more about you than the book in your hands...