



Bible Confidence: Session 1 – Facilitator’s ppt script.

The numbers correspond with the slides. This is an edited version of the Content booklet. ① indicates an animation click is needed.

1. Intro slide
2. Why might we lack confidence when it comes to the Bible?
3. The aims of this course are that you will have an ① awareness of the story of the Bible which will help you understand each part of it better and that you will be equipped with ① practical ways of reading it which you can use in your daily life. Ultimately the aim is that you will have a ① deeper confidence in how to listen to God through the Bible and a desire to do so. This Psalmist loves his Scriptures, and experiences them as “sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psalm 119: 103)
4. There are a number of understandable reasons we might struggle with the Bible. ① **Understanding it can be challenging.** ① **Applying it to our daily lives can take effort.** ① **Reading it can be daunting.** The aim is also to address those things which might be stumbling blocks to our love for, and confidence in, paying attention to God through Scripture.
5. The sessions will offer four things (though not all of them every time): ① Looking at the **story and big themes** of the Bible, so we can see how it fits together. ① Exploring how we **read it well**, in terms of, for example, being good at interpreting what it means for today. ① Examining **difficult questions** which might undermine our confidence. For example, asking how the Bible was put together, or what it means for it to be a divine book. ① Offering some **practical suggestions and resources** which will help make listening to God in Scripture a normal part of life for everybody.
6. How and why does God communicate with people?
7. What God ‘says’ to us makes all the difference. God can ‘speak’ in many different ways - ① for thousands of years many people did not have a book called the Bible – as many do not today. ① This does not mean that God’s words are unable to be heard. Yet, alongside this, the claim is that in the Bible we are given, through a selection of books, an incredible and reliable record of what God has been and is doing in the world. ① To read the Bible is to have *access to our most complete way of seeing into the heart and work of God.* This is why the Bible is called “Holy” – ① it is *unique, special or sacred* in its power to reveal God to us.
8. While God may speak to human beings in many ways, the Bible claims that God’s Spirit works as we absorb its words to transform our lives in every aspect of our discipleship, making us more fully human by: ① *Teaching us about how we and the world are rescued and made whole in Christ* and ① *Training us in right living* (“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness...” 2 Timothy 3: 14-17) ① *Refreshing our sense of God’s love and helping us to grow as disciples.* ① *Giving us wisdom in how we develop as people and make good decisions* (“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.” Psalm 119:105)
9. *Helping us understand our deepest motives and thoughts as we follow God.* Like a “...double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it ① judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” (Hebrews 4:12) ① *Building our lives on what God is doing forever.* ① “Jesus answered, ‘It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” (Matthew 4:4)
10. Reading it well: What is at the heart of reading the Bible well?
11. Each ① **part of the Bible only makes sense in relationship to the whole.** ① The more we can read it as *one story* (nearly half the Bible is written as narrative), the more the *details* make sense. For example, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah only make sense when we know the context and hope of Israel’s story. ① Despite its incredible variety of books (written over 1500 years by over 40 people) the whole Bible has a remarkable unity of direction.
12. The ① **Bible shapes us by being a story.** ① The unified story of the Bible not only tells us what God has done, but it also reveals what God *is* doing and what ultimately God *will do*. It shows us where we have *come from*, what we are *here for* and where we are *headed*. We read it well when we allow the story of the Bible to shape us in this way. ① By knowing God’s story as best we can, we find ourselves living as part of His-story, rather than seeking to fit God into our story. ① We ‘improvise’ faithfully, based on what has gone before, and knowing how the story ends. The Bible contains some rules and instructions – but we don’t primarily read it in order to be able to keep them. Rather, to read it well means to become so familiar with God’s story that our own daily stories become increasingly part of it.
13. **At the centre of the ① story is Jesus** ① Whatever we read in the Bible makes most sense when it points us to Jesus. He is the one in whom we see the ① complete character of God, and who shows us God’s purposes. He is the one ① to whom the whole story of the Old Testament points, and who fulfils its hopes. When we read parts of the Bible which are hard to understand, the only way to approach them is to ask how they relate to Him. John writes that He is the Word of

God who has been with God from the beginning, and through whom God became flesh and blood for us. This brings us to an important point. ① The main way in which God speaks to us is not through the Bible (or any other means) but through Jesus Christ. ① The Bible is God's word, but it only exists to point us to the Word of God – Christ. ① To read the Bible well is always to understand it through Christ, and to be always led to Christ through the Bible.

14. **The ① Bible is a living word.** We can approach the Bible for knowledge, but to read the Bible well is to approach it as God's ① communication of truth, for me personally, in a given moment. It is a 'living and active' word, an encounter with God as His Spirit takes the words from the page and applies them to my mind and heart. This is the kind of listening to God through Scripture which Jesus longed to see His disciples experience: ① "The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life." (John 6:63) This reading of the Bible for knowledge *and* revelation is reflected in the two words for "word" in the New Testament. ① One word, *logos*, is used to describe God's eternal, unchanging truth. Jesus is the "Logos" at the beginning of John's gospel – the true Word of God. ① The other word, *rhema*, is the word that speaks into a specific situation and quickens our hearts. In the verse from John above, the words that give life are Jesus' *rhema*. *Logos* and *rhema* never *contradict* each other, and *both* are needed. This means that there are thankfully many ways to approach reading the Bible. But our desire is always that we may *encounter* God in reading, just as we 'encounter' a loved one through the words of their handwritten letter. St Augustine described the Scriptures as "our letters from home". As we read we will hopefully find ourselves in the same position as Karl Barth the theologian, who, when he read the Bible, said, ① "I have read many books, but *the Bible reads me*."
15. **Questions for discussion: How in a nutshell would you describe the purpose of the Bible? Why is it important that Jesus is at the centre of how we read the Bible? Is there anything I need to change about the way I read the Bible, in order to read it well?**
16. **Reading it well: What is important to know about what is in it?**
17. **The ① Bible's language is meant to be accessible.** Much of the Bible, in Old and New Testaments, began as stories told by word of mouth. ① The Old Testament stories, written in Hebrew, were told by storytellers, priests and judges and passed down through the generations. ① Two other languages can be found in the Bible. ① Some Aramaic (Daniel and Ezra and small parts of the New Testament). ① The New Testament writings are all in Greek - the main language spoken at the time of Jesus.
18. Importantly, knowing this highlights three important things about how accessible it is: ① *The Bible is not linked to one language* – it is meant to be translated into whatever language is needed for it to be understood. ① *The Bible is rooted in story* – and stories which people remembered. ① *The style of language in the New Testament is for everyday use*, not academic study. The Bible was written in a way that ① ordinary people are meant to be able to understand. It is not meant to be a test of our ability to read difficult language.
19. **Not ① all parts of the Bible are the same.** ① The Bible is like a library (the meaning of 'Bible' comes from the Greek *ta biblia* which means little books) made up of ① many kinds of books, with different purposes and styles. It is a book for all personality types! There are ① eye-witness accounts, historical stories, poems, laws, prophecies, songs, political tracts, letters, mythical stories, parables, wisdom literature and what is known as 'apocalyptic' writing. This means that part of reading the Bible well is about ① understanding the *kind of writing* that the part of the Scripture we are reading is. It is not difficult to work out – alongside our own wisdom, there are many simple resources that we can use to give us the necessary background. We are used to doing this. The way we read a car manual – looking for specific bits of information – is very different from the way we read a novel – from start to finish. Or the way we read a poem – slowly and deliberately – is very different from the way we read a magazine article.
20. Similarly, we will ① need to ask the *right kind of questions* of what we read in the Bible. The story of the Prodigal Son is a parable – a made up story to reveal a spiritual truth. It would therefore not help us to ask factual questions such as, "What was his name?" or "When did he live?" to understand it better. On the other hand, when we read the accounts of Jesus, it is helpful to know, as Luke claims at the beginning of his gospel, that ① these are meant to be read as reliable history. The opening of the Bible in particular needs this kind of background understanding. ① Were the two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 written as scientific/historical documents meant to be understood literally? Or is the reason they are in a poetic form because they were only written to express the deeper truths about *why* God created the world and human beings? While some parts of the Bible are clearly meant to be understood literally, not all parts of the Bible make sense as literal fact. In fact, to try and shoehorn a literal understanding into something that was not intended to be read as such might be to make it *less truthful*. ① Taking the Bible *seriously* does not mean taking it all *literally*.
21. **Understanding key themes: how do we enter the story of the Bible?**
22. In the book *The Drama of Scripture* the authors write this: ① "Imagine that the Bible, with its 66 books, written by dozens of human authors over the course of more than 1000 years, is a grand cathedral with many rooms and levels and a variety of entrances....You can, for example, enter the Bible through one of the gospels....If you want to gather a sense of the cathedral as a whole, you face an important question: where is the main entrance, the place from which you can orient yourself to the whole? The cathedral of the Bible has many themes." As we go through its whole story as part of

gaining confidence in the Bible, we will be focussing on its themes as a way of entering the whole book. *The Drama of Scripture* writers offer *covenant* and *kingdom* as the two main themes of the Bible which hold it all together. ① Covenant is about the relationship that God wants with His people throughout history. ① Kingdom is about God's rule over His people and creation.

23. The two are ① linked – when people enter a covenant relationship with God (or a human king) they begin to live under His reign. As well as these two themes, we will open up the Bible through the themes of ① Creation, Image of God, Fall, Exile, Worship, Presence, Justice, Grace, Salvation, Hope, and Right Living. The handout *The Story of Scripture* gives a brief overview of this big story, with themes, books, key characters and dates highlighted, plus a few missing words for you to fill in.
24. **Tackling tricky questions: Can we trust how it was put together?**
25. We have seen how the Bible emerged over time, but one question that may undermine our confidence in it is uncertainty about how it was finally put together. Who decided which books should be included, why and when? And can we trust their decision as authoritative? ① The list of books that make up the official 'canon' of the Bible (the books seen as inspired by God) was finalised at a series of Councils of bishops from across the churches in the 300 ADs. ① By the time of Jesus, the existing Jewish scriptures had been mostly agreed upon – and this was "officially" recognised by 250 AD. ① After Jesus died and rose again nothing was written down for some time and the early Christians were used to using their memories to tell stories and ideas. The first written New Testament texts were Paul's letters – known as the Epistles. ① As the church grew it became necessary to write the accounts of the good news – known as the Gospels. There were other 'gospels' in existence, some of which we still have, such as the Gospel of Thomas.
26. It became necessary to establish which were the authentic, God-inspired, accounts. The twenty-seven New Testament books we have today began to be recognised early on. ① By 50AD the apostles had written or endorsed 23 books, and by the end of first century most of the books were already established. Paul sees Luke's gospel as having authority in his letters, and Peter recognised Paul's writings as Scripture. The first New Testament, known as the ① Muratorian Canon was compiled in AD 170. It included 22 of the 27 books that were eventually decided on by 397AD. In deciding which books had been truly inspired by God's Spirit they asked questions such as: Was the author of the book an apostle or have a close connection with an apostle? Is the book being widely accepted in the church? Is its teaching consistent? Is it transformative? The crucial thing to know is that we can have confidence in the way the Bible was put together because the ① Councils that met 400 years after Jesus were not deciding what should be in the Bible from scratch but were *confirming what was already known and used* – and had been for a long time.
27. **Practical starting points: What version should I use? What resources are out there to get me started reading the Bible regularly?**
28. **Finding ① the Bible for me:** One of the reasons we can lack confidence with the Bible is because we haven't found a version we find easy to read. Yet there are many different translations of the Bible, which means ① there is a version for you! The reason there are different translations is because some provide a literal, ① word-for-word translation of the Hebrew or Greek, but on the other end of the scale some offer an equivalent ① version, which emphasises the meaning of the Bible but in language which is more familiar to us. And some land ① between the two. If you want to study the original text as closely as possible you will go for the more literal version, whereas if you want to be able to read and understand the meaning of the Bible more easily you will want an equivalent paraphrase.
29. The Bible Society have an excellent webpage which leads you through some questions to discover which kind of Bible is right for you. <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/which-is-the-best-bible-translation/> A good literal translation might be the ① English Standard Version. Translations ① which try and combine word-for-word accuracy with more of an emphasis on meaning might be the New Revised Standard or the New International Version. A contemporary language ① version which unpacks meaning (a paraphrase) is the Message. You can easily buy a paper version, but the Bible is also available on websites such as Bible Gateway <https://www.biblegateway.com/> or apps such as Youversion. You can even place different translations of Bible passages side by side on these sites.
30. **Getting the ① background:** As we have said, ① understanding the background to the kind of writing you are looking at in the Bible helps us read with confidence and understanding. In recent years the Bible Project has created short, animated videos on each book of the Bible which help you see its overall meaning and context. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/> The Bible Society has created a resource of three page notes on each book of the Bible. <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/bible-book-club/>]
31. **Starting to ① read regularly:** It can be hard to know where to start reading the Bible, which 'entrance' to use. There are many resources available which offer daily readings, with background information, which you can listen to or read. ① <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans> offers daily Bible reading plans for long or short periods, on lots of different topics to guide you through and help you listen to God. These can even be emailed to you every day. ① The handout *Daily Prayer resources* offers a list of resources you can use on phone or computer to help you read the Bible and pray every day.

- 32. Suggestions** for this week: In building our Bible confidence here are a few short opportunities you could explore this week: Decide which Bible is right for you and make sure you have a digital or paper copy. You could use <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/which-is-the-best-bible-translation/> to help you decide. Next on your own, or with someone else, practise finding and then read a few Bible passages which speak about God's love using different types of writing. You could look at: Psalm 107; Hosea 11: 1-4; Luke 15: 11-24; 1st letter of John 1:2.
- 33.** Become familiar with background resources for understanding books of the Bible by visiting <https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/> and/or <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/explore-the-bible/bible-book-club/> and watching/reading about one book. Find a daily reading resource you like at <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans> or through one of the apps on the bookmark.