

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## What is the Bible?



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

How would you describe the Bible to someone who had never heard of it?



### Understanding the information (20 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

2 Timothy 3:16 describes all Scripture as “God-breathed”. The Bible is different because it is divinely inspired - the many human authors of the various parts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit in their writing.

The early Christians came to accept these writings as uniquely God-given, and drew them together in the form which we have today. The Bible is a fully human book (with all the messiness that can mean) and a fully divine one - the creation of the Bible is another way in which God “covenant-partners” with His people, cooperating with those who have been willing to serve Him through writing His story faithfully throughout many centuries.

For Gandhi the Bible was far more than just a book: “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.”

Once Jesus was challenged by the Sadducees (a religious grouping) who were trying to trap Him. He replied, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). For Christ, it is those who “know the Scriptures” who will know how to live.



The Bible is a “unified story” told over a long period of time. The word Bible comes from the Greek word *biblia* meaning books - it is actually a collection of 66 books (39 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) written over 1200 years (1100BC to 100AD) by 40 different authors. The Bible is full of different kinds of writing, reflecting all of life. About 43% of the Bible is made up of stories, from history to parables. Approximately a third of the Bible is poetry and a quarter of the Bible is prose - laws, sermons and letters.

Its language is meant to be accessible. Much of the Bible, in Old and New Testaments, began as stories told by word of mouth. The Old Testament stories were told by storytellers, priests and judges and passed down through the generations. Many of these were put together by rabbis about 1000 years before Jesus, written on rolls of parchment or papyrus. These Jewish scriptures were written in Hebrew - read from right to left across the page and beginning at what we think of as the back of the book. Two other languages can be found in the Bible. Daniel and Ezra are written in Aramaic which was the official language of the ruling Persian empire. There are a few verses in Aramaic in the New Testament. At the time of Jesus the main language was Greek. A Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was written 200 years before His birth. It is this that the New Testament writers use when quoting the Old Testament. The New Testament writings are all in Greek.

The Bible is therefore not linked to one language – it is meant to be translated into whatever language is needed for it to be understood. The Bible is rooted in story – and stories which people remembered. The style of language in the New Testament is for everyday use, not academic study. The Bible was written in a way that ordinary people are meant to be able to understand. If we want to read the Bible well, it is important to find a version that we find understandable and memorable. It is not meant to be a test of our ability to read difficult language.

The Bible is made up of many kinds of books, with different purposes and styles. It is a book for all personality types! There are eye-witness accounts, historical stories, poems, laws, prophecies, songs, political tracts, letters, mythical stories, parables, wisdom literature and what is known as “apocalyptic” writing – a poetic style of writing using powerful images to explore hidden things about what God is doing in the world and what will happen in the future.

This means that part of reading the Bible well is about understanding the kind of writing that the part of the Scripture we are reading is. 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.

Similarly, we will 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 these are meant to be read as reliable history.

**Discuss:** How accessible is the Bible to you? What would help?

## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 2 Timothy 3: 14-17 which describes the divine nature of the Bible.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of reading the Bible. What parts are easy or difficult?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

The opening of the Bible in particular needs good background understanding. 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? If we don't read with the kind of literature in mind, not only might it lead to disagreements about how we should understand it, but we can miss out on the kind of truth that the writers were trying to convey.

For example, the account of the talking snake was not written to teach us something about the animal kingdom, but to reveal how Eve gave in to a lie about who God was and who she was – revealing the way in which we can all be pulled away from the truth about God and ourselves.

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. Taking the Bible seriously does not mean taking it all literally.

Similarly, when the names of those who wrote the books of the Bible don't match up with their original authors, or the period in which a book is set doesn't align completely with the writing, we can read better if we understand the purpose and expectations of the writer. Here are three examples of how exploring this might help us to read the Bible more truthfully:

For example, we will have greater understanding by knowing that the single book of Isaiah comes from three different time periods and is broken up into three different parts, addressing separate periods of Israel's history. (Many scholars think Isaiah is a collection of religious tracts written at different times by a 'school' of prophets started by Isaiah. Some scholars, however, think the book was written in one time period around 740 BC.)

The Book of Daniel is set 600 years before Jesus while Israel was in captivity in Babylon. Yet its style and detail reflect an accurate picture of Israel only 200 years before Jesus (called the Maccabean period).

Many people therefore read Daniel not so much as a historical account, but better read as an inspiring story about a man loyal to God in captivity, written to encourage Jewish people who were struggling against Greek occupation.

It helps to know that the Psalms are not the work of one person and that King David may have written some but not all, or even most of them. At first there were probably small collections of psalms, or separate psalms, which were put together by the end of the 3rd century BC.

Discuss: in what way can knowing the Bible books' backgrounds give us more confidence in it?

## Responding to God's leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, "What might God be showing me and how might I respond?" They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, "Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?"



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Blessed Lord,  
who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning:  
Grant us so to hear them,  
read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them,  
that we may embrace and ever hold fast  
the blessed hope of everlasting life,  
which you have given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ;  
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.  
Amen.





## What is the Bible?

2 Timothy 3:16 describes all Scripture as “God-breathed”. The Bible is different because it is divinely inspired - the many human authors of the various parts of the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit in their writing.

The early Christians came to accept these writings as uniquely God-given, and drew them together in the form which we have today. The Bible is a fully human book (with all the messiness that can mean) and a fully divine one - the creation of the Bible is another way in which God “covenant-partners” with His people, cooperating with those who have been willing to serve Him through writing His story faithfully throughout many centuries

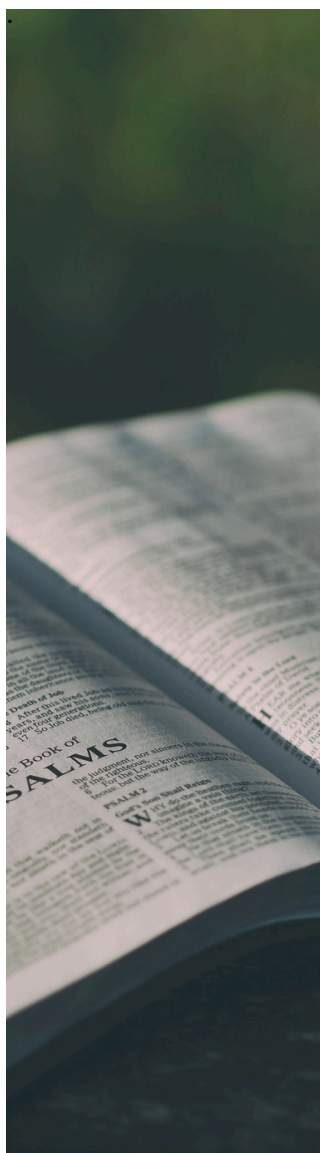


For Gandhi the Bible was far more than just a book: “You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilisation to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature.”

Once Jesus was challenged by the Sadducees (a religious grouping) who were trying to trap Him. He replied, “You are wrong, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29). For Christ, it is those who “know the Scriptures” who will know how to live.

The Bible is a “unified story” told over a long period of time. The word Bible comes from the Greek word biblia meaning books - it is actually a collection of 66 books (39 books in the Old Testament, 27 in the New Testament) written over 1200 years (1100BC to 100AD) by 40 different authors. The Bible is full of different kinds of writing, reflecting all of life. About 43% of the Bible is made up of stories, from history to parables. Approximately a third of the Bible is poetry and a quarter of the Bible is prose - laws, sermons and letters.

Its language is meant to be accessible. Much of the Bible, in Old and New Testaments, began as stories told by word of mouth. The Old Testament stories were told by storytellers, priests and judges and passed down through the generations. Many of these were put together by rabbis about 1000 years before Jesus, written on rolls of parchment or papyrus.







## What is the Bible?

These Jewish scriptures were written in Hebrew - read from right to left across the page and beginning at what we think of as the back of the book. Two other languages can be found in the Bible. Daniel and Ezra are written in Aramaic which was the official language of the ruling Persian empire. There are a few verses in Aramaic in the New Testament. At the time of Jesus the main language was Greek. A Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures was written 200 years before His birth. It is this that the New Testament writers use when quoting the Old Testament. The New Testament writings are all in Greek.

The Bible is therefore not linked to one language – it is meant to be translated into whatever language is needed for it to be understood. The Bible is rooted in story – and stories which people remembered. The style of language in the New Testament is for everyday use, not academic study. The Bible was written in a way that ordinary people are meant to be able to understand. If we want to read the Bible well, it is important to find a version that we find understandable and memorable. It is not meant to be a test of our ability to read difficult language.

The Bible is made up of many kinds of books, with different purposes and styles. It is a book for all personality types! There are eye-witness accounts, historical stories, poems, laws, prophecies, songs, political tracts, letters, mythical stories, parables, wisdom literature and what is known as “apocalyptic” writing – a poetic style of writing using powerful images to explore hidden things about what God is doing in the world and what will happen in the future.

This means that part of reading the Bible well is about understanding the kind of writing that the part of the Scripture we are reading is. 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.

Similarly, we will 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 these are meant to be read as reliable history.





# What is the Bible?

## Additional notes:

The opening of the Bible in particular needs good background understanding. 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?



If we don't read with the kind of literature in mind, not only might it lead to disagreements about how we should understand it, but we can miss out on the kind of truth that the writers were trying to convey.

For example, the account of the talking snake was not written to teach us something about the animal kingdom, but to reveal how Eve gave in to a lie about who God was and who she was – revealing the way in which we can all be pulled away from the truth about God and ourselves.

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. Taking the Bible seriously does not mean taking it all literally.

Similarly, when the names of those who wrote the books of the Bible don't match up with their original authors, or the period in which a book is set doesn't align completely with the writing, we can read better if we understand the purpose and expectations of the writer. Here are three examples of how exploring this might help us to read the Bible more truthfully:

For example, we will have greater understanding by knowing that the single book of Isaiah comes from three different time periods and is broken up into three different parts, addressing separate periods of Israel's history. (Many scholars think Isaiah is a collection of religious tracts written at different times by a 'school' of prophets started by Isaiah. Some scholars, however, think the book was written in one time period around 740 BC.)

The Book of Daniel is set 600 years before Jesus while Israel was in captivity in Babylon. Yet its style and detail reflect an accurate picture of Israel only 200 years before Jesus (called the Maccabean period). Many people therefore read Daniel not so much as a historical account, but better read as an inspiring story about a man loyal to God in captivity, written to encourage Jewish people who were struggling against Greek occupation.

It helps to know that the Psalms are not the work of one person and that King David may have written some but not all, or even most of them. At first there were probably small collections of psalms, or separate psalms, which were put together by the end of the 3rd century BC.