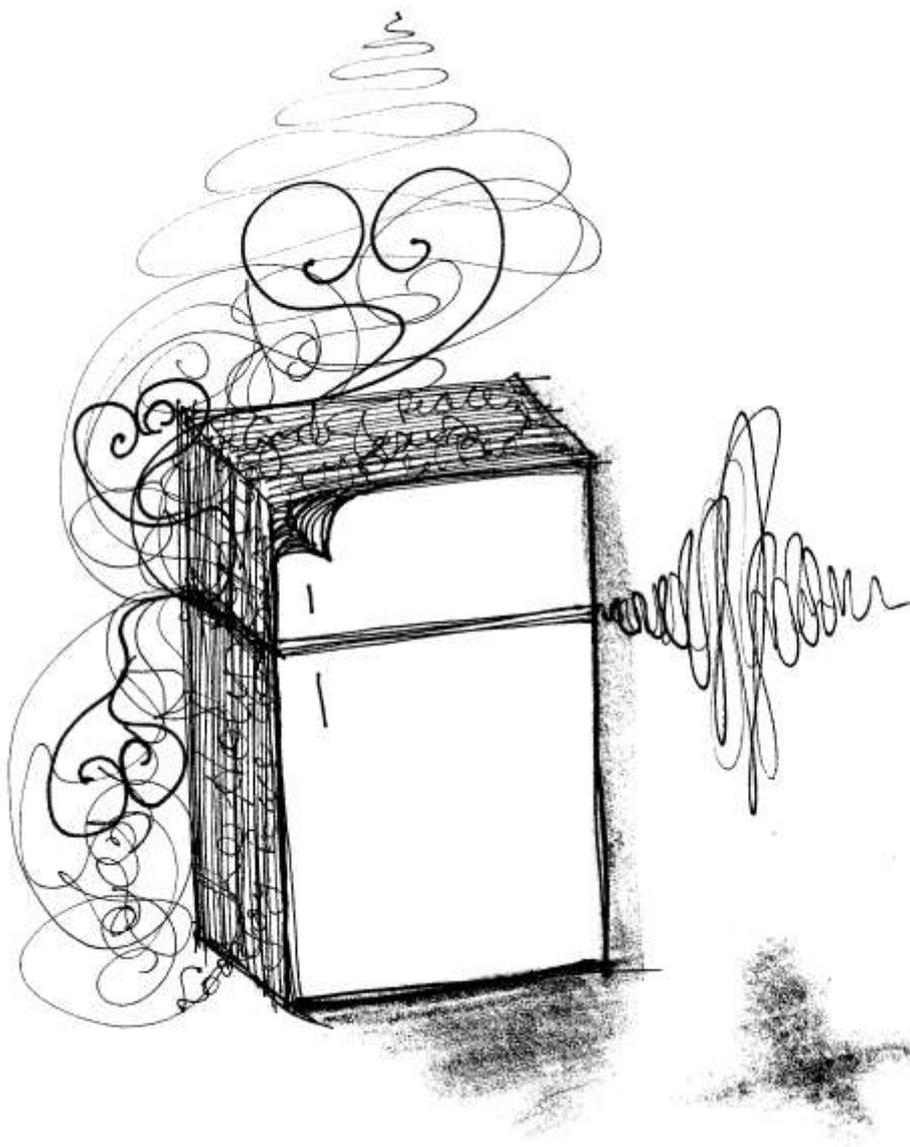


Bible Action: Getting Amongst It!



Tom Kerr National Faith Development Consultant (Youth and Young Adults)
Acknowledgement: How To Read The Bible – 12 Simple Guidelines
Uniting Church in Australia National Working Group on Doctrine

So you've decided you are going to read the Bible!
Good on you! Excellent decision. There is nothing else like it. It is awesome!

This little brochure offers some strategies for getting in to it, for getting the most out of it and then for getting on with applying it.

If you take the Bible's messages to heart, you will probably become..

more kind, forgiving, accepting, concerned for others, bold in sticking up for others, appreciative, connected to creation, open to all good things, outspoken about all bad things. **More alive!** **More** content, at peace, secure, hopeful, joyful, restless for positive change in your life and in the way the world operates. You will become more concerned for others. **More like Jesus!**

Wow! Pretty amazing hey!

The Bible can build your

*faith in God,

*relationship with Jesus

* reliance on the Holy Spirit's help to become all that God intends you to become.

The Bible is the text book for a Great New Life. Great New Ways. Great New You.

CHALLENGE BY CHOICE!

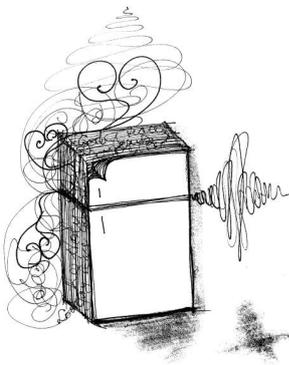
So are you willing to show the courage required for all that change?

Are you prepared to make the commitment it takes? Yes! Fantastic!

Then —let's go there!

May God bless you as you get in to your Bible! And I am pretty sure God will! ☺

Tom



GO THERE!

You can read the Bible on your phone, lap top, tablet or as a paper book. You can listen to it on podcasts, from an app or from a pdf reader. You can watch clips or whole dvds of parts of the Bible. There are even Lego animation Bible clips that are a lot of fun. You can read cartoon Bibles and Manga gospels; teen magazine style versions of the New Testament or the Surfer's Bible. You can interact with people about it by starting a book club with some mates to read one of the gospels together. You could join a Bible study group or meet once a week with your family or a mentor to read and discuss it together.

As you reflect on the Bible's message, you can talk with God about it in prayer, highlight special parts, take notes or doodle all over the Bibles pages, journal about it in a special diary, illustrate stories you've just read, write poetry or music on the theme of favorite passages, facebook your mates about cool verses, talk and ask questions with people who might know a lot about the Bible...

There are lots of creative ways to get amongst some Bible action.

It's all good!

The Manga Jesus Cartoon Bibles Lego Bible Bible animations etc.

Revolve Magazine New Testament for gals Refuel Magazine New Testament for blokes
Bible Apps – eg *The Bible.is* app is free. As well as the text, it will read the Bible out loud to you! It also has video clips of the gospel stories. Cool!

Teen study Bibles with extra info on topical themes for teen life.

Daily devotional readings that refer to bible verses like Devozine, Dayzd, Airlock or www.soundbytes.org.au;

Introductory bible Reading guides like Essential 100 or Daily Bread of New Christians

Join Bible engagement movements from the Bible Society or Scripture Union etc

Big Bible Challenge – this is for kids, but I still like it!

www.wordlive.org

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TIPS

1. The Bible is....

..A collection of many different books

THAT ALL POINT TO GOD

The Bible is a library of 66 books, written by at least 39 authors, written over a period of more than a 1000 years. The different books are grouped in The Old Testament (before Jesus came) and The New Testament (when Jesus came and the growth of the Jesus movement).

Together, all these books tell an unfolding story of God's attempts to help people understand what God wants for them and from them.

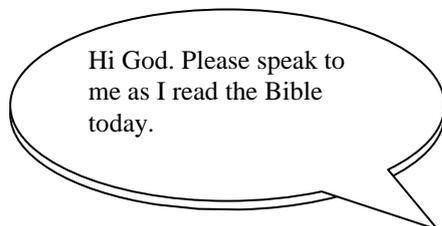
Here's my summary of it all...are you ready for it?

Okay, here it is.... God loves people. God wants their love in return. God wants us to love others as well. Jesus can show us how to love God and how to love others

2. READ THE BIBLE WITH GOD.

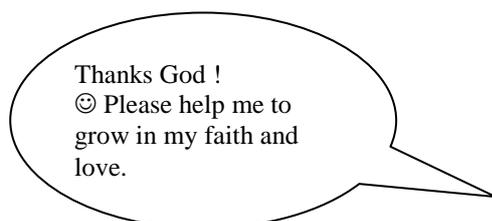
PRAY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER BIBLE READING

Before cracking open the Bible, each time, pray. Turn your Bible reading time into God time.



As you read, turn your spiritual radar on and tune in for blips. Pause every so often and think about what you have read. Be open to hear or sense the Holy Spirit speaking to you.

After you've finished reading for the day, have a general chat with God about what you read and the things that happened in the stories. You may like to have some creative interaction with what you have read by doing a doodle, making a hip hop dance, composing some music or doing a diary entry as a journal about what you have read. An unreflected experience is a lost experience. Taking the time to think over prayerfully what you have read can be really helpful in getting the most out of it.



Then finish by praying and thanking God.

3. MAKE BIBLE READING A TEAM SPORT

Line up a support team to help you interact with the Bible. Maybe by..

* Asking your mates / youth ministry mentor / mum or dad to set up a time and place where you can read some of The Bible together and talk about it.

* Getting your friends, family, Youth Group or whole church, reading the same parts of the Bible, each on your own and then comparing thoughts when you meet or in a virtual chat room. This can lead to some great faith discussions.

If a group of you from the Church are reading it together, it also means you can check with each other if you are interpreting it correctly. Some people who rely only on themselves to understand the Bible, have come to silly conclusions about what they reckon it means. Don't be like that. Don't be too proud to get help with it and to check that you really get it.

* Using reference materials which help explain what's going on in certain passages in the Bible. Bible's with study notes for teens are good. Good Christian bookstores will have some. The WWW has places you can check out. Or ask your parents/mentors/ministers for help finding some youth oriented Bible study notes.

* Reading it by your self and asking for help as you need it is of course a great option too.

Warning: Don't be surprised if you find no one else in your youth ministry is reading the Bible! There's a lot of that going around. Things have slipped. You might have to offer some leadership by suggesting that other young Christians start reading it too, with you, because you could all help each other with the moral support.



Cr8or Alternate Faith Community reflecting on Eternity together.



James Hughes reading the Bible at Nimbin Uniting Church

4. BEGIN WITH JESUS AND END WITH JESUS

Where do you begin reading the Bible?

My recommendation – start with Jesus. Read the four gospel stories of Jesus first up. (That’s the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).

Jesus is God’s best answer to all the questions about what God wants for us, with us and from us. In Jesus, all the previous teachings in the laws, the teachings of the prophets, everything, comes to its best fulfillment.

After reading the gospels, which ever books of the Bible you read next, you’ll be able to filter them through the test question – “How does this match what Jesus taught us?” If Jesus has progressed faith beyond what you are reading, then go with what Jesus says rather than anything else.

For example, the Ten Commandments were written thousands of years before Jesus was alive. But Jesus affirms them and doesn’t want one bit of them messed with.

On the other hand, there’s a lot of violence in the Old Testament.

Back then, their idea of justice was, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.”

If some one bashes you, bash them back.

Jesus advocates loving your enemies instead, doing good for those who hurt you not harming them, going the extra mile; forgiving 77 times 7 when a person wrongs you. This is a new and better way than the “eye for an eye” approach. See Matthew 5 v 38 - 48

This is just one example of how God has helped people progress in the way they are called to treat each other through the teachings of Jesus. Jesus is tops!

W.W.J.D.? What Would Jesus Do?

When faced with a moral dilemma, Christians ask themselves what Jesus would do and then they try to do that. But you have to actually know Jesus well enough to be able to answer that question. The gospels help us know Jesus well enough to apply W.W.J.D.?

R.T.G.S.Y.K.W.J.W.D.T.D.T. Too long for a wrist band do you think?

Read the gospels so you know what Jesus would do the do that.

5. CULTURE SHOCK: ACCOUNT FOR THE CONTEXT

The Bible is an ancient book, telling stories about people whose times and cultures were very different to our own. Tribal warfare, sexism, racism, religious bigotry, stolen lands, social injustice, sexual assault, murder, theft – they were wild old times in Bible days. (Hmnn, actually, there's still a lot of that going around today!)

The most confusing parts of the Bible, are usually to do with our culture shock. The better we understand the contexts that the books were written in, and the way people used to think about God back then, the closer we will get to God's truth.

Let me give you one example. In the book of Genesis, Abraham is just beginning to learn about God. Abraham believes he is asked to sacrifice his only son, Isaac, as an offering to God. Just at the last minute, as the knife is about to come down on Isaac, God speaks to Abraham and stops him. God provides an animal instead that can be used for the sacrifice. It's a story that makes God look kind of mean for scaring Isaac and Abraham like that. (Genesis 22 v 1 – 19)

But understanding the context gives a whole new perspective on this story. Some Bible scholars say that in those days, all the religions of that time and place, sacrificed their first born children to their gods. It was horrible. Abraham, being a person of that culture and time, presumed that God would have wanted him to sacrifice his son too. That's how all the other gods worked. But the real God, who Abraham was just getting to know, puts an end to child sacrifices once and for all. If the people need something else taking the punishment for their sins, let it be animals that they were going to eat anyway instead of their fist born child that is sacrificed.

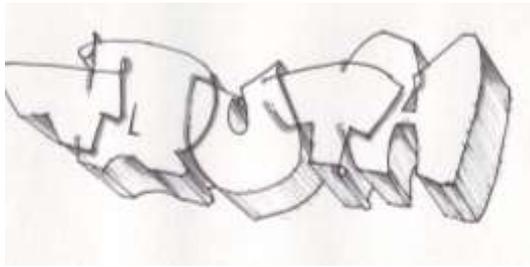
Knowing this about the context helps us understand that God was actually saving children's lives from the hideous practices of the people of those times. God is a God of love after all. Reading Bible commentaries can give us a whole new perspective.

If a story in the Bible really disturbs you, or confuses you, look in to the context of that time. Ask a parent, mentor or a minister who has been reading the Bible for a long time. Get hold of a Bible Commentary on the passage or do a search on line to see what you can find about the context Google it.

Then, There and Now

Some parts of the Bible are so culture and time specific, we really need to ask ourselves,

- A. What was going on in their society back then?
- B. What is the text actually saying right there in front of me?
- C. Now, what, if anything, can I apply to my life in my here and now?



6. TRANSLATE IT FOR TODAY

Can the Bible really be relevant for us today? Can the Bible speak to us about cyber bullying, losing control of your credit card spending, partying, smoking, deciding if you are in love or not, etc? Yep! It can!

Credit cards, cigarettes, party drugs, computers – none of these things were around when the Bible was written. But human nature hasn't changed all that much. With some translation into our context, the Bible has some excellent guidance to give on all these subjects.

Eg. What does the Bible say about Cyber Bullying? “Treat others the way you want to be treated.” If we all did that, there would be no bullying of any sort.

Eg. What does the Bible say about party drugs?

Check out Proverbs 23 v 29 – 35. It's about substance abuse and the end results. Even though it's talking about getting drunk, the principles can also apply to any substance abuse.

Eg. Am I really in love? Check out 1Corinthians 13 v 4 – 7 If you aren't treating the person with this kind of love, you'd have to question if you actually love them!

Work out the principles of the Bible, translate the heart of what it is saying in to your situation and apply it to your life. There's a lot of great stuff in there!

Truth = Truth = Truth = Truth = Truth

7: BEWARE OF BIAS

What you see depends on where you stand.

When you read the Bible, it is as a young Australian, who comes from a secular, materialistic, hedonistic, technologically saturated society that values sport, money, fame, pleasure and popularity.

You have your own personal biases as well as the cultural perspectives that you have adopted. Who we are and where we are coming from, affects how we interpret the Bible. Your church too will have it's own unique culture and perspectives. Your church might emphasize some themes of the Bible and neglect others for example.

We need to be careful not to ignore some parts of what Jesus says because they are uncomfortable for us. We need to make sure that we don't just specialize on the parts of the faith that suit us and ignore the parts that don't.

What sort of biases might those of us who are logical and scientific bring to the Bible when we read about miracles? It won't be the same biases as some one who believes they have actually experienced a miracle themselves. The test of what is true in the Bible isn't with us as individuals. We can't rewrite the Bible to suit ourselves. We have to grapple with the text of the Bible, find the gold, be conscious of our own perspectives and avoid letting them distort what we think the Bible is saying.

Once again, this is where making Bible reading a team sport is helpful. Asking other faithful Christians what they think a passage means can help us test our biases.



What lenses are you using when you look at the Bible?

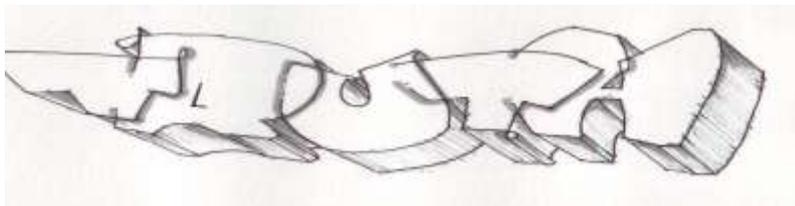
8. TRUST IT!

It is healthy and good to ask lots of questions as you read the Bible. Let me also encourage you to read the Bible with confidence. God can change your life through the teachings and stories of the Bible. God can work wonders in your life through Bible engagement. Approach it with trust!

You may come across people who have all kinds of theories about why the Bible is full of holes, and inaccuracies and has been translated so many times that it has lost all its true meanings. I reckon that's rubbish. The Bible's truths have been well preserved. Relax!

We get out of life what we put in to it. Approaching the Bible with scepticism, cynicism and disrespect will be a bias that skews its potential to shape you as a disciple of Christ.

You, on the other hand, can approach the Bible with confidence. The truth about God is in there! God can use the Bible to grow your faith. Expect God to work on you as you work on reading the Bible.



9. WHAT? SO WHAT? NOW WHAT?

Here's a way to engage with the Bible to get the most out of it, using 3 sets of questions.

Analyse a. What? What happened? Where and when did it happen? Who did what?

Consider b. So what? So what does that mean?

Act c. What now? What am I going to do to apply this?

After you've read a passage, ask your self,

“What Happened?” Explore exactly what happened in the text and in their context.

Who were the characters? What did they do? What did God Do? How did that work out for them?

Then consider these questions.

“So what does that mean?” What does that teach us? What can we learn from this about human nature or God's nature? What is the key theme in this story? What is the spiritual lesson of this story?

Then lastly, ask yourself, **“What now?”** What am I going to do to apply this in my own life? How can I make sure I learn from this and live well by this? What are the possibilities? Which of these possibilities can I realistically achieve? What will I commit to doing from now on? Then ask God to help you live what you have learned.

10. PRACTICALITIES

Cracking it open

Get hold of a Bible that uses language that you understand. If you can get a Teen Bible with study notes down the side, that might have some good extra bits too.

Open your Bible to the Contents page.

There will be a list of Old Testament Books (Covering creation to just before Jesus came) and a list of New Testament books (covering stories about Jesus, the forming of the Christian Church, guidance for the church and stories about a new future for Heaven and Earth)

Find the page number that the first book, Genesis, is on. Go to that page. Read the first chapter of the first book of the Bible. See the big numbers at the front of the text? They are the chapter numbers. Those little numbers are verses. So if you wanted to find Genesis 1 v 31, you..

a. Find the book of Genesis in the table of Contents. You look for the big number 1 for the chapter, then the little number 31 for the verse.

If you've got the hang of it, you'll be reading words along the lines of " God looked at everything he had made and God really liked what he had made. Evening passed and morning came and that was the 6th day." Different Bibles say things slightly differently but the meaning is the same in each. Bible translators have to keep adjusting the language to keep track of how our language changes. Eg. The word "Charity" used to mean "Love", now it's common usage means giving money to help people out.

Try this, to practice finding your way around the Bible some more.
We're going to find 1 Corinthians 13 v 4 – 7

Contents – New Testament – page number – open 1 Corinthians – find the big 13 then find the little 4. Read through to the words that come after the little 7. All about love, right? Good job. Now you know how to find a passage in the Bible.

11. THAT SOUNDS LIKE A PLAN!

Here is a suggested plan for reading the Bible.

Read the book of Luke, a few chapters at a time. Remember about praying as you read. After reading Luke, read **all the gospels** about Jesus. Yep, including Luke again. The idea is to help you really get to know Jesus. After this any thing else you read in the Bible can be measured against what Jesus said, taught and did, how he treated people etc. Jesus is the best!

You will notice how each of the gospels is different. I like how different writers were impressed with different things Jesus did or said. Some things Jesus did are recorded by each of the writers, some are only picked up by one of the writers. Each writer has a slightly different way of describing what happened. All of them tell awesome stories about Jesus.

I remember the first time I read the gospels around the age of about 16. My reactions

went some thing like this..

“Isn’t Jesus amazing! What a guy! The way he treats people is awesome. His incredible power – wow! Jesus really was God come to Earth as one of us. But Jesus is also just like us – he gets tired, sleeps, eats, feels pain, gets emotional.

Jesus is amazing – compassion for all people, healings, raising from the dead, walking on water, his own resurrection!

This is why people want to follow Jesus! Me too!

What books next?

How about you keep going with **the New Testament**? Luke’s 2nd book was the Book of Acts. Acts is about what the disciples did after Jesus death and resurrection.

After Acts, there are lots of letters that some of the apostles wrote to encourage different groups of believers. These letters take up the rest of the New Testament until you get to the Book of Revelation which also gives advice to the churches and some symbolic prophecy about the future. Revelations gets very mystical after chapter 3, and if you can understand it, you are doing better than me. But it’s a fascinating book to read all the same!

Draw up a chart for your self to check off each chapter of each book you read if that will help with motivation.

When you have finished reading the New Testament, give your self a pat on the back. Good on you! Well done.

Are your love for God and your understanding of God growing? Are you soaking up lots of wisdom about how to live your life in such a way as to follow Jesus? With the help of the God’s Holy Spirit, are you becoming more like Jesus yourself, in how you treat others, in how you relate to God, in your daily living? Excellent! That’s what reading the Bible this way is all about.

What now?

I’d recommend going back to read any one of the gospels again, and then how about tackling the Old Testament? Read some books of the old Testament, and every now and then, intersperse them with a New Testament book as well for a break if you want to.

And then?

What do you do when you have read the whole Bible? Keep reading the Bible and being open to God speaking to you through it!

There is a life time’s worth of spiritual nourishment stored for you in the Bible. It’s got plenty to keep you going for the rest of your life. Enjoy!

REACH out to God In prayer

READ some passages in the Bible

REFLECT on what happens in the text and what it means for your life

RESPOND by putting what you learn in to action in your life.