



BETHELEVANGELICALCHURCH
CLYDACH

Growing Together...
...in God's Word

September 2015

Growing Together... *in God's Word*

Becca's seen a job advert, and she's wondering whether she should apply. Liam's wife has just left him, and he is beside himself. Richard feels as though God has been distant, and he longs for a closer walk with him. Sophie's just had to undergo tests at the hospital, and she's bracing herself for bad news. Daniel's getting married in a few weeks, and he wants the best possible start to married life. Lucy's stuck in the same old sin (again), and she aches to be free.

Six very different people, with six very different problems. Each feels that the Bible must say something that could help them. But whilst all six know a few Bible verses they can turn to in times of trouble, none of them are finding much help in their regular Bible readings. They do benefit from remembering that the Lord is their Shepherd, and that all things work together for the good of those who love God. But they each think there must be more in the Bible than that, and they suspect Joshua and Judges and Jeremiah ought to be as relevant and helpful as John 3:16.

Becca and Liam and Richard and Sophie and Daniel and Lucy all long to hear God speak into their lives, but too often they feel he is silent. Maybe sometimes you feel like that, too.

The good news is that God is not silent. He speaks today in many ways, but he speaks most clearly and authoritatively through the Bible. It's living and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). If you want to hear God's voice, it's essential you read his Word. But reading is not enough, is it? Our six friends don't just want to *read* the Bible, they want to *apply* the Bible to their lives.

That's what **Growing Together...** *in God's Word* is all about. Each day (apart from Sunday) we'll read two chapters of the Bible. In this booklet are two simple questions that will help you think about how those chapters might apply to your life. And because we're all reading the same chapters on the same day, it will be easy to chat to one another about what we've read. Then once a month, those who want to can meet together to discuss the passages we've read that month.

The Bible readings are arranged in chronological order, which will help you to get a better understanding of the storyline of the Bible.

If you haven't already got into the habit of reading from the Bible daily, I'd recommend you turn to the back of this booklet and read the short piece called "How to Read the Bible". It gives four simple tips to help you get the most out of your reading. And when you're reading, use a Bible version that you find easy to read and understand – such as the NKJV or the NIV.

Let's pray that we really will grow together in God's word!

September 2015

Who am I? Why am I here? What is wrong in the world? Who is God? What is he like? What does he want from me? What is the meaning of life? These are vital questions for us all, and the answers we find we shape our lives. Thankfully, we're not left on our own to work out the answers, because the beginning of the Bible tackles these questions head on.

As you read Genesis, keep a special eye open for what it tells us about God, humanity, and the world God made. See how sin and rebellion bring about separation from God, and even death. But look out too for some wonderful stories of grace and redemption. Even from the first book of the Bible, we can get a clear impression of a God who is both righteous and merciful.

Monday 7 September – Genesis 1

What does this chapter tell us about God, humanity and the world God made?

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How should we treat God, other people and the world God made?

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Tuesday 8 September – Genesis 2, John 1:1-3

How did God treat the human he made?

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What might it have been like to live in Genesis 2? How is it different to today?

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Wednesday 9 September – Psalm 8, Psalm 104

When David thinks about creation in Psalm 8, how does it make him feel?

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When you think about creation, do you feel the same way? If not, why not?

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Thursday 10 September – Genesis 3-4

How was the serpent able to tempt Adam and Eve? What was his strategy?

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If you are tempted in similar ways, how best should you resist temptation?

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Friday 11 September – Genesis 5-6

Compare the recurring phrase in Genesis 5, with Genesis 1. What do you see?

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Read Genesis 3:1-4 again. How should that make you think about your own sin?

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Saturday 12 September – Genesis 7-8

What happened as the result of the flood?

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What does that tell us about God's reaction against sin?

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Monday 14 September – Genesis 9-10

In a sense, the world started again after the flood. Was it different from before?

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Why is 9:1-17 so important, particularly as 9:18-25 comes straight afterwards?

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Tuesday 15 September – Psalm 12; Genesis 11

Look at 11:4 and 11:8. What's the principle here? (Luke 18:14 might help.)

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Are there ways in which you try and make a name for yourself? Does it work?

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Genesis 12 marks the start of a new section of Genesis. God chooses one man (Abraham), and makes promises to him. We call those promises 'covenants'. Look out for all the covenants in the chapters that follow, and particularly look at the terms of those covenants. The covenants we read about in this section are so important you could say that they drive the storyline of the whole of the rest of the Bible.

They're important, because you could say that these covenants are God's way of restoring what mankind had broken in Genesis 3. We've already seen that destroying wicked men and starting again with righteous men isn't going to solve the problem of sin. So what God begins in Genesis 12 is something quite different, and quite extraordinary.

Wednesday 16 September – Genesis 12-13

Out of all the people on the earth, why did God choose Abraham to bless?

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Read Deuteronomy 7:7-8a. How should we respond to the blessing we receive?

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Thursday 17 September – Genesis 14-15

Remind yourself of 13:10-13. What was Lot's mistake? (Matt. 16:25-26 might help.)

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Have you been tempted in the same way? How can you avoid Lot's mistake?

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Friday 18 September – Genesis 16-17

What was Abraham's big mistake? What were the consequences?

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What promises of God do you find most difficult to trust at the moment? What will be the consequences if you don't trust him?

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Saturday 19 September – Genesis 18-19

What principles did Abraham call on when he pleaded with God for Sodom?

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What are the features of Abraham's prayer that should also mark our prayers?

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Monday 21 September – Genesis 20-21

Why did Abraham lie to Abimelech? What might have stopped him doing so?

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Reflect on the ups and downs of Abrahams' faith over the last few chapters. What does that teach us about our own faith?

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Tuesday 22 September – Genesis 22-23

Why was Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19 will help)?

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Why was Abraham so keen to own the plot where Sarah would be buried? What does this teach us? (Read Genesis 25:9 and 49:29-32.)

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Wednesday 23 September – Genesis 24-25

Why was Abraham determined Isaac shouldn't go back to their home country?

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What was Abraham's servant looking for in a wife for Isaac (24:43-44)?

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Thursday 24 September – Genesis 26-27

What's the connection between chapters 26 and 27? What does that teach us about the way God often orders our lives? (September 15 might help you!)

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Esau rejected his father's blessing for a bowl of stew. What is that a picture of?

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Friday 25 September – Genesis 28-29

How do these chapters show God's grace towards Jacob?

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Looking at your life as a whole, in what ways have you see God's grace to you?

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Saturday 26 September – Genesis 30-31

List the main things Jacob and Rachel did in these chapters. Did God bless them *because* of their behaviour, or *in spite* of it?

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What does that principle teach you about the blessings you have received?

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Monday 28 September – Genesis 32-33

What is suggested by the picture of wrestling with God?

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Would you describe your prayers as sometimes 'wrestling with God'? Why, or why not?

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Tuesday 29 September – Genesis 34-35

Look at Genesis 34:13. What do you notice about the way Jacob's sons behaved, compared to the way Jacob has previously behaved (cf. 27:35-36)?

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What does that teach you about the influence you have on those you love?

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Wednesday 30 September – Genesis 36-37

What three things especially aroused the envy and hatred of Jacob's brothers?

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Again, what does that teach you about the influence you have on those you love?

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How to Read the Bible

(1) Incline your ear

If God is going to speak into your life, it's vital you're listening. It's a healthy habit to prayerfully reflect on a portion of Scripture every day. I'd recommend you do that in a morning – set the alarm 15 minutes earlier if you need to – and slowly read through whole books from both Testaments, over the course of several days or weeks. Let me explain why.

Twenty years ago I was struggling to understand whether sins I'd committed in ignorance were really sins. After several weeks of wondering, I came across Leviticus 4 in my daily readings – one of several chapters in the Bible that deal with that very topic. I felt that God had answered my prayers, and I've never forgotten the lesson I learned from that chapter. I also remember stumbling across Psalm 73 when I was struggling because my non-Christian friends seemed to have an easier life than I did. God used that psalm to speak powerfully into my situation, and it remains one of my favourite passages of Scripture.

If I'd have known there was such a thing, I could have looked up both topics in a thematic index like the *Dictionary of Bible Themes*. But providentially coming across these passages in my daily readings reinforced that I hadn't just unearthed information – I'd heard God speak. In this age of instant information, I often seek God's voice without seeking him. That means I hear dim echoes of his voice, not thunder from heaven. I find truth, but not help.

You do need truth to live the Christian life, but you need more than that. And whilst you think you need some guidance on some particular issue that's troubling you, it may be that God wants to teach you something entirely different first. Regularly and systematically reading Scripture reaches beyond finding information on your specific problem, and opens your heart to hear God speak on a topic of his choosing.

(2) Understand what the text says

If you want to hear God's voice, you need to listen to all he says. Don't be tempted to skim through a chapter or two of the Bible looking for a verse you can immediately apply to your own situation. Although the Bible was written for you, it wasn't written just for you. So before you ask what the text says to *you*, make sure you've understood what it said to the first hearers, whether that's the Israelites on their way to the promised land, the exiles in Babylon, or the Roman church hearing Paul's letter. What was God saying to them?

(3) Find the principles in the text

Once you've considered what the text said to its original hearers, it's time to draw out principles. The principles will be timeless and independent of culture. The same principles will apply to the ancient near east, the 21st century Western world, and everything in between. They're usually deduced from the passage, not explicitly stated in it, so they need to be tested against the rest of Scripture. Don't pursue a principle that you can't find supported elsewhere in the Bible.

If you're struggling to find the principles in the text, two simple questions will be a great help: What does this passage teach about God? What does this passage teach about mankind?

For example, part of my Bible-reading this morning was Joshua 2, where Rahab the prostitute sheltered the two spies before the conquest of Canaan. Asking those two questions reminded me that even in godless societies there are those who fear God and perhaps even long to serve him. The fact that the spies just happened to enter a house of someone so willing to help them, reminded me that God is in control of every detail of our lives. The fact that the faithful heroine was a prostitute reminded me that God welcomes all kinds of people – even the broken and the despised – into his kingdom. These lessons aren't just for me, they're timeless principles for every believer.

(4) Apply those principles to your own life

Once you've thought through the timeless principles, the final stage is to prayerfully apply them to your life. Two principles I noted earlier were that even in godless societies there are those who fear God, and God welcomes all kinds of people into his kingdom. As I tried to apply those principles, I remembered I've been praying through how our church can reach people who may be broken or even despised. I also remembered that just yesterday I was reading the story of someone who, because of a long history of sexual sin, felt despised by many Christians. Yet one Christian took the time and care to befriend her, and eventually led her to Christ.

I don't think I learned anything new in my Bible-reading today. But although I do sometimes learn new things, more often I find that God uses my reading to remind me of something I've forgotten, or at least something I've forgotten to apply to my life. Today, God used the faith of Rahab to remind me that the gospel is for the broken-hearted and to challenge me as to whether I really live that out.

But what does God want to remind you of? As you read the Bible and prayerfully consider how timeless principles apply to you, God will speak into your life. What a privilege, and what a joy!