



## Six Simple Tips for Reading the Bible

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### Approaching the Bible

Christians have always believed that God speaks through the Bible. In fact, the Bible describes itself as “inspired by God” (2 Timothy 3:16), and the experience and history of the Church seem to confirm this. God acts in our lives through this ancient text. This explains why Methodists describe ‘searching the Scriptures’ as a ‘means of grace’, a way of opening our lives to the love of God. Reading this holy book is treading on holy ground.

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, set out several principles for reading the Bible that can help transform us in loving God and our neighbour. They do not simply help us learn about the Bible, but relate us to the God who gave the Bible. We read to grow closer to God. By following these ‘six simple tips’, reading the Bible can become a live-giving spiritual practice:

#### 1. Read the Bible regularly – daily if possible

Wesley encouraged Christians to read the Bible at the beginning and end of each day, a principle that has been adopted by many followers of Jesus. Whether or not you can commit to this rhythm, establishing a regular time when we read Scripture – daily or weekly – is the foundation for growing in this spiritual practice. Regular exposure to the Bible changes us.

#### 2. Read the whole Bible – even the uncomfortable parts

Wesley advised Christians to read from the Old Testament as well as the New. Such a practice helps us to be exposed to all that the Bible says, even the difficult parts! You can make this a part of your practice by following a lectionary (see the Methodist Prayer Handbook for example) or Bible-reading guide.

#### 3. Read the Bible open to change – desiring to know God

It is possible to know the Bible without knowing God, to

read it simply for information rather than transformation. For this reason, Wesley advised Christians to approach the Bible with a firm desire to know what God is saying and with a willingness to obey. As you read the Bible, you might like to ask the questions, ‘How is God speaking to me through this passage?’ and ‘What is God asking me to do?’ Sharing our answers with others can help sustain our commitment to hear God in this way.

#### 4. Read the Bible contextually – keeping the big picture in mind

For Wesley, it was important to read passages of the Bible within the framework of its whole story – a story that reaches its climax in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The whole of Scripture should guide our interpretation of particular passages. For Christians, this means that we remember what the Bible teaches overall about key themes – such as sin, salvation and holiness – when reading particular passages.

#### 5. Read the Bible prayerfully – knowing the Spirit still speaks

Wesley advised Christians to begin and end the reading of Scripture with prayer. This reminds us that we read the Bible to encounter God, and so we look to the Holy Spirit for inspiration to inspire us in following Jesus. You might find it helpful to write a prayer or reflection based on your reading that can help you engage more deeply with the passage.

#### 6. Read the Bible reflectively – taking time to pause

It is easy to rush through our reading of the Bible without lingering on the details. Wesley, however, encouraged readers to ‘pause’ frequently during each reading and reflect on what God might be saying. Give yourself the time to savour and reflect on verses and passages that strike you. This is often a sign that God is saying something to us through them.

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## Challenges

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- If you do not already read the Bible regularly, challenge yourself to commit to a pattern of reading that can fit within your life. Don't be too ambitious: think about what is realistic and achievable!
- To gain a sense of the Bible's story, try Scripture Union's E100 Bible Reading Challenge, which takes you through 100 essential texts from the Old and New Testaments. For further details, visit [e100.scriptureunion.org.uk](http://e100.scriptureunion.org.uk).

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## Going Further

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- If you're unfamiliar with the 'big story' of Scripture, check out K Kandiah, *Route 66: A Crash Course in Navigating Life with the Bible* (Monarch, 2010), or – in a bit more depth – C G Bartholomew and Michael W Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture* (Baker, 2004).

- *A Word in Time* ([www.methodist.org.uk/bible](http://www.methodist.org.uk/bible)) is the Methodist Church's daily online Bible study using the lectionary from the Methodist Prayer Handbook. With background notes and questions it encourages a prayerful, reflective engagement with Scripture from a Methodist perspective.
- For other Bible resources, visit [www.bigbible.org.uk](http://www.bigbible.org.uk) and [www.lyfe.org.uk](http://www.lyfe.org.uk).
- To read the principles which have inspired these 'six simple tips', see the Preface to Wesley's *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament* (paragraph 18) at [wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley).

For a range of resources on engaging spiritual practices, visit [www.deepeningdiscipleship.org.uk](http://www.deepeningdiscipleship.org.uk).