

Books of the Bible for different situations¹

The entire Bible is the word of God, and all of it is useful for “teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”, as Paul says (2 Tim 3:16). In one sense, then, you can read any part of the Bible with anyone, and derive great profit from the experience.

However, some parts of Scripture are particularly suitable for one-to-one Bible reading with different sorts of people.

1. Suggestions for reading with non-Christians

a. Any of the Gospels

Mark’s Gospel is the shortest and punchiest of the four Gospels, and is a favorite of many people for reading with those who are completely new to Christianity or the Bible. You could read through Mark’s Gospel using either the Swedish or COMA methods in around 20 meetings, using the sections listed below.

1. Mark 1:1-15
2. Mark 1:16-2:12
3. Mark 2:13-3:6
4. Mark 3:7-35
5. Mark 4:1-34
6. Mark 4:35-5:43
7. Mark 6
8. Mark 7
9. Mark 8:1-21
10. Mark 8:22-9:1
11. Mark 9:2-50
12. Mark 10:1-31
13. Mark 10:32-52
14. Mark 11:1-25
15. Mark 11:27-12:44
16. Mark 13
17. Mark 14:1-52
18. Mark 14:53-72
19. Mark 15:1-41
20. Mark 15:42-16:8

¹ David Helm, *One-to-One Bible Reading* (Kingsford, NSW: Matthias Media, 2001), 49-56.

For a shorter tour through Mark's Gospel, see chapter 11: 'Eight weeks through Mark's Gospel'. This set of readings looks at the key passages in Mark, and provides some simple questions to guide the discussion.

b. Genesis 1-12

The opening chapters of the Bible are foundational for everything that follows, and are excellent for introducing people to the big themes of the Bible.

In Genesis we read of God speaking all things into existence. Everything we see exists by his word, for his purpose, and under his rule. The climax—the crowning feature—of his creation is the human being. But Genesis also tells us how these created beings have, from the days of their first parents, rejected the very God who created them. Yet while this rejection brings the judgement of a holy God—the banishment from paradise, the flood on the earth, and the scattering at Babel—Genesis is nevertheless a story of God's resilient and persistent grace and promise to human beings, culminating in God's unconditional promise of blessing to the man Abraham and his descendants. God has never broken this promise, which is ultimately kept and now available to all people in the person of Jesus Christ. Here is a suggested path through Genesis 1-12 in eight meetings.

1. Genesis 1:1-2:3 — God creates all things by his word
2. Genesis 2:4-25 — The first humans: their Creator's masterpiece
3. Genesis 3 — The first humans rebel against their Creator's rule
4. Genesis 4-5 — The rebellion spreads
5. Genesis 6-7 — God judges sin and preserves a righteous man
6. Genesis 8-9 — God saves and makes promises
7. Genesis 11 — Rejection and scattering
8. Genesis 12 — An unconditional promise of blessing

2. Suggestions for reading with new Christians

If you are meeting with someone who has just become a Christian or is fairly young in the faith, the letters of the New Testament are an excellent place to start your one-to-one readings—not least because many of them were written to people who hadn't been Christians very long. Colossians, for example, is a brilliant little book about what it means to become a Christian and to continue to live and grow as a Christian. Try reading Colossians over nine weeks, like this:

1. Colossians 1:1-14
2. Colossians 1:15-23
3. Colossians 1:24-2:5
4. Colossians 2:6-15
5. Colossians 2:16-23
6. Colossians 3:1-4
7. Colossians 3:5-17
8. Colossians 3:18-4:1
9. Colossians 4:2-18

Other excellent New Testament to read with young or new Christians include Philippians, Titus and 1 John.

3. Suggestions for reading with established Christians

a. Romans

At some point in the Christian life, everyone should drink deeply from the book of Romans. This is an excellent thing to do together one-to-one with a Christian brother or sister. Here, for example, is a suggested break-up of Romans 5-8 that you could do over eight weeks:

1. Romans 5:1-11 — Reconciliation with God
2. Romans 5:12-21 — The reign of sin to life in Christ
3. Romans 6:1-14 — Set free from sin
4. Romans 6:15-23 — Made slaves of God
5. Romans 7:1-6 — Dead to the law
6. Romans 7:7-25 — The function of the law
7. Romans 8:1-17 — Life in the Spirit

b. Psalms

What we refer to as the 'book' of Psalms is actually made up of five collections or books of psalms. The reading plan below covers selections that come from each distinct collection of psalms, with the intention of giving a comprehensive 'taste' of the whole. As you read the book of Psalms, you cannot help but be moved into great praise of the glorious God who made every part of creation. At other times, you will be led to struggle along with the psalmist over issues of suffering, death, and the apparent prosperity of wicked people in this present age. In all of it, you will rediscover and grow

in your understanding of a book that chronicles the songs of God's people, flowing upward to him in the midst of any and every situation. Here is a suggested reading schedule for the Psalms:

1. Psalm 1 — Trees and chaff
2. Psalm 2 — The judgement of the Son
3. Psalm 42 — A downcast soul turns God-ward
4. Psalm 46 — Of God the fortress
5. Psalm 73 — Perspective on the end of the wicked
6. Psalm 74 — God, defend your cause
7. Psalm 90 — A dwelling place for finite creatures
8. Psalm 91 — The protection of God's shelter
9. Psalm 107 — A history of steadfast love
10. Psalm 110 — The coming King
11. Psalm 121 — God, our keeper
12. Psalm 148 — A litany of praise

c. Micah

Micah is a book of prophecy—words spoken by a man who served as God's mouthpiece to God's people. The basic outline of the book of Micah can be found in six words: judgement now, salvation then, repent now. The first three chapters address the theme of judgement. The people and their leaders have failed God miserably in idolatry, greed, oppression, and violence. God's judgement will be swift and sure. But then chapters 4-5 bring that familiar promise: the remnant will be preserved under the rule of God's coming king, who will shepherd the people and make them a light to the nations. And the last two chapters illuminate the only appropriate response. The prophet demands that God's people turn to him—not with sacrifices, but with true and sorrowful repentance. It is God who, in 7:18, delights in "pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance". Here is a suggested reading schedule for Micah:

1. Micah 1-2 — Against Judah and Samaria
2. Micah 3 — Against Judah's leaders
3. Micah 4 — In God's place
4. Micah 5:1-6 — Under God's shepherd
5. Micah 5:7-15 — With God's people
6. Micah 6:1-5 — Pleading with the people
7. Micah 6:9-16 — Pictures of judgement
8. Micah 6:6-8, 7:1-20 — Pictures of repentance