

Sunday 23rd November 2025 - How To Read The Bible: The Bible As Fibre Optics

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[0 : 00] This is the last in our series on how to read the Bible. I hope it has made you think and ask a few questions! Because that's what it's all about really, asking questions in order to grow our faith.

And we've been on quite a journey these past weeks looking at different ways of reading the Bible. Some speakers have encouraged us to look at familiar stories or books anew.

Some have encouraged us to take time reading the Bible so that we may allow God through his Holy Spirit to speak to us in different ways. And we've also been challenged on how we approach the Bible and in the way we understand it as seen through different lenses.

And we've only just begun! So in the four hours we have together this morning, I thought we could take yet another approach. Sorry, did I say four hours?

It's a typo in my notes. It should be 24 hours, okay? Or is that 24 years? Or indeed perhaps four centuries?

[1 : 17] Or should it be... Right, well, you see the Bible has continued to challenge people century after century, bringing about all sorts of events that have shaped our history.

Not all of it is good, I'm ashamed to say, as some have misused the Bible to bolster their own actions. Others, however, have allowed their reading of the Bible to shape not only their own lives, but the lives of others.

Do you like my new lamp? I think it'll look nice in our lounge. I am told... Get it. All you need, right, is electricity and it should work.

Yeah? So here's the cable. Here it is here. Yeah? And I'm going to put it in the hole in the base and just put the other end in the electric socket.

Yeah? That's all I need to do, isn't it? And we'll have light. Yeah? Is that right? Yeah, it's right. So I just stick that in the socket like there.

[2 : 35] Yeah? And it'll be fine. So what am I doing wrong? You need a plug. Like that. Oh, okay.

So you're right. It's rather more complex than that. We need actually three cables and a fuse for safety. And then hopefully we'll have light.

It's strange then that when we come to the Bible, some people insist that all we need is one way of doing things. One approach and then somehow we will have light.

I've heard it said that the Bible is like the highway code. It gives us the rules by which to live life. Just like the rules of the road.

Follow them and you'll be safe. Follow God's rules and you'll have salvation and eternal life. But like all things, there is truth in that.

[3 : 38] But it's only part of the picture. It's only one thread. Yeah? And it doesn't light up the whole Bible.

It's been fashionable over recent centuries and certainly within my lifetime to make the focus of the Bible as being the story of personal salvation.

And this is just one thread emphasized above all others. Particularly verses, particular verses are highlighted to emphasize certain things.

And again, whereas there's truth here, we just have to be careful if we make it the only single thread. And again, in my lifetime, there have been various church movements which have emphasized different threads.

As they've no doubt been aware that one thread does not actually give you the whole picture. So for instance, there's been emphasis on using spiritual gifts or emphasis on healing.

[4 : 49] And again, there's truth to be found there. But is it the whole picture? Is it the whole picture? Will an extra thread provide us with enough light?

I love this cartoon because unfortunately, it summarizes very well the different standpoints people have, often without realizing it.

The difference between you and me, you use scripture to determine what love is, and I use love to determine what scripture means.

It's all too easy to take isolated verses from the Bible and use them to reinforce a particular viewpoint.

In practice, it works out something like this. The Bible is seen as a vast treasure chest. It's God's word and it all is valuable. All is trustworthy and true.

[5 : 49] And so we dip in and pull things out. We like that verse. It helps support our line of thinking. That's a really good passage.

And we like that story. But at some point, we'll pull out a verse on money. Or poverty. Or peace. Or something else we don't quite understand. Or perhaps it makes us feel uncomfortable. So we pop it back into the treasure chest. And we'll look at it another time.

And we tell ourselves, or we'll wait for somebody else to explain it to us. In this way, we end up sticking with what we know. And what we feel comfortable with.

We expect to have full light. And understanding. And yet we're only holding. There it is.

[6 : 50] It keeps disappearing. A cable. Or possibly two. If I took my Bible. Oops. If I took my Bible and started ripping pages out of it.

You'd be horrified. But in essence, this is perhaps our greatest mistake. We might as well rip pages out. If all we do is focus on certain things.

Ian challenged us as to when we last heard a talk on the book of Job. And most of us realize that this was very rarely or never.

It's all too easy to avoid the difficult things. And the challenging things. We have to learn to stop metaphorically ripping pages out of the Bible.

Psalms 119 is one of the longest psalms. And contains these verses. Which encourages us to spend time considering God's words. So that we walk a life worthy of God.

[7 : 59] And see where we're going. And what we're doing. So it reads. How sweet are your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth. I gain understanding from your precepts.

Therefore I hate every wrong path. Your word is a lamp for my feet. And a light on my path.

Reading the Bible is like a light in a dark place.

When we cannot see in the distance. God can use the Bible to provide us with assurance. And increase our understanding. We're not guided to make snap decisions.

From random verses. But rather we're to gradually absorb the wisdom of the whole Bible. Into our very selves. And Luke tells us this.

In the book of Acts. As soon as it was night. The believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there. They went to the Jewish synagogue. Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character.

[9 : 08] Than those in Thessalonica. For they received the message with great eagerness. And examined the scriptures every day. To see if what Paul said was true.

As a result. Many of them believed. As did also a number of prominent Greek women. And Greek men. So the Berean Jews. Berean Jews were commended.

For their open mindedness. They didn't just take Paul's talk. About Jesus at face value. They tested it out. And did their research. In our fibre optic age.

We have access to all kinds of information. We don't just have to take someone's word for it. We can search. And find out more about the Bible. From so many different sources.

We're blessed with books. Articles. Online talks. Visitors. Conferences. And festivals. If we start to consider the Bible.

[10 : 05] As a sacred text. The Holy Bible. We'll perhaps begin to see things differently. What is God saying to us. Through Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture immerses us.

In the person of Jesus Christ. God in the flesh. How does Jesus. Use Holy Scripture. How does Jesus use Holy Scripture.

So for the next 24 hours. I'll be going over that. In more detail. Or perhaps I might just leave that. To you. Let's have a look.

At this short extract. From Luke's Gospel. Large crowds. Were travelling with Jesus. And turning to them. He said. If anyone comes to me.

And does not hate. Father and mother. Wife and children. Brothers and sisters. Yes. Even their own life. Such a person. Cannot be my disciple.

[11:06] And whoever does not carry their cross. And follow me. Cannot be my disciple. So selecting verses in isolation.

Can often lead to great misunderstandings. Here we have. Hate your father and mother. Jesus says. If anyone comes to me. And does not hate his own father and mother.

And wife and children. And brothers and sisters. Yes. Even his own life. He cannot be my disciple. So there we have it. Just isolate the verse.

And we're there. It appears outrageous. As this command. Directly contradicts. The commandment. To honour your father and mother. And other biblical teachings.

On family love. But if we look at the whole thread. We begin to understand it better. So in Semitic languages. To hate.

[12:04] Hate. To love less. To love less. To love less. To love less. To love less. Or to esteem less. And Jesus was using hyperbole. To make a powerful point.

About priorities. The love for him. Must be so absolute. That all other loves. Even the closest family bonds. Will appear as.

Hate. In comparison. The point. The point. Is not to despise. Your family. But to place. Your commitment. To Christ. Above all. Other.

Relationships. So. Here. Is a helpful. Step process. Which can develop. Our understanding. By looking at the whole thread.

In scripture. So. You start by looking at the verse. Romans. And then the surrounding passage. And then the whole book. And then other books.

[12:58] That are related to it. The same testament. And then eventually. The whole bible. So for instance. We might look at a verse. In Paul's letter to the Romans.

How does that verse. Sit with the surrounding verses. And the letter as a whole. You know. What was he trying to say. To the Romans as a whole. And how does it sit. With the other letters.

That Paul wrote. How does it sit. With the teachings of Jesus. And the new testament. And how does it sit. With the old testament. For those of you.

Who are used to using. Bible study notes. You might find. That they rarely do this. That it's all too easy. To oversimplify. And just sit.

With one strand. So. How are you doing. Now your life's running. On fiber optics.

[13:55] Yeah. A fiber optic cable. There we go. A fiber optic cable. Is it similar to an electric cable. But contains one or more.

Optical. Fibres. That are used to carry. Light. They enable. Long distance. Telecommunication. Or provide.

High speed. High speed. Data connection. Between different parts. Of a building. For us. To benefit. Which we do daily.

All these strands. All these cables. Need to work together. To help us to communicate. And understand. And see. In a technological world.

How much more then. If we're truly. To understand the Bible. Do we need to look at the strands.

[14:49] That make it up. That gives us light. To see the whole picture. So here are just a few strands. We could look at. Okay.

So in the 24 hours. After the next 24 hours. We'll be taking a look at them. And I thought we could take one a day. Which takes us. Well.

Well into the middle of next week. And then of course. We could look at some more things. After that. We could look at prayer. Healing. Silence. And so on. Yeah. You all right for that. So you know.

I think there's some water available. You should be able to manage that. For the next week. Okay. Here's a little taster. Here's a little taster. Liberation theology.

Says the church. Should derive. Its legitimacy. In theology. By growing out of the poor. So a strand here. Is the poor. The Bible is read.

[15:44] And experienced. From the perspective. Of the poor. It should be explained. That this thread. Of reading. About the poor. Is an interpretation.

Or rather. How Christians. In Latin America. Understood God. Was speaking to them. In a particular situation. They believe. That the church.

Should be a movement. For those. Who were denied. Their rights. And plunged. Into such poverty. That they were deprived. Of their full status. As human beings.

The poor. Should take the example. Of Jesus. And use it. To bring about. A just society. And most. Controversially. The liberationists.

Said the church. Should act. To bring about. Social change. And should ally. Itself. With the working class. And. Some radical.

[16:38] Priests. Became involved. In politics. And trade unions. And others. Even align themselves. With violent. Revolutionary movements. And a common way.

In which priests. And nuns. Showed their solidarity. With the poor. Was to move. Out. Of their. Religious. Houses. And into poverty. Stricken areas. To share.

The living conditions. With the people. They ministered to. In the late 1970s. As the security situation. In El Salvador. Deteriorated.

This man. Oscar Romero. The Archbishop. Of San Salvador. Was one of the most. High profile. Priests. Associated. With liberation. Theology.

He became. Increasingly. An outspoken. Advocate. For the poor. And oppressed. And eventually. He was assassinated. While saying mass.

[17:34] In a cancer hospice. In San Salvador. On the 24th of March. 1980. And this opposition. Continues.

To happen. During the past few years. In Nicaragua. There's been much more. Protest. From priests. Followed by crackdowns. From the government. For these people.

Their reading of the Bible. Has led to life-threatening. Consequences. And there are many. Who would say. They're overstepping. The mark. They should just stick. To the Bible.

Of personal faith. But the Bible. They read. Has led them. To this course. Of protest action. This could never happen.

In Britain. We might say. But it does. For some. Their reading. Of the Bible. Leads them. To protest. This is a photo.

[18:32] This is a photo. From the 14th of August. This year. Father John McGowan. Of St. Joseph's Childfonson Peter. In Buckinghamshire. Wrote. An independent.

Catholic news. Website. That he felt. Calm. Even serene. After being arrested. And prayed. For anything. Even going to prison. As soon as I could.

I contacted. A friend. In the West Bank. Who was helping. Palestinians. I felt. I could now. Look him in the eye. I have no regrets. About what I did. My conscience.

Is clear. And in the picture here. The Reverend. Dr. Sally Mann. Of Bonnie Downs Baptist Church. East Ham. In East London. Said. I am aware. There will be repercussions.

In my life. If I'm successfully. Convicted. But I felt. Completely at peace. And both my actions. And my decision. It's the right side.

[19:25] Of history. And that's here. So where does that leave you? How do you read. The Bible? Is it a few nice verses.

To make you feel good? Is it just a guide. For your personal faith? Or do you see. Many threads. Where God. Can speak to you. We see this. In the life of Jesus. Many. Many threads. Are all carefully. Woven together. Revealing the person of God.

In all. His fullness. The Bible. Shows us. A loving God. Who transcends. And transforms. The whole.

Of life. And the culture. And the society. We live in. I'll say that again. The Bible shows us. The Bible shows us. A loving God. Who transcends.

[20:22] And transforms. The whole of life. And the culture. And the society. We live in. So. As we finish this series. I urge you.

To take this sacred text. And to look at it. Anew. Read it with love. Read it with thanksgiving. Read it.

With expectation. And then read it with love. All over again. To finish.

I thought. I would. Use. The benefits. Of fiber optics. To bring you a song. So it's all streamed out. And.

This is one of my favorite singers. Amy Grant. Thy word.

[21 : 22] Thy word. Is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my bed.

Thy word. Is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my bed.

When I feel afraid. Think I've lost my way. Still you're there. Right beside me.

Nothing will I fear. As long as you are near. Please be near me to the end.

Thy word. Is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my bed.

[22 : 22] Thy word. Is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my bed.

I will not forget. Your love for me. And yet. My heart forever is wandering.

Jesus be my guide. Hold me to your side. And I will love you to the end.

Nothing will I fear.

As long as you are near. Please be near me to the end. Thy word.

[23 : 41] Is a lamp unto my feet. And a light unto my bed. Fire. Fire. Is a lamp unto my feet.

And a light unto my bed. And a light unto my bed.

Fire. You're the light unto my bed