



# The Bible Rediscovered

Resources for Study Groups



DIOCESE OF  
LICHFIELD



Come follow Christ in the footsteps of St Chad

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## Introduction

Having a meaningful read of the Bible is a daunting task. Where do I start? Which version should I use? Don't I have to have a theology degree to understand it? What am I looking for when I read it anyway? Isn't it just really boring? These and many other questions often pop in to our minds when encouraged or challenged to read Scripture.

But please don't let the questions stop you having a go. It isn't nearly as difficult or scary as you might think. And I can guarantee you will be amazed, excited, annoyed, irritated, confused and a whole lot more once you start. If you don't experience any of these emotions I doubt you are actually reading the Bible! Moreover you will discover more and more about the God of the universe, the person of Jesus Christ and how His revelation of His love and grace can help you every day of your life.

There are great stories, beautiful poetry, graphic history, pithy sayings and lots to help you in your daily living to be found in the pages of the Bible, so do start. There are even some very funny bits too. As one commentator put it: 'The Bible is greater in scope than 'Lord of the Rings', has more adventure than 'Master and Commander', more romance than 'Love Actually' and in terms of popularity and sales leaves the whole Harry Potter series in the shade.'

This booklet gives you some ways of approaching Scripture so use it during Lent to get stuck into the text and discover either for the first time or afresh the true wonder of the Bible.

Revd Canon Stewart Jones  
Vicar of Barlaston

## About the Authors



### Introduction

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### Week 1

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### On Lions and Lozenges

The Ven Paul Thomas  
Archdeacon of Salop

## Week 1 Luke 4:1-13

### Approach: Narrative

A narrative approach to Bible reading focuses on how the story is being told; how it's put together to convey meaning and to invite us into new truth. It focuses on the idea of text as a complete work, or a story. This doesn't mean it's not true, or that it isn't real, like a fairy story, rather it is a way of recognising that the text has a particular shape, a beginning, middle and an end. Narratives are made up of various things, such as character, plot, setting and structure.

Narrative criticism assumes that the events of the narrative have been plotted in a certain sequence for a certain purpose. The author has constructed it in a certain way using a range of linguistic devices such as metaphors, similes, personification, imagery, hyperbole and alliteration. There might also be plot devices such as backstory, and foreshadowing as well as tropes motifs or clichés. Recognising these is often only possible when you take the text as a whole.

### Key points about reading this week's passage through this lens:

- Recurring theme: The Holy Spirit active in people's lives. Jesus is "full of the Holy Spirit" (v1) so something important is going to happen!
- Character and plot: The devil departs until an opportune time, in plot terms we know then that this character is going to reappear!
- Setting: Those who know the backstory recognise the setting of the desert and the significance of 40 days.
- Character development: We already have enough information about who Jesus is to know that the temptations are real for him, he really could do those things.
- Scene setting: This passage is a foreshadowing of the conflict between Jesus and worldly powers, and the unexpected nature of Jesus' ministry.

### Reflection Questions:

1. What did you notice about the passage reading it in this way?
2. Who is the passage about and what happens?
3. What do you think will happen in the next chapter of the story?
4. How does the way the story is told draw you in? Eg who are you rooting

- for, what are you worried about, etc. ?
5. How are your emotions engaged by the narrative?

**Other passages you might read with this approach:**

This approach works well for the Gospels, and particularly if you read a whole Gospel as one complete work.

## Week 2 Luke 13:31-35

### Approach: Historical/Exegetical

There's no set way to read Scripture but certain principles can really help. A brief description of this approach is: a careful study of the original meaning of texts in their historical and literary contexts. No New Testament author wrote in a vacuum. History and events shaped the composition of the Gospels and allowing ourselves to think about what the text might have meant then will help us to see what the text means for us now.

### Key points about reading this week's passage through this lens:

This passage is part of Luke's 'travel narrative' (Luke 9:51-19:44) - the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem which takes up ten of the 24 chapters of Luke and so is clearly important. The section ends with the 'triumphal entry' into Jerusalem just before the cleansing of the Temple. There are lots of details to notice in this passage. For example foxes and hens are important. Jesus describes himself as a mother hen, and there are lots of Old Testament references to God protecting His people 'under his wings', especially in the Psalms.

### Reflection Questions:

1. What impression do you get of the Pharisees?
2. What do you make of Jesus' calling Herod a 'fox'? Is there a clue in Herod's threat to Jesus? Any clues in Luke 3:18-20? Nehemiah 4:3? Ezekiel 13:4? Lamentations 5:18?
3. Verse 32 has Jesus talking of "finishing His work." What do you think this work is? Look at the wording in some different translations of the Bible.
4. What did you notice about the passage reading it in this way?

### Other passages you might read with this approach:

Luke 21:12-17 linked with their fulfilment in Acts?! Or for some real fun and games any passage from Revelation!

## Week 3 Luke 13:1-9

### Approach: COMA - Asking good questions of the Bible text.

COMA stands for Context, Observation, Meaning and Application. This is really how we read anything: we notice the context, we observe what is being said, we try and discern what the author is meaning, and we ponder whether their message has an application for us.

#### Context

1. What has happened so far in this Bible book?
  - Why is Luke writing (1:1-4)? Who is Jesus (2:11)? Where is he heading (9:51)?
2. What has happened just prior to this section?
  - What has Jesus been teaching about our attitude to the Day of Judgment?

#### Observation

3. What is happening in the passage?
  - What two events are referred to?
  - What were the crowds tempted to think concerning those who suffered? (Verse 1 possibly refers to some massacre in the Temple, typical of Pilate's brutality.)
  - What warning does Jesus twice give his listeners?
  - In the parable:
    - What does the vineyard owner expect but not find, and so what is his rightful response?
    - What solution does the man who tended the vineyard propose?
4. Do you think there is a main point or theme?
  - What is the connection of thought between verses 1-5 and the parable?
  - Is Jesus' use of repetition significant?
5. What surprises are there?
  - Does Jesus address the tragic deaths in the way you would expect? If not, why not? Is an even bigger tragedy imminent?
  - How widespread did Jesus consider sin to be in Galilee and Jerusalem?

#### Meaning

6. What does the passage reveal about who Jesus is, and what he came into the world to do?
  - How would you describe the character of the man sent to tend the vineyard?
  - What danger are we in?
  - If we repent, who promises to perish in our place? (Cf. 1 Peter 2:24)
  - In the light of this parable, what is meant by 'repent'?
7. How could you sum up the meaning of this passage in your own words?

#### Application

8. How does this passage challenge (or confirm) your understanding?
9. Is there some attitude you need to change?
10. What does this passage teach you about being a disciple of Jesus?

#### Key points about reading this week's passage through this lens:

There are lots of other things we might discover under each of the COMA headings, for example how Israel in the Old Testament was called to be fruitful, how Jesus was the true vine, how this theme appears elsewhere in Luke's gospel (especially from the lips of John the Baptist), and how fruitfulness is taught by other Bible writers.

#### Reflection Questions:

1. How well does this approach help you understand what the author is actually meaning?
2. Were you able to discern the Holy Spirit teaching, training, encouraging and equipping you through this Bible passage?
3. Were you able to turn your discoveries into prayers of praise, confession, and intercession?

#### Suggestions of others passages you might read with this approach:

This approach is applicable to all the different genres of literature we find in the Bible. Downloadable templates are available at [www.matthiasmedia.com.au/Samples/otobr/OTOBR-Sheets-for-copying-A4.pdf](http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/Samples/otobr/OTOBR-Sheets-for-copying-A4.pdf)

## Week 4 Luke 15:1-3,11b-32

### Approach: Liberation Theology

Liberation criticism is a contextual approach in that it begins with the context in which people find themselves. Originating largely out of Latin America in the 1960s and 70s its concern is how people who are poor and marginalised might interpret the Bible from their own life experience. Rather than seeking to explore what they might learn about a Bible text relying on 'biblical experts' to inform their thinking, practitioners of this approach engage with the text looking for ways in which it might speak into their specific situation. This goes beyond a simple 'what is the Bible saying to me today?' and looks for ways in which the text empowers those who are marginalised to speak and act against the people and unjust systems that keep them in their particular situation.

Ultimately then it is an approach that has liberation of the oppressed as its primary focus. It is adopted by people at the grass roots in their communities and challenges status and systems looking to the Bible to support practical action. The difficulty for those who hold relative positions of privilege and power is how they might enable the voices of the poor and marginalised to be heard and take seriously their challenge to more traditional understandings of biblical texts.

### Key points about reading this week's passage through this lens:

Reading the passage through this lens asks us to be attentive to issues of power, privilege and wealth. How equitably are the products of the individuals' labours (the father's estate) shared? The Pharisees and teachers (v2) have clear ideas about the social structure that exists; the father has both wealth and privilege, with the power to allocate his estate as he determines (vv.11; 28). In the case of the elder son, he is expected, by not choosing (or not being in a position?) to leave, to work to increase the value of his father's estate, whilst any reward is withheld for an indefinite period. How might interpreting the father as a landowner with indentured servants (working in exchange for food, housing and clothing) change your understanding of this passage?

### Reflection Questions:

1. What did you notice about the passage reading it in this way?
2. How might you interpret this passage as:
  - A foodbank user
  - A migrant worker living in accommodation provided by your employer
  - A refugee who is unable to return home?

### Suggestions of others passages you might read with this approach:

Matthew 20:1-16; Luke 7:36-50

## Week 5 John 12:1-8

### Approach: Ignatian

Ignatius of Loyola (1491—1556) didn't invent this approach to Scripture, but he did make it a central part of his Spiritual Exercises. It's a way of allowing God to speak to us through our imaginations, so we can enter more deeply into relationship with God. Through it, we celebrate that God created us not just as thinking beings, but as feeling, sensing and creative persons too.

### Key points about reading this week's passage through this lens:

The key points of this lens are using our five senses to 'get inside' a passage in order that we might see and understand it differently, and hear God speaking to us through our imaginative participation in the story or passage. Here are some key points for reading John 12:1—8 through this lens:

- Start by praying to come to know and love Jesus better.
- Read the passage slowly, getting more familiar with it.
- Close your eyes and ask yourself: *What do you see?* What does the room look like? How crowded is it? It might be a modern kitchen or your idea of a first-century scene. What matters is that it is vivid to *you*. Where are the windows? What's the light like? Where are you in the room? And where is Jesus? How is he looking? Tired? Happy? Lively? Laughing? How do his expressions and body language change as the story unfolds? There are no rights and wrongs here. This is your insight on the text.
- Next ask yourself: *What do you hear?* You might imagine the sounds of the kitchen, of many voices, of bustle and busyness. How does that change during the story? What about the words you hear? How does all this affect you?
- Then consider: *What do you smell?* It's a meal – what are they eating? What about all those bodies in the room? What about the perfume? Just imagine it, breathe it in . . .
- And now to touch: *What do you feel?* What's the texture of your clothes? The food? Where are you in the scene? What are you sitting on? Is it hard or comfortable?
- Finally: *What do you taste?* What are you eating? Are you enjoying

it? Do you stop eating when this happens? Does the fragrance affect the taste? Do you still want to go on with the meal after this? Why? Why not?

- And now you've 'composed the scene', as Ignatius describes it, let it run in your imagination, allowing yourself to be drawn into whatever aspects seem attractive or interesting, trusting that this is God leading your imagination, taking you to deeper truths.
- Close with a simple prayer of thanks.

### Reflection questions

1. How did you respond to this approach?
2. What happened to you while you were part of the story?
3. Has God has revealed new insights, desires, feelings or emotions, or uncovered memories or things that you need to address?
4. What do you want or need to do now (make a note in your journal to remind you)?

### Other suitable passages

Mark 4:35-40; John 6:1-13; Matthew 21:1-9; Luke 8:41-48

## On Lions and Lozenges

'Defend the Bible?' railed the Victorian preacher Charles Spurgeon. 'I'd sooner defend a lion!' He did not develop the comparison but we could imagine him talking about a lion having brawn, bounce and bite and so being able to look after itself. As the Bible possesses the same qualities, Spurgeon's point is that it does not need our protection. Its brawn means it has enduring strength – Voltaire predicted its disappearance in the eighteenth century but 50 years later his own house had become a publishing house for the Bible. Its bounce makes it explosive – St Paul called the Gospel 'dynamite' and history has shown it has the power to re-shape cultures and continents. Its bite gives it deep penetration – it can rip through the surface of our social or individual actions and expose our motives and secret ambitions.

But lions are dangerous and destructive, specially when provoked and mishandled. Similarly, if we mishandle the Bible it becomes what Adrian Thatcher calls 'a savage text'. It has been used to victimise children, women, Jews, the disabled, people of colour or different sexual orientation, slaves, scientists, heretics as well as animals, nature and the environment. Such usage is usually accompanied by claims of divine authority for its strictures meaning they cannot be questioned, discussed, challenged or resisted. The Bible becomes a source of oppression and exclusion and rather than being a bridge to God, acts as a barrier between God and people.

The lesson to be learned is that just as a lion coming amongst human beings needs a competent handler, so the Bible needs a good interpreter. (cf. Acts 8 v 31-32). We need to respect and listen to what church tradition has said including as it does many great thinkers and theologians. And we need to hear what contemporary scholars are saying as they draw out the Bible's message and meaning and help us avoid the pitfalls of misinterpretation.

But now I want to change the metaphor.

Comparing the Bible to a lion helps us think about its public face and how its message impacts society or the church. But the Bible also has a private face. It can speak directly to the individual. It can be like a lozenge, said Baron von Hugel, which we savour as it slowly dissolves on the tongue. It has the ability to evoke different levels of response from us. Intellectual, yes, but also imaginative, intuitive and intimate. 'Few things affect our behaviour less than

intellectual ideas,' concluded the great psychologist Jung, so we need to let the consolations and challenges of the Bible penetrate the depths of our being and do its work of conversion and transformation at those levels.

Each of the chapters in this booklet invited you to encounter the Bible as either lion or lozenge. They might have left you reeling from the engagement or relishing its effect. Either way, through the Bible God communicates the good news of His unfailing love for all people and all creation. And that includes you and me!

As you continue to encounter the Bible, sometimes you will experience it as a lion and sometimes as a lozenge, but what remains constant is the need for us to go on reading, hearing and being transformed by the Living Word of God.

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## Further Reading:

- Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning: An Introduction to Interpreting the New Testament* London: SPCK 2008.
- John Riches, *What is Contextual Bible Study?* London: SPCK, 2010.
- Clare Amos, *The Bible in the Life of the Church. (Canterbury Studies in Anglicanism)*. Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2013.
- Ellen F. Davis, and Richard B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.*
- David Helm, *One to One Bible Reading* Youngstown: Matthias Media, 2011.
- Alan Stibbs, *Search the Scripture* IVP, 2004.



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Come follow Christ **in the footsteps of St Chad**

The Bible is a gift through which we all can encounter the Living God: a kind of river, shallow enough for the lamb to find a footing, and deep enough for the elephant to float at large, said St Gregory. We are invited to make the story of God at work in the world into our story, and to let it shape our lives both as individual Christians and as Christian communities. The invitation to rediscover the Bible, to find fresh ways to read and hear through it the Word of God, is an essential part of deepening discipleship. This resource includes a range of approaches from people around the diocese who are all passionate about reading and engaging with the Scriptures. They offer ways of encountering the text that they have found helpful in their own journeys of discipleship and they share their own reflections on the Gospel passages for the Sundays of Lent. As we follow Christ in the footsteps of St Chad, my prayer is that this Lent we may be renewed in our enthusiasm for the Scriptures and transformed by the living Word of God.

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**discipleship   vocation   evangelism**