

John | Philippians | Psalms

24 studies for Bible-reading partnerships

Andrew Cornes

“Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil” ECCLESIASTES 4 v 9

These words were originally written for a work context: it is better to work with someone else than to work alone. The wisdom books of the Bible (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Song of Solomon) have a great deal to say about partnership and friendship.

For many Christians reading the Bible is hard work. We manage it for a time and then we give up. Or we keep going without getting much out of our reading. There can be great gain in meeting regularly to read the Bible with one other person: a friend or our marriage partner.

A Bible-reading partnership can revitalise our reading of the Bible: bringing new insights and keeping us up to the mark. We may well discover that our reading alone also becomes easier. And it all began when we discovered *ONE2ONE*.

- 1 AIM:** The aim is that two Christians should encourage each other as they meet regularly to read God's word and talk about what it says. Bible-reading partnerships are no substitute for personal Bible study (except on the day you meet!). At their best, they inspire us to read the Bible more at other times.
- 2 PARTNER:** Choose your Bible-reading partner carefully. If you are married, you may want to have your husband/wife as your Bible-reading partner. Otherwise we strongly advise that you choose a partner of your own sex. It can be good if a more experienced Christian reads with a person who knows the Bible less well.
- 3 FREQUENCY:** The ideal is to meet weekly. Some find that it is better for them to meet every other week. We do not advise meeting less frequently than every other week, if at all possible.
- 4 TIMING:** We suggest that you set aside 90 minutes and keep strictly to whatever timing you have agreed. It is normally a good idea to begin the Bible study as soon as possible after arrival, and to catch up on news at the end rather than the beginning; experience shows

that otherwise the time of Bible study gets squeezed. One suggestion is: Bible study 45-60 minutes; praying together 5-15 minutes.

- 5 **STUDYING THE BIBLE:** There are 24 sessions: a passage for each session and questions on it. The aim of these questions is the same as in all genuine study of the Bible: to help us...
 - understand what the Bible writer was saying; and
 - apply that message to our lives today.You will not always be able to discuss all the questions. That is fine; but make sure you always discuss some of those questions which make you apply the passage to your life today.
- 6 **PREPARATION:** You will get most out of the partnership if you study the passage carefully before you meet, and note down your answers to the questions. This will undoubtedly make your discussion richer. It is, however, possible to benefit from the Bible-reading partnership without studying the passage in advance.
- 7 **VERSION OF THE BIBLE:** The questions occasionally quote from the English Standard Version of the Bible. It is perfectly possible, however, to answer the questions using any other good, modern translation.
- 8 **ORDER:** The 24 sessions are designed to be studied in the following order: John 13 – 17 (sessions 1-9); Philippians (sessions 10-16); the Psalms (sessions 17-24). This probably provides the best progression. If, however, you wish to go through the sessions in a different order, that is fine.
- 9 **PRAYING:** It is always good practice to pray before we read a passage from the Bible. We want God to speak to us; and it is obvious that we need to ask Him to do so.

In addition, there are suggestions for *Praying Together* at the end of each session. When God has spoken to us, we need to speak in response to Him.

These suggestions frequently say: “Pray for each other”. Having discussed and shared together, it is a great encouragement to hear someone else pray about our thoughts/concerns, rather than each of us praying about what we ourselves have mentioned.

As you get to know each other better, it will be very natural, of course, to pray about other concerns not directly related to the Bible study. We suggest that you “pray home” the truths of the passage you have just been reading before you pray for other concerns/needs. Otherwise, you and your partner’s immediate, pressing needs can edge out the eternal truth you have just been hearing from God.

- 10 **REVIEW SHEETS:** At the end of each group of sessions there is a review sheet. Please complete this before going on to the next group of sessions. It will help consolidate what you have learned from the Bible. If there is someone in your church in charge of Bible-reading partnerships, please make a photocopy of each review sheet and send or give this to him/her.
- 11 **STARTING AGAIN:** At the end of the course you may well want to continue in the same Bible Reading Partnership, but we hope that you will instead start again with a new Bible reading partner. Your experience will be invaluable to your new partner. In this way, more and more Christians will have the benefits of being involved in a Bible reading partnership. If you don’t want to go over the same material, you can always use One2One Book Two (studies in Matthew 26-28, 1 Thessalonians and Genesis 1-12)—see p.64 for ordering details.
- 12 **IF IT DOESN’T WORK OUT:** Sometimes a Bible-reading partnership doesn’t fully work. Occasionally the partners don’t gel or one partner has to drop out. This is often nobody’s fault. We would encourage you to choose a new partner; this new partnership will very likely go well.
- 13 **FURTHER READING:** Some people have asked for reading suggestions to help with these studies. This is not necessary but it can be helpful (as long as you don’t make your Bible-reading partner feel small because they haven’t done any extra reading). Over the page you will find some suggestions: in each case, the first book is slimmer and the second a little more detailed.

JOHN 13 – 17

- W. Benn, *The Last Word*, Christian Focus Publications
- B. Milne, *The Message of John*, IVP

PHILIPPIANS

- W. Barclay, *Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*, St. Andrews Press
- J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians*, IVP

PSALMS

- D. Kidner, *The Psalms*, IVP (2 volumes)
- M. Wilcock, *The Message of the Psalms*, IVP (2 volumes)

John 13 – 17
Jesus' teaching on the
night before He died

Today's passage: John 13 v 1-7

When we read the Gospels, it is important to distinguish between two aspects of Jesus' life:

- Where He is *unique*. He did things and said things which we could never copy and should never try to. Our job is to understand and worship Jesus in this aspect of His life, not to imitate Him.
- Where He is an *example* to us. We are His disciples and there is much in His actions and sayings which we are clearly meant to imitate.

This story shows us both aspects of Jesus' life.

A THE UNIQUE JESUS

Read verses 1-11

- 1 What are the tell-tale signs that the foot washing is an “acted parable”, pointing to something unique that Jesus does (v 1-11)?
- 2 John places this at a particular time and tells us what was on Jesus' mind at that time (v 1-3). How do these details help us understand the acted parable?
- 3 What was Jesus teaching them about Himself through what He did and said in washing their feet (v 4-11)?

- 4 Why were Peter's reactions both inappropriate (v 8-9)?
What appropriate reactions would John want to encourage in us?

B JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

Read verses 12-17

- 5 How do we know that in the foot washing Jesus was also setting an example for us to follow (v 12-17)?
- 6 Jesus gives Himself two names. What does each name tell us about why we should follow Jesus' example (v 13-16)?
- 7 Foot washing was not very pleasant (see v 8). Write down at least two somewhat unpleasant ways in which God may be asking you now to care for your fellow Christians.

C PRAYING TOGETHER

- Give praise to Jesus that He has made you "completely clean" (v 10).
- Pray for your Bible-reading partner that they will have the courage and obedience to care for others in the difficult ways that they have mentioned (see question 7).

Today's passage: John 14 v 1-14

There are times for all of us when our faith falters. Peter's did (13 v 36-38). In particular, we may be worried by the thought that:

- there may be no life with Christ after death
- Jesus may not be the only way to God
- Jesus may be no more than a very fine human being
- our prayers aren't really answered

Jesus gives us reassurances ("Let not your hearts be troubled" - v 1) on all these points.

A AFTER DEATH

Read verses 1-4

- 1 What different reassurances does Christ give that those who believe in Him will go to be with Him after death (v 1-4)?

- 2 When have you been "troubled" (v 1) about life after death? How do these verses encourage you?

B THE ONLY WAY

Read verses 5-7

- 3 Jesus says three things about Himself (v 6). Explain in your own words the ways in which Jesus is claiming to be unique.

- 4 Many people today find it offensive that Christ claims to be unique. How would you explain it to a friend?

C ONE WITH THE FATHER

Read verses 8-11

- 5 Jesus claimed to be one with the Father. What signs were there, for the disciples to see, that Jesus was one with the Father (v 8-11)?
- 6 When, if ever, do you doubt that Jesus and God the Father are one? Which of these facts (v 8-11) do you find most convincing today?

D ANSWERED PRAYER

Read verses 12-14

- 7 How do these verses (v 12-14) speak to us when we are “troubled” (v 1)?
- 8 Jesus knew perfectly well that we don’t receive everything we ask for (think of His own experience in Gethsemane). So what is He really telling us in verses 12-14?

E PRAYING TOGETHER

- Share honestly anything that is troubling you about your Christian faith at the moment.
- Give praise for the reassurances in this passage.