

How to use *explore*

Issue 115

The 92 daily readings in this issue of *Explore* are designed to help you understand and apply the Bible as you read it each day.

It's serious!

We suggest that you allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It should be a meal, not a snack! Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible. *Explore* uses the NIV2011 Bible translation, but you can also use it with the NIV1984 or ESV translations.

Sometimes a prayer box will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring his word to life, and to shape the way we think and live through it.

We're serious!

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives.

We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away.



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Welcome to *explore*

Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, nor is it a lifestyle choice. It's about having a real relationship with the living God through his Son, Jesus Christ. The Bible tells us that this relationship is like a marriage.

It's important to start with this, because it is easy to view the practice of daily Bible reading as a Christian duty, or a hard discipline that is just one more thing to get done in our busy lives.

But the Bible is God speaking to us: opening his mind to us on how he thinks, what he wants for us and what his plans are for the world. And most importantly, it tells us what he has done for us in sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. It's the way that the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

Here are a few suggestions for making your time with God more of a joy than a burden:

⌚ **Time:** Find a time when you will not be disturbed. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. But whatever works for you is right for you.

⌚ **Place:** Jesus says that we are not to make a great show of our religion (see Matthew 6:5-6), but rather, to pray with the door to our room shut. Some people plan to get to work a few minutes earlier and get their Bible out in an office or some other quiet corner.

⌚ **Prayer:** Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, do try to develop your own lists to pray through. Use the flap inside the back

cover to help with this. And allow what you read in the Scriptures to shape what you pray for yourself, the world and others.

⌚ **Feast:** You can use the "Bible in a year" line at the bottom of each page to help guide you through the entire Scriptures throughout 2026. This year, you will have an Old Testament and a New Testament passage to read, enjoy and reflect on each day. Over the course of the year, you'll read through the entire Bible once!

⌚ **Share:** As the saying goes, *expression deepens impression*. So try to cultivate the habit of sharing with others what you have learned. Why not join our Facebook group to share your encouragements, questions and prayer requests? Search for *Explore: For your daily walk with God*.

And enjoy it! As you read God's word and God's Spirit works in your mind and your heart, you are going to see Jesus, and appreciate more of his love for you and his promises to you. That's amazing!



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JOHN: Life-giver must die

After the extraordinary "high" of Lazarus coming out of the tomb, the music changes suddenly and we focus not on the life of Lazarus but on the death of Jesus

Telling tales

Read John 11:45-46

Verse 45 is the positive outcome we might expect. But notice how very quickly it begins to turn sour.

- ⌚ *Why do you think some of the eye-witnesses went off to tell the Pharisees?*
- ⌚ *What do you think motivated them?*

It is hard to be sure, but quite possibly they wanted to get into the powerful Pharisees' good books. Anyway, the news spread like wildfire, and before long the Pharisees got to hear of it. It was a very public miracle.

Political anxiety

Read John 11:47-48

- ⌚ *Does anyone deny that Jesus had done all these wonderful signs?*
- ⌚ *What is their problem? What are they anxious about?*

Notice the irony that they are worried everyone will believe in the Messiah! It's a political mindset. If there's another popular messianic movement, there'll be trouble with the Romans. They'll take away "our temple" and even "our nation". It's actually a mindset which ignores the reality of God. They look at history and politics and do not really believe that God might be doing stuff in them. They think about this world only.

Unexpected prophecy

Read John 11:49-53

Caiaphas was high priest right through this period.

- ⌚ *What does he think of the Sanhedrin?*
- ⌚ *What does he decide needs to happen, and why?*

He's not impressed with their pussy-footing around! They need to get on and kill Jesus. Any fool can see that's what has to be done!

Now read how John explains what Caiaphas had said (v 51-52). I'm sure Caiaphas didn't know he was speaking God's words (prophesying). But he was!

- ⌚ *Who is Jesus going to die for, and what will be the result of Jesus' death?*

▲ Pray

People throughout our world are scattered and divided, from broken families to broken nations. Jesus is the only one who can gather broken people together to him. And he can only do it by his death.

Give glory to God for what Jesus' sacrifice has achieved for you.

Take a moment to pray for the broken situations you know of that need his love and power.

Fear and suspicion

We are close to the turning point. So far it's mostly been open miracles and public confrontations. Soon that will change.

Jesus withdrew

Read John 11:53-54

⌚ *How does Jesus react to the plotting of verse 53?*

Jesus has done this before—look back at 8:59 and 10:39-40. Now it's a more sustained withdrawal. Notice how John says that Jesus “no longer moved about publicly among the people of Judea”.

He is “with his disciples”, but no longer with the crowds. Humanly speaking, it's a strange follow-up to the most wonderful miracle. One day he is calling a dead man out of his tomb; the next he has to withdraw from public life! The time for his death is drawing near.

Fevered speculation

Read John 11:55-56

It is now the third and final Passover of Jesus' public ministry. He was in Jerusalem for the first (2:13-25), and Galilee for the second (6:4). Now he is quietly waiting outside Jerusalem. Huge crowds get to Jerusalem in good time for Passover.

⌚ *How does John describe what they're doing in John 11:56?*

They're expecting Jesus to be there. We can imagine the heated conversations over meals among pilgrim groups. No one could be neutral about him.

Bitter hostility

Read John 11:57

⌚ *Who exactly is against Jesus?*

The second group in this verse were the popular religious leaders, very determined to keep the Law of Moses. By contrast the first people John mentions were the powerful churchmen—rich, political and practical. Between them, these two groups made up the ruling council, who ruled Judea under the supervision of the Roman governor.

Notice the atmosphere of suspicion. Back in verse 46 spies reported back. Now there are orders out that if anyone so much as hears where Jesus is, they must report it.

⌚ *What do you think it would be like to be a real disciple in those crowds?*

▼ Apply

⌚ *In what situations of your life have you faced, and do you face, a similar kind of pressure?*

⌚ *How can you stay loyal to Jesus, bearing true and courageous testimony, when times are hard?*

▲ Pray

Pray for courage in standing up for Jesus.



Because he's worth it

Does a fragrance ever take you back in memory, perhaps to a childhood home? Today John tells of a fragrance he never forgot.

A humble devotion

Read John 12:1-2

- ➊ Where is Jesus?
- ➋ Who is with him, and why is this so amazing?

What an extraordinary meal it must have been, with this man sitting and eating with the Lord.

Read John 12:3

- ➊ What does Mary do?
- ➋ Why is she so grateful to Jesus?

As the beautiful fragrance fills the house, her action dominates the meal. Those who were there never forgot it. Here is the man who raised her dear brother from the dead.

A selfish religion

Read John 12:4-6

These verses are like a cold shower.

- ➊ What does Judas pretend to care about?
- ➋ And what does he really want?

He is a selfish man—but he cloaks his selfishness with a pious social concern.

Apply

It is good to care for the poor. But unless we love Jesus from the heart, our concern for the poor can just be a way of making ourselves feel better about ourselves.

- ➊ What primarily motivates you, deep down, when you serve others—love for Jesus or feeling good about yourself?

Pray for a heart love of Jesus, and for this to drive the actions in your life.

A surprising significance

Read John 12:7-8

- ➊ What is Jesus' reaction?
- ➋ Does anything surprise you about this reaction, and the reasons he gives for it?

There's a slight puzzle: how can Mary "save" the perfume if she has just poured it out? Jesus probably means, *She didn't sell it and give the money to the poor, because she had to keep it to prepare me for my burial (which she has just done).*

We don't know if Mary knew that she was preparing Jesus for his burial—but that's what she was doing. It's a shock. Jesus is worth this expensive perfume because he is going to die. It is his death that makes him so precious.

Pray

- ➊ How precious is Jesus to you? How precious is his death?

Pray for a fresh and deep appreciation of just how wonderful and valuable he is.



A stupid hatred

Today we think about the man Jesus raised from the dead, and about people who wanted to kill him.

It is like trying to blow out one of those party candles that keep relighting; how do you kill a man when there is someone around who can raise him from the dead?!

Seeing a resurrected man

Read John 11:55-57

- ⌚ *Why are the crowds in Jerusalem?*
- ⌚ *Who are they looking for?*
- ⌚ *What do the leaders want them to do if they find him?*

Imagine the fevered conversations and the fear felt towards the leaders.

Read John 12:9

They do find him! You can imagine the gossip on the Jerusalem streets now.

- ⌚ *Why do they leave Jerusalem and stream out to Bethany in their thousands?*
- ⌚ *Imagine you're part of that crowd. Why would you want to see Lazarus?*

Look both at verse 9 and then at verse 1 to see just how John describes Lazarus. From then on, Lazarus is defined as the man whom Jesus had raised from the dead.

..... **TIME OUT**

Jesus has raised every Christian from the dead. This is the most important thing about us. Not who we are ourselves but

what he has done for us. Not our work but his work in us.

Think what it will mean to define yourself, not by what you have done but by what has been done for you. It will turn boasting to humility, grumbling to gratitude.

Killing a resurrected man

Read John 12:10-11

- ⌚ *Why were the chief priests worried by Lazarus, and what did they plan to do?*

They had already been planning to do this to Jesus. Now their plotting included Lazarus. There is something perverse about this. The worst thing they could do to Lazarus was to kill him. But Jesus can reverse even that!

⌚ Apply

As Christ's people, we're safe in the hands of the man who can raise us from the dead.

- ⌚ *What are you most afraid of?*
- ⌚ *What is the worst other people can do to you?*

Praise Jesus that he can undo even that.

- ⌚ *How will this change your words and actions this week?*



Who is this man?

On first reading, this psalm is very odd. God speaks directly to someone else, but who is it? The answer to that question is nothing short of earth-shattering...

Conquering King

Read Psalm 110:1-3

David is the author, so who is God talking to?

- ➊ *What is his current privilege (v 1)?*
- ➋ *What has he got to look forward to (v 2)?*
- ➌ *What picture does verse 3 bring to mind?*

Of course, the psalm is talking about Jesus—David’s “Lord”, whom the LORD will make both conqueror and King. It is talking about his return to God’s presence after being raised from the dead, and his being seated at God’s right hand. The “sitting” signifies that his work is finished!

- ➊ *What was the work that Jesus has now finished?*
- ➋ *Where is Jesus now, and what is he waiting for?*

▼ Apply

We live in a time of waiting: the work of Christ is finished, but he is yet to be revealed as Lord of all—we must trust that he rules in the midst of his enemies (v 2b).

- ➊ *Do you find that difficult? How would you answer someone who says, “There is no God: the world is full of injustice, hatred and evil”.*

Priest and Judge

Read Psalm 110:4-7

- ➊ *What does God promise to Jesus (v 4)? What does that mean?*

Melchizedek was a king and priest of Salem (later to become Jerusalem), who gave a blessing to Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20). But the bestowal of this order of priesthood on Jesus shows us what he came to do: to rule the world, and to open a way back into the presence of God for us.

- ➊ *But what will Jesus do (Psalm 110:5-6)? And when will he do it?*
- ➋ *How does verse 7 show us that this King, Priest and Judge is a human being?*

.... **TIME OUT**

This clear and profound prophecy about Jesus means this psalm is the most quoted in the New Testament. Check out some or all of the references: Matthew 22:41-46; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; Hebrews 1:13; 5:6; 6:20; 7:10:12-13.

- ➊ *Is there a way you might use this psalm to convince others about Jesus today?*

▲ Pray

King Jesus will return one day as Judge. Pray that your friends and family would let him be their Priest and reconcile them to God before it is too late.



Hail to the chief!

Jesus says he has been anointed for burial. But the next day he is acclaimed as the King. What is going on? This whole chapter lies under the shadow of the cross.

The acclamation of the crowd

Read John 12:12-13

Picture the scene in your mind.

- ⌚ Who is there?
- ⌚ What do they do?
- ⌚ What do they shout?

There were perhaps over a million people in Jerusalem for Passover. The man who raises the dead is coming. They surge out to meet him, shouting words from Psalm 118:25-26, praising God's King.

The fulfilment of a prophecy

Read John 12:14-16

- ⌚ At the time, did even Jesus' closest followers understand what he was doing?
- ⌚ When did they understand?

Read John 14:26

Only when the Spirit comes can the apostles really understand all that happened.

Thank God for the Spirit's work in the apostles, which means we can trust the New Testament.

Read Zechariah 9:9-10

- ⌚ What will the promised King do?

Notice how the donkey is a symbol of bringing peace, not only to the Jews but to "the nations" (the rest of the world).

The crowd of witnesses

Read John 12:17-18

Within the huge Passover crowd there was a smaller group who had been there when Jesus raised Lazarus.

- ⌚ What did this group of eye-witnesses do?

Notice the pattern: eye-witnesses tell what they saw, and others believe. It's a frequent pattern in John's Gospel.

▼ Apply

We cannot give eye-witness testimony to Jesus, because we were not there. But we can tell people that we believe the eyewitnesses, and what Jesus has done for us. Pray for courage to do this.

- ⌚ Who can you seek to tell about King Jesus today?

The ironic frustration

Read John 12:19

- ⌚ Why are the Pharisees so angry and frustrated?
- ⌚ In what way is this ironic?

It is a deep irony that, by his death, Jesus is going to rescue the whole world!



Dying to bring life

Yesterday we read that the Pharisees said, "The whole world has gone after" Jesus (v 19). Today we meet some representatives of the "whole world".

They picture for us the progress of the gospel all over the earth.

We want to see Jesus

Read John 12:20-22

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Who now appear, and what do they say?

This doesn't necessarily mean they came from Greece. It means they spoke Greek (rather than Aramaic) and were Gentiles, probably what were called "God-fearers"—people who were attracted by Judaism but not allowed to go right into the temple. They were outsiders.

Bethsaida was a "Greek-ish" city, which is probably why they approached Philip first; he was closer to their not-so-Jewish culture. Andrew was also from Bethsaida (1:44).

Their request is very significant: "We would like to see Jesus". They have come to a Jewish feast, but the man they most want to see is Jesus of Nazareth. He is the focus of hope for the rest of the world.

Dying to see life

Read John 12:23-24

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What does Jesus say in verse 23-24?

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What's the shock here?

Jesus will be "glorified" by his crucifixion. But when he dies, he will yield a worldwide harvest.

..... **TIME OUT**

Think about the connection between the cross and "the Greeks" (the rest of the world). If Jesus had not died for our sins, then we who are Gentiles would never have been rescued.

Only the cross makes it possible for the rest of the world to be saved—that's the message that travels the globe once Jesus returns to heaven: **read Acts 1:7-9**.

Following the crucified man

Read John 12:25-26

Jesus must die to bring in a big harvest ("many seeds"). But what about us? We have a choice. We can love our lives and hang on to them selfishly, or we can give our lives for Jesus and his gospel.

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What does Jesus say are the consequences of what we choose?

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What wonderful promise does verse 26 add?

▼ **Apply**

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What will it mean for you to hate your "life in this world" this week?

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In which areas of your life do you find it particularly hard to do this?

Pray that God will keep your eyes on the prize that Jesus promises.



Drawn to the cross

Why did Jesus die? Today's passage gives us some vital answers.

An amazing prayer

Read John 12:27-29

- ⌚ *What does Jesus not pray? Why not?*
- ⌚ *What does he pray?*
- ⌚ *How is his prayer answered?*

The "hour" is the time of Jesus' crucifixion. He can't pray to avoid it, because it is the whole reason he came to earth. He didn't come to teach or work miracles; he came to die.

So Jesus prays for the Father to be glorified—that is, for people to see what the Father is like and how wonderful he is. The Father replies that they have already begun to see this (in Jesus' life) and will see it even more (in Jesus' death). God is the great Lover and wonderful Rescuer; the cross shows them both.

A wonderful victory

Read John 12:30-34

- ⌚ *Who will be affected by the cross, and how (v 31-32)?*
- ⌚ *What issue do the crowd raise (v 34)? How do the events of Jesus' death and resurrection answer their (valid) question?*

- The "world" in John means people ignoring God. All the things they value, all their cleverness and pride, will be shown to be empty and vain.

- The cross is the defeat of Satan. His only power is our guilt and sin; when our sin is paid for, his power is emptied.
- "All people" means all kinds of people without distinction, rather than all people without exception. The cross is the great attractor: men and women, rich and poor, black and white, come to the cross for forgiveness.

A Secretary-General of the United Nations once said that only at the cross can the nations of the world truly be United Nations.

An urgent response

Read John 12:35-36

- ⌚ *Why is it so urgent for them to respond to Jesus?*
- ⌚ *What happens at the end of verse 36?*

It is deeply symbolic. Jesus has said and done so many wonderful things, and still they don't believe. Time is running out for them.

▲ Pray

Pray for a clear understanding of the cross and for urgent repentance today, coming to the foot of the cross again with humble gratitude.

Hidden Jesus, hidden belief

Does Jesus ever actively hide himself from people? Yes, he does! In today's and tomorrow's passages, John is going to sum up the first half of his Gospel.

It's a sad story of Jesus hiding from those who will not see him.

Hidden Jesus

Read John 12:36b-37

• What had Jesus done "in their presence"?

That has been the story of the Gospel so far, the "signs" Jesus did.

• What was the response (for the most part)?

It's a fulfilment of 1:10-11. So the big question is why? Why didn't they believe? They saw the most amazing miracles the world has ever seen and heard the most astonishing teaching.

John answers this from the Old Testament...

Read John 12:38-41

The quotations are from Isaiah 53:1 and Isaiah 6:10.

• What does the first quotation say?

• What response did Isaiah get to his message?

• How does the second quotation help us understand why Isaiah didn't get a better response to his preaching?

... TIME OUT ...

Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12

• What was Isaiah's message?

• Why do you think it wasn't a popular one?

Read Isaiah 6:1-13

• Who did Isaiah see, according to John 12:41?

• How would people respond? Why?

There is a mystery here. God is not taken by surprise by people not believing. In some strange way he even causes it. But what he loves to do is to open blind eyes and heal sin-sick hearts.

Hidden believers

Read John 12:42-43

• What was going on in the hearts of some of the leaders?

• Why were they silent about what they were beginning to think about Jesus?

We met the same fear of being put "out of the synagogue" in the parents of the man born blind (9:22).

Pray

Pray that you will love God's praise more than being popular with people, and show that in how you live. Pray that your faith would be public as well as private.



Final public statement

We are very interested in people's last words. Today we read the last time Jesus ever says anything in public. It is, in a sense, his last words to a world that won't listen.

Light from the Father

Read John 12:44-45

- ❶ *How does Jesus twice describe the Father (once in verse 44, once in verse 45)?*
- ❷ *What two things does Jesus say about himself and the Father?*

In a way, these are two ways of saying the same thing: to “look at” Jesus means to look at him on the cross with trust. We see this in 3:14-15, where the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent to show they believed in its healing power. In the same way, we are to look at Jesus and trust his cross.

Read John 12:46

If Jesus is sent by the Father, then he is the only Source of light and life (1:4-5).

▲ Pray

Praise Jesus that to believe and “see” him is to believe and see the Father and walk in the light.

Words from the Father

Read John 12:47-50

Jesus is speaking to people who refused to believe what he said.

- ❶ *How is a non-Christian defined (v 47)?*

There's a warning here—being a Christian is more than just knowing what Jesus says.

- ❷ *Why did Jesus come into the world?*
- ❸ *When will the non-Christian be judged, and how (v 48)?*

Now is the time of opportunity, when we can turn to Jesus and be saved. On “the last day” it will be too late. The word Jesus spoke (his whole message) will condemn us.

- ❹ *How do verses 49-50 give the reason why the word Jesus spoke will be our judge?*

▼ Apply

- ❺ *Why is it so important not just to have a belief in “God” but to listen to and obey Jesus?*
- ❻ *In talking to others, why is it so important to try to talk about Jesus rather than just about God or spirituality or church?*

Pray for that Jesus-focus in your conversations, and encourage other Christians to do the same.