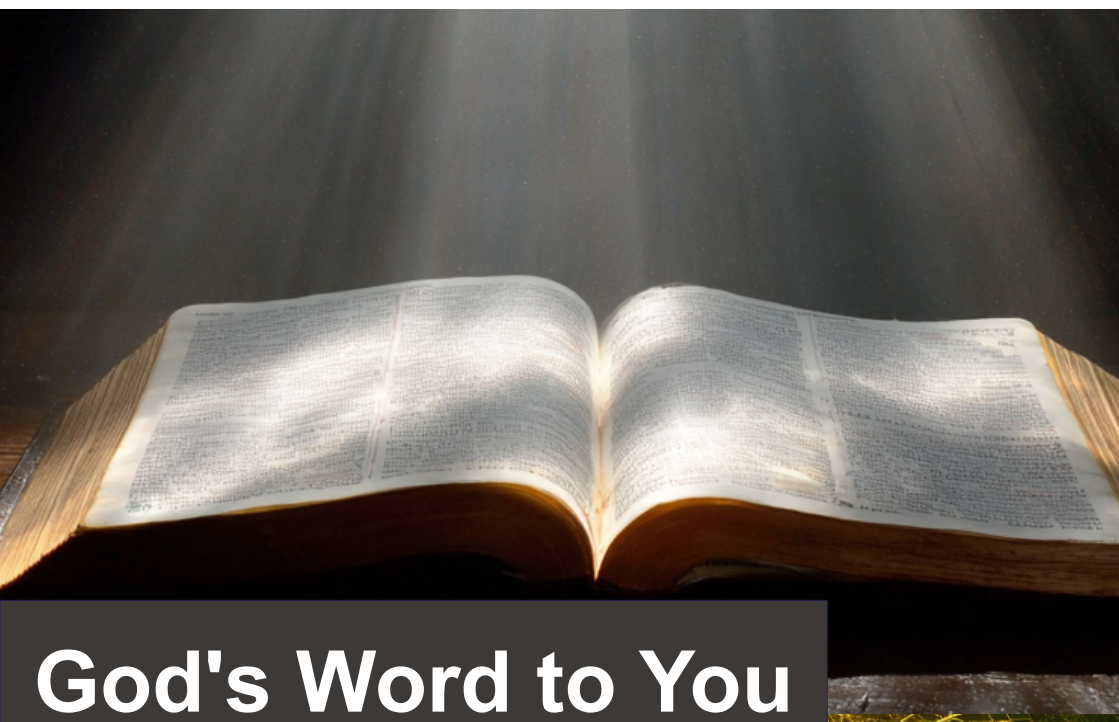




Next Steps - Foundations



God's Word to You

finding your way around the bible

www.c3churchgoulburn.com

Welcome

Welcome to **Next Steps — Walking the Discipleship Pathway**.

We are so glad you are here. Whether you have just made a decision to follow Jesus, or you have been a Christian for a while and want to grow deeper in your faith, this pathway has been designed with you in mind.

At C3 Church Goulburn, we believe that following Jesus is the greatest adventure life has to offer.

On a personal note — I want to tell you something a little embarrassing. Before I became a Christian, I tried to read the Bible. I really did. But I couldn't make sense of it. It felt distant, strange and frankly impenetrable. I found it so frustrating that one day I actually threw my Bible against the wall in anger. Then I gave my life to Jesus. And something remarkable happened. I picked up that same Bible — the same words on the same pages — and I loved it. I couldn't get enough of it. The words that had seemed like a foreign language suddenly felt like they were written for me.

Nothing had changed about the Book. Everything had changed about me.

That experience taught me something I have never forgotten: the Bible is not just a book you read. It is a living Word that reads you — and you need the Holy Spirit's help to fully receive

I hope this booklet helps you find your way into the most extraordinary book ever written.

Ps Fiona

How to Use This Booklet

This booklet is yours to work through at your own pace. There is no rush.

You can:

- Read through it on your own and reflect personally.
- Work through it with a leader or mentor.
- Do a bit of both — read ahead, then chat it through

Each section includes some teaching, key bible passages to look up, reflection questions and space to journal your thoughts.

Don't skip the writing spaces — sometimes the most important discoveries happen when we put pen to paper.

You might like to speak to a leader once you have finished this step to be advised on how to continue.

What is the Bible?

Let's start at the very beginning.

The Bible is not just a book. It is a library — 66 books written by approximately 40 different authors over a period of around 1,500 years, across three different continents, in three different languages. And yet from beginning to end it tells one coherent, unified story — the story of God's relentless love for humanity and His plan to rescue and restore what was lost.

That kind of consistency across that kind of diversity is itself remarkable. But the Bible makes an even more extraordinary claim about itself:

2 Timothy 3:16-17

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

God-breathed. The Greek word is *theopneustos* — literally, breathed out by God. This does not mean God dictated the Bible word for word like a robotic secretary taking notes. It means that the human authors — each with their own personality, style and cultural context — wrote under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that what they produced was exactly what God intended.

The Bible is both fully human and fully divine — much like Jesus Himself.

Why should we trust it?

This is a fair question — and one worth sitting with honestly.

The Bible is the most historically documented ancient text in existence. There are over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament alone — more than any other ancient document by a significant margin. The gap between when the New Testament events occurred and our earliest manuscripts is remarkably small compared to other ancient writings we accept without question.

Archaeologists have consistently found that the historical details of scripture — places, people, customs, political structures — align with what we discover on the ground. The Bible has never been proven historically false.

But beyond the historical evidence, there is a more personal reason to trust it — and Ps Fiona's story on the previous page points to it. The Bible has a track record of changing lives. Not just improving them or inspiring them — fundamentally transforming them. Across every culture, every century, every language, the same book produces the same result: people who encounter it genuinely meet God.



Read Psalm 119:105

David describes God's word as "a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." What does it mean to you that God has given us something to illuminate the way ahead?

The bible is alive

Here is what makes the Bible utterly unique among all the books ever written:

Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

Alive and active. Not was alive — is alive. Right now. The Bible is not a historical record of what God said — it is the living voice of a God who is still speaking.

This means that when you open your Bible, you are not just reading ancient literature. You are entering a conversation with the living God. And He has things to say to you — specifically, personally, directly — through these pages.

† *Have you ever had an experience of a scripture seeming to speak directly into your situation? What happened?*

Finding Your Way Around

Opening a Bible for the first time can feel a little overwhelming. So let's take a quick tour.

The big picture

The Old Testament — 39 books covering creation, the history of God's people Israel, the law, poetry, wisdom literature and the writings of the prophets. It points forward to a coming Messiah — a Saviour who will make everything right.

The New Testament — 27 books covering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus (*the Messiah the Old Testament was pointing to*), the birth and growth of the early church, letters written to new Christian communities, and a vision of the end of all things and the new creation.

Together they tell one story: God made a good world, humanity broke relationship with Him through sin, God refused to abandon what He made, and through Jesus He made a way back — and one day He will restore everything completely.

The different types of books

Not every book in the Bible reads the same way — because they weren't all written in the same style. Here is a simple guide:

Law — the first five books (*Genesis to Deuteronomy*), also called the Torah or Pentateuch. They cover creation, the beginnings of humanity, and God's covenant with Israel including the Mosaic law.

History — books like Joshua, Judges, Kings and Chronicles that tell the story of Israel as a nation — their victories, failures, exile and return.

Poetry and Wisdom — books like Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Job. These are not meant to be read as theological propositions but as honest, often raw, human responses to God and to life.

Prophecy — the major and minor prophets (*Isaiah through Malachi*) — God's words to His people through human messengers, calling them back, warning of consequences, and promising a future hope.

Gospels — Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — four accounts of the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus, each written for a different audience and with a different emphasis.

Acts — the story of the early church and the spread of the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Letters (Epistles) — most of the New Testament from Romans to Jude. These are letters written by apostles to specific churches and individuals, dealing with theology, practical Christian living and community life.

Apocalyptic literature — primarily Revelation, and parts of Daniel. These books use symbolic language to communicate spiritual realities and future hope.



Read 2 Peter 1:20-21

Peter says that prophecy never had its origin in the human will — that people spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. How does it change the way you approach the Bible to know that its authors were writing under the Spirit's guidance?

Where should I start?

This is one of the most common questions new Bible readers ask — and the answer is probably not what you expect.

Don't start at Genesis 1 and read straight through. Many people try this and get bogged down somewhere in Leviticus. The Bible is not designed to be read like a novel from cover to cover.

Start with the Gospels — particularly the Gospel of John or the Gospel of Mark. John gives you the theological depth of who Jesus is. Mark gives you the fast-paced action of what Jesus did. Either one will ground you in the person at the centre of the whole story.

Then read Acts — to see what happens when the risen Jesus sends His Spirit and a movement is born. Then dip into the letters. Come back to the Old Testament with the New Testament as your framework — it will make much more sense once you understand the story it was pointing toward.

Logos and Rhema - 2 kinds of words

This is one of the most exciting discoveries you will make as a bible reader — and it helps explain an experience that many Christians have but struggle to find words for.

The New Testament was written in Greek, and Greek has two different words that we translate as "word" in English:

Logos — the written Word. The text itself. The inspired, authoritative, complete revelation of God in scripture. When John opens his gospel with "In the beginning was the Word" — that is *logos*. It refers to the entire, settled, objective revelation of God.

Rhema — the living, spoken word. A specific word from God that He speaks into a specific situation at a specific moment. It is what happens when the Holy Spirit takes a *logos* scripture and makes it suddenly, powerfully alive and personal to you.

You may have experienced this without having a name for it. You are going through something difficult — a decision, a loss, a fear — and you open your Bible or hear a verse quoted, and it is as if God has reached through the page and spoken directly to your heart. The words seem to lift off the page. They are not just generally true — they are true for you, right now, in this moment.

That is *rhema*. And it is one of the most precious gifts of the Christian life.

Romans 10:17

"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word (rhema) of God."

Notice that Paul uses *rhema* here — not just the written word in general, but the living, spoken, Spirit-breathed word that lands in your heart and produces faith.

The Holy Spirit is your teacher

This is why you cannot fully understand the Bible on your own — and why reading it is fundamentally different from reading any other book.

1 Corinthians 2:14

"But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

Before we come to faith, the Bible can feel impenetrable — strange, irrelevant, even frustrating. This is not a failure of intelligence or education. It is simply that spiritual things require spiritual capacity to receive. The Holy Spirit is the one who opens our eyes to understand what God has written.

This is why Jesus promised His disciples:

John 6:13

"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth."

Every time you open your Bible, you have a Teacher. The same Spirit who inspired the writing of scripture is present with you as you read it. His job — and He takes it seriously — is to lead you into truth, to illuminate what you read, and to make the logos come alive as rhema in your heart.

A simple but powerful habit: before you open your Bible, pause and ask the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. Something as simple as: "Holy Spirit, open my eyes. Speak to me through your Word today." And then read expectantly — not just for information, but for encounter.



Read Psalm 119:18

"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law." Make this your prayer before you read scripture this week.

- † Can you think of a time when a scripture seemed to come alive for you in a specific situation? What was it, and what difference did it make?

How To Read and Understand the Bible

Now let's get practical about how to actually read and understand what you are reading.

James 4:7

"Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."

The most common mistake people make when reading the Bible is pulling a single verse out of its context and treating it as a standalone statement. Context is everything.

Every verse sits within:

- A paragraph — what is the immediate passage about?
- A chapter — what is the broader section about?
- A book — what is the author's overall purpose?
- A testament — is this Old or New Covenant?
- The whole Bible — how does this fit the overall story?

A famous example: Jeremiah 29:11 — *"For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* This is a wonderful and true promise — but it was written to Israelites who were about to spend seventy years in Babylonian exile. Understanding that context doesn't make the promise less true — it actually makes it more remarkable.

Ask good questions of the text

When you read a passage, try asking these simple questions:

- What does it say? — Read carefully and slowly. Don't rush past words. What is actually on the page?
- What does it mean? — What was the author communicating to the original readers? What is the main point?
- What does it mean for me? — How does this truth apply to my life, my situation, my decisions today?

This simple framework — Observation, Interpretation, Application — is the foundation of good Bible reading.

Different translations

The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (Old Testament) and Greek (New Testament). Every English Bible is a translation — and different translations make different choices about how to balance accuracy with readability.

Some helpful translations:

- NIV (New International Version) — readable and accurate, good for everyday reading
- NKJV (New King James Version) — dignified language, very accurate to the original
- ESV (English Standard Version) — very accurate, slightly more formal
- NLT (New Living Translation) — very readable, excellent for new believers or devotional reading
- The Message — a paraphrase rather than a translation, very contemporary — good for fresh perspective but not for detailed study

There is no single "best" translation. Many mature Bible readers use more than one — reading a passage in two translations can often shed new light on what the original is saying.



Read Joshua 1:8

God tells Joshua to meditate on the Book of the Law "day and night." The Hebrew word for meditate means to mutter or murmur — to turn words over quietly in your mouth. What would it look like for you to "meditate" on scripture rather than just read it?

Every honest Bible reader will tell you — there are passages that are difficult. Passages that seem to contradict each other. Passages that raise hard questions about God's character or actions.

This is okay. In fact it is healthy.

The Bible does not ask you to switch off your brain. It invites genuine wrestling — like Jacob wrestling with God through the night (Genesis 32). Some questions have good answers that take a bit of digging to find. Some questions require humility — acknowledging that we are finite creatures trying to understand an infinite God.

Making It A Daily Habit

Knowing what the Bible is and how to read it is one thing. Building a daily rhythm of actually reading it is another — and in an age of constant digital distraction, it is one of the most countercultural and spiritually significant things you can do.

Let's be honest about the challenge. The average person checks their phone within minutes of waking up. Social media, news, messages and videos compete constantly for our attention. Our capacity for sustained, focused reading is being quietly eroded — not through any dramatic decision, but through thousands of small daily choices to reach for the quick and the instant.

The Bible requires something different from us. It asks us to slow down. To sit with words. To read a passage not once but several times. To let silence exist around it. To resist the urge to immediately move on to the next thing.

This is actually a gift — not a burden. In a world that is constantly pulling our attention outward, the Bible calls us inward and upward. The very discipline of reading it trains us in the kind of focused, unhurried presence that deepens not just our faith but our whole humanity.

Practical steps to build the habit

Choose a time — the best time to read your Bible is the time you will actually keep. Many people find that morning works well — before the demands of the day crowd in. Others find evening better. What matters is consistency, not perfection.



Read Psalm 5:3

"In the morning, Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait expectantly." What time of day could you set aside for regular time in God's Word?

Choose a place — find a quiet spot where you can be away from distractions. Jesus talked about going into your room and closing the door (Matthew 6:6). A dedicated space signals to your mind and heart that this is a different kind of time.

Put your phone away — or at the very least, turn off notifications. If you use a Bible app, turn your phone to Do Not Disturb first. Better still, use a physical Bible — the act of holding the actual book, turning actual pages, is itself significant. You are less likely to get distracted, and there is something about the physicality of it that honours the weight of what you are reading.

Start small and build — don't commit to reading five chapters a day if you are just beginning. Start with a paragraph or a short passage. Read it slowly. Read it again. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak. Write down what stands out. Five focused minutes is worth more than twenty distracted ones.

Use a reading plan — having a structured plan removes the daily decision of "what should I read?" and helps you work through the Bible systematically over time. Your leader can suggest a good plan to start with, or there are many available through Bible apps like YouVersion.

Write it down — keeping a simple journal of what you read and what stands out is one of the most powerful tools for retaining and applying what God speaks to you. Over time, your journal becomes a record of God's faithfulness — a written history of rhema moments that you can return to.

Be patient with yourself — there will be days when you don't feel anything. Days when the words feel flat and nothing seems to connect. This is normal. Every relationship has dry seasons. Keep showing up. The discipline of consistency honours God even when the feeling isn't there — and the feeling always returns.

† *What is the biggest practical obstacle to you reading your Bible regularly? Write it down honestly — and then write one specific step you could take to address it.*

Reflect and Respond

Take some time to work through these questions honestly. There are no right or wrong answers — this is between you and God.

1. Before reading this booklet, what was your relationship with the Bible like? Did you find it approachable or intimidating? Has anything shifted for

2. 2 Timothy 3:16 says all scripture is "God-breathed." What does it mean to you personally that the Bible is not just a human document but something God breathed out — that His very breath is in these words?

3. Have you experienced the difference between reading the Bible as information and having a scripture come alive for you personally — a rhema moment? Describe what happened, or describe what you hope that might look like.

4. The Holy Spirit is your teacher when you read scripture. How does that change the way you approach your Bible reading? What would it look like to be more intentional about inviting His help?

Your Next Step

You have taken a significant step by working through this booklet — and not just by learning about the Bible, but by beginning to encounter the living God through His Word.

Here is what we want you to know: this is just the beginning of a lifelong conversation. The Bible is not a book you finish and put down. It is a well that never runs dry. You will read the same passages in different seasons of your life and find that they speak entirely new things — because you are different, your circumstances are different, and the Holy Spirit has new things to say.

Come back to it. Keep coming back to it. Let it become the most familiar book in your life — more familiar than anything else you read, more formative than anything else you consume.

Some practical next steps:

Get a good Bible — if you don't have one you love, speak to a leader about finding a translation that works for you. A Bible you enjoy reading is a Bible you will actually read.

Start a reading plan — ask a leader to recommend a plan suited to where you are. The **YouVersion** Bible app has hundreds of free reading plans at every level.

Join a home group — one of the best contexts for growing in the Word is a small group of believers who are reading and discussing scripture together. Iron sharpens iron — and other people's insights will open up things you would never have seen alone.

Keep a journal — begin recording what God speaks to you through scripture. Date it. Write it down. Over time it will become one of your most treasured possessions.

Hebrews 4:12

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart."

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Open the Book. He is waiting to meet you there.

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A Christ-Centred Community

C3 Church Goulburn

Goulburn Community Centre
155 Auburn St Goulburn

Ph 02 48639942

Email get-in-touch@c3hurchgoulburn.com

Service Times Sundays @ 4pm



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