

one & one

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Matthew | 1Thessalonians | Genesis

24 studies for Bible-reading partnerships

Andrew Cornes

Introduction Why read the Bible together?

“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 their 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: Matthew 26 – 28 (sessions 1-8); 1 Thessalonians (sessions 9-16); Genesis 1 – 12 (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, we hope that you will be able to 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.
- 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 are some suggestions: in each case, the first book is slimmer and the second a little more detailed.

MATTHEW 26 – 28

- M. Green, *The Message of Matthew*, IVP
- R. T. France, *Matthew*, IVP

1 THESSALONIANS

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

GENESIS 1-12

- D. Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11*, IVP
- D. Kidner, *Genesis*, IVP

Matthew 26 – 28

Learning from Matthew's
account of Jesus' trial,
death and rising again

Why it happened and why we're told it happened

Today's passage: **Matthew 26 v 1-16**

The Gospels put us in touch with two periods: the time of Jesus and the time of the Gospel writer. God can teach us truths both from what Jesus said and did and from how the Gospel writer explains the story, and why he includes it in his book. When reading the Gospels, it is good to get into the habit of regularly asking 2 questions:

- Why did Jesus say this (or do that)?
- Why did Matthew (or another Gospel writer) choose to include this story?

The same applies to any narrative [= history] part of the Bible. We can, for example, ask both “Why did David act with such courage towards Goliath?” and “Why did the writer of 1 Samuel choose to include this story?”

A JESUS' DEATH PREDICTED

Read verses 1-2

- 1 Why did Jesus tell His disciples in advance about His crucifixion (v 1-2)?

- 2 Why does Matthew tell us in advance about Jesus' crucifixion (v 1-2)?

B JESUS' DEATH PLOTTED

Read verses 3-5

- 3 What were the Jewish authorities afraid of in Jesus and in the people (v 3-5)?

- 4 Why does Matthew tell us this straight after Jesus' prediction (v 1-5)?
What's the irony?

C JESUS' DEATH PREPARED FOR

Read verses 6-13

- 5 In what ways was the woman's act not a waste (v 6-13)?
- 6 In what way(s) does the woman "prepare Jesus for burial" (v 12)?
- 7 Why does Matthew include this story in the Passion narrative (v 6-13)?
- 8 What extravagant thing might God be asking you to do for Jesus (v 6-13)?

D JESUS' DEATH PAID FOR

Read verses 14-16

- 9 What do these verses tell us about how tragic Judas' betrayal is (v 14-16)?
- 10 Why does Matthew include this story straight after the woman and her ointment (v 6-16)?

E PRAYING TOGETHER

- Praise Jesus for what you have seen of His authority and character in this passage.
- Pray for your Bible-reading partner that (s)he will serve Jesus extravagantly, especially in any way (s)he may have mentioned in answer to question 8.

Today's passage: Matthew 26 v 17-30

There are two dangers in reading parts of the Bible with which we are very familiar, like Matthew 26 – 28: one is to read quickly and superficially, thinking we know the story already; the other is to read into the Bible account more than is actually there. It is always worth asking:

- What are the parts of his account which the writer thought were most important?
- What did he mean us to learn from them?

A THE PASSOVER MEAL: BETRAYAL PREDICTED

Read verses 17-25

- 1 In verses 17-19, what is the most striking thing that Jesus says? What does it tell us about Jesus?
- 2 What did Jesus want His disciples to learn as He spoke about His betrayal (v 20-25)?
- 3 What did Jesus want Judas to learn as He (Jesus) spoke about His betrayal (v 20-25)?

- 4 What betrayals of Jesus should make us “very sorrowful” (v 22)?

B THE PASSOVER MEAL: BREAD AND WINE REINTERPRETED

Read verses 26-30

- 5 How is the bread of the Last Supper a picture of Christ’s body (v 26)?
- 6 What do Christ’s words about the cup tell us about His death (v 27-28)?
- 7 Jesus’ “drink[ing] it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” probably means: at the end of time (see 8 v 11; 25 v 10). Is Jesus giving the disciples bad news or good news in verse 29? Why?
- 8 How will this passage’s teaching enrich the next time you take Communion / the Lord’s Supper?

C PRAYING TOGETHER

- Pray for those (perhaps including yourself) who have betrayed Jesus.
- Pray for your Bible-reading partner’s response to Jesus as (s)he next shares in Communion / the Lord’s Supper, especially in the light of your answers to question 8.