How to use explore



Issue 112

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.

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

> Find a place where you can be quiet

> > and think

Carefully read through the

Bible passage

for today

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.

6

Pray about

what you

have read

Ask God

Ask God to help you understand

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. Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think

5



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 2025. This year, each day explores a different genre of the Bible. On Sundays, you'll read from a New Testament epistle; on Mondays, from the first five books of the Bible ("the Law"); Tuesdays cover Old Testament history books; Wednesdays enjoy the Psalms and Thursdays Old Testament poetry; Fridays focus on the prophets, and then on Saturdays you'll read through the Gospels. You can find the original version at bible-reading.com/ bible-plan/html.
- 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!



Carl Laferton is the Editorial Director of The Good Book Company



TITUS: The good life

Paul wanted Titus to lead a group of Christians on Crete to be church in a way that kept the gospel central to life, growth and mission.

As we read through this small but practical letter, we will be challenged to live the godly life, the missional life... the good life.

Read Titus 1:1-4

- ② What do you think makes a good church leader?
- What do verses 1-2 tell us about Paul's aim in his ministry?
- Why does he feel he needs to say that God "does not lie" (v 2)?

Paul is writing to a young man, Titus, who is the leader of a small church in a culture that is filled with lies and ungodliness (1:12). Paul's first goal was to bring to saving faith those whom God had chosen to be saved (the elect).

Reaching the elect

Reread Titus 1:1-4

A lot of Christians struggle with the Bible truth of election.

- How does God make his eternal purposes and promises known (v 3)?
- Why might the truth of God's election discourage us from evangelising?
- What does this truth lead Paul to spend his time doing (v 3)?

Have you ever thought like this? "Since God has already chosen who he will save, our efforts won't save someone he hasn't chosen:

and he'll save someone he has chosen, even if we don't bother to evangelise."

It's not uncommon for Christians to wrestle with this, but it is wrong thinking. The main thing that stops me witnessing about Christ is the feeling that it will be a waste of time. If I invite my neighbour to an evangelistic event, they will almost certainly say no. If I share the gospel with someone at a party, then they will probably edge away from me. And so I do not bother.

But this is not how Paul saw it: God has done the choosing, so God will do the persuading. All Paul had to do was to find the elect—and he did that by preaching the gospel to everyone without discrimination. And then following that up by encouraging the elect to live godly lives in response to the grace of God shown to them.

Apply

The truth is that what you do for the gospel today has eternal implications. When you tell someone about Jesus, eternity is entering history. When someone becomes a Christian, that is an event with eternal implications. When you meet as church, it is the most significant event happening in your town.

- How does this excite you today?
- How should it change your priorities for your week?

A model for ministry

Paul is not simply describing his ministry; he is providing a model for Titus' ministry, and for ministry in every time and place, including yours...

Read Titus 1:5-9

- **?** Why did Paul leave Titus in Crete (v 5)?
- What should a leader's home life be like?
- What should a leader's character be like (both negatively and positively)?
- **?** What else must a leader do (v 9)?

What do you look for in a leader? We often look for skills—good preaching, a dynamic personality, a pastoral touch, good strategy, administrative capabilities. But Paul is much more interested in the godly character of a person. If you are a leader in your church or home group, then verses 5-9 show the kind of leader you should be. If you are not a leader, then this is the kind of leader you should expect and (if you have them) enjoy. Pray that the leaders in your church will be people like this.

··· TIME OUT

Take each one of these descriptions, and think about them in turn.

What effect would it have on the church if a leader failed to have these qualities?

Family man

The emphasis is more on confession (their belief and teaching) and character (their personal godliness) than on competence (their skills), but Paul especially focuses on the home life of a leader.

- What particular features of home life should we look for in our leaders?
- **②** Why are these particularly important?

"Blameless" (v 6) does not mean entirely without fault. No leader is perfect; and we need to remember neither to pretend they are perfect nor demand it. "Blameless" *does* mean to have a good reputation, against which an accusation cannot be made.

"Faithful to his wife" (v 6) simply means a "one-woman man". In other words, this does not exclude single men. Rather, it means we are to look for men (if married) with a strong marriage, who are committed to their wife, who care for her, and who have no history of flirting with other women.

The same kind of clarification applies to the next phrase: "a man whose children believe". The word "children" here implies small children. Most children in their early years believe what their parents believe. So the beliefs of young children will reflect their home life; and Paul wants to appoint elders whose children's beliefs reflect a home life built around the Christian faith.

Pray

Use this passage to shape your prayers for all those who lead in your church: the pastors and preachers, the Bible-study leaders, the children's group teachers and all who serve with an open Bible.



How not to grow

Imagine you are talking to a brand new Christian, and want to offer them advice as they start in the faith. What is the biggest danger you would warn them about?

What do you think is the biggest danger to Christian growth?

Read Titus 1:10-16

• What is the biggest danger that Paul warns Titus to beware of in his congregation? (See 1:5.)

The surprising answer given in these verses is that *following rules* is a danger to true godliness. Paul had preached the gospel, seen converts and formed churches. But he had left before he could finish the process by appointing leaders. So Titus has been left to finish what is unfinished, and that means the appointment of leaders. But in the meantime, "rebellious people" have arisen (v 10). Disorder has entered the church. So Titus must also order what is disordered.

Handling heresy

- Who does Paul identify as the "rebellious people" at the end of verse 10?
- What does Titus need to do with these people, and why (v 11)?
- What does Titus need to do with those who are listening to them, and why (v 12-14)?

Paul's solution to a disordered church is the appointment of leaders. Notice the word "for" at the beginning of verse 10. Paul tells Titus to appoint elders *for*—because—there are many rebellious people. The solution for rebellion is... more authority! But this

is not overbearing and repressive; it is gospel-centred authority. It is people who disciple others with the gospel. Finishing what is unfinished and ordering what is disordered involves the same task: appointing leaders.

• And what must Titus and the other leaders do to combat both heresy and ungodliness (v 1-3)?

John Stott said, "When false teachers increase, [we must] multiply the number of true teachers".

Handling legalism

We are all called to commend the gospel to one another so that we live gospel-shaped lives that are fit for purpose—the purpose of doing good. And we will only do this as we learn to live out the gospel, enjoying God's good gifts in a way that brings glory to him and good to us. Legalistic abstention is no more the gospel of grace than licentious abuse is; and running to the first extreme in order to escape the other is to swap one error for another.

Apply

- I wish our church would give us some clearer rules on how to be godly." What would you reply to this statement?
- Are there ways in which you are tempted to reduce the demands of godly living by turning it into a set of dos and don'ts?



3

The gorgeous gospel

After exposing the self-willed and self-righteous teachers in chapter 1, Paul now moves on to show Titus what "sound doctrine" will produce in the lives of the hearers.

The word "sound" means "healthy". This is teaching that leads to spiritual and emotional health. Titus is to lead his people to a healthy life or a good life, which is characterised by good works. So what does this good life look like?

The phases of life

Read Titus 2:1-8

Titus must "teach ... sound doctrine" (v I), and the life that flows from it.

- What particular challenges do these verses suggest will be faced by...
 - older men (v 1-2)?
 - older women (v 3)?
 - younger women (v 4-5)?
 - younger men (v 6-7)?
- What command is repeated for most of the groups? Why do you think that is?
- As well as teach, what must Titus make sure he also does (v 7-8a)? Why?

Titus will refute the opposition by making his life match the content of his teaching. He is to model the impact of God's grace in his life, as he tells others how God's grace should be at work in their lives.

Apply

Which of these groups do you fall into? Do you recognise the particular temptations in yourself, and others in your category at church? What will you pray for yourself and for those in the same season of life?

Your place in the world

Read Titus 2:9-10

- **?** What does Paul encourage slaves to do?
- For what purpose?
- How is this the same for others (v 5, 8)?

It's easy to get bogged down in questions of whether Paul is endorsing slavery here, and so miss the (much) bigger issue. In a culture where lying and cheating were considered normal, a slave who was obedient. eager to please, respectful and trustworthy was a staggering testimony to the gospel of grace. The same holds true for young women (v 5) who are positive, kind and committed to their marriages (v 5); and for a teacher who walks the walk, and doesn't just talk the talk (v 8). It all tracks back to 1:1-3. What matters most is proclaiming the gospel; and the shining example of lives that are radically different from the culture show how beautiful our gospel really is.

Pray

Pray that your actions, attitudes and words commend that beautiful gospel to others today.

Judgment Name

Ultimately, there's only one opinion that matters—whether we like it or not. So we can, and must, live with an audience of one.

This psalm has a very different tone from the previous two!

God's Name

Read Psalm 75:1

• What is Asaph praising God for?

God's Name is the revelation of his character and the summary of his God-ness, or "glory". (See Exodus 33:18-19; 34:5-7.)

Read John 1:12-14: Acts 4:12

We live in a privileged time when we can see how God's Name came so close as to be touchable. God's Name lived in a skin. God's glory has been seen because God's Son came from heaven to earth. He revealed the nature of God, "full of grace and truth". And, having saved his people, he now dwells in his people, by his Spirit.

Pray

Praise God that his Name came near in Jesus, to allow you to come near to him in eternity. Praise God that his Name lives in you by his Spirit, to walk you through this life to his home in eternity. Praise him, for his Name is near.

God's purpose

Read Psalm 75:2-10

What did God's Name come near to "say" (v 2)?

• Why is this good news (v 3-5)?

Again, we are being pointed to Jesus. Yes, he came to offer salvation. But he also came to promise justice. He gave warnings as well as invitations. And his was a ministry of reversal—he brought down those who had exalted themselves in power or in self-right-eousness, and he lifted high those who were humble and powerless. At his birth, the old prophet Simeon predicted that Jesus was "destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel" (Luke 2:34); about his resurrection, the apostle Paul said it was the "proof" that God "has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed" (Acts 17:31).

What has God prepared for "all the wicked of the earth" (Psalm 75:8)?

This is a picture of a king being poisoned, not a lively dinner party. And, since we are sinners—"wicked"—our cup must be drunk. We like to identify with the righteous of verse 10, but our behaviour is that of the arrogant and boastful. Only once we feel the weight of this can we appreciate what Jesus did on the cross—read Luke 22:41-44.

Pray

Thank the Lord that he took the cup prepared for you. Pray for an opportunity to tell of that "wonderful deed" today. Pray that his verdict on you—sinful, yet forgiven—would be what matters most to you today.



The heart of the gospel

How we live and what we believe are intimately connected. When we get the gospel wrong, we live wrongly. But when we see the gospel in all its glory, we start to live rightly.

What different motivations do people have for living in the way God wants?

Read Titus 2:11-15

There are many people who strive to live a godly life out of fear, guilt or a desire to escape hell or pay their way into heaven.

- What is the central motivation for living a godly life in these verses?
- Why do we need reminding of this?
- How does grace "teach us" to live a godly life?

Grace teaches us to control ourselves and our passions. It teaches us to treat other people in an "upright" or "just" manner. And it teaches us to be "godly"—that is, to relate to God rightly.

But what enables and energises this life is God's grace. God's grace is our teacher. There will be times when you need to tell people what a good life looks like. That is what verses I-IO are for. But if you want people *actually to live* a good life, then do not emphasise the good they must do for God. Instead, emphasise the good God has done for them. But what does the gospel give us?

A new hope

- What are Christians waiting for (v 13)?
- How does this help us to live for Jesus now?

There is, if you like, both a push and a pull in Christian living. We are pushed from behind by the wonder of grace and we are pulled forward by the hope of glory.

This is why Paul's language is so significant. He does not refer simply to the return of Christ. He refers to the appearing of glory. The attractions of this world do not gleam so brightly when compared with the treasures of the world to come. The pleasures of sin do not attract so strongly when compared with the glory and joy of the world to come.

A new love

• What did Jesus do for us (v 14)?

Why do I serve my wife? I do not have to win her love. She has already given herself to me. I serve my wife because I love her, and my love for her is fed by her love for me.

Why do I serve my Saviour? Not because I must. I do not have to win his love. He has already given himself for me. I serve my Saviour because I love him, and my love for him is fed by his love for me.

A new identity

In Christ, we are members of the royal family of the universe (v 14). That is our status, and we cannot lose it. And our behaviour should match who we are. Royal children have royal manners.

Grace and glory

The key to understanding how to live the Christian life is not just to know **who** we are, but also to appreciate **when** we are...

Read Titus 2:11-15

The first appearance

- **3** What has appeared, and what is significant about that (v 11)?
- **?** What event do you think Paul is referring to?

Jesus' life, death and resurrection are historical facts that the gospel message is based on. This is what Paul outlines in I Corinthians 15:1-10. But his appearing was for a reason: to show the grace of God by offering salvation to everyone. Note that Paul is not teaching that everyone will be saved. He is clear elsewhere that not everyone will escape hell (2 Thessalonians 1:6-10). Paul is teaching not that all people will be saved, but that what God has done means that all the kinds of people identified in Titus 2:1-10 can be saved.

The second appearance

- What will appear in the future (v 13)?
- ② So what are Christians waiting for?

We often talk about "the return of Christ", or "the second coming". But the New Testament speaks much more often of Christ's appearing than of his coming. The idea is that Christ now reigns in heaven and he is glorified. But that reign and that glory are currently hidden from plain sight. As you look around the world, the authority of Jesus is not visible. But one day his glory will be

revealed. One day every knee will bow before him (Philippians 2:10). What is now true but hidden will one day be revealed for all to see. When Christ comes, we will not see anything that is new. What will be different is that everyone will see what now we only see by faith.

We are waiting for Jesus to appear, because that will be the start of our amazing future. It will be "blessed" (a life in which we enjoy being the people we were designed to be). It is a "hope"—not uncertain, but something that we can have a joyful confidence about.

Living in-between

We live for our future hope, in the confidence that comes from knowing that his grace has already appeared.

- How does knowing "when we are" change everything about our life now? How do we think about...
 - our mistakes now?
 - our regrets about the past?
 - the parts of life we find wonderful?
 - the parts of life we find difficult?

Pray

The gospel is for everyone: so pray for opportunities to share the good news with anyone and everyone you meet.

Our future is certain and glorious: so praise God that Jesus reigns now.



Living in the world

We live in a harsh, selfish and often uncaring culture. Some Christians have sought to separate themselves completely from this world, others to conquer and dominate it...

- How do people today feel and think about governments at every level: national leaders, local politicians and officials, and public servants like the police?
- Do you share some of their concerns?

Read Titus 3:1-2

• How do you react to these commands? Do you find them hard to swallow?

Many people now live in distrust of authority of *any* kind at all. People are cynical. They mistrust authority. You do not obey the law; you just obey the laws that are enforced. You get away with what you can get away with. People readily criticise others or put them down. They are quick to argue, to threaten and to fight. They are often inconsiderate and selfish. They cut you up on the roads and drop litter in the street.

The authorities in Crete would have been many more times corrupt, authoritarian and repressive than anything we have experienced in the modern West. And yet Paul urges the Cretans to be obedient, respectful and positive about their participation in society, doing good and being considerate and gentle.

Remind yourself of the reason for Paul's commands (2:8, II).

• How will the qualities described in Titus 3:1-2 mark you out as an individual who is different from others? • How would these qualities mark out a community that is different?

A group of people that slanders no one, who are peaceable and considerate, and who show gentleness to all people without discrimination. That community would commend the kindness and love of God our Saviour. That community would shine like stars as they held to the word of life and held out the word of life (Philippians 2:14-16). That is what the community of Christ's people on Crete is to be, Paul tells Titus. That is the kind of community our own churches should be growing into.

Apply

Think about the kinds of conversations you have about politics, politicians and the laws of the land. Often they involve grumbling, cynicism and mockery.

- How might you join such a conversation in a way that is respectful, peaceable and gentle?
- When you are gathered with other Christians, how can you encourage them to follow these commands?

Measuring grace

How much has God done for you? Sometimes the wonder of the cross and our forgiveness can fade into the background. Paul has a cure for us...

Read Titus 3:3-8

The reason

- What uncomfortable truths about ourselves do we discover in verse 3?
- ② Do you recognise this picture of yourself? How does this make you feel?
- Why is it so important for us to understand this alongside verse 4?

The reality is that we will never understand what God has done for us in verse 4 until we face the reality of what we were like without him. Outwardly, and perhaps even in your own estimation, you may have been someone who was wise, decent and upright in many ways. But unless we see that we were self-deceived, spiritually stupid and utterly enslaved and helpless, we will only ever see the grace of Jesus as an enhancement to our lives, rather than as a rescue.

The rescue

- How is his appearing described here (v 4-5a)?
- Why did God save us?
- What is the Holy Spirit's role in saving us?

How do these verses help us to "measure" the kindness and love of God? We can measure in terms of this:

 What God has given us. He has given us himself. He has kindly and lovingly given

- us his Son (v 4). And he has generously poured out on us his Spirit (v 6). There is nothing more God could have given.
- What God has done. He has done everything. He has justified us, with no cost to us and at great cost to himself (v 7). He has given us new birth; he has renewed us (v 5). Every step of the way, he has provided. Everything that was needed and is needed he has done and is doing. There is nothing more that he could have done.
- What God has promised. He has promised us eternal life in a world reborn (v 7; see 1:2-3). He saved us to become heirs, who look forward with certain hope to an eternity spent enjoying all that Christ deserves (3:7). This is "the hope of eternal life", and it is promised by God, "who does not lie" (1:2). There is nothing more that he could have promised.

Apply

- 1 How does 3:3-5 prevent us feeling...
 - proud?
 - worthless or hopeless?

Pray

Praise God that he has rescued you from a foolish, hopeless life, and has poured out his Spirit on you, and promised you a glorious future.



What to focus on...

How do you react to controversies, arguments or differences of opinion among other Christians? Do you want to roll up your sleeves for a fight or just hide away?

Read Titus 3:9-15

Avoidance

- What things does Paul want Titus and the Cretan church to stay away from?
- Why do you think these things are so attractive to us? Why do we think they are important?
- What makes an argument foolish, and therefore useless, in the end?

Maybe it's the drama of watching an argument unfold; maybe it's just that we love to define ourselves by separating into smaller and smaller factions; or sometimes, it's just an overly zealous, and wrong-minded, approach to being obedient to 2:I. The truth is we are still, to some extent, the people of 3:3. There are some arguments that are important: those that impinge upon the gospel. There are others that are not. Knowing the difference is crucial.

• How do you tell the difference?

Division

Why do you think Paul uses such strong language in verses 10-11? (Think about the letter as a whole.)

Christ "gave himself for us" to make "a people" (2:14)—a united church. Acting in a way that is divisive goes against God's eternal plan. So when someone sows

disunity among gospel believers, the purposes of God, the work of the cross and the task of mission are all at stake. That's why Paul tells Titus to warn, then warn again, and finally to put out of the church ("have nothing to do with") someone who continues to divide God's people.

Focus

- What does it mean, do you think, to live a productive life for God (3:14)?
- What does Paul want Titus to do for Apollos and Zenas (v 13)?
- How does this model Paul's teaching in this letter? (See 1 Corinthians 3:1-9.)

We do not know anything about Zenas, but Apollos was seen by some as a rival to Paul in Corinth. How easy it would be for him to want to undermine Apollos. But this is not how Paul sees it. Paul and Apollos are only servants. Jesus is the one who is the Lord, and God is the one who makes the church grow. Paul's concern is that the needs of Zenas and Apollos be provided for. There will be no divisiveness here—Apollos must have everything he needs to continue to put the focus on the gospel, for the glory of God.

• What do you need to avoid, and what potential divisions will you work to bridge, so that you can focus on being productive as a believer?

JUDGES: Looking back

The book of Judges begins by looking back to the time of Joshua.

To understand the peaks and troughs of this period of Israel's history—to appreciate the triumphs and (more often) tragedies of God's people in the time of the judges—we need to begin, as verse I encourages us to, by looking over our shoulders.

Live by the promises

Read Joshua 1:1-9

Here is the mission of the Israelites under Joshua, the man God chose to succeed Moses as Israel's leader (v I).

- What promises does God make to Joshua and the people here?
- What commands does he give (v 6-9)?

Read Joshua 23:1-13

A "long time" has passed between chapters I and 23; Joshua is an old man (v I).

- What have God's people seen him do (v 3)?
- **?** What remains to be done (v 4-5)?
- What must Israel not do (v 6-8)? Why not (v 12-13)?

These verses set the scene for, and provide the yardstick by which to measure the book of Judges. The people are in the land God promised them when they were slaves in Egypt, and their enemies have been defeated. But they still need to settle the land by taking possession of it.

Live bravely

God's call to his people (then and now) is to combine spirituality with bravery. True discipleship involves risk-taking, because true disciples rely on God to keep his promises to bless them, not on their own instincts, plans or insurance policies.

It is hard to be truly brave without faith in God. The kind of bravery that does not arise out of faith in God is adventurism or macho heroism. It will be rooted in insecurity or a desperation to prove oneself or hopelessness. Only faith-based bravery will keep people from selfishness and thoughtlessness on the one hand, and cowardice and ineffectiveness on the other.

Who Israel chooses to fight, and how they respond to victory, will show whether they are truly trusting in God—whether they are really obeying the Lord.

Apply

How we choose to live shows whether we really trust God.

- What risks do you take because you trust God?
- Are there times you are brave out of a desire to prove yourself?
- ② Are there times you are ineffective or riskaverse out of a desire to protect yourself?
- What would you do differently if you had a faith-fuelled bravery?

