

# How to use Explore

## In this issue

The 91 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.

1

Find a time you can read the Bible each day

2

Find a place where you can be quiet and think

3

Ask God to help you understand

4

Carefully read through the Bible passage for today

5

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

6

Pray about what you have read

the goodbook  
COMPANY

*Opening up the Bible*

# Welcome to Explore

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Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like carpentry or flower arranging. Nor is it a lifestyle choice, like the kind of clothes you wear, or the people you choose to hang out with. 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 many Christians 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 modern 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 the Spirit shows Jesus to us, and changes us as we behold his glory.

The Bible is not a manual. It's a love letter. And as with any love letter, we'll want to treasure it, and make time to read and re-read it, so we know we are loved, and discover how we can please the One who loves us. Here are a few suggestions for making your daily time with God more of a joy than a burden:

☺ *Time:* Find a time when you will not be disturbed, and when the cobwebs are cleared from your mind. Many people have found that the morning is the best time as it sets you up for the day. If you're not a "morning person", then last thing

at night or a mid-morning break might suit you. 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, 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.

☺ *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 remember, *it's quality, not quantity, that counts:* better to think briefly about a single verse than to skim through pages without absorbing anything, because it's about developing your relationship with the living God. The sign that your daily time with God is real is when you start to love him more and serve him more wholeheartedly.

Tim Thornborough and Carl Laferton  
Editors



# ACTS: Encouragements

*We are rejoining Paul in the book of Acts, for the final stage in our journey through this wonderful record of the start of our risen Lord's work in and through his church.*

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## The story so far

To begin with, let's remind ourselves of how we reached this point in the book.

- ❓ *Read Acts 1:7-8. What mission did the risen Jesus give his followers?*
- ❓ *Read Acts 2:1-14. How was the church empowered to begin this mission?*
- ❓ *Read Acts 7:54 – 8:8. What caused the believers to leave Jerusalem, and what effect did that have on the spread of the gospel?*

In Acts 9, Saul (Paul) is miraculously converted on the road to Damascus, and the Lord identifies him as “my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles” (9:15). In Acts 10, God shows Peter that the gospel is indeed for Gentiles, who can be saved by faith in Christ in just the same way as Jews must be.

- ❓ *Scan-read Acts 16 – 19. In which cities did the Spirit work through Paul to plant new churches of believers?*
- ❓ *What kinds of opposition did the messengers of the gospel face?*

## The journey continues

### Read Acts 20:1-6

- ❓ *What does Paul do after he leaves Ephesus, and why (v 1-3)?*

Chronology is important in the book of Acts because it demonstrates God's sovereign

plan for the world as it unfolds through the lives of the apostles. Using Paul's letters to the Corinthians, we can work out that Paul most likely left Ephesus in May of AD 55.

He is accompanied by many emerging leaders in the church. The names and locations listed in verse 4 demonstrate the incredible spread of the gospel out of Jerusalem and Antioch throughout all Asia Minor, including Galatia, and beyond into Macedonia and Greece. Luke also accompanies Paul.

Those listed in verse 4 went ahead of Paul and Luke with the intention of reuniting with them in Troas. The smaller party sailed out of Philippi toward Troas. The mention of seemingly minor details like times and locations bolsters the historicity of the book. Luke does the work of a historian as he laces his narrative together with the geographic progress of Paul's mission.

## Pray

Consider the advance of the gospel from Acts 1 (about 120 believers in a single city) to Acts 20 (dozens of churches throughout the eastern Mediterranean). Thank God that he oversees his plans to bring them to fruition and uses his people to bring those purposes about. Recommit yourself to the ongoing mission to bring the gospel “to the ends of the earth”. Ask the Lord to show you how you can utilise your time, friendships, hobbies and money to that end.

# A dangerous sermon

*This passage could be seen as a warning against long-winded preaching! But it is, in fact, a pointer to something much greater than that.*

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## A long sermon

### Read Acts 20:7-9

Verse 7 marks the first mention in the New Testament of Christian worship on the first day of the week—on what we call Sunday. Christians shifted their day of worship from the Jewish Sabbath to the Lord's Day to commemorate the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❓ *For how long does Paul speak to the church in Troas?*
- ❓ *What effect does this have on Eutychus, and with what tragic result (v 9)?*

## A great resurrection

### Read Acts 20:10-12

- ❓ *What does Paul do, and with what result (v 10)?*
- ❓ *What does he then resume doing (v 11)?!*

There are only seven cases in the whole Bible, apart from the resurrection of Jesus (and those mentioned in Matthew 27 v 52), where human beings are raised from the dead. There are two in the Old Testament, when Elijah and Elisha raise individuals from the dead. Jesus himself raises three people, to show his own authority over death: Jairus's daughter, the young man of Nain, and Lazarus. Two apostles, by the Spirit's power, also raise the dead to life. The first is Peter, who saw Dorcas return to life (Acts 9:36-41). The second is Paul here.

### Read 1 Kings 17:17-24; 2 Kings 4:32-37

- ❓ *What similarities do you see between the way the Lord worked through Elijah and Elisha, and through Paul here in Acts 20?*

Notice that God worked through Elijah in such a way to prove that he was a true man of God: a prophet whose words must be listened to. In a similar way, God worked through Paul so that the church (today as well as then) would know that his words must be listened to—as the church in Troas continued to do after Eutychus was raised (Acts 20:11).

So what are we to make of this today? This narrative should call us to the power of the gospel and the preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was not a miracle service interrupted by a word of preaching. This was preaching interrupted by a miracle. Though no Christian today should expect to experience what Eutychus did, every Christian will experience more than he did. One day, Christ will raise us all up from the grave, and on that day we will be brought back to an eternal life.

## Pray

Thank God for the greater miracle he wrought in your heart when you first believed the word of the gospel; and for the resurrection you will one day experience.



# Paul's leadership school

*The time has come for Paul to say his farewell to the Ephesians. So he calls the elders of that church to Miletus, some 80 kilometres from Ephesus.*

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## Read Acts 20:13-21

### Leaders train leaders

- ❓ *Why did the elders need to travel to Miletus, rather than Paul detouring to Ephesus itself?*

Perhaps more notable than Paul summoning the elders to make this journey is that Paul prioritised speaking with them at all, given the hurry he was in. But a leader's time is never wasted in developing other leaders. Paul ensures his legacy will continue through the faithful leadership of well-equipped and trained elders who will preach the word of God and proclaim the excellencies of Christ to the people of the region.

### Leaders teach the gospel

- ❓ *What did Paul's ministry in Ephesus comprise (v 18-21)?*

This breaks down into three core activities:

1. *Serving the Lord in humility.* Paul's style of leadership provides a helpful and desperately needed paradigm for the 21st century. Leading in ministry does involve back-room vision-casting and executive management. Leadership is not less than that, but it is also more. Ministry also consists of service, teaching the saints and putting the fame of Christ first. In essence, Christian ministry must be about Jesus and about people, and not about the minister.

2. *Boldly teaching all that is helpful.* Christianity suffers from too many churches that preach a half-gospel, which is no gospel at all. Pastors must be willing to imitate Paul by standing upon the sure and lasting rock of the infallible word of God, and not failing to "preach anything that would be helpful" (v 20).

3. *Preaching the gospel of repentance and faith to all.* Paul preached the exact same message to both Jews and Gentiles. There is one gospel by which we are saved (Acts 4:12; Romans 1:16). He does not modify the content of his message to suit the preferences or sensibilities of his audience, but preaches the full gospel of repentance and faith.

### Apply

Think about any ministry you are involved in—whether it be pulpit preaching, eldership, small-group leading, or children's work, and so on.

- ❓ *What would it look like for you to serve those in your care by working as Paul had laboured in Ephesus? Does anything need to change in your approach?*

### Pray

- ❓ *How does this passage prompt you to give thanks for, and pray for, your pastor(s)?*

Do so now.