



**one to one**  
**bible**  
**reading**

A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR EVERY CHRISTIAN

**DAVID HELM**

*Two people with open Bibles—simple and yet powerfully effective in growing disciples of Jesus. David Helm explains why, and gives you practical tips for getting started.*

One-to-one Bible reading is vital for effective and vibrant gospel ministry. This simple guide to an essential ministry is a magnificent resource that will be useful for training all Christians in ministry. There is little else like it. We shall use it extensively at St Helen's.

**William Taylor** | Rector, St. Helen's Bishopsgate, London

Helm's booklet encourages relational evangelism and discipleship based on the living and active word of God, offering practical tools for one-on-one Bible reading and envisioning a mobilization of God's people that would complement church programs. Helm calls us to invite people not only to an event, but into our lives and into the life of faith in Jesus Christ offered in his word.

**Kathleen Nielson** | Author and conference speaker

**DAVID HELM** is a pastor at Christ Church Chicago, and Chairman of The Charles Simeon Trust, a ministry that equips expository preachers. He longs for all Christians to read God's word for themselves and with others.

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# What people are saying about *One-to-One Bible Reading*

This is a fresh approach to one of the most practical and personal ways of sharing the gospel. This strategy for evangelistic ministry is very important for making disciples. Pastors, you'll want to get copies for your elders, deacons, staff, discipleship coordinators and congregations.

**Justin Holcomb**

Lecturer in theology and apologetics at Gordon-Conwell  
Theological Seminary and Reformed Theological Seminary

David Helm has written a guide to help Christians in one of the most basic methods of helping others: reading the Bible with them. In evangelism, in edification, nothing can beat opening the text of the Bible and reading what God himself has actually said. Christians need only have confidence in God's word and a basic skill in reading it with others. David has done us a great service in helping people gain that basic skill.

**Phillip Jensen**

Bible teacher and evangelist at Two Ways Ministries

One of my great joys in ministry among women is reading the Bible with just one other person. David's book explains in a clear and straightforward way how each one of us can get started in this simple yet life-changing ministry. If you have a heart for kingdom growth then read this book, pray and make a start!

**Jenny Salt**

Dean of Students at Sydney Missionary and Bible College

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**Kathleen Nielson**

Author and conference speaker

David Helm is deeply committed to the public exposition of God's word and the training of preachers. Yet in this guide he advocates a deep-rooted culture of one-to-one Bible reading in our churches. Surely the two go hand in hand, but many Christians don't know where to start in this personal Bible reading ministry. This guide provides the inspiration for this desperately needed ministry revolution and the growth of the gospel vine into every corner of our communities.

**Colin Marshall**

Author of *The Trellis and the Vine* and founder of Vinegrowers

# one to one bible reading

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**DAVID HELM**

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*One-to-One Bible Reading*

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# Part I

# What, why and how



*I am deeply grateful to Scott Polender for his contribution to the text of part I, and to Robert Kinney for his editorial work.*

# 1 Some people you know

You probably know someone, perhaps a co-worker, who is not really a church person.

Let's call him Andrew. Perhaps you've discussed religion with him; maybe you haven't. You're reasonably sure he's not a Christian, yet he seems curious about your faith. He also seems to have some misconceptions about what the Bible says. You've never had the time or the right opportunity to address his questions.

You also know a young woman at church. Let's call her Norah. She's in her early twenties and recently began attending your Bible study group. She seems to be a relatively new Christian and knows very little about the Bible, but is eager to learn more.

You probably know some others from church—

perhaps a young man who is a likable, totally committed Christian. Let's call him Julius. He, along with his wife, volunteers to help in the nursery one Sunday per month. People respect him and value his input, but he isn't normally tapped for leadership.

These are three ordinary people very much like the people in your life. They each have a different perspective on Jesus Christ and the Christian faith.

Now, let's imagine that you have been assigned to devise a plan for the spiritual growth and discipleship of all three of these people, or people in similar situations. What a task—and where to begin? Perhaps you could invite Andrew to the next big evangelistic event your church hosts. Check. And isn't there a discipleship program going on that might be good for Norah? Check. That leaves Julius. What are you going to do with him? By all outward appearances he is sailing along quite well. Perhaps a special interest class offered by your church might have some interest for him? Check.

Now, if any of those plans for growth were the kinds of things that came into your mind, I want you to know that you are not alone. After all, for generations we have been conditioned to think of spiritual growth mainly in terms of an *event* to go to, a *program* to register for or a *class* to take. The church often puts its creative energy into initiating events, programs and classes specially designed to win people to Christ and help them grow in the faith.

And yet, as successful as some of these plans have been, we might still be missing out on something more dynamic—something more straightforward and right

for this day and age—that returns gospel growth to the everyday fabric of personal relationship, rather than relying on church-run programs.

Imagine that there is some way that Andrew, Norah and Julius could all grow in their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ by the same means. They could be guided in a deeper, more meaningful way than through an event, program or class. They could be guided on an individual basis by someone who cares for them.

What is this way? What is this activity that is so simple and so universal that it meets the discipleship needs of these three very different people?

We call it reading the Bible one-to-one.

But what exactly is reading the Bible one-to-one? Why should we do it? Who is it for?



## 2 Why read one-to-one?

Reading one-to-one is a variation on that most central Christian activity—reading the Bible—but done in the context of reading with someone. It is something a Christian does with another person, on a regular basis, for a mutually agreed upon length of time, with the intention of reading through and discussing a book or part of a book of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

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1 The idea behind reading the Bible one-to-one in this way is not unique to us or our church. We first encountered the idea in the mid-1990s as it was being used by Carrie Sandom and the staff at the Round Church at St Andrew the Great in Cambridge, England. We also know that similar versions of this idea are being employed at several other churches in England and Australia with great success. Finally, while this idea is typically employed in one-to-one contexts, there is no reason it cannot be employed in one-to-two or one-to-three contexts as well.

In the book *The Trellis and the Vine*, the authors dream about this idea:

Imagine if all Christians, as a normal part of their discipleship, were caught up in a web of regular Bible reading—not only digging into the Word privately, but reading it with their children before bed, with their spouse over breakfast, with a non-Christian colleague at work once a week over lunch, with a new Christian for follow-up once a fortnight for mutual encouragement, and with a mature Christian friend once a month for mutual encouragement.

It would be a chaotic web of personal relationships, prayer and Bible reading—more of a movement than a program—but at another level it would be profoundly simple and within reach of all.

It's an exciting thought!<sup>2</sup>

This simple idea could profoundly influence the growth of the gospel—not only in your own life but in the lives of your family members and friends as well. More specifically, there are at least four tangible benefits to reading one-to-one.

## 1. Salvation

Earlier we imagined a co-worker by the name of Andrew. Andrew isn't a Christian but he is curious about your faith and, at times, even the gospel message. In your situation,

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2 T Payne and C Marshall, *The Trellis and the Vine*, Matthias Media, Sydney, 2009, p. 57.



maybe Andrew is someone at work, or a friend, or a family member. Reading one-to-one is the perfect idea for you and Andrew. The book of James tells us that the word of God “is able to save your souls”.<sup>3</sup> In fact, apart from God’s word to us about Jesus, it is impossible for a person to know how to be forgiven of sin and accepted by him. The apostle Peter makes the same point in one of his letters: “you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God”.<sup>4</sup> From these verses it is clear that reading the Bible is infinitely important, not just for Christians but also for non-Christians.

## 2. Sanctification

Christians are also called to encourage *one another* and build *one another* up.<sup>5</sup> They are called to instruct one another, to speak the truth to one another, to teach and admonish one another with the wisdom of Christ’s word, and to stir up one another to love and good works.<sup>6</sup> In his first letter, Peter says the *Word* that saved us is the same *Word* that strengthens us in our faith. He writes: “long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation”.<sup>7</sup> In another place, the apostle Paul describes

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3 James 1:21

4 1 Peter 1:23; see also Romans 10:10–14

5 1 Thessalonians 5:11, Hebrews 3:13, Ephesians 4:29

6 Romans 15:14, Ephesians 4:15, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 10:24

7 1 Peter 2:2

the usefulness and versatility of the Bible, declaring it to be “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness”.<sup>8</sup> Christians are called to live *together* as Christians, loving those around them and spreading God’s truth to them. Think of Norah and those like her. What does she really need to grow in her newfound faith? Isn’t it exposure to God’s word? Doesn’t the Bible promise us that God will use his word to teach us how to follow Christ? Reading the Bible one-to-one provides an excellent way for Christians to strengthen one another on the road toward sanctification.

### 3. Training

Reading one-to-one can be used to identify and train people for greater ministry responsibility. In other words, it is the perfect plan for someone like Julius. Most churches are filled with people who love Jesus and are involved in every way that they feel capable. In reality, they are waiting for someone to invest in them for gospel work. Imagine the things people like Julius could accomplish for Christ if someone invested in them for Word ministry. Don’t forget, Jesus focused his ministry on teaching twelve disciples, and of those twelve he focused especially on three: Peter, John and James. The message about Jesus spreads today in the same way it spread back then. This investment in just a few may not

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8 2 Timothy 3:16

seem the most efficient use of time, but it is through just a few people that Christ's gospel has gone out to the ends of the earth, gathering people from every nation into his kingdom—not to mention transforming cultures, fixing laws, founding universities and hospitals, inspiring musicians and painters, and reaching out to the poor and outcast.

#### 4. Relationship

The *personal* nature of reading the Bible one-to-one is another reason why every Christian should consider taking up this idea. In this day, people are hungry for relationships of substance. The language of friendship has become a verb. We 'friend' mere acquaintances with the click of a button. Reading the Bible one-to-one offers the appeal of developing true friendships, relationships of greater familiarity and substance. And it is this personal aspect that appeals to many people. Consider this evidence from researcher Ed Stetzer:

We asked a total of 1,000 twenty-something unchurched people (900 American, 100 Canadian), and we compared them to a sample of 500 older unchurched (which would be 30 or above)...

One of the questions that we asked them to agree or disagree with was: "I'd be willing to study the Bible if a friend asked me to". Well, among twenty-somethings, 61 per cent said, "Yes". And among their older counterparts of 30 and above, 42 per cent said, "Yes". And that was a statistically significant

difference, telling us there's something going on, there's an openness that's there. So we're seeing that as an opportunity—that in the midst of maybe some negative views of the church, there is also some openness to the things of God.<sup>9</sup>

So, why read the Bible one-to-one with another person? We do so because of our convictions about the power of God's word. When people are exposed to it, they find salvation in Christ, they are sanctified in faith, they are trained for effective ministry, and they find community in a web of relationships that are unlike any other the world has to offer.

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9 Ed Stetzer, *How Unbelievers View the Church*, radio program, The Albert Mohler Program, 30 July 2009. For more on this see Stetzer's book (with Richie Stanley and Jason Hayes): *Lost and Found: The Younger Unchurched and the Churches that Reach Them*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, 2009.