

# How to use Explore



## Issue 98

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  
Editor



# Jesus' supper

*As Easter approaches, we're going to track through Matthew's account of the Passion, starting with the farewell supper party he held for his friends.*

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Jesus' final supper party with his friends is, in the end, ruined by Judas, but it is not a failure. Jesus gives us something extremely precious to remember him by; something simple but profound; something they ate then, but which would continue until Jesus comes again.

## Bread and wine

### Read Matthew 26:26-30

There was nothing different about the bread and wine. It is the meaning that Jesus attaches to the supper which makes it so special.

- ❓ *What was he really saying as he gave them the bread and wine to eat?*

This is for you! My sufferings tomorrow are for you; my broken body, my poured-out blood for your sins.

## Looking back

This was a priceless farewell gift. But it wasn't just for that occasion. It was Jesus' intention that his followers would celebrate this meal over and over again, and be reminded of his sacrificial death. The early church made the breaking of bread a central part of their practice (see Acts 2:42).

- ❓ *Do you value Jesus' supper as you should? Are you glad to meet at his table to remember his priceless gift to you?*
- ❓ *Or has it become routine and dry?*

The bread—to remind believers that his body was broken for them. The wine—to remind believers of his blood shed for them, as a pledge of forgiveness.

## Looking around

The Lord's Supper encourages us to realise that we are part of Jesus' family—a redeemed community with a task to do. It's why taking communion alone is missing a big part of the picture.

## Looking ahead

### Re-read Matthew 26:29-30

- ❓ *What do you think Jesus means here?*

The feast is for remembering; but also for looking forward to when Jesus shall feast once again with all his disciples.

## ▼ Apply

- ❓ *When was the last time you took part in the Lord's Supper?*
- ❓ *Which aspect of its meaning do you most focus on?*
- ❓ *How can you grow to appreciate the other two dimensions?*

## ▲ Pray

Thank God for this precious reminder, and give thanks for all that it means.

# “I’d never do that”

*“I’d never do a thing like that!” And yet haven’t we all been shocked and ashamed at the way we have behaved, or thought?*

## Never!

### Read Matthew 26:31-33

- ❓ *Why is what Jesus says in verse 31 so shocking after what has just happened?*
- ❓ *What is the nature of the promise in verse 32?*
- ❓ *How does Peter react?*

Peter knew just what Jesus was saying; and he was filled with horror and indignation at the prediction. How could Jesus think they would desert their Shepherd when his enemies came to take him? Never!

But Jesus knows his sheep. He is not surprised at our weakness. He realises just how capable we are of total failure, unless he keeps us from it. Yes, Peter did love Jesus. And the last thing he wanted to do was to betray him. But emotions are changeable, and Peter hadn’t reckoned on being gripped with fear. He had thought his love would stand any test.

Peter was capable of far worse than he had ever imagined—for not only would he run from his Lord with the others, but also...

## You will deny me!

### Read Matthew 26:34-35

- ❓ *What makes Peter and the rest of the disciples so confident, do you think?*
- ❓ *Do you think you would have been any different in the same situation?*

Jesus couldn’t have put it more clearly. It certainly ought to have made Peter think. Hadn’t Jesus always been right before? Hadn’t he shown that he knew Peter better than Peter knew himself? Not even one of the disciples believed Jesus. None of them pleaded with God to prevent them failing in such a shameful way. None of them knew much at all of the evil lurking in their hearts.

## Apply

- ❓ *Do you have an inflated view of your own steadfastness and ability to resist temptation?*
- ❓ *In what circumstances do you think you might be especially vulnerable to denying Christ? Or perhaps, just staying quiet and keeping your faith under the radar?*

## TIME OUT

### Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-14

Despite so many special blessings, notice the unthinkable sins that Israel fell into. We are no safer than Peter—unless we learn those lessons and depend on Christ’s ability to keep us, not our own.

## Pray

Pray the words of **Galatians 6:1-2** for others you know as well as yourself.



# Man of sorrows

*When it comes to the crunch, the most devoted of Jesus' followers are desperately weak and vulnerable. Which is why we need a Saviour who will stand for us...*

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## Cup of horror

**Read Matthew 26:36-39**

- ❓ *What do you find surprising, or shocking about these verses?*
- ❓ *What is the "cup" that he fears to drink from (v 39)?*
- ❓ *What do the emotions expressed in these verses tell us about the cross?*
- ❓ *What do they tell us about the Lord?*

Just ahead of him was a prospect of appalling horror. This man, untainted by the sin all around him, was about to take all sin's evil upon himself. We cannot begin to get hold of the intensity of sorrow, the agony of his soul, which that prospect brought. We have only the faintest idea of the ugliness and terror of sin—but Jesus saw evil in its naked vileness, with the pure eyes of perfect holiness. Not for nothing was he called "the man of sorrows".

Now the "cup" containing all that foulness was in front of him, as if it were touching his lips. It was full of the most disgusting bitter poison, which he had to drink to the very bottom. It was filled with:

- **sin:** he was sinless, but he was determined to carry his people's sin.
- **guilt:** he was innocent, yet he had to bear his people's guilt.
- **wrath:** he was a delight to his Father, yet he had to bear the penalty of his people's sin and face his Father's wrath.

## But as you will

**Re-read Matthew 26:39**

- ❓ *Was Jesus really turning his back on the work he had come to do?*
- ❓ *How does Jesus' prayer show what genuine prayer must look like?*

The pain seems unbearable, the cup seems undrinkable; the Son cries out in anguished revulsion—but then says, "If it is possible..." There was no other way. He knew that. He then says, "But as you will". Jesus' desire had not changed. It was still to do his Father's will. And the Lord Jesus didn't do it grudgingly. He was gladly willing. The horror is unthinkable, but he was ready to grasp the cup in both hands and drain it to its bitter bottom, so that there would be not one drop left for his people to bear.

## Pray

Grieve over the sin which caused him infinite sorrow in order to save you from endless sorrow.

And praise him with all your heart that he has taken every drop himself.

# Prepare for prayer

*Time was fast moving on that emotion-filled night. Very soon they would be facing danger and separation. So what is Jesus' priority for his disciples?*

## When in doubt...

### Read Matthew 26:40-44

- ❓ *How does Jesus want his disciples to be spending their time on the eve of Good Friday?*
- ❓ *What do they do instead?*
- ❓ *How is Jesus' statement at the end of verse 41 so insightful about us?*

Jesus leaves them very clear instructions as to how they need to spend this time (v 41). And yet they sleep on. Not that they were being lazy. It was late in the evening after a tremendously stressful day, and a big dinner with wine. Perhaps too the thought of being separated from Jesus was more than they could bear (see Luke 22:45).

Jesus knew all that. But he also knew that they had a deeper need than sleep. Think of their confident claims—sure, they would stick with their Lord. Here he is in his hour of greatest need—and here they are not even able to stay awake with him! Unless they wake up, unless they prepare with prayer, they will not be ready.

## Too late

### Read Matthew 26:45-46

- ❓ *How does Jesus react to the impending arrival of his betrayer?*
- ❓ *Why is he successful, when the disciples have failed?*

It is too late now for the disciples to prepare with prayer. The enemy is coming. Coming against Jesus and his followers; coming to arrest him; coming to crucify him. Perhaps the disciples would have preferred to hide or run away. But not Jesus. He stands tall and waits for the preordained story to play itself out.

## Apply

Jesus was ready to meet his enemies, ready to do his Father's will, ready to suffer indescribable shame and pain, because—*Jesus had made prayerful preparation*

We may not know what's about to face us; or we may be aware of great difficulties ahead. Either way, there is danger (v 41).

- ❓ *Are you being careless—or have you prepared with prayer?*
- ❓ *Are you “watching” to see potential dangers? Not so that you can run from them, but so that you can prayerfully prepare for them.*

We're so often shocked by events, such as sudden illness, the death of a parent or relative, the breakdown of a relationship, the falling into sin of a friend or prominent Christian. Our bewilderment leaves us vulnerable to attack. We need to talk to the Lord about all these things before they happen, if we want to react in a godly way when they do.

- ❓ *How will you pray this through today?*



# As a lamb...

*The eleven may have let their Lord down, but they hadn't changed sides.*

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## Jesus' "friend"

**Read Matthew 26:47-50**

- ❓ *Try to paint the scene in your imagination. What are the various characters feeling at this moment?*
- ❓ *What is so brutal about the sign Judas chose to identify Jesus?*
- ❓ *What do you think Jesus means in verse 50?*

A kiss is a greeting for a friend. And Jesus had certainly been a great friend to Judas. Although he knows it is a kiss of death, Jesus amazingly is still extending friendship (and forgiveness?) towards Judas.

## Who's scared now?

**Read Matthew 26:51-56**

- ❓ *Why had they not arrested him before?*
- ❓ *How does Jesus react to the violence?*

He had never hidden from them. They could have attempted to take him any day as he taught in the temple—if they hadn't been afraid of the crowds. But they had no valid charge against him. So to avoid public uproar the arrest had to be in secret, at night. And because they feared Jesus, this unruly mob had been hired.

- ❓ *But look at the verses again. Who is obviously in control of the situation?*

All the armies of the world would never have been able to touch Jesus without his

permission (v 53)! These violent men needed his permission to lay their hands on him and lead him away. And the one piece of resistance the disciples did offer was immediately dealt with by the captive himself!

So why was it such an undramatic event? Because Jesus was ready. He had no desire to resist his Father's will! His great concern was that the "Scriptures be fulfilled", as they declare the great plan of salvation.

## ▼ Apply

Are you someone who is known as a friend of Jesus? Never deal Jesus a deadly kiss by pretending you are otherwise. I can remember hearing those condemning words: "But I thought you were a Christian...?" I don't want to hear them again. I want to honour Jesus always as my friend.

## ^ Pray

Ask God to strengthen those who face genuine hostility for their faith. Pray that they would not resort to violence, but would entrust themselves to the Lord.

And pray for yourself, that you would stand with our courageous brothers and sisters around the world and not be like verse 56 when opposition arrives.

# No charge

The chief priests had acted decisively. Now, having arrested him, you can imagine their frustration—there were no charges to bring against him that stuck.

Somehow, before the night was out, they had to convince the Roman governor that this man deserved death...

## Any evidence will do

**Read Matthew 26:57-61**

- ❓ *What do they attempt to do?*
- ❓ *Why does it fail?*
- ❓ *What is the charge that succeeds?*

They had to get evidence quickly. But how? Normally, giving false evidence was itself a crime worthy of death—but not tonight. Many were willing to try their hands at accusing the innocent Jesus; but, incredibly, they could find no two who had got their act together.

At last it looked as if they had success (v 61). Yet what a weak charge. Even if it had been true, it was hardly worthy of the death penalty. Surely not enough to impress Pilate, the governor.

### TIME OUT

**Read Hebrews 7:26; 9:14;  
1 Peter 2:22**

What a witness to Jesus' innocence! We find no one even pretending to have a real charge against him. There is no mention of Judas, who had lived for years close to Jesus, coming up with anything at all to accuse him of. And then even liars could find nothing to condemn him. He was perfectly sinless, and so could be a perfect Saviour.

## Who will testify for him?

- ❓ *Where were most of the disciples all this time (see Matthew 26:58)?*

Would they be there declaring the holiness, the innocence, of their Master? And what of Peter? Would he be standing up for the Lord in line with his fearless boasts?

## Apply

We should be slow to criticise the disciples for their weakness. Do we do any better, when there's probably no more danger than that of putting our own popularity at risk?

- ❓ *What would it look like to protest the purity, the worth, the holiness of the Saviour when his name is scorned or his honour attacked?*

## Pray

Pray especially for those brothers and sisters who work in harsh, godless environments. Ask the Lord to help them work out how to be upright and friendly, without appearing to be joyless or judgmental.

And pray that you would be ready to speak a word in season and out of season in praise of our perfect Saviour.





# Condemned

*Frustrated by the dismal failure of the false witnesses, Caiaphas makes a desperate bid to trap Jesus into saying anything which might give him grounds for a valid charge.*

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## Speak will you!

### Read Matthew 26:62

Jesus had no need to say anything, no need to defend himself. His innocence was already painfully obvious to the high priest. Caiaphas was desperate; he had one last trump card to use to force Jesus to speak. Would Jesus answer when put under solemn oath to God?

## Blasphemy?

### Read Matthew 26:63-66

- ❓ *What is the High Priest asking—and how does he ask it?*
- ❓ *What do you make of Jesus' reply?*
- ❓ *Why does Caiaphas tear his robes?*

You can feel the frustration in his voice, but it has the desired effect. Jesus had willingly admitted to a “crime” worthy of death. It’s as if Jesus is saying: “You know full well I am innocent of all other charges, but I gladly confess to being the Christ, the Son of God”.

The tearing of his robes, supposedly a sign of distress, was perhaps merely to hide Caiaphas’ relief and excitement at what Jesus had said. Blasphemy was the charge. And for anyone else it would certainly have been true. But their intense hatred blinded the accusers to the obvious truth.

## Who’s on trial here?

### Read Matthew 26:67-68

- ❓ *Who are the death-deserving criminals here?*

### TIME OUT

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Think carefully about Isaiah 50:5-9; 53:4; and Micah 5:1b.

- ❓ *What prophecies are being fulfilled?*
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These men will meet Jesus again. He warns them of that in Matthew 26:64. Yes, it is he who is the mighty Christ, the Son of Man who will come in judgment and reign in glory. (They would have recognised Jesus’ claims from Daniel 7:13-14.) Then they will be quite sure that he is innocent—and they are guilty.

## Pray

We should feel compassion towards those who reject Christ, mock him and disdain his people. There is a judgment coming when all their mockery will ring hollow, and when his faithful people will be vindicated. What a terrible day that will be for them.

Pray that the Lord would have mercy on them before it is too late.

# More sorrow

*The scene changes for a while, moving away from Jesus' suffering—or does it?*

## But you, Peter!

### Read Matthew 26:69-75

- ❓ *Do you empathise with Peter here?*
- ❓ *What do you think motivates him to deny Christ three times?*
- ❓ *How does verse 74 add to the picture of what was going on in Peter's heart and mind at this moment?*

The actions of the chief priests—their hatred, their contempt, their abuse of Jesus—were hard to bear. The violence of others, who joined in for no particular reason, added to that pain. The awful actions of Judas, in betraying not only a friend but someone who had shown him such love, was more than enough to break a sensitive heart like Jesus'. But here was someone who really did love Jesus, who had been closer than almost any other person, someone whom Jesus had chosen to be a key figure in his church, for whom Jesus was at this moment suffering, and for whose sins he was about to die...

- ❓ *So how do you think Jesus felt as he watched his friend Peter cursing and denying him?*

## Apply

- ❓ *Have you ever denied that you have anything to do with him, or have you ever attempted to hide your love for him?*
- ❓ *Why, specifically, would your denial of Jesus be a deep cause of grief to him?*

But at least Peter was there! Notice that none of the other disciples were in any position to deny Jesus—they were nowhere to be seen! Their love for their Lord had not brought them into a vulnerable and possibly dangerous position; their love had not forced them to see what would happen to him.

- ❓ *Are you prepared to place yourself in a vulnerable position, even if you are unsure that you will stand the test?*
- ❓ *And do you have very real love for Jesus, like Peter—even if you often fail so miserably, and dishonour your Lord in your weakness?*

It was Peter, not the others, who fell so terribly. But it was Peter who was lovingly restored by his Lord; it was Peter who was specially commissioned to care for Christ's church; it was Peter who was so greatly used in his kingdom...

- ❓ *Is this relevant to you?*

Don't despair, instead...

**Read John 21:7, 15-19; Acts 2:14, 37-41.**

## Pray

Talk to the Lord about past failures, and ask him for boldness to put yourself in places where you can show your love for him.

And pray for the divine strength you will need to be faithful under pressure.



# No repentance, no faith

*The tragedy of Judas's betrayal leads onto perhaps a greater tragedy as the full impact of what he has done strikes home. It is a bitter, heartbreaking story.*

## Led out bound

### Read Matthew 27:1-2

As the servants and others (including Peter) waited in the courtyard of the high priest's palace, there must have been great tension and excitement. What would be the outcome of these extraordinary events?

Would this bizarre mock trial find enough "evidence" to condemn Jesus to death? At last the verdict had been reached. Now everyone would know, as Jesus is led out, bound.

## Remorse...

### Read Matthew 27:3-10

- ❓ *Judas too had been waiting—what was his reaction to the news?*
- ❓ *What does he do about it?*
- ❓ *Why do you think he hangs himself? What might be going on in his anguished mind at that moment?*

The deed had been done. For Judas there was no escape from its consequences. There is a terrible and tragic finality about the account. We would have liked a happy ending to the story, but there's nothing to take comfort in, except, once again, the testimony to the innocence of the Saviour. We would have pleaded with Judas, even after such a foul deed, to repent of his sin and to throw himself on the mercy of the one

who was about to die for sinners like him. We would have told him that there was no sin that was unforgiveable, other than a final rejection of the Saviour.

## ...but no repentance

### Re-read Matthew 27:3-5

- ❓ *How does Judas try to deal with his guilt?*
- ❓ *Why is this short-sighted?*

There was an unbearable sense of guilt, deep remorse, regret that he had ever brought such pain on himself—but no real repentance, no sorrow that he had sinned against Jesus, against God. And no repentance means no hope. Perhaps he hoped the chief priests could sort out his guilt, but there was no relief there either. Judas had lost faith in himself, but had not gained faith in the Saviour. His only hope was in death. But that would give him no ultimate relief, as he plunged into a lost eternity.

## ▼ Apply

Guilt, sorrow and despair are never enough to save anyone. If that is all you have, then you are in a perilous position—learn from Judas's tragic end. Repentance, faith and love towards the Saviour are our desperate needs. Whatever your sin, turn to the only Saviour and live.