

How to use Explore

In this issue

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.

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

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Being a Christian isn't a skill you learn, like cooking or stone skipping. 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 gaze upon 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 better. 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 v 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, break room or some other quiet corner.

☑ *Prayer:* Although *Explore* helps with specific prayer ideas from the passage, you should 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, for the world and for 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 (links below) 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.





TITUS: Truth transforms

What does it look like to live for God in the church and the world? Paul's letter to Titus shows us how the truth about Jesus empowers us to live for him.

Welcome to Crete!

Paul and Titus had recently been to Crete, not on holiday, but to plant and grow churches (see Titus 1:5). The big question when Paul left was how the fledgling churches would stay strong in Jesus and live for him. In this first session, we'll get our bearings on the letter before diving into the details.

Who's writing?

Read Titus 1:1-4

- ❓ *What do you notice about the way Paul describes himself in verse 1?*
- ❓ *What does he say his task is?*
- ❓ *In verse 4, what does Paul say about Titus? What do you think he means by this?*

Titus was a trusted colleague of Paul's. His mission, as we'll see, was to establish the churches on Crete by appointing godly leaders (Titus 1:5).

Who's listening?

Paul was writing to Titus. But Titus was responsible for several different churches in Crete. Titus 3:15 sees Paul greet other believers in Crete. And when Paul says, "Grace be with you all", he means the whole church, not simply Titus as an individual. So the letter is written with the Cretan believers in mind too.

Read Titus 2:1-6; 3:1-2

- ❓ *What do we discover about the believers in the Cretan churches?*
- ❓ *In what ways are the Cretan believers like the believers in your church?*
- ❓ *How does this help us as we come to study Titus and apply its message?*
- ❓ *How does Paul describe Titus's job?*

What's the point?

One of the things we will learn is that the good news of forgiveness in Jesus transforms and empowers us to live for Jesus in the church and the world. Two key passages in Titus, 2:11-14 and 3:3-8, will show us the amazing power of God to change our lives and how wonderful the news about Jesus really is—even for sinful people like first-century Cretans and us!

Read Titus 3:8

- ❓ *This verse is a good summary of the letter. What is the heart of Paul's message in this verse?*

Prayer

Spend some time thanking God for this letter. Pray that God would enable you to understand his message in Titus and help you to see how it applies to your life.

Truth leads to godliness

Being a Christian is more than simply knowing true things. That knowledge must lead to a change of life. That is the key theme to this letter.

God's grace

Read Titus 1:1-4

Paul calls himself a servant and an apostle: two titles which show his humility and authority. He's God's messenger with God's message.

- 🔍 *What is Paul's God-given role?*

▼ Apply

The phrase "God's elect" means "God's chosen people". It speaks of his grace and mercy in taking the initiative to save us to be his people. God's election of his people can be a baffling and profound truth to think about. But why is this an encouraging truth for Paul to start the letter with? If God didn't take the initiative to save us, how then can we be saved from our sin? (For help, see Titus 3:4-5; Ephesians 1:3-6.)

- 🔍 *How might this truth help you when you're feeling weary, hard-pressed or discouraged in your Christian life? Or when your church family is going through a hard time?*

In verse 1 Paul speaks of "the truth that leads to godliness". "Godliness" simply means living God's way.

- 🔍 *Why is it important that truth and godliness stay together?*
- 🔍 *What happens if you only have one or the other?*

God's promise

Re-read Titus 1:1-4

- 🔍 *How does Paul describe the believer's hope in verse 2?*
- 🔍 *How do we know this will happen?*
- 🔍 *How can we know this hope according to verse 3?*

Paul describes in these few verses a remarkable picture of what God does in eternity past and eternity future. It's an amazing picture of the beauty and joy of the Christian life. Believers are chosen in eternity past for an eternal future with him.

▼ Apply

- 🔍 *How does this picture of true Christianity help us when faced by the brokenness of the world we live in, and by the hostility of the non-Christian world?*
- 🔍 *If God uses human preaching and speaking about Jesus to bring people to faith in him, how should this impact the way we view our evangelism?*

▲ Pray

Praise God for his grace and mercy to us in Jesus, from eternity past to eternity future. Pray for courage to share this great gospel.

Raise the praise!

Time for a psalm sandwich. The pieces of bread at the beginning and end are short sections praising God (v 1-3) and trusting God (v 20-22).

This sandwich has two fillings: sections on God the Ruler (v 4-11) and God the Judge (v 12-19). Let's take a big bite...

Praising God

Read Psalm 33:1-3

- ❓ *How would you describe the character of the praise we should offer to God?*
- ❓ *Is that what your praise looks and feels like?*

Psalms are meant to be lived and experienced, not just studied. So why not respond to the call of these verses to praise God with enthusiastic abandon. You could sing a favourite hymn or song if you like—mine is *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation*, but you can choose your own.

God the Ruler

Read Psalm 33:4-11

This is the awesome, astounding God we serve. His word (by which he rules all things) is right and true (v 4). Perfect, in fact. He is dependably faithful. His unending love fills the earth (v 5; Psalm 36:5-9), which he so perfectly created (Psalm 33:6-9), and over which he is sovereign (v 10-11). This is the God of the whole world, and so everyone, everywhere owe their existence and praise to him.

- ❓ *How do you think God feels that so many neither fear nor revere him?*

God the Judge

Read Psalm 33:12-19

God chose one people (Israel) to be his inheritance (v 12). Since Jesus died and rose again, all who trust in him are included in this inheritance.

God sees all of humankind. He sees beyond our appearance, right into our hearts (v 13-15). We are under review, and nothing anyone has (position, power, strength) can save them from death (v 16-17).

- ❓ *So who can know God (v 18)? Who are his people?*
- ❓ *What will God do for them (v 19)?*

Trusting God

Read Psalm 33:20-22

As God's people we have a confident hope (expectation), not only of eternity with him but a hope that assures us that he is our help and our shield (v 20). So we can fully trust God because of what he has revealed about himself: his holy name (v 21). And we can rejoice in him (v 21) and praise him for all that he is. Which brings us back to where we came in—praising God.






Read slowly through Psalm 33 once more, joyfully praising the Lord for everything he is to us and everything he faithfully does for us, remembering our reverent response to him (v 8).

Unfinished business


The first thing on Paul's agenda is leadership in the church. Godly leaders are vital for a godly church.

Godly lives




Read Titus 1:5-9

-  *What does Paul say about a leader's home life in verse 6?*
-  *Why is a leader's private life a matter of concern?*
-  *What other qualities should a leader have according to verses 7-8?*
-  *How might someone with the qualities of verse 7 be a danger to a church?*
-  *How might someone with the qualities of verse 8 be a blessing?*

Paul has already told us that the truth leads to godliness, and that the life-changing truth about Jesus is entrusted to us to pass on. Paul therefore is very concerned that churches have godly and faithful leaders to lead them. He calls them elders in verse 5, which simply means those given leadership responsibility in a church. Christians won't grow into godliness unless they have good leaders teaching the truth and living godly lives. Godly leadership is vital for our spiritual growth. Paul's criteria for leadership though are different from the world's. There's no mention here of leadership skills and management style. Paul is more concerned about a godly life and faithful teaching. Leaders must teach and model the faith. These are the leaders we need.




-  *Recent failures of prominent Christian leaders have shone a spotlight on this issue: what can we learn here on this?*

Faithful teaching

-  *What is the leader's main task, according to Paul in verse 9?*
-  *What will this task involve in practice?*
-  *Why must a leader hold firmly to the trustworthy message?*

Apply

Leaders are a working example how truth leads to godliness. They teach and live the truth for the good of the church, and so must the members of the church. The qualities of leaders are also required of all Christians as they follow Jesus. We'll see in Titus 2:11-10 that many of the same qualities are applied to all the congregation.

-  *Looking at these qualities of leadership and the Christian life in general, what areas do you think you need to work on with God's help?*
-  *How might Paul's words here help those who appoint leaders at church?*
-  *How do these verses help you to pray for your leaders?*

Pray

Pray for your church leaders by name and ask the Lord to help them grow in godly and faithful teaching.



Watch out!

All is not well in Crete. Danger lurks in the churches. So Titus must take firm action.

Ungodly teachers!

Read Titus 1:10-16

- ❓ *What does Paul say about these false teachers in verse 10?*
- ❓ *What effect are they having on the churches, verse 11?*
- ❓ *What is their character like according to verse 12?*

It's easy to think that the job of a good leader is simply to teach the truth and show people how to live godly lives. But that's not the whole task. Good leaders must also refute wrong teaching and wrong living. Notice the "for" at the start of verse 10.

The churches in Crete need godly leaders because there are ungodly leaders in the churches. Paul says that these teachers are "of the circumcision group". These are probably Jewish leaders who claim to be Christians, but who are wanting the non-Jewish believers in Crete to follow Jewish laws too, like circumcision and eating the right foods. Paul is very clear in Titus that all you need to become and then to live as a Christian is to trust in what Jesus has already done for you on the cross! See Titus 2:14 and 3:4-5. You don't need to follow extra rules and laws.

Paul isn't being racist in Titus 1:12. He simply quotes a Cretan poet who is making a general statement about Cretan character and culture. He's saying, "These people are just like the stereotype".

Ungodly lifestyles

In verse 13 Paul seems to be addressing the Christians affected by the false teachers.

- ❓ *What does he tell Titus to do?*
- ❓ *What will be the outcome if he does?*
- ❓ *Verses 15-16 revert back to the ungodly teachers. How is verse 16 a useful summary of this whole passage?*

Apply

- ❓ *Why is Paul so serious about the dangers of false teaching?*
- ❓ *What is the link between false teaching and false living?*
- ❓ *How does this help us to see more clearly the link between true teaching and true living?*

Paul talks about rebuking Christians who are going astray in verse 13.

- ❓ *Do you think such actions have a place in our churches today?*
- ❓ *What makes church discipline so difficult to administrate today?*
- ❓ *How can the rebuking or correcting of other Christians be done in such a way as to build them up, not tear them down?*
- ❓ *Why is this an important part of our pastoral care for one another?*





Family matters

What does godly living look like in practice? Paul tells Titus to teach his church family to live according to their age...

Godly living for all ages

Read Titus 2:1-5

At the end of chapter 1 Paul exposed the dangers of false teaching and living. Now he says Titus must teach “sound doctrine” to his congregation. The word for “sound” is literally “healthy”. Such godly teaching builds the churches’ spiritual health. What we see in this passage is teaching appropriate to the different age groups in the churches in Crete. Different ages face different challenges. But we’ll also see there should be mutual care and respect between the different generations in a church family.

- ❓ *What does Paul say that Titus should teach the older men in verse 2?*
- ❓ *Why do you think Paul commands him to teach these specific things?*
- ❓ *What is Titus to teach the older women in verses 3-4?*
- ❓ *Why do you think Paul commands him to teach these specific things?*
- ❓ *In verses 3-5 the younger women are also addressed. But it’s the older women who are to teach them. Why do you think that is?*
- ❓ *Why do you think Paul commands them to teach these specific things?*

Paul’s teaching about younger women isn’t meant to exclude women whose marital circumstances are different; nor is he ruling out a working career for women. These are general principles for godly living

which need to be applied to each individual person.

Apply

Paul talks about older women training and modelling godly lives to younger women—and Paul will encourage Titus to do the same for the younger men in verse 7.

- ❓ *Why is this an effective way of teaching the gospel to younger women?*
- ❓ *In some Western cultures, respect for the older generation is waning. How does Paul affirm the role of older members of our churches?*
- ❓ *How could you encourage such godly relationships in your church family?*

In verse 5 Paul says that such godly lives among the women will mean the word of God is not maligned. He assumes that ungodly living will bring the gospel into disrepute.

- ❓ *How might such godly living among older and younger believers promote the gospel in your community?*

Pray

Pray for yourself, according to your age, that you would live a godly life which promotes the gospel. Think of an older / younger person you could encourage or seek wisdom from and pray for them now.





Godly living in all of life

Living a godly life affects everything we do, even when we're at work!

To the younger men

Read Titus 2:6-8

The churches in Crete were full of many different sorts of people, who were encouraged to support and encourage one another in godly living.

- ❓ *What's the single command that Titus is to give the young men in verse 6?*
- ❓ *Why do you think he says this one thing?*
- ❓ *What is Titus to do himself (v 7-8)?*
- ❓ *How does this teach again the link between truth and godliness?*
- ❓ *How does it reinforce what Paul taught in 1:6-9?*

▼ Apply

- ❓ *Why is godly role-modelling so important in the Christian life?*
- ❓ *What steps can we take to develop this spiritual mentoring in our church life?*

To the workers

Read Titus 2:9-10

Slaves in the ancient world were numerous—by some estimates up to a third of the population in a typical Roman town. But slavery in the ancient world was very different from the 18th and 19th centuries. It could still be tough, but they were treated

more like “owned employees”. And so there are parallels to our working environments.

- ❓ *What is Titus to teach slaves?*
- ❓ *What's Paul's reason for this teaching?*

TIME OUT

For more help on slaves and masters, look up Paul's teaching in Ephesians 6:5-9.

- ❓ *If you sought to live like this in your workplace, what changes, if any, might you see?*

▼ Apply

- ❓ *Why do you think Paul spends a good deal of time in Titus urging us to develop godly Christian characteristics?*
- ❓ *Why is this so vital in the church and the world? For help compare the ends of verses 5, 8 and 10 in Titus 2.*
- ❓ *How does this focus on character differ from the world's values?*
- ❓ *How could you encourage more thinking about Christian character in your small group or church family?*

^ Pray

Pray that God by his Spirit would help you to develop a godly Christian character.

Pray for your work environment—that you would commend the gospel by the way you work and act.

