

THE WHOLE STORY

Read every page of the New Testament in three months

Peter Thomas

Welcome to “The Whole Story”

The Daily Readings

“The Whole Story” is divided into 78 portions so you can read the entire New Testament in three calendar months. That adds up to 13 weeks with six portions each week leaving one day to pause or catch up. Each portion will take around 20 minutes to read aloud, or to read silently with bits of “thinking time” as you go. There is space alongside the references in case you would like to make a note of a “key verse” which strikes you and a couple of thoughts from each day's reading. The act of making a note will help you remember what you have read and also be very useful when you want to return to a particular passage and study it in more detail at another time.

Especially if you know the Bible well, you may find it refreshing to follow these readings in one of the excellent recent translations such as the New Living Translation or the New Century Version.

The Weekly Studies

Each week there are some relevant and practical study questions to help you explore one or two key themes of a New Testament book you are reading that week. You may like to set aside some time to consider these questions, perhaps on the day you don't have a set passage to read. Alternatively when there are questions on different passages in a book you may like to think about each question as you are reading the related passage.

These questions are also written to be very useful starters for discussion in a Bible Study Group, Home Group or Cell Group. Your Group Leader may choose to focus on a few of the questions and miss others out. In your Group you might agree in advance who will look at a particular question at home and report back answers to that question when you meet. As well as (or instead of) discussing the questions, every Group meeting could also include opportunities for folk to share the key verses and thoughts which have struck them personally in their readings that week.

WEEK 1

Matthew 1-4

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 5-7

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 8-10

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 11:1-13:23

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 13:24-15:39

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 16-18

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 1. MATTHEW

The teachings of Jesus: the Sermon on the Mount

1. What is your favourite section of the Sermon on the Mount? Why?
2. **Read Matthew 5:1-10.** Jesus's "reasons to be cheerful": ways in which the values of this "upside-down world" are turned the right way up again when God reigns as King. Note that Jesus is not saying we must try to become like this, but rather that people who already have these characteristics are actually blessed by God. Do you think any of these "beatitudes" apply to you in your own life? Which saying is most precious to you?
3. **Read Matthew 5:38-42.** Can you think of situations where you have (or should have) "*turned the other cheek*"? Under what circumstances have you ever "*gone the extra mile*"? What did that feel like? Were these easy commands to obey?
4. **Read Matthew 6:1-18.** What does Jesus teach us about these common Christian practices of giving, praying and fasting. Why is fasting neglected in today's materialistic self-centred world?
5. **Read Matthew 7:21-23.** What reasons are given here to explain why Jesus will reject some people on the Day of Judgement? How can we make sure we do not make the same mistakes? (Answers: these false disciples were trusting in their own good works instead of God's grace.)
6. **Read Matthew 7:24-27.** What is the essential message of the two house builders? (Answer: the difference is NOT between knowing or being ignorant of Jesus's teaching, but between people who put what they know into practice in their daily lives and people who know the truth but do NOT put it into practice – a vital lesson for all of us!)

WEEK 2

Philippians 1-4

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 19-21

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 22:1-24:35

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 24:36-26:35

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 26:36-27:56

Key verse

Thoughts

Matthew 27-28:20 and 2 Thessalonians 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 2. PHILIPPIANS

Everyday Christian living

1. ***Read Philippians 1:20-26.*** How does knowing Jesus transform our attitudes to life and to death? Do you share the Apostle Paul's perspectives on our Christian hope of heaven?
2. ***Read Philippians 2:1-11.*** What example has Christ Himself given us of how to live as his followers?
3. ***Read Philippians 3:4-14.*** What did the apostle Paul give up to become a disciple of Jesus? What have you given up? According to verse 10 what is discipleship all about? What should it mean for us in practice to "press on towards the goal?"
4. Reflect on how much it cost the Lord Jesus Christ to die for you. How much does it cost you to live for Him? "That man is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (Jim Elliot)
5. ***Read Philippians 4:4-13.*** How can we experience real joy and peace? What part does prayer play? And meditation (verse 8)? Have you learned Paul's secret of contentment and relying on Christ's strength?
6. ***Read Philippians 1:4-6.*** *"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* Rejoice! This is God's promise to you!

WEEK 3

Acts 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 4:1-6:7

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 6:8-8:40

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 9-10

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 11-12 and 2 Peter 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

Galatians 1-6

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 3. ACTS

The Earliest Church (see the introductions for weeks 9 and 11)

The book of Acts is a historical narrative. It is important to consider how we should understand the different events Luke has recorded. Should we view them as *normal* – describing the way life in the church will *usually* be? Or are they *normative* – the way life in the church *should* be? Or are they events which are simply *possible* – things which happened then and *might* happen now or might not? Different parts of the account will be understood in different ways. How does the writer Luke expect us to understand each part?

1. **Read Acts 2:36-41.** Peter lists a number of elements in receiving salvation: *repent; be baptised; forgiveness; receive the Holy Spirit; added to their number* (becoming part of the church). How have these elements been part of your own spiritual journey and experience?
2. **Read Acts 2:42.** Here Luke records four elements of the life of the early church which he surely thinks will be normal for every church: the *apostles' teaching, breaking of bread* (communion and worship) *fellowship* (sharing life together) *and prayers*. What contributions do these elements make to your experience of church?
3. **Read Acts 2:43-47.** What other kinds of events and activities happened in the life of the Early Church? Does Luke expect us to see these as normal, normative or merely possible in the life of churches today?
4. **Read Acts 4:12-20.** We see the apostles courageously proclaiming the gospel even in the face of opposition. What can we learn from their example? Why are Christians today so timid about sharing their faith?
5. **Read Acts 4:32-37.** Many groups of Christians through the ages have shared their possessions and “lived a common life”. Should this be normal for Christians in today's world too? What does this passage teach us about caring for our fellow Christians?

WEEK 4

Hebrews 1-5

Key verse

Thoughts

Hebrews 6-9

Key verse

Thoughts

Hebrews 10:1-12:13

Key verse

Thoughts

Hebrews 12:14-13:25 and Titus 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

Ephesians 1-6

Key verse

Thoughts

Colossians 1-4 and Philemon

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 4. HEBREWS

How great Christ is!

The letter to the Hebrews explains Christ's death in terms of the Old Testament system of priests and sacrifices. At many points the writer is demonstrating that Jesus is superior to anything and anyone else, and so the salvation He offers is superior to any other.

1. Read Hebrews 1:1-4. What does this introduction show us about the deity of Jesus Christ?
2. Read Hebrews 1:5-2:4 In what ways is Christ superior to the angels?
3. Read Hebrews 2:10-18. In what ways was Jesus made to be like us, His brothers?
4. Read Hebrews 3:1-6. In what ways is Jesus superior to Moses?
5. Read Hebrews 4:14-5:10. , 7:20-8:13 In what ways is Jesus greater than any other High Priest?
6. Read Hebrews 9:11-15 and 23-28. In what ways is Jesus's sacrifice for sins better than any other sacrifice?
7. Read Hebrews 10:19-25. How should we respond to Jesus our great High Priest and the perfect sacrifice He made for us?

WEEK 5

John 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

John 4-5

Key verse

Thoughts

John 6:1-7:44

Key verse

Thoughts

John 7:45-9:41

Key verse

Thoughts

John 10:1-12:11

Key verse

Thoughts

John 12:12-14:14

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 5. JOHN

Knowing God as Father

After the resurrection, Jesus said to Mary, *“I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”* (John 20:17) John's Gospel shows us the relationship Jesus Christ the Son of God has with God the Father and the relationship we have with God through Jesus. On the next page are some of the key passages on this theme. For each passage, think about:

(i) What we learn about the relationship Jesus the Son has with God the Father?

(ii) What we learn about the relationship we have with God as His children?

1. **John 1:10-14** – how we become God's children
2. **John 3:3-8** – being born again
3. **John 5:16-23** – the Son, God's apprentice
4. **John 6:35-40** – Jesus the Bread of Life: assurance of salvation
5. **John 8:23-30** – the Son speaks for the Father
6. **John 10:30** – “the Father and I are one.”
7. **John 14:7-14** – “even greater things than these”
8. **John 14:15-27** – loved by the Father
9. **John 15:9-17** – obedience and love
10. **John 16:22-28** – “the Father Himself loves you”
11. **John 17:1-5, 20-26** – Jesus prays for us, His disciples
12. **John 20:17** – “my Father and your Father, my God and your God.”

If you are studying in a group, this would be a good week for different members of the group to take one or two of the passages each to think about in advance, and then share what they have learned when you meet together.

WEEK 6

John 14:15-17end

Key verse

Thoughts

John 18-20

Key verse

Thoughts

John 21 and 1 Thessalonians 1-5

Key verse

Thoughts

1 Corinthians 1-4

Key verse

Thoughts

1 Corinthians 5-8

Key verse

Thoughts

1 Corinthians 9-11

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 6. 1 THESSALONIANS

The return of the Lord

1. **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.** What will happen when Christ returns? What will happen to believers then? Do these promises give you hope and encouragement?
2. Since Christ is going to return – how then should we live? **Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8.** What does it mean to be sanctified (made holy)?
3. **Read 1 Thess 5:1-11.** What should “holy living” look like in real life?
4. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22.** Here are some simple practical instructions? Which do you find the hardest to obey?
5. **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** and claim these wonderful promises for yourself in your life!

WEEK 7

1 Corinthians 12-14

Key verse

Thoughts

1 Corinthians 15-16 and 2 John and 3 John Key verse

Thoughts

James 1-5

Key verse

Thoughts

2 Corinthians 1:1-5:10

Key verse

Thoughts

2 Corinthians 5:11-9:14

Key verse

Thoughts

2 Corinthians 10-13

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 7. 1 CORINTHIANS

Spiritual gifts and the Body of Christ

1. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:1-11.** *"No-one can say, 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit."* (verse 3) The confession of faith, *"Jesus is Lord"* was all that was required for baptism and admission to the Early Church. Is this an adequate statement of Christian belief? Why do some Christians demand more than that today?
2. Look at **1 Corinthians 12:4-11** again. Paul talks about every Christian having some experience of the working of the Holy Spirit (and he repeats the point in verses 27-31). How should we expect these gifts of the Holy Spirit to be expressed in the life of churches today?
3. **Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.** Can you think of any examples of Christians who have said, *"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body."* Or equally of Christians who have fallen into the trap which Paul explains by saying, *The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!'* What should we do to encourage other Christians to play their part in the life of the church?
4. **Read again verses 21-24.** What kinds of people in the church is Paul referring to when he speaks of *"those parts of the body that seem to be weaker"*, *"the parts that we think are less honourable"* and *"the parts that are unpresentable"*? What should we do to make sure that everybody in the church feels equally welcomed, accepted and loved, so that in practice *its parts should have equal concern for each other*?
5. Read and meditate on **1 Corinthians 13:1-13.** List the ways God's kind of love is different from the ideas of "love" which fill popular songs, soap operas and the media today. Spend some time recognising that this passage describes God's unfailing love for us. In what practical ways should we show God's kind of love to other people? How can we learn to love more as God loves?

WEEK 8

Mark 1-3

Key verse

Thoughts

Mark 4:1-6:29

Key verse

Thoughts

Mark 6:30-9:1

Key verse

Thoughts

Mark 9:2-10:52

Key verse

Thoughts

Mark 11-13

Key verse

Thoughts

Mark 14-16 and 1 Peter 1-5

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 8. MARK

The life of Jesus - the Good News of God's Kingdom

Jesus came to proclaim the Kingdom of God – God's reign as King of all Creation. He announced this reign in words and in actions. Jesus often taught in parables, revealing truth to those with eyes to see but concealing it from those who refused to believe. He also demonstrated God's love and power in miracles of healing and deliverance. Jesus did not perform miracles to prove He was the Son of God. Rather, the miracles were physical expressions of God's kingly rule in action, bringing blessings of salvation and wholeness. Jesus also showed God's love in symbolic actions, eating with “sinners” and forgiving sins. The supreme expression of Jesus's love is seen in his sacrificial death on the cross, giving his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45).

1. From the parts of Mark's Gospel you have read, what passages would you choose to illustrate the points made in the summary above?
2. What is your favourite parable? What does it say to you?
3. What is your favourite miracle story? What does it mean to you?
4. Reflect on this passage from Mark 1.

Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. “The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” At once they left their nets and followed him. (Mark 1:14-18)

What kinds of response does Jesus expect from those who follow Him? How have you responded to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

WEEK 9

Acts 13:1-15:21

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 15:22-17:34

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 18-20

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 21:1-23:32

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 23:33-26:32

Key verse

Thoughts

Acts 27-28 and Jude

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 9. ACTS

The spreading flame

In the second half of Acts we see how the Apostle Paul preached the gospel.

1. **Read Acts 13:1-4.** This shows how Paul and Barnabas were commissioned to preach the gospel to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world. Is this a pattern for church government and for missionary work today?
2. **Read Acts 16:16-32.** What was the gospel Paul preached to the jailer and how did he respond?
3. **Read Acts 17:16-31.** What can we learn from the way Paul preached in Athens to help us preach the gospel in today's multi-faith world?
4. **Read Acts 19:11-20.** Miracles of healing and deliverance from demons were a significant part of the preaching of the gospel throughout the Early church. Should we expect to see similar miracles in the church today?
5. **Read Acts 20:17-31.** What can we learn from Paul's example and from the instructions he gave to the Elders of the church at Ephesus about leadership in church life?
6. **Read Acts 22:1-6.** The account of Paul's meeting with the Risen Christ on the Damascus Road is retold on different occasions in Acts. Many Christians would say that their journey to faith was not so sudden, but rather gradual and for some almost unnoticed. In writing Acts, does Luke expect us to believe that a dramatic conversion experience like Paul's will be normal (usually happens) normative (should happen) or merely possible for Christians today?

WEEK 10

Romans 1:1-3:20

Key verse

Thoughts

Romans 3:21-6:23

Key verse

Thoughts

Romans 7-8

Key verse

Thoughts

Romans 9-11

Key verse

Thoughts

Romans 12:1-15:13

Key verse

Thoughts

Romans 15:14-16:27 and 2 Timothy 1-4 Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 10. ROMANS

Right with God

In Romans 1:16-17 Paul writes, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.”* (Habbakuk 2:4)

Romans is all about righteousness. In places this word refers to God's character of holiness and justice. In other places the same word refers to God giving that righteous character to men and women putting them in a right relationship with Himself, the process called justification (God making it “just as if I'd” never sinned).

1. **Read Romans 3:21-26.** Why do we need to be put right with God? (verse 23). How does God put us right through Christ? (verses 23-25) How do we receive from God this free gift of righteousness? (verses 22 and 26)
2. **Read Romans 5:1-11.** What are some of the blessings of being put right with God? How can we be sure how much God loves us?
3. **Read Roman 8:12-27.** What blessings do we receive from becoming God's children?
4. **Read Romans 8:28-39.** Meditate and reflect on the wonderful security we enjoy when God has set His love upon us!
5. In what ways have you experienced “the power of God for salvation” in your own life?

WEEK 11

Luke 1:1-2:40

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 2:41-4:44

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 5-6

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 7:1-8:39

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 8:40-10:24

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 10:25-12:34

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 11. Luke

Poverty and Riches

1. It has been said that Luke's Gospel more than any other reveals "God's bias towards the poor". Can you think of any examples of this? (e.g. who were the first visitors at the birth of Jesus?)
2. **Read Luke 1:46-55**, Mary's Song of Praise, "The Magnificat". To whom does Mary suggest God gives his wonderful blessings of salvation? **Read Luke 4:18-21**. To whom is Jesus sent to preach good news?
3. **Read Luke 6:20-26**. These "blessings and woes" are equivalent to the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:1-10. What do they reveal about God's bias towards the poor? How should rich Christians show God's love to poor people in our society and around the world? (e.g. Luke 14:12-14, 15:33)
4. **Read Luke 12:13-31 and 32-34**. What does the parable of the rich fool say to our materialistic society? What does it mean in practice to lay up treasures in heaven?
5. **Read Luke 18:1-30**. What does the parable of the Rich Young Ruler teach us about wealth and possessions?
6. **Read Luke 19:1-10**. What does the example of Zacchaeus teach us about God's love, and how we should demonstrate true repentance?
7. What practical changes are you going to make to your lifestyle in response to Jesus's teaching on wealth and possessions?

WEEK 12

Luke 12:35-14:35

Key verse

Thoughts

1 John 1-5

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 15-17

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 18:1-20:19

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 20:20-22:71

Key verse

Thoughts

Luke 23-24

Key verse

Thoughts

STUDY 12. 1 JOHN

Love one another

If we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen? (1 John 4:20 New Living Translation)

1. ***Read 1 John 3:11-20.*** How should our love for other Christians show itself in practice? Are there any situations where you have found it difficult to show God's kind of love? Why is that? From verse 16, what example of love has God set for us to follow?
2. ***Read 1 John 4:7-21.*** List the number of times John commands Christians to love one another. Now list the reasons WHY John says we should love one another (there are at least ELEVEN reasons in that short passage!) Which are the most persuasive or important reasons for us to love other Christians?
3. ***Read 1 John 4:19-21 again.*** Think long and hard about this verse: *If we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we have not seen?* (1 John 4:20 NLT) Are there any exceptions to this verse? Are there any situations where we are not obliged to love our Christian brothers or sisters? (Hint – the answer is no!) How then should we live?
4. What actions is God calling you to take in response to His wonderful love for you?

WEEK 13

1 Timothy 1-6

Key verse

Thoughts

Revelation 1-4

Key verse

Thoughts

Revelation 5-9

Key verse

Thoughts

Revelation 10:1-14:13

Key verse

Thoughts

Revelation 14:14-18:24

Key verse

Thoughts

Revelation 19-22

Key verse

Thoughts

Study 13. REVELATION

Christ triumphant!

1. Skim through the letters from the Risen Christ to the seven churches in Revelation 2:1-3:22. Which letter seems most relevant to the church you belong to at this time? Think in more detail about that particular letter. What challenges and what promises does Christ have for that church in Revelation – and for your church?
2. Read Revelation 5:1-14. The false gospel of “health, wealth and prosperity” is leading many Christians astray in these days. What do we learn about the nature our salvation from the fact that we follow “the Lamb that was slain”?
3. Read Revelation 7:9-17. What blessings are enjoyed by those who share in Christ's ultimate victory?
4. Read Revelation 19:11-21. Here is a picture of the triumphant Lord of all! Praise Him for the victory He shares with us!
5. Read Revelation 21:1-8 and meditate on the happy certainty of heaven which we enjoy as believers, that we will spend eternity in God's presence! What are you looking forward to most in heaven?

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