



Welcome to a set of weekly bible reading notes to accompany our MATURE series. Our aim with these notes is to encourage one another to read God's word, so you may want commit with a friend to do these bible readings and to pray each day – and then ask each other how you've got on during the week – as Hebrews 10:24 says, *lets spur each other on.*

*These notes should hopefully be useful for individuals and for families with and without children. Each day, there is a bible passage to read – **read that first, and pray** - ask God to help you understand it. (If it is your habit to spend some time with the passage and make your own notes, then do that now.)*

*Once you're read the passage and thought about it – have a look at the accompanying notes. The notes cover some of the context of the passage, an explanation and an application. There are also some accompanying questions or suggestions for action. As God speaks to you through his word, you may wish to write down what he is calling you to do (and share it with someone!) However, don't worry if sometimes you don't receive an obvious answer to prayer or clear instruction – just keep faithfully reading God's word, and He will use it in your live, as the Holy Spirit works in you.*

*After you've looked at the bible passage is a good time to pray – pray for strength to do what you need to do – thank God for what you have learned about him – and bring your requests before him.*

Then, you'll see that there is an activity for families with children; the target age range of these activities is 4-11ish, so you may need to modify them. This activity draws on one or two of the verses you've been reading, and give you some suggestions for sharing them with the family – over the breakfast or tea table perhaps. There's a starter activity to get people thinking, then reading the passage, some questions to answer, and then something to read – and a prayer so you don't forget to pray (just a starting point – do pray for longer if you can). Should take about five minutes – but can easily expand if you want it to.

Don't worry about communicating everything – particularly if you've got small children – communicating something of the good news of Jesus Christ every day is a great place to begin.

Enjoy – and let me know how you get on

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial 'J'.





## Monday

### 2 Timothy 3:16-17 God-breathed

#### Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Paul writes to his 'dear son' Timothy with instructions from one church leader to another – and as a father to a son in the Lord. Paul knows that his time left on earth is limited, and in one of his last letters, he exhorts Timothy to stay true to the gospel, and keep working as a workman approved by God (2:15). Here in chapter 3, we read of Paul's last charge to Timothy, which can be summarised in this way: live a godly life by continuing in what you have heard from God's word.

So here in verses 16 and 17, Paul reminds Timothy of what he knows. He reminds him of the universal scope and application of scripture – every part of the bible (all scripture) can be used in all sorts of ways (teaching, training etc.) to equip people for doing the things, the good works, that God has prepared in advance for us to do. Why does Paul make this universal claim for scripture? Because it is 'God-breathed'.

And so – if this is truly God's word – and it is – and is breathed out by God – what is our response going to be? We need to take these words seriously – more than that, we need to follow God's word. We cannot have the bible as a guide book, just to be consulted if we don't think we know the way – or as one of a number of things we might find useful when making decisions – the bible is God's word, and the Holy Spirit works through God's word to show us what it means, and what we need to do with what God has breathed out for us.

So today, ask yourself:

*What does it mean to say that all scripture is God-breathed?*

*Is there an area of my life where I don't listen to God's word? How am I going to change that?*

And give thanks to God for the priceless gift of his word.

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** get a small mirror and get everyone round the table to breathe on it. What happens? The mirror steams up with the water droplets from our breath. Although we can't normally see our breath, we can on a mirror, or outside on a cold day – and we know that we breathe out.

The bible talks about God breathing out his word. We breathe out air and water droplets – God has breathed out his word, the bible. God has breathed out the bible for us to see – and read – and understand.

#### Read 2 Timothy 3:16

What is the bible useful for?

Whose wrote the bible?

Why do we need to read our bibles?

**Read:** *The bible is useful for teaching us about what God wants us to do and be. It is God's word that he breathed out – he wrote it. We need to read it because it comes from God, and it's useful for us.*

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help me to understand what the bible says and help me to do what it says. Amen



## Weekend

### Hebrews 4:12-13 God's powerful word

#### Read: Hebrews 4:12-13

In our final passage looking at the subject of being captive to God's word, we come full circle – and remind ourselves again of the power of God's word – spoken and written.

Look at verse 12 – as we come before God's word, as we read it – notice how we don't stand over it and judge it – notice how it judges, challenges and convicts us. It penetrates deeper than just the physical – to the spiritual.

We recognise this don't we – that as we read God's word, praying that God's Holy Spirit will show us what it means, we are convicted of sin – and so we repent. We are shown the ways in which we have been living lives that aren't pleasing to God – and so we seek his forgiveness. We learn about things that we should be doing – and about things that we should no longer do.

Then look at verse 13. We are reminded that God sees everything – and that on the last day, we must all stand before him. And when we stand before the Lord, whether we stand or fall will depend on what we have done with God's word. Have we believed its message – that salvation can be found in Christ alone – or have we believed some other message?

Have we listen to God's word – and put our trust in Jesus as our Lord and saviour? Have we obeyed God's word – are we seeking to live as Jesus Christ's followers? These are all good questions to ask ourselves.

So today

*Reflect on your attitude to God's word – does it judge and challenge us – or do we judge it?*

*Thank God for the gift of his word*

*Thank God for the gift of his son, who will enable us to stand on the last day*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** take a bible and place it on the table. Does it move on it's own? Does it make any noise? No

Here in Hebrews, we learn that God's word is living and active – how can that be?

#### Read Hebrews 4:12

How is God's word described?

What does God's word do?

**Read:** *God's word is powerful – when we read the bible, God is speaking to us through his word. He tells us how to live – how to follow Jesus – how to live. We change how we live and how we think because of what God's word says*

Ask God to help us to read his word and do it

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for the bible. Help us to understand how powerful it is.

Amen.



## Friday Psalm 51:1-4 Forgiveness

### Read: Psalm 51:1-4

So far this week we have looked at a number of passages dealing with God's Word.

And as we've reflected on those passages, we surely recognise that we often don't desire to do what God's word says – in fact we sometimes deliberately ignore God and his word, and go off on our own track.

Which brings us to Psalm 51. As the super-scription says, David wrote this Psalm after committing adultery with Bathsheba – and making sure here husband was on the front lines to be killed. David's sin is great – and yet he gives us here a model for seeking God's forgiveness.

We're only looking at the first few verses here, but notice a number of things. First see how, when David has sinned and recognised his fault – he doesn't run as far away from God as he can – instead he comes to God, seeking forgiveness. Second, he seeks forgiveness based on God's compassionate and merciful character (v1-2). Third, he trusts that God can deal with his sin – we of course have the advantage of David here, knowing how God deals with our sin – in Jesus Christ, on the cross. And fourth, notice how in verse 4 David sees his sin as being primarily against God.

David has sinned – and sinned against God – and yet the only answer to his problem is to seek God and ask for his forgiveness. Our natural reaction when we sin is to seek to hide and flee from God – and yet we need to learn from David – we need to come before God in genuine repentance and asking for forgiveness.

*So today*

*Ask for God's help in avoiding patterns of sinful behaviour you may have got into*

*Thank God that he is a gracious and merciful and forgiving God – and that in Jesus Christ, we can know forgiveness.*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** ask children to think of a time when they did something wrong, and to remember what happened to them. Discuss how actions have consequences.

Here in Psalm 51, David, who has done a very bad thing, comes to God for forgiveness.

### Read Psalm 51:1-2

What does David ask for?

Why does David need to ask for this?

**Read:** *David trusts in God's mercy. When we come to God to say sorry for what we have done wrong, we too trust God's mercy – we trust that because Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, when we say sorry to God, he forgives us.*

Do we need to say sorry to God for anything in particular?

**Prayer:** Dear Lord Jesus, we thank you that when we say sorry to you, you forgive us, because you died on the cross for us.

Amen.



## Tuesday Psalm 119:1-8 Hearing God's word

### Read: Psalm 119:1-8

As we look at this first section of Psalm 119, notice that this is a long Psalm – 176 verses split into 22 sections. As a whole, it is an extended reflection on what it means to be blessed and blameless, to walk after the Lord.

Notice in this first section how often the Psalmist refers to God's law – his statutes, ways, precepts, decrees, commands and righteous laws. The Psalmist earnestly desires to do God's will, and to follow God's way. He refers to the law; as we read this passage we recognise that our desire should be to follow God's way revealed in the whole of scripture.

In the first three verses of the Psalm, those who are blessed are those who follow the Lord, and are blameless; the Psalmist desires to be like that, but recognises that he isn't in verses 5 and 6 – and resolves to praise the Lord and obey him in verses 7 and 8.

We too need to recognise that we should be blameless in following the Lord – but that we are not, and that we are not put to shame (v6), not because we achieve perfect obedience, but because Jesus Christ achieves perfect obedience for us, by dying on the cross.

And our response to what Christ has done for us should be like that of the Psalmist – praising God, and seeking to obey his word. Not because we earn our own salvation because of our obedience – the Psalmist couldn't, and neither can we. But because it is our response to what God has done in Christ – we want to praise Christ, and we want to become more like him.

So we see here that this extended reflection on being blessed and blameless is, for the Psalmist, an exhortation to himself and others to follow after the Lord – to obey him. As

we saw yesterday, all scripture is God-breathed, and useful for teaching and training us. This is God's word – we need to seek to be obedient to it

*So today - Ask God to show you the areas of your life where you need to be obedient*

*Give thanks to God that Christ died on the cross and has made us right with God*

### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about favourite songs and favourite activities. What do we like to do with our songs? What do we like to sing about?

In this part of the bible, the Psalmist tells us what he likes to sing about (or say) and do:

### Read Psalm 119:7-8

What does the Psalmist like to sing about?

What does he want to do?

**Read:** *We saw yesterday that the Bible is God's word, and that we need to read it because it comes from God. Today we see that we don't just read it – we also do what it says.*

How can we follow the Psalmist example – how can we do what he does?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help me to understand what the bible says and help me to do what it says. Amen.



## Wednesday

### Psalm 119:1-8 Hearing God's word

#### Read: Psalm 1:1-3

Psalm 1 describes two ways to live – the way of the righteous, and the way of the wicked. It is a wisdom Psalm - it talks about the right way to live under God. Verses 1-3 describe one who is blessed or righteous, (v6). They describe how a righteous person should live.

In verse 1, there are things to be avoided – walking or standing or sitting with the wicked – do notice the progression there from walking with someone, to sitting and identifying with them. One thing to hear the wicked talk – another to sit down with them!

Then in verses 2 and 3, the Psalmist describes what one who seeks to follow the Lord should be doing. He or she meditates on the Law of the Lord day and night – reading God's word and seeking to understand it, so that it can be obeyed.

Then in verse 3 we have this description of one who meditates on the law of the Lord. A tree planted by water – a well fed and watered tree, that grows strong, and bears fruit. The Psalm talks about prospering – prospering in doing good, prospering in doing God's will.

As we read this Psalm we need to apply it in two ways. The first is to recognise that there is a model of conduct here to be followed: close attention to God's word, leading to obedience to God and his word. The second is to recognise our failure to be this righteous one. We do not meditate of God's word in this way – we are not obedient in this way, and we do have a tendency to follow the ways of the wicked – a least a little.

And so this Psalm also leads us to recognise our failure to live up to God's standard, and to recognise our need of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The only truly blameless man ever is Jesus Christ – this Psalm draws us to recog-

nise afresh our need for forgiveness in his name, and draws us to renew our trust in Christ, our saviour and Lord

*So today*

*Ask God to work in you through the Holy Spirit to enable you to be obedient*

*Give thanks to God that Christ died on the cross and has made us right with God*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** talk about the kind of things we like spending our time doing – reading books, watching TV, playing with friends. Encourage children to share details of a favourite activity.

In this part of the bible, the Psalmist tells us how we should value God's word, the bible:

#### Read Psalm 1:1-2

What does the Psalmist say we should avoid doing? What does he say we should do?

What does it mean to delight in the law of the Lord?

**Read:** *We have seen this week that the bible is God's word, and that we need to obey it. Today, we see that we need to spend the time getting to know what it says, so that we can follow it!*

How can we follow the Psalmist example – how can we do what he does?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, help me to understand what the bible says and help me to do what it says. Amen.



## Thursday

### Psalm 1:4-6 The Righteous and the Wicked

#### Read: Psalm 1:4-6

Yesterday we saw how Psalm 1 begins with a description of the righteous – and how they should live, meditating on the law of the Lord. Today, we come to the wicked, and their end.

In verse 4, the wicked are like chaff – the light bits of grain left over when the grain is threshed to get at the good stuff – traditionally threshing floors were built in the open so that when the grain was beaten (threshed) the chaff would blow away. Such a contrast to the imagery of the tree in verse 3!

Then verse 5 looks to the future and to the judgement – the wicked will not stand, and will not be part of the congregation of the righteous – they will not enjoy everlasting fellowship with God. Finally, verse 6 draws the two ways to live together, and reminds us that the Lord knows the way of the righteous - and by implication, the wicked also.

As we read through this Psalm, we should heed the warning of this section about what happens to the wicked – to those who oppose and ignore God. Whatever appearances might seem – however much they might appear to prosper, ultimately when we all stand before God on the last day, only those who know Jesus as Lord and saviour and can therefore truly be counted righteous – only they will stand.

And so this Psalm also leads us to recognise our failure to live up to God's standard, and to recognise our need of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. The only truly blameless man ever is Jesus Christ – this Psalm draws us to recognise afresh our need for forgiveness in his name, and draws us to renew our trust in Christ, our saviour and Lord

At the same time, we can draw comfort from the fact that God watches all our ways. He

has not forgotten us – nor has he forgotten the conduct of those who do evil. God is watching –he is active and he will act. We need to be reassured that God is in control, and will achieve his purposes and make sure justice is done.

*So today*

*Ask forgiveness for the ways in which you have opposed or ignored God*

*Ask for God's help in avoiding walking in the ways of the wicked*

*Thank God that he is in control*

#### Activity for Families with Children

**Starter:** get a small tray of objects and show them to your children for a few moments, then cover up the tray and see if anyone can remember what was on the tray

In this part of the bible, the Psalmist tells us that God is always watching:

#### Read Psalm 1:6

What are the ways the Psalmist talks about?

Who sees what we do?

**Read:** *God knows all our ways – he is watching us! When we live our lives each day, we live knowing God is watching us – and we seek to please him.*

How can we please God today?

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, thank you that you are watching everything that happens in your world. Help me to please you today. Amen.