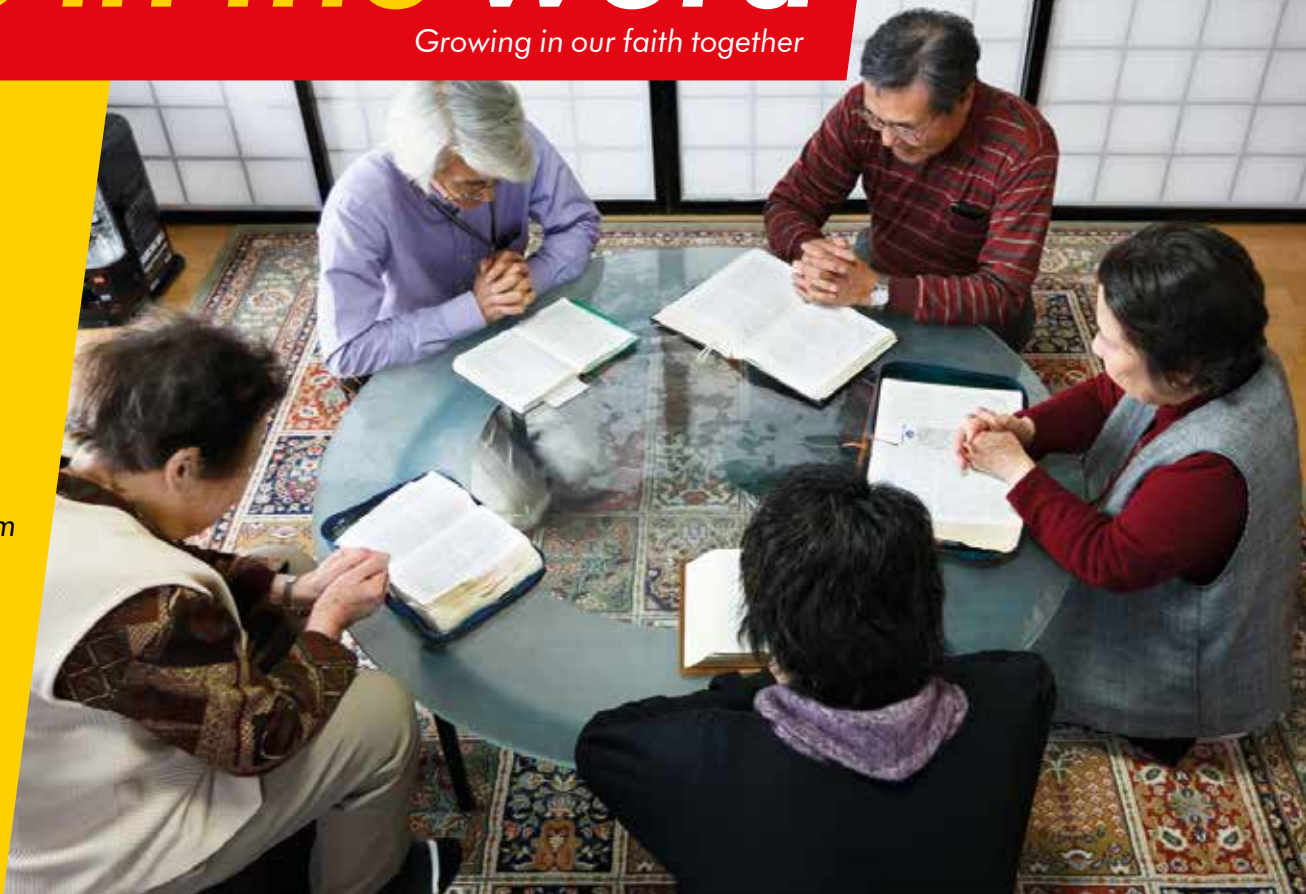


life in the word

Growing in our faith together

A Bible study resource for individuals and small groups from

**Wycliffe
Bible
Translators**



Welcome

The early believers 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (Acts 2:42 NIV). They were a community who knew the significance of life together in Christ.

Whether your small group has been together for some time or you are just setting out on this journey, we hope that you find joy and encouragement in studying God's word together.

You can adapt this study to suit the needs of the group. It is here as a guide to give you space to read, reflect and pray.

We 'pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding' (**Philippians 1:9** NLT).

Gillian Andrews
(Prayer Advocate)

Studying the Bible together is an important part of our Christian life, so that we can help one another to grow in our faith and knowledge of God.





1. Sweet words

Discuss:

What is your favourite Bible verse or passage? Why? Share with the group how that particular Scripture has made a difference to you.

Perhaps it has brought comfort when you were facing difficult circumstances, given guidance when making a decision, or challenged you to take bold steps for your faith.

Now imagine if that verse or passage did not exist in your language – that you never had the chance to read it or hear it.

What difference would it have made to your life if you had never been able to hear that verse? How might that have changed your relationship with God?

Take a few moments as a group to pray and thank God for the impact these verses have had for each person.

Watch: (optional)

The Bible Banquet (2 minutes)

Available at wycliffe.org.uk/videos

‘Can you imagine never having understood God’s word?’

Discuss your reactions to the video.

'How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!'





Pray:

Spend time praying together as a group.

- | Ask God to give you a hunger for his word and to help you understand what he is saying to you through it.
- | You have shared with each other the things that hinder you in Bible study. Pray for one another that God would help you overcome these obstacles.
- | Pray that God would help you to trust him, even when life is challenging or he feels far away.
- | Pray for those who do not have access to the Bible in the language that speaks to them best (1 in 5 people around the world). Pray that they would soon be able to feast on his word, as we can.

2. Connecting with God's heart

Discuss:

Prayer is an essential part of our Christian lives, through which we can communicate with God.

There are different types of prayer: adoring and praising God, thanksgiving, confession and asking God to meet our needs or the needs of others.

Think of something specific that you prayed to God for and share the experience with the group:

- | Did you get an answer quickly, or did you find yourself earnestly praying for that thing for a long time?
- | Did you get the answer you hoped for?
- | Did you recognise the outcome as an answer to prayer?

We can be surprised when God acts differently than we wanted. We can even be surprised when he acts exactly as we had hoped!

Read:

Acts 12:1–19

Look at verse 5:

'So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.'

The church prayed earnestly for Peter. It doesn't say specifically, but I imagine they would have been asking for Peter to be freed, to be rescued from the threat of being put to death.

Notice how they prayed – earnestly. This means sincerely and intensely. This was an urgent situation and they knew they needed to turn to God.

Have you had any situations in your life that have caused you to pray earnestly?

How did you feel?





Read: continued

The Lord miraculously rescues Peter from prison, and verse 12 tells us that *'he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying.'*

Peter arrives at the house while the people are praying – but what is their response when Rhoda tells them Peter is at the door?

Have you ever found yourself astonished when God answers your prayers, even though you have been asking him for something?

Optional further discussion:

In Acts 12:2, we read that Herod put James to death, prior to arresting Peter. It does not go into detail, but I imagine that the church would have been praying for James and the others who were arrested, just as they prayed for Peter.

What can we learn from this?

Why weren't both men miraculously delivered?

Note how the church responded after James' death. They could have felt it was hopeless to pray after that. Why do you think they were able to continue to pray?

Notes

How do you feel about praying after a disappointing outcome?

It is tempting sometimes to think that our prayers don't really matter. Surely God knows about the situation anyway. But there are many stories in the Bible and testimonies from Christians that highlight just how significant our prayers are.

A Wycliffe worker, Judith, had this conversation with Tychique, the Ngbugu team leader. (The Ngbugu are a people group in the Central African Republic.)



'What difference does it make when people pray?' Judith asked.

Tychique replied, 'Goodness! This country has been at war for over six years and we haven't stood still.' Judith looked a bit puzzled, so he explained:

'What you don't expect, in a country that's been at war for over six years, is to have advanced during that time to the extent that we are now standing on the threshold of typesetting our New Testament. We've progressed, not stood still. And the reason we've not simply stood still ever since the war began is because people have prayed!'

And those prayers continued as typesetting was completed remotely, with the typesetter in Switzerland – a rather miraculous 'first' for CAR.

Read: continued

2 Corinthians 1:8–11

'On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, as you help us by your prayers.' (v10b–11a)

When Paul faced hardship and extreme trouble, he told the Corinthian church that he was helped by their prayers, that God had shown favour 'in answer to the prayers of many'.

Isn't it amazing that our prayers do make a difference? That God hears us and graciously answers?

But this doesn't mean we just come to God with a list of demands.

Through prayer we connect with God's heart for the world.

So how should we pray or what should we pray for?

Paul is a good example to explore how we might focus our prayers and what things should concern us.

Make a note of what Paul prays for the Ephesians in these passages.

Ephesians 1:17–19

Ephesians 3:16–19

Make a note of what Paul asks the Ephesians to pray for him.

Ephesians 6:19–20

Are these your priorities when you pray for friends and family?



Pray:

Take time to pray together as a group.

- | Pray for each other's needs, knowing that your prayers do make a difference.
- | Follow the example of Paul with your prayers, desiring spiritual growth and to see one another deepening your relationships with Jesus Christ.
- | Pray for all the teams who are working on Bible translation. When we ask them how we can support them, one thing they often say is, 'Pray for us!'

3. Hearing clearly

Discuss:

In the previous session, we looked at prayer, with a focus on talking to God. But prayer is two-way communication. We also need to listen.

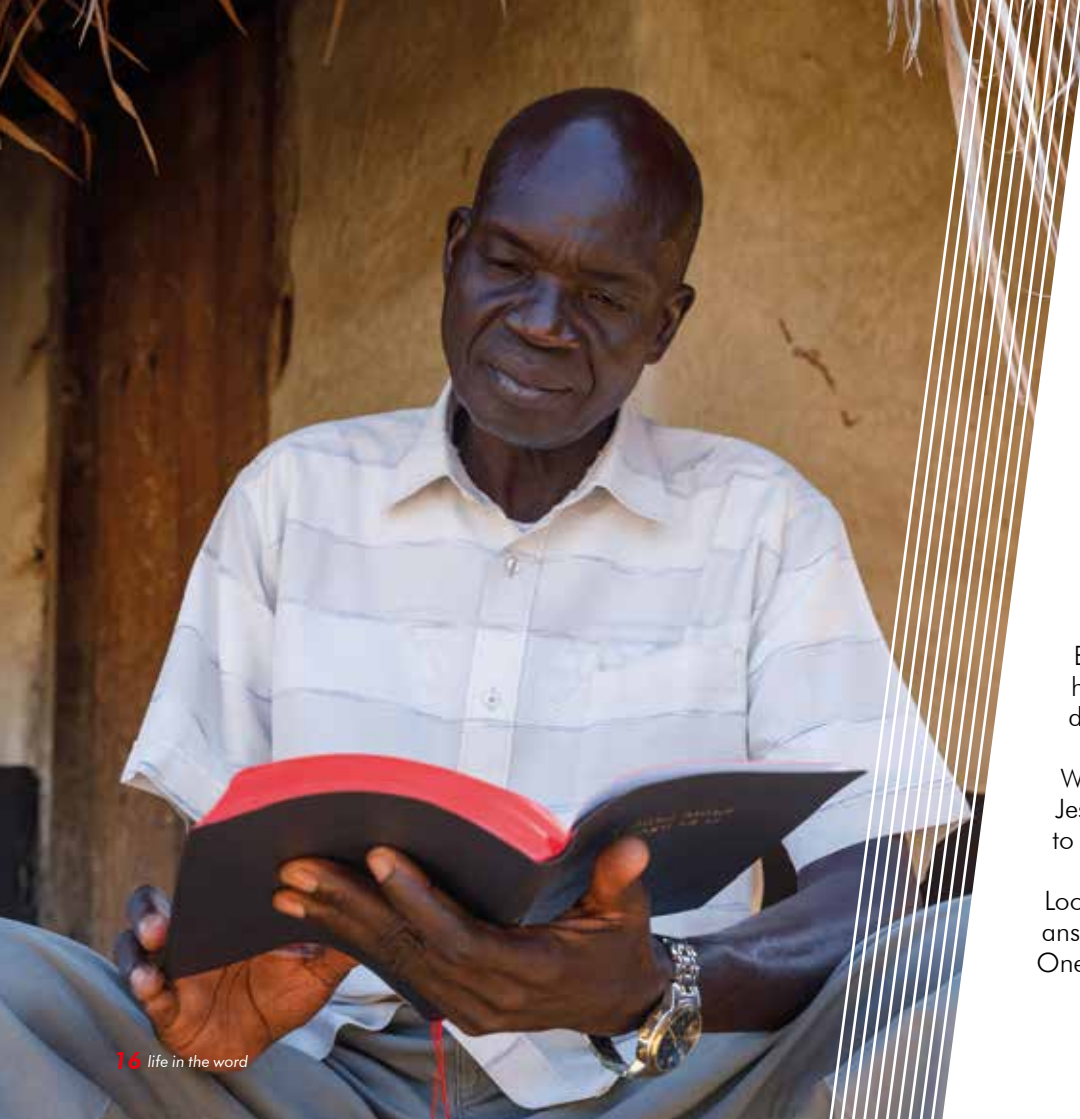
What does it mean to you to listen in prayer?

What makes listening in prayer difficult?

- | Lack of time?
- | Fear about what God might say?
- | Uncertainty that you will hear anything at all?
- | Anything else?

And yet, we don't want to let these things hinder us from really praying in the fullest sense and tuning into what God wants to say to us.





Read: continued

Luke 4:1–13

This might seem like an unusual passage to turn to for this topic, but it contains important lessons for us about knowing what God says.

It is hard to listen when we can't hear an audible voice, and that can leave us feeling unsure that we will be able to hear from God.

God speaks to us through his word, the Bible. When listening in prayer, what we hear will always confirm Scripture; it won't disagree with it.

When the devil tried to tempt Jesus, Jesus used his knowledge of Scripture to stand strong.

Look again at verses 4, 8 and 12. Jesus answers each time with truth from Scripture. One of the problems when we want to hear

from God is that we might not be sure if he is really speaking to us or our own minds have come up with the thought.

So it is important to listen with one eye on the Bible!

Take a look at verses 9–11. When the devil tried to tempt Jesus for the third time, he actually used Scripture to try to convince him!

What does this show us?

We need to be very careful not to misinterpret or twist God's word to suit ourselves.

Be careful to avoid using the Bible to select the verses that back up what you want. We need to know verses in their context and the full breadth of God's word.

How can we ensure that we are really hearing what God says?

- | Check if it agrees with Scripture.
- | Talk it through with wise Christian friends.
- | Take the time to be still in prayer to allow God's Spirit to prompt us.

Jesus responds in verse 12 with a proper application of Scripture. He shows complete trust in God and a desire to do his will.

When we listen in prayer, we set aside our own desires and seek to obey God's will. But the more we know him and love him, the more we find that it is our desire and delight to obey and follow him!

Pray:

You could choose a verse to meditate on as you begin this time of prayer and ask God to help you to listen.

- | Pray for God's help to be still. Ask him to guide you and to help you hear what he is saying to you.
- | Thank God for his word, which allows us to know him and clearly hear from him.
- | Pray for those who are still waiting for God's word in the language that speaks to them best, that they might be able to hear his voice clearly too.





Read:

John 10:1–16

Why do the sheep follow the good shepherd?

They know his voice.

This passage paints such a beautiful picture of the relationship between the shepherd and the sheep.

When you answer the phone, if the caller is someone close, such as a family member or dear friend, you don't even have to ask who it is. The moment you hear their voice, you know them.

When we are walking closely with the Lord, we know his voice. We recognise when he is prompting us and learn to tune out other voices.

How do we learn to know God's voice?

The other interesting thing to note in this passage is that God is a good shepherd.

Are you worried about what you might hear if you took the time to listen to God?

He could convict us about things that aren't right in our lives.

What if he calls us to do something we don't want to do?

But he is good. The sheep happily follow the good shepherd who cares for them and even sacrifices himself for them.

We don't need to be anxious about what God will say to us, because we can trust that all his intentions for us are good! And how amazing that *'He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out'* (v3b).

But what about when it seems that he is leading us down a difficult path? Alison Tute, who served with Wycliffe's partner organisation in Papua New Guinea, shares an experience of waiting and trusting, even when the way seemed hard:

What has God been teaching me during this time of waiting? Some days it feels that the waiting will never end and other days I'm reminded in God's word of something that sustains and inspires.

As we faced brick wall after brick wall last weekend, two passages stood out to me. Deuteronomy 8:1–18 is a passage about what God did for the Israelites in the wilderness. He led them in the right direction, but in ways that were not pleasant or easy – a desert place, with no water, with poisonous snakes and scorpions – and he gave them all they needed – food and water, and his leading. In verse 16b, it says this was *'to humble you and to test you, and in the end to do you good'*. The same day I read that, I also saw a post on Facebook about 1 Peter 5:6 – *'So, humble yourselves under the mighty power of God'*.

So often I want things to go my way, I want God to answer me. I realised that I must humble myself and trust him who is greater than everything and remember that *'in the end'* I will be able to look back and see that it did me good.



Pray:

Praise God for his faithfulness and care as our shepherd.

- | Ask him to help you to completely trust him, even when the path isn't the one you would have chosen.
- | Pray for his help not only to hear his voice clearly, but also to act on it.
- | Pray for one another, whether the path is currently pleasant or difficult.

Wycliffe Bible Translators

We invite you to join us on our prayer journeys,
which seek to help focus your prayers and deepen
your relationship with God as you learn about
various people and projects around the world.
wycliffe.org.uk/prayerjourney



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