**How to Read the Bible: An Introduction**

**The Surprise of Scripture**

**[Slide 2]** Let me introduce you to WALT. Our four-year-old Esther has been getting to know WALT for the past couple of weeks; as many of you know she has just started P1. It’s WALT’s job to let the boys and girls know what they are learning each day. That’s because, as those of you who work in education will know, WALT is an acronym for “we are learning to…”

Now, I confess I often neglected poor WALT when I was a teacher. I don’t know… I suppose I felt that he killed the element of surprise in my lessons. But I did wonder whether – just for this evening – I should break the habit of a professional lifetime. After all, it just might be helpful to make clear what we are all here to learn.

But, you know, creating a WALT for this evening isn’t as easy as it sounds. Sure, in one sense, it’s pretty obvious: we are learning to read the Bible. Sounds straightforward, doesn’t it? Take this course and by the end you will know how to read the Bible. You will have all your questions answered. And, better still, all those differences of theological opinion will be no more.

Maybe you are beginning to see my problem. It just isn’t that simple.

You see, I am very aware that we’re not in a classroom learning our ABCs and you are not school children; you are grown ups, grown ups that have been reading the Bible for a very long time, many of you much longer than me. The fact that you are here this evening, despite your familiarity with the Bible, indicates that you have some grown up questions about this book, questions that will not be easily resolved this evening, or indeed in this course. To think otherwise would be rather naive. But more than this, I fear it would do a tremendous disservice to Scripture itself. It would be to reduce the Bible to just another human book, one that can be made to fit our self created schemes and methodologies.

But we all know that the Bible is not that sort of book. For us, the Bible is the place of God’s special revelation. It is a “God-breathed” book, as Paul writes to Timothy. A living book, that reads us as much as we read it. That is to say, we read the Bible to discover who we are. Or, as Frederick Beuchner puts it, the Bible “speaks out of the depths of an almost unimaginable past into the depths of ourselves.”

I suppose the popular idea is that the Bible is a handbook for life, a list of rules or an answer book for life’s problems. But this is simply not the case. Within the pages of the Bible itself we have an acknowledgement that Scripture cannot be easily categorised: it is at times described as gold or honey, light or fire. At other times it is a hammer or a sword, food or a mirror. It’s interesting to me that these are all metaphors, because only poetry can convey the complexity of this book.

**[Slide 3]** If you are at all familiar with the fiction writer Marilynne Robinson, you will know that she is a phenomenally well-read person. And yet, when it comes to the Bible, she has this to say:

I know many other books very well and I flatter myself that I understand them – even books by people like Augustine and Calvin. But I do not understand the Bible. I study theology as one would watch a solar eclipse in a shadow. In church, the devout old custom persists of merely repeating verses, one or another luminous fragment, a hymn before and a hymn afterward. By grace of my abiding ignorance, it is always new to me. I am never not instructed.

And this is the point. When we come to the Bible we are never not instructed, we are never not surprised. No matter how many times we read it, the Bible continues to speak to us anew.

So maybe my instinct as a teacher was right all those years – it’s best to leave the learning intention to one side, lest we lose the surprise of Scripture. So, this evening let us embark on this journey of thinking seriously about how to read the Bible with a sense of adventure, wonderment and excitement at the new things we will learn by the help of the Holy Spirit.

**[Slide 4]** Now, of course, before you all ask for your money back, so to speak, this is not to say that you won’t learn *something*. In fact, I hope you will learn a great deal. Over the next ten months, and maybe even beyond that, we will be working our way through the Bible, pretty much one book at a time. Each evening you will come away equipped with the tools to approach this sacred text and have the confidence to read it wisely.

Someone different will facilitate each evening, which means that we will benefit from a variety of perspectives on the different books and benefit from the different expertise of the various speakers. But you can also expect each evening to have some things in common. You can expect to come away with an understanding of the particular themes of a given book; an appreciation of the literary styles involved; how the book might have been understood by its original hearers; where the book fits into the bigger story of the Bible; and, of course, the particular historical and cultural contexts that might inform our understanding today.

This will be followed up with some optional further reading and suggested resources; questions to discuss in fellowship groups; and possibly some advanced reading for the next evening.

But we’re getting ahead of ourselves. My task this evening is simply to set the scene. And so, what I would like to do in the time that we have together is to think about the Bible from two different angles that might help us begin to answer this very big question of how to read this book. Now, I can’t possibly cover everything I should in the short time we have. I can’t talk about how to read devotionally, for example. What I want to do is to lay the foundations for us to think further about this important topic. **[Slide 5]** Firstly, I want us to consider the story *of* the Bible; that is, what the Bible is and how it got to us. Secondly, I want us to think about the story *in* the Bible; that is, the story the Bible tells. After each point I want to leave a little bit of time for group discussion and reflection.

So, without further ado, let’s get stuck in with **The Story *of* the Bible**

Well, I guess the first thing we need to establish from the get go is that the Bible is not a book. And, despite popular assumptions it did not fall out of heaven in the King James Version. **[Slide 6]** The English word ‘bible’ actually comes from the Latin ‘ta biblia’, meaning ‘the books’. It is, in fact, a small library of books – sixty-six in all. These books were written over a period of a thousand years or more, in a number of different languages, involving different human authors and editors and in a variety of different genres and literary styles.

Now, of course, you probably know this already. But don’t let your familiarity gloss over the strangeness of what we are talking about here. In a great many ways the Bible is a very odd collection of books indeed. **[Slide 10]** I read something recently by Rowan Williams that helped me to grasp something of this strangeness:

The diversity of the Bible is as great as if you had within the same two covers, for example, Shakespeare’s sonnets, the law reports of 1910, the introduction to Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, the letters of St Anselm and a fragment of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Now, does that help you to appreciate what an unusual assortment of books the Bible is? I mean, imagine for a moment just how much of a struggle it would be to get your head around a library like this. Most of us wouldn’t know where to start! And yet, all of us are engaged in reading the Bible. And, as Williams points out, the Bible is even longer in its chronological span than the books listed here. And not only this, it is written out of a culture completely alien to our own.

**[Slide 8]** You see, the story of the Bible begins somewhere very different from 21st century Belfast. It’s a story that begins in the ancient Middle East with the nation Israel. And it emerges out of he language, culture and practices of this people. Over the course of their long history this library of literature emerges, progressively revealing more about God and his plan to restore Creation. This history spans several key moments: from origins in Egypt to the establishment of a Jewish nation, from the Babylonian conquest to the building of the Second Temple - a history of over one thousand years.

Now what is important for us to realize is that this collection of books spoke *into* and *out of* that history – at different times and in different ways, until eventually, at some point in the Second Temple period the books were gathered together into the form we have today.

**[Slide 9]** Now while we call this the Old Testament, Jews refer to it as the TaNaKh, which is an acronym of the three main subdivisions of the Jewish Bible. The T stands for Torah, the books of “instruction”; the N stands for Nevi’im, the books that cover “the period of prophecy”; and, finally, the K stands for Ketuvim, or the “writings”. You can see the various books in each category listed here.

**[Slide 10]** But these were not the only books to emerge out of Israel’s history. The eagle eyed among you may have picked up on this from the Bible itself. Maybe you have stumbled across reference to the Book of Jashar in Joshua or the **Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel** in I Kings. There other examples I could mention, but these two are enough to illustrate the rich variety of literature that existed in ancient Israel.

And while these books may not have been considered Scriptural – as inspired by God – they clearly remained significant to Jewish communities. **[Slide 11]** For example, a whole bunch of writing from the Second Temple period: books such as Tobit, Judith, Maccabees, etc. are still read alongside Scripture in Jewish communities today. And this was true for most of Christian history as well. This is why Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, include some of these books as apocryphal works.

Now, it’s important to understand that the TaNaKh is the version of the Bible that Jesus and his early followers would have known. But as the Church grew, so did the Bible itself. **[Slide 12]** The apostles picked up the quill, so to speak, where the ancient scribes left off. Over the course of a hundred years or so, another small library of books emerged. Again, these texts were written into and out of the history of God’s people. And again, within this library we have a good deal of variety. **[Slide 13]** We have the Gospels and the book of Acts; a host of letters, most of which are written by the Apostle Paul to particular churches or individuals; and the book of Revelation.

But there are some notable differences with the Hebrew Bible. For a start, the apostles wrote in a different language: Greek, rather than Hebrew or Aramaic. And, perhaps most significantly, they wrote for a different purpose. It seems to me that, for the most part at least, the texts of the New Testament arise out of necessity. Their authors were writing to support and guide specific Christian communities in specific places as the need emerged. In other words, the New Testament is written with pastoral intent.

**[Slide 14]** Take Luke’s Gospel, for example, which begins with Luke telling the recipient that the book has been written, “so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.” Or Paul’s letters, addressed to particular people (often by name), for the purpose of speaking to specific pastoral issues that have arisen. This means that the New Testament was written into a vibrant faith community, a community that was dealing with real questions and real challenges about what it means to live out the Gospel in the real world.

Of course, this throws up interesting questions about how God chooses to speak through the New Testament writers. I always remember a question my A Level Religious Studies teacher once asked me when I was studying Galatians. “Do you think Paul realized he was writing Scripture when he wrote this letter?” That’s an interesting question to ask, isn’t it? I mean maybe if he realized his words were going to be so closely scrutinized for millennia, he might have been clearer on one or two issues. But that’s something you can discuss in your small groups. For now, I want us to remember that when we consider the words of Paul or any other New Testament writer as inspired by God, we must not divorce their words from the context into which they were first spoken.

**[Slide 15]** Now, whether or not Paul was aware that he was writing Scripture is in one sense neither here nor there. The important thing for us to remember is that for the first Christians his writings were on a par with the Hebrew Bible. Remember what Peter says in his second epistle:

So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, **as they do the other scriptures**.

Aside from the comfort we might take from knowing that even Peter found parts of the Bible confusing, these words show us that the canon of Scripture as we know it today – the books of the Old and New Testament – was already taking shape at the end of the first century. There would be some disagreement later in the history of the church over the status of the deuterocanonical books, for example, or even whether some gnostic Gospels should be included in the canon, but this is not to undermine the fact that the books that sit between the covers of our Bibles have been regarded as the authoritative books of Scripture, from the very earliest of days. Now, of course, the story of the Bible doesn’t end there, because what follows is a long history of translation into different languages. But I’m afraid that story will have to wait for another evening.

For now, there is just one more thing that I think I should say before we wrap up the story *of* the Bible. So far we have been speaking about the Bible as a collection of written texts. But the reality is that for most of Christian history the Bible was more often heard than read. It has been primarily received through the ear, rather than through the eye. Aside from the fact that many people were simply not able to read, the prospect of owning a personal copy of the Bible is a distinctly modern idea.

This can be a difficult notion for us to get our heads around. We walk around with dozens of translations of the Bible – commentaries and sermons even – in our back pockets, ready to be accessed at the touch of a finger. But I wonder have we lost something? Of course, it is an incredible thing to be able to read the Bible silently and intently, but there is also something to be said for listening to the Bible being read as a community.

At the last meeting of our small group we did just that. Instead of our usual study and discussion, we simply listened to Paul’s letter to the Philippians from beginning to end. Simply listening to an entire letter as a group of believers, meeting together as the first hearers would have done in a home, was an edifying experience. I think we would all agree that it opened up new ways of hearing and understanding God’s word. Of course, this should not have been any surprise to us. The Christian life is, after all, about listening; listening together and listening to God.

And that’s what’s surprising about the story of the Bible. We listen to God, not in one book, but in many books. Not through one author, but via many contributors, writing at different times, in different places and even in different languages. And yet, while all this is true, it is at the same time just one book, written by one author. Because, while there is great diversity in the Bible, there is also great unity. While there is complexity, there is also a beautiful simplicity.

And that’s the part of the story we are going to get to next. But first, I am going to give you a little break from my voice and a chance to discuss what we’ve been thinking about so far.

**[Slide 16]** So I am going to give you a few minutes to have a think about this question on the screen before we move on to part two.

Why not one book? Discuss the value of God revealing Himself through texts spread out over 1000 years and written by different authors.

**[3-4 minutes in small groups]**

**[Slide 17] The story *in* the Bible.**

**[Slide 18]** There is a remarkable moment in Luke’s Gospel when Jesus goes to synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. He stands up to read and is handed a scroll with the words of the prophet Isaiah:

 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,

    because he has anointed me

    to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives

    and recovering of sight for the blind,

to set at liberty those who are oppressed,

 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

After reading it, Jesus hands back the scroll, sits down and we are told that “The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.” Now, we are not told why they were staring. There was nothing particularly unusual about a man reading in synagogue, after all. But something caused them to stare. It might have been outrage, amazement, sheer bafflement. Whatever the emotion, it is clear that these familiar words from Isaiah were heard somehow differently from the lips of this carpenter’s son. As if to confirm their suspicions, or confound them, Jesus says something even more remarkable:“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

The *Old* Testament is an unfortunate phrase. It seems to suggest that, in the light of Jesus, the Hebrew Bible is defunct - out of date - superseded by the *New* Testament. But this passage in Luke’s Gospel reminds us that this is not the case. As Christians we believe the Old *anticipates* the New. Or better still, that the Old finds its *fulfillment* in the New.

Roman Williams helpfully puts it like this:

**[Slide 19]** “The full meaning of what has gone before is laid bare in Jesus. The agenda for what follows is set in Jesus. And, without trying to undermine or ignore the integrity of Jewish Scripture in itself […], the Christian is bound to say that he or she can only read those Jewish Scriptures as moving towards the point at which a new depth of meaning is laid bare in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.”

As Williams rightly states, Christ is the key to unlocking our understanding of Scripture. Through him, we are able to make better sense of what the Old Testament is ultimately pointing us towards. But take note of his reminder that we do this while recognizing that the Hebrew Bible has its own integrity. That means we should always seek to ask the question, how would the first hearers have understood this passage? Once we have considered this question, we are to read it again with Christ as our lens. We put on the spectacles of Jesus, so to speak, so that we might better understand the Hebrew Bible in light of God’s fuller revelation.

So, with that caution duly noted, what is the story in the Bible? Well, beneath all the complexity and nuance that we have spent most of this evening speaking about, we find a very simple plot.

Now, as I said at the beginning, you are all pretty experienced Bible readers, so I am going to ask you to do this part for me. And, if you’re new to the Bible, don’t worry – you can make your neighbour do all the work.

**[Slide 20]** I’m going to ask you to get a little creative for a moment. I want you to imagine the Bible as a play. Now, students of literature will know that a well-made play should have – how many acts? That’s right: five. Five acts: exposition; rising action; climax; falling action; resolution. I am going to give you just a couple of minutes to plot the Bible as a well-made play. You can give your play a creative title. And, if you are really keen, you can briefly identify which books or parts of the Bible are relevant to each act.

**[2-3 minutes in small groups]**

So how did you get on? Well, I never asked my students in school to do anything I wasn’t prepared to do myself. So here’s my attempt.

**[Slide 21]** If you will excuse the shameless plagiarism from Dante, I am calling this play *The Divine* Comedy. Maybe you think that is a strange title for a story so full of tragedy. There are certainly lots of tragic moments – and not too many laughs either, for that matter – but as every good student of literature knows a comedy is a play that has a positive resolution. All is made good in the end - and usually this takes the form of a wedding. Well, this is certainly true of the Bible, isn’t it? All comes good in the end and we even have a wedding of sorts: heaven and earth are married together; Christ the bridegroom is joined with the Church, his bride.

And the plot of this play goes like this:

* Act 1: “It was very good”: Creation and the Fall;
* Act 2: God’s Faithfulness and Our Forgetfulness: Covenant and Disobedience;
* Act 3: God with Us: The Life, Death and Resurrection of Jesus;
* Act 4: “To the ends of the earth”: The Spreading of the Good News;
* Act 5: It will be more than very good: Christ’s Return and the New Creation.

Now, of course, this is just a bit of fun. But looking at the story of the Bible in this way helps us to see that Jesus is right at the centre of the drama. He is the pinnacle. His entrance on stage, however brief, is the moment of climax, the turning point for the whole plot. It is Jesus who rescues this play from tragedy. The first two acts certainly put it on that trajectory, towards a very sorrowful end. But Jesus moves that ending forward, to the middle. He suffers the tragedy himself and turns the whole story in another direction. Ultimately, this means that when the final curtain falls, it does so, not with tears and grief, but with laughter and joy.

**[Slide 32]** Now that’s quite a story. But let’s pause for a moment and think about what we are saying here. Because, if we are serious about it, then we are making quite an astonishing claim about this ancient library of books. We are asserting that this odd assortment of sixty-six books, from an ancient Middle Eastern culture, written across centuries, somehow work together to tell this one story. And, not just the story of this small group of people from Israel, but the story of the whole world – the whole cosmos, even. Now that is quite a claim. But this is the surprise of Scripture: a book that speaks into a *moment* in history and yet tells the story of *all* history.

Now, of course, this claim raises some important questions about how we are to read this story today. For example, how are we to read the Bible’s story of life, the universe and everything alongside what we read in science, for example? Is there not a conflict here?

**[Slide 23]** Well, I think the Apostle Paul, for one, would say that there doesn’t need to be. In Romans chapter 1 we read these words:

Ever since God created the world, his invisible qualities, both his eternal power and his divine nature, have been clearly seen; they are perceived in the things that God has made. So those people have no excuse at all!

These words of Paul were developed by John Calvin into his famous metaphor of the two books through which God reveals his glory: the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture. There have been suggestions at various points to suggest that these two books fight with another and there have been various other attempts to make them somehow correspond, sometimes in contrived ways. But Calvin would argue that we approach both books with different questions, questions which, in their turn, help us to take in something more of God’s glory.

One of the great challenges we face as a Church is how to share that big story of the Bible in a world where our understanding of God’s other book, the Book of Nature, is so radically different from what it was millennia ago. But isn’t this what we are called to do as Christians - to tell God’s story in a way that is relevant and understandable to the culture around us?

**[Slide 34]** So what I would like to do now, is to offer you one way of telling that story. I want to introduce you to a short film by a retired pastor in the Christian Reformed Church of North America, Len Vander Zee. He worships at Church of the Servant in Grand Rapids, the church from which we borrowed the model for doing communion at our Epic Service back in June. It’s also the Church to which our own Rev Karen Campbell, formerly the minister of Kilbride Presbyterian, has just been called. The film is called: God’s Big Story: From Stardust to the New Jerusalem. We’re only going to look at the first few minutes, but there is a link in the handout you will get at the end to the full film and some resources for using in small groups.

**[film clip - 5 minutes]**

I really encourage you to listen to the rest of this story in your small groups. It will give you a whole new appreciation of the psalmist’s words: ‘O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!’

Now, you’ll be relieved to hear that we are almost finished. But I want to pick up on something really crucial that Len alluded to in his introduction.

**[Slide 25]** You’ll all recognise this guy. No, it’s not Frankenstein - it’s the Monster or, to be more accurate, the Creature in Mary Shelley’s novel. When the Creature is first brought to life he is unable to speak or read, but he later finds himself in the possession of some books from which he is able to make himself literate, and more crucially, to learn about the world and his place in it. The book that has the most profound impact on him is *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, an imaginative retelling of the Genesis story, written with a great deal of poetic license. Of course, the childlike Creature picks up the book without a real appreciation of what it is: “I read it,” he says, “as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as a true history.” I’m sure you don’t need me to tell you what happens next. This misreading leads the Creature into serious trouble. Before long, he begins to find meaning and direction, not from the character of God, but from the figure of Satan. And it is this misreading that eventually leads him to adopt Satan’s words as his own: “all Good to me is lost; / Evil be thou my Good.”

*Frankenstein* is often regarded as a novel that cautions against the misuse of Science. But it is also a book about the dangers of reading irresponsibly. The tragedy of the Creature is that he is not given the tools to read wisely; he is not taught to distinguish between poetry and history.

And you know, we sometimes make this mistake when we read the Bible. We have just been thinking about the big story of the Bible and this can lead us to think of the Bible predominantly as a history book. **[Slide 26]** But this is not the case. According to Tim Mackie, co author of the Bible Project, the Bible is made up of 43% narrative, 33% poetry and 24% prose discourse. But within these broad categories there is a staggering amount of diversity in literary style. We have letters, genealogies, codes of law, collections of wise sayings, epic narratives, hymns, laments - even some erotic love poetry. The list goes on. And this diversity isn’t just in the library, but within biblical books themselves. Take Luke’s Gospel, for example. You have historical narrative, songs and prophecy all in the first couple of pages.

**[Slide 27]** Now, of course, this is nothing new to us. An appreciation of the Bible as highly sophisticated literature has a long history. We need only look again to Calvin to see how this has been present in our Reformed tradition from the very beginning. This is what the philosopher, Paul Helm, has to say about how Calvin read the Bible:

Calvin did not for a moment think that every word, clause and sentence of the Bible was objectively factual, that the streets of heaven are (literally) paved with gold and that God literally has a backside. He had a Renaissance humanist's[[1]](#footnote-1) appreciation of metaphor and analogy and of the different genres of biblical writing.

Now, part of the intention of this series is to recover that Renaissance humanist perspective that we have somehow lost. We can’t possibly do this in one evening, but if you come back again next month, and in the months that follow, you will have an opportunity to start flexing your literary muscles once again in order to experience the Bible as the Divine Literature that it is.

So that’s the story *in* the Bible. A collection of separate narratives with their own integrity and voice, but which somehow speak together to tell the story of the whole universe, a story which finds its beginning and its end in Jesus Christ.

**[Slide 28]** Which brings me to another question for you to have a think about together. We are very nearly finished, I assure you. But if you can keep going for just another bit, let’s take a few minutes to think about this question in your groups:

Why is there so much diversity of genre in the Bible? Discuss the

ways in which this diversity contributes to our understanding of the big story of the Bible.

Well, we’ve covered a lot this evening. And you’ll be relieved to hear that I am going to draw things to a close. While I was able to ditch poor WALT at the very beginning of this talk, I haven’t got my teacher training entirely out of my system. And so, before we finish, I feel obliged to share with you my success criteria for reading the Bible. These are the criteria that I suggest will help all of us to serious readers of the Bible, readers who want to honour the Bible as the means of God’s special revelation and readers who want acknowledge its rightful authority in our lives.

**[Slide 29]** So, without further ado, here they are:

You will be successful if you:

1. read the Bible in light of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ the living and eternal Word of God (while at the same time recognising the integrity of the Hebrew Bible);
2. read individual parts of the Bible in light of the greater whole. Scripture interprets Scripture, and often obscure passages can be interpreted with the help of clearer ones;
3. read the Bible in light of its historical contexts, recognising the diversity of books and the limitations, cultural understandings and world views of the various biblical writers;
4. read the Bible in its literary contexts, with an appreciation of grammar, genre and form;
5. read the Bible in conversation with the Book of Nature (this does not mean that science, for example, should control our reading of Scripture; rather, that science should inform our interpretation of Scripture for today);
6. read the Bible as a community with the help of the Holy Spirit.

And this last point is really important. Because if we are to get better at reading the Bible then we really need each other. So let me encourage you to keep coming to this course and, just as importantly, keep reading and talking about the Bible in between times.

In the handout you will see some questions and suggested activities for you to pick up in small groups. It’s not homework - you don’t have to do it - but you might find some of it helpful. And, of course, if you are not yet in a small group, why not take this as the opportunity to join one. Just speak to me afterwards and I can point you in the right direction. I should also mention this resource published by Biblica, which Michael drew to my attention this morning: The Books of the Bible – Covenant History. And appropriately for this series, it covers Genesis through to 2 Kings.

So that’s it. It just remains for me to thank you for coming and for beginning such good listeners. And I pray that we will continue to be good listeners as we continue to read the Bible together.

On that note, I think it would be appropriate to end with some words from the Bible itself. So let me finish with this well known passage from Deuteronomy chapter 6. I am not going to put them on the screen or ask you to open a Bible. Instead, let us *listen* together to the word of God.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

Let’s pray together.

Heavenly Father,

As people of the Book, we want to put these words from Deuteronomy into practice. Help us to do this, Lord, as we seek to grow in our understanding of what you have revealed of yourself in Scripture, in the world around us and, most importantly, in the person of your Son Jesus Christ. May Christ, the Living Word, dwell deep in our hearts, and by the help of your Holy Spirit, may we learn to love you with our whole being and, in the same way, learn to love others as you have loved us.

For Jesus’ sake we pray. Amen.

1. Renaissance humanism was a cultural and intellectual movement of that emphasized human potential to attain excellence and promoted direct study of the literature, art, and civilization (particualrly of classical Greece and Rome). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)