

Reading together through the whole Bible in two years

Dear PCF and Christ Church Townsend,

The new year is nearly here, and will bring significant change for us. On Sunday, January 1, 2023, forty of us will begin gathering for weekly worship as Christ Church Townsend. Instead of being one church, we'll become a family of two churches.

We've seen God's hand actively at work throughout the process of planting Christ Church, and we're filled with excitement at the things He will do. So the pain we feel as we send out our beloved brothers and sisters, or as we ourselves go (if we're among the forty), is mingled with the joy of seeing the gospel advance in our region.

Of course, a church plant is not the only new thing coming our way in 2023. Some of us are facing significant personal transitions in 2023. Although change can be exciting, it can also be painful, scary, and frustrating. So it's important to grab hold of things that are firm and stable. One of those unchanging realities is God's Word. 'The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever' (Isaiah 40.8). 'Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock' (Matthew 7.24). 'Your statutes, LORD, stand firm' (Psalm 93.5). 'Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away' (Matthew 24.35). 'Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens' (Psalm 119.89).

Back in 2009, as your new pastor, I created a two-year Bible-reading plan and invited our church to read through the Bible together. Many people accepted that invitation. Throughout 2009–2010, we enjoyed countless conversations about what we were reading and experiencing. In 2014–2015, we did it again, and once more God's Word came alive for us as we read and discussed it. In the years since 2009, that two-year Bible-reading plan has had an impact I couldn't have imagined. People and churches around the world – from Boise, Idaho to Calgary, Alberta, from Birmingham, England to Mumbai, India – have used it.

As Pastor Jeff and I have considered the needs of Christ Church Townsend and PCF during this pivotal season of change, our desire has been to encourage unity, perseverance, and spiritual growth within our small family of churches. We believe one key way to do that is through a deeper treasuring of God's Word together. So, here's our invitation: **will you join us in reading together through the whole Bible in 2023–2024?**

Beginning on January 1, 2023 we'll start a two-year trek through the Bible, reading through the entire Old Testament and New Testament, and through the Psalms and Proverbs four times. If you've already read all the way through the Bible, please join us again. There's joy in doing it together, and I guarantee you'll see new things this time through.

If you've never read all the way through the Bible, please join us for the first time. You might think you could never do it. But you can. With two years, you have a manageable pace (and built into this plan are 'catch-up days' to help you get back on track if you fall off the pace). With a group of Christian friends doing it together, you have encouragement. I'm praying that spouses will read through the Bible together, that parents and children will talk about what they've read each day, that our Bible study groups will encourage each other as they share questions and insights. I'm excited already about the fruit God will produce in our lives.

With this plan, we'll read one book of the Bible at a time, and we'll read according to the logical units of Scripture. Sometimes those units will match up with our modern chapter divisions, and sometimes not. Perhaps the most helpful feature of this plan is that it's geared to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's book, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Zondervan 2014), which is an accessible and easy-to-use guided tour of the whole Bible, with brief introductions and overviews of each book of the Bible. You'll benefit the most from this Bible-reading plan if you read it together with Fee and Stuart's book (it's easily available wherever you buy books).

Here are eight tips as we begin our two-year journey through God's Word together:

- (1) **Request God's help.** As you come to the Word each morning, ask God to open your eyes to its splendor. Psalm 90.14: 'Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.' Psalm 119.18: 'Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.' Psalm 119.36: 'Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!'
- (2) **Look for God.** The Bible is mainly a book about God. So, in each passage we read, ask yourself, 'What does this tell me about God?' If you ask and seek to answer this question throughout your Bible-reading trek, you'll come away knowing God better.
- (3) **Slow down.** Some readings will be longer and others shorter. Take advantage of the shorter ones. Read meditatively, reflectively, asking questions, praying for answers, engaging. In Psalm 119.48, the psalmist says he *meditates* on the Lord's statutes.
- (4) **Read with a pen.** Why not keep a notebook of insights from this two-year journey? Write down your best thoughts. Record your questions and prayers. It'll help you focus and give you a record of what God has taught you.
- (5) **Get specific.** As you do the reading for each day, look for a 'best thought' – a truth you can meditate on throughout the rest of the day, a verse you can memorize, a phrase that's particularly memorable. That way, you're left with more than a vague feeling of what you read in the morning.
- (6) **Pray the passage.** Let your prayers for others emerge from what you read. As you read a passage, pray those inspired words for yourself and for those you love.
- (7) **Read on mission.** As you read the passage for each day, ask, 'Who can I share this with?' Allow your reading to overflow into conversations with others. It's a natural way to share Jesus with your non-Christian friends. When they ask, 'How's your day going?' tell them, 'I saw this encouraging truth in the Bible this morning...' You're just being yourself and answering their question.
- (8) **Do the Word.** Consider how you can live out what you're reading. James 1.22: 'But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.'

Here's another exciting thing about reading through the Bible in 2023–2024. As you know, PCF and Christ Church Townsend are part of the Village Green Collective, a group of small-town New England churches planting small-town New England churches together. A number of the VGC churches will be joining together in this Bible-reading plan over the next two years. So, we'll be reading God's Word together with Rivertown Church in Brattleboro, Vermont; Cornerstone Church in Royalton, Vermont; First Baptist Church in Dexter, Maine; Redemption Hill Community in Lewiston, Maine; and Terra Nova Church in North Adams, Massachusetts!

I love you, Christ Church and PCF. You're precious to me. I'm eager for us to read and treasure God's Word together over these next couple years. Great riches await (Psalm 119.127).

Pastor Stephen