

## Information Sheet: The Bible Challenge

**The Bible Challenge** started in a congregation in Fort Washington, Pennsylvania, USA and was designed to help Episcopalians and Anglicans read the entire Bible in a year. Since it started as a challenge by one Rector to one congregation the idea has grown and The Bible Challenge has given birth to different reading guides that cover large sections of the Bible in Lent, Advent or a year and offers support and accompanying reflections to make the reading more meaningful.

All the material that [The Bible Challenge](#) has produced can be found on the website then click on "Bible Challenge" on the right-hand side.

### **How effective is Bible Challenge?**

**Stephen Lyon**, the Coordinator of the BILC project visited St Thomas' in Fort Washington 2013 and listened to the experience of over 40 people who had risen to the Challenge. Through these conversations he learned three important lessons about The Bible Challenge:

1. *That it offers an approach or method of engagement with Scripture that makes it unique.*
2. *That by reading or hearing complete sections of the Bible on a daily basis we see the BIG message of Scripture that we miss if we only hear Sunday lessons.*
3. *That the challenge to read the Bible everyday changes the lives of those participating and the life of the church they belong to.*

**The Bible Challenge** offers an approach or method of engagement with Scripture that makes it unique.

There is nothing unique about reading the Bible in a year. There is nothing unique about a whole congregation reading the Bible in a year. But what is unique is offering a challenge to a whole congregation to read the Bible in a year together; at a time each day that suits each person; by a means they find fits their approach; and with constant and consistent encouragement to continue from the Rector and one another.

It is that combination of elements that I believe makes The Bible Challenge, as it was envisaged at St Thomas', unique.

It is a corporate activity that a significant number of the congregation take part in. They come together each Sunday, share their journey and are prayed for by the whole congregation. Yet, it is flexible as those participating all find the best time for them to read the passages for each day. It is also flexible in that those participating choose the Bible version they find most helpful or, as some do, listen to the passages being read on CD as they travel or simply sit quietly. It is presented as a challenge so recognises it will not be easy yet a challenge that goes to the heart of what the Church says about the Bible. We say it is important and it plays a central role in our life, mission and ministry yet for so many of us, especially in the global north, despite having free access to it the Bible remains a 'closed book'. But the challenge is given with the encouragement of regular E-mails that support those involved and offer guidance to what is being read.



*"My commitment was to the challenge not to joining a group, so there was freedom, people can do what they want and possible to do it on various platforms. 'Reading the Bible was hard going so why not listen to it – on my way to work, 15 minutes a day'"*

*"Doesn't mean turning up but we are doing it together."*

*"The E mails from the parish priest were an encouragement, it meant feeling part of the whole"*

*"I did my reading before bed so keeping the big picture in mind as I went to sleep".*

**The Bible Challenge**, enables us, by reading or hearing complete sections of the Bible on a daily basis, to see the BIG message of Scripture that we miss if we only hear Sunday lessons.

**The Bible Challenge**, whether in its original form of reading the whole Bible in a year or in its other schemes of reading larger portions – the New Testament, the Psalms and Proverbs – takes participants to parts of Scripture they have, probably, never read before. While at times this is not easy, especially with sections of the Old Testament, it gives the reader the BIG picture, the whole message of Scripture.

**The BILC project** discovered that although we say as a Church that all Scripture is important we only really read parts of Scripture – a canon within the canon. The Bible Challenge encourages us to read it all.

But the challenge goes beyond simply reading undiscovered passages it offers a context for the passages we do know and often hear read as single lessons in church Sunday by Sunday.

*"The Challenge made me read the Old Testament right through – go back to the beginning to 'get it'"*

*"It gave a greater context for lessons on Sunday, I feel more part of the Church, feel better about myself, less of a fraud."*

*"I came to the realisation of the missing context in the past – I enjoy church services more."*

*"The Challenge takes participants to parts of the bible the lectionary cannot cover."*

**The Bible Challenge**, to read the Bible everyday – changes the lives of those participating and the life of the church they belong to.

**The challenge to read the whole Bible in a year** is a big one and for those who succeed quite an achievement. But is that all it is about? The evidence from those that Stephen talked to suggests that the impact of The Bible Challenge on those that responded was significant.

Many spoke of it offering a discipline that, while it did not come easily, was spoken of as a habit they now missed if they were unable to find the space to read on a particular day. They also spoke of their faith deepening in understanding as they saw the significance of Scripture to their everyday lives and the way different parts of the Bible built on these messages in different ways. There was clear evidence that as the challenge took hold of St Thomas' the congregational life was built up from within. If the challenge was important for individuals, it was also important for the corporate life of the church. So, now all commissions and committees start their meetings with Scripture reading and discussion. People spoke of Scripture 'permeating all of our life'.



For some of those who had been part of the early days of challenge that experience has encouraged them to deeper engagement. One talked of now "Comparing versions and different meanings to get the full meaning" another embarked on a three year 'Education for Ministry' training and another spoke of the challenge "closing the gap between the academy and the pew".

*"As a previous 'non-reader of the Bible I thought I couldn't relate to what it said. I was astounded at how I could relate to the Bible"*

*"What has been happening in the parish? interest, response, engagement, honesty, eagerness"*

*"The Bible is a document known and referred to, so I shouldn't be ignorant about it. Until now I have never taken the time to pursue it. It feels like constant exercise."*

*"Being involved in the Challenge has led to more involvement in the life of the Church than anticipated, feeling a need to be involved. Gave impetus."*

*"The effects? – great year, checking in every day in a spiritual way which led to more meditation second time through."*

*"The Challenge enabled me to teach the Bible with great foundations – discovered and forgotten parts."*

*"The impact? – want to know more; help my faith; building stronger through hard year – building from the inside out."*

*"Reading the Bible I found questions but I was also forced to find answers."*

*"What was the congregational difference? – more people reading the Bible, greater receptivity and sensitivity, more active in faith, seeing whole story, stewardship increased."*

