[JOHN]

The beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

He himself was not the light, so that through him all might believe. He was in the world, and though the world was coming to know him, the world did not recognize him. Yet to all who did recognize him, he gave the right to become children of God—children born of God through believing in his name, not of human desire, nor of human effort, but of God.
DEAR PASTOR,

I’m delighted you’ve chosen to bring Covenant Community Bible Experience to your church. “Reading big” for eight weeks will stretch your congregation in powerful ways. I believe we discover our place in God’s story when we immerse ourselves in the redemptive drama of the Bible.

This Pastor’s Planning Guide will walk you through each step of the journey, from start to finish. If you have any questions about Community Bible Experience, or if we can support you in any way, please contact us at mdd@covchurch.org.

Thank you for sharing this journey with us. I’ll be remembering your group in my prayers, asking God to transform lives through his Word.

In Christ,

Michelle Sanchez
Executive Minister of Make and Deepen Disciples
Evangelical Covenant Church
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ABOUT THIS JOURNEY

A better Bible experience

What would happen if we actually read the Bible? Not a verse here or there, but the whole New Testament?

What if, instead of going it alone, we could have a real conversation about the Bible—one anyone can join, no matter where they are in their faith journey?

Community Bible Experience is about reading the Bible as it was meant to be read—whole books, in community. It will take your church beyond Bible study, beyond reading in fragments, and beyond reading in isolation.

Discover the complete story. For eight weeks, let’s read big, read real, and read together.

How it works

1. Read big. Your church will cover the whole New Testament in 8 weeks—reading 5 days a week, around 12 pages a day. The average day’s reading takes 30 minutes or so to complete.

2. Read real. You’ll use a groundbreaking presentation of the Scriptures, called The Books of the Bible. It’s designed to feel more like reading the original.

3. Read together. Discussion groups meet once a week for book club-style conversations about the Bible.
ABOUT THIS JOURNEY

Campaign resources

The two most important things every participant needs are:

✓ A copy of *The Books of the Bible*
✓ A reading plan **bookmark** (included with each Bible)

If you have these two things, you have what you need to do Community Bible Experience. We also offer a number of additional tools to help you on your way, including:

• **eBook and audio versions** of *The Books of the Bible: New Testament*, so you can read or listen (or both) wherever you go.
• **abridged audio New Testament for kids**, so you can share the experience as a family. Each day’s episode follows the reading plan for grownups.
• **downloadable guides** for individual participants and group leaders.
• **daily videos** to prepare you for each day’s reading, delivered by email.
• **promotional tools**, including several videos, which you can use to promote your journey through the New Testament.

As a Community Bible Experience partner, you and your church have unlimited access to these digital resources—during and after your campaign. To download your materials and sign up for the daily videos, go to **CovChurch.org/CBE**
ABOUT THIS JOURNEY

The Books of the Bible

During Community Bible Experience, you’ll read from a revolutionary presentation of Scripture called The Books of the Bible.

When you open your copy, the first thing you’ll notice is that this is no ordinary Bible. There are no chapter or verse numbers. No study notes or cross references. No red lettering.

That’s because none of these features are original to the Scriptures. Most were added centuries later to help us find things. But the Bible isn’t a reference book; first and foremost, it’s a story. It’s a collection of books, each of which was meant to be experienced as a whole. Modern Bible formatting imposes a different structure on the text, one that encourages us to read in fragments.

The Books of the Bible is designed to be read from beginning to end. We’ve stripped away centuries of artificial formatting, leaving behind nothing but pure Bible text in a presentation that’s easier to read and understand.

We’ve formatted each book so you can see the natural section breaks put there by the authors. We’ve rearranged the books for easier understanding—for example, putting Paul’s letters in a more chronological order (instead of longest to shortest), so you can follow along more easily.

The Books of the Bible features the complete text of the New Testament in the NIV®, the most widely read contemporary English translation of the Bible.
BEFORE YOUR JOURNEY

Planning your journey
Community Bible Experience is a simple idea—reading and talking about the Bible together. So we’ve made planning your journey as simple as possible.

Schedule
If possible, start planning four to six weeks before your campaign kicks off. Use the checklist on page 8 to prepare.

Organizing small groups
Discussion groups should meet weekly, ideally on weekends when participants have a break from reading. The recommended group size is 8 to 12 people. Meet with discussion group leaders before your campaign starts and review the material on page 10 together.

Engaging youth
Don’t forget to include younger members of your congregation! The Books of the Bible uses the NIV® translation, which reads at a 7th-grade level. Invite middle and high school students to join the rest of your group in reading or listening to the New Testament. You may want to give students a head start on their reading, or give them extra time to finish.

Those too young to read the entire New Testament can follow along using the kids’ audio version of The Books of the Bible: New Testament. Each 10-15 minute episode follows the Community Bible Experience reading plan, so parents and kids can explore the New Testament together. The kids’ audio version is designed for children ages 6 to 12.

Community Bible Experience has transformed our church in a way that nothing else has.
– Kyle, pastor
BEFORE YOUR JOURNEY

Step-by-step planning checklist

☐ Step 1: Announce your campaign.
* Suggested time: 4-6 weeks before campaign start
  
  Play the opening video for your congregation and invite everyone to join the challenge of reading the New Testament in 8 weeks. You can also use the customizable presentation and inserts. Give participants an opportunity to sign up during or after the service.

☐ Step 2: Tell us how many Bibles you need.
* Suggested time: 4 weeks before campaign start
  
  Go to CovChurch.org/CBE to order your Bibles. Cost is $5 per Bible including shipping. ($6 USD per Bible for Canada.) An invoice will be sent with your books.

☐ Step 3: Take care of any last-minute sign ups.
* Suggested time: 3 weeks before campaign start
  
  If you have more participants than you initially expected (many churches do), order more Bibles ASAP. Please allow two weeks for shipping.

☐ Step 4: Organize your discussion groups.
* Suggested time: 2 weeks before campaign start
  
  If you already have a small groups program, decide whether you'll use existing groups or start new ones for this campaign. Either way, 8-12 people per group is ideal.
  
  Also, meet with discussion group leaders at this time. Share the material on page 10 to prepare them for leading book club-style conversations about the Bible, as opposed to a traditional Bible study.

☐ Step 5: Hand out Bibles.
* Suggested time: 1 week before campaign start
  
  Make sure everyone gets their copy of The Books of the Bible: New Testament, along with a reading plan bookmark (included inside each copy). Participants can sign-up for the daily emails by going to CovChurch.org/CBE.

☐ Step 6: Kickoff!
* Suggested time: 1 week before campaign start
  
  Have discussion groups meet once prior to the first day of reading. Announce the start of your campaign the Sunday before you begin.

☐ Step 7: Keep the momentum going.
* Suggested time: During the campaign
  
  Take some time during each service to encourage participants in their reading. Some pastors plan their sermons around the campaign as well. For more suggestions, see page 17.

☐ Step 8: Finish strong.
* Suggested time: 8 weeks after campaign start
  
  Play the closing video for your congregation.
  
  For additional tips on how to finish strong, see page 18.
BEFORE YOUR JOURNEY

Promoting your campaign
We have a number of tools you can use to prepare your church to read the New Testament. Feel free to use them in the run-up to your campaign. All the resources listed below are available at CovChurch.org/CBE.

Promotional videos
Play the opening video when you announce Community Bible Experience to your congregation.

Presentation and talking points
Use our customizable presentation (available in Keynote and PowerPoint) to introduce the New Testament reading campaign to your church.

Promotional bulletin inserts
There are two customizable inserts you can use to promote your campaign (along with eight you can use during your campaign). Include the first promotional insert in your bulletin for 4-6 weeks leading up to your campaign. Use the second insert the week before your campaign kicks off.

Graphics kit
You can also download our graphics kit, which you can use to create additional materials or share Community Bible Experience on your website.
BEFORE YOUR JOURNEY

Organizing discussion groups

Schedule a 30-minute meeting with discussion group leaders two weeks prior to your reading campaign. Here's what to cover...

Group Leader’s Guide
Make sure every group leader downloads the Group Leader’s Guide, available at CovChurch.org/CBE. Encourage leaders to spend a few minutes reviewing the guide before your campaign starts.

When to meet
You can let each group decide when to meet, or you can set a single gathering time for all groups. Either way, here are some guidelines for when and how often to meet:

• Groups should **meet once a week.** Allow 60 to 90 minutes per gathering.
• The first gathering should take place **before** participants start reading.
• The final gathering should take place **after** the last day of reading.

Rules of the road
Encourage group leaders to treat weekly gatherings more like a book club than a Bible study. The Group Leader’s Guide has a few conversation starters (also on page 16 of this guide) to help participants reflect on each week’s reading.

Leaders should encourage participants to ask questions and share what inspired, surprised, or even puzzled them about the text. Don’t worry if it takes a couple weeks for groups to hit their stride. Some groups need a little time to adjust to a book club model, but most participants find that it’s a refreshing change of pace.

In eight weeks, we were united as we listened to the text and conversed about it with each other.

– Stephen, pastor
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

New Testament reading plan

Read five days a week, Monday through Friday. Most readings take around 30 minutes to complete. Some daily readings are longer or shorter, because each one ends at the close of a book or a natural section break within a book. Section breaks are indicated by line spaces—the bigger the space, the bigger the break.


*Luke consists of a prologue and three main sections which tell the story of Jesus as he ministers in Galilee, journeys to Jerusalem, and lays down his life—only to rise again and become Ruler and Savior of the world.*

- **Day 1** p. 1–11 read until “...he left him until an opportune time.”
- **Day 2** p. 11–24 read until “...whoever is not against you is for you.”
- **Day 3** p. 25–33 read until “...worked all through the dough.”
- **Day 4** p. 33–42 read until “...and kill them in front of me.”
- **Day 5** p. 42–54 read until the end of Luke


*Acts (days 6–9) has six parts, each describing a successive phase in the expansion of the church outward from Jerusalem. The apostle Paul’s first two letters, 1 and 2 Thessalonians (day 10), were written to encourage a Christian community facing persecution and to assure them of their coming vindication.*

- **Day 6** pages 55–64 read until “...priests became obedient to the faith.”
- **Day 7** pages 64–75 read until “...continued to spread and flourish.”
- **Day 8** pages 75–86 read until “...spread widely and grew in power.”
- **Day 9** pages 87–102 read until the end of Acts
- **Day 10** pages 103–115 read until the end of 2 Thessalonians
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

New Testament reading plan

Week 3: 1–2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans

1 and 2 Corinthians (days 11–13) address a number of problems facing a dysfunctional church in a cosmopolitan city. Paul wrote Galatians (day 14) to refute the claim that Gentile Christians had to observe Jewish customs in order to be saved. In his letter to the Romans (day 15), Paul insists the good news of Jesus is for everyone, Jew and Gentile.

Day 11  pages 117–126  read until “...I too have the spirit of God.”
Day 12  pages 127–138  read until the end of 1 Corinthians
Day 13  pages 139–153  read until the end of 2 Corinthians
Day 14  pages 155–163  read until the end of Galatians
Day 15  pages 165–177  read until “...love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Week 4: Romans, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon, Philippians, 1 Timothy, Titus, 2 Timothy

The rest of Paul’s letters address various challenges facing churches in different parts of the Roman Empire. These letters, which are presented in the order they were most likely written, also include Paul’s personal correspondence with three individuals: Philemon, Timothy, and Titus.

Day 19  pages 177–188  read until the end of Romans
Day 20  pages 189–195  read until the end of Colossians
Day 21  pages 197–210  read until the end of Philemon
Day 22  pages 211–226  read until the end of 1 Timothy
Day 23  pages 227–238  read until the end of 2 Timothy
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

New Testament reading plan

Week 5: Matthew

Matthew tells the story of Jesus from a distinctly Jewish perspective. This gospel is arranged into five major sections (not unlike the Torah, the first five books of the Jewish Bible). Each section highlights a different theme of Jesus' life and ministry, through a combination of story and teaching.

Day 21  pages 239–251  read until “...and not as their teachers of the law.”
Day 22  pages 251–262  read until “...new treasures as well as old.”
Day 23  pages 262–270  read until “...your brother or sister from your heart.”
Day 24  pages 270–283  read until “...but the righteous to eternal life.”
Day 25  pages 283–290  read until the end of Matthew

Week 6: Hebrews, James, Mark

Like Matthew, the books of Hebrews and James were addressed to predominantly Jewish audiences. Hebrews (days 26–27) is a plea for Jewish believers to stay faithful to the Messiah, while James (day 28) is a collection of practical wisdom, much like the Old (or First) Testament book of Proverbs. Mark’s gospel (days 29–30) presents the story of Jesus as a two-part drama. Each part contains three acts.

Day 26  pages 291–297  read until “...to whom we must give account.”
Day 27  pages 297–309  read until the end of Hebrews
Day 28  pages 311–318  read until the end of James
Day 29  pages 319–334  read until “...not to tell anyone about him.”
Day 30  pages 334–350  read until the end of Mark
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

New Testament reading plan

Week 7: 1–2 Peter, Jude, John

Many believe that Mark (week 6) recorded the memoirs of Peter in his gospel. The next two books (days 31–32) are letters from Peter himself, encouraging believers in what is now Turkey to hold on to their faith and assuring them Jesus will return as promised. Jude’s letter (day 32) has many similarities to 2 Peter. John’s gospel has two main parts: the “Book of Signs” (days 33–34), chronicling seven miracles performed by Jesus, and the “Book of Glory” (day 35), detailing his death and resurrection.

Day 31  pages 351–358  read until the end of 1 Peter
Day 32  pages 359–368  read until the end of Jude
Day 33  pages 369–382  read until “...was later to betray him.”
Day 34  pages 382–395  read until “...what the Father has told me to say.”
Day 35  pages 395–408  read until the end of John

Week 8: 1-3 John, Revelation

John’s first letter emphasizes the importance of believing that Jesus came in the flesh, while his second and third letters instruct churches on how to deal with false teachers and faithful ministers of the gospel, respectively. Revelation is an apocalyptic book meant to encourage persecuted believers to endure to the end.

Day 36  pages 409–423  read until the end of 3 John
Day 37  pages 425–431  read until “...what the Spirit says to the churches.”
Day 38  pages 431–444  read until “...because the plague was so terrible.”
Day 39  pages 444–453  read until the end of Revelation
Day 40  catch-up day
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

Five tips for reading

1. Read what you can.
   Don’t get discouraged if you fall behind. Keep at it, even if you don’t make it all the way through each day’s reading. If you have trouble keeping up, listening to the audio version can help.

2. Read every day.
   Plan on reading five days a week, Monday – Friday. The pace is a little intense, but reading large portions of Scripture is also incredibly rewarding. (And remember, you only have to keep this pace up for eight weeks.)

3. Be fully present.
   Avoid distraction while reading. (Turns out we’re not that good at multitasking.) Instead, devote your full attention to the text.

4. Read the book intros.
   *The Books of the Bible* includes brief introductions or “invitations” to each book, unpacking the context and literary structure of what you’re about to read. Trust us, they’re well worth your time.

5. Don’t worry about the parts you don’t understand.
   The goal is to read big, not to catch every detail. You can always go back and study a specific passage in greater detail later. For now, take in the big picture; let that be your focus for the next eight weeks.

Community Bible Experience made the Bible come alive in a way I don’t think I’ve ever experienced.

– Gabe Lyons
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

Five conversation starters

Each week, participants will share their reflections on the text with their discussion groups, using these five simple prompts:

1. What’s something you noticed for the first time?
2. What questions did you have?
3. Was there anything that bothered you?
4. What did you learn about loving God?
5. What did you learn about loving others?

OK, these are a bit different from your average Bible study questions. Then again, this isn’t your average Bible study.

When people read whole books of the Bible, they notice things for the first time. They may have questions they never thought to ask before. They may even come across things that trouble them. These discussion prompts are meant to help readers navigate the text without giving them all the answers. They’re an invitation to wrestle with the Bible and ponder its implications for how we live.

Encourage participants to treat weekly gatherings more like a book club than a Bible study, to allow their discussions to be free-flowing and wide-ranging.

We’ve seen relationships form that wouldn’t have formed any other way.

People who never wanted to be part of a group—now they don't want to leave.

– Janine, pastor
DURING YOUR JOURNEY

Three tips for pastors

If you’re leading your whole church through Community Bible Experience, these tips are especially for you. Use them to help keep the momentum going during your campaign.

1. Make Community Bible Experience part of the weekly service.
   Take a moment during each service to remind everyone what’s ahead for that week. Use the customizable inserts available at CovChurch.org/CBE.

2. Preach on what you’re reading.
   Tie your weekly sermons into your own experience of the New Testament…
   • Talk about how God is speaking to you each week. Share what questions and observations you have as you read the New Testament.
   • Preach on a different New Testament book each week. Use your sermon time to give a big-picture overview.
   • Choose one passage that stood out to you during the past week and preach a sermon about it.
   • Profile a different New Testament author or character every week.

3. Capture the experience.
   Set up a video booth and invite participants to use it before and after services so they can share how reading the New Testament has impacted them. (And don’t forget to share your stories with us, too!)

I loved the conversations.
I loved hearing how people were challenged.
It’s been the most rewarding study
I’ve been a part of.

– Pete, pastor
AFTER YOUR JOURNEY

Tips for finishing strong

Here are things you should do to finish your New Testament journey as strong as you started:

1. **Encourage everyone to finish.**
   If some participants fell behind, that’s OK. Encourage everyone to finish reading the New Testament, even if it takes them an extra week or two.

2. **Take time to reflect.**
   Have small groups meet one last time after the campaign is done, so everyone has a chance to reflect on the journey.

3. **Share your story.**
   Your experience can encourage other churches to read the New Testament together. Invite members of your congregation to share their stories at facebook.com/MakeAndDeepen.
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Questions about Covenant Community Bible Experience? Contact us at mdd@covchurch.org.

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