

WHY READ THE **BIBLE?**

30 REASONS **JESUS DID**

REASON 1: TO FACE BEING TESTED – MATTHEW 4:1-11

Matthew is one of four authors who tell us about Jesus' life on earth. In the previous chapter, we read that Jesus was baptised. When Jesus came up out of the water, God's Spirit came down on him, and a voice from heaven affirmed that Jesus was God's son. Now we read that the Holy Spirit led him into the desert, all alone, to be tempted by the devil. Not exactly what we'd expect after that dramatic scene in the river. But in the passage we see how Jesus stays strong – with the words of the Bible.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. What else does the Bible say about being tempted or tested? You might like to look up Matthew 6:13, 1 Corinthians 10:12-13, Hebrews 2:18, James 1:12-16. Remember, sometimes the warnings in the Bible can leave us feeling fearful, but God is our helper! He warns us just as a good parent who sees their child going to run into the road, so although the warning can feel sharp, he loves us and it is for our good.
2. Test yourself. Try a wall squat. Put your back to a wall and slide down until your hips are the same level as your knees. How long can you hold it? What would happen if you took this test every day for a week? Can we learn anything from this about times of testing?
3. Find a quiet "remote" place, without distraction. Ask God for provision, protection and the ability to respond to temptation like Jesus.

REASON 2: TO EXPLAIN A CALLING – LUKE 4:14-21

After he had been tempted, Jesus went back to his home town. Luke (one of the authors who wrote Jesus' life story) tells us that he was full of the Holy Spirit and people were amazed at the things he was saying and doing. Some people praised him for the wonderful things he did, but later in the chapter we see that others thought he had got a bit above himself! Jesus used the Bible to explain that he was doing what God had called him to do.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Jesus quotes from Isaiah, an Old Testament prophet. A prophet is someone chosen by God to deliver messages, warnings and guidance from himself. There are thousands of prophecies in the Bible, many of which have now been fulfilled. Reflect on how Jesus fulfils the words of Isaiah, quoted in this passage.

You could make a list of Bible passages which demonstrate times when Jesus fulfils his calling to embody these words (for example, Jesus' encounter with the woman in John 4).

2. 2 Corinthians 2:14–16 says that as a Christian, your fragrance is Christ! As you notice different smells today, think about what Jesus was anointed by the Spirit to do. What has God anointed or called you to do?
3. Look for opportunities to do something today to help someone in need or someone broken-hearted. In what ways is God calling you today to help someone in need?

REASON 3: TO HANDLE OPPOSITION – LUKE 4:22–30

Reactions to Jesus' words and actions are mixed. Some want to see him do even more dramatic miracles, but some think he is nothing special because they had known him growing up. Jesus responds by reminding them of two incidents from the Old Testament, where Israelite prophets did miracles that benefitted foreigners, not fellow-Israelites. This made the people very angry for two reasons – firstly, they believed they were better than foreigners, and secondly, because Jesus was claiming to be as great as these prophets who were heroes in their eyes.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. We see Jesus face opposition in this passage, and he is clear that his followers will also have to do this: 'In this world you will have trouble', John 16:33. The Bible contains many passages on handling opposition as followers of Jesus. Explore James 1:2–4; Titus 2:7–8; Psalm 91 and/or John 15:18–21. What do these passages tell us about handling opposition? What comfort do they bring?
2. Draw or imagine a picture of this scene – Jesus reading and a crowd of people listening. Pay attention to the expressions on the listeners' faces – how do you think they were reacting to Jesus' words?
3. Take a walk through your local area. Pray for peace for issues God has put on your heart.

REASON 4: TO RESPOND TO MIRACLES – MARK 1:40–45

Leprosy is a very contagious disease. In Bible times, with limited knowledge of medicines and infection control, when someone contracted leprosy, they had to leave their community and go and live in the open countryside, away from friends and family. If a leper thought they were healed, there was a complicated, lengthy process they had to go through before they were allowed to return home to their family, to ensure that no-one else was infected. In today's passage, Jesus tells the man to do what the Old Testament law required to prove that he really was healed.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Leprosy was often seen by people in these times as a symbol of impurity and sin. They would assume someone with leprosy had sinned in some way in order to be afflicted like this. How does Jesus' miraculous treatment of this leper compare to his treatment of sinners? You may wish to explore how some of Jesus' other miracles changed attitudes of the time – for example, what did Jesus want the disciples to learn through his miracle in Mark 4:35–41?
2. Imagine you are the man in this story. Write or think about some diary entries, examining your feelings and actions as you come to Jesus for healing.

3. Wash your hands and as you do so tell Jesus what wrong thoughts, attitudes and behaviours you would like him to wash away.

REASON 5: TO GET TO THE HEART OF THINGS – MATTHEW 5:38-48

The law, given to the Jews by God, explained how people should behave in all sorts of situations. In this passage, Jesus is reminding the people of what the law requires of them. But, he says, look at the heart behind what the law asks of you; be generous in your dealings with other people. Show by the way you respond to others that you are really a child of God, showing something of his loving character.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Matthew's Gospel was written particularly to Jews, to help them recognise Jesus as the promised Messiah. What different examples do we find of how Jews responded to Jesus changing the emphasis of their traditional law? You'll find one example in Matthew 12:1-14. Can you find others, both of those Jews who rejected and those who accepted Jesus' teaching here?
2. Jesus asks us to be counter cultural. Imagine what your neighbourhood would be like if everyone in your community lived by Jesus' instructions in this passage. What creative thing could you plan to do that would show God's heart to someone in your community?
3. Jesus asks us to do the opposite of what the world expects. Do a cartwheel or forward roll to see the world topsy-turvy. Encourage someone you wouldn't normally chat to.

REASON 6: TO RECOGNISE TRUE RICHES – MATTHEW 6:25-34

Jesus shows that he knows the Bible and expects that his hearers do so too. He refers to a famous King, renowned for his wealth and splendour, but points people beyond material possessions. Solomon made a magnificent temple for people to come and worship God, but he made himself an even bigger and more spectacular palace. Jesus warns us against following Solomon's example and losing our focus and trust in God.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Read about 'Solomon in all his splendour' – 1 Kings 10:14-29. Then read on in 1 Kings 11:3-6. Where did Solomon go wrong according to Jesus' teaching in today's passage? Look back over Matthew 6:25-34. Where are you tempted to put your trust (other than in God)? How can you ensure you are 'seeking first his kingdom and his righteousness' instead of running after other things as Solomon did?
2. Find a wild flower and observe it closely.
 - How many petals are there? What colour is the flower?
 - Are the petals united or separate?
 - Is the flower symmetrical or asymmetrical?
 - Are you seeing flower clusters or individual flowers?
 - What shape is the stem? Is it hollow or pithy? Hairy or smooth?
 - What shape are the leaves? What are the edges like? What colour and texture are they?Praise God for the way he cares for the wild flowers and, even more so, for you.
3. Find a stone and reflect on a worry you have today. Throw the stone away to represent giving your worries to Jesus.

REASON 7: TO APPLY THE BIBLE TO PRESENT CIRCUMSTANCES - MATTHEW 11:7-19

John the Baptist is Jesus' cousin. His role was to prepare the people for Jesus' coming. But he has been arrested and put into prison. This wasn't how he had expected things would turn out, so he began to question if Jesus really was the special one God had sent. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus what was going on. Jesus responds by quoting some passages from the Old Testament to affirm both John's role and his own.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Explore John the Baptist's life further in Matthew 3:1-12 and his death in Matthew 14:1-12. Today's passage falls in between these accounts in John's life. How does this context help explain John's doubts in today's passage? Jesus' words would have brought him comfort in prison. Which passages do you turn to when you need comfort and reminding of God with you in difficult circumstances?
2. Draw a map of your life so far. As you look at it, where can you see God at work? Are there things that have happened that you don't understand? Talk to God about what he is doing in your life.
3. Put a note on your phone for next month, selecting a verse from the passage, and set a reminder that God goes before you.

REASON 8: TO PUT MERCY ABOVE RULES - MATTHEW 12:1-8

One of the ten commandments, the basis of the Jewish law, says that the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, must be a day of rest. In order to enforce this commandment, the religious leaders (Pharisees) had added so many supplementary rules about what was or was not permitted on the Sabbath until, rather than being a day of rest, it became a very tricky day to negotiate without breaking one of these additional rules. Jesus uses an example from the Old Testament to show that rest and well-being were more important than extra picky rules.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. The Pharisees, a group who believed in strict adherence to the Jewish religious laws and traditions, were so named, because 'Pharisee' means 'separated one', referring to their zeal and choice to separate themselves from others. Their extra rules were all about making sure they stayed miles away from potentially breaking a commandment. Keeping rules made them proud and look down on others who couldn't. Read Luke 18:9-14 and reflect on any ways you need to grow in putting mercy above rules.
2. Imagine you were a news reporter interviewing a Pharisee and one of Jesus' disciples after this event. What questions would you ask?
3. Listen to a Christian song you don't like. Find something in the song or lyrics that you could agree with.

REASON 9: TO EXPLORE WHY SOME PEOPLE DON'T FOLLOW GOD - MATTHEW 13:10-17

Jesus often taught people by telling stories with hidden meanings, and he didn't always explain what the meaning was behind the story (or parable). His disciples questioned him about this – surely if he wanted everyone to follow him, he would explain everything really clearly, not hide it in a story. Jesus quotes an Old Testament prophet showing that some people have closed their spiritual eyes and ears, so they would not understand. Those who do want to understand more about God would ask further questions and God would show them the truth.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. A parable is a simple story using everyday situations for ordinary people to teach a spiritual lesson. Sometimes they can be frustrating and hard to understand though, as the disciples frequently demonstrated! Look through the whole of Matthew 13 to find some other parables. What do you think Jesus was teaching with each story? If you can't work it out, reflect on what good reasons Jesus had for not making everything immediately obvious to us.
2. Imagine you were one of Jesus' disciples. What questions would you ask him after you heard him say this?
3. When you are with friends today who don't know Jesus, thank God for them. Think about how you will honour God with your conversation.

REASON 10: TO EXPLORE THE MEANING OF THE CROSS - JOHN 3:1-16

Many Old Testament stories, although they are actual events that happened, provide pictures which point to the way God is going to rescue humans from sin. Here Jesus refers to an incident as the Israelites were travelling through the wilderness from Egypt to the land God had promised to give them. A plague of snakes infested the camp. People were being bitten and were dying. God told Moses to make a snake out of bronze and put it up high on a pole. Anyone who looked at the bronze snake was healed.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. What do you think Jesus means when he tells Nicodemus he must be born again, or born from above? Read Galatians 2:15-20 and/or Romans 5 to see how Paul explains the idea of spiritual death and life. How would you explain this idea to someone who has never heard the phrase 'born again' before?
2. Write or imagine two journal entries as if you were Nicodemus, one from the night before he met Jesus, and one from the night after.
3. Imagine you are at the foot of the cross. Kneel down and thank Jesus for what he did on the cross.

REASON 11: TO AFFIRM THE BIBLE'S PURPOSE - JOHN 5:31-40

The religious leaders of Jesus' time were generally opposed to him and questioned his authority. They were angry that he claimed to be sent by God, which they thought was a blasphemous claim. In today's passage, we see Jesus challenging them – they have read the Old Testament which was full of prophecies about the Messiah, the special rescuer that God had promised to send. Jesus was doing the very things that the prophets foretold the Messiah would do, but the religious leaders did not recognise that.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Jesus is again talking to the Pharisees and telling them that they have not understood the purpose of the Bible. What do you think is the purpose of the Bible? Look up John 20:30-31; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12 and make a list of the purposes mentioned.
2. What is your favourite Bible verse about Jesus? Write it out and illustrate it, creating a poster.

3. Tell someone what the Bible means to you or what God has done in your life today.
(Alternatively, write it down, so that you are ready to share it with someone in the future.)

REASON 12: TO EXPLORE WHAT REALLY SATISFIES - JOHN 6:27-35

Jesus has just fed more than 5000 people with five bread rolls and two small fish. The people, thinking that it would be wonderful to have free food forever, would like to make him their king, but Jesus knows that this is not his purpose for coming to Earth. The people remind him that God provided food for the Israelites in the wilderness, but Jesus states that he provides spiritual food and drink for everyone who believes in him.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Often we can be overly concerned about things we wish we had, and struggle to be satisfied with what God has already provided. Paul explores this in Philippians 4:4-13. Read this passage and note what stands out to you about Paul's attitude to contentment. What things does he encourage the believers to do? How could you add these into your daily rhythms of life as a believer?
2. Make a word cloud about bread. Think of different types of bread and its benefits as a staple food. In what ways is Jesus like bread for you?
3. Make some bread. (Use three large spoons of self-raising flour and one spoon of water, a pinch of salt and a pinch of sugar – mix together until it is the consistency of playdough and then cook in a frying pan over the hob. Turn it over once one side is golden brown.) As you make it, give thanks for all the ways God has provided for you.

REASON 13: TO USE THE BIBLE WISELY - JOHN 8:2-11

In this story, the religious leaders are quoting the Bible to try and catch Jesus out – it was a no-win situation. The Romans were the overlords at this time. They did not permit the Jews to carry out their own executions, so if Jesus said the Jewish law should be upheld and the woman should be executed, they would accuse him of rebelling against the Romans. But if he said that the woman shouldn't be executed, because the Romans wouldn't allow it, they would accuse him of disregarding the law given by God.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Look up Ecclesiastes 7:20; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23 and Galatians 6:1-3. How do these verses explain Jesus' interpretation of the Biblical law in today's passage? How do they help us to use the Bible wisely when we see someone else's sin?
2. Can you think of a time when you knew the relief of Jesus' forgiveness? Write a poem or journal entry about how that felt.
3. Find a stone. Pick a sin in your life that this stone can represent. Confess your sin to God, then throw the stone away as a symbol that God has forgiven you and taken your sin away.

REASON 14: TO COMPARE JESUS WITH THE PROPHETS - JOHN 8:48-59

The religious leaders are still questioning Jesus' authority and authenticity. They try to use their ancestor Abraham and the Old Testament prophets to prove that Jesus is either mad or bad. But Jesus uses the example of Abraham to show that he is God – even though, as a man, he is in his early thirties, as God, he is eternal and has always existed. In Genesis 18, we read about three men visiting Abraham – many scholars believe that one of the three was a rare physical appearance of Jesus in the Old Testament.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. When God first introduced himself to Moses in Exodus 3:13-14, he called himself 'I am who I am'. In today's passage, Jesus says, 'Before Abraham was I am', in order to identify himself as God. Read John 6:16-21. The words Jesus uses to identify himself in verse 20 are the same words as 'I am' in the original language. What impact do you think these words would have had on the disciples?
2. Imagine you were listening to this conversation between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. What questions would you ask Jesus about the things he said?
3. Write down all the names of God that come to mind. Try keeping one in mind all day. See how it applies to things that come up during the day.

REASON 15: TO SPOT A FAKE - MATTHEW 15:1-13

Jesus is again clashing with the religious leaders and their interpretation of God's law. The law stated everyone should honour their father and mother, including providing for them in their old age. The religious leaders had twisted this law, saying if their money was 'dedicated to God', it didn't need to be used to help others. Effectively it meant they could keep all their possessions for themselves just by declaring them dedicated to God.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Read 1 Timothy 4 and make a list of the ways Paul encourages Timothy to spot a fake. What things is Timothy to do to help himself and other believers not to be deceived by fake teachers? Reflect on whether you are doing these things. Who could you ask to help you? Who could you help?
2. Imagine or draw the facial expressions of Jesus, a pharisee and a disciple, while Jesus was speaking. What might they be thinking or saying? Draw a speech or thought bubble above each – what is each one thinking or saying?
3. Take a photo of something out of place or edit/add a filter to a photo. Reflect on areas where your attitudes, words or behaviour is out of place with your faith in God.

REASON 16: TO GLIMPSE THE FUTURE - LUKE 13:31-35

There are several men named Herod in the Bible – this passage refers to Herod Antipas who ruled the Roman state of Galilee. He had John the Baptist imprisoned and later executed.

Later, when Jesus was arrested, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod, because Jesus was from Galilee (and therefore one of Herod's subjects). Herod was excited to see Jesus, because he hoped Jesus would perform a miracle. When Jesus just remained silent, Herod mocked him and sent him back to Pilate.

Jesus did not feel the need to run away from Herod, because he knew that God's plan was more powerful than any plans of Herod's.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Jesus had courage to face Herod, because he knew what was coming in the future – his death would secure our salvation; his Father would raise him up from death; and he would

return to glory in heaven. Read Revelation 21:1-7. How does this glimpse of the future for all believers help you live for Jesus now?

2. Imagine you were Jesus – what would be your body language and facial expression as you said these words? How would they change over the course of the passage?
3. Set a reminder in your phone for a date in the future to remind you that “blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord”.

REASON 17: TO AFFIRM MARRIAGE - MATTHEW 19:1-6

During Jesus’ time, there was disagreement among the Jewish leaders on the subject of divorce. The law (in Deuteronomy 24:1) allowed divorce in certain circumstances. Some leaders felt divorce should only be for serious reasons, such as adultery, while others allowed men to divorce their wives even for trivial faults. The Pharisees here try to trick Jesus into taking sides in their theological debate. Jesus’ response takes them right back to creation and God’s original design for marriage.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today’s Bible reading further:

1. Read Ephesians 5:22-33 and note the elements which God wants to see in a healthy marriage. Note any questions you have and find someone you trust to explore them. What does this passage tell us about the deeper symbolism of marriage and what marriage is designed to be a picture of?
2. How would you rewrite this passage to your own church/SU Group/school/town? How do you think people would react to this message?
3. Write each verse from this passage onto a separate strip of paper. Make all the strips into a paperchain.

REASON 18: TO READ THE SIGNS OF JESUS’ RETURN - LUKE 17:22-33

Jesus frequently used the term ‘Son of Man’ to refer to himself – a reference to Daniel’s prophecies. The Son of Man had God-given authority to judge the world and forgive sins. The title also emphasises Jesus’ humanity and weakness – he will not seize hold of his kingdom forcibly, but by his suffering and death. He will, however, one day come again in power, finally destroying all his enemies and taking his rightful place as Lord of all.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today’s Bible reading further:

1. Read the parable in Matthew 25:1-13. What does this story with a hidden meaning tell us about how we can prepare for Jesus’ return? If you’re not sure, read the rest of the chapter for some clues about what Jesus wants from us as believers in this time before he returns.
2. Pick one of the verses from this passage and illustrate it.
3. Spend some time in your favourite place with God, listening for his voice and reflecting on areas in your life where you easily get distracted. Ask God to help you focus on him alone, making him your first priority before he returns.

REASON 19: TO TRUST GOD’S PLAN IN SUFFERING - LUKE 18:31-34

In today’s passage, the disciples are spiritually blind and don’t understand what Jesus is saying. Perhaps this is partly caused by their preconceptions of what the Messiah would be like and what he would do. Jesus’ dying wasn’t part of their plan and they struggled to accept that it was part of God’s.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. When suffering comes into our lives, we can find it incredibly difficult to trust God. We can't see why he would allow pain in our lives, and we question if he really is good. Read Psalm 34:18; Psalm 56:8 and Isaiah 42:3. Reflect on how we can use the Bible in times of suffering to help ourselves and others trust God's goodness and care for us.
2. Draw or paint a response to this passage. (You may also like to look at Isaiah 53:5-7 which is one of the prophecies Jesus is referring to.)
3. Put a note on your phone to read in a month about difficult times in your past and how God was there with you.

REASON 20: TO FOLLOW THE RIGHT TRACK - JOHN 12:12-16

The Old Testament is full of prophecies about the Messiah's coming (between 300 and 400!) It would be impossible for one person to manipulate their behaviour to fulfil all those prophecies (especially as some referred to the place and manner of his birth!) In this passage, we see Jesus fulfilling some prophecies, but the disciples don't recognise this. After Jesus' death, resurrection and return to heaven, they realised that the prophecies had been written about Jesus.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. We can often struggle with knowing how to follow the right track. Read Psalm 119 (or some of it!) and reflect on all the ways the Bible is described as a guide for us. Look also at the Psalmist's attitude towards the Bible. Ask God that he would increase your love for his word.
2. Imagine you were one of the disciples in this story. What would you feel, think, say, do as the story unfolds?
3. Gather some leaves or sticks and arrange them into an arrow shape, reflecting on how God leads us on the right track.

REASON 21: TO RESPECT GOD'S HOUSE - MARK 11:15-17

Anyone who wanted to bring a sacrifice to God had to bring an animal or bird without marks or defects. By Jesus' time, this had become a bit of a scam – the priests would examine the animal and find fault with it, requiring the worshipper to buy another from the temple traders for a highly inflated price. This trade was taking over the courtyard, which was to be a place for worship and prayer.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Some of our churches meet in traditional buildings and some in schools, homes or public buildings. Read 1 Corinthians 3 and discover what God's house is. Reflect on what the passage says about those who do not respect it, and spend time confessing any of these which you have fallen into.
2. What emotions are being described in this passage? Pick one emotion – how would you illustrate that?
3. Show your respect for God's house by finding a way to tidy up an area of your church, or help decorate for an upcoming celebration, to honour God.

REASON 22: TO FACE REJECTION - LUKE 20:9-19

Several of our readings this month have highlighted the conflict between the Jewish religious leaders and Jesus. In the earlier verses of this chapter, they once again questioned from where Jesus got his authority to teach and do miracles, feeling that he was taking power away from them. Jesus tells this parable to warn people about spiritual leaders (the tenants) who had forgotten, or disregarded, the fact that they were servants of God (the owner) and thought they were the owners themselves.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Jesus tells this parable, having already faced harsh words from the leaders, and knowing he would face ultimate rejection and be killed. The rejections we face for our faith in the UK are not as serious, but are still painful. Rejections in other parts of the world can be severe. Read these verses and reflect on how God comforts and helps us through his word as we face rejection: Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 43:1-3; Song of Songs 2:16a; Psalm 61:1-5.
2. Rewrite this parable in a contemporary setting.
3. Write Luke 20:17 on a piece of scrap paper and turn it into an origami paper house.

REASON 23: TO EXPLORE LIFE AFTER DEATH - LUKE 20:27-40

The religious leaders continue to try and catch Jesus out. They were desperate to find a reason to trick Jesus into saying something that would sound like blasphemy (speaking insultingly or disrespectfully about God). Group after group came with different approaches or questions, but in verse 26 we read that they were unable to trap him in what he had said there in public. Finally, along came a group of Sadducees.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. The Sadducees were a group of Jewish religious leaders who were responsible for the maintenance of the temple. They did not believe in life after death. How did Jesus use the Bible to show them they were wrong?
2. Write a letter to an imaginary friend, reassuring them that death is not the end, that we have the hope of life with Jesus in heaven after our physical bodies die. How can you be sure that this will really happen?
3. Find a broken item in your home and use it in a new way, e.g. a mug with a broken handle could be used as a flowerpot or pen tub.

REASON 24: TO GET TO THE MAIN POINT - MARK 12:28-34

After all the attempts to trick Jesus, along comes a teacher of the law who might have had a genuine question. He is impressed with how wisely Jesus has answered. He wants to know, out of all the commandments God gave to the people of Israel through Moses, and all the extra commandments added in by religious leaders over the centuries, which one is the most important.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Learn verses 29-31 off by heart.

Reflect as you memorise these verses on how these verses impact your daily life if they are the main point. Why not set a reminder on your phone for a week's time and a month's time to check that you still remember it!

2. Listen to a worship song that brings out the theme of loving God with every part of yourself.
3. Share this Bible passage with someone today to encourage them.

REASON 25: TO CHALLENGE OPPONENTS - MATTHEW 22:41-46

Jesus responds wisely to attacks by the religious leaders and their spies in previous readings. Now the tables turn as he has a question for them. The Pharisees knew the promise of the Messiah. Jesus challenges their understanding of who the Messiah is by quoting David. Was the Messiah David's son, or David's Lord? In other words, was the Messiah going to be a human sent by God, or God himself?

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. In 1 Peter 3:14-16, Peter gives advice for dealing with people who oppose your beliefs. Make a list of questions you have been asked about being a Christian, or about your faith, and make a plan for how you might prepare yourself to give an answer. (You could ask a trusted adult, do a Bible search, or look at a site such as bethinking.org.) Imagine you were one of the disciples in this story. What would you feel, think, say, do as the story unfolds?
2. Using the word MESSIAH, write an acrostic poem about Jesus (Line 1 starting with M, line 2 with E, line 3 with S, etc.).
3. Ask someone you meet today about their beliefs. What gives them hope in this life? Listen well to what they share.

REASON 26: TO FACE BAD TIMES - MATTHEW 24:4-22

Jesus wants his followers to understand that following him will not mean that all their troubles are over. In fact, just as Jesus himself faced criticism and persecution, there is every likelihood that his followers will as well. Jesus knows that Christians will find these times confusing, so he warns us that they will come, so that we can be prepared. He also tells us that these bad times will only last a while – they are not the end of all things.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. What Bible verses can you think of that would encourage you if you were facing persecution? Make a list. (If you're not sure where to start, why not do a Bible search on the word 'fear'.)
2. As you read today's passage, what colours come to your mind? What, if anything, gives flashes of hope? Why did Jesus give his followers such a dire warning?
3. Take a walk through your local area and pray for peace for issues God has put on your heart.

REASON 27: TO FACE PEOPLE LETTING YOU DOWN - MATTHEW 26:30-35

Jesus knows that his purpose in coming to this world is to die, and soon. And he knows that when the time comes his disciples will be taken by surprise, will be frightened, and will run away. But he doesn't want them to think that they had failed or that following him had been a failure, so he reassures them. First, he quotes a prophecy saying that they will run away, and then he states that he will rise again, and will meet them in Galilee.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. Jesus quotes a verse from Zechariah, referring to himself as a shepherd, and his followers as his sheep. Explore this frequently used picture by reading Psalm 23 and John 10:11-18. What does it mean to you to have Jesus as your shepherd?
2. Rewrite this passage in your own words. How do you think Jesus felt? Did the Bible verses he used comfort him? How did his disciples feel? Write Luke 20:17 on a piece of scrap paper and turn it into an origami paper house.
3. Scatter some food for the birds or make a bird feeder – mix together softened lard and sunflower hearts, bird seed, peanuts, cooked rice, grated cheese and/or breadcrumbs. Pierce the bottom of a clean yoghurt pot and poke a length of string through, tying it securely. Fill the pot with your lard and food mixture. When it has set, hang the pot outside. As you watch the birds enjoying their food, reflect on how God always promises to provide in times of persecution and scattering.

REASON 28: TO FIND WORDS FOR PAIN - MARK 15:33-39

Jesus' crucifixion was accompanied by some supernatural events:

Firstly there was darkness for three hours, much longer than a solar eclipse. The darkness symbolised God's judgement and his sorrow over the sin of the world.

Then the thick temple curtain, separating people from God's presence in the holiest part of the temple, tore from top to bottom. Only the High Priest could enter the holiest place, only once a year. Tearing the curtain from the top was done by God himself, showing that everyone can now have direct access to God through Jesus.

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Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. The Psalms are full of words for pain, including Psalm 88 which includes the line 'Darkness is my closest friend'. Read this Psalm, and/or search for others which include ways to help us express our pain to God. Give thanks that he wants to hear from us in this way.
2. Jesus quotes Psalm 22 here. Write a poem using both this passage and Psalm 22:1-8 to reflect what Jesus might have experienced on the cross.
3. Go for a walk and gather leaves and branches. Form these into the shape of a cross, reflecting on the pain Jesus took on himself for us.

REASON 29: TO EXPLORE THE CROSS & THE RESURRECTION - LUKE 24:13-27

Emmaus was seven miles from Jerusalem, a journey of about three hours. This gave Jesus plenty of time to explain how the Old Testament had foretold his coming, the opposition he would face, his death and the purpose of it, and his resurrection.

Cleopas' name means 'vision of glory'. Often in the Bible, the meaning of names is significant; in this case, Cleopas is one of the first people to experience the transformation that comes when someone receives a vision of Jesus' glory, as he and his friend transform from downcast and confused to excited and joyful.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. This story is a model of spiritual growth, moving from despair to faith. It shows Jesus walking with us, even when our own state of mind means we can't sense him there. It emphasises the importance of reading and trying to understand the Bible so that we can know God's plan, even when things are difficult. And it demonstrates the value of communion, revealing who Jesus is and opening our eyes to his presence with us. As you re-read the passage, reflect on what place these things have in your life.
2. Try using an app like GarageBand or BandLab to compose some music reflecting the travellers' journey from sadness and confusion, through gradual understanding to enlightenment as to who Jesus is.
3. Go for a walk with a friend and chat about what you would ask Jesus if you had been the travellers on the road to Emmaus and known it was him!

REASON 30: TO APPLY THE BIBLE TO THE CHURCH'S CALL - LUKE 24:44-53

After Jesus rose from the dead, he appeared to his disciples several times over the course of forty days.

The disciples were overjoyed when they first saw Jesus. They may have thought that life would continue as it was before the crucifixion, but Jesus explains to them that he is the Messiah, and their task is to share that good news with the whole world. He promises that when he goes back to heaven, the Holy Spirit will be with them forever.

Alternative Ways to Explore the Bible

Choose one of the following ideas to explore today's Bible reading further:

1. This event happened on the road to Bethany. Do a Bible search for Bethany and make a list of other significant events that happened on the road to Bethany, or in the village itself. What memories would have been in the disciples' minds as they listened to Jesus on this occasion? How might that have helped them?
2. Do a search online for Christian art depicting Jesus' ascension. What aspects of the story do different artists emphasize? How does their interpretation help you understand this passage?
3. Read the Bible passage outside and look at the sky. Give praise to God for Jesus' life on earth and his ongoing ministry in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.