

# Daily Bible Readings

## Week One

### The mystery of our origins

The book of Genesis is an account of life's origins entirely different from the scientific approach. These ancient writers expressed their understanding in the form of myth, a word that to contemporary ears still needs explanation. It has two current meanings, that of something untrue, and the rather different one being used here of 'a story told to make sense of the world'. In this latter definition, a myth may be factual or fictional, or quite likely both, for the ancient storytellers had no methods to sift one from the other. But don't conclude that because these stories may not be factual, they therefore aren't true. These ancient stories have lasted precisely because they do say something deep and truthful about the human condition, and that is why they reward our attention.

#### DAY 1

*'God saw everything that he had made and indeed it was very good.'*

##### Read

Genesis 1:1-5 and 26-31

##### Understand

Long before the mechanism of the Big Bang was conceived, the Judeo-Christian understanding was that the world had a beginning (unlike the Greek philosophy of Plato and some Eastern religions like Buddhism, which claim life always was). The Genesis writers understood not only that our universe had a Prime Mover, but that this was a God deeply involved at every stage of the process - and enjoying it too. 'Yes, that's good,' he keeps saying, and even speaks directly to his creation: to the earth and its vegetation, to the birds and animals, and to humankind, blessing them and giving them their task. This God was not just a force but a Person, the epitome of personhood, and that made all the difference, for the nature of personhood is to love.



##### Reflect

Picture God bringing you into being, as no more than a cluster of cells. Picture him saying to himself, 'Yes, this is good', then speaking his blessing over you and giving you your secret unknown tasks. Genesis shows God having this level of love and interaction with all humankind - even and especially you.

##### Pray

Lord God, help me be the person you intended me to be. May my dominion over my little patch of earth be just and fruitful. May your blessing remain with me throughout my life. May I fulfil the tasks to which you call me.

#### DAY 2

*'For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened.'*

##### Read

Genesis 2: 15-18 and 3:1-7

##### Understand

You will probably have absorbed so many accretions to this story, it's hard to see the original without them. For instance, did you realise it doesn't include the words 'apple', 'sin' or 'Fall'? Think about it now, not as an ancient incident for which we bear the consequences, but as a picture of us all: the journey each of us makes from the safety of childhood, through the boundary-breaking of adolescence to the 'sweat of the brow' of adulthood. God must have realised this was the nature of the humans he had made. God did not want automatons. Rather, like any good

parent, his intent was to help the first humans push the boundaries at the right time in the right way. Unfortunately, like all of us sooner or later, the first couple pushed too far for their own good.

### Reflect

Have you heard that voice in your head, the voice of the serpent? 'Is that really off-limits?' 'What harm can it do?' In today's world, delayed gratification is unpopular, and gratification permanently postponed an absurdity. Yet sometimes this is what God calls us to. What are the voices in your head clamouring for? Are you sure God wants you to have them?

### Pray

Lord God, help me hear the subtle voices for what they are. May I be prepared to hold back, to wait to be given rather than to take. May I think more about responsibilities than rights.

## DAY 3

*'Sin is lurking at the door, its desire is for you, but you must master it.'*

### Read

Genesis 4: 1-15

### Understand

This is where the word 'sin' first comes in, not against God, but against a brother, not in disobedience but in envy. Yes, this is where it begins - it begins in families: in tiny things said or done or sometimes simply inferred, things that create resentments that if left will fester and grow. Mostly it begins in childhood, because all siblings must at times face rivalry, and no parents (or teachers) are perfectly wise and even-handed. It pursues us into adulthood: into marriage, into the work place, even into churches. Strangely even the most talented and privileged people can be its victims. And as Cain discovered, letting it have the mastery leads only to regret and alienation. Though as he also discovered, God did not give up on him.



### Reflect

This dark envy is always lurking at the door, never far from any of us. So picture in your mind now those who you envy, or envied once. Then picture once again God blessing the tiny cluster of cells that will become you and giving the tasks that only you could achieve.

### Pray

Lord God, help me to accept that life is never fair, to know, nevertheless, that you made me and love me just as I am, to know that you still work for my good, whatever ill I do. Protect me, Lord, from envy. Let not sin have the mastery.

## DAY 4

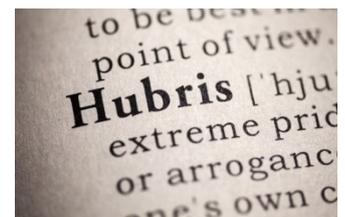
*'The Lord said "This is only the beginning of what they will do."'*

### Read

Genesis 11:1-9

### Understand

This book of beginnings charts how quickly rivalry spread from family units to tribes and people groups. The violence it provoked caused God to send a flood; though even that could not stop it. On it moved into the formation of city states, and as God looked down on the massive tower being built on the plain of Shinar, he understood that this was an act of hubris. Hubris means excessive pride: pride without the good bits of dignity and rightful self-esteem. Hubris is a pride that is intent not merely on seeing itself as having value, but being seen by others as the best. It is intent on provoking envy and on gathering control and power. It is pride without limitations, so intent on proving itself that moral boundaries are broken. It happens within every organisation and is undoubtedly happening in one near you.



## Reflect

In what aspects of your life have you become victim of hubris? Maybe you have been directly put down by another, intent on gaining control or position. Or perhaps indirectly, as the result of institutional corruption, or simply the hubris inherent in maintaining the status quo. Wherever you find it, pray for those who create it or perpetuate it, for they are undoubtedly discontented people.

## Pray

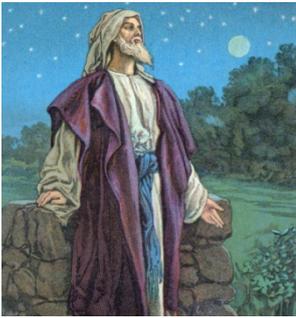
Lord God, help me not resent those whose scramble to the top has pushed me down. Help me retain my rightful dignity in the face of their unrighteous hubris. Help them find the only validation that can truly satisfy, that which comes from you.

## DAY 5

### Read

Genesis 12:1-8

### Understand



It might be concluded that relations between God and humankind have been somewhat strained so far in this history of beginnings. But now the story takes a different turn, moving to God's relationship with one particular man and following it through in detail. Right from the start God is seen as caring for individuals, even those who made life difficult for themselves, and now again we see God working not in a great hero, but in a flawed individual. (See the rest of chapter 12 for an example.) Abram's story is recorded because it marks the beginning of the Jewish nation, but it has a wider resonance. It shows that God cares not just for that particular individual, but for the complex twists and turns in every individual's life.

### Reflect

Picture God coming to you and sending you on a journey. What is it? Is it new, or have you been on it for years? Has it changed over time? Maybe it's time for a new one! Whatever it is, God is with you on it. Let God come now to strengthen or redirect.

### Pray

Lord God, help me take the right steps through life, even if I do not know the destination. May I know you with me, even in difficulties I could never have envisaged. Father, I may not understand you, but I trust you.