

How to **READ** *The Bible*

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“When their son left for his freshman year at Duke University, his parents gave him a Bible, assuring him it would be a great help. Later, as he began sending them letters asking for money, they would write back telling him to read his Bible, citing chapter and verse. He would reply that he was reading the Bible--but he still needed money. When he came home for a semester break, his parents told him they knew he had not been reading his Bible. How? They had tucked \$10 and \$20 bills by the verses they had cited in their letters.”¹

Reading is defined as “to go over and mentally take in the content of.”² Cambridge Dictionary wrote that it is “the skill or activity of getting information from books.” Reading automatically sets one on a social, intellectual, and spiritual pedestal (cf. Daniel 5:8, 15, 17). Not being able to read can cause sadness (Revelation 5:4). “Someone asked Benjamin Franklin what sort of person he most pitied. Franklin replied, ‘A lonesome man on a rainy day who does not know how to read.’”³

On the other hand, many can read, but they do not read with profit. Reading demands determination to develop a proper way of getting the most out of it. Proper planning precedes proper performance. Abraham Lincoln said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”

The word “read” occurs 70 times in the Bible while the word “reading” occurs 6 times. Jesus read the Bible (Luke 4:16). Every Sabbath, Jews read the Bible (Acts 15:21). Why should we read? The reasons are multi-purposed:

- *Revelation.* God has chosen writing to communicate His will and reading to receive His will. Rene Descartes said, “The reading of all good books is like a conversation with the finest minds of past centuries.” Reading the Bible allows God to speak to you. If you don’t read, you will never hear God speak.

¹https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/b/bible_reading_of.htm

²Merriam Webster.

³Robert J. Morgan, *Preacher’s Sourcebook of Creative Sermon Illustrations*, Thomas Nelson, 2007, p. 658.

His will, His character, and His love, can never be fully understood if the pages are never opened (Ephesians 3:4). This is why reading of His Law was important (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 17:19; 31:11).

- *Correction.* “[N]ew research shows how taking God’s word seriously adds to life’s meaning. Researchers found that: [T]hose who read their Bibles once or twice a week experienced no benefit over those who never read their Bibles. At three times a week, minor gains were detected **[B]ut with at least four times a week, everything seemed to spike** [emphasis mine]. Sharing their faith skyrocketed 200%. Discipling others jumped a whopping 230%. [F]eelings of loneliness dropped 30%. Anger issues dropped 32%. Relationship bitterness dropped 40%. Alcoholism plummeted by 57%. Feelings of spiritual stagnancy fell 60%. And finally, viewing pornography decreased 61%.”⁴
Some read and find out that they must correct sinful habits (2 Kings 22-23), while others read about things they should have been implementing (Nehemiah 8; 13:1).
- *Association.* Someone said, “We are what we read.” The food one eats ultimately changes him (Jeremiah 15:16) either for the good or worse. Reading the Bible leads to living out the Bible. “In the absence of his father, a little boy attended the Sabbath School of a Dutch Reformed minister. On the father’s return he went upstairs and finding his son reading the Word of God, he

⁴Breakpoint podcasts.

asked him, ‘What book are you reading?’ He replied, ‘The Bible.’ ‘Where did you get it?’ ‘In yonder Sabbath School.’ He then took the Bible from him and committed it to the flame, saying, ‘If you ever go to the Sunday School again, I’ll give you such a thrashing as you have never had.’ Having ascertained that the Bible was burned, his son said to him, ‘Father, you have burned my Bible; but you cannot burn out of me those chapters I have committed to memory from the Gospel of John.’”⁵

- *Recollection.* Reading helps recall facts forgotten. It reminds people of obligation (Joshua 8:34-35). Jesus answered the critics’ traditionalistic or unbiblical ideologies with “have ye not read?” (Matthew 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31). If you don’t read the Bible, you will lose the Bible!⁶

If reading were not important to God, He would have placed His salvational blueprints in another form. Instead, He chose the Bible and the Bible is meant to be read. Woodrow Wilson said, “I ask every man and woman in this audience that from this day on we realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this Book [the Bible].”

Paul told Timothy to read (1 Timothy 4:13). The epistle to the Thessalonians was meant to be “read unto all the holy brethren” (1 Thessalonians 5:27). Colosse was told to “read the *epistle* from Laodicea” (Colossians 4:16). If reading was important to first century Christians, it must be important to us. If we want to be good at Bible study, we must first be good at reading. “When John G. Mitchell, of Multnomah School of the Bible, was pastor of the First Presbyterian

⁵W. Baxendale.

⁶Idea from this website that used the phrase “use it or lose it” in regards to reading: <https://www.nu.edu/blog/reading-improves-memory-concentration-and-stress/>

Church in Tacoma, Washington, he heard Dr. G. Campbell Morgan preach. The man knew his text, and young Mitchell was impressed. In fact, he asked the visiting Bible teacher how he understood Scripture so well. ‘If I told you, you wouldn’t do it,’ the older man said. ‘Just try me,’ Mitchell insisted. ‘Before I study a book, I read it fifty times,’ the veteran explained.” Reading is like building a house, one cannot start without proper plans, principles, and tools. Here’s how to effectively build a good Bible reading structure:

Have a Right Approach.

If we want to build a solid Bible reading plan, we must have the right purpose. The **how** we read is just as important as the **way** we read. Without the right purpose, we will never be effective at reading the Bible (cf. Daniel 1:8). Some wrong approaches are:⁷

- *The warm fuzzies approach*—reading the Bible for a glowing, subjective experience of God, ignited by the words of the text, whether we understand what they actually mean or not. Result: **frothy reading**.
- *The grumpy approach*—reading the Bible out of nothing but a vague sense that we’re supposed to, to get God off our backs for the day. Result: **resentful reading**.
- *The gold mine approach*—reading the Bible as a vast, cavernous, dark mine, in which one occasionally stumbles upon a nugget of inspiration. Result: **confused reading**.
- *The hero approach*—reading the Bible as a moral hall of fame that gives us one example after another of heroic spiritual giants to emulate. Result: **despairing reading**.
- *The rules approach*—reading the Bible on the lookout for com- mands to obey to

⁷The following points come from: <https://www.crossway.org/articles/9-wrong-ways-to-read-the-bible-and-one-better-way/> Noah Olson provides the emphases.

subtly reinforce a sense of personal superiority. Result: **Pharisaical reading**.

- *The Indiana Jones approach*—reading the Bible as an ancient document about events in the Middle East a few thousand years ago that are irrelevant to my life today. Result: **bored reading**.
- *The magic eight-ball approach*—reading the Bible as a road map to tell me where to work, whom to marry, and what car to buy. Result: **anxious reading**.
- *The Aesop's Fables approach*—reading the Bible as a loose collection of nice stories strung together independently, each with a nice moral at end. Result: **disconnected reading**.
- *The doctrine approach*—reading the Bible as a theological repository to plunder for ammunition for our next theology debate at Starbucks. Result: **cold reading**.

The approach is the foundation for the building. If the right purpose is missing, one will not read for profit. Determine to approach Bible reading with the right purpose. Come with a delight (Psalm 119:16) and a love (Psalm 119:97). Good approaches in Bible reading are:

- *Read the Bible to get to know God better* (Psalm 119:27). The only way to know God is to read what He says about Himself; this is the only way to know Him. Read to better understand His nature (Exodus 34:6-7).
- *Read the Bible to understand God's will* (Nehemiah 8:8; Psalm 119:104). The Psalmist said, "Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law" (Psalm 119:18). The only way to understand God's will is to read the Bible. Read it often. Repetition is the key to success. Someone said reading helps one know

where things are. Its ok if you don't understand; ask someone for help (Acts 8:31).⁸ Don't remain ignorant. One Greek phrase reads "The knowledge of ignorance is the beginning of knowledge."

- *Read the Bible for information* (Psalm 119:98-100). While the Bible is not a historical or science book, it does contain information to be grasped. The main reason for reading the Bible is not to gain new facts, but to use these facts to either (1) prove major Bible doctrines (1 Peter 3:15), (2) support further applicational studies, or (3) promote the validity of the Bible.
- *Read the Bible to clean up the dirt* (Psalm 119:9, 67). Some don't like what they read, so they literally (Jeremiah 36:23) or figuratively rip pages out of their Bible. Read the Bible to correct errors and ignite sparks to things you have not been doing. Let the Bible shed light upon any sins and mistakes (Psalm 119:105). Go into Bible reading examining what things this specific passage can teach you about your own sins or failures. Ask "how does this passage tell me how to fix this sin," or "what principles here show me how to correct ____?"
- *Read the Bible to prevent stumbling* (Psalm 119:11). It is best to read the Bible in the morning so you don't sin during the afternoon or evening. Apply lessons about sin to your life by determining not to engage in sin. Observe the destruction of sin in the Bible and resolve not to engage, even in a speck of sin.
- *Read the Bible to comfort your soul* (Psalm 119:165). Go into Bible reading expecting to be

⁸Hiram Kemp in the House to House article Volume 29 Issue 12.

comforted. Appreciate the promises of God and read especially during trials.

- *Read the Bible as if God is writing to you personally.*⁹ Change pronouns to “I” or “me” if warranted. Read the Bible as if God wrote a letter with your name on the cover!
- *Read with curiosity* (Nehemiah 8:1; John 5:38-40; Acts 17:11, 32).¹⁰ Be invested in your Bible reading and want to know every detail. There is nothing more important in Bible reading than first having a good heart and motive.

Choose Your Material.

After a foundation is laid, one must choose the materials with which to build. Some choose biographies, others fiction, and some non-fiction. Reading demands a choice, a choice of **what** to read. The Bible is a collection of 66 books with 1,189 chapters, and over 780,000 words, what direction could we go?

Read verses. Sometimes it is good to read verses all relating to a singular topic. Take a Bible concordance (i.e. *Strongs*) and look up all verses relating to the desired topic.

Read passages and paragraphs. The original text was not formatted with chapters and verses. These additions can sometimes ruin the flow of the context. Sometimes it is good to read a few passages at a time. Some Bibles **bold** certain verses showing you when a paragraph ends while others include Bible headings. It is good to read the Bible by sections. When you misunderstand a passage, look at the surrounding verses.¹¹ Examples of this include material of reading is: Matthew 6:1-19; Acts 17:16-34; Galatians 5:19-26.

Read chapters. It is good to read a whole Bible chapter at a time. Most Bible chapters are divided to help the reader grasp the central idea.

⁹<https://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/how-to-get-the-most-out-of-your-bible-reading/>

¹⁰Kevin Rhodes, *How to Study The Bible*, Hopkins Publishing, 2016, p. 49.

¹¹Hiram Kemp in the House to House article Volume 29 Issue 12.

Read multiple chapters to get a broader view of the subject. Having a daily Bible reading plan will have you reading multiple chapters a day. Maybe you read three chapters of the Old Testament in the morning and three chapters of the New Testament in the evening. Perhaps you are reading the Bible by sections (Law, poetry, psalms, etc.) or chronologically.

Read books. One preacher advised reading a whole book at a time so that you can keep up with the context. Maybe reading smaller books like 1 Peter and 1 John is a good place to start.

Listen. Some never learned how to read. Others are blind. Perhaps you find it hard to sit still and read. Listening to the Bible is also good. Download a Bible app and have it read it to you. Some are *Bible* or *Blue Letter Bible*. This alternative will allow you to do multiple things at once (i.e. drive, workout, etc.). Be careful that your mind doesn't grow distracted. If you can read, choose it more often for it eliminates distractions and allows for Bible marking.

Buy Good Tools.

Don't settle for the cheaper editions; buy the best kind of tools. To get the most out of Bible reading fill your toolbox with these:

- *A good translation.* Make sure what you are reading is the Word of God. Some "versions" are actually perversions.¹² Do not use the *Message* or *NIV*. Remember that easier is not always better, but it may help in understanding hard passages.
- *A pen or pencil.* NEVER read without a writing utensil. Having a good utensil will help you make notes, circle words, underline phrases, cross reference verses, and draw lines. If you like pencils use *Paper Mate Sharp Writer # 2*. If a pen, look for smaller ones like .5mm or .7mm. Make sure your utensil doesn't bleed through.

¹²Tom Wacaster

- *A dictionary.* For hard-to-understand English words, use *Merriam Webster*. If you are reading from an older version like the KJV, try looking up the etymology of the word so that you know how it was used in the 17th century. Always look up the word you don't understand in the original Greek and Hebrew through *Strong, Thayer, or W.E. Vine*.

Have the best tools so that you can get the most out of Bible reading.

Build Correctly.

Building a better Bible reading plan demands that we build right. Here are a few suggestions:

- *Have a schedule.* Get into the habit of reading. Create a reading plan or print one off from the internet. If we do not plan to read, we will not do so. Willie Alvarenga said, "It is not about finding time but MAKING time."
- *Get up early.* Try to make Bible reading the first thing you do every day.
- *Read every day* (Psalm 119:147-148). As you cannot go for a day without eating, you should not go a day without the food that is more important (Job 23:12; Matthew 4:4; 5:6). Always make sure you are doing some reading every day. Also try to read the Bible the same time every day. "A gentleman having an appointment to meet President Lincoln at five o'clock in the morning went a quarter of an hour before the time appointed While waiting for the appointed time he heard in the next room a voice as if in grave conversation, and asked an attendant standing by, "Who is talking in the

next room? "It is the President, sir," replied the attendant "Is anybody with him?" the gentleman inquired "No; he is *reading* the Bible." "Is that his habit so early in the morning?" "Yes, sir, he spends every morning from four o'clock to five in *reading* the Scriptures and praying."¹³

- *As you read, watch for repeated, interesting, or strange words.*¹⁴ Circle, highlight, underline, or box these words. Look up words that you do not understand and mark their definition in the margin or side.
- *Choose a good location.* Read in quiet places if your mind grows distracted. Go to the basement, on the front porch, or in your bedroom. Cars make good places too as you will can adjust the temperature and seating.¹⁵

If you don't built the house correctly, the fall will be catastrophic.

One man said, "If you want to hear from the Rock of Ages you gotta turn the pages." Let's determine to read the Bible more!

¹³<https://www.studylight.org/pastoral-resources/sermon-illustrations-archive.html?q=reading&t=body&a=search>

¹⁴<https://www.anglicancommunion.org/media/253732/5-Ten-practical-tips-for-studying-the-Bible-as-Christian-Scripture.pdf>

¹⁵Allen Webster.