

Reading the Bible with Profit

Often when a person comes to personal faith in Jesus Christ, they are counseled to read the Bible daily and to pray and attend church. Certainly, this is good and needful advice. But it is quite general and leaves a newly minded believer with some questions. One thing we often do is to try to encourage the believer to engage in daily Bible reading and we may even give them the goal of reading the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation in a year or even every year. In fact, many people begin a New Year with this goal before them. To aid in this task that are One Year Bibles that have sections from the Old Testament and New Testament and Psalms set out in daily portions. Others recommend charts for the same purpose. Now there is nothing wrong with these approaches, although I am not convinced that they are the most profitable way of reading and digesting God's Word. One reason I say this is because often people fall behind in their Bible reading program and become discouraged, give up, and then feel guilty. Another reason is people may read over a lot of text but not be successful in connecting the dots and because a strait reading from Genesis to Revelation does not present the true chronology of revelation, people can be confused. Are there better ways to read the Scripture with increased understanding?

Reading the Scriptures or listening to the reading of the Bible is a commanded activity. In fact, studying the Word and memorizing his Word are also mandated. Listen to these passages from the Bible on reading or listening to the reading of scripture:

"You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. Deut. 11:18-21

This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.

Joshua 1:8

My son, be attentive to my words; incline your ear to my sayings. Let them not escape from your sight; keep them within your heart. For they are life to those who find them, and healing to all their flesh. Proverbs 4:20-22

When we turn to the New Testament the exhortations to listen, to read and even study the Scriptures are even stronger. Peter writes, *Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 1 Peter 2:2*

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. Revelation 1:3

1 Thessalonians 5:27: *“I put you under oath by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.”*

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea. Colossians 4:16

Romans 15:4 informs us-

For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

Paul in 2 Timothy 3:14-4:1-2 issues the following instructions: ⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.**

4:1-2 *I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ² **preach the word**; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

From these passages we understand the crucial importance of reading the Bible, listening to the Scriptures as they are read and studying the sacred writings. Knowledge of God's Word feeds our souls, enlightens our minds and empowers our wills and warms our hearts by the presence of God ministering to us by his Holy Spirit. This requires reading with understanding, not simply running over the text or reading a verse here and there.

My concern is that feeling the pressure that one must read all the Bible in a year by some prescribed method may get us to have scanned the text but leave us with shallow understanding. ***So what I can do to read the Bible with maximum profit?*** There is no one method that fits all with guaranteed results. But let me offer some alternative approaches.

1st.- Listen to the reading of the Scriptures in the public worship of the church. Congregations should weekly hear a number of passages from the Bible read in the service. Often these passages will relate to the service theme or sermon. Listen carefully and reread after the service as you meditate on the message. Before the Bible was available in printed form for the ordinary believer to have a personal copy, this was the primary way of hearing the Word of God. Listen to words the Apostle John writes repeatedly in Revelation 2 and 3. *Anyone who has an ear should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Paul issues this instruction in 1 Timothy 4:13, *devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.* Another translation reads, *give your full concentration to the public reading of Scripture, to exhorting, and to teaching.* (ISV)

2nd.- When using a "read the Bible through approach" seek to read the Scripture chronologically, according to a progressive revelation timetable. A narrated or chronological Bible can help with this. And as you read forget the timetable and spread the reading out over 2 years instead of one. ***It is not the quantity of words read per day that counts but the quality of understanding gained.*** Also depart from time to time from the schedule to simply browse casually among the various writings of the Bible.

3rd.- Considering the New Testament, as you read keep in mind that the arrangement of books is by type and length. Therefore, a more profitable reading would be to read one of the gospel narratives through, then read Acts and related the letters of Paul to the various churches that are established. Here is an example: read Acts chapter 16 on the founding of the church at Philippi. Afterward read through in one or two settings Paul's letter to the Philippians. Another example would be to read Luke, Acts and then Paul's letters to the various churches.

The letters of the Apostles were written to particular churches and were expected to be read aloud in a service and then shared with other congregations. In fact, this is one of the principal ways the canon was formed. Listen again to Paul's instructions. Colossians 4:16, *And when this letter has been read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you also read the letter from Laodicea.*

[1 Thessalonians 5:27](#) - *I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.*

In fact, I recommend that congregations from time to time read a whole letter aloud in one service with or without comments later. This allows God's word to have direct impact upon the listeners!

With some of the larger books, a profitable method is to read them by sections in one sitting. Take for example, Paul's letter to the Romans, consisting of 16 chapters. Paul lays out a systematic presentation of the gospel. So on the first day read chapters 1:1 to 3:20, which concerns the universal sin of people and the desperate need of deliverance from God's just and righteous judgment. Think upon all he has written. Review the flow of his argument and humble yourself before God in confession of your own unrighteousness. For the next reading, begin at Romans 3:21 to 5:21, where Paul delivers the good news of salvation by the death of Jesus Christ through which we have a right standing with God by faith. Dwell on this great truth of justification by faith in Jesus Christ alone!

Next read Paul's explanation of the Christian life from Romans, chapter 6:1 through chapter 8:39. By a slower reading and engagement with this section you will better understand the struggles of the Christian in pursuit of righteousness, and God's provided resource of the

indwelling Holy Spirit by which we can live confidently and securely in his love with knowledge of our promised glorification grounded in God's elective love! On the next reading, in one sitting reading Romans 9, 10, & 11, with reference to God's purpose of salvation for Jew and Gentile in accordance with his covenants.

The last section would take up Paul's exhortation to Christian living in human relations as God's family, as Christ's body. Read from Romans 12:1 to the end of the letter. Other larger letters can be broken down by sections for a concentrated 20 minutes or so of uninterrupted reading.

Here is another profitable approach. Read slowly and carefully a section of one or two paragraphs. Perhaps it will relate to a particular theme. Ephesians yields itself to such reading. Read Ephesians 2:1-22 and let your mind engage in God's work of grace in you and all believers. Or in Ephesians chapter 1:3-23, there is teaching that easily flows into prayers of thanksgiving. Another prayer to meditate on and then pray is found in chapter 3:14-21.

As you read through the New Testament you can profitably go back to the Old Testament background it refers to and read the extended passages from the law or the prophets. Reading the letter to Hebrews in this way is very enlightening. In fact, you can read extended sections of Genesis and Exodus and Numbers and Leviticus in this way, having the New Testament fulfillment before you.

Meanwhile never forget that the Psalms lend themselves as praise, prayer, lament, and questioning that can give expression to thoughts and emotions as we engage with the living God by means of his living and powerful word. So read them, sing them and pray them! *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.* Hebrews 4:12

So take up the Book and read with understanding the Bible, God's written revelation because your spiritual health and development depends on it!!

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