

## **How Do You Read the Bible?**

**1) Sketch out what your daily reading pattern looks like. What tools do you bring to your reading time? Include things like books and resources as well as pens and highlighters.**

**2) What kind of schedule are you on? Are you reading the Bible in a year, reading it through chronologically, or using another type of plan?**

**3) Which parts of daily reading are most exciting for you?**

**4) Which parts of daily reading are most difficult for you?**

**5) What is one thing you'd love to get out of your time reading the Bible?**

## NOTES

## **Alternate Topic: How to read your Bible Daily**

This is probably one of the most difficult topics for me because from the very beginning of my Christian life I've struggled with reading the Bible daily. You may recall in our first session I talked about the difficulties I had with reading the Bible because of how intimidated I was about "getting it wrong." Like most of you I want to sit down and read the Bible and get something out of it. I want to make sure that what I read every single day is going to have a heart and life changing effect on me. I want to have a mountaintop experience every single day when I read the word. There may be people out there, there may be people in this room, for whom this is a reality. But it's not mine. I tell you this because I also believe that there are probably people in this room who need to know that you're not failing if you're reading the scripture every single day and only occasionally have in the insight or an encounter with God through the word.

The thing that I want all of us to see and to know is that there is great value in reading scripture every single day. One of my friends who is probably the smartest and most faithful person I know talked about sin from the perspective of Saint Augustine. He said that the seed of every sin is planted in the human heart. The sins that grow to bear fruit in our lives are the ones that we tend to. They are the ones that we give attention to and cultivate through our own bent toward sinning. The point of this was to say that the old phrase "there but for the grace of God go I," is a reality. I would say that the converse is also true, that the disciplines we cultivate are like seeds planted in our hearts that grow to fruition with the help of the Holy Spirit and allow us to become the people that God both created and caused us to be reborn into. The reading of scripture is one of those disciplines. Every single day that we practice by reading there is Truth going into us. And make no mistake about this the world around us is trying to get us to absorb the seeds of untruth, the seeds of strife, division, hatred, and the evil. The only way to guard ourselves from this is by doing what Romans 12:1-2 says to present our bodies as living sacrifices which is our spiritual worship, and to refrain from being conformed to the patterns of this world but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may be able to discern what is good and acceptable and perfect. How are we going to know what is good, acceptable, and perfect? Paul says it is the will of God, but how will we know that if we are not acquainting ourselves with what is true? The way that we acquaint ourselves with what is true is by reading daily the truth. Jesus says in John 17:7 "sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." To sanctify means to make holy, which is who and what God is. How does the fruit of holiness grow in us? By the word.

So how do we get into the word? Friends, I must tell you that sometimes it feels dry. Or rather, I feel dry. Just this morning I was reading Numbers, and I wrote down in my journal a kind of apology prayer to God that I speed through it so quickly that I didn't glean one thing from the reading. Sometimes Numbers will do that to you. You see a repetition of things that happen among each of the tribes, like how many people are in each tribe or which tribes gave what or who the heads of the tribes are, and your eyes can just glaze over. The thing that has taken me way too long to figure out though is that these things are in this

book for a particular reason God is showing us things if we will just slow down and read and dig a little bit. But that takes time in time is what we feel that we have very little of and so we read and move on and then wonder why our scripture reading didn't live in us today. I use that phrase "live in us" deliberately because it was one of the questions that John Wesley noted was a question that his Oxford holy club would use when they were sharing their hearts and holding each other accountable. "Did the Bible live in me today?" Many times, the Bible doesn't live in us because we're too busy thinking about other things. We're distracted by our calendar, our phones, or the list of tasks that we must perform each day. The interesting thing is if we can create the space to do it, even the alleged boring parts reveal a reality to us that is so important. For instance, and I have no idea whether this is of any theological significance, but some years ago I noticed that when I was reading Numbers that got arranged the 12 tribes of Israel around the Tabernacle in a certain way. Some tribes were on the north, some tribes were on the West, some tribes were on the South, and some tribes were on the east. The thing that stuck out to me about this was that Judah, the tribe from which Jesus descends, is the tribe closest to the Tabernacle on the east side facing the rising sun. Now I'm sure that could mean a whole host of things, but for me, a follower of Jesus Christ, it was significant that the tribe closest to the heart of the Tabernacle and facing the rising, or the resurrection, of the sun is the tribe out of which Jesus the Messiah comes from. Could spend a lot of time pondering that but I mention it just to say if our eyes glaze over at even the alleged boring parts, we might miss something. So how do we keep from missing something?

I believe the answer to this question comes in two ways. The first being we each need to have a familiarity with the Bible and the story of the scriptures. This is why reading through the Bible in a set amount of time is important. There are lots of plans out there that will help a person read through the bible in a year. If a year seems too long there are probably plans that will tell you what you must read if you want to read the Bible in a month, or two months, or six months. I know for a fact there's a Bible reading program that will help you read the Bible in three months called the Bible in 90 days. The publishing house Zondervan prints a Bible in 90 days version of the NIV that will tell you where to begin and where to end each day. I've done that one two or three times. I also read this particular Bible in two weeks when I bought it a little over a year ago when I knew I was going to be leaving my last church to come here. Before I wrote anything in it, I wanted to read it from cover to cover and so I just read it as fast as I could. One of the things these quicker readings of the text does for us is to give us a great overview of what is happening in the scriptures.

When I took my inductive Bible study classes in seminary the very first assignment for each of those was to read the book or books we were studying multiple times as quickly as we could. We would name each chapter so that we would have kind of an outline helping us to remember the contents of what was in each chapter. It also helped us to remember the flow of the of the narrative for subsequent readings. Then we would outline, so to speak, each of these books. My very first class was Matthew, my next one covered genesis through Deuteronomy, my third one was the 12 minor prophets, and then I had to do the same thing for advanced classes in Hebrews and Jeremiah. I'll never forget how daunting the task was

to read through Jeremiah multiple times as quickly as possible. But what that did for me was to give me a good overview of the book where I could begin to break it down and understand what was happening with each movement. It's almost like thinking about reading as an inverted triangle. You read fast and widely to start with and then narrow down your focus on particular chapters paragraphs and verses.

I'm telling you this because reading the Bible from cover to cover is a method toward doing a similar thing on a much larger scale. You should probably buy a copy of *How to read the Bible* for all its worth which has a lot of great introductions onto the books of the Bible or Leland Ryken's handbook of the Bible which I'm not sure is in print anymore, but it should be. Each book of the Bible has an outline and some background information on it. Some of your study bibles will have the same type of information at the beginning of each book. But it's helpful to get a sense of the book as a whole before wading in and focusing upon particular verses or chapters. You could have a resource like this at your side as you read a Bible in a year plan for instance and have a sense of what's going on each day as you read 3 or 4 chapters. My suggestion is you get a notebook and a pen and read the Bible from cover to cover making observations as you go in as much time as you need to complete it. You can read the Bible through in a year, you could read it through four times in a year with the Bible in 90 days program, or you could spread that out to two or three years. It's up to you but I think that the more familiar you are with the entirety of the Bible the more individual stories or sayings are going to have an impact on your daily reading. Another example is that I was reading yesterday about the snakes that bit the rebellious people of Israel in Numbers and how they were supposed to fashion a bronze serpent on a pole that they lifted up and everyone who looked upon it was healed. Now on its own that's just a really strange story. But when you get to John 3: 14, and read Jesus saying, "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up," you're going to think, "whoa, there's something much bigger going on here. I know why Jesus said what he said because I remember the story from Numbers."

The 2nd way we keep from missing things in the Bible is to pay attention. This is where I would invite you at some point to move from reading through the Bible in a set amount of time and begin to focus on particular books of the Bible. One of my former seminary professors started a practice many years ago that I'm afraid I'm too old to do and to complete but before I die, but one that seems very fruitful, is to choose a book of the Bible that you're going to read for a whole year. And you read genesis for a whole year. How many times do you think you could read genesis in a year? Well, I know for a fact that in the spring of 2000 I read genesis three times in the space of a couple days for my class. But you could easily read it once every two weeks if you read 4 chapters a day. The more you read it the more details you're going to notice and the more details you notice the more connections you notice and the more connections you notice you begin to realize that there was a reason God inspired Moses to write these stories down the way that he did. Because it's not just the words themselves that are communicating something but the arrangement of the words into sentences and paragraphs that are communicating something. You'll start to notice the places where the Bible inserts short genealogies of particular people that stand

out as signposts of significance within the book. Because genesis is obsessed with the descendants not only of Adam but of a particular man named Abraham and why is Abraham important? Because he is the one with whom God made a covenant and a promise that is ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

I'm not saying there aren't other ways of reading the Bible regularly and faithfully, but this is the pattern that I'm finding has the most intentional power behind it. When I hear people say, "Oh, I've read that before," I think, "Yeah, so what? You think you've got it down pat? Or that God won't reveal something new to you?" Not to keep picking on Arden, but do you think after a Ph.D. and all these years of reading and teaching the Bible he doesn't find new things in his Bible reading? I know he does because he must think through my dumb questions every Monday! So, write down your questions. "Why did God provide a ram? Is there significance to a ram in the thicket when Abraham didn't kill Isaac?" You don't have to answer them all that day, but you can come back to them or maybe on one of your read-throughs, God shows you an insight on what that means.