



A GUIDE TO PERSONAL BIBLE READING

As Christians, we seek to be transformed by God's grace to love God and one-another, serve the city and share Christ. The fundamental means of grace (the ways that God transforms us) are God's word and our prayer in response. The Bible is God's gift to us, because as we read and reflect on it his Holy Spirit transforms us. So it is right and good for us to listen to him daily and respond in prayer and thanksgiving.

Reading the Bible can be a little daunting. This is true for many Christians, especially if you are a fairly new Christian, or if you have not read the Bible on your own much before. This short guide will help you as you approach reading the Bible for yourself and seek to cultivate this vital habit.

BUILDING THE HABIT

The habit of reading the Bible is a life-long journey. Do not be discouraged if it feels hard or if things do not go to plan. It will get easier over time, and you can always just get back on the horse. For families with children, what works and what does not will change over time. The important thing is set routines, but also try new things to find what works.

Feel free to mix things up and follow your nose. If a book is getting too hard or boring, switch to something else. The main thing is to be reading and meditating on God's word regularly.

Be realistic about what is manageable. Choose a path that works for you and follow it, but do not be discouraged if you need to cut back some days. This is especially true with small children. Just do what you can to make it a habit.

CHOOSING A PATH

There is no single way to approach reading the Bible. Here are a few possible paths you could take:

You may like to read a short passage (a few verses, or half a chapter or so) a few times, reflect on it and pray in response. Do not feel that you have to read a lot. Too much can give you indigestion. This approach is especially effective for New Testament letters.

You may like to read a few chapters a day as you might read a novel. Then choose one thing from your reading to reflect on and pray about. Reading a lot of the Bible more quickly is a good way to get a sense of the big picture, especially if you are reading New Testament Gospels or Old Testament narrative.

Another approach is to read a few different parts of the Bible at the same time. This is a good way to get through some of the tougher, more fibrous parts of the Bible, by giving you some reprieve with tastier morsels. Think in layers: Begin with a part of the New Testament; if you want more, add some Old Testament wisdom or a Psalm; if you want more, add some Old Testament narrative and/or prophets (see below on good places to start in these categories).

Families with children should find a few good children's or family Bibles and focus on one story a day. Find a way to make it fit your family's schedule. Perhaps in the morning before everyone leaves for the day. Or right after dinner. Or divide and conquer and read a short story to kids individually in their beds before sleep.

As kids get older and become pre-teens and teens, encourage them to read a chapter of the Bible on their own each day. You can use the guide below to help them.

SELECTING THE TEXTS

The easiest place to begin is with the New Testament, starting with the Gospels (Mark, John, Matthew, then Luke). Then move onto the letters. The shorter ones are generally easier, like Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and James. Romans and 1 Corinthians are tougher but contain fundamental teaching on faith and life.

From the Old Testament, begin with wisdom books and the Psalms. Perhaps one Psalm or a chapter of Proverbs every day.

The next step is Old Testament narrative. It contains many familiar stories and characters. Pay attention especially to what God is doing in the background in these books. Genesis is a good place to begin, followed by the first half of Exodus. After that, you might like to skip to 1 and 2 Samuel.

If you are really keen, get into the Old Testament prophets. Some of the shorter ones are less daunting. Isaiah is long, but contains fundamental promises from God.

Places to Start

NT Gospels - Mark, John, Matthew, then Luke

NT Letters - Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, James

OT Wisdom - Psalms, Proverbs

OT Narrative - Genesis, Exodus (first half), 1 & 2 Samuel

OT Prophets - Habakkuk, Isaiah 1-12, Isaiah 40-55

PRAYING THE WORD

We read the Bible not just to exercise our brains but to engage with God and be transformed by him. So it makes sense that we pray as we read.

Pray before you begin. Call on God to fill you with the Holy Spirit so you can understand and be changed by his word. Here is a prayer that you can use:

Heavenly Father, give me faith to receive your word, understanding to know what it means, and the will to put it into practice, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Pray as you read. As you notice things about God, praise and thank him for it. When you notice things about the goodness of the gospel, thank God. When things are troubling or challenging, ask for God's help.

Pray when you have finished. A good model is the teaspoon model: TSP - Thanks, Sorry, Please. *Thank* God for something you read. Say *sorry* to God for good things that you have not done or for wrong things that you have done. Ask God '*Please*' for help to live his way in response to his word.

Thank you, Father for...

I'm sorry, gracious God, that I have not ... ; I'm sorry that I ... ; please forgive me. Thank you for your mercy and forgiveness through Jesus' death and resurrection for me.

Please, Father, help me to...

Families with kids can use the TSP model of prayer too. But it might be that using just one of the topics per night is a good way to stay focussed.

ENGAGING WITH THE WORD

As you read, here are three different methods to help you reflect more deeply. It might help to get a note book where you can jot down your thoughts and prayers for the day.

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

This simple approach is great for anyone, even kids



What does it say about God / Jesus?



What does it say about people?



How should I live in response?

THE SWEDISH METHOD

When reading with kids, choose one or two of these at a time



Light bulb - what stands out as new, interesting, or important?



Question mark - what is challenging or hard to understand?



Heart - how does this part of the Bible make you feel?



Hand - how can you live in response?

COMA

This approach is a little more advanced and intellectual

Context - What has happened until this point in the Biblical story?

Observations - What stands out? What questions do you have?

Message - What are the important messages from this passage?

Application - How could you seek to live this out?

FURTHER INTO THE WORD

If you have any questions, please come and talk to the ministry staff. We love helping people to hear and live out the word of God.

Online, bibleproject.com provides excellent videos that summarise books of the Bible in engaging ways.

We also recommend a study Bible. The NIV Bible Speaks Today Study Bible is a great place to start. The NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible is excellent and more advanced. These are available from Christian bookstores like reformers.com.au and koorong.com.

You might also find commentaries helpful. The New Bible Commentary is a classic single-volume commentary on the Bible. Otherwise, we recommend the following commentary series: Bible Speaks Today, God's Word for You, Tyndale, and Reading the Bible Today. Come and ask us if you want guidance on more technical commentaries.

As you embark or continue on your journey of personal Bible reading, we pray that God's Spirit will increasingly transform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father.



ST MARK'S
