

How to Enjoy Your Bible Reading

From the earliest years of your Christian life, you will have been told how important it is to read your Bible regularly. Perhaps you decided to try some sort of Bible read-through and set to reading four chapters a day. Early zeal meant you tore through the Gospels and enjoyed the drama of Genesis, but before long you ran into rock solid Romans, or life-draining Leviticus. You missed a few days out, and then... well, it's been a while since you found the will to pick your Bible up again.

Every now and then, first thing in the morning and last thing at night, you see it on your bedside table and it stares you out. It's at these times that other things tend suddenly to grab your attention. 'I really ought to mow the lawn!', 'I never did write that thank you card to Aunt Daisy!', 'I never did start 24 season eight.' It's so easy to drop reading the Bible down the list of priorities just a little bit, and never get around to it. Why is that? There are three very common reasons, and they all have solutions that aren't so much to do with how well disciplined you are, but more about the way you think about the scriptures in the first place. The first reason isn't even really a proper one, so we'll start with that one and get it out of the way.

1. You have no time

This may be the most common 'reason' we give to explain to ourselves why we've not read the Bible for a while: events of the day got on top of me, my feet have hardly touched the ground, I overslept. Yet of course this isn't a serious reason for missing out on the scriptures. We all make time for what we believe we need, and we certainly make time to do what we want! Life is rarely too busy to scroll Instagram, watch Netflix, or go to the pub. The fact is that our priorities reveal what we truly value, and the 'not enough time' excuse is most likely a cover-up of one of the two reasons below. So if this first one sounds like you, admit it's nothing more than an excuse and read on!

2. You're reading it wrong

The first is that deep down, you feel your Bible reading isn't 'working' for you – and it's really because you read the Bible with your eyes on yourself. As you read it, you're looking for practical lessons on life, inspiring breakthroughs, and commands to immediate action. The Bible doesn't provide these particularly well, and you find yourself feeling impatient and bored.

The scriptures don't read like a 'how to' guide for life or '1001 Inspirational Quotations'. The Bible is full of ancient history, genealogies, instructions for priests and kings, bizarre-sounding visions, and precious little in the way of direct instructions to you, the reader. Even in the New Testament where things seem a little easier to apply to you, vast chunks go by without a word on how to live! The whole of Acts passes without even one command to go and do evangelism like the apostles did; Romans takes 11 long chapters to get to any application.

This can be immensely frustrating for us at times as we often want some clear moral guidance or a quick nugget of wisdom for the day before we get going with life. This will lead us to ignore the 'dull' bits, allegorise and twist the difficult passages, and generally stick to our favourite books and verses. We focus on what we think will directly apply to us at the expense of the tabernacle, minor prophets, and anything about numbers of people in tribes.

The solution to this problem is to understand that the Bible is about Jesus and not you.

We must take our eyes off ourselves and begin to look at Jesus in the Bible. It is dedicated not to doling out moral lessons or spiritual fast food, but to teach us about Christ so that we can delight in him. If you're disappointed in the Bible as a moral 'how to' guide or a daily encouragement dispenser, your next move is to start reading it differently. Let the Bible show you the glory and beauty of Jesus, and you will find that as you do, love for him will bubble-up inside. Believe it or not, you will see him held-out to you in even the obscure passages you've always avoided. You will find that, far from dutifully going to the Bible for handy hints for the day, you will gladly run to it so that Christ will capture your heart afresh.

3. You're doing it for the wrong person

Everyone will be familiar with this situation: you've been going strong with your Bible reading, enjoying it and feeling your love for the Lord grow. But something comes up (perhaps the opportunity for a Saturday morning lie in) and you miss a day. Somehow the next day gets dropped too and, before you know it, it's been a week. Maybe two or three.

There's a feeling of nagging guilt which tells you that if you really cared about God then you would have read the Bible... that you really should have finished Jeremiah by now. The pressure only mounts as more missed days go by. This condemnation can cripple the most eager Bible reader. The flipside of this feeling is, of course, a sense of satisfaction (dare you admit it, a smug satisfaction) when you do manage read the Bible, especially when you survive a whole book in one go. You think, 'I'm obviously maturing as a Christian!' and are tempted to drop into conversations that, 'Yes, I was in Ezekiel 47 this morning. Marvellous chapter!' Secretly, you lollap between these two feelings: some weeks feeling quietly pleased with your progress, and others feeling wretched and low.

The diagnosis for you is that you imagine your Bible reading to be doing God a favour. The crushing guilt you feel when you miss it is your heart telling you God is displeased, and the slightly haughty contentment you feel when knocking out five chapters instead of your usual four is your heart telling you that God is now smiling on you.

The medicine is to recognise and live in God's grace.

You are eternally loved and accepted by the Father only because of Jesus. He and he alone is the reason that a sinful person like you can relate to God at all; as you find yourself in him, you are adorned with his status and standing before his Father. Without him you would not be able to stand. That is the heart of your salvation and the ongoing reality that dominates your Christian life. When you imagine that your commitment to reading the Bible can in any way add to or detract from this, you are cheating yourself out of assurance. Your faithful Bible reading over decades will not gain you any more favour in God's eyes – you are poor and needy before him! But don't despair: missing a quiet time could never change God's gracious love for you, either. You stand before God secure in Jesus, not resting on the ups and downs of your own spiritual life. If you have thought this way, you're underestimating Jesus and trying to wrestle from him

great burden of pleasing God. Give it back to him and pick up your Bible – it's much lighter!

The truth is, the Bible is given to us as a gift to feast on, rather than a project to complete before judgment day. We're invited to savour and enjoy it. When we stop reading, we might feel hunger pangs but we could never feel guilt, fear, or condemnation. Skipping breakfast is more of a missed opportunity than a moral slip, and skipping Bible reading is the same. God is not angry when you miss a quiet time, but he wants you to stay spiritually healthy by nourishing yourself with his word.

How to enjoy your Bible reading

The Bible has been given to us to help us know and love Christ. Our Father is generous and loving, and loves to communicate with us; the Spirit has inspired the scriptures so that they bring life, joy, and fullness to the Christian walk. There is a joy and freedom as we open God's book and hear his words. If you have misunderstood or abused the Bible up until now, making it about you and your efforts, simply look to Jesus instead. The Bible speaks of him and your salvation rests on him. Read it to love and trust him more.



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