

HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

If you're like 58% of Americans, you want to read your Bible more than you already do. It's easy to feel like there isn't enough time in the day, and when it comes to a book like the Bible, it's hard to know where to start. As a church, we want to be intentional about digging into God's word.

How do you see the Bible? Some people view it as just a historical book full of stories from the past or a list of how-to rules for living a better life. Or, they see it as something they are supposed to read to be a good Christian. They beat themselves up or feel ashamed when they haven't read in awhile.

Over the course of 1,400 years, God spoke to shepherds, kings, warriors, and poets who wrote down His words. And in all 66 books of the Bible, all of the different stories and writings point to the same thing—Jesus. So that big book is really just one giant story. A story of God's rescue plan starting in Genesis and going clear through to Revelation.

THE BIBLE IS

WRITTEN BY MEN, INSPIRED BY GOD (2 TIMOTHY 3:16)

ALIVE AND RELEVANT (HEBREWS 4:12)

100% TRUE (JOHN 17:17)

A LETTER TO US FROM GOD (1 JOHN 3:1; 1 JOHN 4:8)

THE BIBLE ISN'T

MAN MADE

OUTDATED AND IRRELEVANT

INACCURATE

A BOOK OF RULES

WHY IS READING THE BIBLE SO IMPORTANT?

We have a personal God who is all about relationship. And we all know that the basis of any relationship is trust. How can you trust someone you don't know well? Trust is based on what you learn about someone's character, and grows as you get to know them more and more. Reading the Bible is how we get to know God. He reveals all kinds of things about Himself to us through His Word. The Bible is our invitation to better understand His character and what He's all about.

God's not up in heaven with a giant clipboard keeping track of when we read and when we don't. It has no bearing on whether we're going to heaven or how pleased God is with us. But the more you read and learn about Him, the richer your relationship with Him—and your life—will be.

In this mixed-up world we are bombarded with all kinds of crazy messages about who we are, what life's all about, and what choices we should make. God's Word is an amazing filter for all of that noise. It catches all of the untrue and twisted voices that enter our heads and gives us clarity on what's good and true. The more familiar you are with God's voice through the Bible, the more you'll recognize it and be transformed by it.

OTHER NAMES FOR THE BIBLE

GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE

THE WORD / THE WORD OF GOD

HOLY BIBLE

LET'S GET PRACTICAL.

If you've ever been overwhelmed at the thought of reading and understanding the Bible, you're not alone. It can definitely feel that way at first. We've outlined some tips on how to set yourself up for success and make the most of your reading time. Don't get caught up on how much you read or even how much you understand at first. Just make a genuine effort to read a portion of God's Word every day, and to look for ways to apply it to your life.

- 1. Pray.** Before you crack open the Bible, take a moment to talk to God. Ask Him to reveal Himself to you through His words, to direct your thoughts, and to see and hear what it is He has to say to you. If you're struggling to find the motivation to read, tell Him. If you are confused or frustrated by it, share that.
- 2. Set aside time and find a good place.** Block out a regular time in your schedule to spend with God, just like you would any other friend. Don't be afraid to start small with 10-20 minute chunks of time. Remove any distractions (your phone, laptop, etc.), and find a quiet, comfortable spot to settle in and start reading.
- 3. Find a Bible that fits your needs.** If you don't already own a Bible, now's the time to get one. They come in all shapes and sizes—some with lots of background information, notes, and cross-references, others with just the passages themselves. The ESV Study Bible is a great place to start. It's packed with background information like details on the author and historical context and definitions of tricky terms.
- 4. Read thoughtfully and slowly.** It can be tempting to blaze through your reading time, but taking a deeper look at the details will help you make sense of what you're reading. It's also helpful to read when you are awake and alert (maybe not bedtime). Try these three techniques to really dig in.

Observe. Simply look at what the verse says. Then think about the context. Who wrote it? What was happening in the world at that time? It may be helpful to do a little research on your own or read through the notes in a study Bible to get some insight.

Interpret. What does it mean? Think about how the text might have applied to the people who heard it initially. Imagine what their lives were like and how the message likely impacted them. What does it say about God and His character?

Apply. Consider the themes and implications of the passage and how it relates to the world today and to you personally. How might it apply to current culture? What could God be trying to teach you? What will you do with what you've learned?

- 5. Ask questions.** You will likely run across things that don't make sense or leave you frustrated. We've all been there. Have a notebook or journal handy and jot down confusing passages and questions that you have. Share your questions with a believer you trust who can talk through it. No question is a bad question.

WHERE TO START IN THE BIBLE

Maybe you've tried to read the Bible before without much success. You sit down, open the cover, and start reading. But then things get boring, confusing, or outrageous... and you're still in Genesis. There must be a better way! When you begin reading the Bible, you need a strategy to help you make sense of what you're reading and get you excited about regular time spent with God. The readings we suggest below will give you a good look at the basics of Jesus' life, expose you to His teaching, and provide some context for other parts of the Bible.

THE BOOK OF JOHN (NEW TESTAMENT)

John was a fisherman-turned-disciple who wrote this and several other books in the New Testament (1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation). He is known as the "beloved disciple," one of Jesus' closest friends. The book of John shares Jesus' miracles, teaching, and prayers. It also gives a behind-the-scenes look at ideas that Jesus shared only with His inner circle.

ROMANS (NEW TESTAMENT)

Another disciple, Paul, wrote this letter to Christians in Rome about how to be devoted to God and to better explain God's righteousness. Do a little research on ancient Rome, and you'll see that Paul's message to the Romans has lots of application for us today.

EPHESIANS (NEW TESTAMENT)

Ephesians was also written by Paul to the early church in Ephesus, a port town on the coast of modern day Turkey. Ephesians has some great applications for personally applying truth to our lives and advice on how to live a faith-growing, soul-filled life.

JAMES (NEW TESTAMENT)

This book was most likely written by James, the brother of Jesus, who wasn't a believer during Jesus' life, but later became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. James is sensible and ethical, directing us to have a faith that produces real life change and explaining what it means to practice godly living.

PSALMS AND PROVERBS (OLD TESTAMENT)

While you are reading the books recommended above, make a goal to read a proverb and a psalm each day. These collections of songs, poems, and wise sayings are easy to read, thought-provoking, and so relatable and applicable to your life.

These are all great passages to dive into, but honestly, where you start is not nearly as important as just starting somewhere. Keep at it, even if you're still struggling in your reading time. Sometimes obedience has to come first, and the rewards come later. In Psalm 119:103, David talks about God's words tasting sweeter than honey in his mouth. The more you read, the more you'll grow a taste for the Bible and be transformed by it. So pick a passage and just go for it.

REFLECT

- Share your recent experiences with reading the Bible. What was it like for you? Was it easy, interesting, fun, hard, frustrating, or confusing (or a mix)?
- How would you like your reading time to change?
- Did you feel like God spoke to you through something you read?
- Is there someone in your life that you can share this with?

GO DEEPER

- *How To Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, book by Gordon Fee
- The Bible App, free mobile app by YouVersion
- Biblegateway.com, free online Bible resource