

# How to Read the Bible

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Bible / Read; Bible | January 1, 2023

Do you read your Bible everyday or are you too busy? In this message, Pastor Steve talks about why it is important to read your Bible and gives 5 ways to do it.

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## INTRODUCTION

· Did you know that the Old Testament is composed of:

- 39 books
- 929 chapters
- 23,214 verses
- 593,493 words

· Did you know that..

- Psalms is the longest book
- Obadiah is the shortest book

· Did you know that there are...

- 17 historical books
- 5 poetical books
- 17 prophetic books

· Did you know that the New Testament is composed of:

- 27 books
- 260 chapters
- 7,959 verses
- 181,253 words

· Did you know that...

- Acts is the longest book
- 3 John is the shortest book

· Did you know that there are...

- 4 Gospels
- 1 historical book
- 22 epistles
- Did you also know that it was not until 1250 A.D. that the Latin Bible was divided into chapters by Cardinal Hugo?
- Did you know that in 1551 Robert Estienene included verse divisions in the Greek New Testament
- Did you know the first entire English Bible to have verse divisions was the Geneva Bible in 1560 (Willmington)
- Did you know any of this?
- Do you know why I ask?
- I ask because what I have to say today is about your time in God's Word
- As we begin the new year, I want to encourage you to read your Bible MORE or start reading it for the first time on a regular basis
- Someone said it takes 70 hours and 40 minutes to read the Bible at pulpit rate
- It takes 52 hours and 20 minutes to read the Old Testament
- It takes the 18 hours and 20 minutes to read the New Testament
- In the Old Testament the Psalms take the longest to read: 4 hours and 28 minutes
- In the New Testament the Gospel of Luke takes 2 hours and 43 minutes to read (Doan)
- Reading the Bible is certainly attainable and should constantly be pursued
- The question is a matter of priority.
- There was a church in Scotland that reported it read the Bible nonstop in 62 hours and 55 minutes (E7700I)
- Saints throughout the ages have expressed this kind of commitment

### · Like...

- A French nobleman, M. De Renty, who read the Bible daily for three hours on his knees...
- Lady Frances Hobart read the [Psalms](#) twelve times a year, the New Testament three times, and other parts of the Old Testament once
- Susannah, who was the countess of Suffolk, for the last seven years of her life, read the Bible twice yearly
- Dr. Gouge read 15 chapters daily—five in the morning, five after dinner, and five in the evening before bed

- Jeremiah Whittaker read all the epistles in the Greek New Testament twice every night
- Joshua Barnes read a small pocket Bible which he always carried with him—over 120 times
- Robert Cotton read the whole Bible through 12 times a year
- Henry Willmer, read with the most detailed attention the whole Bible 8 times over. During his 9th reading at the Book of Job, death overtook him (E7700I)
- John Quincy Adams said: “I have for many years made it a practice to read through the Bible once a year. My custom is to read four or five chapters every morning immediately after rising from my bed. It employs about an hour of my time, and seems to me the most suitable manner of beginning the day.”
- Did you know the Law was read regularly in the synagogue? (FB)
- Did you know the New Testament letters were read in the churches to which they were sent? (FB)
- Did you know there are saints who have committed the Bible to memory

#### • Like...

- Tertullian who devoted his days and nights to Bible reading, so much so that he learned much of it by heart, even its punctuations
- Theodosius the Younger could repeat any part of the Scripture exactly, and discourse with the bishops at court as if he himself were a bishop
- Origen never went to meals or to sleep without having some portions of the Scriptures read
- Eusebius said that he heard of one, whose eyes were burned out under the Diocletian persecution, repeat from memory the Scriptures in a large assembly
- Beza could repeat all of Paul’s epistles in Greek at the age of 80
- Cramer could repeat the entire New Testament from memory, learning it on his journey to Rome
- Ridley also memorized the entire New Testament during his walks in the Pembroke Hall of Cambridge
- Well as you can see there are many who have committed their lives to this Book, the Bible
- As we think about it today, I want to focus on the labor of reading the Bible
- Not everyone can read
- For them, audio Bibles are perfect
- For those who struggle with reading, having an audio Bible is extremely helpful
- It is difficult to estimate the extent of literacy in the ancient world

- Professional scribes passed on their knowledge within their families
- Their services were available to those who were illiterate (FB)
- [Revelation 1:3](#) says there is a blessing for those who read and give heed to the things written in this book
- Though that may have reference to the book of Revelation, it is still true as you read the Bible
- Charles Spurgeon said, “I usually find that the greatest doubters are the people who do not read the Bible.”
- As we talk about reading the Bible, there are different ways to do this
- That’s what I want to talk about this morning
- As we begin the new year, let’s make a commitment to read the Bible
- Let me show you how to do this
- Charles Spurgeon said, “How often do we open the sacred book and read a chapter through, perhaps at family-prayer, or perhaps in our own private devotions, and having read from the first verse to the last, we shut up the book, thinking we have done something very right and very proper, and in a vague way somehow profitable to us. Very right and very proper indeed, and yet, right and proper as the thing is, we may really have gained nothing thereby. We may, in fact, have only drilled ourselves in the merely external part of religion, and may not have enjoyed anything spiritual, or anything that can be beneficial to our souls, if we have forgotten the divine Spirit through whom the Word has come to us.”
- So let’s change that this morning
- I want to give you 5 ways to read your Bible
- The first is to...

## LESSON

### **I. Read Prayerfully**

- Our reading should be done with the deepest reverence
- No one can comprehend the teachings of the Bible in his own ability
- He must have the assistance of the Holy Spirit
- Remember “the Holy Spirit helps us in our infirmities, but not our idleness” (Spurgeon)
- David’s prayed in [Psalm 119:18](#), “Open my eyes, that I may behold Wonderful things from Your law.”
- Albert Barnes says the Hebrew word for “open” means to “be naked...to make naked”
- In other words, it means to “uncover, to disclose, to reveal”

- Thomas Manton said, “The Hebrew phrase signifieth ‘unveil mine eyes’”
- David’s prayer was for God to “take away from [his] eyes what is before them to prevent clear vision”
- It’s what God did to Balaam in [Numbers 22:31](#), “Then Yahweh opened the eyes of Balaam, and he saw the angel of Yahweh standing in the way with his drawn sword in his hand; and he bowed his head down and prostrated himself to the ground.”
- Since the Fall, men’s eyes are naturally blinded...[they] have a veil over them, which God must remove before they can see clearly (Spence)
- Paul prayed for the Ephesians in [Ephesians 1:17-19](#) “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the full knowledge of Him, 18 so that you—the eyes of your heart having been enlightened—will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe according to the working of the might of His strength”
- For that to take place you must read it prayerfully, depending on the Holy Spirit as you read
- He opens your eyes and heart to His Word
- So before you start reading your Bible, it is crucial to pray (Pickowicz)
- Prayer and Bible reading go together
- Prayer is talking to God
- Reading the Bible is God talking to you

• Next you must...

## II. Read Undistractedly

- The number one reason why people don’t read the Bible is because they are too busy.
- George Barna said, “Among those who say their Bible reading decreased in the last year, the number-one reason was busyness: 40% report being too busy with life’s responsibilities (job, family, etc.), an increase of seven points from just one year ago.
- Other factors Americans cite as reasons for less time reading Scripture include a significant change in their life (17%), becoming atheist or agnostic (15%), going through a difficult experience that caused them to doubt God (13%) and seeing that reading the Bible made very little difference in someone else’s life (8%).
- Barna says, “These relatively smaller percentages reveal that Americans don’t often turn away from the Bible over ideological or emotional conflicts. Indeed, on the whole Americans say they want to read the Bible—62% wish they read Scripture more—they just don’t know how to make time” (<https://www.barna.com/research/the-state-of-the-bible-6-trends-for-2014>).

- Probably the worst enemy of Bible study today in the Western world is television
- If you are an average American 18 years of age, you have already amassed about 18,000 hours of TV viewing
- Experts tell us that by the time a TV-raised American reaches the age of 65, he will have had an average of nine-and-a-half years of solid TV viewing
- That's 15 percent of a person's life spent in front of the TV set! (Taken from A.C. Nielsen)
- If on the other hand, a person went to Sunday School regularly from birth till age 65, he would only have had a total of four months of solid Bible teaching
- Is it any wonder why there are so many weak Christians in Western society?
- We have to discipline ourselves and make specific time for Bible study, and not let anything get in its way
- You should study your Bible when you are at your best physically, emotionally, and intellectually, and when you can be undistracted and unhurried (RW)
- You also should push yourself to read when you don't feel like
- Being busy and tired are a dangerous combination but you must push through it
- It's helpful if you have others to hold you accountable
- Maybe together you read through the Bible with your family or with a friend or a group
- Because I preach weekly and teach a class before our service, that keeps me accountable
- Jesus is our greatest example!
- [Matthew 14:22-23](#) tells us After He fed the five thousand, "Immediately [He] made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitude away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on a mountain by Himself to pray. And when evening had come, He was alone there."
- Jesus needed time alone with the Father, so do you and I
- So He made it a habit to slip away
- [Luke 5:16](#), "But He Himself would often slip away to the desolate regions and pray."
- Sometimes He would spend all night in prayer
- [Luke 6:12](#), "Now it happened that at this time He went off to the mountain to pray, and He was spending the whole night in prayer to God."
- Other times it would be early in the morning
- [Mark 1:35](#), "And in the early morning, while it was still dark, Jesus rose up, went out of the house, and went away to a desolate place, and was praying there."

- If Jesus needed to do this, so do we

• So you need to read prayerfully and undistractedly

• Notice the third...

### III. Read Daily

- In the Gospel of Matthew and Mark, there is a question Jesus asked of the Pharisees and Sadducees
- It's the question, "Have you not read?"
- When the Pharisees questioned Jesus about His disciples picking the heads of grain and eating them stating that this "is not lawful to do on the Sabbath" ([Mat.12:1](#))
- Jesus replied in [Matthew 12:3-8](#), "3 But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he became hungry, he and his companions, 4 how he entered the house of God, and they ate the consecrated bread, which was not lawful for him to eat nor for those with him, but for the priests alone? 5 "Or have you not read in the Law, that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple break the Sabbath and are innocent? 6 "But I say to you that something greater than the temple is here. 7 "But if you had known what this means, 'I DESIRE COMPASSION, AND NOT A SACRIFICE,' you would not have condemned the innocent. 8 "For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.""
- Some of the views we have can easily be cleared up by simply reading the Bible
- On another occasion when the Sadducees sought to test Him, they asked in [Matthew 22:24-29](#), "24 saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'IF A MAN DIES HAVING NO CHILDREN, HIS BROTHER AS NEXT OF KIN SHALL MARRY HIS WIFE AND RAISE UP A SEED FOR HIS BROTHER.' 25 "Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no seed, he left his wife to his brother; 26 so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. 27 "And last of all, the woman died. 28 "In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had married her." 29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God."
- Jesus responds by showing them their ignorance of the Scripture
- He says in [Matthew 22:29-32](#), "29 But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. 30 "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. 31 "But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 32 'I AM THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND THE GOD OF ISAAC, AND THE GOD OF JACOB'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.""
- The third occurrence of this question is in Mark's version of the latter story in [Matthew 22:24-29](#).
- We are ignorant of what the Bible teaches because we have not read it

- We heard in our last point why people don't read the Bible
- They are too busy
- But in our age of technology, it is possible to read daily in the midst of being busy
- How many of you do other things when you're watching TV or listening to the radio?
- When Theresa and I are watching TV and I pause it when she goes to the kitchen, she always says you can turn it back on I can hear it
- In our case, because of the location of the kitchen and the living room, you can watch it too
- But by her saying she can "hear" it while she is doing something in the kitchen tells me she can listen and attend to other things "at the same time"
- When I'm driving I like to listen to the Bible
- When I'm working on my tractor, I like to listen to the Bible
- You can claim to be too busy to read but depending on what you're doing you can listen and do something else at the same time if you have to
- Many of you are doing that right now as I preach :)
- If you're a parent you are always doing a couple of things at the same time as you care for your children
- You may not always have time to sit down and read a paper copy of your Bible, but you can listen on your phone, tablet, computer or TV
- I use the mobile app called "Dwell" when I listen to the Bible
- I also use our new church app to listen to the Bible read by Max McLean
- If I am in a rush, I can listen to the 1 minute Bible
- Or I can listen to today's proverbs or the Bible in a year
- Either way, we CAN read the Bible daily
- When responding to the Devil's temptation, Jesus said in [Matthew 4:4](#), "...It is written, 'MAN SHALL NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE, BUT ON EVERY WORD THAT PROCEEDS OUT OF THE MOUTH OF GOD.'""
- How often do you eat food? Everyday
- Jesus said you also need "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" everyday
- Job said it this way in [Job 23:12](#), "I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my portion of food."
- John Gill said, "The words of the Lord...that came from his mouth, are food for faith; there are in them milk for babes, and meat for strong men; they are savoury, salutary, and wholesome



words, by which the people of God are nourished up unto eternal life; and they are esteemed by them more than the food that is necessary and convenient for their bodies.”

- Since that is the case you need to read them everyday
- John MacArthur says, “Sophisticated and ingenious Bible study methods books are fine, but they should never come ahead of fundamental steps. And there is no more fundamental step than systematically reading God’s Word, line upon line, precept upon precept, absorbing its total truth and cohesiveness” (How to Get the Most From God’s Word, p.156).
- There are many ways to read the Bible daily
- One way is to use a Bible reading plan
- This will help you to stay focused
- It will give you something to follow
- It will guide you each day in your reading of Scripture
- J.C. Ryal gives his plan
- He said this in 1879: “I believe it is by far the best plan to begin the Old and New Testaments at the same time, to read each straight through to the end, and then begin again. This is a matter in which every one must be persuaded in his own mind. I can only say it has been my own plan for nearly forty years, and I have never seen cause to alter it.”
- A plan that I want to encourage you to use is found in your bulletin this morning
- It’s called the 5 X 5 X 5 plan developed by the Navigators
- I want to encourage you to begin using this plan tomorrow
- It’s just the New Testament
- You can add the Old Testament for 20 minutes a day in your other reading
- But the 5 X 5 X 5 plan is just 5 minutes a day and 5 days a week
- It’s 5 minutes a day, which will take you through all 260 chapters of the New Testament
- It’s 5 days a week
- So you’ll need to determine a time and location to spend 5 minutes a day for 5 days a week
- As you do this, there are 5 ways to dig deeper
- That’s the last 5 in the plan
- This part is asking you to pause in your reading to dig into the Bible
- Here’s 5 ways to do that:
- Underline or highlight key words or phrases in the Bible passage

- Put it in your own words
- Read the passage or verse slowly
- Then rewrite each phrase or sentence in your own words
- Next ask and answer questions
- Ask questions about the passage
- Keep a pad of paper and write down your questions
- Next capture the big idea
- Ask what's the point of this sentence?
- What's the point of this paragraph?
- What's the point of this chapter?
- One of my professors in seminary used to tell us to ask, "What would it matter if this chapter was not in the Bible?"
- Last, personalize the meaning
- This is application
- Ask how could my life be different today as I respond to what I'm reading
- Irving Jensen said, "Where does one find time to read the Bible? Free time is so scarce for most Christians that it is never found. So we must take time to read the Bible, scheduling it at a regular time, if possible, in each day. Someone has said, 'We ought to have a Medo-Persian hour — an unchangeable hour for our Bible Study'" (Cited by Finzel, p.40).

· As you read the Bible, you also need to...

## **IV. Read Repetitiously**

- Take the time to read the text a number of times
- As you read the words, verses, and passages over and over again consistently, your familiarity of them will grow
- At the end of one week, you will develop a good working understanding of what's going on in the passages
- At the end of two weeks, your critical thinking of the verses begins to intensify
- And at the end of one month in the same section of Scripture, it becomes an old friend that you're sad to leave when you move on to the next book of the Bible (Pickowicz)
- Take a book in the NT and read it over-and-over once a month
- You can select one of your choice or read the one we're studying

- Break larger books into smaller sections and read each section for 30 days (eg. Revelation has 22 chapters - divide it up into 8, 7, 7)
  - While you're reading, write on a 3 X 5 card the major theme of each chapter
  - Everyday when you read the book, look at the card and read through the list
  - After a while you will begin to learn what's in the chapters
  - If you want to spread out your repetitious reading, use the 7 year plan that was developed by Nate Pickowicz in his book, "How to Eat Your Bible"
  - He started with the 30 day plan but altered it a bit for his reading
  - You can do the same but make it a priority to read the Bible repetitiously
  - We learn best by repetition
  - God repeats the same truths over and over in the Bible
  - In [Genesis 41:32](#) God repeated a dream to Pharaoh twice to show that "the matter is confirmed by God, and God will quickly bring it about"
  - [Deuteronomy 5](#) is a repeat of the 10 Commandments
  - The Bible speaks of the virgin birth of Jesus in [Matthew 1:23, 25](#); [Luke 1:27, 34](#).
  - The Bible speaks of the crucifixion of Christ in all four gospels, Acts, Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Hebrews and Revelation
  - The Bible speaks about the deity of Christ over 100 times
  - The Bible also talks about salvation over 100 times
  - The point is God uses repetition and you should too
- So we must read the Bible prayerfully, undistractedly, daily, repetitiously, and last...

## V. Read Carefully

- "Don't hurry as you read the passage. Take as much time as is necessary."
- A cursory Google search will reveal a plethora of articles about how to read
- People often struggle with practicing the right method of reading in order to better understand the text in front of them
- What is the best approach? Slow or fast? Scanning or searching?
- In the Bible we find the Scripture read out loud - [Acts 8:30](#), "And Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?""
- We also find the Bible read publicly in the assembly when believers met, whether it was in a synagogue or church

- [Acts 13:15](#), “And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.””
- [Colossians 4:16](#), “And 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.”
- [1 Thessalonians 5:27](#), “I implore you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.”
- [1 Timothy 4:13](#), “Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching.”
- While you may desire to explore the theories behind the practice of reading, for the purpose of Bible study, I encourage you to vary your approach
- Perhaps start by reading the text at a comfortable pace in order to get the context and the flow of what’s written
- Then when you have a general sense of the content, go back and read more slowly to begin to examine it more deeply (Pickowicz)
- Rudyard Kipling said “I kept six honest serving men; they taught me all I knew; their names are *what* and *why* and *when* and *how* and *where* and *who*. I sent them over land and sea, I sent them east and west; but after they have worked for me I’ve given them all a rest” (quoted by Jerry Vines, Sermon Preparation)
- Careful reading involves questions
- As you read the Bible will give the answers
- Martin Luther said, “I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb—study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters when they do not break the sense. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.” (E7700I)
- Another word that describes careful reading is the word “assiduously”
- That means with great care, attention, and persistence
- To read the Scriptures assiduously means that you approach the texts with great care, intense scrutiny, and unrelenting vigor
- It’s where you grab a verse and wrestle with it until you understand why it’s there
- Eighteenth-century New England pastor Jonathan Edwards offered this encouragement: “Be assiduous in reading the holy Scriptures. This is the fountain whence all knowledge in divinity must be derived. Therefore let not this treasure lie by you neglected” (Pickowicz)

## **CONCLUSION**

- If this is your first time making this kind of commitment, I'm sure it can be a bit overwhelming
- But the most important thing you can do is read your Bible...prayerfully, undistractedly, daily, repetitiously and carefully
- [Romans 15:4](#), “For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through the perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”
- God told Joshua in [Joshua 1:8](#), “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 successful, and then you will be prosperous.”
- We need to learn from the Bereans
- [Acts 17:11](#), “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.”
- Job had this same attitude
- He said in [Job 23:12](#), “I have not departed from the command of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my portion of food.”
- Let's commit ourselves this year to read the Bible or to read it more—to saturate our minds with God's truth
- This will inform you, comfort you and give you hope because you will know what God's Word says
- And in knowing what it says and what it means are you then able to do it
- None of this makes any sense without a relationship with Jesus Christ
- When the disciples asked Jesus in [Matthew 13:10](#), “Why do You speak to them in parables?”
- He said in verse 11, “To you it has been given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given.”
- If you want to know God's Word, then you must commit your life to Christ
- You cannot understand apart from Him
- Let's pray (Lord's Supper)