

5 Reasons You Struggle to Read Your Bible Regularly

My first article gave four reasons to read the Bible regularly. Even if you didn't read that article, you probably have a strong sense that you should be reading your Bible more than you do. The majority of Americans, including non-Christians, feel that way. But relatively few Americans read their Bibles regularly or will increase their Bible engagement significantly in the next year.

The "magic number" for frequency of Bible reading is four days per week. Researchers have found that people who read that (or more) frequently are much less likely to engage in risky behavior—such as abusing alcohol, having sex outside of marriage, viewing pornography and gambling—and much more likely to share their Christian faith and disciple others.

For the past eight years, only around 20 percent of U.S. adults have reported that they read God's Word four or more days per week. The true numbers probably are much lower, as people tend to over-report desirable behavior. Christians read the Bible more than non-Christians, but most U.S. Christians are not regular Bible readers. They want to be, but they're not.

Here are five reasons why we struggle to read the Bible regularly.

1. We Read in Bursts

In the early 2000s, when I worked at Cisco, I communicated with the sales force primarily via email. I prided myself on giving thorough answers to questions. My typical answer would extol the virtues of Cisco products, bash the competition and provide lots of technical information to buttress the salesperson's efforts to win the deal.

One day, an experienced manager pulled me aside and said, as nicely as he could, that no one was reading my responses. Cisco salespeople were too busy to wade through my verbose emails. Chagrined, I started providing simple, straightforward answers in the first few sentences of my responses and burying the details at the bottom (or omitted them entirely).

I started getting invited on a lot of sales calls.

That was 15 years ago. Before instant messaging. Before smartphones. Before social media. Today, you don't have to work at an information technology company to be inundated with things to read. We all are. And our response is to read in bursts. If we don't get what we need in a few seconds, we move on.

The Bible was not written in sound bites that render well on a smartphone. It was not designed for busy people who want quick answers to specific questions.

2. The Bible Is Challenging to Read

Even for avid readers, the Bible can be challenging to read. For starters, it's really long, with 66 books and 1,189 chapters. About 40 different authors wrote portions of the Bible, with their work spanning not just a few years but many centuries. Those authors wrote in several different languages and used syntax, metaphors, and sentence structures with which many of us struggle today.

The Bible is a diverse book that includes not just stories and teachings but also poems, genealogies and detailed laws. Much of the New Testament is letters that were written for specific first-century audiences. Those letters were dictated and captured live, and some of the transcriptions include very long, run-on sentences that are packed with complex theological ideas.

Even long-time Christians who know a lot about the Bible's

authors and the times and cultures in which they lived can struggle with certain parts of the Bible. The rest of us can struggle to read and understand a lot more of God's Word.

3. Parts of the Bible Are Boring

Ever try to read the entire Bible in a set period of time, such as a year? I have. Several times. Never succeeded. I start Genesis with gusto and fly through it pretty quickly. Exodus goes well. And then I hit the dynamic duo of Leviticus and Numbers. Here's a look at the first 15 chapters of Leviticus:

Chapters 1-6: laws for offerings

Chapters 6-7: priests and offerings

Chapters 8-9: Aaron and his sons

Chapter 10: death of Nadab and Abihu

Chapters 11-12: laws on eating and childbirth

Chapters 13-14: laws on leprosy

Chapter 15: laws on bodily discharges

If I make it through those two books, then I usually hit a wall somewhere in Kings or Chronicles. And most of the 42 chapters of Job are a seemingly endless conversation between Job and his friends.

The Old Testament is loaded with terrific, enriching material, but the boring parts can seem insurmountable.

4. The Most Popular Version Presents Special Challenges

Written in 1611, the King James Version (KJV) is still the top choice of 55 percent of America's Bible readers, and its popularity is growing faster than that of any other version. But its frequent use of archaic terms makes a challenging book

next to impossible for many people to understand, dissuading them from digging into the text on their own.

5. Well-Read Parts Can Get Stale

I've never made it through the entire Bible, but there are parts of the Bible with which I'm intimately familiar. The story of the first Christmas? I've read or heard that nearly 100 times. The parables of the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son? I've read them, heard them and heard sermons on them dozens of times. I'm not very good at memorizing Scripture, but I have nearly all of Handel's *Messiah* memorized from performing it and listening to it so many times.

When I come to a familiar story or passage, I find myself going on autopilot. I read it, but I don't really pay attention. It has become stale to me.

What's the Solution?

There is tremendous value in reading your Bible regularly. Many people want to read the Bible more, but they struggle to succeed. What's the answer?

In my next article, I'll provide some tips on having more success in your quest to read the Bible more regularly.

(A big hat tip to David Murrow for ideas that I used in this article.) {eoa}

Chris Bolinger *is the author of Daily Strength for Men, available in November from BroadStreet Publishing.*