

7 Tips to Develop Your Own Bible Reading Plan

A man who became a Christian bought a Bible. He said, “Have you seen this thing?”

The Bible is daunting. At roughly 770,000 words, that’s about 2,500 normal book pages—equivalent to 12 non-fiction books!

Bible reading falls into that special category of things we all know are important but struggle to do, like diet and exercise.

Every year since 1988 I’ve read the Bible cover to cover. This is certainly not required, but I’ve learned some things along the way that may be helpful to you.

As you might suspect, I’ve encountered every imaginable distraction from lack of motivation, inability to concentrate, and outright laziness to barking dogs and making the mistake of checking my email just before I planned to read!

There have been times of emotional weariness, physical tiredness, and spiritual warfare. Nevertheless, I succeed because I have a plan.

If you already have a plan, great. But if you don’t—and even if you do—here are seven tips to help you make the most of reading your Bible. At the end is an exercise, “My Bible Reading Plan,” for you to complete.

1. A Purpose for Reading – When I attend a meeting I like to ask, “What’s the purpose of our meeting today?” That way, we tend to stay on target. Uppermost, I read the Bible for communion with God. First and foremost, Christianity is a relationship with the Father who lavishes His love on me. When I read the Bible I am literally spending time with the living

God who delights in me. The Bible, along with prayer, allows us the experience to holy presence of God for a few moments. Communion is what keeps me coming back. For everything else, there's Google. I also read the Bible for discipleship—to grow and mature in faith. So, my purpose to read the Bible is for *communion* (knowing) and *discipleship* (growing). What is your purpose?

2. A Fixed Routine – My best time to read is early in the morning, because that's when I'm fresh. I grab a cup of coffee and settle into a favorite chair for an unhurried time of prayer and reading the word of God. If it fits your personality, it's a good idea to have a set schedule. Daily Bible reading (often called a "quiet time" or "personal devotions") makes sense for the same reasons we recharge our cell phones. Of course, things come up—an argument with your spouse, an alarm that doesn't go off, early meetings, or cranky kids. On average, I read about five days a week. How much time you spend reading is completely a matter of personal preference, but I like to read one day from an annual Bible reading plan. What routine works best for you?

3. Pray Before Reading – It's a good idea to pray when you read. How I pray connects to my purpose: *communion* and *discipleship*. I start by bringing myself into the presence and power of God. I usually start by praying,

"Father, I come to meet with You. Please meet with me, Your much loved son. (Then I will usually add a few sentences, mostly repeating Scripture about God's love for me and my love for Him).

"Jesus, I come to meet with You. Please meet with me, Your much loved servant. (Again, I add sentences like, "I surrender my life today to Your Lordship.")

"Holy Spirit, I come to meet with You. Please meet with me, Your much-loved vessel. (Plus the additional sentences like,

“Lord, I invite You to disciple my heart, to reveal what’s inside of me, and to speak to me.”

Also, I pray about things as I read. How do you pray, or want to pray, when reading your Bible?

4. It’s Always Good to Have a Goal – My friend Tom Skinner said, “When you set a goal, you are literally writing history in advance.” If you’re new to the Bible, your goal might be, for example, to read a chapter a day in the New Testament five days a week. (If you did this you would read all 260 chapters of the New Testament in one year: 52 weeks x 5 days = 260 chapters). I don’t micromanage my Bible reading. Instead, I set one annual goal each year. That’s to read through the Bible cover to cover annually. I don’t worry if I miss a day or two. Call me “inconsistently” consistent. I like the flexibility of chasing down rabbit trails, such as looking up all the verses in the Bible on, say, “God’s will.” As I write this, I’m 20 days behind in *The One Year Bible*. It doesn’t matter. You may prefer shorter goals. God has no set formula for Bible reading. What is your goal for reading the Bible?

5. Increase Your Comprehension – I mark up my Bible. Some may consider the Bible too reverent to mark. But from a learning theory perspective, writing things down improves my comprehension. I’ve got margin notes, underlines, arrows, check marks, asterisks, and a few chicken scratches I can no longer decipher! You can also journal in a notebook, on a computer, on scraps of paper, or in the margins of your Bible. I do them all. You may concentrate better with a display screen or a hard copy. If you learn better by listening than reading, the Bible is available in all popular audio formats. It’s totally up to you. Memorization makes up an important part of my plan. I keep a list of verses I’m working on. At this point in my journey, it’s rare to find myself in any situation without a verse coming to mind. Another part of your plan could be to teach the Bible. Preparing Bible lessons drives me deeper into the Bible than anything else. What can

you do to increase your learning and retention?

6. What to Do When Your Mind Wanders – My mind wanders all the time. And to be honest, I like it. There are four possibilities when my mind wanders: the world, the flesh, the devil, or the Spirit. When your mind wanders, you have to figure out which one it is. If it is the world, the flesh or the devil, then of course you want to reel it back in.

However, if I read a text and my mind goes racing to a relationship that's not right, or I am convicted of a sin, or prompted to some good deed, then that is the Spirit and I let that happen. When I read a phrase or sentence that impacts me, I like to linger awhile, letting the Word soak into my soul. What if your mind wanders because you're tired and exhausted? When I get that way, I try to read out loud. If I still can't concentrate I just stop and live to read another day! What can you do when your mind wanders?

7. Know What Keeps You Coming Back for More – My commitment is to stay at it each day until I have what I call "a moment of humility," an overwhelming sense of God. It could be an insight, a sense of awe, or feeling completely and totally loved. It's a moment when I feel the power and presence of God washing over me. I'm not looking for a self-help book. I want the truth. The truth is what's relevant and applicable. That's what keeps me coming back. What keeps, or will keep, you coming back for more?

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