



Nearly every gospel preacher on the planet, including both Shawn and me, will advocate reading the Bible on a regular, ideally daily, basis. Most Christians will agree that, yes, it would be good for them spiritually if they were to carry a Bible-reading program to its conclusion. However, I suspect that most Christians never have managed to read the Bible cover-to-cover despite those good intentions.

If that's you, don't feel bad about that, so long as you intend to do better this year. Though it seems simple, sticking with a Bible-reading program is quite difficult. I myself didn't manage it until 2013, despite having preached the gospel for nearly 10 years by then. In the years since, though, I've read through the Bible at least one time every year, and I've learned a few things about reading along the way. This morning, I'd like to share them with you so that all of us can step up in Bible reading.

First, I'd like to discuss the importance of CHOOSING THE RIGHT BIBLE. I don't think this is something that most Christians think about, but the Bible we select to do our reading has everything to do with how successful we will be. For instance, at home, I've got this awful purple fake-leather KJV Bible that's printed on what feels like copier paper in 7-point type. Yes, it's the Bible. It contains all 66 books from Genesis to Revelation. However, if you wanted to read that thing cover-to-cover, you'd have to have the patience of Job!

The Bible we use to read matters a lot, and my guess is that a lot of Christians fail in their Bible-reading resolutions because they aren't reading out of a Bible that's right for them. My suggestion, then, if you want to get serious about it, is to buy a Bible specifically for reading. Don't try to cheap out. Don't try to do your reading on your phone. I suspect that most people who start out doing daily Bible readings on their phones end up doing a daily Facebook reading! It's too tempting.

Instead, go to the nearest big Lifeway or other Bible bookstore and spend some solid time looking for a Bible that's right for you. I recommend paying particular attention to Bibles in the ESV, NKJV, and CSB translations. Those are all translations that are good for reading, and they are well supported by publishers that turn out a quality product.

When you're out Bible-shopping, don't judge the book by its box. Actually take those Bibles out there in the store and spend a few minutes reading a page or two in each one. Pay attention to whether the print is comfortable for your eyes. Ask yourself if the Bible feels right in your hand. I myself read out of a genuine-leather Bible rather than a polyurethane Bible because I like the way it feels. Does it have a whole bunch of references that you find distracting? Go through this process with a couple dozen Bibles, pick the one you love, and buy it. Whatever it costs you, successfully completing a reading program will be worth far more.

Second, if we want to succeed in our Bible-reading, we have to UNDERSTAND THE PURPOSE OF READING. To illustrate what I mean by this, I'd like to look at two different passages from the book of Acts: Acts 8:27-31 and Acts 17:11. Both of these texts involve the Bible, but they are not about the same activity.

Let's start with the Bereans. Notice that Luke doesn't say they're reading the Scriptures. He says they're examining the Scriptures. In other words, this is a text about Bible study rather than Bible reading, and study and reading are not the same thing. The Bereans are trying to answer a particular question, and they're devoting a lot of effort to their search. These things, focus and intensity, are characteristic of study.

Reading, by contrast, isn't like that. Look at the eunuch back in Acts 8. He doesn't have the word open for any particular reason. He's just killing time on his way back to Ethiopia. Similarly, his consideration of the word isn't that intense. He doesn't understand what he's reading, but he's OK with not understanding, and if Philip hadn't shown up, he would have gone on not understanding.

In the church, I think we have a firm handle on Bible study, but I don't think we understand Bible reading. As a result, brethren approach Bible reading in the same way that they do Bible study. They're very intense with the text. They try to figure out every little nuance. They may even have a system of marking up the text with colored pencils as they go.

Now, that's all well and good, but the problem is that it's exhausting! Christians who start this way will often end up with a Bible that's 10 percent marked up and 90 percent unread. Their intensity defeats their purpose.

Instead, I find that for me, Bible reading is a lot more passive. I'm not trying to outline the text or figure out everything; instead, I'm simply listening to what God has to say to me. Whatever I get out of it is what I get out of it. If I come to something I don't understand, I make a mental note of it and move on.

If you want to get through our reading program this year, then, don't try to study your way through it. Read your way through it. It's a lot less demanding, and I think you'll find that it's much easier to maintain.

Finally, we will be much more likely to succeed in our Bible-reading plans if we READ REGULARLY. Consider the psalmist's attitude toward the word in Psalm 119:20. He doesn't want to encounter God's law yearly or monthly. He wants it to be a constant part of his life.

I think all of us want that too. Well, if we don't, we have spiritual problems that are beyond the scope of what this sermon can fix! We want to be in the word daily, but then life intervenes. We get really busy at work, one of the kids gets sick, or we just plain lose focus, and the next time we look up, we're two months behind. "Oh, well," we say to ourselves. "Guess I might as well wait till 2020 to take another crack at it." What we want doesn't end up being what we do.

However, with a little bit of thought, we can make what we want into what we do. Some of this starts with timing. For all of us, there is an optimal time to read: maybe in the morning, maybe on our lunch break, maybe right before bed. For me, since I'm a morning person, first thing in the morning is my ideal time. Whatever it is, we need to figure it out and read then. If we do that long enough, the habit will become ingrained.

Second, we need reminders. I started off by getting a daily email notification. Now, I've printed off reading plans for both of my Bible reading schedules and check off readings as I do them. If that doesn't work, maybe we need stronger behavioral cues. For instance, it might help if every night, you sat your Bible down on top of your TV remote or your phone. Want to check your messages? Want to watch something? You have to read first! Things like this sound silly, but in reality, they can help us tremendously in reaching our spiritual goals.

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