

HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

There are two issues that are significant for anyone who wants to spend time regularly reading the Bible. First, how should I study the Bible so that I can understand what it is saying? Second, what kind of routine should I develop to help me apply the Bible to my life? Below are some suggestions to help your learning process as you examine a biblical passage.

How should I study the Bible?

As you begin studying a particular passage, keep two things in mind. First, realize the **literary context**. This includes knowing who wrote the passage, to whom the passage is written, what comes before and after the passage, and the purpose of the book that contains the passage. This doesn't need to take much time, but scanning the introduction of the book and the verses before and after the passage is usually sufficient. Second, be aware of the **cultural context**. Remember, the Bible was originally written to somebody else who lived a long time ago in another part of the world where they spoke a different language and had different cultural values. Consequently, we should attempt to understand the cultural background of the original readers, the genre of the passage, and any significant cultural/ historical events or phrases in the passage. Keeping those things in mind, follow the next four steps.

1. What does the passage say?

Read the passage and try to determine what it is saying. Become a detective. Is there meaning in the details? Are there one or two significant words or themes? What is the "flow" of the passage saying? Mainly, try to determine exactly what the author was communicating to the original recipients. Focus on the facts. Ask the questions:

What happened? Or what was taught?

2. What does it mean?

Now, begin to wrestle with the primary meaning of the passage. Is there a central principle or lesson that the passage is communicating? Ask the questions:

*What was one principle or lesson the writer was trying to communicate to his original audience?
Why do you think God put this in the Bible?*

3. How does the principle apply to one specific area of my life?

When we study the Bible, ultimately we move beyond what was intended for the original recipients. We can begin to learn new things about God for ourselves and about his will for our lives. This is an important step in Bible study. Ask God to show you how the principles you learned in step two can directly apply to your life. Ask the question:

How should the principle or lesson from this passage impact my life?

4. How can I remember it?

This is where you become intentional about remembering what you are learning. Be creative. If it's worth applying to our lives, it's worth remembering. Ask the question:

How can I remember this passage and its application to my life?

What kind of routine should I develop?

Spending a little bit of time each day is the most beneficial way to read the Bible and connect with God. Having this "quiet time" or "devotional time" isn't about checking a task off a list or becoming more acceptable to God. It's about communicating with him and cultivating an intimate relationship with him. When we want to get to know another person, we spend time with them, learn about them, and simply enjoy their company. The same is true with God. The more time we spend with God, the better we get to know him and his will for our lives. Given that life is so full of distraction, how can we prioritize this time? Here are a few tips for developing a routine.

Find a Place

Utilize a special chair, a spot on the floor, a different desk, or a room in your house that you never use. All you do there is spend time with God. Make it an environment that is a good place to listen.

Choose A Time

Schedule it, don't try to just squeeze it in. When we get busy, we always compromise relationally. Try spending time with God first thing in the morning; set the direction for the whole day.

Read/Study

Try to read through entire books of the Bible, meaning read through a few passages at a time until a given book is finished. Follow the outline provided above for studying a passage. As you wrestle with each step, allow God to reveal things to you.

Prayer

Pray about the passage you just read; pray over the schedule for your day; pray for relationships (family, friends, co-workers, acquaintances).

Journal

A journal is a record of God's activity in your life. You don't need to add entries every day, just occasionally. Record those things God is doing in your life as well as those you pray he will do. Frequently read back over previous entries and watch for God's faithfulness.