

How to Start Reading the Bible

Tips for getting started and understanding what you read

Courtney Reissig

It can be intimidating to start going to church every Sunday and hear about passages you didn't even know were in the Bible. How can you even begin to grasp this massive book? You want to understand the Bible for yourself, but the laws and stories seem so different from your life today; how can you possibly understand and apply it? Must you be a scholar?

The good news is that you, like every other Christian (educated or not) who has gone before you, have exactly what you need to study God's Word and glean from it—the Holy Spirit. You have been bought with Christ's blood, brought into his family, and been given the third person of the Trinity as your helper in this Christian walk. You have everything you need to understand and apply the Bible, and some tools will help you get started.

The Bible Is Valuable

You may believe the Bible is true, but you may not understand the tremendous value it has for your life, made clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

God gives us the Bible so that we will be able to live the Christian life. It is the means by which we can be equipped, encouraged, and edified as children of God. It's a living book that breathes life into our souls. In order to understand the Bible for yourself, you must first believe that it has a lot to say to you—that it is the very word of God to you. Once you grasp that truth, you are ready to begin diving in for deeper understanding.

Start Small and Observe

It's easy to get overwhelmed whenever you undertake a new task, especially reading and interpreting the Bible. The best advice I ever received for getting started: take it one day at a time. There is no shame in baby steps. They will get you to the same destination. That's how growth begins. Learning to interpret the Bible on our own takes discipline, but over time you will see God work in your life because he has promised to do his work through his Word (Isaiah 55:11).

Start small—maybe one chapter a day. In that chapter, observe carefully what the text says and what comes before and after it. It may be helpful to jot down those observations.

Ask Questions

Sometimes Scripture passages are just hard to understand. Asking questions will help you get on the right road to interpreting the Bible and applying it to life. While these questions are not exhaustive, they are a start. If it helps you, buy a journal and write down these questions and answers each time you read:

- What does this verse or passage say about God?
- What does this verse or passage say about me?

I start with God because he is the author of the book. He establishes authorial intent. When he inspired the biblical writers to pen the pages of Scripture, he had a plan and purpose in mind. To understand God, his character, and his work in the Bible is to understand the message of the Bible. It's also important to start with God because only in light of who he is will we rightly see ourselves in the pages of Scripture. The Bible is a mirror, and while it also gives us a big view of our God, it also gives us an accurate view of ourselves.

Sometimes these questions lead to more questions and thoughts, and that's the point. Great things happen when, coupled with the work of the Holy Spirit, we stop and linger over God's Word.

Apply It to Your Life

After you take some notes and ponder what these verses are saying about God and you, you're ready to apply it to your life. Interpretation is the key before application. It is impossible to apply the Bible to your own life if you miss what the Bible is saying about God.

So how do you apply the Bible to your life? Let's look at Jesus' sermon in Matthew 6:25-33:

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow? They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the pagans run after all

these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

So what is the point of this sermon? God is sovereign over all things, including the seemingly mundane like feeding sparrows. How much more will God be involved in the intricate details of your life? Even more than that, this understanding of who God is should banish any notion of fear or anxiety. How comforting to know that God's Word speaks directly to those fears and provides an answer and a way of escape.

Watch God Work

Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." If God saved you, he will do whatever it takes to conform you into his image. He will grow and change you. One of the primary ways he accomplishes this goal is through his Word. He wants you to know him. He wants you to treasure him and delight in him by drinking deeply from the truths of Scripture and having your eyes awakened to who he is.

This Bible has been feeding the souls of countless believers for thousands of years. People have given their lives for it. Others have sold their treasured possessions to obtain a copy. And the Holy Spirit promises to be a helper, enabling you to understand the very word of God. "The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it" (1 Thessalonians 5:24).

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(from ChristianityToday website)