



## *The Bible In A Year*

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**1 Timothy 4:6-8:** “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, ***constantly nourished on the words of the faith*** and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, ***discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness***; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

What “resolutions,” if any, do you make at the dawn of each new year?

In one sense, January 1 is just another day. The sun comes up and goes down just like every other day. There is nothing magical about it, except in our minds. Only in that sense is January 1 different than, say, July 19. It is, after all, the beginning of a new year. You write a different year on all our dated documents. You have to get a brand new calendar or daytimer (if you still use those relics in this age of smartphones). It FEELS like you are starting something new—at the beginning.

Personally, I am not big on New Year's resolutions, but there is one practice that I start afresh each and every New Year's Day and I wish to commend it to you: ***read through the Bible in a year.***

Please don't take what you are about to

read in any way I do not intend. I am not trying to lay down my own manmade, Pharisaical, legalistic law for you to follow. I don't wish to impose some false standard of spirituality upon you. I don't want to make you feel guilty or lesser if this is not your practice, but I do want to commend something for your consideration that has proved to be of tremendous spiritual blessing and benefit to me over the past nearly two decades. If it is not your practice to regularly and systematically read Scripture, I hope that this article will convince you of the benefits of beginning such a practice and encourage you to start.

### The Word

The Bible makes a lot of lofty claims for itself. It claims to be the Word of the living God—powerful, divine, eternal, everlasting Truth. The Bible is the mind of God, God's wisdom, containing all that is necessary for life and godliness.

If you are not convinced of the benefit of reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating on Scripture, take some time to slowly read and think through **Psalm 119**. I doubt that describes most who would be reading this. Given that, let me ask you this: do you have a systematic, consistent way of exposing yourself to that Word?

Reading through the Bible one (or more) times each year is ***one of the, if not the***

***single greatest spiritual discipline I have ever adopted.*** You may be wondering, “What about prayer?” “What about serving others?” or, “What about pursuing holiness by mortifying sin?” The discipline of regular Bible reading provides energy, direction, and fruitfulness to all other spiritual disciplines.

Your prayer life will be enhanced when you know God's mind, God's will, and God's wisdom because you are regularly in His Word. Reading Scripture informs our prayers. Saints of old recognized the benefit to praying through passages of Scripture, allowing the Word of God to inform the language and content of prayer.

Knowing God's Word helps us resist temptation and put sin to death. When the words of Scripture course through our minds, we will not be conformed to this world (Romans 12:1-2).

Reading through the Bible makes our prayers more meaningful, our service more fruitful, and our war against sin more powerful. I can say without hesitation that reading the Bible through each year is ***the single greatest spiritual discipline I have ever adopted.***

### **A Reachable Goal**

Reading through the Bible once each year is a far more attainable goal than you might at first imagine. It might seem daunting to those who have never tried. The way to tackle a big project like this is to take one small step. Then follow that with another. Then another.

As the old proverb so aptly says, “You eat an elephant one bite at a time.” I would rather read Scripture than eat an elephant, but you get the idea.

A year is a very long time. You are only going to enjoy 80 or so of them in your whole life. When you spread the reading out over the *whole* year, it turns out that it is not that much per day/week.

It has been said that if the average reader

spends only 15 minutes a day, 6 days a week, they can read through the Bible in a year. There is a handy online tool you can use to gauge how much time this actually takes relative to your reading speed.<sup>1</sup> Someone who reads 200 words per minute will spend an average of 10 minutes a day, 7 days a week, to read through the Bible in a year.

Some people will spend 10 minutes a day reading Facebook posts, standing in line at Starbucks, or even staring at a wall, wondering what to do next. That is not a lot of time.

I have known people who read through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year. That would only add a couple minutes to your daily routine. I knew a Bible college professor who read the Old Testament twice and the New Testament four times each year. For many people, simply reading through once a year is a huge accomplishment. Consider starting there!

### **My Own System**

I am going to share with you some elements of my own practice that have helped guide me through the years. Again, I am not trying to impose my system on you, but I do hope you will find some things here that are encouraging and useful to you.

I started reading through the Bible once a year on January 1, 1997, one month after I took over as pastor at Kootenai Community Church. Almost immediately I found a system and a rhythm that I have maintained with little deviation over the last 19 years. Starting this January 1, 2016, I will begin my 20<sup>th</sup> read through Scripture.

I prefer to pace my reading not by time spent, but by chapters. I try to read 4-6 chapters a day, depending on the length of the chapters. Sometimes I read more, sometimes less. I read every day of the week

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.howlongdoesittaketoreadthebible.com/>

except Friday and Sunday. On Fridays I have an early morning appointment. On Sundays, I am usually reviewing my sermon manuscript from 5:30 a.m. until I step into the pulpit. So, in short, I average 5 chapters a day, 5 days a week.

You might suspect this would take more than 10 minutes a day. It does. I make it my goal to have finished reading through the Bible by Thanksgiving<sup>2</sup> each year. Then, during the month of December, I pick a single book of the Bible to read through over and over and over at that same pace (5-6 chapters a day).

For two Decembers before I started preaching through John, I spent those months reading through John. When reading a book over and over, I try to break in different locations each time through so I am always reading different contexts together.<sup>3</sup> The first time through, I might read chapters 1-5, then 10-15, etc. The next time through, I might read chapters 1-3, and then 4-8, 9-13, etc.

One December I read through the book of Titus (3 chapters) each day, 5 days a week, for the whole month. Another year, I read the book of Hebrews over and over. This December (2016) I am reading Psalm 73 (the prosperity of the wicked) over and over (and trying to memorize it as I do).

You really get to know a book well when you read it a couple dozen times in a month.

It is important that you find something that works for **you**. *You should never feel like you have to make my system your system.*

My advice to “find your own method” applies to selecting a Bible reading plan as well. There are dozens of Bible reading plans available, offering dozens of approaches to

the Scriptures.<sup>4</sup> You can read through the Bible chronologically, reading passages in the chronological order of the events they describe. If you take this approach, you might be surprised to find yourself reading Job long before you read Joshua. You will also read Isaiah before you read Nehemiah. There are chronological Bibles available for purchase that arrange the passages in this fashion instead of the order we find in a standard Bible.

There are daily reading plans that offer a morning reading and an evening reading. Some plans offer three different readings for each day: one from the historical section (Genesis-Nehemiah), one from the Psalms and Prophets (Job-Malachi), and one from the New Testament.

I prefer to work my way through both testaments at the same time, varying the order of books slightly each year. So my program looks something like this:

Genesis-Deuteronomy  
Matthew  
Joshua, Judges, Ruth  
Mark (by this point it is Easter)  
1 Samuel – 2 Chronicles  
Luke-Acts

I divide the Psalms up into three 50-Psalm blocks and read those sections between other books. You can see how I alternate from one section of the Old Testament to the New and back again.

I try to group together books that are similar, or books written by the same author. For instance, I read the books of Moses (Genesis – Deuteronomy) in one stretch. I read Jeremiah and Lamentations together. I group the Pastoral Epistles together (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus). I also prefer to take in the whole kingdom history of Israel in one long stretch (1 & 2 Samuel, 1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles). Sometimes I will break up

2 That would be *American Thanksgiving* for the sake of any of my Canadian readers.

3 Keep in mind that the chapter divisions are artificial. I break it up differently so that I am always seeing the text from a bit of a different angle by taking different chunks of text each time through.

4 <http://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/>

those clusters with another book that fits within the history of those books, thus mingling a bit of a chronological approach into my schedule. As they say, “Variety is the spice of life.”

Once again, find your own system, your own plan, your own pace and enjoy.

### **Some Handy Tools**

I used to track my progress on a small Bible reading plan published by the Gideons that we made available on the back table at church. Each day I would cross off the chapter or book that I read. Now I do the very same thing on my iPhone.

The most customizable and versatile app I have found is called **ReadingPlan**.<sup>5</sup> This app allows you to choose from dozens of premade reading plans, or if you are a bit more tech savvy, create your own. I use their plan called “Not A Plan” that allows me to check off individual chapters. It also keeps track of the amount (%) of the Bible I have read. That helps me stay on pace since I know roughly what percentage of the year has passed.

If you prefer reading on an electronic device (tablet or Kindle), there are a number of great apps available to you. **Bible** gives you access to dozens of translations and allows you to create notes and highlight passages—which highlights remain forever tied to your online account.

Perhaps the BEST Bible app available is published by Grace to You (John MacArthur’s ministry). It is free and contains the full text of the English Standard Version. For only \$5.99 you can get ALL of the MacArthur Study Bible notes integrated into the app, as well as links to articles, blog posts, and MacArthur’s sermons, all provided through Grace to You. *I love this app!*

If you want a great app for helping you memorize Bible verses, get **Scripture Typer**

(scripturetyper.com). This is an AMAZING system for Bible memorization that you can take with you everywhere. I am not going to describe this for you. You just have to check it out!

### **Some Pointers for Profitable Reading**

Here are a few things I have learned and try to keep in mind when I am reading:

**1. Always be looking for something.** For the sake of avoiding a wandering mind, I find it helpful to intentionally look for something as I read. For example, this last year I intently looked for every passage in the gospels where Jesus addressed human sexuality or immorality, writing down the references as I read. When reading through Genesis to Deuteronomy one year, I took note of every reference to the hardening of a heart.<sup>6</sup> Reading through the minor prophets one year, I noted every passage that mentioned God’s kingdom, rule, or sovereignty.

If you determine prior to reading that you are going to be attentively looking for passages that speak of something, your mind will be engaged and your reading more fruitful.

**2. Don’t be afraid of genealogies.** When I read through passages that offer long lists of names, tribes, or families, I don’t get bogged down trying to pronounce in my mind each and every name. Instead, I let my eyes land on the name long enough to see if it is familiar. In fact, in genealogies, that is what I am looking for. I am looking for familiar names—names I know from other books, passages, or stories. For me, part of the benefit of genealogies is to be reminded of the millions of people who have had their time on this globe and played their part in God’s redemptive plan before I ever showed up. I see a list of people who all lived, served God, and died. It is a reminder that I too will pass

<sup>5</sup> I don’t think this is available for Android.

<sup>6</sup> “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” or “Pharaoh hardened his heart” or “God hardened their hearts.”

from the scene and likely be lost in the blank spaces of history between names much more notable than my own.

By all means, read the lists, but don't try to pronounce each and every name.

**3. Don't be discouraged if you don't understand EVERYTHING you read.** You are not going to understand everything you read. You are not going to grasp the significance of every name or place. References to geography may mean nothing to you. Some of the events will sound odd. You won't comprehend the details of every prophecy. Don't worry about it. Read. Glean what you can and keep in mind that next year about that same time, you will be coming back to that passage to read it again!

You will be AMAZED how much better your understanding of these passages is after you have worked your way through them ten times over ten years. It is better to read God's Word and not understand everything you read than to not read it because you don't understand everything you read.

**4. Don't be discouraged if you fall behind.** If you miss a few days because of circumstances you cannot control, don't abandon the project. Keep track of where you left off. Add a little bit to each day's reading for a couple of weeks and you'll catch up in no time.

In 2000, Diedre and I built our home. Since I was working over 40 hours a week on our house and still preparing a weekly message, I was not able to keep up my daily reading routine. I fell behind by a third of a year. It took me 2 years of increased reading to catch up. In fact, that is when I started my current pace of 5-6 chapters, 5 days a week that allows me to finish by Thanksgiving each year.

**5. Consider an audio Bible.** The technology available to us has eliminated every excuse for not knowing our Bibles. If you cannot read, or genuinely cannot find

time to read, you can opt to have the Bible read to you. Nearly all of the Bible apps that I have mentioned have the option of listening to the text. Your tablet, phone, or computer will actually read Scripture to you! You can listen while you shower, drive, work in the garden, walk, or cook dinner.

**6. You are never too old to start.** If I had started this practice when God saved me instead of waiting until I was 24, I would be starting on my 30<sup>th</sup> year of reading instead of my 20<sup>th</sup>. I would know my Bible that much better and I am convinced that my high school years would have turned out differently! Do you think you are too old to start? You are not!

If God should grant you only one more year on this earth, can you think of anything more profitable, more productive, than reading through His Word just one more time? If I knew I were to die next week, I would not give up this discipline! If God should grant me 45 more years and I were to live to be 90, I would be able to read His word 45 more times and I would delight to do so. Don't delay!

I am completely sincere when I say to you that reading my Bible though once each year is ***the single greatest spiritual discipline I have ever adopted***. It has produced the greatest blessings. It has yielded fruit beyond what I could have imagined. If I had known this earlier, I would have started earlier.

I commend this to you. Will you consider it? Not because I want to make my thing your thing, but I desire to see the fruit in your life that it will most certainly produce.

Without Wax -

