
The Bible is not just a book of stories about things that happened long ago. Nor is it just a book of prophecies about things that will happen in the future. The Bible is also a book from which we can learn how God wants us to live *now*. If you don't already do it, make a real effort to read your Bible every day.

Focus passage: Nehemiah 8:1–12

Few of the people of Israel would have heard the Bible read previously. Ezra the priest and teacher would probably have had a copy of the first five books of the Bible, and perhaps some others. But most Israelites probably did not have access to anyone who had some biblical scrolls. They wept as they heard it read with meaning.

1. Who was present at this assembly? What conclusions can we draw about who should read the Bible today?
2. What did Ezra do before beginning to read? What conclusions can we draw about how we should read the Bible today?
3. How important was it that the people understood what was read to them? What conclusions can we draw about how we should read the Bible today?
4. Why do you think the people wept? Why do you think they celebrated?

An essential habit

If we want to serve God, the first thing we must do is become familiar with what he tells us in the Bible. How else can we know what he wants us to do? In fact, if we do not listen to what he tells us in the Bible, he will not listen to our prayers (Proverbs 28:9).

God has given us his Bible so we can use it. Paul wrote
 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17)



So if we are serious about being followers of Jesus, we need to know this book very well. God gave it to us so we would know

who he is and how we should live. It was written to be part of our lives—when we have problems, we should be able to turn to the Bible and get help. The Bible is not just for emergencies, it is for every-day training.

Some suggestions

1. Pray. Jesus promised

See also James 1:5

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

(Matthew 7:7)

God will help us to understand the Bible and to apply it if we ask him.

2. Use a reading plan. Because the Bible is a big book, and because it is so important, it pays to have a system for reading it. After all, it is your textbook for life, and if it is worth reading at all, it is worth reading well. A Bible reading plan will help you cover all parts of the Bible regularly and systematically.

Two reading plans are listed at the end of this chapter.

3. Take your time. Bible reading is most effective if you are not rushed. Set aside 20–30 minutes each day to read a few chapters and think about what they mean. It takes time to become familiar with the Bible message and the background in which it is set. Be patient and over time it will start to fit together.

God told Joshua

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. (Joshua 1:8)

See also Deuteronomy 11:18–21

4. Ask questions. You will get far more out of your Bible readings if you ask questions as you read.

- *Who* are these people I am reading about?
- *Why* are they doing these things?
- *Why* is God responding in that way?
- *What* lessons are there for me?
- *Does* this remind me of something else I have read?

You may find it helpful to keep a notebook with some of your questions and ideas. Then you can take them to a more experienced Bible reader to see if he or she can help. Or you may discover the answer yourself through further reading.

Archaic words

Language is dynamic—it is always changing. New words are created, old words die out, some words change their meaning. Here are some examples of words that have changed their meaning.

1. Read Psalm 119:147–148 in the King James Version and in a modern version. What does the word “prevent” mean in the KJV?
2. Read the KJV of Philippians 1:27. Turn to a more recent version for comparison. What does the word “conversation” mean in the KJV?
3. Find the meaning of the following archaic words from the King James Version:

• armholes	• bowels	• meat	• tale	• unicorn
• bottles	• bruit	• pygarg	• trow	• wot

Problems people raise

1. **“The old language is difficult”.** If you are having difficulty understanding the version you normally use, then try another one. There are some good modern versions that are relatively easy to read (e.g., NIV, NKJV). The difficult old language is no reason for not enjoying Bible reading.
2. **“It is boring”.** Not all of the Bible is easy to read. Parts of it consist of lists of names or detailed laws. But it can all be interesting. When you read a passage, think about why it is recorded and what God intends you to learn from it. If you understand the background to the passage and approach it with the right frame of mind, it will be much more interesting.
3. **“I don’t have enough Bible background”.** The only solution to this problem is perseverance. By regular reading, you will gradually learn the Bible background, culture and language. Attending a Bible class or reading group can be a great help. It is often more interesting and enjoyable to read with other people. You can discuss what you have read and help each other understand the Bible better.

Bible study is challenging, exciting and life-changing. It can enrich you as no other study can. Discovering Bible themes yourself and finding answers to your own questions is especially rewarding. You will experience a new energy as you learn to make judgements based on firm principles, and the Bible will become more alive and powerful in your life. Remember, you are intended to understand this remarkable book and to meet God in its pages.

Summary

Reading the Bible is essential if we are to please God and understand his requirements. He gave us the Bible to help us and teach us. Your Bible reading will be most successful if you:

- read regularly, systematically and thoughtfully;
- use a version that you understand;
- ask questions and look for answers;
- attend a Bible class or Bible reading group.

Thought provokers

1. Read Philemon and answer the following questions.
 - (a) What do we know about Philemon, Apphia and Archippus?
 - (b) Where did they live?
 - (c) How many other first century churches do we know met in homes (v2)? Should we meet in homes?
 - (d) Who was Onesimus and what had he done?
 - (e) How did Paul persuade Philemon to have Onesimus back?
 - (f) What can we learn about how we should deal with other people?

Think of more questions about the book and try to find answers.
2. Acts 1:16-20 and John 13:18 both quote Old Testament passages and apply them to Judas Iscariot.
 - (a) Are the Old Testament passages primarily referring to Judas? If not, to whom do they refer?
 - (b) Can you find any other Old Testament references to Judas?

Onesimus means "useful". Can you spot Paul's pun on his name?

Further investigation

1. Genealogies are sometimes thought to be uninteresting. This one isn't! Read Matthew 1, the genealogy of Jesus.
 - (a) Why is the genealogy given?
 - (b) Four women are mentioned in the genealogy: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. What nationality were they? What lesson can we learn from this?
 - (c) Three of these women were involved in sexual sin. What lesson can we learn from this?
 - (d) Some generations seem to be omitted. Find some of them. [Hint: who was the father of Uzziah?]
 - (e) Are the numbers in verse 17 correct? If not, why not?

- (f) Luke 3 also gives the genealogy of Jesus, but it gives different names. Why?
2. Read Jonah 1 and prepare a list of ten questions for other class members to answer.

Want to know more?

- *Exploring the Bible* (published by The Christadelphian, 1973) and *Enjoying the Bible* (2nd ed, published by Biblia, 1984), both by Harry Whittaker. These are excellent and motivating books on reading and studying the Bible.
- *Learn to read the Bible effectively* course notes, by Rob J Hyndman (Bethel Publications, 1998). Chapter 2 covers "Starting to read", Chapter 6 covers "Reading carefully", Chapter 7 covers "Interpreting the Bible", and Chapter 8 covers "Bible study tools".
- *How to read the Bible for all it's worth: a guide to understanding the Bible* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart (published by Scripture Union, 1982). This is a more technical book but is very helpful in discussing interpretation and different types of Bible literature.
- *Bible companion* (available from any Christadelphian ecclesia). This gives daily readings for one year with three different sections each day. It covers the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice each year.
- *Bible reading planner* (published by the Christadelphian ALS). This gives daily readings for one year with one chapter to read each day. Through the year, you will read from many different parts of the Bible. The accompanying booklet helps explain each chapter.

Produce a leaflet

'How to read the Bible'

- See also:
1. God's inspired word
 2. Reasons to believe the Bible

LETTER	KEY WORD	KEY TOPICS/QUOTES	MORE INFO
P	PROPHECY		
R	RESSURECTION		
E	ENVIRONMENT		
A	ARCHAEOLOGY		
C	CONSISTENCY		
H	HISTORY		