

The following is excerpted from the Advanced Bible Studies Course “How to Study the Bible,” available in print, VHS, and DVD formats from Way of Life Literature:

Effective Bible study requires both READING (Deut. 17:19; Rev. 1:3) and STUDYING (2 Tim. 2:15). Reading and studying are two different things. It is crucial, first, simply to read the Bible. There is probably no other one thing that can help a believer better understand the Bible than simply reading it and reading it and reading it. It is necessary, also, to study the Bible. This involves slowing down the pace, doing word studies, analyzing individual passages, doing topical studies, outlining books, using commentaries, etc. This is the point at which we begin to use Bible study tools.

SOME TIPS ABOUT READING THE BIBLE

(1) READ IT SYSTEMATICALLY. That means read it all of the way through. Why should the Bible be read systematically? First, the Bible is not merely a series of writings; it is one Book; and to be understood it needs to be read and studied as one Book. Each individual book of the Bible complements the other books, and as the Bible is read systematically the pieces gradually fit together.

I supposed I knew my Bible,
Reading piecemeal, hit or miss,
Now a bit of John or Matthew,
Now a snatch of Genesis,
Certain chapters of Isaiah,
Certain Psalms (the twenty-third)
Twelfth of Romans, First of Proverbs--
Yes, I thought I knew the Word!
But I found that thorough reading
Was a different thing to do,
And the way was unfamiliar
When I read the Bible through.
You who like to play at Bible,
Dip and dabble, here and there.
Just before you kneel aweary,
And yawn through a hurried prayer;
You who treat the Crown of Writings
As you treat no other book--
Just a paragraph disjointed,
Just a crude impatient look--
Try a worthier procedure
Try a broad and steady view;
You will kneel in very rapture
When you read the Bible through!

-- **Amos R. Wells**

This is why it is good to have a plan to read the Bible through at least once a year. To do this requires reading about three and a half chapters a day. A yearly Bible Reading Schedule can be very helpful. There are many of these available. The *Perpetual Bible Reading Schedule* is a system whereby you read one portion from four different parts of the Bible each day: Historical (Genesis - 2 Kings), Devotional (1 Chronicles - Song of Solomon), Prophetic (Isaiah - Malachi), and Doctrinal (New Testament). The average amount read each day in this plan is less than four chapters. It is available on the web at <http://rejoicing.com/bread.html>. The *Good Book Company Bible Reading Plan* also uses a Bible portion from four parts of the Bible, the history and prophets of the O.T., the wisdom books of the O.T., the N.T. Gospels, and the N.T. Epistles. This is also available on the web at <http://www.olywa.net/mmccahan/gbbiblereadjan.html>. Back to the Bible has five different Bible Reading plans: reading the Bible by the Chronological order of the books; reading the Bible by the Historical order of the books; reading the Old and New Testament together; reading from beginning to end of the Bible; and a blended plan which is a combination of the others. These can be found at <http://www.backtothebible.org/devotions/journey>. My favorite reading plan is to read the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice during the year, and there are reading plans that help the Bible student accomplish this goal.

(2) READ AN INDIVIDUAL BOOK OF THE BIBLE REPEATEDLY UNTIL THE THEME AND MEANING BECOME CLEAR. Well-known Bible commentator G. Campbell Morgan read a book of the Bible 50 times before commenting. Evangelist R.A. Torrey advocated reading a book 12 times. Dr. Bruce Lackey advocated reading it at least 10 times in order to get the right meaning. The exact number of times is not the essential thing; what is essential is that you read the book or passage enough so that its meaning becomes clear and its individual parts begin to fit together and make sense.

(3) KEEP A POCKET BIBLE OR NEW TESTAMENT HANDY so that you can make the most of any extra time during the day by reading a portion of Scripture. So much time is wasted that could be better spent. One well-known secular writer read an entire large history of Britain during the minutes he had to wait each day for his meal to be brought to the table.

(4) One can also have some of the benefits of reading the Bible by LISTENING TO IT ON CASSETTE OR CD in the car or at home or elsewhere.

(5) DIVIDE YOUR BIBLE STUDY TIME INTO TWO PARTS: the first part just for reading and the last half for studying. It doesn't take very long to read the three to four chapters required for one to read the N.T. through twice in a year and the O.T. once. (a) You can do your reading and studying at one sitting. (b) Or you can divide them into two separate times during the day. (c) You can also focus on reading during the first part of the year, while focusing on study the second part of the year. For example, during the first part of the year you could read 10 chapters a day and thus read the Bible all the way through in a mere four months (the Bible contains 1189 chapters). That would leave eight months in the year in which to apply yourself to the study of the Bible.

(6) DIVIDE YOUR BIBLE READING INTO MORNING AND EVENING PORTIONS (Psalm 119:147-148). A good habit to develop is to read a portion of Scripture in the morning and in the evening. Some possibilities: (a) Read a portion of the Old Testament in the morning and a portion of the New Testament in the evening. (b) Read the Scriptures systematically in the morning, three or four chapters a day, proceeding through the Bible; and then read more devotionally in the evening, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead to various passages.

(7) DIVIDE YOUR READING TIME BETWEEN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS. I have also found that it is good not to read continually in the Old Testament without also reading some in the New. One can forget that we no longer live under the Mosaic Law and that it was given to lead us to Christ. The law can actually hinder rather than strengthen the spiritual life if it is used improperly. Always be careful to look at the Old Testament through the eyes of the New. It can be helpful, though it certainly should not be made into a hard and fast rule, to read the New Testament at least twice as much as the Old.

There are many ways to divide your time between the Testaments. *For example, you can read a section in the Old Testament and a section in the New Testament every day. Or you can read an Old Testament book and then a New Testament book, or any combination thereof.* As already noted, a good plan is to read the New Testament through twice in a year while reading the Old Testament through once. That is 1449 chapters, so one only has to read an average of four chapters a day to do this.

TIPS ON CONCENTRATING ON BIBLE READING

Following are some suggestions to help you concentrate upon the Word of God:

(1) A QUIET, PRIVATE PLACE IS REQUIRED. I have seen Christians trying to study the Bible in a room where other people are talking and a radio is blaring, etc. That is not wise, and it is not honoring to the Lord, who deserves our undivided attention. The Bible is the very Word of God. Would it be proper to invite God over for a visit and then have many other things going on at the same time as He was talking to us? On some occasions when I have visited people in their homes to talk to them about spiritual matters, they have kept the television on and have continued watching it even while I was trying to talk with them about the Word of God. That was very disrespectful to me personally and, more importantly, to the message that I was bringing. There have been occasions, especially while traveling, when I have gotten into my car and driven out to a country road or, if in a city, to the backside of the parking lot of a large shopping area in order to have a quiet and private place for my Bible study time.

(2) ASK THE LORD TO HELP YOU KEEP YOUR MIND ON HIS WORD. If you find your mind frequently wandering during Bible study, lay the matter before the Lord. Tell Him that you desire to grow in knowledge of Him and His Word, explain your problem to Him, and beseech Him to help you concentrate.

(3) IF YOU ARE PARTICULARLY WORRIED ABOUT SOME MATTER, CAST IT UPON THE LORD (1 Pet. 5:7) and trust Him to take care of it for you; then turn your full attention to His Word.

(4) HAVE PEN IN HAND AS YOU READ. Just the action of picking up one's pen and being ready to write things down or to mark in one's Bible causes the mind to focus more on the reading.

(5) REMOVE THINGS FROM YOUR BIBLE STUDY AREA THAT ARE DISTRACTING. I know a pastor who removed all of the bright colored covers from the books in his office, because they distracted him when he was trying to study the Bible.

(6) BE CAREFUL ABOUT USING A COMPUTER DURING BIBLE READING TIME. I use my computer to study the Bible, because it is so efficient, but I do not use my computer when I have my daily devotion time in the Scriptures and when I am just reading the Scriptures. It is too easy to get distracted with other things on the computer.

(7) BE CAREFUL ABOUT EXTRANEIOUS THOUGHTS. When you are studying the Bible, it will often happen that thoughts about other things will rush in and you will be tempted to leave the study of the Bible and to rush off and take care of those things. For this reason, it is a good idea to have pen and paper handy and to jot down thoughts so that you can take care of them later. This way, you can put them out of your mind for the time being and proceed with your study. If you get in the habit of allowing yourself to rush off and take care of other things, you will be crippled in your ability to study the Bible fruitfully.

(8) GO BACK AND READ THE PASSAGE AGAIN. When you find that your mind has wandered during the reading of the Scripture, it is important to go back and read that passage again until you understand what you are reading, even if it takes several readings. It is better to read one verse with clear understanding than to read an entire chapter with the mind drifting to other things.

(9) TRY NOT TO READ THE BIBLE WHEN YOU ARE TIRED. Sometimes this cannot be avoided, and it is better to read the Bible when you are tired than not at all. But the wise Bible student will arrange his schedule in such a way that he can study the Scriptures when he is alert.

(10) IF YOU FIND YOUR MIND WANDERING, IT MIGHT HELP TO PUT THE BIBLE READING FIRST BEFORE YOU DO ANYTHING ELSE IN THE DAY. I have found that if I start reading and studying other things first, it is much more difficult to concentrate on the Bible later.

(11) SOMETIMES IT IS HELPFUL TO READ THE BIBLE ALOUD IF YOU FIND YOUR MIND WANDERING. This can help you maintain your concentration.

(12) A LARGER PRINT BIBLE can also help with concentration because it is easier to read and the pages of the Bible are not as cluttered with type.

(13) BE PERSISTENT. Don't let the devil defeat you in your Bible reading. If you find yourself unable to concentrate for a period, don't quit. Just go back at it the next day and the next and the next. There are ups and downs in Bible study as there are in everything else in life. The best tip for effective Bible study is to just keep on keeping on!