

How to Read the Bible

Many people struggle to read the Bible. Obviously there are many methods people use, but this lesson is to give some practical tips on how I read and study the Bible, that I hope will be of use to you.

Many people read the Bible so slowly that they feel like it is an unachievable feat to read the whole Bible through. They think they must meditate on every verse so much that it takes them 6 months just to get through the book of John. Other people only read the books or passages that they find rewarding or understandable, and so never read other books. Others only read the NT, as if the OT is now irrelevant. Many read randomly, whatever strikes them at the moment.

I have found that it is possible to get through the whole Bible in 3 or even 2 months. Not everyone reads and comprehends at the same speed, but still, if you are a reasonable reader, you can read the whole Bible in much less than a year, if you want to. My Bible is larger print, and so has around 1500 pages. Reading 17 pages a day would get through the whole Bible in 3 months, but a year would only mean 4 pages a day. I don't count pages when I read, but this gives an idea of how much reading is required for a certain pace. Some people try to read so many chapters a day, but chapter length varies quite a bit.

Advantages of fast reading

- You can get through all the Bible without giving up. Going slow "just takes forever".
- You force yourself to read all of it, even "the boring parts". There are sections that are not as interesting as others, but even there you will find verses that seem to pop up in their midst that "speak to you". For example, the verses about "the prayer of Jabez" is in the middle of a genealogical section (1 Chr. 4:9-10). God had a reason for giving us ALL the Bible, so we shouldn't limit ourselves to our favorite parts.
- You tend to see the big picture. Reading quickly is like seeing a map; reading slowly is like looking through a microscope. One is to see the forest; the other is to examine a leaf. Both are valuable.
- You can take note of certain types of passages that occur all through the Bible. They will remind you of related passages that you read only recently. For example, you might be on the lookout in one reading of the Bible for all passages relating to the kingdom of God, or his sovereignty over the governments of men. If you read too slowly, you won't even remember that there is a verse somewhere back in 2 Chronicles that helps you understand some verse elsewhere.
- Reading quickly helps you put everything in context. If you read only the NT, you will never understand it as fully as when you read the OT also.
- It helps to develop personal discipline.

Some people think they should just start in Genesis and "plow through". The problem is that they get bogged down in Leviticus or Numbers and their Bible study becomes dry. They may even give up. A new Christian should probably start with Luke-John-Acts along with Psalms and Proverbs, and then branch out from there. After those initial readings to get the new Christian "kick-started", they should continue in the NT and then start the OT.

Disadvantages of fast reading

- It is true that you have to really focus, so you don't read a page and then realize you don't remember what it said. Sometimes we mechanically read all the words without comprehending, but that is true with slow reading also.
- Some might object that if they go fast they might miss something. This is true, but I can guarantee you will always miss something, no matter how many times you have read it. Reading it more often allows you more opportunities to get it, though.
- We need to meditate on the Word, and study it, which requires a much slower pace.
- The point of reading the Word is to understand it, and then to line our lives up with it. Make sure your "speed reading" doesn't keep you from applying the Word, and doing it.

For this reason, I do NOT recommend fast reading only. It should be combined with slow, in-depth, verse-by-verse study so you can really dig in to the meat of the Word and fully digest it. I believe the fast reading helps give you a fuller context that will help you understand the parts you are really digging into.

For me, preparing for Sunday School lessons gives me a good opportunity to do the detailed study and meditation, while the fast reading gives me the connections between various parts of the Bible that relate to my topic. Fast reading also give me ideas for topics that I think would be appropriate for future lessons. You may not be teaching on a regular basis, but you can still do the detailed study that arises out of your fast reading.

I would recommend that you keep three or four bookmarks all the time, as shown in the table below. Within each column, read the books in order from top to bottom. At the beginning of a reading, I keep a fourth bookmark, specifically for Psalms and Proverbs. When I get through those, I just use three. You will need to read more in the OT than the NT, because it is longer. For each page in the NT, there are just over three in the OT. Another approach might be to read the NT twice for every once in the OT.

Bookmark 1	Bookmark 2	Bookmark 3
Torah/Historical Books	the "Writings"	New Testament
Genesis	Ruth	Matthew
Exodus	Ezra	Mark
Leviticus	Nehemiah	Luke
Numbers	Esther	John
Deuteronomy	Job	Acts
Joshua	<i>Psalms</i>	Romans
Judges	<i>Proverbs</i>	1, 2 Corinthians
1 Samuel	Ecclesiastes	Galatians
2 Samuel	Song of Solomon	Ephesians
1 Kings	Lamentations	Philippians
2 Kings	Daniel	Colossians
1 Chronicles	The Prophets	1, 2 Thessalonians
2 Chronicles	Isaiah	1, 2 Timothy
	Jeremiah	Titus
	Ezekiel	Philemon
	Hosea	Hebrews
	Joel	James
	Amos	1, 2 Peter
	Obadiah	1, 2, 3 John
	Jonah	Jude
	Micah	Revelation
	Nahum	
	Habakkuk	
	Zephaniah	
	Haggai	
	Zechariah	
	Malachi	

The only translations I can personally recommend for general use are the King James (KJV), the English Standard Version (ESV), and the New King James (NKJV). These are literal translations, not the more dangerous "thought for thought" versions, which allow for twisting and distortion by the "translators". Paraphrase versions are even worse. The American Standard (ASV) and New American Standard (NASB) are supposed to be good, but I have not read them recently. There are, I am sure, many good study Bibles available, but the only one I have used is the Thompson Chain Reference, which I often find helpful.

What about "kid's" and "teen" Bibles? It is better to read to the young (out of a real Bible), explain it to them, and then encourage them to read well as soon as possible. Changing the text just to make it more understandable and calling it a "Bible" is dangerous. Likewise, for people who read poorly (if at all), the answer is Biblical teaching, and encouragement to learn to read better, not to dumb down the text.

Sunday school teaching notes are available at: <https://hnslack.wixsite.com/mysite>