

9 Rules for Effective Bible Reading

Standing alone amidst the world's literature, the Bible especially ought to be read. The skills for Bible reading are identical, mechanically, for reading a secular document. But a keener appreciation applies to the Divine Revelation, and additional considerations for the Heavenly Message are required. Our devotion to the Sacred Word must be as special as the Book itself.

Rule One: We ought to read the Bible regularly. Any child of God who needs convinced that he ought to read the Bible regularly is in spiritual peril already.

Rule Two: We need to read the Bible analytically. God intends for us to understand the Bible, and we ought to analyze the Word's component parts to better understand it as a whole. For example, the Bible student needs to understand the two major parts of the Bible – the Old and New Testaments. The differences between the Old and New Testaments are critical to "rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). A good Bible dictionary will facilitate this rule. For instance, if we plan to read the book of Genesis, we ought to consult a Bible dictionary article on "Genesis." An introduction to the content increases our ability to understand and retain the material. Give the mind an advantage by knowing as much as you can about your reading before you read. This is true with respect to the Bible as a whole, and in connection with chapters and verses. Halley's Bible Handbook is a useful tool for this; its chapter summaries are a helpful reader's guide.

Rule Three: We would profit more, I believe, if we read the Bible systematically. A well-organized plan facilitates any objective—even Bible reading. Reading calendars, study aids, and valuable suggestions are numerous. Take advantage of a method and use it. Devise your own and tenaciously work through it. The most prolific Bible readers, with whom I am familiar, are people who are systematic in method and time. A designated pattern and time of day, interrupted only because of absolute necessity, establishes a way of life; there is no need to "fit it in" to one's schedule. Other things may be postponed. We have our Bibles to read!

Rule Four: We must read the Bible persistently. Bible reading can be discouraging for some, especially the new Christian. He or she may be distracted by what is not readily understood, rather than absorbing what could have been easily grasped. I recommend that you keep a notebook nearby while reading the Bible. Write down the reference of a verse that perplexes you, and keep on reading. Schedule another time for a more exhaustive study to research the difficult text. Avoid interrupting your plan, as a general rule, to ponder about an obscure thought to the neglect of much that could have been understood. Don't allow discouragement to set in. Keep reading, and press on. I do not imply that the Bible should be read sloppily. We ought to devote separate time and proven methods for deeper study. This is indispensable to our growth as well. Such projects, however, usually cannot be accomplished in short periods of time. We need an entire morning, evening, or Saturday afternoon, to devote uninterrupted hours for these special studies. With perseverance and planning, we can devote ourselves to persistent Bible reading with thirty minutes to an hour per day.

Rule Five: The previous guidelines help us accomplish this one: Read the Bible completely. A plan best accomplishes this, and it certainly ought to be our resolve. Some books of the Bible captivate our attention more than others. Some are more immediately relevant to our spiritual needs. Yet neglect none of them. Read it. Read it all—1,189 chapters. And read it over and over again, for "Man does not live by bread alone," (Matt. 4:4).

Rule Six: We must read the Bible reverently. It should not degrade into a mere routine. For reverent readers, Bible reading and prayer are inseparable (see Acts 6:4). The regularity of our reading should not diminish our respect for the words breathed out by God. To the contrary, I believe that the persistent reader will become more reverent through the passing of time.

Rule Seven: Because this book is from God for our utmost good, we ought to read the Bible expectantly. We must realize that the Bible will do for us what it can do for any person (2 Tim 3:16-17). It is useful for teaching – what we need to know. It is profitable for reproof—what we must reject and refute. It is beneficial for correction—what we must turn away from and avoid. It is good for instruction in righteousness—what we must consider about our lives and duties with respect to God and man. Expect to grow stronger, be encouraged, and more fruitful, through

regular contact with God's Word. Conversely, spiritual atrophy is the expectation for those who do not open the Good Book. Confident that it is true, but void of its power, defines the complacent attitude toward the Bible in which the Devil, no doubt, rejoices.

Rule Eight: Read the Bible fervently. We must stay awake to effectively read the Bible. But more than that, we must read it with focus and fervency. It doesn't matter if the brain wanders while reading the latest editorial in the paper. The Bible matters. The kind of effort we expend in reading, comprehending, retaining, and applying God's Word, eternally matters. Choose a time of day when you are alert. Select a place where you will not become easily fatigued. Provide yourself with adequate lighting. And focus. It is work; it is soul-saving work—your own!

Rule Nine: We need to read the Bible collectively. As friends, dating couples, married couples, entire families, small groups, congregations—we can read the Bible together and all be better for it.

The Bible demands more than lip service from members of the Lord's church. It requires our attention in addition to our affection (Ps. 1:2). Become, or continue to be, an effective Bible reader. That is exactly what God wants you to be.

- by Jason Jackson

What Can I Do This Year?

Many times Christians feel as though there is nothing they can do to positively assist in the work of the church. This, of course, is a huge mistake. There is something for everyone to do. Let us suggest these things that EVERY member of the local congregation can do that will help our collective service for the Lord:

1. You can read your Bible every day. There are few things that can compare to regular Bible reading when it comes to strengthening the soul and maintaining focus on spiritual priorities. What are you waiting for? Make the commitment right NOW to read your Bible this year.
2. You can attend the services faithfully. We all push ourselves to do certain things. We'll go to real extremes to attend family gatherings, keep a doctor's appointment, go to a ballgame, have a regular time at the beauty shop, etc. Unfortunately, some are not nearly so determined to attend worship services and Bible studies. If you can get out for other things, why can't you get out for services? Think! You can really help by simply being present.
3. You can pray fervently. Do you consistently spend time in prayer every day? Pray for the church, for the elders, for those who are weak, for our work in reaching the lost, etc. *"The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"* (James 5:16).
4. You can invite a neighbor, co-worker, or family member to attend the services with you. You might be surprised how many would be willing to come with you if you simply invited them.
5. You can set a good example. Don't forget that others are watching everything you do, everything you say, everywhere you go. If you let down, even once, they will notice it, and your influence will be damaged. Be conscious of your impact by way of your example.
6. You can be positive and enthusiastic. Too many are "doom and gloom" Christians, always looking for negative things to complain about. Look up! Be thankful for what you have and excited about what you can do for God's glory.

- by Greg Gwin