

Use a Bible Reading Plan

Imagine picking up a history of the United States and starting with the chapter on the Great Depression. Finishing that, then suppose you turn to read of the War of 1812, and then of putting Neil Armstrong on the moon. Or picture yourself taking the biography of George Washington off the shelf and reading first of his marriage to Martha, then a chapter on his final years, and then the one on the general's initial military campaign.

Not a good way to understand either history or someone's life, is it?

But that's how some people read the Bible. A chapter of Genesis today, one from Romans tomorrow, a couple of psalms the next day—such a haphazard approach is not the way to understand the message of Scripture.

To read the Bible purposefully requires a plan. The plan can be as simple as starting in Genesis and reading a certain number of chapters each day straight through to Revelation, or as involved as reading in multiple books at a sitting.

A good plan is easy to find. Many study Bibles (the kind with lots of explanatory notes at the bottom and other resources throughout) have Bible reading plans included at the back. Devotional magazines and church Bible study literature often print daily readings on each page that will direct you through the entire Bible in a year. With very little effort you will find the plan developed by a godly Scottish minister in the 1800s, Robert Murray McCheyne, and which is one of the most widely used in the world. You can even buy a Bible specially printed in a format for daily reading instead of in the traditional Genesis-to-Revelation arrangement.

My favorite plan takes the reader through five parts of Scripture per session. On the first of January I read in Genesis (the Law), then an equal amount in Joshua (History), Job (Poetry), Isaiah (the Prophets), and Matthew (the New Testament). I read consecutively through each section, and since each is approximately

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the same length, I finish them all about the same time. A variation on the plan is to read equal amounts daily in three sections, beginning in Genesis, Job, and Matthew.

The advantage of any plan that guides the reader through more than one book of the Bible per sitting is variety. On the days when part of your reading is in the more difficult passages, it's easier to maintain the momentum when you know you'll also be reading from other parts of the Bible as well.

Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). If we are to *live* by "every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," then surely He intends for us to at least *read* every word. And the best way to do that is with the help of a Bible reading plan.

Even if, however, you aren't presently attempting to read through the entire Bible, but are reading books at random, there's no better—or simpler—way than chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book, in a purposeful and orderly method.

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Excerpted from Donald S. Whitney, *Simplify Your Spiritual Life*
(Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2003).

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