
Helpful Tips for Reading the Bible

Reading the Bible is one of the best ways to learn about God—and what God wants from us. When we read the Bible, we read about a specific people and their relationship to God, but we also can learn about our own relationship with God.

Set aside time...

to read the Bible on a regular basis. Be realistic. For some people, this may be a few minutes once a day. For others, it may be a longer time a few times a week. Try to make it about the same time each day, whether in the morning, at lunchtime, or just before going to bed.

Find a quiet place...

so that you can be alone with your thoughts without being disrupted. If you find it helpful, you might want to have a notebook nearby to jot down questions and thoughts you have as you read and reflect on the biblical text.

Begin by praying.

You may want to spend a few minutes in prayer before you begin reading. Ask for an open mind and for God's guidance.

Here are some suggestions for you to use as a model as you find your preferences for spending time with the Scriptures.

1. Select a passage.

Some people find it helpful to follow a specific Bible reading plan to guide their reading. Many Bibles have reading plans included at the back. American Bible Society provides a Daily Bible Reading plan that you might want to consider.

Other people want to read through the Bible on their own. Still others move from one passage to another based on preference, lectionary readings, or Sunday school lessons.

Any of the above ways to select a passage is fine. The important thing is not to spend too much—if any—of your reading time in selecting the passage!

2. Read the passage through once.

Read the passage once without stopping in order to gain an overall sense of the passage. Listen to your initial reactions to the text ... both positive and negative.

3. Read the passage a second time.

As you read, pause from time to time and answer questions about the background (or context) of the passage. You might choose to pause between verses or small groups of verses, between significant events or announcements in the passage, or between any natural break you see as you read. Below are some types of questions about the context of a passage that you might find helpful as you read.

In what book of the Bible is this passage found? Is this book a prophetic book? A historical book? A book of poetry? A Gospel? A letter?

What happens immediately before and after the passage? What is the literary context of this passage?

Who are the main characters in this passage? Do they speak or do others speak for them? What are the relationships between these characters? What is the relationship between God and the characters in this biblical text?

Where did these things take place? What are the key places mentioned or assumed in the passage? What has happened before this passage? What is happening during this passage. In other words, what is the specific historical context of the passage?

What are key words or phrases that are repeated in the passage? What is the significance of these words?

Are there any cause-and-effect relationships established in this passage? Are any comparisons made or similarities pointed out? Are there any contrasts made between people, things, or ideas?

What is the intent or purpose of the passage?

As you ask yourself these questions, answer them in your own words. Be careful to listen to the text. Try to avoid listening to what you want the text to say to you. If you are using a notebook, take a few minutes to write down your answers to these questions. Be prepared to be comforted by the text, but also be aware that you may also be confronted, even challenged.

4. Read the passage a third time.

Now reflect on your answers to these questions:

What did I learn about God from this passage?

What did I learn about human nature?

What did I learn about my own relationship with God? How does this passage apply to me?

Is there anything I need to change in my life based on my reading of this passage? How can I be stronger in my faith?

What can I do to show God's love to people in my life?

If there is one verse or part of a verse you would like to remember, you might want to write it down on an index card or scrap of paper and carry it with you throughout the day.

5. Finally, thank God for the time you had to read from Scripture.

Also ask God to help you make the changes you identified.