

HOW NOT TO
READ THROUGH THE BIBLE
THIS YEAR!

Every January millions of people start diets. Most of them lose weight... and then put it on again... plus! It's so easy to start with the best of intentions and get sidetracked, discouraged, defeated. But as the old saying goes, "An ounce of prevention...!" Taking a little time to consider the following can yield much better results.

Reading through the Bible in a year is nothing to sneeze at. It's not some easy thing to do. But oh the benefits it yields! It is a discipline – a spiritual discipline and as we're told in Hebrews 12:11, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who've been trained by it."

Note that last part: "for those who've been trained by it." That's one thing I love about the spiritual disciplines – as I seek to do them I am being trained, especially in the arena of self-control. But just like an athlete preparing for the Olympics, such training must push me beyond what I've done before... and that isn't easy!

This will be my 26th year doing this. The first time I attempted to do this it didn't happen. The next time, it took me three years to complete my first read through. And there's no shame in that! Especially as I was stumbling through on my own!

Remember there's no command in Scripture that says you have to read through the Bible in a year. It is one method for helping you let God's Word dwell in you richly.

Does God want you doing this method this year? Or a variation of it (eg., reading through in two years, etc)?

Just in case He does, I thought I'd take a few minutes to write down what's been of help to me... in a creative way! Hopefully, it will help you to reap the benefits of this spiritual discipline, and not trip over the obstacles I have!

These first few weeks are critical, so here's a bit of extra help as you get started! :o)

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1. BE AMBIVALENT

“Well, maybe this is a good thing to do. I’ll give this a try and see if I like it. If I feel like doing it, then I will...”

If you don’t want to read through the Bible this year it’s so important to keep this attitude. And does the enemy ever love it when you do! It provides him with lots of material for beating you up and making you feel badly! “See one more thing you started and never finished...”

But if you do want to read through the Bible this year, it’s vital you take time to answer the following questions early on:

Why do you want to do this?

How important is it to you to do this?

Are you willing to sacrifice to do this?

In Colossians 3:23 we’re instructed, “Whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men...” Is your whole heart behind you doing this?

Luke 14:28 in the NLT states, “But don’t begin until you count the cost. For who would begin construction of a building without first calculating the cost to see if there is enough money to finish it?” Let me encourage you, before you go any farther, take time to count the cost.

Once again, please note – You don’t need to read through the Bible in a year! God isn’t going to love you one ounce more if you do it, nor one ounce less if you don’t!

But can it ever help you be well nourished spiritually! And can it ever help you learn to think biblically! And as 2 Timothy 3:16 states, “All Scripture is God-breathed and useful...” Reading through the Bible each year helps you reap the benefits from all of it!

Those are some of the reasons why I do this. But this is not an exhaustive list. What are your reasons? And do they warrant the time and effort it will take to do this? Do they warrant the sacrifice it will take to do this?

You will need to sacrifice to do this! Are you willing to?

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2. ADD IT ON TOP OF A BUSY SCHEDULE

If you want to NOT read through the Bible this year just do it whenever you have time. No need to adjust your schedule -there's sure to be ample that will crowd it out! (and you'd better believe there's an enemy eager to help assure that happens!).

But in case you DO want to read through the Bible this year...

Here's the first sacrifice required.

Most of us have very full plates. Depending on how fast you read it can take anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes a day to read through the Bible in a year. That may not sound like much, but it's like our lives are a pie, where every day the whole thing gets eaten.

Where is this new slice going to come from? To spend 30 minutes reading through the Bible, means there's 30 minutes of something you did last year that you won't be doing.

Now I know there's often more than 30 minutes a day I waste. But, if I'm not doing something to actively recapture that time, it's not going to be available for me to use.

One thing that has been a tremendous help for me in recapturing "lost" time is keeping a to do list – where I write down each morning what I need to do and then check each thing off as I do it. I tend to waste time when I don't know what I need to do next.

So often I "forget" to do my daily Bible reading – if I don't have something like this to remind me!

Another thing that's helping is to write down what I do throughout the day. It may sound crazy but that "accountability" makes me think twice about what I'm doing and really is helping me not waste time (granted I'm only on my fourth day doing this – but so far it's been a HUGE help! And I am so not a scheduled planner! Obviously God's grace is playing a huge role here!!! :o).

So what will you give up so you'll have time to do this? A tv show? Reading magazines at lunch? Time on facebook? :o) It's vital you answer this question if you're serious about doing this!

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3. WING IT! (AKA DO IT WITHOUT A PLAN)

If you don't want to read through the Bible this year be sure to plunge ahead without a plan. Don't establish a set time for doing this and by all means don't try to tag it onto something you already do! "I'll get it done sometime" is the best attitude for it NOT to happen.

However, if you DO want to read through the Bible this year...

It can really help to have three plans:

a. A plan for WHAT to read

This can be a printed plan downloaded from the internet or else last year I placed an article on the discussion board by Nicole Piper about how she didn't use a printed plan but instead her plan was to only read the Bible, nothing else, and pick it up every spare minute she found – while waiting in the doctor's office, or in line at the post office, etc. Whenever she would normally reach for a book, she disciplined herself to reach for The Book of books! And she read what she could, whenever she could.

Last year I gave this a try, and found for me, I do best when there's something to pace me – even though I always fall behind multiple times throughout the year, it helps guide me and spur me on.

Ask God to show you what He wants you to do this year. And then learn from it. If it's not "working" after a few weeks, be ready to try something different!

b. A plan for WHEN to read

Some of the early Navigators had a saying, "No Bible, no breakfast." Did that ever help keep them accountable! Others choose to read on their lunch hour. Having a set time you read can really help you be faithful in doing this. Why? Because this provides set boundaries that facilitate it occurring.

It's also helpful to have a back up plan. For example, I find it helpful to set aside Sundays so if I've fallen behind in my reading (I often find a verse I want to learn more about and as I camp out there it slows things down). So I set aside Sunday afternoons for catching up each week. This can really help keep me on track.

Tacking it onto something you already do on a daily basis can be a big help, so can establishing a set time and treating it as an appointment. It is so important you aren't vague as to when you will be doing your reading if you want to read through your Bible this year.

c. A plan to re-evaluate

I find I need to intentionally plan to re-evaluate my plan whenever the schedule changes. Holidays, vacations, summer breaks can really throw me for a loop. For example, if I'm used to doing my Bible reading while my son practices a sport, but then there's a break or the end of the season comes, that can throw me for a loop unless I've first considered a new plan for those break times!

And if you do plan to read through the Bible this year, please take time to share your plan with someone. And ask them to pray for you. You just never know, you may end up spurring someone else on by giving ideas they hadn't thought of!

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4. DO IT ALONE

Have you ever stood before a roaring fire and removed one of the coals? What soon happened to that coal?

Even the “hottest” coal cools quickly when isolated. So if you DON’T want to read through the Bible this year, one of the best things you can do is seek to do it alone!

But if you DO want to read through the Bible this year remember...

Starting a new discipline is like trying to swim upstream against a strong current. Can it ever help to have others with you.

When you get tired they can spur you on.

When you get sidetracked they can help renew your focus.

Plus it’s just more fun to share the journey!

That’s one reason why I often create Read Through The Bible groups. Some are in person. Some have been online. It sure can help to know you’re not the only one.

Each group is whatever the members want to make it. As Hebrews 10:24 states, “Let us consider how we can spur one another on toward love and good deeds...” That’s why I’m doing this. Let me encourage you, as God leads, take time to share on the wall or discussion board anything He gives you that might encourage someone else – even your struggles.

Then we can pray for each other, too!

But I will say what I’ve found most helpful is having a friend to meet with face to face who is doing this too. That provides the best accountability ever!

One of my favorite years doing this I hosted a group that met weekly in my home. We did our daily Bible reading on our own then got together to share what stood out to us, what God was teaching us and to encourage each other in pressing on and in living it out.

I was so shocked when two sisters who didn’t know Jesus joined us in the middle of Leviticus! I thought, “Oh Lord, this is not where I’d encourage someone to start!” But they hung in there and before the year was over both had entered into a personal relationship with Him!!!

So you just never know where this may take you! Look at the members of the group, is there someone who lives near you? Or is there a friend you could invite to do this with you who will meet with you regularly to share? That will help you INCREDIBLY to press on! I cannot stress that enough.

And if there's no one around you – why not ask God if He'd provide you with someone?! You might be surprised – and blessed – to see how He answers!

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5. DO IT IN YOUR OWN STRENGTH

This is probably the most important suggestion on here. If you DON'T want to read through the Bible this year it is imperative that you never ask God to help you do it – not even once!

Just pull yourself up by your bootstraps determined that in your own strength, relying on your own discipline, you will slug it out. This is the best way to NOT make it through the Bible this year.

But in case you DO want to read through the Bible this year...

Let me encourage you – Cry out to God for the ability to do this! As 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, He “is able to make all grace abound to you so in all things at all times having all you need you will abound in every good work.” Ask Him to pour that grace on you! Not just once, but often!

Remember how I mentioned this discipline can grow you in self-control? Open up in your Bibles to Galatians 5:22-23... what do you learn about self-control from here?

If you want to grow in your understanding of what this fruit is, check out the following link:

http://www.preceptaustin.org/galatians_523.htm

and scroll down to where it starts talking about self-control.

Be prepared to have the socks blown off you! There is pure gold to chew on here! I cannot encourage you enough to read this!

A key part in my daily Bible reading is crying out to God for the strength and perseverance to do it. I need to act in faith on what He provides, but He is my starting point. This isn't “Well, she's just a disciplined person.” I'm not. I so need Jesus to do this!

Remember that first year I tried? That was my key problem, “I” tried. I tried to do it on my own.

And what is the secret of growing in self control? Check out John 15:5. When I struggle the most, that's when I most need to actively abide, to be with Him.

When I ask Him for help, I am declaring my desperate dependence upon Him. Not only is that true! It also opens me up to receive His help. Considering He is The All Mighty God (not just a little bit mighty!) that's some serious help!

And year after year, as I cry out to Him, I am finding Him so faithful!

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6. LOSE YOUR PLAN!

If you DON'T want to read through the Bible this year make sure you only have one copy of your Bible reading plan. That way when you lose it you have a good reason why you can't read! :o)

But if you DO want to read through the Bible this year...

Remember, we are talking about doing something over the course of a year. A lot can happen in a year. And can it ever sideline you if you lose your reading plan- especially if you are using a plan where you are dependent on the plan to know where to read!

So here's a few suggestions:

- a. Tape a copy of your plan inside the front cover of your Bible. That can really help you keep track of it!
- b. At the start of the year make a couple extra copies of your plan and put them somewhere you will remember!
- c. And if you use more than one Bible, tape a copy into each one you use!

You may think, I'll just go online and make another copy if I need it. And yes, that may work.

But remember, this is akin to running a marathon. During those last miles when you're struggling just to take the next step, what seems like a small thing at any other time can be huge! It's best to eliminate anything that requires extra energy along the way.

I can't even begin to count the number of times I've been sidelined by this very thing (yes, I am a slow learner! :o). This suggestion may seem so simple – but has it ever helped me a ton!

Press on dear friends! And know you continue in my prayers!!!

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7. JUST READ IT AND CHECK!

If you DON'T want to read through your Bible this year just dive right in, racing through your reading, getting it done as quickly as you can and then.... check off your box for the day! You've done it! And it's been done in the most unsatisfying way possible... so the likelihood of you persevering greatly decreases.

But if you DO want to read through the Bible this year...

Never forget the author is with you. It is His Word you are reading – His Living Word. He wants to interact with you through it. He has specific things He wants to say to you each and every day.

And the crazy thing is whether you acknowledge Him or not, He is there! The Almighty God of the Universe is with you! No matter what time, day or night you pick up your Bible, He is present and so eager to share the journey with you.

So when you sit down to do your daily Bible reading, why not first say “Hi!” Then ask Him to open your eyes so you can see wonderful things in His law! And as you come to listen, get ready to be amazed...

There is nothing that spurs me on in doing my daily Bible reading like experiencing the Lord communicating to me through it.

Honest, time after time, He blows me away at how He will meet me right where I'm at, telling me exactly what I need to hear right where I “just happen” to be reading. He is incredible!

Once this starts happening to you, it takes your daily Bible reading to a whole new level. Instead of “I have to...” it becomes, “I get to!” And quite honestly I am motivated to do the hard work persevering in this discipline because I don't want to miss out!

Now I will say it takes extra time to listen. And I find it often helps to have a pen in hand to “hear.” As I'm reading, I underline anything that stands out to me and then pause to either talk to Him about it or come back after to jot it down, taking time to consider it while dialoging with Him and writing down the thoughts that come to mind– is that ever a rich investment!

We live in a fast paced society – but there are things about God you will never get to know going 60 mph! So as you take time to find time in your schedule to read through the Bible, let me encourage you add in a bit more time to relate to God. Even a few more minutes can make a big difference!

I love to stop after each paragraph and praise Him for how I see Him present in this situation. That takes thought at times and sure can slow you down so I don't do it all the time. But when I do!!! What precious times of fellowship we share!

And sometimes I'll ask Him questions! I mean, He's right there – and He knows the answers! I find especially if I write down my questions and the thoughts that follow, I'm often blown away to find He really is answering!

Again, this is something you learn to do.

Have you ever learned to speak a foreign language? How long did it take?

Now consider what God says in Isaiah 55:8-9, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Should we be surprised it takes time to learn to listen to God? But just like Spanish, or French or Arabic – you’ve got to practice and practice regularly to grow in your skills and ability to understand. But is it ever worth it!

This one thing, reading relationally, will take your Bible reading from black and white to HDTV!

And can that ever spur you on to persevere!

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8. JUST READ IT AND WALK AWAY

If you DON'T want to read through the Bible this year then you need to make certain you don't benefit from it. Because when you benefit you experience serious motivation to keep persevering.

So here's my top advice for those of you who really DON'T want to keep doing this... after you've finished reading that last word, promptly close your Bible, put it aside and rush straight into your day. If you are diligent to do this, your mind will soon be consumed with other things so you won't be tempted to "do" anything you've read. Then you will never be sidetracked from your goal by experiencing the incredible value of living out God's Word!

However, if you DO want to read through the Bible this year... we now come to The Most Important Part of a successful Bible reading plan... application! I cannot stress how critical it is to actively apply what you're reading to your life!

As James states in chapter 1, verse 22, "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Do you realize you can invest the time reading through the whole Bible this year and end up only deceiving yourself?

One half hour a day multiplied by 364 days translates into 182 hours – that's seven and a half days! Do you want to spend that time deceiving yourself?! If not, then you need to be serious about doing what you are reading!

One friend suggests you take time each day to ask God to give you something you can do in response to what you've read that will take just five minutes and that you can do in the next 24 hours.

This can be as simple as praising God for something new you've observed about Him or thanking Him for something you've read He's done. It may involve confessing sin that He's brought to mind. Or there may be something specific He wants you to do (someone to forgive, a letter to write...) or a promise He wants you to trust Him for.

Here is an acronym that can help you as you consider different ways to apply what you've been reading:

S = is there Sin I need to confess?

P = a Promise I can claim?

E = an Example to follow?

C = a Command to obey?

K = new Knowledge of God to praise Him for?

At first your applications may seem contrived, but this can help you get into the habit and mindset of being "an effectual doer" (James 1:25 NAS)

And is there ever a huge blessing that comes with doing this – one being, as you experience the difference God’s Word is making in your life, this is a huge motivator to keep coming back for more! It takes daily Bible reading out of the realm of “I should do this because it’s something good Christians do” to “This is changing my life!”

Just as reading through the Bible is a discipline to be learned – this is also true for application. But taking time to read and do will change your life!

Don’t take my word for it – check out what Jesus says in Matthew 7:24! Both men heard the word – but the one who withstood the storms of life – and such storms come into every single life – is the one who DID what he heard.

I’ve been camping out in Job this week, really wanting to understand how Elihu fits into it all – and this has taken extra time. Yet I’m finding he brings such a vital twist to the story.

Whereas Job’s friends conclude his calamities are punishment, Elihu speaking with the “breath of the Almighty” (sure sounds a lot like 2 Tim 3:16, eh?!) introduces a redemptive side to suffering – that it’s not just for destructive purposes but God is creatively at work even in the worst of tragedies seeking to bring about good – though it sure may not seem at all good at the time. (Can you imagine what went through Mary’s mind as she watched her son unjustly tried and crucified?!)

And can that message ever speak hope today... especially in the light of this week’s devastating earthquake in Haiti. For me personally, as I hurt for friends, lifting them and their families before our Father’s throne, it really has been guiding my prayers.

May God richly bless your reading this year, and your living it out, and your life!

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9. IF YOU FALL BEHIND BE SURE TO THINK “I CAN’T CATCH UP!”

So I wasn’t going to do it last year.

After 16 years of reading through the Bible each year I finally decided it was time to take a break. So mid-July of this year I stopped. And I really didn't give it much thought until the day after Christmas...

It's been a hard year where it seems I keep discovering new things I can't do – not only because of my severe hearing loss that has finally progressed to the point where I'm almost totally deaf, but also because of my personality.

I'm an extreme ENFP according to the Myers Briggs Type Indicator. We tend to be creative, fun, enthusiastic, accepting, inspirers! But we are not organized planners! And again, this year I've been trying so hard to grow in this area but it's been a constant struggle. As a result I've really battled feeling like a loser and I was getting so down until...

the day after Christmas when the Lord laid it on my heart to finish reading through the Bible this year. I was like, "But Lord, I stopped on July 9th!!! Do you know how much reading that is to catch up?!!!" But I really sensed this was what He wanted me to do – so it's been a rather intense five days of reading!

But, what a difference it's made in my heart!!! First, as my mind was so focused and filled with the scriptures there wasn't much time for me to listen to the enemy's lies! But also, reading that much of the Bible almost straight through has been such a wonderful reminder of who He is and what He does. Has it ever rekindled hope in my heart and over and over provided me with truth to combat the lies!

This also created a perspective shift on why I read through the Bible. It's not just in obedience to God's command to let His Word dwell in me richly. I'm diving back in because more than ever before I have experienced the truth, "These are not just idle words for you, they are your life!" (Deuteronomy 32:47).

