

A Simple Plan for Reading the Bible

The purpose of reading the Bible is to listen to God, learn from him, and be transformed into the persons he created us to be. Below is a simple guide for where to start in the Bible and what to do when you open it.

Step 1: Pray. It doesn't have to be fancy or formal. Start with something like this: "Lord, open my mind and heart to receive what you want to give; remove whatever obstacles will hinder me from hearing what you want to say."

Step 2: Read. Choose a portion of the Bible* and read it through 2 or 3 times slowly.

Step 3: Study. To study is to think intentionally about something so as to understand it. We're asking what the words and sentences and paragraphs mean. What is the author talking about, and what is he saying about it? Here are some more questions if you want to dig a little deeper:

- How does this section (or chapter) relate to what came after and before it?
- What is taught or commanded or promised or warned or celebrated? What examples are we to imitate or avoid?
- What does this passage tell me about God (Father, Son, Holy Spirit), myself, other people, the world?
- How would I restate this text in my own words? (It can be very helpful to paraphrase the text on your own. This really makes you think about what it says!)
- In one or two sentences, summarize what you have read: What is the central idea of this verse, paragraph, chapter or story?

Step 5: Apply. Prayerfully reflect on your life (and those of people close to you): In what ways might this truth relate to actual situations in your daily life? Pick just one specific thing you will do (or not do) today because of what you have read. Ask God for help, and then get to it!

* If you don't know where to start, we recommend beginning with one of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke or especially John. You can read a chapter per day, or you can also break it up into smaller chunks and just look at one event or teaching at a time. This should last you about a month. After that, consider Ephesians (one of Paul's letters that lays out basic Christian doctrine), Acts (tells the story of the church after Jesus completed his earthly ministry), James (a very practical but hard-hitting letter written by Jesus' little brother), or some of the Psalms (here are two weeks' worth of our favorites: 1, 19, 23, 27, 32, 42, 46, 47, 51, 104, 119, 136, 143, 150).