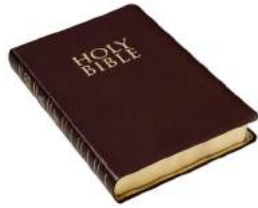


More Bible Spiritual Practices:

- ♥ Read the Bible out loud, Savour the words. What words stand out? Keep them with you all day.
- ♥ Listen to the Bible on a device.
- ♥ Print a verse out on a card and post it where you will see it all day. Or put it on your screen saver.
- ♥ Go online to study the places cultures and peoples you are reading about in your Bible
- ♥ Visit a Christian bookshop, and look at the array of Bible study guides and commentaries. Ask God to give you a heartfelt attraction to the right one to buy.
- ♥ Make a point of memorising one verse a week, and of practising the earlier ones regularly.
- ♥ If you are a group leader, use a creative approach to access the right brain. Visualisations, impromptu skits, maps, games, quizzes, artwork, human sculpture, continuums, actions, letter or poetry writing, and play dough have all been used to great effect with gospel Bible studies.



Learn more about spiritual formation through creative bible studies, devotional Bible Reading (lectio) and meditation in Spiritual Practice 11 (under construction)

Useful Resources

Free downloads at

<http://store.scriptureunionresources.com/the-essential-bible-book-e100/>

<https://scriptureunion.org/how-to-read-the-bible-pray/>

<http://www.scriptureunion.org/e-book/bible-reading-start-guide>

<http://store.scriptureunionresources.com/the-essential-bible-book-e100/>

<http://www.e-sword.net/>

<http://www.olivetree.com/store/home.php?cat=259&free=y>

<http://www.youversion.com/mobile>

<http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com/ambassador/free-audio-bible-download>

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Spiritual Practices

Practice Ten



"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true, and to help us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work."

2 Timothy 3: 16, 17

"Practice" means the repeated performance of a task or action regularly over time. A spiritual practice is exactly what the word suggests, a way to be deliberate about matters of the soul.

"A godshaped life is a flourishing tree" Proverbs 11: 28

Why Read the Bible?

The Bible is our supreme rule of faith and life. Why? Because it is there we meet Christ. The good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ lived, died and rose again. He is Lord; this is the starting point for Christian faith. Because he is alive, we can discover what he wants us to do and be. Christ-followers ask, "What does our Lord want us to believe, and what does He want us to do?" Our first source for finding out is the Bible, the Word of God written, a trustworthy record of God's encounters with people in Israel, in the living Word Jesus Christ and in the early church. "All scripture is god-breathed" (2 Timothy 3:16), and is God's authoritative guide for faith and practice.

Christ-followers in my own traditions of Presbyterian and Baptist have always been keen Bible students, reading the Scriptures regularly and seeking with an open and reverent mind what God is saying. Sometimes we won't find specific answers to modern problems in the Bible, but we'll always find God's guiding principles. We want to devote time to its study and application, to interpret its meaning for our daily life, and to find the right balance of the key principles of faith. ("rightly dividing the word of truth", 2 Tim 2:15).

For some people the Bible is never more than a well-thumbed manual for life. They study it, analyse it and read commentaries on it. But they do not seem to realise that not only has God spoken but he still speaks today. The Bible is not only a manual, it is a love letter. We who follow Jesus don't need psychics or horoscopes to guide us because we have a living Lord, who steps out of the pages of Scripture to meet us:

The Bible is the portrait of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels are the figure itself in the portrait. The Old Testament is the background leading up to the divine figure, pointing towards it and absolutely necessary to the composition as a whole. The Epistles [letters] serve as the dress and accoutrements of the figure, explaining and describing it. Then while by our Bible reading we study the portrait as a great whole, the miracle happens, the figure comes to life and stepping down from the canvas of the written word, the everlasting Christ of the Emmaus story becomes himself our Bible teacher, to interpret to us in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."




Dr Christopher Chavasse, formerly Bishop of Rochester

The Bible Society tells us Bibles are bestsellers all over the world. Yet research in 2008 showed that while 68% of New Zealanders own a Bible, only 23% of those owners pick it up to read at least once a month. Of those who describe themselves as Christians, only 11% read the Bible daily and 13% weekly. 60% of us rarely or never discuss the Bible's teachings with others, and less than half are convinced that the Bible influences our life. Despite the ready availability of Bibles in many different versions, it seems Kiwi Christians do not see engaging with God through Bible reading as a priority. We need to explore creative ways to help the post-modern generation turn back to their Bibles.

Ways to Study the Bible

Artist Method

Read the passage of Scripture, and consider these three questions:

-  What speaks to my heart? Draw a heart beside the word that connects deeply.
-  What new thought or idea comes to me? Draw a light bulb beside that concept.
-  What does this Scripture move me to do? Draw a hand beside the action to take.

Detective Method

For narrative (story) passages. As you read the passage let the scene take shape in your imagination.

1. Observe all the facts. Ask the *who, when, where, what* questions.
2. Interpret the facts. Ask the *why* and *wherefore* questions. What meaning did the actions have for the characters? What meaning do the actions have for you?
3. Apply the study to your life. Ask *how* this will change my life? What will be my 'take away' from this story?



Treasure Seeker Method

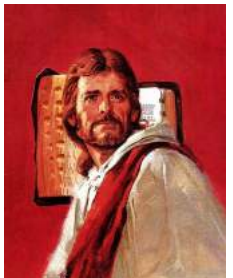
When reading the passage ask yourself the following application questions:

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a promise to claim, or a command to obey?
3. Is there a truth to be applied?
4. Is there a prayer for me to pray?
5. Is there a sin to be confessed?
6. Is there a conversation with God I need to have?

Essence of Jesus Method (good for those new to the Bible)

Use Mark or Luke's gospel to learn what "makes Jesus tick", and ask yourself:

- What seems important to Jesus?
- What sort of questions does he ask people?
- What sort of questions do people ask him?
- What is Jesus inviting me to be and do?

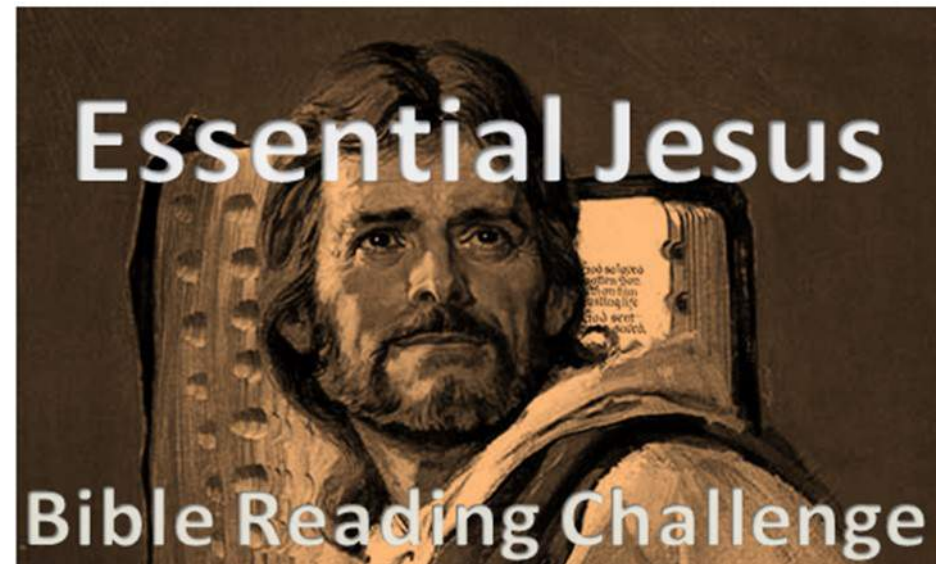


Seven Habits of Effective Bible Readers

Reading the Bible is both spiritually valuable and personally difficult. That's why so many people find it's just easier to live on spiritual snack food rather than a healthy diet of God's Word. How can we satisfy our deep hunger for spiritual nourishment? How can we overcome the challenges and enjoy the benefits of daily Bible reading? Here are seven practical principles to help you develop a more effective and meaningful time with God in his Word.

1. Choose a convenient Time and Place for your time with God. It doesn't have to be long, perhaps just ten minutes. Find a quiet place with minimal distractions—a quiet corner of your house, in your office before the workday begins, during lunch break or perhaps before bedtime. Find a time and place that works for you.
2. Establish a Habit. Research shows that repeating something for three weeks embeds it into our thinking. Think of your Bible reading and prayer as an appointment with God.
3. Don't Feel Guilty. People often say "I'm having trouble keeping a regular quiet time, I know I ought to but ..." Spiritual disciplines like Bible reading can be a challenge. But be careful not to think of it as "paying our dues" or assume God is waiting to "zap" us if we fail. The important thing to remember is God *loves* you and *wants* to meet with you.
4. Find a Plan that works for you. It's helpful to use a daily Bible reading plan or app; Scripture Union, IBRA, and Word for Today are useful print but apps like Youversion are more accessible. Make sure you read the actual Bible passage though, not just the comments! Find one that gets you into all parts of the Bible and stick with it.
5. Be Creative. Even good things can become routine. Sometimes our walk with God feels dry and lifeless. When that happens, try something new; read the passage in a different translation, or read a few pages from a classic Christian book. Keep a journal of reflections, or a record of prayer requests and answers. A little variety can make a difference.
6. Hand Distractions Back to God. It's a noisy world out there! Even the most disciplined Bible reader faces plenty of distractions: unexpected phone calls, family interruptions and pet emergencies. The biggest distractions come from within: fears, frustrations, temptations and worries. We can't always control distractions, but we can incorporate them into time with God. If children interrupt, invite them to read with you. If the phone rings, pray for the caller when you hang up. Give worries and concerns back to the Lord in prayer.
7. Practise the Art of Listening. Take time to quiet your breathing, and to reflect back on the day. Recall ways you saw God at work in and around you. When you feel your heart is still, some call it "centered," slowly read a passage of the Bible. Then, wait in silence. When you love someone, you listen to them.

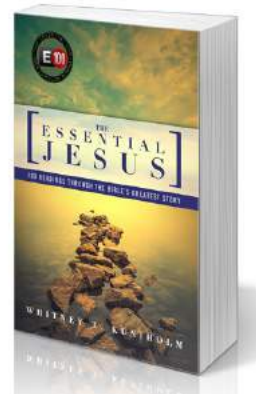
Adapted from Whitney Kuniholm



In 2011 I led a programme at our local church called the [Essential Jesus Challenge](#). It consists of 100 readings through the Bible—25 in the Old Testament and 75 in the New Testament. Participants took the challenge to learn more of who Jesus and why he is so significant. But most of all because we expected to experience God's presence and hear his voice.

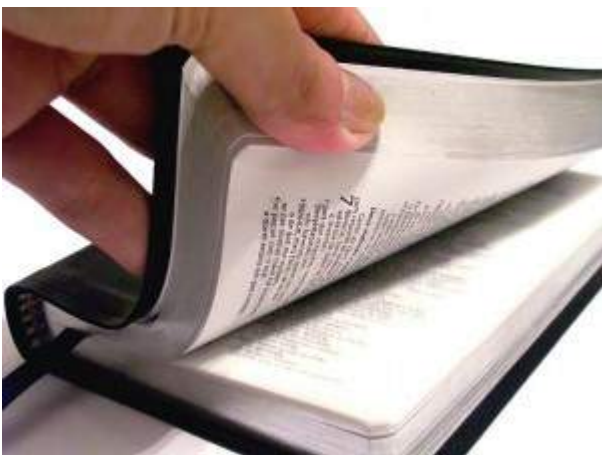
To take the challenge:

- Check if your local church is holding the challenge; if not, access the 100 reading plan through Bible.com at <https://www.bible.com/reading-plans/56-the-essential-jesus>
- Find a Bible translation that's easy for you to understand; see the next page.
- Try to set aside time at least five days a week. Use the time to read and pray. There is a companion study guide available. Order at your local Christian bookshop or at <http://store.scriptureunionresources.com/the-essential-jesus-1st/>
- Set a goal as to when you will complete the 100 readings. But don't be too hard on yourself if you don't achieve your goal!



Choosing a Good Translation

The Bible is a library of 66 books from many different eras in history and from authors who wrote in Hebrew Greek and a little Aramaic. Unless we are trained in those languages, we need to use a translation into our own language. But how do we choose which one? - there are over 1000 English translations of the Scriptures! Fifty years ago the King James (Authorized) Version was the only widely available translation and choosing a Bible involved selecting the binding and colour. Today, dozens of English translations are available. Which one should I use?



It's important to realise that a translation is actually a mini-interpretation, as the translators have to make judgments in choosing words and phrases that reflect what the original meant, and make sense to readers today. That means versions that come from a single individual, or from a sect like the Jehovah Witnesses, are going to be less trustworthy than those prepared by a committee of fifty or so Biblical

scholars. Some **translations** are more literal (word for word), and others rely on "dynamic equivalence" (thought for thought) translation. Both stay close to the original text, compared with the **paraphrases** that are very readable, but not so precise. For Bible study, sermons and Bible lessons we should use a translation rather than a paraphrase. Here are some other pointers:

1. Translation is an art rather than a science, so no version is a perfect translation; they all have limitations. Using several can be very helpful.
2. Look for a team translation, that is, one put together by a team of linguists and theologians (to find out, read the introductory material at the front of the Bible or google the name of the version)
3. Use paraphrases devotionally, or to augment your study, but not as your main source of Biblical truth.
4. Be sensitive to language issues. A good translation will be inclusive of both genders, especially when the Greek uses a word like anthropos, human being. A quick way to check this is to look at Mark 10: 27 where many translations say, *What is impossible for man is possible with God.* The

Greek here is 'anthropos' (human being); there is no reason in the world to translate this as "man" and exclude half the human race. NRSV offers "*For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible.*" In my opinion, a good translation will follow this pattern. Other examples would be the NLT or the "inclusive NIV". Please note, none of these versions change the references to God to inclusive language, which is another issue altogether.

5. Some translations are written for a higher reading age and perhaps a more formal faith expression, than others. The Good News version for example, was aimed at people for whom English is a second language, and therefore avoids a lot of symbolic language or words of several syllables. The NRSV is for readers at age level 10 or more, NIV is aimed at a reading age of 8, and CEV is easier again. That may affect your choice.
6. Go to a Christian book store and have a look at the versions, and compare the text and study aids, if the Bible has them, for a particular passage. Look at a section you know well, such as the Woman at the Well in John 4 or the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, and compare. Ask God to guide you in your purchase.

These notes were taken from a very good article on this topic from Ben Witherington. The original is no longer online but this interview covers the ground: <https://www.biblegateway.com/blog/2014/12/reading-understanding-the-bible-an-interview-with-ben-witherington-iii/>

Sir Isaac Newton, arguably the greatest scientific mind of all times, said, "We account the scriptures of God to be the most sublime philosophy. I find more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever."

Voltaire stated that that in less than 100 years from his lifetime Christianity would be swept away. Fifty years later the Geneva Bible Society was using his press and house to print Bibles. No other book has been so dissected, scrutinised, analysed, studied, criticised quoted, yet, it has stood the test of time.

The Bible is high explosive. It works in strange ways. No one can tell or know how its journey through the world has startled the individual soul in ten thousand different places into a new life, a new belief, a new world, a new conception, a new faith.

English Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin