

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

A Simple Guide to Deeper Intimacy with God

David Platt



W PUBLISHING GROUP

AN IMPRINT OF THOMAS NELSON

How to Read the Bible

Copyright © 2025 David Platt and Radical, Inc.

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, scanning, or other—except for brief quotations in critical reviews or articles, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published in Nashville, Tennessee, by W Publishing, an imprint of Thomas Nelson.

Thomas Nelson titles may be purchased in bulk for educational, business, fundraising, or sales promotional use. For information, please email SpecialMarkets@ThomasNelson.com.

Scripture quotations are taken from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Any internet addresses, phone numbers, or company or product information printed in this book are offered as a resource and are not intended in any way to be or to imply an endorsement by Thomas Nelson, nor does Thomas Nelson vouch for the existence, content, or services of these sites, phone numbers, companies, or products beyond the life of this book.

ISBN 978-1-4003-5255-5 (audiobook)

ISBN 978-1-4003-5254-8 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-4003-5253-1 (TP)

Library of Congress Control Number: 2025930884

Printed in the United States of America

\$PrintCode

To Jim Shaddix,
who taught me to love the Author and
fear the authority of Scripture.

Contents

Introduction: Falling in Love	ix
Chapter 1: Why Read the Bible?	1
Chapter 2: How NOT to Read the Bible	13
Chapter 3: Meditate and Memorize (Part 1)	25
Chapter 4: Meditate and Memorize (Part 2)	39
Chapter 5: Apply	51
Chapter 6: Pray	63
Chapter 7: Share	75
Conclusion: Love That's Worth Your Life	87
Appendix: Practical Tips for Reading Different Parts of the Bible	95
Acknowledgments	117

INTRODUCTION

Falling in Love

When you're writing a book, you're supposed to begin by establishing your credibility in the eyes of the reader. Knowing this, I'm about to take a risk by sharing something that may cause you to question my credibility to write anything at all. Here goes. . . .

I was pretty socially awkward in high school (in a way that some would say persists today!). I hadn't been on a date until a girl came along who was somehow attracted to my social awkwardness. The problem? She was a year older than me, which meant she would graduate soon and go on to college, leaving me alone in high school without the only girl who had ever taken an interest in me.

Once she had moved away, I decided to write her a letter (this was before texting and email were conceived). Years later, I was unfortunate enough to read it again, and I couldn't believe what I had written.

INTRODUCTION

Here's what it said (with a bit of commentary along the way as I look back at my teenage self):

Dear Heather,

Dude, I am so glad you called tonight.

[Dude?!? What kind of opening is that? When you write a letter like this to a girl, you pore over every word. I have no clue what compelled me to think that the first word out of the chute should be "Dude." Apparently, we had just talked, so I continued . . .]

I have wanted to call you Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and today, but I just figured you were too busy.

[You're not supposed to say that! You're supposed to say that *you* have been really busy. Apparently, I was not.]

When I heard your voice, it was so awesome that I can't explain how I felt. You sounded so awesome . . .

[Is this not the lamest thing you've ever read? It got worse—three pages of worse—but I'll go ahead and jump to the end . . .]

INTRODUCTION

Dude, I'm not just wasting ink when I say this.

["Dude" again? And I'm not "wasting ink"? Can you tell I had never had a girlfriend?]

My life isn't the same without you around, and I miss having you to talk with and spend time with. I miss you something fierce.

[Fierce. Really?]

Praying for you, dude.

[For those counting, that's three "dude" mentions in a total of eight lines.]

In Christ,

[Don't blame this on him.]

David

I wish this letter was a fabrication, but it's not. I had completely forgotten about writing it (some memories are meant to be forgotten), and the only reason I have it is because Heather—that girl, now my wife—saved it for many years and gave it to me on one of our wedding anniversaries. With tears, she thanked

INTRODUCTION

me for pursuing and loving her before and after we got married. These words that seem preposterous to everyone else in the world are priceless to her because they reflect the intimate relationship we share with each other.

The reason I'm starting this book by sharing that letter is because I want you to experience intimacy in your relationship with God through his words to you. God has made you to experience eternal life in a love relationship with him through hearing, believing, trusting, and obeying his Word. The problem, however, is that we all have sinned against God, which means we have turned aside from God's Word. Our sin has led to brokenness in our lives and in the world around us. But God loves us so much that he came to us in the person of his Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for our sin. He then rose from the dead in victory over sin so that anyone anywhere who turns from their sin and trusts in Jesus will be forgiven and fully restored to a right relationship with God forever. If you have never placed your faith in Jesus to begin this relationship with God, I invite you to do that today.

Your view of the Bible completely changes when you realize that it's a revelation of God's love for you. People who don't know God may look at the Bible

INTRODUCTION

and call it antiquated or even absurd. Sadly, even many people who call themselves Christians sometimes see God's Word as dull, hard to understand, or unworthy of the time it takes to read it. They view Bible reading as something they're *supposed* to do, not something they're *ecstatic* to do. But for those of us who follow Jesus, this is not how we should think about God's Word.

My aim in the pages ahead is to show you how the Bible is a priceless treasure that reveals God's pursuit of and love for you. Far more than a high school boy and girl might delight in each other's words, your soul is designed to delight in the Word of your Creator. I want to show you how to experience this delight—the indescribable, supernatural thrill of hearing God speak personally to you. Ultimately, I want to help you read, study, and understand the Bible in such a way that you fall deeper and deeper in love with its Author every single day.

We'll start by addressing some of the most common reasons so many people *don't* study God's Word, and we'll see why we need this Word more than anything else in this world. Then, after considering a few dangerous approaches to studying Scripture, we'll walk through a dependable, simple, four-step guide

INTRODUCTION

to studying God's Word that you can put into practice every day. (Note: I've also included an appendix with some principles for studying different parts of the Bible.) As you take these steps with the help of God's Spirit, your life will completely change while you experience the awe, wonder, beauty, majesty, and intimacy of a love relationship with God himself.

PRAYER

God, please help me to experience intimacy with you through your Word.

CHAPTER 1

Why Read the Bible?

Why do so many professing Christians never learn to study the Bible? Whenever I have taught on studying God's Word, countless people have come up to me and said something similar to, "I have been a Christian for [five, ten, fifteen, twenty, or more] years, and I've never learned to read, study, and understand the Bible." Then they share a variety of reasons for why that's true, usually ones like those listed below.

1. "I don't understand how the Bible applies to my life."

Many Christians would hesitate to say this out loud, but deep down, they think the Bible is archaic and irrelevant to life in the twenty-first century. In reality, I think we've all probably had

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

this feeling at one time or another while reading Leviticus or Ezekiel and trying to understand ancient laws or confusing visions. We wonder, *How does this relate to all the things I'm walking through today?* And we think this all the more in our age of technological advancements and artificial intelligence.

2. "I've tried, but I just don't know how."

Even so, many people have experienced conviction and made a commitment to begin studying God's Word. They sit down and open the Bible with great intentions, but they're not exactly sure where to start or what to do. They begin reading, but it doesn't click, and a lot of things just don't make sense to them. They want to see what others claim to see, but it doesn't happen like they hope. Eventually they close their Bible in frustration, concluding that they'll never "get it."

3. "Isn't studying the Bible the pastor's job?"

Meanwhile, a lot of Christians are content simply to learn the Bible from the "experts" whose job is to teach it. Without question, we all (including pastors) need Christian leaders who faithfully teach the Bible to us. But if we don't dig

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

in and study the Bible for ourselves, we will miss out on the deep joys of personal discovery as we pursue God in his Word. Studying the Bible is not something you do by proxy—through someone else—any more than you fall in love with someone by proxy. God wants all of his children, not just pastors, to personally experience a love relationship with him through his Word.

4. “I just don’t have time.”

Someone might work fifty, sixty, or even seventy hours a week. Or maybe they are home with a toddler, with very little alone time and even less mental energy to sit down and study anything.

These are common sentiments today, but they stand in stark contrast to the way Christians have approached God’s Word throughout church history. It was customary among some Christian groups and traditions for everyday believers—not just the “super-spiritual,” as one might call church leaders—to rise before dawn for extended time in God’s Word, and then to gather with family around God’s Word over breakfast. Then they set aside time around God’s Word in the middle of the day, either alone or with other Christians. Finally, they ended their day with time in God’s

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

Word around the dinner table before personally reflecting on God’s Word at bedtime.

We can hardly fathom this picture amid everything going on in our lives today. We can’t imagine from the moment we rise to the moment we go to bed—and in moments throughout the day—spending so much time looking at . . . well, wait a minute . . . we *can* imagine this, can’t we? Is this not what we do with our phones? The average person in my country spends five hours and twenty-four minutes every single day on a mobile device. From the moment we wake up to the moment we go to bed, and every moment in between, we check our phones an average of ninety-six times a day, or once every ten minutes.¹

Apparently, we’re not as strapped for time as we think. While it’s true that smartphones can be addictive, it’s also true that we usually make time for what’s most important in our lives. The question is: How important is God’s Word in our lives?

1. “How Much Time Does the Average Person Spend on Their Phone in 2024,” What’s the Big Data, April 22, 2024, <https://whatsthebigdata.com/smartphone-usage-statistics/>.

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

5. “I’m not sure the Bible is even true.”

There is nothing like the Bible in all the world. Picture sixty-six books written by more than forty authors in three languages over the course of fifteen hundred years, all telling one consistent story: the gospel of Jesus Christ. No passage in the entire Bible contradicts this single narrative. Not one. Ask yourself, *How is that even possible?* If you asked forty people you know to write a book that told one overarching story about who God is, who we are, how this world was made, what’s wrong with the world, and how this world can be made right, there’s no chance those forty people would agree or have a consistent story. And those people are all living at the same time and likely speaking the same language. But the Bible—which includes books written in different languages over the course of centuries and by people such as a farmer, shepherd, soldier, lawyer, priest, tax collector, and fisherman (to highlight just a few authors)—tells one stunningly consistent story.

This is not even to mention how reliable, accurate, and prophetic the Bible is. We base our knowledge of certain events in world history on

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

only a handful of historic documents. Yet we have more than five thousand complete or partial manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, with more discovered every year, and not one has ever resulted in a major revision of Scripture. Biblical accounts of history and geography have proven accurate time and time again. That accuracy extends not only to past events the Bible recorded but also to future events that it predicted. The Bible contains thousands of prophecies that have been fulfilled with uncanny exactness, including three hundred specific prophecies in the Old Testament written over hundreds of years that were fulfilled in detail in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Throughout history, critics of the Bible have come and gone, yet God's Word remains. Nevertheless, some Christians doubt its authority, inevitably leading them to disregard it daily. If we truly believed that the Bible was God's Word, then we wouldn't ignore it most days, would we?

6. "I just don't have a desire to study God's Word."

Many professing Christians simply don't have

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

a strong desire for God's Word. But we shouldn't be surprised by this.

I remember the first time I went to Heather's house for dinner after we finally started dating. When I was growing up, my dad didn't like seafood, so no one in my family ate it. I didn't even like the smell of it. But that night at dinner, seafood was served, and in order to make a good impression on Heather's family, even though I couldn't stand the taste, I ate every bit of it. Heather's family was convinced I loved it, so much so that whenever I ate with them, they would serve seafood. As a result, I now love seafood. Why? Because I had to learn to love it to get a wife!

In all seriousness, my taste buds changed. The more I ate seafood, the more I learned to enjoy it. I think one of the reasons we don't desire God's Word is because our taste buds are so accustomed to the things of this world. We fill our stomachs with so many empty calories (like five or more hours of messages from the world on our screens every day), and as a result, we're not hungry for God's Word. But what might happen if we took the time to feast on Scripture

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

instead of all the measly morsels the world offers us? Might our taste buds change?

Whenever someone tells me, “I just don’t desire God’s Word, and I don’t know how to change that,” I always give them three gentle words of advice: Read. God’s. Word. I’m confident that when someone who has the Spirit of God in them reads the Bible day in and day out *the right way* (see the next chapter for the wrong way), their spiritual taste buds will be totally transformed. They will discover how God’s Word is infinitely better than everything else in this world, and they will experience the truth from this passage:

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the Lord is sure,
making wise the simple;
the precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
the fear of the Lord is clean,

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

enduring forever;
the rules of the Lord are true,
and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
Moreover, by them is your servant
warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
(Psalm 19:7–11)

I invite you to decide today to let go of any excuse for not studying the Bible. Your Creator loves you so much that he has supernaturally inspired his Word to show you who he is and how you can experience abundant, eternal life in relationship with him. His Word is unlike anything else in the world: It is perfect, sure, right, pure, clean, true, righteous, more valuable than millions of dollars, and more satisfying than the finest of foods.

We live in a fallen world full of unfulfilled desires, unmet expectations, broken relationships, hollow pursuits, fleeting pleasures, pain, sorrow, anxiety, depression, despair, fear, and discouragement. Don't

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

you want to experience everlasting joy, life-changing awe, otherworldly wisdom, death-defying courage, never-ending peace, and indescribable love? Then study the Word of the One who guarantees you all of this reward and more when you hear and obey him. It's time to realize that your life here on earth—and for all of eternity—depends on listening and responding to God's Word.

PRAYER

God, help me not to settle for a supposedly "Christian" life that never learns to study your Word and misses out on your rewards every day.

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

INTERACTIVE QUESTIONS

What are you hoping to discover or change by going through this book?

Of the six common reasons offered for why Christians say they don't read or study the Bible, which one do you tend to think or say? (If more than one, which reason resonates with you the most?)

Why do you suppose you have come to believe that reason for not reading the Bible is true for you?

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

What is your initial response when you compare the time you spend in Bible engagement with the time you spend looking at a screen?

What's your response to the idea that your life on earth and for all of eternity depends on listening and responding to God's Word?
