

How to start reading the Bible – Hillarie Griggs

“All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.” 1 Timothy 3:16-17

The Bible is the written revelation of God to his people so it is an important source of our knowledge of him. It records the history of Israel, Jesus and the early church. Through reading it we learn about God, about his world, about ourselves, and about how they fit together. Even today the Holy Spirit works through scripture by challenging us. Through reading we not only gain knowledge but wisdom and we will mature in our faith. It begins to shape how we think and act as we look for the coming of God’s kingdom. This is why as Christians we are encouraged to read scripture. We don’t read out of a sense of pious duty in a hope that God will love us more. We read it so it causes us to love God more and to do his will. It also enables us, as we know it better, to share scripture and our faith more confidently with others.

The bible is not like a novel which must be read from cover to cover, probably only once. It is something we should read often and it is preferable to read it in small parts, slowly, rather than quickly trying to race to the end. It is a library full of many books of different genres. It contains poetry, wise sayings, history, letters, prophetic writings, and apocalyptic literature. It is also not to be read like a magazine where we flip to the section we like and ignore the rest. Nor is it just an instruction book. It is a revelation of God written at a particular time and in a particular context and we need to interpret it and apply it to our life today. It is all too easy to pick individual bible passages and use them in a way that can cause hurt to others without proper regard for their interpretation and looking at the bigger picture.

It doesn’t matter which version of the bible you read, so chose your favourite. There are three main types of bible:

1. **Word for word** translations that follow the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts most accurately. Examples of these include the **King James Version** and the **New Revised Standard Version**.
2. **Thought for Thought** versions convey scripture in its most understandable wording. Ancient colloquialisms are replaced with modern ones that can be easily understood by today’s reader. These include the **New International Version** and the **Good News Translation**.
3. **Paraphrased** versions are the least accurate to the original text. Authors are given a great amount of freedom in interpretation, so some passages may stray slightly from the original meaning. However, they are very easy to read in modern language. A popular paraphrased bible is **The Message**.

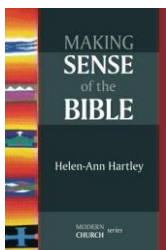


How to start reading the Bible – continued

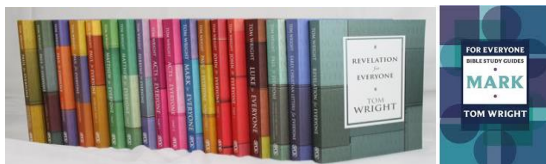
There is no real set place where you must start reading the bible as it is a library but it is probably easier to start with the New Testament, especially one of the gospels. You can find daily readings on the weekly notice sheet. Below are two ways to go deeper into the readings, one is more academic in the sense that we are looking for meaning and the other is more spiritual in that we are trying to allow God to speak to us through the passage into our lives today. It is helpful to pray that the Holy Spirit will help us to learn from, and inwardly digest scripture before we start reading.

Reading scripture for meaning: a traditional bible study

1. Before reading the passage find out what genre of book it is from. This will help in interpreting it. We would interpret poetry very differently from a historical document.
2. After reading it through, notice/observe (you may not be able to answer all of them for all passages):
 - Who is in the passage?
 - What is happening?
 - Where is it happening?
 - When is it happening? Its place in the bigger picture.
 - Why is this happening?
3. After Now you can start interpreting using these steps:
 - Look at the historical context. When, where and to whom was this passage written?
 - Look for cross references to other passages in the bible. Does it remind you of other stories or sayings of the bible? Does it fit with the overall message of the bible?
 - Make a conclusion. Using all this new understanding you should be able to make a preliminary statement of the passage's meaning.
4. A final and important step is to consult. Reading books called commentaries, written by Biblical scholars, help us to grow in our understanding. Some recommended books:



Making Sense of the Bible: Helen-Ann Hartley



For an accessible commentary with a good balance of biblical scholarship and application. For Everyone Bible Study guides by Tom Wright

How to start reading the Bible – continued

Reading scripture devotionally/prayerfully: based on the monastic tradition of Lectio Divina

1. You may want to read the passage through first to familiarise yourself with it.
2. Now read the passage slowly noticing any words or phrases that catch your attention.
3. Read the passage again slowly, trying to identify where and how it connects with your life today. This time you are asking God why these words are speaking to you. Try looking for a new or different light so you don't always drift back to our own thoughts, assumptions and prejudices.
4. You may like to read it again before thinking about what God may want you, in light of what you have heard, to change or do.
5. End the time in prayer asking God's help in helping you to change or do what you have heard.

Recommended book:

Reading with God *Lectio Divina* : Dom Foster OSB Downside Abbey

There are lots of other ways to read the bible and I would encourage you to find what suits you. Begin by setting aside some time over the week to read scripture and see what happens.

Hillarie Griggs

