

Benefice of Penn and Tylers Green

A Note From the Vicar

New Year's Resolutions and Bible Reading Plans

Firstly may Linnea, Alfred and I say Happy New Year! We hope that all are doing well and look forward to seeing you in Church.

Each year, many resolve that this year is going to be an improvement on the last. We shall be healthier, wealthier, and finally going to make good on as yet unrealised hopes and intentions. Whether you're going to take something up, like a gym membership, or put something down, such as taking part in 'dry January'; many of us find ourselves doing something as we leave Christmas behind us and step into the year ahead.

One of the things which Christians often consider is adopting a Bible Reading plan; a pattern of reading the Bible each day so that they can grow in their faith and understanding.

This is unequivocally a good thing.

However, much as many New Year gym goers tail off by the end of February, many find it tricky to find a Bible reading plan which 'sticks'.

WHY?

I don't believe that it's because the Bible is boring, but often more because Christians can fall into the trap of reading the Bible because they should read the Bible.

Reading can feel like an obligation which ought to be done and checked off as part of the days tasks. When reading large amounts it can feel like you 'need to get through it'. When reading bitesized chunks it can feel like it's taking forever to make progress. (Spending two whole weeks in the rules of Leviticus, for example, might feel like a slog compared to the narratives of Genesis or Judges).

If we read because we should, then we're unlikely to continue reading *ad infinitum*.

We should read because we want to...

- ... find an answer to a question
- ... see how others have managed in similar situations or dealt with similar emotions
- ... glimpse something of who God is
- ... be able to find key passages to memorise
- ... be able to say we have read the Whole Bible at least once
- ... be able to defend and share what we believe when people ask us questions about it
- ... grow in our faith
- ... have our hearts changed by the love of God

Each and any of these is enough, and you might have other motivations - many read the Bible in order to try and discredit it or disprove its claims (a good number of people have found faith whilst trying to do exactly that).

But having a 'why', a purpose to your reading will make it much more likely that a reading plan will work for you.

How should I read the Bible?

Understanding what it is that motivates you to read the Bible will also shape how and what you read. For example, if you're really interested in how Jesus treated women you probably wouldn't start with Genesis 1.1. Or if you want to explore what the scriptures hold concerning themes of grief you probably wouldn't start by reading Numbers. When selecting passages to memorise you're more likely to find something useful in the psalms or the Gospels than you are to focus on lists of genealogies.

Even if your motivation is to read the whole Bible you might not start with Genesis and work your way through in order. Perhaps you might start with Job, likely the first book of the Bible to be written. Perhaps you might want to start by reading two of the Gospels, say John and Mark, before reading the Old Testament and then reading the New Testament in something approaching the Chronological Order in which they were written.

This might look like:

James--A.D. 44-49	1 Timothy--A.D. 62-64
Galatians--A.D. 49-50	Titus--A.D. 62-64
Matthew--A.D. 50-60	1 Peter--A.D. 64-65
Mark--A.D. 50-60	2 Timothy--A.D. 66-67
1 Thessalonians--A.D. 51	2 Peter--A.D. 67-68
2 Thessalonians--A.D. 51-52	Hebrews--A.D. 67-69
1 Corinthians--A.D. 55	Jude--A.D. 68-70
2 Corinthians--A.D. 55-56	John--A.D. 80-90
Romans-- A.D. 56	1 John--A.D. 90-95
Luke--A.D. 60-61	2 John--A.D. 90-95
Ephesians--A.D. 60-62	3 John--A.D. 90-95
Philippians--A.D. 60-62	Revelation--A.D. 94-96
Philemon--A.D. 60-62	
Colossians--A.D. 60-62	
Acts--A.D. 62	

Why would you do things in this order?

Well the principle is that the Gospels are filled with references to the Old Testament. By reading two Gospels first and then reading the Old Testament you are more likely to notice elements in the Old Testament writing which are referenced in the Gospels, but then by the time you return to the Gospels you'll potentially notice more things you've picked up along the way.

The concept behind reading the New Testament in 'chronological order' is that you get more of a sense of how the different letters relate to each other and can see the development of certain theological ideas as the early Church grows in her understanding of who Jesus is and what his life and death and resurrection means for us.

I'm not advocating this method as being the 'correct' way to read the Bible. I do however advocate for people to feel able to read the Bible in a way that helps them to actually engage with it rather than feeling like they have to simply go from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible is a Library of Books with different topics and genres and so it's important to not

treat it as 'just a book'.

That said, there is an underlying consistent reality which grounds all of the books of the Bible and that's the living God to whom the scriptures testify; there is a sense of revelation which permeates the entire collection, a revelation which occurs not strictly in each word as printed on the page but by the presence of the Holy Spirit who takes these human words which have been written by faithful believers and enables them to be sanctified and presented to us afresh in such a way as to open our hearts and minds to the reality of God.

The presence of God is the other reason why we should be mindful of our reading the Bible. Every time we sit down with our Bibles we take the risk that God might speak to us powerfully in such a way that who we are as ourselves can be fundamentally transformed.

If that's a possibility which excites you then good - let that be a motivation to read!

Different Plans

The following are examples, do pray about them and see which you would like to do or have a look online and see if you can find something else which might work for you.

The best plan for reading the Bible is the one which helps you to actually spend time reading the Bible.

Just Read

This is how I first read the Bible in a year. I heard a preacher say: **If you read at least three chapters a day and at least five on Sundays, you'll read the whole Bible in a year.**

There's 1189 chapters in the Bible.

52 Sundays times 5 chapters = 260.

1189 - 260 = 929 chapters.

365 days - Sundays is 313 days.

929 chapters over 313 days is 2.968 chapters a day. (So basically 3 chapters).




However, the key is 'at least'. Sometimes stopping at the end of the third or fifth chapter leaves you in an awkward place in a story or section and you'll want to keep reading. In which case keep reading until you want to stop, and feel guilt free when you do stop. By doing this it will take less than a year to read the Bible. I was done mid-September in 2013 when I did this.

The Bible in a Year

There are numerous 'Bible in a Year' plans but Bible Study Tools website offers a classic pattern where you'll read one passage from the Old and New Testament each day.¹

If you would like a plan which has some space in it, then Bible Study Tools also offers a 'Stay on Track' plan which provides readings only for weekdays, leaving the weekends free to catch up or get ahead.²

Here are some apps which have reading plan features. There are others but I believe the following are good (and should be available for both Android and iOS.)

App	Logo
Faithlife Study Bible	
Life Bible	
YouVersion	

M'Cheyne Reading Plan

This is perhaps one of the more well known plans out there. It presents four readings a day but with readings from both the Old Testament and the Gospels alongside each other. Following this system you'll read the whole of the Old Testament once and read the New Testament and Psalms twice.³

There's a well known variation of this by Don Carson split across two books where you read the New Testament and Psalms once in a year, and the Old Testament over two years, and he provides a reflection each day as well: *For the Love of God - Volumes 1&2 by Don Carson*.

¹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/old-testament-and-new-testament.html>

² <https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-reading-plan/stay-on-track.html>

³ <https://www.mcheyne.info/calendar.pdf>

Through the Bible, Through the Year

A well known book by John Stott which I was given by my grandparents. One of the great strengths with this is that it's not dated. You can either start it when you start it and work your way through, or you can work out which week matches the liturgical calendar without worrying whether it's the 1st of January or the 15th of April etc.

Daily Bread

Scripture Union have for a long time offered daily Bible study notes and reflections called Daily Bread. You can find digital versions⁴ or you can subscribe for the booklets to be delivered.⁵ These notes are a fantastic resource for cultivating a sustainable habit of daily reading.

AudioBibles

I love Audio-Bibles, they offer a chance for people to reflect and engage with Scripture in a way that reminds us that the Bible is not something we read privately but is a message which is spoken to us. Indeed in the grand scheme of history the written Bible in our own language is a relatively recent phenomena; for generations the Bible was read aloud to the majority of people and AudioBibles keep that tradition and experience going.

Dwell

My personal favourite is Dwell, though it is \$40 a year or \$8 a month.

It has 14 different translations including the ESV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, and some translations have a number of different voices available. For example the ESV has a female British voice (described as soft and relaxed), a male East African English voice (reassuring and kind), and two male american voices; one characterised as 'dramatic and storyteller' and the other 'casual and calm'.

There is also the option to read along whilst listening and it has a lot of different kinds of plans such as: Bible in a Year, Anglican Lectionary Readings for each day, they had a '12 Days of Christmas' plan, five minute daily from different books of the Bible. They also have a range of reflections and devotions all available within the app.

⁴ <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/daily-bread-digital>

⁵ <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/resource/daily-bread-subscription>

David Suchet Reads the NIV⁶

The well known Actor has done a fantastic job reading the NIV and the entire series of recordings are freely available on YouTube.

Christopher Glyn Reads the KJV⁷

Christopher Glyn is one of a number who have read the KJV Bible and posted it on Youtube but his is one of the better efforts.

Podcasts

The Bible in a Year (with Fr Mike Schmitz)

This podcast suggestion is done by a Catholic priest called Fr Mike Schmitz. However his approach is engaging and I've had a number of friends recommend it to me, along with its companion podcast: The Catechism in a Year. Naturally it's from a Catholic perspective, but it will help you to reflect on the scriptures.

These daily episodes are typically between 20 to 30 minutes long.

BibleInAYear.fireside.fm

The Bible in a Year with Jack Graham

Pastor Jack Graham is a baptist preacher from the United States who also does a similar thing. Episodes tend to be between 15-25 minutes long.

You can subscribe to these wherever you get your podcasts.

Church of England

The Church of England doesn't have a daily Bible podcast but the Daily Prayer App can let you listen to morning or evening prayer, including the Bible Readings, each day.

Find out more about the Church of England Daily Prayer App at <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/apps/daily-prayer>

⁶ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jx_65IT1pUc

⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtwDzmlzd9g>

A Challenge

The last plan I'm going to highlight is one that you're unlikely to find elsewhere. An Audio-Bibles' total running time tends to land at around 90-91 hours. In a month that's three hours a day. For some people their reading speed will be about the same as listening to it, for others it may be faster or slower.

Whilst it is good to linger over smaller chunks and focus in on the details, sometimes you might want to do a bigger sweep and take in the larger context of passages. So if you want to dive in and do a bigger challenge why not try the Bible in a Month?

The Bible reference is the day's starting point, and averages about 38 chapters a day.

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|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Genesis 1 | 17. Psalm 130 |
| 2. Genesis 40 | 18. Proverbs 19 |
| 3. Exodus 32 | 19. Isaiah 7 |
| 4. Numbers 4 | 20. Isaiah 43 |
| 5. Deuteronomy 7 | 21. Jeremiah 17 |
| 6. Joshua 10 | 22. Ezekiel 1 |
| 7. 1 Samuel 1 | 23. Ezekiel 40 |
| 8. 2 Samuel 13 | 24. Amos 1 |
| 9. 2 Kings 4 | 25. Zechariah 11 |
| 10. 1 Chronicles 4 | 26. Mark 7 |
| 11. 2 Chronicles 14 | 27. John 7 |
| 12. Nehemiah 7 | 28. Acts 23 |
| 13. Job 25 | 29. 2 Corinthians 7 |
| 14. Psalm 22 | 30. 1 Timothy 1 |
| 15. Psalm 58 | 31. 2 Peter 1 |
| 16. Psalm 94 | |

There are no right or wrong reading plans, and I encourage people considering embarking on one this New Year to reflect first of all on what it is that you want to get out of it; that will help you as you set about getting stuck in.

As I mentioned above, the best plan is the pattern which you'll commit to and see through;
and by so doing, may we all grow in our faith and walk with God.

With Every Blessing,



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