

Article 2: Reading Right, Reading Wrong

Guidelines for Getting the Most from Your Time in God's Word

The following guidelines are provided to help you evaluate your own approach to reading, meditating in, and studying the Word of God. Read each one carefully. Then reflect on your own practice. **Using a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is the best rating you could give, evaluate yourself at each point.** Be prepared how you intend to improve your reading and study of God's Word.

Read Regularly

Certainly, we are not going to benefit from the Word of God if we do not spend regular time reading and meditating in it. The goal here would be to have daily time set apart for the Word of God, and to make that time, daily. Regular reading of God's Word must become as important to us as our daily meals (Job 23.12). Set up a schedule and work at it until regular, daily reading is the foundation of your spiritual disciplines and your walk with the Lord.

Read It All

Not all Scripture is alike interesting or clear, to paraphrase *The Westminster Confession of Faith*. However, all Scripture is inspired by God, and all Scripture is profitable to equip us for every good work. Therefore, our regimen of reading, meditating, and studying the Word of God must include *all* the counsel of God, all of Scripture. Guard against merely settling into favorite or familiar books or sections of the Word. Discipline yourself to read it all, read it regularly, and read with a view to gaining the overall perspective.

Read for Glory

We are reading wrong if we read the Scriptures, in the first instance, to "get something" out of them. We must learn to read the Word as a way of seeking the Lord in His glory. He is prepared to make His glory known to us, and it is this encounter with God in His glory which alone has power to transform us increasingly into the image of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18). Along the way, of course, we will gain many wonderful insights into God's truth, learn important doctrines, find precious truths to comfort and strengthen our souls, and gain a clearer overall perspective on the divine economy. But if we seek these first, before seeking God in His glory, all gains we may achieve will be merely temporary.

Read for the Larger Story

The Bible is the result of one divine Author, Who breathed His Word into and through His servants, to tell the one grand story of redemption that brings blessings to men and great glory to God. Wherever we are reading in God's Word we must keep this overarching narrative in mind. All Scripture works to unfold this story and holds together on it as the central thread of divine revelation. Scripture's purpose is to reveal *God* and to show us His heart and initiate us into His plan. Wherever you are reading in the Word of God, therefore, seek to discern the ways that God intends to bring glory to Himself through a people He has redeemed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read for the Present

Sometimes people who read the Bible fall into the mistake of thinking that God operated during the period in which Scripture was being written in a manner different than He does today. There is some truth to this. However, God is still sovereign over all human affairs; miracles still do happen; the Kingdom of God is advancing on earth as it is in heaven; and the promises and commandments of God continue to be valid now, just as they were in the days of David, Paul, and John. We need to read Scripture as though it were written *in* our time and *for* our time, and guard against the tendency to think, "That was then, this is now." (Heb. 13.8)

Read with the Right Spirit

God intends for us to enjoy reading and studying His Word (Jer. 15.16). If we will ask Him to give us delight in reading and studying Scripture, this will keep our time in the Word from becoming a duty, something we feel as if we *should* do, rather than something we dearly *want* to do. Our time in the Word can be a delight if we will look to the Lord, allow the Spirit to search and teach us, and wait patiently for the Lord to draw us into His glory, rather than hurry through our reading, just to get it done.

Read It In

Both the Psalmist (Ps. 119.9-11) and Paul (Colossians 3.16) hold out the idea of the Word of God dwelling within us, becoming a living reality within the various components of our soul. The soul consists of mind, heart, and conscience. Thus, as we read, we should strive to *understand* the Scriptures, to *nurture the affections* Scripture commends, and to *value* the Word as the guide of our wills. Memorizing Scripture, praying Scripture back to God, and determining specific courses of action based on our reading are just a few ways of reading the Word into our souls, that it may take root deeply within us.

Read It Together

Because the Bible is divided into two primary sections – Old Testament and New Testament – readers can sometimes get the impression that these are two separate kinds of revelation, with different – and not always harmonious – meanings. In reality, one God has given His Word, one overarching narrative directs all its various parts, one Lord Jesus Christ is the focal point of it all, and the sanctification of God’s people for lives of good works is its temporal aim. Thus, we should in our reading always seek ways of bringing together, rather than separating or opposing, the Old Testament with the New, Law with grace, promises with commandments, and mysteries with those parts that are abundantly plain.

Read to Learn

Scripture, we know, is profitable for doctrine (2 Tim. 3:15-17). Unhappily, it’s all too easy to read Scripture only for the sake of “fleshing out” our doctrinal views. This we should do; however, we should also keep in mind why doctrine matters. Sound doctrine matters because it is the key to sound learning and real discipleship (1 Tim. 1.1-5). We must never fall into the practice of reading only, or even primarily, to gain doctrinal understanding. Sound doctrine must always be for the nurture of the entire soul and the transformation of the life.

Read to Run

Scripture is to be shared (Hab. 2.2). It tells the Good News of the King and His Kingdom. Thus, we should read Scripture with the idea that we will share what we learn with others. Read in order to learn, but learn in order to share. The more we share Scripture, the more we will grow in our persuasion of its power to make all things new in our lives.

Overall Summary

In which of the approaches to reading and studying God’s Word do you most need to improve?