

**HOW
DO I
READ
THE
BIBLE?**

Help!

A JESUS-CENTERED GUIDE



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HELP! HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE?

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“

So the Word
became human and
made his home among us.
He was full of unfailing love
and faithfulness. And we have
seen his glory, the glory
of the Father's one
and only Son.

”

John 1:14



INTRODUCTION

It's never been easier to get your hands on a Bible. They're handed out on street corners, given as graduation gifts, and tucked into drawers in hotel rooms. In America, almost 90 percent of households have one or more Bibles sitting on bookshelves or bedside tables.

And that's generally where they stay: unopened and unread.

Because—let's be honest—while *getting* a Bible is easy, actually *reading* it? Not so much.

For starters, the Bible is a thick brick of a book, usually running more than a thousand pages. It crisscrosses cultures and centuries, ricochets between nomadic tribes, royal courts, and the occasional harem.

Plus, it's a mishmash of poetry, prophecy, personal letters, songs, statutes, history, and hair-raising apocalyptic warnings. There are about a zillion names you can't pronounce and places Google Maps has never heard of.

It's tough sorting out how all the parts and pieces fit together. Where to start. What passages mean. Even what translation to use.

No wonder wading into the Bible can be overwhelming.

Until now.

Because reading the Bible is about to get a *lot* easier with this little book.

We'll help you get started in the Bible and answer some of the Big Questions about the Bible. We'll even keep things interesting by suggesting a few Bible-related experiments to try.

Relax. The experiments are just that: *experiments*.

If they work, you'll experience the Bible in new, dynamic ways. You'll be less baffled and more at home in the Bible.

And even better: You'll not only read the book, but you'll also meet its Author.

If an experiment doesn't work, just move on to the next one—you'll eventually find something that helps you better connect with the Bible.

We promise.

But *you* make a promise to *us*, too: Promise to give these experiments a try.

Promise?

Good. Then let's get started.

Whether you're a first-time Bible reader or an experienced, through-the-Bible-in-a-year veteran, we're glad you're here.

Let's pull out a Bible and—believe it or not—have some fun!



“

I tell
you the truth,
until heaven and
earth disappear,
not even the smallest
detail of God's law
will disappear until
its purpose is
achieved.

”

Matthew 5:18



HELP! HOW DO I READ THE BIBLE... AND WHY BOTHER AT ALL?

Why bother reading the Bible when there are so many quicker ways to find out what's in it?

Plenty of smart people who study the Bible are lined up to give you the inside scoop. So why not just fire up their podcasts, sit through their sermons, or read their blogs and call it good? Why go to the trouble of reading the Bible yourself?

Because if you don't, you're missing the entire point.

God didn't give you the Bible so you could master the material in it. When you stand in front of God in heaven, you won't be there because you aced a 10-question quiz about the details in his book.

What will matter most then—and matters most now—is your friendship with God.

And *that's* the purpose of the Bible—to help you discover the heart of God, to become familiar with the pulse of his love. As you see what and who God values, as you hear his words speaking through the Bible, you get an ever-better sense of who he is.

And that seldom happens when you rely on others to filter God's voice and explain him to you.

Is there value in listening to what the experts say about the Bible? Sure—and we'll get into that later. But don't settle for mining the Bible for *information* when you could be experiencing *transformation*.

The single most important decision you can make about reading the Bible is to read it—not to study it—to draw closer to God.

It's all about relationship.

And that relationship is best seen in the person of Jesus.

He's what God's love looks like when it shows up wearing skin.

He's at the very center of not just God's heart, but the Bible itself. If you're meeting Jesus as you read the Bible, you're on solid ground—even if you're not an expert.

For some reason, people love studying the Bible, poking into every nook and cranny, digging for one more detail. While that's not necessarily a bad thing,

it can be a distraction. Knowing details about the Bible doesn't amount to much if you miss the bigger picture.

Consider what might be the most spectacular Bible study ever—one that happened on a dusty road between Jerusalem and the town of Emmaus.

Two men are walking, Jerusalem slowly disappearing behind them as they make their way home.

They're tired and discouraged, and their hunched shoulders show it. So does their conversation, which is all about Jesus.

Jesus, the rabbi they'd heard speak and decided to follow.

Jesus, who had healed lepers, fed thousands with just a handful of fish and crusts of bread, and raised the dead.

They'd believed in Jesus, and then the unthinkable happened.

An arrest. A cross. A tomb.

And now they're walking home, trailing a cloud of dust and disappointment behind them.

They hardly notice when another man falls in step beside them. A stranger who listens for a few moments and then asks them to explain what's happened. Who is this Jesus they keep talking about?

They tell the stranger everything—about what Jesus has done and how their hopes died with him, how their dreams for a new kingdom lay buried with the rabbi.

The stranger hears them and then does something amazing: He connects the dots between Scriptures both men *know* but have never fully *understood*. He walks them through familiar passages, helping them see how nothing that's happened is a mistake, how it's all been planned for centuries. And how this Jesus they loved and lost is at the center of it all.

They feel as if they've been blind. They know all those passages from the Law and Prophets—every Jewish boy knows them by heart. But they've never really understood them until this moment.

So of course they invite the stranger to dinner. Not just because it's polite but because there's something about him. Something...well, they can't quite say.

Until he prays and cracks open a loaf of bread.

And *then* they know.

And Jesus disappears.

These two men who dragged their feet the seven miles from Jerusalem to Emmaus, staggering under the weight of fear and disappointment, almost fly as they dash back to Jerusalem to share the news.

They've seen Jesus! He's alive! And his words, even before they fully understood who he was, burn in their hearts. They at last could see past the details to the big picture. They had the full story.

And it came not because they pried one more fact out of Scripture, but because of a relationship. Jesus breathed fresh life into passages the men already knew as he revealed himself through those familiar words. If you want to read the story yourself, check out Luke 24:13-53.

To be sure, the Bible isn't the *only* way Jesus may make himself known to you. He has plenty of tricks up his sleeve, and there's no putting him in a box.

But the Bible is one way, and that's why it's a poor decision to outsource spending time in the Bible to others. You give up the opportunity for Jesus to engage you there—and that's a missed opportunity indeed.

So why bother to read the Bible?

Because you're looking for more than data points—you're looking to meet a friend there.

The Bible is the living, breathing Word of God, still every bit as powerful as when Jesus spoke to the men on that road to Emmaus. And equally able to burn in your heart the way Jesus' words burned in theirs.

As you pursue the heart of God and the person of Jesus, expect the Bible to take on new meaning. To speak to you as it's not spoken before.

It's worth listening because the voice you hear is none other than the voice of God.

By the way, turn to page 155 if you'd like to see how well you'd do on that quiz God won't be giving you. We scored 4 out of 10—and we wrote the quiz.

Maybe you can do better.

PAUSE TO PONDER

People come to the Bible for lots of reasons.

Some because they're at a crossroads and want guidance. Should they take the new job offer? sign that contract? say yes to the marriage proposal?

Others come looking for rules to live by—for the security of knowing the right thing to do in every situation.

And then there are those who just don't want to feel guilty. They flip through a Bible now and then because that's what good Christians do, right?

What about you? Why are you coming to the Bible?

As clearly as you can, and in just a few lines, explain your motivation:

The Bible has the potential to deepen and energize our relationship with Jesus, not just our knowledge of him. How has reading the Bible in the past helped or hurt your relationship with Jesus?

EXPERIMENT 1: Getting Ready

For this experiment you'll need a sticky note or another easy-to-use bookmark. Rustle one up now, please.

We can wait...

You back?

Now turn to the Table of Contents in your Bible and mark the page so it's easy to find in the future.

We'll be asking you to turn to specific passages in your Bible, and it will be a lot easier if you use the Table of Contents to find them. Perhaps you have friends who can instantly find any Bible passage because they've memorized the order of the books, but if that's not you, it's not a problem.

Remember: The goal isn't to master the *mechanics* of the Bible. The goal is to experience the *message* of the Bible. To pursue the heart of God and let him more fully transform you into the person he's created you to be.

While the Table of Contents isn't technically an inspired portion of the Bible, we're lobbying for it to get an upgrade. Anything that helpful is definitely a gift from God.

Go from
reading
the Bible
because you
should...

...to
reading it
because you
want to.

Help! How Do I Read the Bible? strips away complicated study lessons and theological lingo common in Bible-reading guides and reveals a simpler truth: Reading the Bible is about discovering God's heart. When you know *why* you're reading and *who* you're reading about, the *how* falls naturally into place.

You'll experience...

- A guilt-free approach to reading the Bible that builds momentum over time.
- Practical Bible-reading tips shared by real people.
- Helpful guidance for selecting easy-to-use study tools.
- Principles for Bible reading that steer you away from confusion and misinterpretation.

Help! How Do I Read the Bible? is part of the **Jesus-Centered Guide** series for people wanting to grow in their relationship with Jesus, including helpful instruction on prayer, knowing God's will, and reading the Bible. Collect and share the whole set.

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