



Christ Church Bible Reading Initiative

Introduction

As we head into a New Year together it's a great opportunity to take a moment to reflect on a personal question: *What priority will I give to daily Bible Reading (or listening) for the sake of my own spiritual growth in 2024?*

It's an important question. Why? because it's so easy to forget even as Christians that (spiritually speaking) the word of God is our *very life*. After all, how did we become Christians in the first place? The apostle Peter writes, "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the *living* and enduring word of God" (1 Peter 1:23, emphasis mine). Furthermore, Bible reading is a means of grace that God uses to grow us spiritually more like Christ. How did Jesus answer the devil when he was being tempted in the wilderness to turn stones into bread for food? He said, "It is written: 'Man shall not *live* on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt 4:4). Elsewhere, the word of God is described as "...*alive* and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword..." (Heb 4:12), the Psalmist writes, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Ps 119:105) and Paul urges the Christians in Philippi to, "hold firmly to the word of *life*" (Philip. 2:16a). So, will we do just that ourselves in 2024?

How are we going?

If spiritually speaking the word of God is our *very life* (and it is!)—how are we going as a Church community at prioritizing God's word in our daily lives like we do for other basic necessities? According to our most recent parish NCLS report (National Church Life Survey, 2022 which had 363 forms received)—46% of us self-reported that we "spend time in prayer, Bible reading, meditation every day or most days." This is somewhat encouraging! It means that almost half of us *are* committed to prayer and daily Bible Reading in our lives. However, it also means that slightly more than 1 in 2 of us have a diet of God's word in our lives which is better described as: "a few times a week" (32%), "once a week" (7%), "occasionally" (10%), or "hardly ever / never" (5%).

Three Implications:

In light of the above, as we start a New Year can I encourage and challenge all of us in three ways related to our daily Bible Reading (or listening):

1. **Firstly, Remember the *Why!*** The word of God is our *very life!* So, let's continue to give ourselves to reading (or listening) to God's word *daily* in 2024! God himself has given us his precious word as a gift so that we might be transformed by the renewal of our mind (Rom 12:1-2).
2. **Secondly, Have a *Plan!*** Most of us know that Bible Reading is important for our spiritual growth, but sometimes we can have a gap between good intentions and execution. We need a plan! Remember one of the wisdom principles from Proverbs 6:6-8, "⁶Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! ⁷It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, ⁸yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" Well, the same is true when it comes to our spiritual habits too. It's wise to plan ahead and diligence here pays dividends over time (Gal 6:8).
3. **Thirdly, Let's Help Each Other!** One of the great blessings of belonging to a Church family is that God gives us other brothers and sisters in Christ to help us to grow. Why not pair up with someone else in following a plan together? Why not make it a normal question to ask someone in Growth Group or on a Sunday what they're reading in the Bible at the moment? Who might you invite to pray for you or permission to ask how you're going at this at various points throughout the year? We need each other.

Getting Practical:

There will be some among us who are very committed to prioritizing daily Bible Reading and who also already have a plan that works for them. If that's you, keep going! We're not asking you to change your Bible Reading plan if it's working well already. It would be great for you to consider how you might encourage another brother or sister around you who perhaps finds this spiritual discipline more difficult.

For others among us though, a New Year might be a great opportunity to consider being more intentional or ambitious in your Bible Reading (or listening) or even to start (or re-start) a new daily habit. To help you with this, we've prepared three simple resource options (print & digital):

Option 1 – For the 'Ambitious' (M'Cheyne - Whole Bible+ 1 or 2yr Version)

This first Bible Reading plan is aimed at people who want to be challenged to be more ambitious in diligent and serious Bible Reading. It's a plan written & named after Robert Murray M'Cheyne who was a minister in the Church of Scotland in the 19th Century. It has been popularized in recent decades through Don Carson's devotional book "For the Love of God: Vol 1 & 2" & also The Gospel Coalition website. It prioritizes wide coverage of the Bible and gets you reading from different parts of the Bible at the same time. For example, on Jan 1 you will read: Gen 1, Matt 1, Ezra 1 and Acts 1. If you follow this plan across the year you'll cover all of the Old Testament once & all of the Psalms & New Testament twice. The plan can also be easily adapted down from four readings to two readings a day. If you're keen for a challenge we've printed A3 versions of this plan for you to take home. There's also a digital PDF available on Elvanto, or if you prefer to track your Bible Reading on an iPhone use the free iOS app 'ReadingPlan' (Settings→Reading Plan→ M'Cheyne).

Option 2 – For the 'Flexi' (Three Bookmarks & a Bible: OT / Pss. / NT)

This second Bible Reading plan is aimed at people who find it helpful to have more flexibility in their approach to daily Bible Reading. It appreciates a reality that God hasn't wired everyone the same. Not everyone loves to tick a box on a structured plan and sometimes the season of life we're in can make it harder to have a predictable time-slot for Bible Reading (e.g. if you have small children or are a shift-worker). This strategy involves putting three bookmarks in your Bible (one in the OT, one in the Psalms/Proverbs and one in the NT) and remaining committed to advancing one (or more) of these bookmarks each day at a pace that suits you. If this sounds more like you – we recommend you read the print or online article, "Three Bookmarks and a Bible" by Brian Rosner (The Gospel Coalition Australia, 12/01/2021) to learn more about this approach. We have also designed and printed some bookmarks for you to take home and use.

Option 3 – For the 'More In Sync' (Christ Church Preaching & Teaching)

This third Bible Reading plan is aimed at people who want a relatively easy and quite achievable approach to daily Bible Reading which also ties in somewhat closely to our preaching and teaching calendar at Christ Church in 2024. For example, in January we'll be covering Acts 21-28 and so the plan takes you through the whole book of Acts one chapter at a time. In Term 1, we will be studying the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7 and so the plan takes a slow approach to reading through Matthew's gospel leading up to the events of Easter). The plan generally includes one or two readings a day (if two, usually with a shorter 2nd reading). Overall, it covers a large portion of the NT and a selection of OT readings too. If this approach sounds appealing to you we've printed A3 versions of this plan for you to take home. There's also a digital PDF available up on Elvanto or if you prefer to track your Bible Reading on an iPhone- use the free iOS app 'ReadingPlan'. (To set-up go to: Settings→Reading Plan→View Available Plans→Search: 'CCG').

Yours in Christ, Seb Lane

(Maturity Minister)