

**FAITH, LIFE & WORK**

# Three Bookmarks and a Bible

12/01/2021 | **BRIAN ROSNER**

I love New Year's resolutions. A fresh start. The opportunity to establish new and healthier habits. The satisfaction of making progress. My goals have ranged from doing better as a husband, father and friend, to improved management of sleep, money, exercise, and even personal hygiene! Most years I also resolve to improve my daily Bible reading.

**“Most years I also resolve to improve my daily Bible reading.”**

Not everyone agrees. My brother-in-law likes to tell me that new year's resolutions are to-do lists for the first week in January. Sadly, when it comes to Bible reading plans, in my case he's not far wrong.

My favourite Bible reading plans are the Bible-in-one-year versions. So, with the best of intentions I start out at a steady pace and feel the satisfaction and benefits of making progress. The summer months kicking off the New Year with long holidays makes finding the time relatively easy. But, as the year progresses, I inevitably seem to stutter and stumble.

When reading the Bible cover-to-cover—say four chapters a day—I move confidently through the gripping and sometimes colourful narratives of Genesis and the first half of Exodus. I then struggle through the construction of the tabernacle in the second half of Exodus. However, the detailed sacrifices and priesthood legislations of Leviticus have been known to derail me.

**“The detailed sacrifices and priesthood legislations of Leviticus have been known to derail me.”**

Don't get me wrong, I don't give up completely reading the Bible in those years, but I fail in terms of sticking to the Bible reading plan. (Just for the record, I think reading Exodus and Leviticus are worth the effort, both underscoring the holiness of God and his people and moving along the story of salvation history in critical ways.)

Not everyone has my experience with Bible reading plans. There are many good ones, and for many people using one establishes a profitable pattern of daily Bible reading.

But in my experience, there are three potential problems with Bible reading plans that allocate passages across the year in 365 chunks of the same length.

First, the Bible's rich and varied genres make one pace of reading ill-advised. Narratives are best tackled with fast reading—covering large sections—whereas the Bible's poetry and proverbs require slow and patient pondering. Some plans try to deal with this by spreading Psalms and Proverbs across the year, which can help. Certainly, the same speed for reading all parts of the Bible is not ideal for optimal reading.

Second, the ups and downs of daily life make reading the same amount every day unrealistic. Every year of life brings its own challenges. My year is never even in terms of busyness or health. And different life stages bring different opportunities for Bible reading—ask a parent of young children or someone in retirement how much discretionary time is available to them. Life brings many different seasons for all of us. There are times when I have plenty of time for reading and others when it has to be squeezed in. You can catch up, of course, but such reading (for me, at least) doesn't bring the same benefits as the unhurried sort.

Third, prescriptive Bible reading plans don't work for everyone. Some people with certain personalities find them helpful. Yet, diligence and determination are not equally distributed among human beings. Individual differences mean that different people have different styles when it comes to what works for them in terms of regular Bible reading.

But, having noted my misgivings with many Bible reading plans, I remain convinced that daily Bible reading is one of the most effective means of grace in the Christian life: “man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Regular Bible reading keeps me focused on what's important in life; reminds me of who I am in Christ; helps me deal with my fears and anxieties, and gives me plenty of reasons to love, trust and obey God.

So how can we encourage it and make daily Bible reading a sustainable habit for those of us who struggle?

With multiple decades of mixed success in daily Bible reading, I'd like to recommend a simple approach that works for me: the three-bookmark method. I put one bookmark in the New Testament, one in the Psalms, and one elsewhere in the Old Testament. When I finish reading a book I mark it off in the contents of my Bible. I still use a hard copy for this kind of reading, but it works for reading on a device too using virtual bookmarks.

**“Different people have different styles when it comes to what works for them in terms of regular Bible reading.”**

## **“I put one bookmark in the New Testament, one in the Psalms, and one elsewhere in the Old Testament.”**

Each day as I read, I advance one, two or three of the bookmarks, depending on what I'm reading and where I'm at in life that day. I try to include a Psalm each day, as an encouragement to pray. As one Church Father put it, the Bible speaks to us, the Psalms speak for us.

Some days, I read one chapter or less, while on other days I might devour whole books. It's a more natural way of reading in my view. After all, who reads a novel in designated portions?! I find some parts of the Bible are unputdownable. For some books of the Bible, I need some help for profitable reading. I benefit from some background and context for

Jeremiah and Ezekiel, for instance, before I start reading, or some study Bible notes or commentary to keep me going. The three-bookmark method allows time and space for such special needs.

The method also leaves room for reading certain books of the Bible at particular times. Reading the book that is being preached weekly at church is a good idea and it doesn't interrupt my reading plan. A flexible approach allows for such things as reading a Gospel at Easter or Christmas or reading a long narrative like Kings or Chronicles on holidays.

Finally, missing some days does not discourage me to the point of giving up. Getting back to my daily reading habit is easier when it doesn't require the effort of catching up or the discouragement of skipping some portions.

Most Christians recognise the need to read the Bible more regularly. If, like me, you are patchy in your Bible reading without some kind of system, I suggest giving the three-bookmark method a try. It is the most natural way of reading the range of the Bible's literature, at your own pace, and its flexibility might just be the thing that keeps you going.

**“I find some parts of the Bible are unputdownable. For some books of the Bible, I need some help.”**

**Brian Rosner** is principal of [Ridley College](#). Brian is passionate about theological education that is both rigorously academic and profoundly practical. He is also enthusiastic about promoting the gospel in the public sphere and is a fellow of [The Centre for Public Christianity](#). He has a PhD from Cambridge University and previously taught at Aberdeen University and Moore College. He is the author and editor of over a dozen books, including *Paul and the Law*, the *Pillar* commentary on *1 Corinthians*, *Beyond Greed*, *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* and *Known by God*. Brian is married to Natalie and has four children.