

THE BIBLE DIET

Simple tools to help you understand what you read in the Bible

According to the National Church Life Survey, only 31% of Christians read the Bible more than once a week.

A further 5% read it weekly, 27% only occasionally, 20% hardly ever, and 17% never read the Bible at all.

That means that 64% of church-going Christians read the Bible less than once a week!

How few, then, are 'feeding on it' daily?

But why should we read the Bible? Let's see what the Bible says about itself.

Look up these texts and write down the things that strike you as useful:

- 2 Timothy 3:15-17
- Hebrews 4:12
- Matthew 4:4
- Deuteronomy 8:3

Down through the ages, God's people have relied on the wisdom of God's Word to teach, encourage, support, settle disputes, and bring them closer to God. They memorized huge



amounts of Scripture by heart so they could carry it with them always.

Read about some of God's people:

Ezra 7:10-11

Do a little research to find out more about Ezra. Did he know God's Word?

Luke 24:25-27

Find another text that demonstrates how well Jesus knew the Scriptures.

Romans 9:24-29

What do we know about Paul? Did he know the Scriptures well?

Read Luke 4:9-11

In this passage, who is demonstrating their knowledge of God's Word?

Can you think of any reasons why it may be helpful for Christians to know the Scriptures better?

Here's what you'll need

- A note pad
- A pen
- A Bible. Perhaps even a second Bible in a different version. This sometimes helps your understanding.
- A concordance may be helpful.
- Any extra books that give background information about culture, time and place.

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TOO BUSY FOR THE BIBLE

One of the most common reasons people give for not reading the Bible is that they don't have enough time.

Perhaps this story will help.

One day an expert in time management was speaking to a group of students.

As he stood in front of the group, he pulled out a large container and set it on the table in front of him. Then he pulled out some large rocks and placed them carefully into the container, one at a time. When the container was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit in, he asked: "Is it full?" Everyone yelled, "Yes". The time management expert replied, "Really?"

Then he reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of pebbles. He poured some in and shook the container, causing the pebbles to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked again: "Is it full?"

Now the students were more cautious ... "Probably not," they answered. "Good", the expert said.

He reached under the table for a bucket of fine sand and poured it into the container until the sand had filled all the spaces between the rocks and pebbles. Again he asked: "Is it full?" "No" the class responded. Once again the expert said, "Good"

Then he pulled out a bucket of water and poured it in until the container was full to the brim.

He looked at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager student raised his hand and said, "It teaches us that no matter how busy you think you are, you can always fit more in."

"No," said the speaker, "that's not the point. The point is that if you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all!"

How do you spend your time?

We need to learn the lesson of prioritising. If the Bible is important for our lives – a rock—a foundation – we need to find time for that first, and then fit our life around it.

God has given each of us exactly the same amount of time in a week. He has allowed 7 days x 24 hours, giving us a total of 168 hours to use. But HOW we use it is up to us.

Surprisingly, most people don't have a clue where all those hours disappear to.

On the next page you'll see a Time Audit Sheet. Take the time now to figure out how you spend your time.

You might be surprised at the result.

Most people find they have time left over ... regardless of how busy they are.

But some people do find they are using more time than God has given them!

Remember you only have a total of 168 hours per week.

Most likely, if you are too busy—that is, spending more time than you have—it's not just your time with God and His Word that is suffering.

Probably your family, friends, and health are also suffering as a result of your "lack of time".

Regardless of whether you find you have time left over, or not, if you're not fitting in the big rocks—the highest priorities, like God's Word—something needs to change.

So work through the Time Audit Sheet and see how you spend your time. Then ask yourself, "Can I find a few minutes a day to read God's Word?"

TIME AUDIT SHEET

This is your personal Time Audit Sheet. No-one else will look at it, so be honest with yourself. Keep your travel time separate, because you may be able to use this time to read or listen God's Word if you find the rest of your week is too pressured.

Activity	Hours spent in 7 days	Travel time	Total hours
Work / Studies			
Sleep			
Bathroom			
Dressing			
Shopping			
Meals (include preparation and eating)			
Home duties (ie cleaning, dishes, maintenance, garden)			
Church meetings, small groups, events			
Family commitments (including family pets)			
Sports / exercise / gym / dance / other activities			
Communications (include phone, email, internet etc)			
Bill paying			
Health care (include doctors appointments etc)			
Hobbies / leisure activities			
Personal Bible reading / study			
	TOTALS		

My response / reaction:

It's okay to 'guesstimate'. Every week will be a bit different, so you just want an idea of how an average week is spent.

FORM A NEW BIBLE READING HABIT

Experts tell us that it only takes 21 days to form a new habit—and 21 days to break one. So in order to form a new daily Bible reading habit, all you have to do is read the Bible today, and again tomorrow, and so on for the next 21 days! Easy!

These days we are not even restricted to reading the Bible. It could be that you choose to listen to the Bible on CD or cassette as you drive to work each day. Or you may have a daily Bible text sent to you by email, the internet, or mobile phone.

To start your habit, don't try to read large slabs of Scripture. Just take small bites every day.

On the next page is a 28 day Calendar to help get you started.

Just take it one day at a time.

Always read the Bible IN CONTEXT!

FIVE RULES FOR BIBLE STUDY

Once you have become a daily reader of God's Word, set aside a little extra time on just one day a week to go a little deeper. Some people call it Bible study, but really it's relationship building—with God.

It doesn't have to be hard. In fact, it's pretty basic and logical. Here and on Page 6 are some rules and tools to help you think a little more about what you are reading.

Rule 1 / Put yourself in the picture.

You've heard the expression "to walk in someone else's shoes"? So imagine yourself as one of the characters in the story. Try to imagine what it was like to be them. This will give you a whole new understanding of the story. But no selecting just the good guys! Look at it from the "bad guys" perspective as well!

Rule 2 / Feel the passion!

Emotion is an amazing thing. Try to really connect with the emotion of the characters. Imagine how they felt ... to feel their pain, their disbelief, their anger, resentment, fear, humour ... Look for the passion within the text. There's plenty of it there.

Rule 3 / Look for the hidden treasure.

No, I don't mean secret codes! I mean the tiny little words that our eyes skip right past ... words like "and", "but", "if" ... they can change the whole meaning of the text. For instance, "if" suggests that there's a condition attached. How often do we claim the promises of God, without giving any serious thought to the conditions that may be attached?

Think about other words that change or add to the meaning of a text. You might even start your own 'treasure' list.

Rule 4 / Do your homework!

Find out a little about the culture of the time, the religious beliefs, the unfamiliar words. Arm yourself with some study guides, eg a Bible atlas and Biblical encyclopaedia. Don't assume that you already know, and don't automatically accept what someone else tells you. Do your own research.

Rule 5 / Always read the Bible in context.

That is, know what comes before and after the passage or verse you're reading. If you take verses out of context you can make the Bible say things that God never intended it to say or mean!

DIY BIBLE DIET

28 DAYS TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
John 1:1-8	John 1:9-18	John 6:26-35	Hebrews 3:1-14	Hebrews 4:1-16	Hebrews 5:7-6:3	Matt 4:1-11
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
James 1:12-27	James 2:8-26	2 Tim 3:1-17	2 Peter 1:3-21	1 John 1:2-6	1 John 2:7-17	Deut 30:1-20
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2 Sam 22:29-37	Psaln 19	Isaiah 40:1-11	1 Thes 4:9-18	1 Thes 5:1-22	Psaln 119:1-24	Psaln 119:89-112
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Mark 4:1-20	John 14:15-31	John 15:1-17	2 Cor 4:1-18	Matt 5:13-20	Col 3:10-17	Eph 6:10-18

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

— 2 Timothy 3:16

FIVE TOOLS FOR BIBLE STUDY

Tool 1 / Who?

Who are the characters? Who's telling the story and who's listening?

Tool 2 / What?

What's going on? What's the action? (Look for the verbs or doing words) Notice which characters are involved in the action—who's the doer and who's on the receiving end.

Tool 3 / When?

When is it happening? When in history, when in the week or the day? You may need to look back or forward through the chapters to find this out.

Tool 4 / Where?

Where is the action taking place? Imagine what it must have looked like. Was it hot and dusty? Busy or

quiet? Wealthy or poor? Was there any significance to the place? ... did it have some special meaning?

Tool 5 / Why?

Why do you think this story is important enough to be in the Bible? What was the lesson for the people of the day and what is the lesson for us?

Always read the Bible IN CONTEXT!

GETTING STARTED

On the next page you'll find a short passage from Luke 24 in the Contemporary English Version (CEV).

Referring back to the 5 tools and 5 rules, work through the passage, marking up as you go.

Firstly circle the people as they are mentioned, all the way to the end.

Then underline the action words (verbs) and connect them to the characters who are involved (the doer/s and receiver/s).

Also mark any of your "hidden treasure" words that you find. This particular passage is pretty straightforward, but it's a good habit to acquire for the future.

Open your Bible and search backwards from this passage to find out when this was happening—when in Jesus ministry; when in the week; when in the day.

As part of the 'context' search, find out where this is taking place. Then spend a minute trying to imagine what it looked and felt like to be one of those gathered together.

Choose one of the characters and put yourself in their shoes. What are you feeling? How do you react? Make it REAL!

Here are some things to ponder:

How many people were gathered together? Remember to search

backwards and forwards to get a complete picture (context).

Why were these people gathered?

Check out the cross references to other passages that give more information, eg Mark 16:14. & John 20:26.

Note that in Verse 33, (before our text begins) Jesus says "beginning in Jerusalem ...". That's where the disciples were gathered. But what does that mean for us—Jerusalem or wherever you are right now?

Ask yourself why was this story recorded for the Bible? Why was it important for the people of the time, and why is it important for us today?

FINAL THOUGHTS

Luke 24:36-45 (CEV)

³⁶ While Jesus' disciples were talking about what had happened, Jesus appeared and greeted them. ³⁷ They were frightened and terrified because they thought they were seeing a ghost.

³⁸ But Jesus said, "Why are you so frightened? Why do you doubt? ³⁹ Look at my hands and my feet and see who I am! Touch me and find out for yourselves. Ghosts don't have flesh and bones as you see I have."

⁴⁰ After Jesus said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. ⁴¹ The disciples were so glad and amazed that they couldn't believe it. Jesus then asked them, "Have you got something to eat?" ⁴² They gave him a piece of baked fish. ⁴³ He took it and ate it as they watched.

⁴⁴ Jesus said to them, "While I was still with you, I told you that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Books of the Prophets, and in the Psalms had to happen."

⁴⁵ Then he helped them understand the Scriptures.

How important is the Bible to you?

The words Jesus used when proving he was real: look; see; touch. Why were they important?

The actions Jesus used to prove he was alive: showed them his hands and feet; asked for food and ate it while they watched. What was he really doing?

What was his purpose? What was the point of his visit?

After he proved he was real, how did Jesus spend this precious time?

He helped them understand the Scriptures!

He explained what the Scriptures meant and how he—Jesus—fitted in to the story, and then he told them to go and tell everyone all about it.

Imagine if you died and were given the opportunity to pay one last visit to your loved ones. Would you waste your time on the stuff that doesn't matter? Or would you tell them the most important thing they need to know?

So, do you think the Scriptures are important? Are you ready to commit to reading them daily?



The Bible Society's Story

Over 200 years ago, a girl named Mary Jones walked over 40 kms in her bare feet just to buy a Bible. It sounds like the experience of new Christians in China or in remotest Africa. But Mary Jones was a 15-year-old girl who lived in Wales. Her story led to the founding of the worldwide mission of The Bible Society – the oldest Bible Mission in the world.

We are now working in over 200 countries and territories to translate, publish & distribute the Bible.

We do not work alone, but in partnership with all Christian denominations and Christian mission groups throughout the world.

The Bible Society is not funded by governments or corporations, but by the generous, sacrificial giving of ordinary Christian people with an extraordinary commitment to spreading the Living Word of God.



In John 8:32 we read: “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Millions are still waiting for the truth that will set them free.

Today, we have the Bible on tap. But worldwide, a crisis is upon us. Even among our fellow Christians, millions are denied the Bible's comfort and guidance. It is a crisis that we can only tackle with your support.

- For a billion people, the Bible is a luxury they cannot afford.
- 4,500 languages still wait for even one book of the Bible.
- One billion people haven't learned to read—but only 3% of languages have the Bible in audio.
- Someone goes blind every five seconds, but the Bible in Braille exists only in 30 languages.

This is Bible poverty on a colossal scale. It's truly global. Here at home, the Bible no longer shapes our own nation.

That's why we're calling on every Christian to pray and give every month to help set the truth free.

The task is huge. Bible poverty is as widespread as physical poverty—something we all know must be tackled too.

But Bible poverty is just as devastating, robbing people of knowing the very God who made them; the Friend who knows their pain; the Love that knows no bounds; the Truth that sets them free.

Please help bring Bible poverty to an end. You can contact the Bible Society by phone, fax, email, regular mail, or via the website. Pledge \$15.00 (or more) each month and become a Bible Partner—helping to bring Bible poverty to an end.

Jesus said, “If you keep on obeying what I have said, you truly are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

– John 8:31-32



*Making the Bible Available, Affordable
& Accessible to everyone, everywhere*

The Bible Society in Australia (Victoria)

2-6 Albert Street, Blackburn 3130

Phone: (03) 9877 9277

Fax: (03) 9877 8399

Email: infovic@biblevic.com.au

ABN: 97 004 631 743

Website: www.biblevic.com.au