**How to Read the Book: Nine Rules for Effective Bible Reading**

**Lesson 2: Pastor Duane**

Who needs to read the Bible? Kings were commanded to read the Scriptures all the days of their lives (Deuteronomy 17:19). The Scriptures have been read aloud for the benefit of various groups of people (Exodus 24:7; Deuteronomy 31:9-13; Joshua 8:34-35; Nehemiah 8:1-3, 8, 18; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 15:21; Colossians 4:16). God’s word needs to be taught to families (Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 2 Timothy 3:15). It must be read individually as well (Psalms 1:2; 119:11, 105; Acts 8:28-32).

The Bible is not an ordinary book. It is the only revelation of God’s nature and will; it alone is “profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteous” (2 Timothy 3:16). It can make us wise unto salvation, and the word is able to save our souls (2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:21).

Standing alone amidst the world’s literature, the Bible especially ought to be read. The skills for Bible reading are identical, mechanically, for reading a secular document. But a keener appreciation applies to the divine revelation, and additional considerations for the heavenly message are required. Our devotion to the sacred word must be as special as the book itself.

**Rule One**

We ought to read the Bible ***regularly***. John Stott was right when he wrote to preachers, “Sporadic and haphazard dipping into the Scriptures is not enough.” Neither is it enough for any Christian. Any child of God who needs convinced that he ought to read the Bible regularly is in spiritual peril already.

**Rule Two**

We need to read the Bible ***analytically***. God intends for us to understand the Bible, and we ought to analyze the word’s component parts to better understand it as a whole. For example, the Bible student needs to understand the two major parts of the Bible—the Old and New Testaments. The differences between the Old and New Testaments are critical to “rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15).

A good Bible dictionary will facilitate this rule. For instance, if we plan to read the book of Genesis, we ought to consult a Bible dictionary article on “Genesis.” An introduction to the content increases our ability to understand and retain the material. Give the mind an advantage by knowing as much as you can about your reading before you read. This is true with respect to the Bible as a whole, and in connection with chapters and verses. Halley’s Bible Handbook is a useful tool for this; its chapter summaries are a helpful reader’s guide.

**Rule Three**

We would profit more, I believe, if we read the Bible ***systematically.*** A well-organized plan facilitates any objective—even Bible reading. Reading calendars, study aids, and valuable suggestions are numerous

Take advantage of a method and use it. Devise your own and tenaciously work through it. The most prolific Bible readers with whom I am familiar are systematic in method and time. A designated pattern and time of day, interrupted only because of absolute necessity, establishes a way of life; there is no need to “fit it in” to one’s schedule. Other things may be postponed. We have our Bibles to read!

**Rule Four**

We must read the Bible ***persistently***. Bible reading can be discouraging for some, especially the new Christian. He may be distracted by what is not readily understood, rather than absorbing what could have been easily grasped. I recommend that you keep a notebook nearby while reading the Bible. Write down the reference of a verse that perplexes you and keep on reading. Schedule another time for a more exhaustive study to research the difficult text. Avoid interrupting your plan, as a rule, to ponder about an obscure thought to the neglect of much that could have been understood. Don’t allow discouragement to set in. Keep reading and press on.

I do not imply that the Bible should be read sloppily. We ought to devote separate time and proven methods for deeper study. This is indispensable to our growth as well. Such projects, however, usually cannot be accomplished in short periods of time. We need an entire morning, evening, or Saturday afternoon, to devote uninterrupted hours for these special studies. With perseverance and planning, we can devote ourselves to persistent Bible reading with thirty minutes to an hour per day.

**Rule Five**

The previous guidelines help us accomplish this one: read the Bible ***completely***. A plan best accomplishes this, and it certainly ought to be our resolve. Some books of the Bible captivate our attention more than others. Some are more immediately relevant to our spiritual needs. Yet neglect none of them. Read it; read it all—1,189 chapters. And read it over and over again, for “man does not live by bread alone” (Matthew 4:4).

*The next several suggestions involve a mind-set more than methodology. They are vital for effective Bible reading.*

**Rule Six**

We must read the Bible ***reverently***. Bible reading is not a matter of Pharisaic self-congratulation. It should not degrade into a mere routine. For reverent readers, Bible reading, and prayer are inseparable (see Acts 6:4). The regularity of our reading should not diminish our respect for the words breathed out by God. To the contrary, I believe that the persistent reader will become more reverent through the passing of time.

**Rule Seven**

Because this book is from God for our utmost good, we ought to read the Bible ***expectantly***. We must realize that the Bible will do for us what it can do for any person (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

It is useful for teaching—what we need to know. It is profitable for reproof—what we must reject and refute. It is beneficial for correction—what we must turn away from and avoid. It is good for instruction in righteousness—what we must consider about our lives and duties with respect to God and man.

Expect to grow stronger; be encouraged and more fruitful through regular contact with God’s word. Conversely, spiritual atrophy is the expectation for those who do not open the Good Book. Confident that it is true, but void of its power, defines the complacent attitude toward the Bible in which the Devil, no doubt, rejoices.

**Rule Eight**

Read the Bible ***fervently***. Mortimer J. Adler in his work, How to Read A Book, begins his chapter on “How to be a Demanding Reader” with a yawning observation. By the way, get comfortable, and enjoy this quotation.

“The rules for reading yourself to sleep are easier to follow than are the rules for staying awake while reading. Get into bed in a comfortable position, make sure the light is inadequate enough to cause slight eyestrain, choose a book that is either terribly difficult or terribly boring—in any event, one that you do not really care whether you read or not—and you will be asleep in a few minutes. Those who are experts in relaxing with a book do not have to wait for nightfall. A comfortable chair in the library will do any time.”

We must stay awake to effectively read the Bible. But more than that, we must read it with focus and fervency. It doesn’t matter if the brain wanders while reading the latest editorial in the paper. The Bible matters. The kind of effort we expend in reading, comprehending, retaining, and applying God’s word matters eternally. Choose a time of day when you are alert. Select a place where you will not become easily fatigued. Provide yourself with adequate lighting. And focus. It is work; it is soul-saving work—your own!

**Rule Nine**

We need to read the Bible ***collectively***. As friends, dating couples, married couples, entire families, small groups, congregations, we can read the Bible together and all be better for it. On October 4, 1982, Ronald Reagan signed a joint resolution passed by the United States Congress. While it is worthy of being quoted in its entirety, I cite only the final paragraph:

“Resolved the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the President is authorized and requested to designate 1983 as a national “Year of the Bible” in recognition of both the formative influence the Bible has been for our Nation, and our national need to study and apply the teachings of the Holy Scriptures.”

We desire and pray that our nation’s leaders would resolve to do what this august body resolved. We, however, who are not wavered by infidelity nor distracted by the entanglements of the world, what have we resolved? The Bible demands more than lip service from members of the Lord’s church. It requires our attention in addition to our affection (Psalm 1:2). Become, or continue to be, an effective Bible reader. That is exactly what God wants you to be.