

Immerse Yourself in the Word

1. Introduction

People say that the best way to learn a foreign language is to be immersed in it. When you are in a situation where you have to speak a second language, it really stretches your brain to pull up words that you have learned in that language. It is great mental exercise. The same applies to God's Word. When you read, study, and digest it every day, the more easily the Holy Spirit can pull up from within you a verse or just a phrase to help you in a situation. And like learning another language, the more you use it, the more you retain what you have learned. The more you read your Bible and study it, the more you will retain.

Have you ever read through the entire Bible? For many that is an overwhelming thought. God's Word is of paramount importance to us. God speaks through His Word, and shows us the answers to life's questions, the solution to life's problems, and wisdom for life's dilemmas.

2. The Bible Reading Guide

The Bible reading charts below have organized readings from four daily portions to offer variety. The first portion is the weekly reading from the Torah, or Pentateuch (Genesis-Deuteronomy). Observant Jews practice reading through the five books of Moses every year and have divided up that section of Scripture into weekly portions.

The second portion is a roughly chronological reading through the events and corresponding prophecies of the Old Testament. This gives the reader a glimpse into the historical events leading up to the end of the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the exile of the Southern Kingdom of Judah into Babylon. It concludes with the return of the Jews from captivity and the reestablishment of the nation of Israel with the rebuilding of the Temple.

The third portion is a reading from the rich literature of the Scriptures. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Songs, and Ecclesiastes offer wisdom and inspiration to each day. While the readings jump around a bit in this portion, it is not a random selection. In as much as possible, we have looked for connections between the literature and something in the other reading portion that it is grouped with. It gives the reader a special nugget to help drive home the power of the events that are taking place in the chronological timelines. The psalmist, for example, may have written his psalm hundreds, or even thousands of years before or after events that they are grouped with. But it shows the impact of what both the psalmist and someone far removed from that point of time had in common.

Finally, there is included a portion from the New Testament for each day. It, too, is a roughly chronological reading through the four Gospels and Acts to keep the events of Yeshua's

ministry in perspective together. It is vital to read the Old Testament in order to better understand the New Testament. But the New Testament has great practical insight into how we should conduct ourselves in our walk of faith. It should not be neglected. It contains important instructions for our spiritual growth and well-being.

3. The Yearly Schedule

The Jewish calendar begins on Rosh HaShana, which usually falls in late September or early October. Ten days later is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), the most holy day of the year. Jewish people use those ten days, which they call the Days of Awe, to prepare themselves spiritually and rectify any strained relationships before they stand before the Lord in judgment. Yom Kippur is followed very shortly by the Feast of Tabernacles, or Sukkot. It is a time of rejoicing, of sharing fellowship with neighbors and friends and with God. On the final day of Sukkot is a special celebration called Simchat Torah (Joy of the Law). It is then that the Jewish people rejoice in completing the reading of the Torah, the five books of Moses, in a year. People thank God for His Word, given to Man as a great teacher, to bring them into the knowledge of how to live for and please God. Simchat Torah is also the kick-off day for the next annual reading of the Torah.

Thus, Simchat Torah has been chosen for the day to start this cycle of reading through the Bible. Some people like to start their reading cycle in January, with the beginning of a New Year on the Gregorian calendar. Others may want to start their reading cycle on a different date. Either way, it is good to have a definite start and future goal to end the reading cycle. The reading guide has been set up with numbered days to be easily adjustable for whatever date you choose to begin reading on.

It may seem a bit overwhelming to read through all four portions of Scripture at once. In today's hectic schedules, one may not always have the time to sit uninterrupted and read all the portions at once. So, because the readings are organized into four portions, it is easy to divide the passages into a morning and evening portion. Whatever you need to do to adjust the reading to fit your schedule is fine. That is why this is called a Bible reading guide. If you can only read the morning portion one day and the evening portion another day, that is fine. The main goal is to get into the habit of reading God's Word every day. That is how we become immersed in the Word of God.

Finally, there are inevitably days that sickness, holiday activities and other unexpected events throw us off schedule. It is easy to get behind, and hard to catch up if there is not an allowance in each week for the reader to be flexible. That is why this reading guide has been organized for five days a week instead of seven. The portions are only slightly longer, but if you miss a day, it is easy to get back on track without feeling pressured. A good Bible reading habit should

not feel like a chore or drudgery. Of course, aim to read your Bible every day, as this will help you stay ahead of the schedule and even finish reading the Bible in less than a year.

Your Bible Reading Challenge

Developing a daily habit of Bible reading is a challenge. It requires commitment and determination. But there are some techniques that can help make your Bible reading more enjoyable. Here are a few ideas that can be helpful:

1. Keep a journal. Write your reflections, questions, nuggets you learned from your reading, and even prayers in your journal.
2. Look for connections in Scripture and highlight them or jot them down in the margin of your Bible.
3. Ask questions. God is not offended if we don't understand something in His Word. Pray and ask Him for wisdom to interpret His word correctly. Look in a commentary or Bible study resource to see what others have learned from the verses you find difficult to understand. Even if you can't find the answer right away, God can reveal more truth to you as you continue reading and studying.
4. Choose one verse from your daily reading to be your verse for the day. Try to commit that verse to memory-- write it down and put it in a prominent place, quote it out loud, or put a tune to it to make it a chorus of worship.
5. Create a Bible reading chart that you can cross off each day the portion you have read. It will be a visual reminder and a motivator to help you continue your good habit.
6. Listen to an audio recording of the Bible as you read along. Sometimes our ears can pick up on something that our eyes might gloss over. The more senses you have active in receiving information, the more of that information you will retain.
7. Utilize more than one translation/version of the Bible to compare verses. One version may word a verse in a more impactful way, while another version may help clarify a hard to understand passage. Lay two Bibles side by side to read for comparison.
8. Choose a topic that interests you for your yearly reading like faith, healing, foods and their benefits, the Holy Spirit, overcoming fear, characteristics of God, etc. Each time you find a verse that relates to your annual topic, highlight it in a certain color. When you finish reading your Bible, go back and review all the verses you highlighted on your topic.
9. Find a partner that you can read with and discuss what you learned. Even if you read the passages separately, it helps to have someone walking with you along your journey through the Bible. They can encourage you to keep up your habit, and you can look for answers to questions either of you might have together.

10. Feel free to customize this Bible reading guide to best suit your needs. Develop your own techniques to keep the readings interesting for you.

May this Bible reading guide be a blessing to you and help you to develop the daily habit of immersing yourself in God's Word. The benefits you will glean will be immeasurable. Even if you don't finish reading the Bible in a year, hopefully you will develop a love of the Word of God that will enrich your life with wisdom and wonder.

Then you will be able to truly say as the psalmist David did in Psalm 19:7-11,

*"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul;
The testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple;
The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes;
The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.
More to be desired are they than gold,
Yea, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.
Moreover by them Your servant is warned,
And in keeping them there is great reward."*

Following is a chart of the Bible reading schedule that I have organized. It is available in a simple table, or a full calendar format.

Many Blessings on your Bible Reading!