

Systematically Reading the Grand Story

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Imagine that you went to your refrigerator, closed your eyes, and then opened the door and grabbed whatever items you happened to reach in order to make a meal. You might get a jar of mayonnaise, a pickle jar, and a peach—not an especially appetizing or nourishing combination. Yet that is a picture of the way many people approach the Word of God. They blindly “grab” whatever passage they come to first, in no particular sequence or order. When passages are separated from their context, their meaning is changed and well-meaning believers can easily be misled.

Others read the Bible much like a teenager whose preferred diet consists of pizza, chips, pop, and ice cream. Our bodies require a nutritionally balanced diet in order to stay healthy. Likewise, our spirits need the balance that comes from taking in the “whole counsel of God,” not limiting ourselves to those passages that seem particularly appetizing. The spiritual growth of some believers has been stunted due to a diet that consists primarily of the Psalms with perhaps a smidgen of the New Testament Epistles.

It’s true that not all parts of the Bible are equally easy to digest. For example, there are some passages in 1 Chronicles and Ezekiel that seem particularly tedious and even unnecessary, especially when compared to more “succulent” passages we might discover in 1 Peter or the Gospel of John. But Paul reminded Timothy that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16).

Yes, we need the Psalms and the Epistles. But we also need the Books of the Law, the Historical Books, the Prophets, and the Gospels. We need the whole of God’s Word. And we need to read in such a way that we get a sense of the flow of the Word.

Getting a Sense of the Whole

When you pick up a book, you don't usually start in the middle. Especially if the book has a plot, you're not going to jump around haphazardly from chapter to chapter. Yet that's the way many of us read the Bible.

We don't realize that the Bible has a plot. It's a story. It's the grand story of redemption —one that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It's the story of a God who created man for fellowship with Himself and then watched as man rejected Him. As God put into place a plan that He had devised in eternity past to restore man to fellowship with Himself, God sent Jesus to bring that plan about through His death on the cross.

So we see the story of God, but you can't get the whole of that story if you're just picking pieces here and there. That's why I want to encourage you to read the Bible not only prayerfully and thoughtfully but also systematically.

That doesn't mean that the Bible can only be read straight through from Genesis to Revelation, although many people have found great blessing in reading the Scripture that way on a regular basis. Systematic reading means we understand that context and flow are important. Individual verses need to be read in the context of the paragraph and the chapter in which they appear. Chapters of the Bible need to be read in the context of the book in which they're found. And books of the Bible need to be read in the context of other books in the Bible so we see how they fit into the scheme, flow, and plot of Scripture and of God's eternal redemptive plan.

Different Approaches

For me personally, to keep the grand picture in mind, I like to always be reading in the Old and New Testaments at the same time. There are various reasons for this.

One is that the Old Testament shines light on the New Testament and vice versa. You can understand each better in the light of the other. It's easier to see the connections between the two when you're reading both at the same time.

Furthermore, I don't like to go for long periods of time without reading in the Gospels. That's where we get the clearest, most focused picture of Jesus.

My father had an approach to Bible reading that he rarely varied. Each morning he read five chapters from the Psalms and one from the Proverbs, thus reading through the Psalms and Proverbs every month. Then he read two chapters consecutively from the Old Testament and one from the New.

Some time ago, a dear, older servant of the Lord recommended an approach to Bible reading that I have found to be a great blessing. He suggested dividing the Bible into six major sections, beginning in Genesis, Joshua, Job, Isaiah, Matthew, and Romans. Each day, read one or more chapters consecutively in each of those sections. Mark where you end up in each section so you can pick up at that location the next day.

This has been one of the most exciting ways I have discovered to read the Word. Though penned by many different authors over a period of 1,500 years, there is a unity and coherence in the Scripture that can only be supernatural. Invariably, I find that what I am reading in one portion dovetails precisely with what I am reading in another.

Looking Through a Microscope and a Telescope

As you read through Scripture, there are different ways to look at it. One would be under a microscope and the other would be through a telescope. When we look at the Word of God under a microscope, we choose to read a small portion of Scripture each day, meditating carefully on each word and phrase, dissecting it, and digesting it carefully.

One way to do that is to take a particular book of the Bible and just saturate yourself in those chapters for a few weeks. Soak yourself in it. Perhaps take one of the shorter books of the Bible and read it every day for thirty days, asking God to give you deeper insight into the heart and message of that particular book or portion of Scripture.

The other way to look at the Word of God is through a telescope. In this way, you are covering more ground more quickly. You're looking for broad, overarching themes to see the threads that run from Genesis to Revelation. You're getting a bird's-eye view of the panoramic plan of God. You'll see that themes that run through the Scripture are like threads in a tapestry woven together to form a great story of redemption.

As you read with whatever means you're using, don't get discouraged. Remember that not every day will be a spiritual feast any more than every physical meal you eat is a scrumptious banquet.

Some passages will taste more like cardboard than honey. But the value and impact of God's Word in our lives can't be seen in what we read in just one day or week—just as the value of a balanced nutritious diet is not generally experienced in a day or a week. Rather the cumulative effects and benefits of eating right are experienced over an extended period of time.

Whether it's easy reading or not, the Word of God is still profitable. Even those passages that are the most difficult to grasp or seem to be of relatively little value can have a sanctifying, cleansing, maturing effect as they enter into our system.

Don't let yourself become a slave to the method. Don't get so caught up in the mechanics of how you're reading the Scripture that you miss the point. Remember the goal is not how fast you can get through the Bible. The goal is to meet with God each day. It's to get the Word—the living, written Word—into you and to cultivate an intimate relationship with Jesus, the living Word.

Adapted from the series "[Getting into the Word and Getting the Word into You](#)" by Nancy DeMoss Wolgemuth.