

How to Read Your Bible

By Bobby Schuller

Well we are in a series called DIY. DIY means do it yourself. “No one can follow Jesus for you.” And a lot of this is rooted in the fact that we just celebrated the 500 year anniversary of the Reformation, which was this sort of returning by many Christians to a Christianity that was existential, meaning a Christianity that was between me and God personally, rather than through an institution. The institution wasn’t thrown away, but it was seen in its proper context, which was to come alongside the journey of a believer.

So I thought it was a good time. We have a lot of people in this church who are new Christians, and many watching on TV who are on the fence, or just became Christians, and I just thought, man it would be great to just spend a few weeks talking about the basics of a Christian life, and how to do certain things as a Christian.

So today we’re going to talk about one of the most important aspects of a life of discipleship to Jesus, and that is simply reading your Bible, and how to read your Bible. It’s a daunting thing, isn’t it? And so that’s what we’re going to talk about today. How do I read my Bible? And there’s many ways to do it. A lot of this is Bobby Schuller philosophy.

The Bible doesn't tell us how to read the Bible, so we're going to talk about that today.

First, I want you to get in your mind that historically, in its context, first, the Bible, I mean, is an unbelievable book. I think everyone could argue that it's the most important piece of literature in human history. It is three thousand years old. It took a span of a thousand years to put it together, several authors, on three continents, in three languages, God appearing to people in theophany, meaning that He breaks the rules of physics and appears to people every century or so, and those things are written down. God's revelation through His Holy Spirit comes through so that mankind can have divine revelation; can have true moral and spiritual knowledge. It is the most important work, even if you are an atheist, you should know the Bible because it has influence. Almost every great work of literature in the west. So if we can just begin there, as believers, we know that this is even more than that, though. It is God's word to us. God's promises, God's songs, and God's stories that shape the way we think.

And more than anything, the first thing I want us to know as those worshipping in a free society, is that reading your Bible is a privilege. It's a privilege that many people haven't had in history and many people even today still don't have. And that it's a tragedy if your Bible is gathering dust. That the greatest source of moral and spiritual

knowledge; no, the greatest source of knowledge period lies squarely unopened on your coffee table. And I don't say that to make you feel judged, I say that to simply say that there's an opportunity every day that Bible is closed that you're missing out on to receive power on high, to do better in your relationships, to know God, to become a better person, to enjoy life more, to have the strength that you need to endure suffering, to hear from God. It's in here. Reading the Bible is a privilege.

You know in the early church, the first century church, in a way, didn't have the Bible. They had what we call the Old Testament, the Jewish Bible, but the New Testament was still being sort of passed around in the form of mostly letters and sermons. And then they had the gospels, and as things were written down, most people had it in parts, and so any time they could get their hands on Galatians, or on the gospel of John, or whatever, it was a great treasure that the early church could have. Even well into the second century, people didn't have a Bible because one, books were incredibly expensive, but two, it was something that was shared in community that was just this great treasure.

And so what happened is the Catholic church put this Bible, which was in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, and they put it in Latin, because Latin was the language everybody spoke in the late Roman era, the second and third century. They called it the Vulgate. Do you know why they called it the Vulgate? Because the language was vulgar. That's true.

A vulgar language. Latin. Vulgar is a Latin word for common. They wanted to put it in a language that everybody could speak because it was the academics that read and understood Greek at the time.

So they wanted everyday shopkeepers and moms and dads to be able to take this book and to read it in their language, Latin. And as the Catholic church over time, which has done amazing things for God, is of God, but has had, can we all agree, had a rough patch in the late medieval period. It was during that time the church as an institution that those in power, the powerful, wealthy leaders of the church took a Latin Bible that was a thousand years old, in a language that had now pretty much died and become only available to rich academic people, and used that to protect the Bible. In other words, the only way in the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth century, the only way you were getting access to this was through a powerful aristocrat who was a high ranking member in a church. And he was only going to let you see the parts he wanted you to see: the parts that supported what he believed. And he wasn't going to let you see the parts that he didn't want you to believe, like you're saved by grace through faith!

And so the irony in the medieval age is that the Bible written in vulgar language now becomes unavailable as people in power want to consolidate that power. In other words, the people that were alive during those days, once they got their hands on the Bible, everything changed.

And they thought I don't need a curmudgeonly old angry rich priest to access God. He's given me everything I need right here, and that's why the Reformers, the Reformed doctors just treasured their Bibles because they fought for it and they saw what happened to believers once they started reading their Bibles.

There's this famous quip where one of Martin Luther's challengers says "do you know what happened when everyday people started reading their Bibles?" as a criticism. And Martin Luther says, "We got moral Christians?" And that's exactly what happens. People have fought. And when that was coming to an end, I don't mean to get caught up in history, I love it but you know the institution of the church so didn't want people to read this in their own language, that when John Wycliffe, who was the first to translate the Bible into English so that the everyday Englishmen and Englishwomen could read it, they were so upset about that that after he died, they dug up his body and burned it just a way to say we hate you.

And Tyndale, who didn't come much later, who translated the first printed Bible into English, was burned at the stake. Why? Why would evil people in power do that? Because the Bible is the greatest authority of moral and spiritual knowledge, and it's meant to be made available to everyone! And every minute we're not learning and studying this Bible is a minute lost! That's hyperbole. But truly this is such a treasure that

when you begin to study the Bible for you, not for anybody else, not because you have to, but because you recognize what it is, it just becomes such a joy.

So it's a privilege that in every hotel room Gideon's have faithfully made sure there's a Bible there for you to read, and nobody reads it. Whenever you open a Gideon's Bible, so often it feels stiff and unopened. And when you go to people's house, you see it on tables, Bible's gathering dust. What a waste. The greatest source of knowledge. And that's why people who read the Bible love the Bible is because they've seen what it's done in their lives.

I remember an extended family member I sort of would see from time to time and grew up with, was just this kind of poisonous really bad person. And I didn't like to be around her, and I remember one year she decided I'm going to spend this whole year reading my Bible, and I thought oh that's going to be interesting for you. I was a kid, you know, I don't think those things anymore now that I'm very holy and righteous and all. But she completely transformed. I just watched. I think that's when I first started.. and I wasn't a Christian at the time. That's when I first started really believing in the Bible. I watched what it did to her. Even today, I think 25 years after that happened, she's an amazing person.

And so these are things that I see that the Bible does to the human heart. And that the enemy doesn't want you to read it. He doesn't want you to know what's here. That's why this Bible is banned in 55 countries today. And all of those countries are countries where they don't want regular, everyday people like you and me to have power! That's why it's in tyrannies that this thing is outlawed. This is more dangerous than guns. And it's a gift. And that's why we, as believers, ought to know it. Even if you love art and history, you ought to know the Bible. It informs everything, especially in western culture.

So for us, for many of us, the easier life gets, the harder it is to read your Bible, in a way. I remember when Jesus was teaching in the scriptures, in Mark 4, He says that the word of God is like seed from a sower. That there's a farmer out, and he's sort of just recklessly casting handfuls of seeds, and they're just kind of spreading everywhere. He says the ones that fall on the road, those ones get gobbled up by the birds. That's what happens because of the hardness of our heart, nobody hears it, nobody cares, nobody wants it.

Then he says the second one is when the seed falls among rocks, and it springs up quickly with joy, but then when persecution comes, it withers. Can I ask you a question: do you feel persecuted when you read your Bible? If you say yes, you're a big wimp, I'm sorry. You are not persecuted. Just because somebody makes a crass comment or offends

you because you're reading your Bible, there are countries where people are being murdered and tortured and killed because they read their Bible.

Okay so the first thing the enemy does is persecution. Like third world, tyranny persecution, right? And then Jesus says but if they endure that, we can say, there's some seeds that fall on good soil, but as it grows, also thorns and thistles and weeds grow up with it. And he says those thorns and thistles and weeds, that's the last stage. That's the wealth and the worries of this world. Everybody say wealth and worries. A wealthy society is almost always an anxious society, for whatever reason. We can wax about why that is, but studies have actually shown that although America is the wealthiest country in the world, it's also one of the most anxious. You only need six breaths a minute. The average person breathes twelve breaths a minute, and the average American breathes 18 breaths a minute. Welcome to America!

So the reason I say that is that I think these two stages, the rocks that gets pulled up from persecution, and the thorns that the wealth and worries, that if the enemy can't choke out our faith through persecution, he will then do it through our wealth and our comfort and our anxiety. And I think that method is more effective. That's why I believe persecuted Christians love their Bibles more than American Christians. It's a

different and in a way it's almost more difficult, as crazy as that sounds. It is and it isn't.. for the soul, you know?

So, I think God wants you to do well in life. I think He wants your business to succeed. I think He wants you to thrive as a human being. But He wants you to be a godly person first. He wants His relationship with you to be primarily the most important thing. And so the wealth and worries of this world don't have to choke out your desire for God. They don't have to keep you from reading your Bible. This is the greatest bit of knowledge you can get in the world, amen? And the reason is, you won't be wealthy forever. Whether it's an economic cataclysm, or something horrible happens in your life, or when you die and you can't take it with you, you need to be prepared. And that's why this scripture that we're reading today is so important. A Bible verse about reading a Bible verse.

Jesus says, and this is the closing remarks of the Sermon on the Mount, the most important probably thing that Jesus ever said, or even that's in the Bible, and here Jesus says, "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds

blew and beat against that house and it fell with a great crash.” Reading the Bible prepares you for the worst in life. And that’s why it’s important when we read it during the best of life.

I remember years ago, there was this huge storm that came through California, and I don’t know why they came up with this name. I always think of weed because of that movie. It was called Pineapple Express. This storm, it was called Pineapple Express, blew through California for four days. There were floods, and mega landslides, a bunch of people died, it was a terrible thing, and it totally caught California by surprise. And I remember just after that happened, I went down to this church, Rancho Capistrano for a retreat, and when I got there, I remember that they had all these very nice like tents and outdoor furniture, and things, and all of it got totally destroyed. And it was strewn about: ropes, torn tents, demolished furniture and it was over a whole parking lot where they made this amazing set up. It was all completely destroyed and wiped out. And I got out of my car and I thought, that is such a California thing to do. Why? Because Californians are never ready for bad weather. We just aren’t. That’s why we pay to live here. We just hate bad weather.

So when the storm came, nobody’s ready for it here in California. And it’s funny because I went to high school in Oklahoma and college, and Oklahomans are almost, when it comes to weather, the exact

opposite. Weather in Oklahoma, it's not only bad, it makes bad weather in California look amazing. And so it's totally different there. You have people who are in Oklahoma, and it's a beautiful state, but they are always paying attention to the weather because although there's plenty of beautiful days, you just never know when there's going to be like a gigantic storm.

I remember when we first moved there, I was 15, and there was this lightening storm outside, and I thought I was going to die. I was terrified. It was like the apocalypse. And come to find out it was just a Thursday. Just like your everyday. And so they're always.. young people, old people, they're always into the weather, and not only their own weather, they're like oh what kind of weather's going on in like Minnesota, and like oh look it's snowing in New York today. So they're into weather, right?

So the idea of a bunch of tents being blown away, or furniture being left outside in a storm to Oklahomans is laughable and ridiculous because Oklahomans are always ready when the rain comes down, when the wind blows, when the storm comes, they're prepared. They have shelters, they have strong houses, they know what to do. Californians don't. That's why we got caught.

And that's why the Oklahoma weatherman's like well, you thought last week was bad, it's really bad this week.

I remember, this is a true story. I remember, I was terrified of tornados when we moved to Oklahoma, and I was like mom, why are we moving to Oklahoma? I'm terrified of tornados. I was in college and I was invited to speak at a Baptist church in this little town in the middle of nowhere, so I went with the guy who invited me, Don, and we were staying at a guest's house, and there was a tornado warning; this giant wall cloud, which means like one side of the sky is blue and beautiful, and the other side looks like the four horsemen of Revelation are coming and you know it's bad.

And so we're looking at this, and we're like that looks bad. And I'm sitting with this guy at his house, because I'm supposed to speak later, and he goes, 'oh don't worry. That tornado warning, it just comes up all the time. If there was truly a tornado on the ground, you'd hear the sirens.' And it was like a sitcom. It was like the second he said that, these sirens went (MAKES SIREN NOISE) and a cop car goes flying down. And he goes 'all right kids,' and his wife and his kids, he put them in this like shelter down underneath the house, and it had like board games and food and supplies.

And of course he and Don, they're like 'let's go look at the tornado.' So the three of us.. I'm like 'are you sure you want to go like look at the tornado?' And so we went outside, and he's like 'oh there it is.' And there's this tornado and I'm like 'guys, we should get in the shelter.' And

they both look at me and there's a long awkward pause, and he goes 'do you want to go in the shelter with the ladies?' I was like no, no, I'm totally fine getting slaughtered by a tornado to prove that I'm a tough man. No.

But my point is that they weren't worried. Why weren't these guys worried? Because they were prepared. They were ready. They had food, they had a shelter. Can you imagine if a tornado landed in Orange County? More people would die from being afraid of a tornado than from the tornado itself.

Okay, the reason I say this is most people are not prepared for life because most people don't read their Bible. Jesus says that there are two paths: a narrow path that leads to life and only a few will find it. And a wide road that leads to death, and everybody takes that route. I don't think that's necessarily about heaven and hell. I think it's about eternal living today, as Dallas Willard would say. It's about having a thriving, full life, but it's difficult and it requires certain things, and one of those things is knowledge. Knowledge. Knowledge. And this is the greatest source of knowledge for how to live a good life. Can I get an amen from anybody that loves the Bible. The Bible is valuable, it is a gift, it is a gift.

So what happens is when you read your Bible, you get to a place where you don't need Bible verses anymore. What I mean by that is that you create within yourself a biblical mind. So like you don't need a Bible

verse, for example, that says don't do coke. Right? Like you know. You've trained yourself to have wisdom and moral.. you're like I don't need a Bible verse that says don't do coke because I know from a moral mind, right? You learn, you grow, and so that wherever you go, there's going to be so many things in life where you have to make moral decisions that there's not a Bible verse for it. So you train yourself to have a moral mind, and if you leave your Bible as a training mechanism, you leave your moral mind. It's just that simple. So we prepare our minds to have the wisdom to endure the suffering of life.

And when you read your Bible, always read it through the eyes of Jesus. So what I mean by that is if you read a Bible verse that feels like Jesus would disagree with it, He in a way, does. He doesn't disagree with the verse, but He disagrees with probably what you think you're seeing. So it's so important. Jesus was not only the Savior of the world and is the Savior of the world, but He was a rabbi, too and the sole role of a rabbi was to teach the Bible. So we want to see the Bible through Jesus' eyes, okay?

So like for example, the Bible says honor the Sabbath. And so Jesus is with His disciples, and they're eating heads of grain on the Sabbath, and a bunch of pastor type people say hey, you're not supposed to do that on the Sabbath. We think the Bible says you're not supposed

to do that. And Jesus says I say the Bible says you can do that because what the Sabbath means. So see it through Jesus' eyes.

Okay, so I want to give you some quick tips on how to read your Bible well when you do read it, okay? Number one, and this is I think the most important thing on this whole list. Is before you read your Bible, ask the Holy Spirit to help you. I find that there are so many times when I'm reading the Bible, and something from the Bible shoots out to me, and it just changes my life. And it seems so simple, but it's because the Holy Spirit is coming along.

I used to tease people about this when they would be like I just need to hear from God and they'd be like.. (PAPERS SHUFFLING). And you know what? I'm okay with that now. I think the Holy Spirit can use that. So ask the Holy Spirit to come alongside you when you read to guide your eyes and to guide your reading. He wrote it, after all, right? So even if you don't know what the Holy Spirit is, if that seems weird to you, just do it, okay? Just trust me. It'll help you.

Number two – find a rhythm. Like find a time in the day when you're going to do it. Just like any other like discipline you want to work out, or if you want to whatever, you got to find a time when you're going to do it. So when do I do it? Every morning over coffee and bacon and eggs. I just do it, that's when I do it. I read my Bible and I begin my day that way. And it's like anything, it's about consistency, isn't it. Just

doing it consistently either every day, or three times a day, or maybe before you go to bed, or maybe on your lunch break at work, you're just like this is what I do.

And then make it easy on yourself. There's a great kind of business guy, performance guy named Tim Ferriss and I don't know what this method is called. I call it the floss three teeth method. And he's talking about how it's so important that we want to do something, you do it small. So like you can't bring yourself to floss, just floss three teeth. You don't have to do the rest. Because if you get three.. you know start back here, the next day here, because he's like if you start with three, there's something mentally that if I just have to do a little bit, but then I do extra, it's like extra credit. So don't feel like you got to like sit down and read a whole book. Or even that you have to read a whole chapter. Even if you're old to it, you've done it forever, just read a couple verses somewhere. Okay? You don't have to read the whole thing and then if you do extra, hey its extra credit. So make it easy on yourself, okay?

Number four – and this is again Bobby Schuller, but make Proverbs your default. So look it doesn't mean only read Proverbs, it means if I can't think of anything to read, or I don't know what to do, just read Proverbs. And you'll start there and Proverbs is so great because it'll spring you into other questions and things you want to find. So read Proverbs and the great thing about it is Proverbs itself is already

designed as a method. There are 31 days in the week. And there are.. thank you, I already heard it before you fixed it. There are 31 weeks in a day. Just kidding. There are 31 days in a month. There's 31 days in a month, so if it's the fifth of.. it's okay. If it's the fifth of the month, you read Proverbs 5. If it's the 12th of the month, you just read Proverbs 12. And Proverbs is always relevant. I promise you, when you read Proverbs, and especially if you read it slowly, you're going to find something in there that you're like oh I've got to Tweet this. This is good. This is really good. So you read Proverbs, and that will give you wisdom, and that's exactly what we need, and it'll lead you into the rest of the Bible.

Number five, when you read the Bible, let the Bible read you. So in other words, try and spend time with it almost as you would a person or a teacher, and let it examine your life. One of the challenges is going to be to like, when you read the Bible, to apply it to your political persuasion, to policy, or to apply it to another person you're feeling angry at. You're like oh she needs to read this. Maybe I should text it to her. Okay. So apply it to you! Right? Have the Bible examine you, and therefore you read it slowly. The most important discipline I ever did was to memorize the Sermon the Mount, and then say it over like a prayer. And then it would challenge me, I would see like a car out of tune, like I would see parts of my heart that were out of sync with Jesus' easy rhythms of grace.

And then finally, and this is just the last note, especially to the justice generation, don't give up reading something that bothers you. I promise you, if you read the Bible, you're going to find bits that annoy you, and remember, this is a three thousand year old book, with a thousand years of context on three continents in three languages. So there is going to be stuff in there that either doesn't make any sense, and that just means it's for later, is boring, which is like the whole book of Numbers, and it's boring, all right? It doesn't mean it's not the word of God, but some stuff is boring.

And so there's a couple examples of this. Like in Psalms, for example, there's a Psalm that says happy is the man who dashes the Babylonian baby's head on the stones, or something awful like that. So if you read that, it should bother you. But what you see as one, Jews don't bash babies heads against the stone. It's against the law, let alone they wouldn't do that. But its echoing from the Psalmist his context that his children's heads, his kids, his little babies have been killed by the Babylonians. So Psalms becomes a catharsis, a way of feeling angry about the evil in the world. He's not suggesting that we do that.

Or another common one, when a man says I want to follow you, Jesus. Let me just go bury my dad and then I'll come follow you. And Jesus is like, nope. Right? Nope, sorry, no time for that. That would take easily two hours. Because again, it's a context. In those days, to say let

me go bury my father means, in that context meant I want to wait until my dad dies so I can inherit his money. So give me a few years. He's really old, he's almost there. So you see why Jesus is like no, I don't want you to follow me.

The point is that you're going to read things in the Bible that bother you, but don't let that ruin what's here, and you'll find, like even in that example of Jesus telling that man, that was a very good thing for Jesus to say. You have to choose the Lord or money. Which one is it? See, it's beautiful.

So there we go. Read your Bible. It is the greatest source of knowledge and wisdom. It will transform your life. Memorize your favorite bits. Tweet about it. Argue it. Fight with it and wrestle with it, and that's a good thing. And let it impact your mind so that you have a Biblical mind, amen?

Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you that here in this free country, we can read this and study it and preach it and talk about it as much as we want. And we pray, God that you'd give us a hunger to know more and more of your word, to go deeper, to understand it, and to let it be a blessing to our lives and to those around us. Lord, we love you, it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.