

How to Get Started in The Bible Challenge as an Individual



- By the Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie, Rector of Christ Church Greenwich in Greenwich, CT, Founder of the Center for Biblical Studies and The Bible Challenge

www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org



Dear Friend:

We welcome you to The Bible Challenge. We are delighted that you are interested in reading God's life-transforming Word. It will change and enrich your life. Here are some things that we encourage you to read and consider before you get started:

Initial thoughts about reading the Bible

- You can start The Bible Challenge at any time of the year that you desire.
- We encourage you to read a portion of the Bible each day.
- We suggest that you give yourself a year to read the entire Bible.
- Some individuals try to read the Bible in 90 days, but this short time frame can be daunting. The Bible has a profound message, and we suggest that you take ample time to allow God's Word to penetrate your heart, mind and soul deeply.
- If you need more than a year to read the entire Bible, we support you in moving at the pace that works best for you.

Our website thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org offers many resources to help you.

Which translation of the Bible should I read?

- We encourage participants to read The New Oxford Annotated Version of the Bible. It is an excellent, highly readable translation with helpful footnotes. The New International Version of the Bible and the Common English Version are other good translations. There are

many other fine translations of the Bible. If you wish to read a different one, please feel free to do so. Bear in mind that using the King James Version to read the Bible for the first time can be difficult.

- Harness the power of technology. Many participants in The Bible Challenge are reading the Bible using their iPad, iPhone, Kindle or Nook or are listening to the Bible on CDs. The NIV Bible is readily available on CDs.
- Some Bible Challenge participants have chosen to use a 365-day-Bible. Please note, however, that these Bibles usually omit some Bible stories.
- Most participants in The Bible Challenge read the entire Bible. This is what we recommend. If this task seems too daunting, then we encourage you to 1) read the New Testament or 2) read one of the Gospels or 3) read The Book of Acts or 4) read the Psalter (the Book of Psalms), and tackle a larger challenge later.
- Some individuals enjoy reading *The Story*, a collection of seamless Bible stories published by Zondervan, which omits genealogies, dietary codes, etc. This is very accessible for people not used to reading the Bible, but it is not the full Bible and it is not our first choice of recommendation.

Reading with children and reading for teenagers

- We recommend using age-appropriate Bibles with children when parents and children read the Bible together.
- Please see our recommended resources for teenagers in the “Resources Section” of our web site under “Children, Youth and Families.”

How do you recommend that I begin reading the Bible?

- We strongly discourage participants from reading the Bible from cover to cover starting with the Book of Genesis and ending with the Book of Revelation, because most readers who do this do fail to read to the end. There are many parts of the Hebrew Scriptures that readers find challenging and spiritually dry that discourage them from completing the Bible.
- We encourage you to read three chapters of the Old Testament, one psalm and a chapter of the New Testament each day. This will help you read the entire Bible in a year. Reading a chapter of the New Testament and a psalm daily will sustain you through spiritually dryer parts of the Hebrew Scriptures.
- Our website offers a scheduled read for those who want to follow a clear plan of daily Bible reading, which will help you conclude your reading in a year's time. Please see "The One Year Read" under the "Resource" section of the website.
- Because the Bible is not a newspaper, it is best to read it with a reverent spirit. We advocate a devotional approach to reading the Bible, rather than reading it as a purely intellectual or academic exercise. We encourage you to begin each session by putting yourself in the presence of God as you start to read.
- We like the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*, where you read the text, meditate on a portion of it, then offer a prayer to God and listen in silence for God to respond. We therefore encourage all readers to read the Bible prayerfully.
- We encourage you to read in the morning for 20 or 30 minutes, so that your prayerful reading will spiritually enliven the rest of your day. If you cannot read in the morning, read when you can later in the day, especially if you can carve out a regular time for your reading.

- We encourage you to skim or skip over long genealogies, lengthy descriptions of the ephod or temple construction, animal sacrifice, or dietary codes found in the Hebrew Scriptures. Get the gist and move on so that you remain on task to finish reading the Bible.
- Many Americans make New Year's resolutions. The most common New Year's resolution in America is to lose weight. The second most common resolution is to exercise more often. Within six days most Americans have quit their resolutions. Psychologists say that this occurs because persons making resolutions have no one to hold them accountable. Hence it is vital to offer ongoing support and hold people accountable especially through the first three months of The Bible Challenge. Those who succeed in regular Bible reading for the first 90 days are likely to reach their goal.

Team strength and reaching out for support in reading the Bible

- One way to hold yourself accountable to reading God's Word and to help you to read the Bible is to start a group within your church or community. By participating in The Bible Challenge together, you can support one another in your reading, ask questions about the Bible, discuss what you are reading and share how God's Word is transforming your life.
- If you do not want to start your own group, we encourage you to find a group in your church or local community or consider reading the Bible with a friend or group of friends. It is important to share what you are learning, ask questions about the Bible and share how reading God's Word is transforming your life.
- We call our support classes "Intelligent Talk about the Bible." Some call their support groups "The Good Book Club" and other names. These groups can offer support to novice Bible readers, especially during the first 90 days of reading when novice readers are moving through the Hebrew Scriptures and struggling with stories of violence, wrathful actions attributed to God, women being treated poorly, and

strange facts such as persons living to be 920 years old. If a novice reader can work through these difficult areas, success will be likely.

- You may ask your church to see if you can put a notice in your parish newsletter that you are starting a group to join The Bible Challenge to read the entire Bible together. Invite others to join you and to come together regularly to discuss your reading, questions, learning and how it is transforming your life. Please see “How Churches can participate” for helpful suggestions, if you wish to start a group in your church to join The Bible Challenge.

If you do form a group to read the entire Bible together, we encourage you to hold a celebratory gathering or meal to celebrate your spiritual accomplishment.

Let the Center for Biblical Studies support you.

- If you have questions about what you are reading, we encourage you to e-mail them to The Center for Biblical Studies, and we will endeavor to respond promptly.
- We encourage you to have fun and to find spiritual peace and the joy that God desires for you in your daily reading. Our ultimate goal is to have you discover God’s wisdom for your daily Bible reading and to create a lifelong spiritual practice of daily Bible reading so that God may speak to you in silence and solitude and guide you through each day of your life.

Life after The Bible Challenge

- If you have found reading the entire Bible and being part of The Bible Challenge to be a blessing in your life, then we strongly encourage you to share the blessing. Invite several friends or family members to participate in The Bible Challenge.

- Those who successfully read the entire Bible may wish to read the Bible again using a different translation.
- We strongly encourage participants to make daily Bible reading an important spiritual practice for the rest of their lives. The Bible is a book worthy of a lifetime's dedication to read and reread. It is a never-ending fount of wisdom that can bestow blessings upon us on each day of our lives. Hence, one reading of the Bible is something to rejoice in having made.
- There are those like President John Adams, the second president of the United States, who made it a practice to read through the Bible each year during his adult life and felt greatly blessed by doing so. We highly advocate this practice.
- After reading the Bible through once, you will be much more able to help encourage and support others in reading the entire Bible. We encourage you to serve as an encourager and mentor for others to do this.
- Once again, we are thrilled that you have accepted to participate in The Bible Challenge. May God richly bless you for making this decision and help you to honor your commitment to reading God's Word.

If this spiritual experience has touched your heart and nourished your soul, I invite you to contribute to the Center for Biblical Studies to help us promote The Bible Challenge globally so that others may benefit from the daily reading of God's Word and participate in The Bible Challenge. Your gift can be made out to Christ Church Greenwich, with a memo for "The CBS" and sent to Christ Church Greenwich 254 E. Putnam Avenue, Greenwich, CT 06830.

May God richly bless you as you engage the Scriptures, and may God's light and love transform you and shine through you each day.

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