

Why We Read Scripture

“They would have the corn, but they will not go forth into the fields to gather it; the fruit hangs upon the tree, but they will not pluck it; the water flows at their feet, but they will not stoop to drink it. From such folly deliver us, O Lord.” — Charles Spurgeon

The Benefits of Reading Scripture

If we tried to expound upon the many benefits of reading God’s Word, I have a sneaking suspicion the list would be almost as endless as the qualities of God Himself. But for the sake of brevity, there are four reasons I find particularly helpful and convincing when trying to refuel my vision on why to read Scripture.

1. Intimacy: We commune with our Lord as we learn more about Him. In our hectic lives, even when we have the right motivations, it can sometimes be easy to let serving God replace knowing God. The longer we spend out of deep, relational time with God, the more we begin to lose track of why we were doing all these good things in the first place! This Christian lifestyle only makes sense when it is rooted in knowing God, and loving Him! We know that God already deeply loves us. This means reading Scripture doesn’t cause God to love us more, it causes *us* to love God more. The more we are reminded of and seeped in knowledge of His many free gifts, and deep affection, the more we abound in joy that we get to be intimate with such a great King, and Father!

2. Changed Desires: First of all, a grateful heart is a healthy heart — reading Scripture reminds us of what we have to be thankful for already, and helps combat our cultural inclination for always desiring *more, more, more*. But I would also challenge you to consider this: our desires are formed by what we *do*. Another way of saying that is: “we hunger for what we feed ourselves”. Have you noticed that when you watch a lot of T.V., you start to want more? And not just that, but you may begin to desire the sort of life that T.V. show presents! I know I do. Sometimes, I find myself desiring something, and I’m jolted by how out of character it is for me. Then, I trace back through what I’ve “fed” myself the last few weeks, and normally, I can find a source. But when I feed myself on Scripture, my desires also shift! I start to desire God’s affirmation, rather than the world’s; riches in heaven, rather than on earth; to forgive my offender, rather than to rage at them. If you want to look more like Jesus, feed yourself on Scripture and consider what else you are consuming. But if you want to look more like the world, better hide that Bible! It *will* change you.

3. Stability: By abiding in the Word, we begin to live by truth and not emotions. Charles Spurgeon says it this way: “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn’t.” That’s a tongue in cheek way to say that being seeped in the truth helps to keep us from being buffeted by the world with its many opinions and competing value systems. Do you know that feeling? The feeling of confusion and chaos that builds as you try to figure out where to devote your time, what really matters, who is wise, who is trustworthy? When we spend more time in the truth, those other voices and opinions grow smaller and God’s voice grows larger in our

heart. We start to judge things based off of eternal and unchanging values -- not the shifting whims of culture. And all of a sudden, the world isn't so scary and uncertain anymore. We are doing life with a powerful and kind God right beside us. Kingdom values are unshakeable, which means we can be unshakeable too.

4. Fruitfulness: Chi Alpha loves the saying, *what God does in you He wants to do through you*. It reminds us that God's grace and mercy for us personally is not the end goal of our faith. Rather, He wants to overflow through our lives into those around us, that they too might know and love Him. Our fruitfulness is vital to God's plan of salvation for the world. Thankfully, Scripture helps us with this (along with His Spirit)! Increased time in God's Word multiplies what we can speak into other's lives. *Consider this:* You know someone who is struggling to make friends at UVA. Even if you've only been a Christian a day, you can affirm that God loves them. But, if you spend time in God's Word, you can speak with even more clarity! Maybe you'll remember reading "God places the lonely into families" (Psalm 68:6). Specificity helps people better connect to God. Spending time in God's Word also increases our understanding of His truth and love, which increases our boldness and courage to speak to those around us. The more you know about something, the more confidently you can share it!

Once you've decided to start reading the Scriptures, it helps to make a plan:

When will I spend time with God?

"I will wake up at __A.M. and spend __ minutes praying and reading God's Word." While not Biblically mandated, making time to read the Bible in the morning can be wise. Practically, it helps you to focus on the text, because you're not distracted by the business of the day yet. Personally, reading God's word also helps to reset your heart and mind to go about the rest of the day with a Biblical perspective. Tip: give yourself an adequate amount of time, and set an alarm for when you want to finish so you won't constantly check your phone.

Where will I spend time with God?

Possibilities may be your kitchen table, a coffee shop, that comfy chair in your living room, or even Chick-fil-A; lying down in bed is not recommended. You want to choose a place where you will not experience heavy distraction, but also where you will not be tempted to grab a few extra snoozes.

What will I read when I spend time with God?

Try to read through a book of the Bible at a time - another great goal is reading through the Bible in a year. George Mueller (1805-1898), who is famous for founding orphanages in England, and for depending on God for meeting all his needs, wrote at age seventy six: *"It is absolutely needful . . . that we should read regularly through the Scriptures, consecutively, and not pick out here and there a chapter. If we do, we remain spiritual dwarfs. I tell you so affectionately. For the first four years after my conversion I made no progress, because I neglected the Bible. Now I have been doing this for 47 years. I have read through the whole Bible about 100 times and I always find it fresh when I begin again. Thus my peace and joy have increased more and more."*

Once your plan is made and you're getting ready to read the Scriptures:

An important thing to consider is *how* we read the Bible. We aren't supposed to read the Bible like a novel (straight through and focused only on plot development), like a magazine (flipping through to our favorite sections and skipping the rest), or even like a textbook (searching for facts as if to pass a test). The Bible is unique! It is part story, part instruction, part diary, part encouragement, and all important. So how *do* we read God's Word?

Before you even open the Scriptures, make time to pray: ask to be able to see Him clearly in Scripture and for Him to change your heart as you read.

Then, as you read, ask these 3 questions of the text:

1. What do I learn about God in this passage (who He is/what He does)?
2. What do I learn about people in this passage (who we should be/how we fall short)?
3. What does this passage tell me about the relationship between God and people?

Remember: the goal is not to just get it done. The goal is to get God's Word inside of you and be changed by it. This comes through slow and thoughtful reading. Try reading with a pen handy or a computer on which to type. This slows you down enough to really think about and write down what you are reading.

Finally, end in a time of prayer. Thank God for His Word you just read, and for who He is & His grace toward sinners. Then ask God to help you live out what you've just read. Finally, lay out your day & your requests before God.

Relevant Scriptures

John 20:30-31	<i>... these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus ...</i>
2 Timothy 3:16	<i>...All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching...</i>
Hebrew 4:12-13	<i>For the word of God is living and active and sharper than ...</i>
Psalms 119:9	<i>How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according...</i>
Colossians 3:16	<i>Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...</i>
Psalms 119:105	<i>Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.</i>
John 17:17	<i>Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.</i>

Questions for Discussion

1. What would it look like to attempt a faithful Christian walk without intimacy, stability, fruitfulness, or increasingly sanctified desires?
2. Which of these four benefits do you want more of in your life? Why?
3. What gets in the way of you reading your Bible? How can you combat this?