

Why I Plan to Read Less of the Bible This Year

By Garrett Kell

“Let us strive, every year we live, to become more deeply acquainted with Scripture.” ~ J.C. Ryle

Regularly reading God’s Word is one of the most important things we can do. We live in a world that constantly lies to us, and our hearts are prone to believe those lies. But in His mercy, God has given us His Word to guide and guard us. He has “granted to us His precious and very great promises” to renew our minds and refresh our hearts (2 Peter 1:4). As much as we need food to live physically, we need God’s Word to live spiritually (Matthew 4:4).

The turn of the New Year offers a natural time to reset (or recommit) to regularly reading God’s Word. Of course there’s nothing magical about the New Year, but it certainly seems like a good time to make any changes that are needed. For me, one of the changes I’m making is that I’m planning to read less of the Bible this year; and I’m hopeful less will actually be more.

Since I became a Christian 14 years ago, I’ve been following a Read the Bible in a Year plan. I was introduced to this idea early on as “the thing to do” and ever since I’ve found it to be a pretty typical goal for many Christians. I’ve enjoyed this plan, but to be honest, I’ve never finished the plan in a year. There, I said it. I’ve never finished the Read the Bible in a Year Plan.

Some years I’ve made it further than others and by God’s grace I’ve never gone more than a few days without hearing from the Scriptures. But over the years I’ve been riddled with guilt for failing to not finishing the plan and for rushing through some portions of the plan just to check it off. In my younger years as a Christian this guilt was more debilitating, but even today, as I look toward 2013, I feel guilty for the unchecked boxes in my 2012 plan. Jesus didn’t tell me I needed to read those ten chapters in 1 Chronicles, but my heart tells me I’m a loser for not getting to them (yet).

To be clear, I'm not taking a flamethrower to spiritual disciplines. If we don't "discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness" we are in sin and our hearts will grow cold toward God. So if you're prone to be so "spiritual" that you don't need to make a plan, then I'd encourage you, whenever you feel led to, read through some of the verses I list in the next section. I trust you will, as I have, come to understand the necessity of Spirit-empowered discipline.

I also want to be clear that I'm not against the Read the Bible in a Year Plan. It's an excellent goal and very achievable. In fact, I had one friend who after his conversion read through the Bible deeply twice in just under a year. So, what our plan is seems less important to me. What is most important is that we commit to God's Word in the hopes that we will grow in our love for Christ. So in conclusion, I'd like to leave you with a few principles to consider as you plan to pursue Christ through His Word in the upcoming year.

Make a plan.

As Don Carson rightly said, "no one drifts toward holiness." If we just go with the flow, we will eventually be swept away with the current of idleness and sin. In light of this, it is wise to make humble plans to draw near to God and fulfill His purposes (Prov. 6:6-8, 21:5, 24:27; Matthew 6:33, 25:1-13; Luke 14:28; James 4:13-17). As you think about what plan you intend to use, I'd encourage you to look [here](#) and [here](#) for good options. As for me, here's the three-fold path I'm planning to take this year.

First, I plan to read the passage that will be preached on the next Lord's Day. If I'm preaching this will be a necessity since I'm hoping to live better than I preach, but if I'm not preaching, I plan to study ahead to get the most out of the sermon.

Second, I plan to pick one Bible book a month to study deeply. In January, a friend and I are studying Amos. For the month we will read and re-read it. We plan to outline it, chart it, and memorize portions of it. Then in February, I'll select another book with a similar approach, though hopefully improved by January's attempt. By doing this I'm able to meditate deeply on one book, something I felt I was missing in other seasons of my life. Some months I may do two books if they are short (i.e. Haggai, Obadiah, Philemon, 2 and 3 John).

Third, I plan to read other books of the Bible in one sitting throughout the year. To avoid neglecting other portions of the Scriptures, I have a list of the books of the

Bible in my journal and plan to regularly step away for an hour or two throughout the year and just read them straight through.

Partner Up.

I encourage you to not keep your plan by yourself. Find another brother or sister in your local church who you enjoy spending time together with and ask them to join you in this journey. Commit to a month or two or whatever works for you, but don't do this alone.

As I mentioned above, a guy that I'm discipling and I are going through Amos together in January. We will get together twice in the month, but we'll email or text or talk on the phone during the month about what we're learning and what we are struggling to understand. You don't have to work out your plan with someone else, but I've certainly benefited from it.

Remember Why You're Reading.

The reason we read the Scriptures isn't just to check off boxes and make ourselves feel like we've accomplished something for God. The Scriptures aren't an end in themselves, God is the end. As we plan to seek Him, however we do it, we must come with the supreme goal of loving Him more and obeying what He teaches us when we do read. If our plans become traps for guilt and discouragement...then plan to scrap your plan and do something else.

The most important thing in this moment and in the moments that make up next year is that we draw nearer to God through His Son Jesus. His Word teaches us how to do this, so let us plan to draw near with great hope because of promises like these from the Prophet Isaiah "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight ourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..." Isaiah 55:1-3