

2015 CONNECTION GUIDE with annual Bible reading plan

Daily CONNECTING TO GOD THROUGH GODLY GOALS, BIBLE READING, PRAYER & WORSHIP

Dear Friends,

In 2015, we are emphasizing 3 key ways for you to engage in *The Power of One*: prayer (and Bible reading), evangelism and giving.

As part of that, I encourage you to connect to God through praying and reading the Bible daily. Though we may be eternally connected to Him through our faith in Jesus Christ, God wants us to be relationally connected to Him every day. I've seen my desire to be connected to God increase as I've made a point to spend time daily in prayer and reading His Word.

Each year, reading Scripture and praying daily become more of a joyful habit. If you've never read the whole Bible through, I encourage you to join me this year. The enclosed Bible reading guide gives you daily reading assignments to help you stay on track. There are several other plans for Bible reading listed on the back cover of this brochure. I've also provided some tips to help you get back on track when you fall behind.

We are also providing a quarterly prayer guide in 2015 that will include each month's Bible reading (using the same plan included here) along with monthly prayer lists you can personalize. Working toward the goals I made in 2014, my satisfaction with my prayer life has grown immensely. I'm praying the same will be true for you in 2015.

If you have read the Bible through or if you've tried to read it in a year but didn't finish, I hope you'll take up the challenge again this year. I pray you'll approach prayer and this year's Bible reading with renewed excitement and anticipation. God bless you as you seek the Lord this year.

Your Pastor,

Dick Lincoln Email: dick@shandon.org @dicklincoln

ESTABLISHING SPIRITUAL GOALS

Each year I encourage you to set a few spiritual goals. I've found that setting specific goals for myself each year, beyond just wanting to read the Bible and pray daily, help me stay on track with my desire to be connected to God. Setting specific goals can help you if you have struggled in the past to be consistent or if you are looking for way to deepen your connection from year to year.

Few beats many, meaning you are more likely to be successful in achieving your goals if you don't set too many. I recommend just three or four. Prayerfully spend some time thinking through your goals for this year and then score them using the worksheet on the next page. It's very important that your goals are measurable, dated, worthwhile, desirable, reachable and controllable. You may also want to choose goals by categories where you desire to see growth, such as Bible reading, prayer, evangelism, or tithing.

Often, even seasoned goal setters over- or under-reach when they set their goals. You are always free to adjust goals during the year and should do so without guilt. But it is also important that you exercise self-discipline when you find it a little harder to achieve them than you expected. Remember, your goals should be reachable, but they should also stretch you.

Evaluate your progress from time to time. Are your goals helping you connect to God or deepen your connection to Him? When we are close to God, it is a pleasure to do things for Him and to spend time with Him. It is a pleasure to give to Him. But when we are not especially close to God, spending time with Him and doing things for Him become a duty. The longer the status is duty the more those tasks are agony rather than pleasure. Make your goals work for you as you seek to connect to God, but don't let your goals become a slave master.

Are you excited about your new goals? One indication of a good goal is that you look forward to implementing it. God bless you as you set goals for the coming year and diligently work towards them. May you see your connection to God deepened this year because of them.

MY SPIRITUAL GOALS FOR 2015

Remember: Few beats many.

Take a few days to ask the Lord what His will is for your spiritual goals. Record your impressions until they become firm. Try to stick to no more than 4 goals.

Rate your goals according to the qualities below.

		SCORE 1-10			
QUALITY	DEFINITION	GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3	GOAL 4
Measurable	You can determine success or failure without question.				
Dated	There is a definite finishing point.				
Worthwhile	Seems worthwhile to you.				
Desirable	Is desirable to you.				
Reachable	Honestly within reach with some discipline.				
Controllable	You have what's needed to reach your goal.				
	TOTAL				

The total for each goal should exceed 50. If your total is 50 or below, your goal needs revision.

My spiritual goals:

1.

2.

3.

4.

CONNECTING TO GOD

To honestly grow in our connection with God, we must interact with Him so we can hear what He has to say about Himself. While He often speaks by His Spirit through men, our most reliable source of God's opinion about Himself is the Bible. Therefore connection to God requires reading the Scriptures consistently and personally.

It can be a challenge to do either, and it is certainly a challenge to do both. Consistency is fairly easy for some people, but for others, developing and keeping a routine is a great struggle. They are more likely to read the Bible in crisis, out of guilt, or when inspired. For the more naturally consistent person, it is a challenge to keep it personal and to come to each reading expecting or seeking something from God instead of fulfilling a duty. The occasional reader is generally motivated when he or she comes to God but comes too seldom.

Connecting Consistently

Most people are inconsistent because they don't consistently feel like spending time with God. They make the common mistake of wanting an emotional push to be consistent, but feelings are never consistent for anyone. Consistency must come from elsewhere. People who are consistent have learned to motivate themselves by habit or by playing games with themselves. An example of a game would be: "I will not let myself get the paper, turn on the television, get my coffee, or do my exercise until I have finished reading Scripture and praying." Having a reward for yourself can help you get started. Consistent people may also develop a habit so that the day feels out of sync if they have not spent time with God. Habit usually produces more consistency than a game, but both work. Setting goals as described in the beginning of this resource will help you.

Connecting Personally

Being personal is not very hard to do, yet it is also easy to not be personal. It only takes a few seconds to flip your heart from task/habit mentality to "Lord, I want to hear from You." My friend, Howard Ramsey, encouraged people to start their time with God with the prayer: "Lord Jesus, please speak to me personally." I need at least one other fairly easy step. After I spend time with God, I need to be able to tell myself what interested me, spoke to me, convicted me, or comforted me. Those are the kinds of things you experience when you are seeking to connect to Him personally. When I actively want to do these two steps, it is surprising how personal my time with God is on a regular basis. It is also surprising how easy it is to be slothful, skip the active desire to hear from the Lord, and slip right into the "duty mode."

To grow your connection you need both consistency and the desire for personal connection. God bless you as you seek to spend time with Him in a personal, intimate relationship.

The Discipleship Journal[®] Bible Reading Plan

The *Discipleship Journal* Bible Reading Plan offers special features that will aid you in your journey through the Bible.

- By reading from four separate places in the Scriptures every day, you should be able to better grasp the unity of the Scriptures, as well as enjoy the variety of four different viewpoints.
- You can begin at any point during the year.
- To prevent the frustration of falling behind, which most of us tend to do when following a Bible reading plan, each month of this plan gives you only 25 readings. Since you'll have several "free days" each month, you could set aside Sundays either not to read at all or to catch up on any readings you may have missed in the past week.
- If you finish the month's readings by the twenty-fifth, you could use the final days of the month to study the passages that challenged or intrigued you.
- If reading through the entire Bible in one year looms as too large a task, you can alter the plan to meet your needs. For example, you could read the gospels and the wisdom books this year, and the other two categories next year.

In the year ahead, ask God each day to speak directly to you from the Scripture portions you read. Be expectant, and let your continual exposure to God's Word reshape your attitudes and behavior as you gain a better understanding of every part of His written testimony to us.



To subscribe, go to www.discipleshipjournal.com Or call: 1-800-877-1811 | Or write: P.O. Box 5548, Harlan, IA 51593-1048

The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan

January

	New Testament		Old Testament	
	▶ MATTHEW	ACTS	PSALMS	▶ GENESIS
1.	1:1-17	1:1-11	1	1-2
2.	1:18-25	1:12-26	2	3-4
3.	2:1-12	2:1-21	3	5-8
4.	2:13-23	2:22-47	4	9-11
5.	3:1-12	3	5	12-14
6.	3:13-17	4:1-22	6	15-17
7.	4:1-11	4:23-37	7	18-20
8.	4:12-17	5:1-16	8	21-23
9.	4:18-25	5:17-42	9	24
10.	5:1-12	6	10	25-26
11.	5:13-20	7:1-38	11	27-28
12.	5:21-32	7:39-60	12	29-30
13.	5:33-48	8:1-25	13	31
14.	6:1-15	8:26-40	14	32-33
15.	6:16-24	9:1-19	15	34-35
16.	6:25-34	9:20-43	16	36
17.	7:1-14	10:1-23	17	37-38
18.	7:15-29	10:24-48	18:1-24	39-40
19.	8:1-13	11:1-18	18:25-50	41
20.	8:14-22	11:19-30	19	42-43
21.	8:23-34	12	20	44-45
22.	9:1-13	13:1-25	21	46-47
23.	9:14-26	13:26-52	22:1-11	48
24.	9:27-38	14	22:12-31	49
25.	10:1-20	15:1-21	23	50

February

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	New Testament		Old Testamen	t
	▶ MATTHEW	ACTS	PSALMS	▶ EXODUS
1.	10:21-42	15:22-41	24	1-3
2.	11:1-19	16:1-15	25	4-6
3.	11:20-30	16:16-40	26	7-9
4.	12:1-21	17:1-15	27	10-12
5.	12:22-37	17:16-34	28	13-15
6.	12:38-50	18:1-17	29	16-18
7.	13:1-23	18:18-28	30	19-20
8.	13:24-43	19:1-22	31	21-23
9.	13:44-58	19:23-41	32	24-26
10.	14:1-21	20:1-12	33	27-29
11.	14:22-36	20:13-38	34	30-31
12.	15:1-20	21:1-26	35	32-33
13.	15:21-39	21:27-40	36	34
14.	16:1-12	22	37:1-22	35-37
15.	16:13-28	23:1-11	37:23-40	38-40
				▶ LEVITICUS
16.	17:1-13	23:12-35	38	1-4
17.	17:14-27	24	39	5-7
18.	18:1-14	25:1-12	40	8-10
19.	18:15-35	25:13-27	41	11-13
20.	19:1-15	26:1-18	42	14-15
21.	19:16-30	26:19-32	43	16-17
22.	20:1-16	27:1-26	44	18-20
23.	20:17-34	27:27-44	45	21-23
24.	21:1-11	28:1-16	46	24-25
25.	21:12-22	28:17-31	47	26-27

March

	New Testament		Old Testamen	t
	▶ MATTHEW	ROMANS	PSALMS	NUMBERS
1.	21:23-32	1:1-17	48	1-2
2.	21:33-46	1:18-32	49	3-4
3.	22:1-14	2	50	5-6
4.	22:15-33	3	51	7-8
5.	22:34-46	4	52	9-11
6.	23:1-12	5:1-11	53	12-14
7.	23:13-24	5:12-21	54	15-17
8.	23:25-39	6:1-14	55	18-20
9.	24:1-14	6:15-23	56	21-22
10.	24:15-35	7:1-12	57	23-25
11.	24:36-51	7:13-25	58	26-27
12.	25:1-13	8:1-17	59	28-30
13.	25:14-30	8:18-39	60	31-32
14.	25:31-46	9:1-18	61	33-36
				DEUT.
15.	26:1-16	9:19-33	62	1-3
16.	26:17-35	10	63	4-5
17.	26:36-56	11:1-24	64	6-8
18.	26:57-75	11:25-36	65	9-12
19.	27:1-10	12:1-8	66	13-17
20.	27:11-26	12:9-21	67	18-21
21.	27:27-44	13	68	22-26
22.	27:45-56	14	69:1-18	27-28
23.	27:57-66	15:1-13	69:19-36	29-31
24.	28:1-10	15:14-33	70	32
25.	28:11-20	16	71	33-34

April

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22. 8:22-30 14:26-40 91 20-21	22.	8:22-30	14:26-40	91	20-21
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23. 8:31-38 15:1-28 92 1	23.	8:31-38	15:1-28	92	1
24. 9:1-13 15:29-58 93 2-3	24.	9:1-13	15:29-58	93	2-3
25. 9:14-32 16 94 4	25.	9:14-32	16	94	4

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The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan

May

	<u>u</u>			
	New Testament		Old Testament	t
	► MARK	▶ 2 COR.	▶ PSALMS	▶ 1 SAMUEL
1.	9:33-50	1:1-11	95	1-2
2.	10:1-16	1:12-24	96	3-5
3.	10:17-34	2	97	6-8
4.	10:35-52	3	98	9-10
5.	11:1-11	4	99	11-13
б.	11:12-26	5	100	14
7.	11:27-33	6	101	15-16
8.	12:1-12	7	102	17-18
9.	12:13-27	8	103	19-20
10.	12:28-34	9	104	21-23
11.	12:35-44	10	105	24-25
12.	13:1-13	11:1-15	106:1-23	26-28
13.	13:14-31	11:16-33	106:24-48	29-31
				2 SAMUEL
14.	13:32-37	12:1-10	107	1-2
15.	14:1-11	12:11-21	108	3-4
16.	14:12-31	13	109	5-7
		▶ GALATIANS		
17.	14:32-42	1	110	8-10
18.	14:43-52	2	111	11-12
19.	14:53-65	3:1-14	112	13
20.	14:66-72	3:15-29	113	14-15
21.	15:1-15	4:1-20	114	16-17
22.	15:16-32	4:21-31	115	18-19
23.	15:33-41	5:1-12	116	20-21
24.	15:42-47	5:13-26	117	22
25.	16	6	118	23-24

July

	New Testament		Old Testamen	t
	► LUKE	► COLOSSIANS	PSALMS	▶ 1 CHRON.
1.	7:11-17	1:1-14	123-124	1-2
2.	7:18-35	1:15-29	125	3-4
3.	7:36-50	2:1-7	126	5-6
4.	8:1-15	2:8-15	127	7-9
5.	8:16-25	2:16-23	128	10-11
6.	8:26-39	3:1-14	129	12-14
7.	8:40-56	3:15-25	130-131	15-16
8.	9:1-17	4:1-9	132	17-19
9.	9:18-27	4:10-18	🗌 133-134	20-22
		▶ 1 THESSALONIAN	IS	
10.	9:28-36	1	135	23-25
11.	9:37-50	2:1-9	136	26-28
12.	9:51-62	2:10-20	137	29
				2 CHRON.
13.	10:1-16	3:1-6	138	1-2
14.	10:17-24	3:7-13	139	3-5
15.	10:25-37	4:1-10	140	6-7
16.	10:38-42	4:11-18	141	8-9
17.	11:1-13	5:1-11	142	10-12
18.	11:14-28	5:12-28	143	13-16
		2 THESSALONIAN		
19.	11:29-36	1:1-7	144	17-19
20.	11:37-54	1:8-12	145	20-21
21.	12:1-12	2:1-12	146	22-24
22.	12:13-21	2:13-17	147	25-27
23.	12:22-34	3:1-5	148	28-29
24.	12:35-48	3:6-13	149	30-33
25.	12:49-59	3:14-18	150	34-36

Ju	ine			
	New Testament		Old Testament	
	▶ LUKE	▶ EPHESIANS	PSALMS	▶ 1 KINGS
1.	1:1-25	1:1-14	119:1-8	□1
2.	1:26-38	1:15-23	 119:9-16	2-3
3.	1:39-56	2:1-10	 119:17-24	4-5
4.	1:57-66	2:11-22	119:25-32	6-7
5.	1:67-80	3:1-13	119:33-40	8
6.	2:1-20	3:14-21	119:41-48	9-10
7.	2:21-40	4:1-16	119:49-56	11
8.	2:41-52	4:17-24	119:57-64	12
9.	3:1-20	4:25-32	119:65-72	13-14
10.	3:21-38	5:1-21	119:73-80	15-16
11.	4:1-12	5:22-33	119:81-88	17-18
12.	4:13-30	6:1-9	119:89-96	19-20
13.	4:31-37	6:10-24	119:97-104	21-22
		▶ PHILIPPIANS		▶ 2 KINGS
14.	4:38-44	1:1-11	119:105-112	1-3
15.	5:1-11	1:12-20	119:113-120	4-5
16.	5:12-16	1:21-30	119:121-128	6-7
17.	5:17-26	2:1-11	119:129-136	8-9
18.	5:27-32	2:12-18	119:137-144	10-11
19.	5:33-39	2:19-30	119:145-152	12-13
20.	6:1-16	3:1-9	119:153-160	14-15
21.	6:17-26	3:10-14	119:161-168	16-17
22.	6:27-36	3:15-21	119:169-176	18-19
23.	6:37-42	4:1-7	120	20-21
24.	6:43-49	4:8-13	121	22-23
25.	7:1-10	4:14-23	122	24-25

<u>August</u>

	New Testament		O l d Testament	
	▶ LUKE	▶ 1 TIMOTHY	PROVERBS	► EZRA
1.	13:1-9	1:1-11	□1	1-2
2.	 13:10-21		2	3
3.	13:22-35	2	3	4-5
4.	14:1-14	3:1-10	4	6
5.	14:15-24	3:11-16	5	7
6.	14:25-35	4	6	8
7.	15:1-10	5:1-15	7	9
8.	15:11-32	5:16-25	8	10
				▶ NEH.
9.	16:1-9	6:1-10	9	1-2
10.	16:10-18	6:11-21	10:1-16	3
		2 TIMOTHY		
11.	16:19-31	1:1-7	10:17-32	4-5
12.	17:1-10	1:8-18	11:1-15	6
13.	17:11-19	2:1-13	11:16-31	7
14.	17:20-37	2:14-26	12:1-14	8
15.	18:1-8	3:1-9	12:15-28	9
16.	18:9-17	3:10-17	13:1-12	10
17.	18:18-30	4	13:13-25	11
	_	► TITUS	_	_
18.	18:31-43	1:1-9	14:1-18	12
19.	19:1-10	1:10-16	14:19-35	13
				► ESTHER
20.	19:11-27	2:1-10	15:1-17	
21.	19:28-38	2:11-15	15:18-33	2
22.	19:39-48	3:1-8	16:1-16	3-4
23.	20:1-8	3:9-15	16:17-33	5-6
24	D 20:0 10	▶ PHILEMON	□ 17·1 14	7 0
24.	20:9-19	□ 1-11 □ 12-25	☐ 17:1-14 ☐ 17:15-28	□ 7-8 □ 9-10
25.	20:20-20	12-23	17:15-26	<u>□</u> 9-10

The Discipleship Journal Bible Reading Plan

<u>September</u>

Ν	New Testament		Old Testament	
	LUKE	HEBREWS	PROVERBS	ISAIAH
1.	20:27-40	1:1-9	18	1-2
2.	20:41-47	1:10-14	19:1-14	3-5
3.	 21:1-19	2:1-9	 	 □ 6-8
4.	21:20-28	2:10-18	20:1-15	
5.	21:29-38	□3	20:16-30	 □ 11-13
6.	 22:1-13	4:1-11	21:1-16	 14-16
7.	22:14-23	4:12-16	21:17-31	 17-20
8.	22:24-30	5	22:1-16	21-23
9.	22:31-38	6:1-12	22:17-29	24-26
10.	22:39:46	6:13-20	23:1-18	27-28
11.	22:47-53	7:1-10	23:19-35	 29-30
12.	22:54-62	7:11-28	24:1-22	31-33
13.	22:63-71	8:1-6	24:23-34	34-36
14.	23:1-12	8:7-13	25:1-14	37-39
15.	23:13-25	9:1-10	25:15-28	40-41
16.	23:26-31	9:11-28	26:1-16	42-43
17.	23:32-37	10:1-18	26:17-28	44-45
18.	23:38-43	10:19-39	27:1-14	46-48
19.	23:44-49	11:1-16	27:15-27	49-50
20.	23:50-56	11:17-31	28:1-14	51-53
21.	24:1-12	11:32-40	28:15-28	54-55
22.	24:13-27	12:1-13	29:1-14	56-58
23.	24:28-35	12:14-29	29:15-27	59-61
24.	24:36-44	13:1-8	30	62-64
25.	24:45-53	13:9-25	31	65-66

November

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	New Testament		Old Testament	
	▶ JOHN	2 PETER	▶ JOB	► EZEKIEL
1.	7:37-44	1:1-11	🗌 1	1-3
2.	7:45-53	1:12-21	2	4-8
3.	8:1-11	2:1-9	3	9-12
4.	8:12-20	2:10-16	4	13-15
5.	8:21-30	2:17-22	5	16
6.	8:31-47	3:1-9	6	17-19
7.	8:48-59	3:10-18	7	20-21
		I JOHN		
8.	9:1-12	1:1-4	8	22-23
9.	9:13-25	1:5-10	9:1-20	24-26
10.	9:26-41	2:1-11	9:21-35	27-28
11.	10:1-10	2:12-17	10	29-30
12.	10:11-21	2:18-23	11	31-32
13.	10:22-42	2:24-29	12	33-34
14.	11:1-16	3:1-10	13	35-37
15.	11:17-37	3:11-18	14	38-39
16.	11:38-44	3:19-24	15:1-16	40-41
17.	11:45-57	4:1-6	15:17-35	42-44
18.	12:1-11	4:7-21	16	45-47
19.	12:12-19	5:1-12	17	48
				▶ DANIEL
20.	12:20-36	5:13-21	18	1-2
		2 JOHN		
21.	12:37-50	1-13	19	3-4
		3 JOHN		
22.	13:1-11	1-14	20	5-6
		JUDE		
23.	13:12-17	1-7	21:1-21	7-8
24.	13:18-30	8-16	21:22-34	9
25.	13:31-38	17-25	22	10-12

<u>October</u>

N	lew Testament		Old Testamen	t
	▶ JOHN	▶ JAMES	▶ ECCLES.	▶ JEREMIAH
1.	1:1-18	1:1-11	1	1-2
2.	1:19-28	1:12-18	2:1-16	3-4
3.	1:29-34	1:19-27	2:17-26	5-6
4.	1:35-42	2:1-13	3:1-15	7-9
5.	1:43-51	2:14-26	3:16-22	10-11
б.	2:1-11	3:1-12	4	12-13
7.	2:12-25	3:13-18	5	14-15
8.	3:1-15	4:1-10	6	16-18
9.	3:16-21	4:11-17	7:1-14	19-22
10.	3:22-36	5:1-6	7:15-29	23-25
11.	4:1-14	5:7-12	8	26-29
12.	4:15-26	5:13-20	9	30-31
		1 PETER		
13.	4:27-42	1:1-9	10	32-34
14.	4:43-54	1:10-16	11	35-38
15.	5:1-15	1:17-25	12	39-43
			SONG OF SC	DNGS
16.	5:16-30	2:1-8	1	44-46
17.	5:31-47	2:9-17	2	47-48
18.	6:1-15	2:18-25	3	49
19.	6:16-24	3:1-7	4:1-7	50
20.	6:25-40	3:8-12	4:8-16	51
21.	6:41-59	3:13-22	5	52
	_	_	_	▶ LAM.
22.	6:60-71	4:1-11	6	□ 1
23.	7:1-13	4:12-19	7	2
24.	7:14-24	5:1-7	8:1-7	3
25.	7:25-36	5:8-14	8:8-14	4-5

December

	New Testament		Old Testament	
	JOHN	REVELATION	▶ JOB	HOSEA
1.	14:1-14	1:1-8	23	1-3
2.	14:15-21	1:9-20	24	4-6
3.	14:22-31	2:1-17	25-26	7-8
4.	15:1-8	2:18-29	27	9-12
5.	15:9-17	3:1-13	28	13-14
				▶ JOEL
6.	15:18-27	3:14-22	29	1
7.	16:1-11	4	30	2-3
				AMOS
8.	16:12-24	5	31:1-23	1-2
9.	16:25-33	\square_6	31:24-40	 □ 3-4
10.	□ □ 17:1-5	□_7	32	5-6
11.	17:6-19		33:1-11	7-9
				▶ OBADIAH
12.	17:20-26	□9	33:12-33	1-21
				▶ JONAH
13.	18:1-18	10	34:1-20	1-4
				▶ MICAH
14.	18:19-27	□11	34:21-37	□ 1-3
15.	18:28-40	□ 12	35	4-5
16.	19:1-16	13	36:1-15	6-7
10.	13.110			▶ NAHUM
17.	19:17-27	14	36:16-33	1-3
17.			0.10.55	► HABAKKUK
18.	19:28-37	15	37	
10.	19.20-37			► ZEPHANIAH
19.	19:38-42	□ 16	38:1-21	
20.	20:1-9		38:22-41	□ 1-2
20.	20.1-9		50.22-41	L S ▶ HAGGAI
21.	20:10-18			I 1-2
21.	20:10-18	18	39	
22.	D 20 10 22			► ZECHARIAH
	20:19-23	19	40	1-5
23.	20:24-31	20	41:1-11	6-9
24.	21:1-14	21	41:12-34	10-14
	_	_	_	MALACHI
25.	21:15-25	22	42	1-4

BIBLE READING

Choose a translation. If you are new at reading the Bible, try an easy reading version such as The New Living Bible. If you like a challenge or have been at this for a while, try a more literal translation, such as The New American Standard, The New International Version, and The New King James.

Choose a reading plan and persevere. Everyone has parts of the Bible they struggle to enjoy. The most workable plans break up the hard parts of Scripture so that each day you read some more difficult passages and some easier, inspiring passages. The plan included in this resource is just such a plan, with daily readings in the Old Testament and New Testament.

Choose a time and place. If the time and place you pick at first doesn't work for you, re-think and try again until you find one that is comfortable and inviting. Try not to allow other things to crowd out time for reading your Bible.

Hold yourself accountable. The plan included in this resource has a check box for each day so that it's apparent to you where you are in your Bible reading.

Begin each reading with prayer: "God, please speak to me personally through Your Word. In Jesus' name. Amen."

Stay connected when you get behind or discouraged. Remember that Bible reading is not about task completion. It is about connecting to God and establishing spiritual health. You can take one of two basic approaches if you get behind: 1. do whatever it takes to catch up, no matter how much time it takes, or 2. forget what you haven't done and pick up where you left off in the plan. If you have a chance to make up some of what you haven't read, then do so. Both approaches work. Try both and see which you prefer.

Combatting Discouragement

Take advantage of your plan. The plan included in this resource provides 25 days of reading every month. That means you have at least five days in every month (except February) and six days in the 31-day months when you don't have any assignment. Use those days to make up missed readings or read ahead.

Ask God for help. God loves you and wants you to succeed in connecting to Him. He loves to help people who know they need His help. Tell Him you want to be spiritually healthy and need His help to do so.

Don't worry about the parts of Scripture you don't understand. Just keep reading and enjoy the parts you do understand. The Bible is a very deep book, and understanding it is a lifetime project for everyone. Don't get frustrated because you couldn't understand it all this year. You may find that you understand more and more each year.

Make a strong commitment. If you start this endeavor saying, "I'm going to read the Bible every day," you will be better off than if you say, "I guess I'll give it a shot." Even if you have to make up for days missed, commit to finishing by the end of December.

PRAYER

We all talk differently-same language, but different manners of speaking. We shouldn't be surprised, then, that we can and do talk to God in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the more you can adapt your speaking style to different kinds of people, the better you'll be able to communicate to more people. On the other hand, God doesn't need you to be a better communicator for His sake. He knows and hears the needs of your heart before you even speak them. He does, however, will you to pray about more than you naturally feel like praying for and in different ways and amounts. To that end, the Bible describes multiple ways to pray:

- 1. Confession of sin
- 2. Praise of God
- 3. Thanksgiving to God
- 4. Petition (asking on behalf of yourself)
- 5. Intercession (asking on behalf of others)

Read the following descriptions of confession, praise, thanksgiving, intercession and petition. Rate how frequently you utilize these forms of prayer, then choose the one you don't typically employ and add it to your prayer time. Be intentional to do it on a regular basis and you'll experience the joy and blessing of a well-rounded prayer life that leads to a deeper connection to God.

Confession

Read the following passages: 1 John 1:8-10; Psalm 32:5, 38:18; and Proverbs 28:13. These verses (and many more like them) convince me that my confession of sin is important to God. To confess means "to say the same as." If the Bible calls something a sin, it doesn't matter if you think it is okay or whether it bothers you or not–what God calls sin is sin. If the Holy Spirit convicts your conscience about an act or habit of yours, confess it as sin, whether the Bible explicitly condemns it or not. When convicted by God's Word or by His Holy Spirit, agree with God that you have committed a sin. That is confession. If your sin is a crime or a debt, you may need to satisfy the requirements of justice in addition to the requirements of confession. But in regards to your relationship with God, He cleanses you of all unrighteousness the moment of your confession.

Because we tend to develop sin habits, it's common to wonder how many times we can commit a sin and still be forgiven. Jesus said in Matthew 18:21-22 that we are to forgive one another "seventy times seven." I don't think he meant literally we are to forgive 490 times and no more. Rather, I think He meant we are to forgive one another an unlimited number of times. Moreover, I'm convinced He is willing to forgive us an unlimited number of times as well. But beware of taking His forgiveness for granted! Don't settle into the attitude that says, "Well, He's forgiven me the previous 100 times, so I won't bother with confessing this one." Confession is absolutely necessary for forgiveness and cleansing from our unrighteousness– no matter how embarrassed or disgusted we may get with a particular pattern of sin.

PRAYER

<u>Praise</u>

You don't know the value of this form of prayer until you personally experience Psalm 22:3: "God inhabits the praises of His people." When you are low or discouraged, try setting aside the source of discouragement long enough to spend some time telling God how wonderful He is. Don't even let your praise bleed over into thanking Him for what He's done. Just focus on God's amazing attributes. I like to praise God by turning to the Psalms, particularly chapters 23, 37, 103 and 145-150. I personalize them as I read them. For example, "Lord, You are my Shepherd, and I marvel at the ways You guide, lead and provide. I know I can count on You for everything I need." Try it. It doesn't matter if your theology is great or if it's the same way someone else would do it. What matters is that you tell God how wonderful He is. I recommend that you get off by yourself to do this. Praising God can be a profoundly personal and powerful experience. I sometimes get loud and praise God in a way I wouldn't especially want others to see. But I definitely want God to see my heart of praise for Him. It is amazing how praise lights up the dark places in your life when you experience God inhabiting your words of praise.

Thanksgiving

The spiritual and emotional values of thanksgiving are the same as that for praise. While we praise and thank God, we are lifted out of our anxiety and turmoil and ushered into His presence. However, the focus of thanks is different from that of praise. Praise focuses on loving God for who He is; thanksgiving focuses on loving God for what He's done. It's easy to get caught up in one and slip into the other, but don't worry about blending thanks and praise. Just remember to judge the balance in your prayer life by whether or not you utilize both praise and thanksgiving.

For example, I praise God for being a wonderful Creator, a loving God, and a wonderful Savior. I thank Him for saving me from my sins, for giving me a good wife and family, and for giving me a church that I love. It is certainly possible to get out of balance in focusing so much on thanksgiving that I'm only aware of the blessings I get from God and neglect the greatest blessing I can have from Him–His grace and attention to me. On the other hand, I can get so ethereal in my prayers that I'm simply thinking about God and not about what He does here on earth. Prayer needs to be both heavenly (praise)- and earthly (thanks)-minded. Making time to praise and thank God provides this balance.

Intercession

Intercession is praying for other people. Most people find it helpful to have a prayer list with the names of people they are praying for and what they're asking the Lord to do for them. Scripture commands us to also pray for the governing authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-2). Make intercession for those in authority over you a regular part of your prayer life and have a consistent way of praying for other people in your life. I also enjoy closing my eyes, relaxing before God and saying, "Lord Jesus, You know who You want me to pray for. Please bring their names and needs to my mind and lead me in prayer." Then for the next few moments, I pray

PRAYER

for whoever comes to my mind. One of my spiritual goals for this year is daily praying very intentionally and specifically for those God brings to my mind—not just saying, "Lord, please bless this person."

Petition

Petition is asking God for help. I was told when I was in seminary that you could tell the depth of your spiritual life by how little you prayed for yourself and how much you prayed for others. While that sounds pious and spiritual, it isn't necessarily accurate. The word most frequently translated "pray" or "prayer" means asking God for help for yourself. There should be no shame in it, no reluctance to do it, and no worry about what you ask for. He is our Father. We are His children. I was never offended by my children making a request of me, even though it might have been way out of bounds. Likewise, our Father wants us to ask Him for whatever our hearts desire, as long as we're willing to take "no" for an answer.

Legend has it that one day a man asked Alexander the Great for a ridiculous sum of money so that his daughter could be married, and Alexander gave it to him. When Alexander the Great's chief advisor learned about it, he asked, "Why would you do that? That's a ridiculous amount of money. It's probably more than you would have given for your own daughter." Alexander replied, "That man paid me a great compliment when he asked me to do this." "I don't understand why you would say that," replied his bewildered advisor. But Alexander explained, "He must believe that I am both rich and generous if he asked for this, and therefore he paid me a compliment." Remember, your Father in Heaven is both rich and generous. He is not offended by your asking. So if you have needs in your life–emotional, personal, financial, or material–ask the Father. Then leave your need in His hands and trust His answer, whether it is "yes," "no," or "not yet."

Prayer is a wonderful discipline. It keeps us close to God, and it is absolutely essential to the Christian life. There can be no fulfillment of God's will for our life without prayer.

Quarterly Prayer Guide

We've updated our prayer guide for this year to make it more personalized yet still guide you through praying for our church, the lost and our community. Pick up a prayer guide at the Welcome Centers.

Learn more about getting involved in Shandon's Prayer Ministry at *www.shandon.org/prayer* or contact Mat Saxon: msaxon@shandon.org, (803) 782-1300.



PUBLIC WORSHIP

Our connection to God is based on our personal time with Him: reading Scripture, praying and placing our personality under the Lordship of Christ during private times with God. But our connection also requires public worship. Public worship is, in many respects, more transformative than private worship. You can never be what God wants you to be with only one form of worship or the other. We need to have our personal time with God on a daily basis and our corporate worship time on at least a weekly basis. How can you make your weekly worship time as transformative as possible?

- 1. Prepare the day before. For example, lay out your clothes or polish your shoes. As you do whatever your activity is, pray, "Lord, I'm looking forward to tomorrow. I want to be ready for worship so that it is not just something I roll into." Become active in Sunday School and take time to read your lesson. If you think of a few questions or comments you'd like to make, write them down. Pray something as simple as, "God, when we go to church tomorrow as a family, please speak to my family and to me through our worship and through Sunday School."
- 2. Come with a hungry heart. On Sunday morning, get by yourself and pray, "Lord, I will not hunger and thirst for righteousness unless Your Holy Spirit works in me. I am dependent upon Your Holy Spirit. If He does not work in me, I will go to church looking only for how You can help me. Please help me go to church knowing that I need Your leadership and Your Lordship."
- 3. Share your anticipation ith your family or roommate. If you're a father, you are the leader. Lead your family in this every week. If you are a mother, you are also a leader and can do this every week. There's no need to suggest what others in your family should say. You don't even need to require that they say anything. Just set the example. You might say something like, "I'm looking forward to discussing prayer in Sunday School today. I can't wait to hear what the music is going to be and what the pastor is going to say about the Scripture." You have an influence when you share your anticipation, and it makes a big difference in your children's lives.
- 4. Worship interactively and passionately. Pay attention to the words of the songs on the screen. Let them fill your heart. Push yourself to participate in worship through music and song. When you feel the Spirit of God working on your heart and the passion wells up, express it. Don't worry about who looks around at you. As the Scripture is read, open the Bible and read along.
- 5. Share your experience. Ask your family or friends, "What did you think about this?" or "Did you notice that?" or "I heard...did you hear that?" Give your family or friends an opportunity to interact with you about their feelings and thoughts as a result of worship.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Other Bible reading plans might work better for you. The important thing to remember is that you are seeking to connect with God by being in His Word consistently. If you have not been able to complete the plan in this resource, consider trying a different plan this year. Listed below are several alternatives that you may prefer:

blueletterbible.org

Blue Letter Bible has five different plans available on their Web site: canonical, chronological, historical, Old Testament and New Testament together, and blended. Download and print a PDF file of the plan of your choice.

bible-reading.com

This Web site provides a blended plan that gives you weekly readings from the major genres of the Bible. Each week you will read from the Epistles, the Law, History, Psalms, Poetry, Prophecy, and the Gospels. Download the PDF file and print you own, or sign up to have your daily reading e-mailed to you.

youversion.com

Download a free Bible app for your mobile device. Choose from 150+ plans. Looking for an additional challenge? Choose the plan that takes you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in one year.





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