

Two-Year Bible Reading Plan

Posted By [Stephen Witmer](#) On December 29, 2010 @ 12:04 PM In [Articles of Interest,Featured](#) | [49 Comments](#)

On December 30, 1842, a 29-year-old Scottish pastor named Robert Murray M'Cheyne wrote a letter to his congregation. He said:

MY DEAR FLOCK,—The approach of another year stirs up within me new desires for your salvation, and for the growth of those of you who are saved. "God is my record how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." What the coming year is to bring forth, who can tell? . . . Those believers will stand firmest who have no dependence upon self or upon creatures, but upon Jehovah our Righteousness. We must be driven more to our Bibles, and to the mercy-seat, if we are to stand in the evil day. Then we shall be able to say like David—, "The proud have had me greatly in derision, yet have I not declined from thy law." "Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart standeth in awe of thy Word." It has long been in my mind to prepare a scheme of Scripture reading, in which as many as were made willing by God might agree, so that the whole Bible might be read once by you in the year, and all might be feeding in the same portion of the green pasture at the same time.

I regularly feel these same stirrings in my heart for my own congregation. So a couple years ago, I gave the people of Pepperell Christian Fellowship a two-year Bible reading plan and invited the whole church to read through the Bible together, with all of us "feeding in the same portion of the green pasture at the same time." The fruit over these last couple years has been immense. We've enjoyed many conversations about the Bible that we would never otherwise have had. People who had never read the whole Bible have done so for the first time. We've come together around the Word.

I am aware of the drawbacks of Bible-reading plans, but I think the advantages outweigh the drawbacks. M'Cheyne agreed. After writing the above paragraph, M'Cheyne went on to discuss both the dangers and the advantages of giving a Bible-reading plan to his congregation. The dangers he mentioned were formality (in which Bible-reading degenerates into a lifeless duty); self-righteousness (we pat ourselves on the back for doing the daily reading and ticking the box); careless reading (we read fast to get it done and don't tremble at the Word of God); and having the Bible-reading plan become a yoke too heavy to bear. M'Cheyne counseled those for whom the plan had become a heavy yoke to "throw aside the fetter and feed at liberty in the sweet garden of God. My desire is not to cast a snare upon you, but to be a helper of your joy."

After noting the dangers of a reading plan, M'Cheyne went on to list the many advantages. These included the reading of the *entire* Bible in an orderly manner over the course of a year; no wasting of time deciding what portion of Scripture to read each day; improved spiritual conversations between parents and children and between friends when each member of a family or circle of friends is individually reading the same portions of Scripture; a greater opportunity for pastors to reference passages of the Bible in their praying and preaching and individual conversation with church members who have just read those same passages; the strengthened bond of Christian love and unity among Christians who are reading the Scriptures together.

In the years since 1842, M'Cheyne's Bible-reading plan has become one of the most-used in the world.

Modified Plan

It is an incredible privilege to read through all of God's Word. The first time I ever read right through the Bible, I was a teenager. I used a read-through-the-Bible-in-a-year program my grandmother gave me, and took two years to complete it. This program involved reading a section of the Old Testament, a section of the New Testament, and either a Psalm or some verses from Proverbs. The second time I read straight through the Bible was while I was a seminary student, this time using M'Cheyne's plan. Later, while doing further graduate study, I read through the Bible again, not using any plan, but simply beginning at Genesis and reading straight through to Revelation.

I've found several weaknesses in many Bible-reading plans:

- The plans that guide you through the whole Bible in a year sometimes require so much reading each day that you don't have sufficient time to reflect and pray about what you're reading—you're scrambling just to keep up with the rigorous pace. M'Cheyne identified this danger: "Some, by having so large a portion, may be tempted to weary of it, as Israel did of the daily manna."
- M'Cheyne's plan, and most others I have seen, have you read from three or four different sections of the Bible each day; for instance, on June 11 in M'Cheyne's plan, you will read Deut 16, Ps 103, Isa 43, and Rev 13. The next day you will read Deut 17, Ps 104, Isa 44, and Rev 14. I find it difficult to really understand a book of the Bible when you're only reading a chapter at a time, and reading a bunch of other books alongside it at the same time. This isn't how we usually read other books, is it? You don't read three novels at once, a chapter of each novel per day. That would be too confusing.
- Most plans I have seen divide up the daily readings according to chapter divisions. That is okay . . . some of the time. But not all of the time. None of the books of the Bible originally had chapters. Our modern chapter divisions come from Stephen Langton, the archbishop of Canterbury, who invented them in 1205. Langton was not inspired when he set the modern chapter divisions, so Bible reading plans that divide up readings by chapter rather than by logical units of thought can sometimes be quite unhelpful.

The Bible reading plan I gave my church tries to avoid these weaknesses:

- On this plan, you read through all of the Old Testament and New Testament in two years rather than one year, and you read through the Psalms and Proverbs four times in those two years. In my opinion, it is better to read the whole Bible through carefully one time in two years than hastily in one year. Throughout this Bible-reading plan, there are catch-up days to help you get back on track if you've fallen off the pace.
- On this plan, you read one book of the Bible at a time (plus a reading from the Psalms or Proverbs each day). This will hopefully allow you to get a clearer sense of the overall structure and message and contribution of each of the 66 books of the Bible.
- On this plan, you read according to the logical units of Scripture. Sometimes those logical units will match up with our modern chapter divisions, and sometimes not. Perhaps the most helpful feature of this Bible-reading plan is that it is geared to Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart's book, [How to Read the Bible Book by Book](#) ^[1] (Zondervan 2002). I have benefited a great deal from this book, because it is basically a "guided tour" of the whole Bible. Fee and Stuart have a brief introduction and overview for each book of the Bible, plus an analysis of the logical and/or narrative flow of each book. You will benefit the most from this Bible-reading plan if you read it together with Fee and Stuart's book.

Each morning (or evening, or whenever you have your daily time with God) simply read the passages that have been assigned for that day. If possible, read the brief comments on those passages in *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. You can use the catch-up days to get back on top of your reading if you have fallen behind. But ideally, you'll be caught up already and you can instead use these days to read the introductory section in *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* for the new book of the Bible you're about to begin reading.

You will notice that for some days the readings are a bit longer and for some days they are quite short. For instance, the Old Testament reading for January 4 is Genesis 6.9-9.29, while the reading for January 6 is Genesis 11.10-26. If you look at Genesis 11.10-26, you may wonder why that has been chosen as a reading—it is nothing more than a listing of Shem's descendants. If you're reading *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* together with this Bible reading plan, you will see why these two readings have been chosen. They follow the way Moses has organized the book of Genesis. He has organized it around a phrase that occurs ten times: 'This is the account of...' If you look at the two readings above, you'll see that they both begin with this phrase. The readings have been chosen in order to help you to see clearly for yourself how Moses has chosen to structure the book of Genesis. Moses didn't include our modern chapter divisions, and it is important to see how he ordered the book.

Seven Tips For the Two-Year Journey

1. If at all possible, read through the Bible using this plan *together with other people*. The fruit of reading through the Bible together as a church over the last couple years has been immense.
2. There will be some passages that you find boring and difficult. Remember 2 Timothy 3.16-17 as you read these passages: "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work." Ask yourself why God breathed out this particular passage, and how it is profitable for you.
3. Do the whole reading for each day, but look for a "best thought" for each day—something you can meditate on throughout the rest of the day, perhaps a verse you can memorize, something that is particularly memorable. This way, you are left with more than a vague feeling of what you read in the morning.
4. As you come to the Word each morning, ask God to open your eyes to its splendor. Psalm 119.18: "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Psalm 119.36: "Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!" Psalm 90.14: "Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."
5. Let your prayers for others emerge out of what you read. Don't choose between praying and reading Scripture—do both! After you read a passage, pray that passage for yourself and for those you love.
6. Some readings will be longer and others will be shorter. Take advantage of the shorter readings. Read them more carefully and meditatively. Don't just read; reflect, ask questions, pray for answers, engage. In Psalm 119.48, the psalmist says that he *meditates* on the Lord's statutes.
7. Look for ways in which you can practically live out what you're reading. James 1.22: "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

[TGC Two-Year Bible Reading Plan](#) ^[2]

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[1] *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*: <http://www.amazon.com/How-Read-Bible-Book-Guided/dp/0310211182?tag=thegospcoal-20>

[2] TGC Two-Year Bible Reading Plan: <http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/files/2010/12/TwoYearBibleReadingPlan.pdf>

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