



Chapter 2: How to Read God's Word

There are basically four ways to read God's Word:

- *Informational*
- *Instructional*
- *Inspirational*
- *Incarnational*

The approach you select reflects the difference between the desire for more data about God versus building a relationship with Him.

Informational Reading

The first and most basic of all Bible reading is "informational"; that is, it is the gathering of facts. Informational reading provides information and knowledge, but it does not necessarily result in changed behavior. Based on the information, the reader is still able to choose whether or not to believe that information, much less make changes in lifestyle as a result of reading God's Word.

The world is full of scholars who have studied the Bible all their lives and can even translate it from the original languages. They may be able to quote large sections of Scripture but that does not mean that the Bible is for them the Word of God; they tend to see the Bible merely as a history or philosophy book of great interest.

Christians, particularly Bible teachers, can fall into the trap of reading God's Word simply for informational purposes and never allow God to

Speak to them through His Word to the level of the heart. That is a great tragedy and not what God intended.

Instructional Reading

The second method of reading the Word of God is "instructional"; that is, God's Word is there to teach us.

*"How can a young man keep his way pure?
By keeping it according to Your word."*

—Psalm 119:9

*"Do not take the word of truth utterly out of my mouth,
For I wait for Your ordinances."*

—Psalm 119:43

*"I rejoice at Your word,
As one who finds great spoil."*

—Psalm 119:162

Instructional reading of God's Word is to seek knowledge that will change or strengthen what we believe. We go to the Word to learn truth. The difference between informational reading and instructional reading is that the latter tends to have greater personal value and can result in changed behavior.

New believers often immerse themselves in instructional reading. For the first time in their lives the Bible comes alive. This is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as He opens the Word of God to our minds. Suddenly spiritual things begin to make sense. For example, stories like Noah's ark and the Sermon on the Mount have a context; the person, teaching, miracles and works of Jesus begin to fall into place. For many new believers, discovering God in His Word is one of the most exciting things that ever happens to them.

Good Bible teachers always study the Bible on an instructional level, for the task of the teacher or the preacher is to explain to others the revelation of God through His Word, and not just convey facts and information.

Inspirational Reading

Inspirational reading is also called devotional reading. This approach to the Word of God is usually in conjunction with an emotional or personal need, such as grief. David wrote...

*"I am exceedingly afflicted;
Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word."
—Psalm 119:107*

*"You are my hiding place and my shield;
I wait for Your word."
—Psalm 119:114*

*"Plead my cause and redeem me;
revive me according to Your word."
—Psalm 119:154*

David knew that throwing himself into God's Word would revive his spirit and restore his soul.

The classic "quiet time" is often a time of inspirational reading. The purpose? To inspire us, of course; that is, to renew our spirits and restore our hopes.

Inspirational reading can be very important to us during times of crisis. We are not necessarily looking for information, and if truth be known, instruction is not desired. What is needed is a spiritual "lift," a word of comfort from the Father. Usually inspirational reading is not structured or methodic. More commonly, a believer is hurting and goes looking through the Psalms or prophets for a ray of hope.

The long-term benefits of inspirational reading are perhaps not as manifest as the short-term benefits which can be remarkable. In one's darkest hour, a passage of Scripture that would make no sense out of context may be the very source of inspiration that is needed to enable the believer to cope or endure, and as the missionary and author Elisabeth Elliot says, "Do the next thing."

Incarnational Reading

Incarnational reading is the most dramatic and enduring of all types of reading. Incarnational reading refers to taking the Word of God to the level of the heart resulting not only in changed living, but changed relationships. One form of a changed relationship comes in truly knowing God.

*"With all my heart I have sought You:
Do not let me wander from Your commandments.
Your word I treasured in my heart,
That I may not sin against You."
—Psalm 119:10-11*

*"The LORD is my portion;
I have promised to keep Your words.
I sought Your favor with all my heart;
Be gracious to me according to Your word."
—Psalm 119:57-58*

When incarnational reading takes place the reader believes without hesitation that God is speaking. He or she "hears" the voice of God.

The key to grasping incarnational reading is in understanding that the Bible is, in fact, the very words of God, relevant and applicable to the reader today. As the writer of Hebrews wrote,

*"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart."
—Hebrews 4:12*

One of the best ways to attain incarnational reading is to journal one's thoughts as he or she reflects on the Word of God. [See "Journaling" under the "Individual Guide" section of Walk with the Word.]

Don't Get Discouraged!

It is the rare individual who can actually find time to sit down and read the Bible every day. Illness, crises, work schedules, babies, vacations, and a myriad other factors can interfere with our time in the Word.

Satan would love for you to feel guilty about missing your reading. In fact, he would love for you to get so discouraged as to give up altogether! He doesn't want you in God's Word even a little bit.

But Jesus prayed, *"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."* God loves you even if you miss reading His Word, and He's delighted for you when you pick it up again because He knows you will be blessed.

Don't get discouraged if you miss a day or more of reading. The plan is designed to keep you up with the rest of us. Therefore, if you miss a week's reading, just join back in the next week so you will remain at the same place with the rest of us.

Remember, the Walk with the Word Reading Schedule repeats every 3 years. Therefore, you will be able to pick up the missed portion of Scripture on the next go-around!