

Practical Advice on Daily Bible Reading

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

Tim: You've got to have discipline. If you're going to get up and read the Bible at 5 a.m. every morning or at 6 a.m. every morning, you've got to have discipline. Brethren, I am here today to talk to you about reading your Bible. And it is sloppy Christian life if you are not reading your Bible every single day. Lay it down. This is the food for the soul. This is our life. This is our health. This is where we see Christ. This is the Word of God. This is where God talks to us and shows us Himself. If you are not reading your Bible every day, that is sloppy and there is no excuse for it. Because if you're not reading your Bible every day, you're doing other things every day – things that are not near as important and you know it's true.

Brethren, this is where the Christian life – healthy Christian life – this is where it starts. If you're not in the Word of God every single day, there is no excuse for it. No excuse. And the discipline of the Christian life has to start here. We talked last week about Bible memorization. And I wanted to start there because of how important it is for the health of the church. But now we're stepping back a step. We're talking just about getting in the Word. And I'm not talking about reading four chapters every day. Listen, you should be working towards something like that. I'm not even talking about reading a whole chapter. And not all of us are cut out the same. Not all of us read as well. Not all of us like to read as much. For some it's more difficult. For some, our vocabulary is greater or lesser. Some of us are just more wired readers. Some love to read.

I recognize we're all over the place. But brethren, this is our food. This is the food of the Christian life. And if there's any discipline you've got to nail down, even above getting to Sunday School on time, it is this. You've got to be disciplined in reading the Bible. You've got to. When you walk into a church, and you see people who spiritually stand head and shoulders above the rest, when you look throughout history, they were not Scriptural lightweights. When you come across William Carey's and Hudson Taylor's and John G. Paton's, Adoniram Judson's, Amy Carmichael's, Andy and Rebecca's, if you look at their saved life and their relationship to the Word of God, they weren't lightweights. They lived in that book. If you think that you're going to run – have some incredible spiritual life and fruitfulness and be a vessel fit for the Master's use and you've got a shoddy approach to Scripture, you're sadly mistaken. You will never excel until you have excelled in the Word. I guarantee it.

Why? Because that's where you draw the life. That's where you draw the power. That's where you see the Christ. It is sanctification by Your Word – that's what Christ said. Sanctification is growth in the Christian life. It is maturing. It is being separated further and further. It is achieving holiness. It is coming more and more to the image of Christ. And it comes through that Word and there is no substitute.

So how do we do it? (incomplete thought) We've got the discipline. We need to have this delight and this desire and this trembling from the Lord. So you're up at 6 o'clock. You've got your cup

of coffee. And you've got to factor these things in. Listen, whatever it takes to be wide awake when you're in God's Word – you don't want to do it in a shoddy way. If you've got to drink tea, you've got to drink coffee, look, it might just require you to get enough exercise in your life so that you're wide awake at 6 o'clock. It may require that you don't eat after 6 p.m. Look, you've got to do what you've got to do to make this work. This is really important. Discipline.

If you know that eating at 10 o'clock – I know every once in a while, we'll leave a prayer meeting and a bunch of us will go down to Denny's. Look, if you can't get up the next morning after you do that, don't do that. Just pure and simple. You say, well, other people do it. Well, so what what other people do. If you can't get up to get in the Word if you do that, don't do it. That's what discipline is. Discipline is not always doing what the crowd does. Listen, typically the crowd even in good churches are not spiritually where they need to be. And so just doing something because the crowd does it, I guarantee, Hudson Taylor got to where he was because he was doing exactly what the crowd wasn't doing. So there you are. You've got your Bible in front of you.

Now what do you do? Look, once you make your first pass through the whole Bible, you'll get an idea that there's some places that are more exciting. Usually, Joshua, Judges... they read pretty well, right? Numbers. That first chunk of 2 Chronicles. Those things can be difficult. Leviticus can be rather difficult. (incomplete thought) I can remember as a new Christian just starting to get out there into certain parts of Isaiah, certain parts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it was just judgment, judgment, judgment, judgment. It was just kind of wearing me out. But God gives it to us for a reason. Remember, He that is absolutely perfect designed this book perfectly. He put what truth in it to the degree that He wanted it in there, He designed it. And look, Tawfiq is saying you need to read all of it. Yes, you need to read all of it. All of it is the Word of God. All of it is profitable for doctrine and reproof, for correction, for instruction. It definitely is. It's all inspired. I mean, if somebody just told me right now there was a whole book of the Bible that I had never read, I would go home right now and devour it. The Word of God thrills my soul. I want to be in it.

But I know that there are some parts that are more difficult to go through. And so what you need to figure out is this: how to get through all of it and actually make it through without wearing yourself out. Look, I know this, that just what Hudson Taylor knew, there are certain parts of Scripture that can tend to be drier than other parts. Or at least that we have less expectation going in that it's going to be helpful, even though God can come like He did to Taylor there in Numbers 7. So it's very important that you pray, but look, the reality is, there's some parts of Scripture that are going to thrill your soul more than others. And you've got to figure out how to get through the hard parts. And typically, if you're wired this way, and you can start at Genesis 1:1 and go all the way through, do it. Do it. You've got to do that sometimes. I mean, try that. You don't have to, but I recommend that you at least try to do that once. And look, if you're reading it at a fairly average clip, you ought to be able to go through the whole Bible in a year. Disciplined people set goals. Set a goal for when you're going to get up. Be goal-driven. Set a goal for how far you want to get. I mean, make the goal. I want to read through the Bible once

this year. It is almost at hand. Sometimes there's a place wherever you are just to stop. Pick up the M'Cheyne Bible reading program and just go through the whole Bible. I think that one actually takes you through the Old Testament once and the New Testament twice in one year. And it has you reading four different places in the Bible all the time. So the day you have to read Numbers 7, you also get to read several other places on the same day. And you can kind of mix it up. And when you read the M'Cheyne Bible reading schedule you're always in one of the Gospels I believe. I've gone through that a number of years.

Please, brethren, don't just open your Bible randomly and read wherever. Read with a purpose. Read with a goal. Read to get through the Scriptures. Read to accomplish reading everything that God has written to you. (incomplete thought) When I was first saved, I heard John MacArthur say that he recommended pick a book and read it through. Like 1 John. All the way through every day for 30 days. That's a great way too. Sometimes it's good to mix it up like that. You don't have to do it the same all the time. But be goal oriented. Give yourself a plan. Be disciplined and knock it out. If you've never read through the whole Bible in one year, do it. If there's a certain book of the Bible that you want to become familiar with, do it, read Galatians once a day every day for 30 days. That will be immensely profitable to you. If it's a bigger book like Isaiah, you might want to break that up into quarters. And try to do a quarter of it a day, or you might structure it so that you read through Isaiah once a week for four weeks. You do it four times. Something like that.

The McCheyne – McCheyne's not the only one. I just bring him up because that's the one that I've been familiar with. Lots of people have created Bible reading schedules. Get you one. Do it with purpose. Give yourself to it. Go through like that. Brethren, every day. Every day, make it a practice, and unless you have some fluke schedule, start your day. Wake up. Get your coffee. Get your tea. Brush your teeth. Wash your face. Take your shower. And then get in the Word. And brethren, I'll tell you one thing that kills it is when you try to bite off more than you can chew and then you get discouraged and you drop out. Don't do that. You're better off starting out with ten minutes and doing it faithfully every single day and continue to do it and then broaden to 15 or to 20. Or start with 20 minutes. If you suddenly start – I'm going to do it two hours. I'm going to read 8 chapters. There was a year when I tried to read a minimum of 8 chapters a day. I wanted to go through the Bible really fast. I just wanted the feel of that. I wanted to get lots of it quick. Not that I was going to stay anywhere real long and meditate, but I wanted the overall view of the whole Scripture, and I was trying to nail down at least 8 chapters a day.

But you know what? That's the kind of thing you know, you hear George Mueller prayed a certain amount or you come across Leonard Ravenhill and he said if you don't pray two hours a day, you're just basically sub par or something. Listen, if you get wrapped up in that kind of thing, and you're trying to measure up to somebody else, that's not the way to do it. The way to do it is, yeah, [I'm] going to start in two months, and I want to go through the whole Bible. And you can create your own Bible schedule or you can look at some of these. McCheyne's a good one. Doesn't it have you in four places at once? Yeah. You can be somewhere in the Pentateuch; you can be somewhere in the minor prophets; you can be somewhere in the

epistles; and somewhere in one of the Gospel's. Tremendous way to read the Scriptures. That's four chapters a day. That's healthy. Go at half speed. Read half of each of those chapters. Or two of them. And flip flop back and forth and read the whole Bible in two years. Some are wired more for one than the other, but brethren, do it.

And if you feel like, no, I want to read repetitiously; if you feel like I want to read John till I know it, do it. The most important thing is that you're doing it. That every day you're getting in there. Every day you're getting in there. Brethren, read to understand. (incomplete thought) Listen, every one of us that have been saved for any amount of time, we know what it's like to be trying to read in Leviticus, and you're like (nodding off). And you have to go back and read the last chapter over again. Then you're like, falling out on the thing. Anybody been there? Where you've tried to read the same paragraph like 10 times? Finally, you just give up. Brethren, if you're falling off to sleep at night, that might be an acceptable way, but that is not acceptable in the morning. That is not acceptable if it's happening to you every day. If it's happening to you, you're not getting to bed on time.

And you know, I'm recommending that you do it before you launch out into your family, your work, your school, interacting with others, but give the Lord your best. If you're just wired where you've got a chunk in the middle of your day and you're a student and you've got three hours between classes and you can sit down and you're wide awake at that time of the day, I'm certainly not going to discourage you. If you come in here and tell me that, I'm not going to call you a godless wretch because you didn't get up at 5 a.m. and do it. Brethren, the most important thing is you're getting that Word of God into your eyeballs and into your brain and into your thinking and renewing your mind with it. That's critical. Read to understand. Don't read when you're drowsy. Don't read when there's distractions. Brethren, it's no good if you're over at the table and somebody's trying to watch TV and you've got one eye over there and one eye in the book. You need to read this book with your whole-hearted devotion and attention. Don't read it where there's distraction. Sometimes you can read – I find I can sit at a Starbucks with music on, people talking, and I can lose myself in the white noise of it and be far less distracted than if I'm at home sitting in my office where when I'm trying to read, I keep noticing other things that I have to do. Wherever, brethren. Typically I do most of my reading before we have family devotions. I try between 6 and 7. From 7 till 7:30, I'm trying to study for my family devotions, but from 6 to 7 is that allotted hour that I want to give myself to my own personal and devotional Bible reading. When I go out praying, I may take my small testament for Bible memorization or if while I'm praying, a verse comes to mind, and I take a small, tiny little Bible with me. But the big one comes out in the morning.

Tawfiq: Can I say something to being careful of the distractions? I know a lot of us have Bibles on our phones and that can be a good thing, (incomplete thought), because if you're reading your Bible and you get a text message, it can easily distract you. So like Pastor Tim said, you have to know yourself. You have to know your limitations. It's really good to have that paper if that digital screen would distract you.

Tim: Yeah, I have a sleep function on my Mac and you know what? That's good to kick that in. I don't need to have a computer screen on right in front of my Bible if it's going to be a distraction. You guys know what distracts you. Be honest. If your phone is distracting you, turn it off. If your computer is distracting you, turn it off. If there's any distractions, turn them off. Brethren, pray. George Whitefield. Many of you know this. "Above all, my mind being now more opened and enlarged, I began to read the Holy Scriptures upon my knees, laying aside all other books and praying over, if possible, every line and word. I got more true knowledge from reading the book of God in one month than I could ever have acquired from all the writings of men." I strongly recommend that you do not have study bibles if you are prone to go look at the notes all the time. Let God speak to you through His Word without John MacArthur's interpretation. You do not need that. If you don't have discipline to read God's Word and to hear God's voice and meditate on His Word before you run to the commentary on it, don't get a study Bible. Whitefield is right. The Word of God is pure. John MacArthur's interpretation of that Word is not always. The best men have wrong interpretations.

And I would just say this, if you're going to read to profit, ask questions of the text. I mean, come to God's Word, like I just read to you. Here is Asa. Ask yourself questions. Asa is clearly – something about his life is being pinpointed as not being good. He sought doctors first. You ask yourself this – ask questions of the text. Is Asa a godly example or an ungodly example? So you have to know your Bibles somewhat. You need to be reading your Bible. You need to know the context. Is he a good guy or a bad guy? What do you say? What's that? Yeah, he's one of the good kings. He was one of the good kings. And you would want to compare this to 2 Kings. Because when you get these synonymous accounts you can compare them. Just like in the synoptic Gospels, you can compare these accounts. So he's a good king, but he did a bad thing. I mean, you're asking yourself questions. Is he a good king? Is this something I should imitate? No, he's a good king, but this is something I shouldn't imitate. It's kind of like Lot. Is he righteous? Yes. Scripture tells us "righteous Lot." We brought it up the other day. When he offered his daughters to the homosexuals, the Sodomites, was that a good thing? So you have to be asking questions of the text. (incomplete thought) When God finds fault with Asa for not pursuing Him before the doctors, what does that teach me about God? Oh brethren, theology proper. The theology of God. If there's anything we want to find out when we go to God's Word, it is who our God is. What does it teach us about God when you find God finding fault with Asa for seeking doctors before he sought God? What does that teach you about God? He wants to be sought first. He wants to be trusted. He wants to be looked to. You read that text in the Old Testament.

If you're asking questions of the text – I just threw down some questions that I think are very relevant for asking yourself. This will help you. Don't just read blindly. Ask. Ask. What is this teaching me about God? What does this teach me or reveal to me that I need to believe about God? Does it reveal something I need to thank God for? Should something I'm reading here produce praise? Does it reveal something I need to repent of? Does it reveal sin in my life? Does it reveal something that should influence the way I pray? (incomplete thought) This influences me to pray.

Brethren, if all of a sudden I get sick, or I get a headache, or my child is ill, or they get a disease... Father, You find fault with Asa for running straight to the doctor. I'm coming to You, but Lord, if You don't rise up and intervene when Your people are coming, then what good is it? Lord, why would You tell us to come to You first if You never help us? If when we come to You, You don't help us and we have to go to the doctor then, what good is it for You to tell us in Your Word that we should come to You first? Father, why would You tell us that unless You are going to do what the doctors can't do? And if we time and time and time again go to You first and You're not doing what the doctor's can't do and we have to go to the doctors to get any help at all, why would You tell us that in Your Word? Do you think there's a place to pray that way? I do. I think there's a way to pray definitely that way. Father, You told us.

This is given to us, brethren, for our doctrine, for our teaching, for correction. You know what correction is. I'm going in a wrong way. Correction is God's Word moves me to the right way. And so if I'm going to the doctor without praying, this is good for correction. It moves me into the right way. For instruction in righteousness. This shows me how to live a righteous life. A righteous life is living by faith. And God is telling us to live by faith. Don't just run to the doctors and don't just run to the nurses and don't run to the medical authorities. Don't just go to Texas Med Clinic until you get on your face. You've got a problem in your family? Get the whole family on their knees. My daughter had a serious problem. We anointed her with oil and we prayed over her. And God wasn't pleased to heal her and we took her to the hospital. (incomplete thought) There's some people who will never take their kids to the hospital. I'm not saying that. That may be the way that the Lord's going to deal with it.

But don't start there. Start by running to the Lord. Lord, what would You have me to do? Ask these questions. Does it reveal something I need to change my thinking about? Brethren, think with me here, every single encounter with Scripture ought to confront something about you, about your sin, about the way you think of God, about your faith – everything. Every encounter with Scripture ought to be correcting. It ought to be instilling something. It ought to be showing you truth. It ought to be causing you to refine your thinking. Something. Scripture demands a response from us. It is God's voice. He's looking to us to respond to His Word in praise, in awe, in repentance, in faith. Remember that. I need to go to God's Word and God is expecting response. Trembling. To this man will I look. Trembling at His Word is a response. Believing His Word is a response. When you walk away feeling a thrill in your soul, brethren, I find that thrilling to my soul that God doesn't want us going to the doctors first. Don't you? I mean, I find that something to rejoice over. I find that something that my faith can lay its teeth into. I love that! God doesn't want us to go there first. But some response.

As Donald Whitney in his *Spiritual Disciplines*, he says if you can just come away from Scripture with one thing; (incomplete thought) I have a feeling that if we really looked at it exactly, how many an hour after they've read their Bible, don't remember anything they've read. It doesn't come into their mind. And they go through the day not thinking about what they read. But if you can shut your Bible and remember one thing; if you can key in on one thought, let it really

register in your mind and give enough time on that thought, meditate sufficiently on it, and sometimes it may be 2 or 3 things, but if you can lay a marker down – a mental marker – one thing, one reality, one truth, if you can remember at least that one thing, you'll typically be miles ahead of what most people leave their Bible reading with. And brethren, if you just do that times out of the year, you come away from your Bible reading with one thing that you're able to carry with you into the day several hours or through the whole day, brethren, do you know what that does in a lifetime? Massively profitable.

And I think it will really help if you're asking questions. If you're asking questions: What does this teach me about God? You ask those questions. Those little markers are going to come. Because as you're answering those questions, as you're saying what does this teach me about God? What does this teach me about me? What does this teach me about the devil? What does this teach me about my world I live in? What does this teach me about the way man is? What does this teach me about sin? What does this teach me I ought to be repenting of? How does this teach me how to fight this good fight of faith? What does this teach me about Christ? What does this teach me about how I ought to relate to Christ? You're just asking all these questions. How does my encounter with Scripture, what sort of response is demanded from me? You're asking that kind of question. It will be so helpful. And then you take one of those things that seem significant to you and you just try to make a mental marker of it. You give enough time to thinking about it right there at that moment that when you walk away and you're driving to work or you're walking to work or you're going somewhere, you're on your way to church, it comes back to you. Wow! God taught me this morning He doesn't want me looking to doctors first. That's huge!

Tawfiq: Something I find extremely profitable right on the heels of what he was just saying, because after we read, there is a tendency to pray before and after you read, because if you don't think that the enemy of your soul is crouching at the door ready to grab the very things that you just read, desiring to distract you with everything else, then you've forgotten that this is a war. So highly, highly encourage to pray before, even during – you read something, praying that the Lord would help you to, the Bible says, to hold fast to the Word with patience and endurance.