



Helps for Reading the Bible

how do i decide what/where to read?

I love to finish a good book, there is a sense of accomplishment, closure, reflection on how it illuminates life and human experience... but when I finish reading a book of the Bible, it is often accompanied by a nagging little feeling of dread. Now I have to tackle what, for some (me!), can be a paralyzing question: *what do I read next?* If I'm honest, this question can sometimes be the difference between actually reading my Bible or not. The temptation to just give up because I don't know what to read is a real one.

The following descriptions of the different genres of the Bible is meant to help with just that question. As you take inventory of the season of life God is leading you through right now, is there a book that may be particularly relatable? Read through the list to find out.

Narrative (history, heroic, epic, tragedy):

Genesis and the first half of Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Jonah, and possibly Acts

The narratives help us read the "Big God Story." This helps us understand who God is and how He interacts with His people. They help us learn from history, specifically how not to repeat it. A wise man once said, "Only a fool learns from his own mistakes, a wise man learns from the mistakes of others." Are you in a season wondering where you fit? Are you wanting to grow in foundational knowledge of the "Big God Story"? Do you want a hero to follow? Do you need to get lost in a story (maybe to escape the brain twist of chemistry homework)?

The Law:

The last half of Exodus, also Leviticus, Deuteronomy

Reading the books of the Law can help us know what it means to be the people of God. It was originally through the Law that God revealed Himself and His heart for us. Jesus said He came not to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it - and even though we no longer live under the Law as the Israelites did, the Law can continue to reveal to us what it means to live in right posture to God.

Wisdom:

Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

Wisdom literature provides a lens through which we can use for life, our priorities, life principles, and understanding. These are great nuggets to fill each day with. A lifelong study of these truths will only serve to cement wisdom into your being. The kicker is, you actually have to put it into practice to be considered wise. Challenge accepted?

Poetry (figures of speech, artistry, different types):

Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations

Biblical poetry can help us know what to do with all the emotions we experience through life and help us know we are not alone in what we are feeling. These passages contain conversations with God captured in real time, expressions of awe and wonder, as well as angst. In word pictures, ideas can impact us in ways that prose cannot. For instance, the Song of Solomon paints a picture of love, could it also paint a return to Eden? Poems can be like a treasure hunt.

Prophecy:

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi

How does God reveal Himself in the midst of failure, defeat, suffering? What promises are still true for us today? What does He want our response to be in the midst of failure, defeat, or suffering? Fascinating question as you read through prophecy is what was breaking God's heart here? How does this apply to me? Is this a wakeup call for me just as it was to God's people in their day?

Gospel:

Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and possibly Acts (second part of Luke)

The gospels are accounts of Jesus' life on earth. Through them, we encounter God's heart, so full of grace that he would enter the human experience and live among us to show us The Way. Did you know first followers of Jesus were called followers of The Way? What is The Way? That is exactly what these gospels help us discover. They help us answer the following: Who is this Jesus that we follow? Who is God revealed through Jesus? How do I respond? What am I being called to? What is the Kingdom of God?

Epistle (letters, also oral tradition):

Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude

These letters were written to early believers who, like us, were asking questions about what it meant to live out the specifics of their faith in their current situations. They deal with both 1) Orthodoxy (*what* we believe) and 2) Orthopraxy (*how* we execute what we believe).

Therefore, as we read them, we can also discover the answers to our questions like: What is the church's response to culture? What does it mean to be the people of God? What does it mean to be the Church in times of persecution, growth, struggling through cultural distinctions, issues of unity and diversity? What does it look like to be people on mission in the day to day of life?

Apocalyptic:

Daniel, Revelation

The apocalyptic passages of the Bible can also be like a treasure hunt as one tries to decipher metaphors and historical context. We have to understand apocalyptic literature from that time in order to get a full understanding of God's promises, truths about God, and the future for His people. These books can be very nuanced, like the world of comic books or anime, the more context you have, the deeper into the world of understanding you can go.

The following Bible Project Videos are definitely worth the watch:

The Story of the Bible https://youtu.be/7_CGP-12AEo

Literary Styles of the Bible <https://youtu.be/oUXJ8Owes8E>

reading the big God story

It is important to remember that the Bible is one grand narrative! It is God's story and all of it is interconnected and intertwined. To help know where what you are reading fits into the grand narrative, ask yourself the following:

- How does what you are reading fit into that chapter's context?
- How does what you are reading fit into that book's context?
- How does what you are reading fit into the surrounding books?
- How does what you are reading fit into the OT/NT?
- How does what you are reading fit into the theme of the Bible as a whole?
- How does what you are reading help you further understand the theme of the Bible?

Maps help any adventurer find their way. Likewise, these maps that show the book layout of the Old and New Testaments can be helpful in navigating how and where what you are reading fit into the grand narrative.

Map of the Old Testament:

5	12	5	5	12
The Pentateuch (Genesis - Deuteronomy)	Historical (Joshua - Esther)	Poetry (Job - Song of Solomon)	Major Prophets (Isaiah - Daniel)	Minor Prophets (Hosea - Malachi)

Map of the New Testament:

4	1	21	1
The Gospels (Matthew - John)	History (Acts: start of the church)	Letters (Romans - Jude)	Prophecy (Revelation)

what do i do in my quiet time?

Suggested reading plan:

- 1 Chapter of Proverbs a day. There are 31 Proverbs and up to 31 days in a month. What is today's date? Read the corresponding Proverb.
- Gospel reading. Since Jesus is at the center of our faith, studying his life and teachings is important. Read through the gospels regularly.
- OT reading. Challenge yourself to read what others often shy away from. We need the foundation of the Old Testament to understand the New. Plus, have you ever read 1 or 2 Samuel? It reads like the script of a Robin Hood movie!
- Spiritual practice. Journal, write out your prayers, work on memorization, etc.