

Take Up And Read — Why Do I Need The Bible?

January 2, 2022

I hope everyone had a great Christmas and a good New Year. One of the things we love to do at CrossWinds is read the Bible. Jesus said, “Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” In other words, God uses his Word to create spiritual life in us and to sustain spiritual life in us. Just as important as physical food is for physical life, reading, studying, and meditating on the Bible is just as essential for spiritual life. If we only ate food once a week, we would not be healthy. If we only encounter the Word of God once a week, in a similar way, we will also not be healthy and strong in our walk with Jesus.

This is why we preach the Bible at CrossWinds. This is also why I do everything I can to have you regularly read the Bible on your own when not in church. I know God will mature you in Christ when you encounter Jesus through the Bible.

At the beginning of the year, I love to give a message about the Bible and why we trust it. I also like to challenge you to join your church family in a church-wide Bible reading plan for the year. It is good for the sheep to be grazing in the same pasture. That is what I will do this morning, so let's begin.

In the sweltering summer heat in August of 1885, six and one-half inches of torrential rain fell on Chicago in only 24 hours. As you would expect, this produced major flooding. Sewage from the city's 750,000 residents and runoff from the stockyards washed into the Chicago River. The polluted water was then carried by the river to Lake Michigan. According to an exaggerated story in the

Chicago Tribune published at that time, this toxic brew was sucked up by the intake system that provided the city with its drinking water. Soon the people of the city began talking about the possible outbreak of cholera, dysentery, typhoid, and other waterborne diseases. Somebody suggested that people were dying of these diseases. That eventually led to the claim that one out of eight Chicagoans succumbed to this water-borne epidemic. This story was repeated for years, without any evidence. It was assumed to be an established fact of history. In 1956, Chicago's water sanitation department actually distributed a pamphlet describing the 1885 epidemic.

This fact of history changed when in 2000 Libby Hill wrote a book on the history of the Chicago River and its impact on the city. She planned to include a chapter in her book on the 1885 epidemic that caused one in eight people in Chicago to die from the sewage in the river.

Here is the problem. When she began examining the death rate in 1885 in Chicago, she found it was actually lower than in previous years. Then she did the math. If one in eight people in Chicago died from a waterborne epidemic, that would have been 94,000 people. There would have been bodies everywhere in the city, but that didn't happen.

It turns out the 1885 Chicago epidemic was a tall tale that was started by the media then repeated so many times it was assumed to be true. It never took place. The facts don't back it up.

Today, many people look at the Bible in a similar way. They think the Bible is just a collection of tall tales. It is a book of urban legends that have been

around so long and repeated so many times that people assume it is true even though there is no evidence it is true. Is that true? Is the Bible nothing more than a collection of long-standing urban legends? Is there is no evidence to prove the Bible is true? Can we trust this book?

Today, I am going to make the case that we can trust this book for four reasons. First, because it is a supernatural book. Second, because it is an inerrant book. Third, because it is an authoritative book for our lives. Fourth, because it is the only way to truly know God. Lastly, we will look at how to get a grip on this book and have it as a guide in our lives. Let's begin.

The Bible is a supernatural book.

When it comes to understanding what the Bible is, the key verse is 2 Timothy 3:16. This verse is worth memorizing if you haven't done that already.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness... 2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

This says all of the Scriptures, that is all of the Bible, is breathed out by God. This verse claims that the entire Bible is literally God speaking to us. While the Bible was written by different authors, God spoke exactly what he wanted to say to us through those authors.

Some translations say all Scripture is inspired by God. I don't like the word inspired. Inspired can carry the idea that a human being was having a particularly good day and they did something they felt was inspired, like they wrote a good song or a great piece of poetry. Using the word inspired can make it sound like the writers of the Bible wrote the books of the Bible when they were having a good day. That is not the case. The Greek word used here means literally

breathed-out. It says the words of the Bible are literally spoken by God with his breath. While there are human authors of the Bible, God literally spoke his words through them so they said exactly what God wanted to say. The Bible is literally God speaking to us.

If the Bible is literally God speaking to us, brings us to a fair question. Is there any evidence for the Bible being a supernatural book? Let me show you some evidence. While I will admit that no single piece of evidence I am about to give you conclusively proves the Bible is God speaking to us, when taken together, they provide strong evidence that the Bible is indeed authored by God.

The Bible is historically accurate.

When it comes to the many references in the Bible to people, places, and events, archaeologists tell us the Bible has amazing accuracy. In Lee Strobel's book The Case For Christ, he cited highly esteemed archaeologists who examined every one of the geographical references in the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts for accuracy. Those two books alone reference 32 countries, 54 cities, and nine islands, yet they never found a mistake.

Famous Jewish archaeologist, Nelson Glueck — who is not a Christian — has gone on record saying there has never been a single archaeological discovery that has contradicted the Bible. All archaeological discoveries have only served to further support the Bible.

The Bible is prophetically accurate.

In church, you hear about Old Testament prophecy that is fulfilled by Jesus in the New Testament all the time. What most of us don't know is a prophecy

about the future is extremely rare in most religions. In all the works of Buddha and Confucius, there is not a single occurrence of predictive prophecy. In the entire Quran written by Mohammed, there is only one prophecy, and it is very vague. The reason other religions don't give prophecies about the future is that if they are proved wrong, they would look like fools and the error of their religion would be plainly seen.

When we come to the Bible, it is different. We have more than 2,000 prophecies about the future. They are not vague prophecies like you would find in a fortune cookie. Most are clear and specific. You would only expect to find this if the Bible is authored by God. Only God knows the future and can tell us the way things will take place in the future. Consider a few of the prophecies made about Jesus hundreds of years before he was born. Daniel told the exact time of Jesus' birth in Daniel 9:24. Micah predicted Jesus would be born in a small village in Bethlehem 700 years before he was born.

But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. Micah 5:2 (ESV)

About 500 years before Jesus, Zechariah predicted Jesus would enter Jerusalem triumphantly on the back of a colt in Zechariah 9:9. He also predicted Jesus would be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver, which he was.

Then I said to them, "If it seems good to you, give me my wages; but if not, keep them." And they weighed out as my wages thirty pieces of silver. Then the Lord said to me, "Throw it to the potter"—the lordly price at which I was priced by them. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord, to the potter. Zechariah 11:12–13 (ESV)

Isaiah described how Jesus would be put to death alongside criminals and yet would be buried in a rich man's tomb.

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Isaiah 53:9 (ESV)

Jesus died hanging between two thieves, yet was buried in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, the tomb of a rich man. There are hundreds of prophecies like these. These kinds of prophecies are specific. They don't happen by chance. They are evidence that God was speaking about the future through the prophets and apostles that God used to write the Bible. This is strong evidence of the Bible's supernatural character. No other book is like this.

The Bible is a durable book.

Again and again throughout history, the enemies of Jesus and the church have attempted to stamp out the Bible. Those efforts, although sometimes sustained for years, have all proven unsuccessful. God has supernaturally protected the Bible from being destroyed. My favorite story on this topic is about French philosopher and atheist Voltaire. He constantly wrote against the church and the Bible. He described the Bible as a book of fairy tales. This is what he said about the Bible and what he expected would happen to it in the future:

One hundred years from my day, there will not be a Bible on earth except one that is looked upon by an antiquarian curiosity-seeker. — Voltaire in 1776.

In an ironic twist, 50 years after his death, his house was purchased by the Geneva Bible society to warehouse Bibles and gospel tracts because the demand for them was so great. Then his personal printing press was used by the Geneva Bible society to print more Bibles!¹

¹ <https://crossexamined.org/voltaires-prediction-home-and-the-bible-society-truth-or-myth-further-evidence-of-verification/>

The Bible is a consistent book.

We must remember the Bible is not one book. It is a library of 66 different books. The authors of the various Bible books wrote in three different languages over 1,500 years in history. They came from a variety of backgrounds. Some were farmers, another a physician, yet another a king. The books of the Bible have remarkable consistency. They fit together into one book like pieces of a puzzle. It is as if there was one central author writing through each biblical author so the details in one book line up with details in the other books.

Imagine trying to get writers today to agree on any topic, like sports, politics, medicine, or COVID. It would be impossible. How do the books in the Bible written over 1,500 years from authors with such diverse backgrounds and cultures find themselves agreeing with one another if God wasn't the ultimate author superintending the writing of each book?

The Bible is a miraculous book.

If the Bible is truly God's book speaking God's words, don't you think it would contain stories of God's miraculous intervention in our world? Unfortunately, the miracles in the Bible are the very reasons skeptics give for discrediting the Bible.

Thomas Jefferson is an example. As a child of the scientific enlightenment, he refused to believe anything that couldn't be tested, repeated, and studied in a laboratory. If he couldn't repeat it, he didn't believe it. Since Jesus' miracles were unrepeatable, he refused to believe them. One day he took out his Bible and

literally cut out all of Jesus' miracles. He considered them impossible since they couldn't be repeated.

Here is the problem with that line of thinking. Historical events cannot be repeated and proven by testing them in a science lab. The only way we can verify historical events is by talking to the eyewitnesses of the events in history. How do we know that George Washington crossed the Delaware River in 1776? We can't repeat that in a lab. How do we know Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address in 1863? We can't repeat that in a laboratory either.

The only way to know if George Washington crossed the Delaware or Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address is by talking to the eyewitnesses who were there. They told us what took place and verified what happened.

It is no different when it comes to Jesus' miracles. The way we know they are true is from the claims of the eyewitnesses who were there. They claimed the miracles were true.

The stories of Jesus' life, which tell us of Jesus' miracles, were written close enough to the events that if the miracles in the Gospels were not truly what happened, the eyewitnesses would have discredited the Gospel writers and they would have been laughed out of town. That isn't what happened. The eyewitnesses who were still alive when the Gospels were written confirmed Jesus' miracles. They didn't deny Jesus' miracles.

Paul made the same argument in 1 Corinthians 15 about the resurrection. He said the eyewitnesses of the resurrection were still alive. "If you think it didn't

happen, feel free to call them, text them, reach out to them and they will confirm that Jesus did indeed rise from the dead!"

The Bible is a book that transforms lives.

As a Christian, but especially as a pastor, I have a ringside seat as I meet with people whose lives were transformed by the Bible when they started reading it. They asked Jesus to take away their sin and save their lives. The Bible tells us that when people do this, they are literally supernaturally transformed into new people.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)

In the Gospel of John, this is called being born again. Show me any other book that has transformed people like this. Show me another book that can take lives that are caught in a web of sin and addictions then completely transform those people into new people who love pleasing God instead of love living in sin. No other book does that.

So those are six pieces of evidence that the Bible is a supernatural book. That brings us to another question. While the Bible is supernatural in origin, is it trustworthy in nature? Is the Bible a book we can trust? Let's see.

The Bible is a trustworthy book.

Let me give you some reasons why we can trust the Bible.

The Bible is true because God's character is true.

The Bible repeatedly tells us it is true and we can trust it. The reason we can trust the Bible is that God by nature is trustworthy and true. The Bible, as God's words to us, will therefore be trustworthy and true.

But you are near, O Lord, and all your commandments are true. Psalm 119:151 (ESV)

Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. John 17:17 (NLT)

The book of Hebrews tells us it is impossible for God to lie to us.

...it is impossible for God to lie... Hebrews 6:18 (ESV)

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. It is 176 verses. It is all about God's Word. It repeatedly says God's words are true.

Your righteousness is righteous forever, and your law is true. Psalm 119:142 (ESV)

Since God is a God of truth, God's character is 100 percent true. That means God's words in the Bible must always be true because God cannot speak a lie.

...which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began... Titus 1:2 (ESV)

That brings us to a related question. Some people will agree with us that God's words are true and that it is impossible for God to lie, but they claim the writers of the Bible did not accurately write down God's words to us. They introduced error into the Bible. Do you think that is true? Think this through logically.

If Paul claimed the Bible is literally God's words spoken to us, did the writers of the Bible write down in error what God was trying to say through them? If God could not control the authors of the Bible to say exactly what he wanted to say through them, then God is not God. If God cannot control a human being to do or say exactly what he wants them to do, then he is not God in the first place!

The Bible is true because Jesus claimed it was true.

Jesus believed the Bible was trustworthy and true, even the miraculous portions. If we can trust Jesus to save our souls, we should be able to trust what Jesus says we should believe when it comes to the trustworthy character of the Bible. Jesus constantly quoted the Old Testament to back up his teaching. He often said, “It is written...” then cited the Old Testament to justify his actions. Jesus also took the miraculous stories of the Old Testament at face value. He believed they literally happened.

For example, Jesus believed in a literal Noah and a literal worldwide flood of the earth.

For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark... Matthew 24:37–38 (ESV)

Jesus believed in a literal Sodom and Gomorrah that were destroyed by fire from heaven by God because of their sin, just as the Bible said.

But I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you. Matthew 11:24 (ESV)

Jesus believed that God literally fed the Exodus generation with bread from heaven called manna for 40 years because there was no food to eat in the wilderness. Incidentally, this was not a natural occurrence. Every time the manna appeared, it was a supernatural occurrence because it was only on the ground six days a week, not seven.

Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. John 6:49–50 (ESV)

Jesus believed in a literal Jonah who spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish then lived to tell about it when he was vomited up by the fish on dry ground.

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.
Matthew 12:40 (ESV)

It says if Jonah was literally in the great fish for three days, Jesus would be literally in the heart of the earth for three days. If what happened to Jonah wasn't literally true, then Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection would not be literally true.

Jesus' position was not that the Old Testament was true in a general sort of way and some details are in error. Absolutely not! Jesus' position was that every detail of the Old Testament was literally true and should be taken at face value, not explained away.

Jesus did not think it was just the concepts in the Old Testament that were true or the words in the Old Testament that were generally true. Jesus considered each letter of the Old Testament to be accurately and authoritatively spoken by God so we can trust everything in God's Word.

For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Matthew 5:18 (ESV)

An iota is the smallest consonant in the Hebrew alphabet. A dot is the smallest vowel in the Hebrew alphabet. Jesus said every consonant of every word, every vowel in every word was accurately and authoritatively spoken by God and given to us. We can trust the Bible is true.

The Bible is true, because as God's Word, that logically means it must be true.

Some pastors and Bible teachers will tell you the Bible is basically trustworthy but it is not without error. They tell you not to worry about it because God is still able to get his general message across in spite of the mistakes and errors sprinkled throughout the Bible.

What do you think? Does that make sense? If sometimes you spoke truthfully to your children and other times you spoke deceptively to your children, would that be OK? Would you tell them they need to trust you because you are generally truthful even though many times when you spoke to them you were not truthful? How would they be expected to know when you are speaking truthfully and when you are speaking deceptively?

Let me give you an example. This is Adam Hamilton. He is part of the United Methodist Church. I found this quote from him on the United Methodist website. In this article, he is answering the question, "Should we trust the Bible?"

People ask me if you have to read the Bible literally. That hinges on what parts of it you are reading. [When you go to Genesis, Adam and Eve, and the Garden of Eden, those are archetypal stories. Those are not the stories of actual ancient people who lived thousands of years ago.](#) They are trying to tell us about ourselves. We don't read those stories literally. We are Adam and Eve. [We don't believe they are literally true...](#) [Take the story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale. That story is meant to be read prophetically, not literally. Did it really happen? I am ok if it did, but that is not the point of the story.](#)² — Adam Hamilton

What do you think about this? Adam Hamilton may not think Adam and Eve were not literally true, but the apostle Paul said Adam was the literal first human being created by God. Do you want to trust Adam Hamilton or the apostle

² <https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-is-the-bible-literal>

Paul on this one? Adam Hamilton may not think Jonah was literally true, but Jesus did. Are you going to trust Adam Hamilton or Jesus on this one?

Does it make sense God would speak truthfully sometimes but at other times he would be wrong? Would God sometimes be able to say what he wanted to say through the prophets and apostles who wrote the Bible but at other times he couldn't say what he wanted to say through them?

If some of what we are reading in the Bible is in error, who decides what parts are wrong and what parts are right? This puts us in a position to simply reject portions of the Bible we don't like. All we need to do when we run across something in the Bible that we don't agree with is to shrug our shoulders and say, "This must be one of those errors."

To show you what this looks like in real life, let me quote from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America right off its website. It believes the biblical writers are sometimes wrong. They heard God wrong and wrote the Bible down wrong so if there is something in the Bible you don't agree with, you can get rid of it.

Having done this listening, we sometimes conclude either that the writer's culture or personal experience (e.g., subordination of women or keeping of slaves) seems to have prompted his missing what God was saying or doing, or that God now is saying or doing something new.³

As you can see, it only makes logical sense that we take the Bible as true. God is true so his words will always be true. Jesus took the Bible literally, so we should take the Bible literally. It makes no logical sense that sometimes God would speak to us truthfully then at other times speak to us deceptively.

³ <http://www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/New-or-Returning-to-Church/Dig-Deeper/The-Bible.aspx>

The Bible is an authoritative book.

This past week, I was lifting weights in the gym. I was going heavy on the bench press. Thankfully, when the manager of the gym sees this, he always offers to spot me in case I get stuck under the weight. When I was coming to my last set of bench, he said, “You really should take some weight off and go lighter.” So do you know what I did? I didn’t listen to him. I kept going heavy and wearing myself out. I did that, because while he made a good suggestion, his suggestion was nothing more than a suggestion. He is not the final authority in my life. He does not determine what I will do. I can choose to ignore him.

Many people treat the Bible the same way. They treat it like it is a book of suggestions like we get from a coach or YouTube videos on how to lose weight. Don’t make the mistake of considering the Bible a book of suggestions. God’s Word is not empty advice. It is authoritative. The Bible is to be the final authority in our lives. Let me give you an example. Jesus said it this way.

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6 (ESV)

Is that a suggestion? No, it is an authoritative statement. Either Jesus is wrong, and we should not believe anything in this book, or Jesus is right, and everyone needs to desperately turn to him. There is no middle ground.

When it comes to how we respond to the words of the Bible, Jesus put it this way.

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain

fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. Matthew 7:24–27 (ESV)

The builders in the story represent people who have heard Jesus' teaching. They are like people who go to church and listen to sermons or read the Bible when they are at home. The foolish builders hear what Jesus says but don't do what Jesus says. They are building the houses of their lives on the sand. When hard times come, their lives will fall apart.

Are you responding to the Word of God like God is looking you in the eye and giving you authoritative words to be followed or is the Bible nothing more than casual advice you may consider? The Bible is the Word of God. That makes it authoritative for our lives! It tells us the truth!

Let me give you some tests to help you determine if you consider the Bible authoritative truth or just a book of suggestions that can be ignored.

In Ephesians 4:29, the Bible says to not let any unwholesome talk come out of our mouths but only what will build people up that it may benefit those who listen. Is that something you seriously want to obey or did you tear your family apart with your words this holiday season?

In Hebrews 13:4, the Bible says the marriage bed must be kept pure and God will judge those who pursue sex outside of marriage. Are you sleeping with your girlfriend today? Are you being unfaithful to your wife? Are you busy fantasizing about people of the opposite sex that you see on the Internet?

In Ephesians 4:31, God says to let go of bitterness against those who have wronged us. We are to forgive them as Jesus forgave us. Are you holding

onto bitterness? Holding onto bitterness against someone is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to get sick. It doesn't work.

None of those are suggestions to be considered. They are commands to be obeyed. When God speaks in the Bible, it is authoritative truth. Anyone who knows what God says on a subject but chooses to close his or her eyes and ignore God's words on a subject is building his or her life on the sand. One day, it will all come crashing down.

Let me encourage you to build your life on the rock, the solid foundation of the Word of God which tells us the authoritative truth that we should obey.

The Bible is an essential part of knowing God.

Imagine this. You are at work. You overhear two people talking on the other side of the office cafeteria. As you overhear them, you suddenly realize they are talking about you! You can't help but listen to them once you heard your name. They are talking about your life! They are talking about the things you like, the goals you have for life, your marriage, your hobbies, and how you are doing at work. What is completely weird is you have never talked to these people. You don't know them, and for sure, they don't know you! Everything they are saying about you they are making up in their heads. How could they talk about you like that if they have never met you?

As ludicrous as that may sound, people do that with God all the time. They guess what he is like and assume their guesses about God are true. A great example of this is a best-selling novel that was in recent years turned into a movie called *The Shack*. Maybe you have heard about it.

It is the story of a grieving father who, after the murder of his daughter, encounters God at a shack in the woods. The triune God appears to him in that shack. God the Father is a large African woman with a sense of humor. Jesus the Son is a laid-back handyman who likes to skip stones. God the Holy Spirit is a thin, young Asian woman. When the author of The Shack was interviewed about the book, he was asked why he depicted God in his trinitarian form this way. His answer was, "This is how I like to think about God." This is what he guesses God is like. The problem is that millions of people have either read the book or seen the movie and now they also think they have a better understanding of God. This is nonsense! Nobody gets to know what God is like by speculating about him. The only way for us to know God is by him revealing himself to us so we truly know him.

Psalm 19 tells us there are two ways God reveals himself so we can know him accurately. The first way is by looking at the creation around us. God's creation gives us an idea of God's size, beauty, complexity, and power. Psalm 19 then tells us the only other way we can know God truly is how he reveals himself to us in the Bible.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes... Psalm 19:7–8 (ESV)

God's Word doesn't just reveal God to us, but look what God's Word does in us. It revives the weary soul. It makes simple people wise. God's Word brings joy to our hearts. God's word enlightens the eyes. That means it helps us see the truth about life and how to live. Look what else David says about the Bible in this Psalm.

More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Psalm 19:10–11 (ESV)

If you had a choice between winning the lottery and having a Bible, you would be better off choosing the Bible instead of winning the lottery. God's Word is valuable and life-transforming. If you think chocolate tastes good, the Bible tastes better. It brings more joy and happiness into our lives than chocolate.

How do I get the Bible into my life?

According to a recent study by the U.S. Department of Education, half of American adults have difficulty reading. Reading has become a lost art, especially for those who are young. Less than a third of 13 year olds read on a daily basis. What are people doing with their time? Watching television, sitting on YouTube, flipping through Facebook, Instagram, or Snapchat.

Nicholas Carr in his book The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brain concludes that the Internet is making us stupid. Our brains are being jammed full of useless information from pop-up ads and hyperlinks to funny YouTube cat videos. There is such a flood of useless information in our lives that we don't retain anything of value. What does Nicholas Carr recommend as the antidote to the Internet making us stupid? Reading quality books. From what we have looked at this morning, what is the best book of all to read and get in our lives? The Bible!

I want to give you a three-step plan to get the Bible into your life this year. There is nothing better we can do than to get the Bible flowing through our veins. Getting the Bible into our lives is not just our responsibility, it is our pleasure. It is our reward.

Get a grip on the Bible by hearing it taught.

The first way to get a grip on the Bible in our lives is to regularly hear it taught. Be a faithful church attendee who takes notes and who listens attentively with a desire to learn. This is biblical.

Nehemiah 8 tells us what God's people did when they returned to Jerusalem after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. At the time, their country was a mess. The temple was in rubble. The people were demoralized. They knew the reason for their exile in Babylon was that they wandered from God. They didn't want that to happen again! How could they turn their lives around? They needed to start hearing and learning God's Word. They asked Ezra, their spiritual leader, to read the Bible to them. All of the people assembled to hear the Bible read from daybreak to noon. Day after day, Ezra stood on a wooden platform and read the Bible to people. Then the Levites instructed the people in the Bible. It was Ezra who read the Word, then the Levites taught people how God's Word applied to their life.

If the public teaching of the Bible was an essential part of the Israelites getting the Bible in their lives, it stands to reason that sitting under the public teaching of God's Word will also be an essential part of us getting the Bible into our lives. I have one friend who comes to CrossWinds with his family. He knows he cannot pay attention during Sunday mornings in the church because of his children. Every week after church he listens to the sermon a second time so he can take notes and concentrate and learn his Bible. God will honor that.

Get a grip on the Bible by reading it.

Last week, I had some friends in my office. They were looking at my bookshelves. They asked if I had read all the books on my shelves. I am sorry to tell you, I have not. Until I read them, those unread books have done me no good.

Many people treat the Bible the same way. They have it on the shelf but until we take it off the shelf and read it, it won't do any good in our lives. A recent poll revealed that 95 percent of those who claim to be Christians have a Bible in their house but only 19 percent of Christians read the Bible two or more times a week. Think about that. Eighty-one percent of Christians read the Bible less than two times a week! Remember, the Bible isn't any book. It is God's book. It is the truth we need in a world filled with error and political spin. Remember it is more valuable than winning the lottery. The Bible brings more pleasure in our lives than eating honey. How can we get the Bible in our lives on a regular basis?

Today, I am giving you a Bible reading challenge for the year. Pastor Jordan and I have been working on this together. Last year we did a challenge called *Take Up And Read*. In that challenge, we learned that what worked best for people was reading about one chapter of the Bible a day. We did some calculations and realized that if someone reads one chapter of the New Testament five days a week, they will finish

take up and read the New Testament		CROSSWINDS CHURCH	
1 chapter a day 5 days a week in 1 year		1924	
JANUARY			
□ JANUARY 3:	MATTHEW 1	□ JANUARY 17:	MATTHEW 11
□ JANUARY 4:	MATTHEW 2	□ JANUARY 18:	MATTHEW 12
□ JANUARY 5:	MATTHEW 3	□ JANUARY 19:	MATTHEW 13
□ JANUARY 6:	MATTHEW 4	□ JANUARY 20:	MATTHEW 14
□ JANUARY 7:	MATTHEW 5	□ JANUARY 21:	MATTHEW 15
□ JANUARY 10:	MATTHEW 6	□ JANUARY 24:	MATTHEW 16
□ JANUARY 11:	MATTHEW 7	□ JANUARY 25:	MATTHEW 17
□ JANUARY 12:	MATTHEW 8	□ JANUARY 26:	MATTHEW 18
□ JANUARY 13:	MATTHEW 9	□ JANUARY 27:	MATTHEW 19
□ JANUARY 14:	MATTHEW 10	□ JANUARY 28:	MATTHEW 20

reading the New Testament in almost exactly a year. That is our *Take Up and Read* challenge for the year. Will you join your church family in reading one chapter of the New Testament five days a week which will finish the New Testament in almost exactly a year?

There is one problem with this challenge. There is another part of our Bible that is equally important called the Old Testament. We don't want to ignore that. We did some figuring and realized that if we read one chapter of the Old Testament six days a week, we will finish the entire Old Testament in two years!

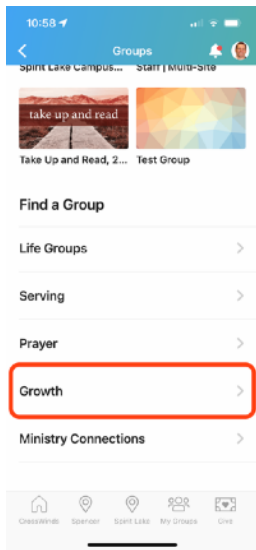
JANUARY	
▫ JANUARY 3: GENESIS 1	▫ JANUARY 17: GENESIS 13
▫ JANUARY 4: GENESIS 2	▫ JANUARY 18: GENESIS 14
▫ JANUARY 5: GENESIS 3	▫ JANUARY 19: GENESIS 15
▫ JANUARY 6: GENESIS 4	▫ JANUARY 20: GENESIS 16
▫ JANUARY 7: GENESIS 5	▫ JANUARY 21: GENESIS 17
▫ JANUARY 8: GENESIS 6	▫ JANUARY 22: GENESIS 18
▫ JANUARY 10: GENESIS 7	▫ JANUARY 24: GENESIS 19
▫ JANUARY 11: GENESIS 8	▫ JANUARY 25: GENESIS 20
▫ JANUARY 12: GENESIS 9	▫ JANUARY 26: GENESIS 21
▫ JANUARY 13: GENESIS 10	▫ JANUARY 28: GENESIS 22
▫ JANUARY 14: GENESIS 11	▫ JANUARY 28: GENESIS 23
▫ JANUARY 15: GENESIS 12	▫ JANUARY 29: GENESIS 24

So this is the challenge. If you feel you can only handle reading one chapter a day five days a week, that is OK. Start there and read through the New Testament with your church family. For others of you who want to take it a step further, join us not just in reading the New Testament in one year, but also in reading the Old Testament in two years. If you do both the Old and New Testament challenge, it is only two chapters a day. That is manageable. If you fall behind, you will be able to catch up.

We will have the Bible reading cards in the bulletin at the beginning of each month. The New Testament reading for the month will be on one side of the card and the Old Testament reading for the month will be on the other side of the card.

So how do you let me know you are accepting the challenge? While you can put your name down on the response card and leave it in the pew for ushers to pick up after the service, there is a better way.

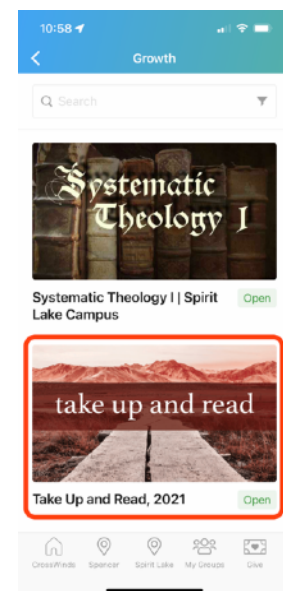
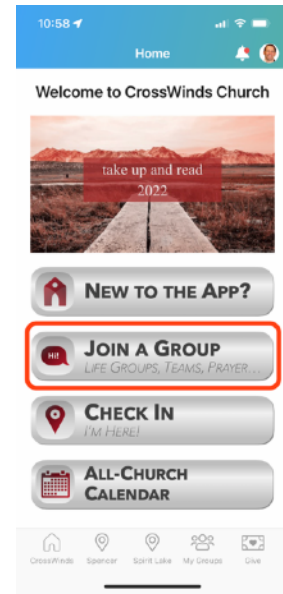
I hope you are using the Church Center app. If you are, sign up for the *Take Up and Read* group in the app. Let



me show you how. Go to the home page of the app. Click the *Join A Group* button. Scroll to the bottom and click

the *Growth* category. Then scroll to the bottom where you will find the *Take Up And Read* group. Go ahead and join it. In that group, I will put the Bible reading cards for each month.

In addition, we are working with a group called *The Bible Project*. As we get to new books in the Bible, I will add the Bible project overview video for the book. Each of these videos is only 5-7 minutes in length and provides an overview of the book in the Bible you are about to read. These brief video summaries are a great way to better understand books of the Bible. Also, in the library, I will have these video Bible book summaries playing for you to see them. Grab a cup of coffee and spend a few minutes after church in the library getting an overview of a book of the Bible before you read it. We are starting that this morning with the books of Matthew and Genesis.



So today, I ask you to join your church family in reading the Bible. Let us know by either filling out the response card or by joining the *Take Up And Read* group in the Church Center app.

Get a grip on the Bible by memorizing it.

One last challenge that I do with my Iron Man group each week is take one Bible verse that I read during the week that I liked and memorize it. In my Iron Man group, we hold one another accountable to memorizing one verse of our choosing from our Bible reading. Memorizing God's Word helps make the Bible portable. That way we can bring the Bible to mind whenever we need to hear it or be reminded of it.

Conclusion

Will you take the CrossWinds Church *Take Up and Read* Bible reading challenge for 2022? My prayer is that you would. There can be nothing better in your life and mine than the Word of God.



Dr. Kurt Trucksess is ordained in the Evangelical Free Church of America. He enjoys reading, writing, and time with his family. Feel free to contact him at www.Christ2RCulture.com (www.c2rc.com)

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