

7 Ways to Approach Your Bible in 2016

By Matt Smethurst*

If you're a Christian, you believe reading the Bible is important. But have you considered how to approach it in the first place? What kind of "heart posture" is necessary?

God cares deeply about these questions. Here are seven ways we should approach his Word in 2016.

1. Approach It Humbly

The Bible is empirical evidence that the Maker of the universe is a God who initiates, who reveals, who *talks*. There are, after all, only two options when it comes to knowledge of one's Creator: revelation or speculation.

Either he speaks, or we guess.

And he has spoken. As Carl F. H. Henry said, the God of heaven and earth has "forfeited his personal privacy" to befriend us through a book. The Bible is like an all-access pass into the revealed mind and will of God.

Now, given that we're not only creatures of the dust but rebels against heaven's throne, this is astounding. The King would've been entirely right to leave us to ourselves, sunk in an ocean of ignorance and guilt.

But he didn't. He peeled back the curtain. And then opened his holy mouth.

Any authentic knowledge of God hinges on his generous self-disclosure to us. Only through his Word can we know who he is, what he's like, what he demands, and how we may know him. This ought to humble us deeply.

2. Approach It Desperately

Having rehearsed God's law one final time before his death, Moses looks at the people of Israel and says, "These are not just idle words for you—they are your life" (Deut. 32:47). The stakes could not be higher. Not only are our spiritual lives launched by God's Word (James 1:18; 1 Pet. 1:23), they are sustained by it too. As Jesus declared, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matt. 4:4).

The psalmist, too, ached to hear the words of God: "My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times," he exclaimed. "I cling to your testimonies. . . . I open my mouth and pant, because I long for your commandments" (Ps. 119:20, 31, 131).

Your soul will wither and die without the Bible. Approach it desperately.

3. Approach It Studiously

Imagine if you asked me about my wife and I responded, "Oh, she's incredible—the most amazing girl I've ever known! She's from Oregon, has gorgeous red hair, and hates chocolate." Now, would my chocolate-loving brunette who hails from Virginia feel honored by this description? Of course not. I can gush about her all day, but unless my words reflect who she really is, she'll be insulted.

Why, then, are we so careless when thinking and speaking of our Creator?

"Great are the works of the LORD," the psalmist exclaims, "*studied* by all who delight in them" (Ps. 111:2). The New Testament, too, commends engaging Scripture with care: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and *examined* the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11).

Come to the Bible with a learner's posture, asking the Author to teach you wonderful things.

4. Approach It Obediently

The psalmist didn't just long to understand God's commands; he wanted to obey them, too.

You have laid down precepts that are to be fully obeyed. Oh, that my ways were steadfast in obeying your decrees! . . . Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. . . . I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. (Ps. 119:4–5, 34, 60)

The New Testament reinforces this urgency of submitting to Scripture: "Whoever says, 'I know [God],' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person" (1 John 2:4–5). Or, as James simply urges, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says" (James 1:22).

5. Approach It Joyfully

As a dad, I'm not always pleased when my kids obey me. They need to do so with a happy heart, too. Anyone can muster grudging compliance, after all, but real obedience flows from love and joy (John 14:15).

The Book of Psalms opens with a man whose "delight is in the law of the LORD" (Ps. 1:2). He can't get enough of it. Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah confesses, "When [God's] words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight" (Jer. 15:16). Even Jesus said the purpose of his words is to induce joy: "I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete" (John 15:11).

Cracking open my Bible feels like a duty at times. It will for you, too. We're fallen humans in a fallen world. When that moment arrives, though, press on. Press through. Ask for help. Plead for joy. It's a prayer the Father loves to answer.

6. Approach It Expectantly

Since the Bible's ultimate author is God, it is a book of unparalleled power. Its words can melt hearts (Jer. 23:29) and change lives (John 17:17).

Did you know even obscure books like Leviticus and Obadiah were written to encourage you? "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). *Everything*. Paul is saying that the entirety of the Old Testament is for you—to instruct you, to encourage you, to help you endure, and to flood your heart with hope.

When you open your Bible, do so expectantly. Comfort (Ps. 119:50), strength (Ps. 119:28), guidance (Ps. 119:105), hope (Rom. 15:4), assurance (1 John 5:13), and transformation (John 17:17) everywhere await.

7. Approach It Frequently

It should be obvious, given everything we've considered, that we ought to approach God's Word frequently.

"I rise before dawn and cry for help," the psalmist proclaims. "My eyes are awake before the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promise. . . . Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Ps. 119:147–48, 97). In order for "the word of Christ [to] dwell in you richly" (Col. 3:16), you must soak yourself in it like a teabag in water.

Friends, there is nothing like God's Word. Approach it humbly, desperately, studiously, obediently, joyfully, expectantly, and frequently in 2016.

You'll be so glad you did.

*Source: Gospel Coalition > <http://goo.gl/Apxtfb>