

DIVE INTO THE BIBLE AND LEARN TO SWIM

By Trevin Wax



Americans love the Bible; they just don't read it enough.

According to [research](#) from the American Bible Society, the majority of Americans believe the Bible is inspired and that its principles should exert more influence on public life.

Eighty-eight percent of households in America own at least one Bible, including non-Christian homes (68 percent). The average family has three to four copies of God's Word. Twenty-four percent of American families say they own more than five!

Reading the Bible

Bible ownership is high. Not so with Bible readership. Only one in seven adults reads the Bible daily.

Why so few? Most Americans claim it's the busyness of their lifestyle or their own frustration in understanding the biblical text.

Among churchgoing Protestants, the number of Bible readers is much higher. Eighty percent claim to read the Bible at least once a week. That's a hopeful place to start if you want to reinvigorate Bible reading in your church or push toward a "read the Bible every day" routine this year.

Bible Reading Practices

Lately, I've been sifting through some unpublished Lifeway research on how people interact with the Bible. Many of the tools available (cross-reference Bibles, topical indexes, and so on) help readers find the connections between Scripture passages or come across a timely word in a troubling season. People admit they are more likely to seek out Bible promises when they need encouragement in their daily life.

But I'm conflicted about these reports.

On the one hand, I want people going to the Bible for whatever reason may prompt them. I believe God's Word changes lives. I believe His Word will not return empty. I trust Christ to accomplish His purposes through His Word.

Throughout church history, we see people transformed by a seemingly random portion of God's Word: the eyes of Augustine falling on Paul's instruction in Romans 13:13, or the preacher's quotation of Isaiah 45:22 ("Look unto Me!") that gripped the heart of a young Charles Spurgeon.

On the other hand, I want *Christians* going to God's Word for more than daily tidbits for practical life. Too many of us go to God's Word in order to *get something out of it*. I want more of us to go to God's Word in order to *get into it*.

The Bible Is a World in Itself

We shouldn't approach the Bible like it's a sunken ship, where we dive deep for an artifact or treasure we can bring back to our own world. Instead, we should see our era

like the sunken ship and the Bible as the ocean that surrounds us. Christians must learn how to *swim* in the Bible.

No one should say this is easy. It's true that the Bible can feel to the newcomer as if it were a foreign land. The tourist may feel disoriented when visiting another country, where the language is different, where the signs are a mystery, and where the customs are unusual.

But the best way to learn a language or adapt to another culture is full immersion into its rituals, routines, and language. That's why we need full immersion into the world of the Scripture: its message must be celebrated and proclaimed in communities of faith, its stories must be told as our own, and its characters must feel as close as family.

Sampling vs. Savoring

When it comes to food, there's a difference between sampling and savoring. You sample finger foods. You savor a meal.

Many Christians are used to sampling the Bible; they know how to pull out verses here and there. Instead, we should see the Scriptures as something we savor, as a meal that gives us sustenance and energy to get on with the task at hand. (And if you think the metaphor of "eating" God's Word sounds strange, spend some time with the psalmist!)

Immersed in Scripture

I love the scene in *Mary Poppins* when Bert, the chimney sweep, shows the children his chalk drawings, only then to jump with Mary and the children into the animated world He has created. First, they all admired the drawing. But suddenly, they were immersed in that world.

This is what I mean by getting *into* the Bible. The Bible is more than words that inspire; it is a world we inhabit. If Bible reading is only the attempt to get something *out* of God's Word, we'll miss the chance for God's Word to dwell *in* us.

This is why we should immerse ourselves in the grand story of the Bible. This is why we should recite its poems and sing its songs. This is why we should imagine ourselves in its stories and welcome its comfort and confrontation.

World of the Bible

Countless worlds are offered up to us these days—diversions that form us in countless ways. We inhabit the “worlds” of popular video games, or the world of Top 40 Radio. We dive into the worlds of Star Wars, or Middle Earth, or Marvel's superhero universe. We binge-watch television shows that invite us to imagine a different era, shudder at an apocalyptic scenario, or distract us from our daily routine.

These stories cultivate and form our imaginations. That's why, if we are to be faithful in our time, we need Christians with Scripture-soaked imaginations, believers committed to full and regular immersion into God's Word as the great story of our world.

So let's not allow the Bible to lay dusty on the shelf. With God's Word on our lips and His stories planted in our hearts, let's dive into the strange, new world of the Bible until we speak its language fluently and display its beauty for the world to see.