

HOW TO READ THE BIBLE

MICHELLE KAREN D'SILVA



Michelle
KAREN D'SILVA



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Published by Michelle Karen D'Silva.

Unless otherwise directed in writing by the writer, scripture quotations are from the NRSV Bible translation.



HOW?

Do you want to start reading the Bible but unsure where or how to begin?

Well, firstly do not be intimidated. You can begin today by simply following a few practical tips. My sincere prayer is that these will equip and empower you greatly, just as they have shaped my own desire and hunger for the Word of God.

Before we proceed, I would like to remind you that there is no 'one-size fits all' when it comes to learning the scriptures. So don't give up when you don't make it. God will meet you right where you are in a way where you can respond fully to Him, as you approach the Word with your whole-heart. There I have said it – it's always the matter of the heart. This is where God desires to enter. The goal of Bible Study is to know the heart of God for you more each day. And as you read, you will beautifully discover not only God in a deeper way but also who you are and who you were always meant to be in Him.



PICK THE RIGHT TOOLS

PICK THE RIGHT TIME:

The reason I say 'right' is because it is important to give God the best part of ourselves. If you pick a time when you are tired, you will compromise on your attention towards God. So, whether you are an early riser or someone who loves to settle down late into the night, pick an intelligent time that works for you. Just start somewhere and you'll see the fruit that this time brings to your life.

PICK THE RIGHT PLACE:

Have a place that you enjoy being – a room in your house where you can be alone, or somewhere you are comfortable and like to be. Take up that cozy corner and grab that cup of coffee. It's worth it!

PICK THE RIGHT BIBLE:

There are many great Bible versions out there, but it's important to pick one that helps you see things holistically (by that I mean, having all 73 books). It is important that your Bible is comfortable to read, light enough to carry and also inexpensive so that you don't feel bad writing or marking in it. Isn't it great that there are Bibles today for every age group? Pick one that's right for you.



Here are a few Catholic Bibles I recommend:

- **New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE)**
- **New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE)**
- **Good News Translation (Today's English Version, Second Edition), American Bible Society**

Source: USCCB's website

I also highly recommend referring to a Concordance and a Catholic Study Bible.

A Concordance is a book that has an alphabetical index of the main words you find in the Bible and where to find them. It can be helpful when you have specific words you want to locate in the Bible. The New American Bible Revised Edition Concise Concordance is one such book.

A Catholic Study Bible gives details on the background, history and other vital information that enables you to study the passage in its right context. This is so crucial so that scriptures are not misinterpreted. Two Catholic study Bibles are: The Catholic Study Bible (NABRE) and The Didache Bible: With Commentaries Based on the Catechism of the Catholic Church (RSV-2CE).

The great part of learning the Bible is that there is always more to explore. While having the right version of the Study Bible is great, what enables you to go deeper is having some additional books that can help you understand THE BOOK.

These are a few of my favorite picks:

- ***Life of Christ*, by Fulton Sheen – exposition on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**
- ***Ask the Bible Geek*, by Mark Hart – helps us see “how God thinks” by having different verses unpacked and explained in a way that relates them to everyday life**
- ***Ascend* – gives insights and background into the Sunday Mass readings.**

Besides these, I absolutely dote on Bible Study series by Scott Hahn, Curtis Mitch, Jeff Cavins and Peter Kreeft. I also take time periodically to read up homilies of the Pope, another great way to see scriptures as relevant and resourceful.



WHERE DO I BEGIN?

There's really no wrong place to start.

You can study anything that's going to help you. I always recommend studying the Bible in areas where you need it the most. For example, if you're dealing with anger or pain in relationships, then start there.

The Psalms for example, is a book packed with human emotion. The first Letter of John is full of brotherly love, Job is full of deep suffering, James is about practical Christian living, Acts is about ministry hardships; Judith is full of fierce passion. The list goes on. It is important to allow the Word of God to minister to your reality.

When I first started studying the Word, I had deep wounds from broken relationships, which needed healing. But I also didn't really understand what authentic love was. As I studied the subject of love, I learned that love was so much more than just a fuzzy feeling; true love was a commitment. It was a decision that could only be lived to the measure we believed and received God's love for us. By studying what the Bible says about love, I learned how much God loved me and how I could love in return.



LESS IS MORE

Sometimes I meet people who tell me they easily drift away less than fifteen minutes into reading. It is important to remember that this is not a check list, but rather an invitation of love. Don't most love stories begin with so little? Rather than diving chapter after chapter, begin with just 1 verse and then read up-to 8 verses maximum. Pause, ponder, reflect and respond to what you are reading. Take your time, enjoy the relationship.

On days when I don't feel like it, I simply look up the daily verse on a bible app. God's Word always has a way of penetrating my heart even during dull days.

PRAY

Invite the Holy Spirit in. The Lord knows where you are at and what you need. He can handle it. And He cares. So, pray. One specific thing I pray is, 'Lord, open my mind to understand your scriptures'. Ask Him to reveal Himself to YOU on a personal level and to give you clear discernment to recognize His voice! Allow your mind to be infused by His grace and your intellect overtaken by His Wisdom. Nothing is more powerful than inviting the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom into your learning experience so that you not only read the Word, but also live the Word.



JOURNAL

Nothing takes you deeper like journaling. There are so many moments in my life, when I am going through difficult times that I visit an old tattered journal, only to find volumes of God's love and faithfulness in my life. Journaling is a great way to give voice and words to your thoughts.

Write down verses that strike you or even confuse you. Search the commentaries or Study resources for meaning and exposition. Give your imagination to God. What is God saying to you in that verse? Does He have a message for you right now? God will reveal a great deal about yourself to you when you let Him. Another great way to strengthen what God may be speaking to you is to share it with a friend. Pray, Discern together.

Also, it is not necessary that you have to 'study' and 'journal' daily. You may try creating a simple Bible Reading Plan with a friend. That way, you can help each other be accountable on days when it's easy to give up or forget.

AND IF YOU ARE CRAZY LIKE ME...

You can post notes of verses that speak to your heart, on your study desk, your refrigerator and other places to remind you of God's love letter speaking to you through the day.



A sneak peak into my own journey with the Word of God...

I have been teaching the Bible for more than a decade now and I can tell you from my experience that the Word of God has changed my life forever. It has been the key to radical transformation in my perspectives and attitudes. God has healed and restored my spirit, soul and body through the power of His Word.

The Word of God has convicted me in areas I never thought offended the heart of God and allowed me to focus on areas that needed further strengthening. It has changed the way I relate to people and taught me to forgive and love when it was easy to do otherwise.

More than anything, it has brought me closer to the Catholic Church. It has deepened my experience of the Eucharist, both at Mass and Adoration. It has deepened my love for our Mother Mary and awakened me to the gift of sainthood. It is only through the Word of God that I am able to live in this world, but not be of this world.

My prayer for you is that you discover this passion and so much more that God has in store for you, in and through your time with Him.

Learning the discipline of reading and reflecting the Word of God requires nothing short of bravery. So be brave, friend. Do it!

And last, but certainly not the least, encourage somebody who has the same questions as you. Point them to the Word. Better still, do it together. After all, the outcome of our time with God is always discipleship!