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# 25 Ways to Engage the Bible

by Ron Forseth

Of this I am convinced: This side of heaven there is nothing more wonderful we could ever hold in our hands or engage with our minds than God's Word as given to us in the Bible. Through it God's Spirit breathes life into our hearts and empowers us to live in healthy relationships with others. Countless passages in the Bible on the Bible affirm just how incredible and life-giving Scripture is (See Joshua 1:8; Deuteronomy 6:-6-7; Psalm 1:1-3; Psalm 19; Psalm 119: 9-11, 105; Matthew 4:4; John 6:63; John 17:17; 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12, just to name a few). Joshua tells us that engaging with the Word of God will lead to success in life and the same promise is repeated again in the very first Psalm. God has so constructed the world that the vibrancy of life is dependant upon his Word—empowered and revealed by his Spirit.

We must make every effort to get into and stay engaged with the Bible as the predominant force in our lives. To do so is to arrange our lives around God himself—because that is just what the Bible is: A clear expression of the mind and thoughts and heart of God as he seeks to be in relationship with us. God inhabits his Word. We love the Word of God because we love God himself. He even goes so far as to call his Son "The Word" (John 1:1; John 5:39).

Here are 25 ways to encourage people everywhere to engage the Bible and re-center their hearts and lives around God's Word. Some you're certainly already aware of. Others will be new to you. A handful may jump out as just what God has in mind for you or for your church. This is not an exhaustive list but one that I have compiled over the last 10 or so years and practiced in varying degrees in my own life. Note: You will not find here a prescription for how much time one must spend in the Bible. This is not meant to be a regimented structure but rather an inspirational piece to encourage people to engage and enjoy the Bible more. In Acts 17 the Bereans were described as being in the Word daily. I'll leave that as Scripture's simple recommendation for all of us.

## 1. Survey the Word

Whether it be the whole of Scripture, an entire book in the Bible, or a given passage, capturing the big picture makes a deeper engagement of the Word more accessible and productive. An example of such a survey I enjoyed crafting\* is what I call the 51-Word Bible<sup>1</sup>. Here it is:

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## **51-Word Bible**

God's Creation!  
Satan's Deception. Adam's Consumption.  
Noah's Boat. Abraham's Faith. Joseph's Dreams.  
Pharaoh's Oppression. Moses' Escape. Doubters' Wandering.  
Joshua's Conquests. Judges' Strength. David's Slingshot.  
Solomon's Wisdom. Prophets' Proclamations. Israel's Scattering.  
Mary's Delivery!  
Jesus' Miracles. Rabbi's Lessons. Lamb's Death. Resurrection!  
Spirit's Arrival. Disciples' Testimony. Paul's Letters.  
Churches' Multiplication. World's Demise.  
Heaven's Triumph!

The value of a survey is that it gives perspective on the rest of a passage, short or long, and contextualizes all other Bible engagement.

### **2. Listen to the Word**

Whether it be listening to ourselves read the Word or hearing someone else read it to us, listening is a wonderful staple of "Scripture consumption." Listening is an intake strategy that offers an opportunity to hear the Bible when busy lives so often push it out of our schedules. The other day when I was doing some sorting at my desk, I was able to turn on my MP3 player and enjoy a contemplative half hour listening to the whole of Ephesians. My preferred source of audio Scripture is with [The Bible Experience](#) which I find to be a gift from heaven. I think it stands to re-engage our generation in Bible appreciation like no other resource I can think of. This dramatic recording of Scripture engages some 200 African American readers (including my favorite, Cuba Gooding, Jr., who is probably best known for his performance in "Radio") in a lively articulation of God's Word that I recommend for everyone. (You may download a free recording of Romans 8 if you'd like to "experience *The Bible Experience*.")

Depending on the recording, one can listen to an entire audio New Testament in 15-20 hours. The whole Bible can be completed in 75-85 hours. (Here's an idea: "Fast" from TV and discretionary Internet use for 30 days and listen to the entire Bible in a month instead. Be prepared to have your thought processes changed!)

### **3. Read the Word Silently**

Probably the most common form of engaging God's Word in our time, silent reading of the Word, is the fastest way to take in Scripture. The average person silently reads 250-300 words a minute. Its advantages include privacy, ease, speed, and volume of intake. Silent reading allows for quick overviews and a first pass before preceding deeper Bible engagement. At 300 words a minute, one can read the entire Bible in approximately 42 hours. An hour of rapid reading a day could get you

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from Genesis to Revelation in six weeks! Or you could slow it down slightly and read [The Bible in 90 Days](#) (12 pages a day).

#### **4. Read the Word Aloud (Privately)**

People in centuries gone by, particularly the contemporaries of Christ, spoke the word aloud when they read it. That's what the Ethiopian Eunuch was apparently doing when Philip "stumbled" onto him in Acts 8. Reading aloud slows us down to approximately 125-140 words a minute, half the speed of reading silently. Frankly, this is my favorite way to read. It helps take in Scripture through two gates, the eyes and the ears, and is far more engaging than silent reading. If this is a new idea for you, you might find it a little awkward at first. And if you don't find a place where you're comfortable doing it, others might think you're a little odd. But I do encourage you to try it.

#### **5. Read the Word Publicly**

Certainly our faith cannot be fully realized when we are isolated as individuals. A corporate reading of the Word in a public context creates a community dynamic of praise, honor, obedience, grace, and hope. I don't know of anything that can strengthen a body of believers more effectively than an extensive corporate reading of God's Word. We're not simply talking about a few verses read on a Sunday morning—though that can certainly be powerful. I'm talking about a public proclamation of Scripture over an hour, hours, or even a full day or weekend. You've likely heard of "Concerts of Prayer." How about "Concerts of Scripture"?! What would happen if the whole of your church gathered to hear the whole of Genesis read in the course of a day? Or the Book of Matthew from beginning to end? Or an evening dedicated to the reading of Revelation? D.L. Moody once said, "The world has yet to see what God will do with a man who is fully consecrated to Him." I think it's equally true that "The world has yet to see what God will do with a church that fully embraces God's Word." Corporate reading of the Word is the best place I can think of for aligning a church with God himself.

#### **6. Discuss the Word**

I'm reminded of the Rabbis in training in the movie *Yentl*. They had as much fun discussing the finer points of The Torah as fans at a football game. Discussions about meaning, interpretations, doctrinal substance, and sheer trivia can be a productive means of engaging the Word and driving it more deeply into our hearts. Get in a Bible study or choose a friend and a passage and jump in!

#### **7. Hand-copy the Word**

This exercise can be far more stimulating than you might guess. Hand-copying the Word slows the brain down and synchronizes the mind with the meaning of a passage. Bible on one side. Journal on the other. Practice your penmanship as you go. I usually use cursive when I copy the Word. A slightly faster way to copy the Word is to re-type it on the computer. Try using different fonts. Copying the word is

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a tremendous way to nourish the spirit and align the mind with the thoughts of God. Take. Eat. Enjoy!

### **8. Study the Word**

Probably the broadest of these engagement techniques, study of the Word calls for a close examination through multiple approaches. Analyze the grammar. Observe the facts. Find parallels. Note the verb tenses. Consult commentaries. Investigate the original languages. Post a question on a discussion forum. (Try [BibleMaster.com](http://BibleMaster.com).) Compare with other Scriptures. Ask someone else for insight into a passage. Buy a Bible software program. Do a word study. Do a character study. Pick apart a passage. Investigate using the productive approach of "Observe, Interpret, and Apply."

### **9. Cross-reference the Word**

When Peter said that no Scripture was a matter of private interpretation, I take that to mean that it doesn't stand alone. Each passage is understood in light of other Scriptures because it is part of the integrated message of the whole of the Bible. Cross-referencing one passage with another related passage can release as much light into the soul as opening into the night the door of a lit room. Use a concordance. Use in-line references found in a study Bible. Use a computer search capability. Besides the Bible itself, my favorite Bible study tool is Zondervan's "[The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance](#)" which is available in book or computer form. Just as a good knife and fork facilitate the consumption of a good meal, so a skilled use of cross-referencing facilitates the intake of nutrition from God's Word.

### **10. Stress the Word**

Some don't like to take large passages. Instead, they prefer to meditate on a single verse, phrase, or even word. One way to really "squeeze some extra nutrition" from a passage is to use contrasting stress as you repeat a text. For instance, consider the fresh angle from each stress in the following from Psalm 23:

**THE** Lord is my shepherd.  
The **LORD** is my shepherd.  
The Lord **IS** my shepherd.  
The Lord is **MY** shepherd.  
The Lord is my **SHEPHERD**.

Choose a favorite verse and "chew" on it with some contrasting stress. Try Ephesians 2:10, Romans 8:28, Matthew 4:4, Isaiah 40:31, Jeremiah 29:11, John 3:16, or another favorite passage.

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## **11. *Highlight the Word***

A specific approach to studying Scripture is to type or copy a passage of Scripture onto a page, triple-spaced. This allows ample space for note-taking, diagramming and highlighting a passage. One type of diagram that makes things leap off the page is to circle all the pronouns in a passage and then connect them by lines to the noun which they reference. Another diagramming approach is to take six different colored markers and use each to highlight: 1) nouns/pronouns, 2) verbs, 3) adjectives and articles, 4) adverbs 5) conjunctions, and 6) prepositions. Watch even more insights and meaning leap off the page!

## **12. Read the Word Responsively**

A cousin to public reading of the Word is responsive reading of a passage. Here a leader reads a verse and the group or assembly responds with the next. Or women can read one and men respond with the next. Or adults and children. (Why not try tall people and short people?!) Frankly, I've got childhood recollections of responsive readings that did more to convince me Scripture was boring and lifeless. Let's remember the words of Henrietta Mears: "It's a sin to bore people with the Word of God!" A responsive reading must be done with energy and a measure of passion as the meaning is brought forth through intonation and expression. Consider prefacing such a reading with a reminder to "say it from the heart." An advantage to responsive readings is that they can get people on their toes, leaning into the meaning rather than sitting back and passively listening.

## **13. Paraphrase the Word**

Good translation can be defined as taking the meaning from one language and capturing it accurately in another language. Paraphrasing is like that, only it is capturing the meaning of a passage and re-expressing that same meaning with different words. For instance:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"

can be re-expressed as:

"The Creator of us all had such a deep love for us that he willingly sent the only Son he ever conceived to die in our place!"

(Notice some of the meaning that is implicit is sometimes brought out explicitly in a paraphrase. Remember, the goal is *accuracy* in meaning.)

This isn't an attempt to turn us all into Bible translators. But it is an exercise that attunes our hearts to the meaning expressed in a biblical passage. The paraphrases don't have to be of publication quality. Though, if you come to like this type of exercise, you might be surprised by some of what you write and want to share it with others.

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#### **14. Dramatize the Word**

If drama can bring life to life, then certainly it can be a useful means of bringing Scripture to life. Dramatizations of the word can be completely spontaneous and amateur exercises or they can be professional quality productions that are scripted, rehearsed, costumed, recorded and replayed. They can bring a narrative story to life or they can articulate a poetic passage through dance and physical expression. A Bible study group may attempt to capture a passage through an interpretive drama or a worship drama team may memorize and re-enact a passage. In any case, the Word comes to life as it takes on three dimensions, motion, and sound.

#### **15. Sketch the Word**

For the right-brain artistic types among us, sketching the Word is something that is second nature. But even for those of us who do better with straight lines and right angles, sketching the Word can be a rich experience capturing the big idea of a passage or even details best highlighted with a picture or illustration. Here are a few sketch ideas:

- Choose a passage like Jesus' reference to swallowing a camel and enfold it into a three-panel comic strip.
- Find an event in the Bible like the stoning of Stephen or the raising of Lazarus and see how many details you can weave into a sketch.

Select a more abstract or difficult passage like Romans 6:1 about dying to sin and see what you might illustrate with a sketch.

#### **16. Read the Word Interpretively**

I remember the scene in the *Dead Poets Society* when the boarding school students snuck out of their dormitories and met in their secret location to recite verse written by poets that had long since died. They did it with such passion and expression that I wanted to find their hideout and join the society myself. Scripture can be so powerfully communicated when we escape a monotone rendition of the Word using a neutral intonation and instead capture and express the meaning of a passage with precision, passion, and expression. When you consider such powerful passages as Ephesians 3:14-21, John 14:1-3, Romans 8:31-39 and countless others, A "Scripture Reading Society" could be every bit as exciting as a Dead Poets club—and then some!

#### **17. Memorize the Word**

David said he hid the Word of God in his heart to avoid sin (Psalm 119:11). My mother told me to do that in case persecution came and they took my actual Bible away. But I discovered an even better reason to memorize Scripture: It's really quite fun. In fact, Scripture memorization is a foundational exercise on which many other forms of Scripture meditation are based. Sure, it's rather easy to come up with reasons not to memorize Scripture:

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- “That’s for the legalists.” (Often times it has been!)
  - “It fosters spiritual pride.” (Sometimes it does!)
  - “That’s for young people.” (True, I find that the challenge increases as the years go by—but it’s still doable.)

But why let the nay saying thoughts rob us of one of the great activities the soul can ever experience? Let me say two more things on this point:

- If you struggle memorizing a passage, try this: Read that passage aloud three times in the morning, once at noon, and three times at bedtime, every day for three weeks. By that time you’ll find yourself with a surprising grasp on the passage!

If you struggle with the pride associated with memorization, keep the actual goal of memorization in mind: Meditation. It’s not ultimately about reciting a passage word-for-word from memory. It’s about having a passage at the full disposal of the mind at any time God might want to teach you from it, so you can meditate as you...“Sit at home...Walk along...Lie down...and Get up.” (Deuteronomy 6:7)

### **18. Recite the Word Interpretively**

One of the payoffs from memorizing the Word is that you are then able to recite it to yourself or to others. I remember the day when I committed Edgar Allen Poe’s poem *Annabel Lee* to memory. “It was many and many a year ago, in a kingdom by the sea, that a maiden there lived whom you may know by the name of Annabel Lee. She was a child and I was a child in that kingdom by the sea. But we loved with a love that was more than love, I and my Annabel Lee.” (I didn’t look up the poem so I might have missed a word or two!)

In 1991 in Nanchang, China I surprised my wife Carol when I interpretively recited that poem for her. It was certainly a romantic high watermark in our 18-year marriage. But more significantly, a high watermark of my 28-year walk with Christ is when I committed Romans 8 to memory and recited it to myself each day on my two-mile walk to work and back. NEVER can I recall a season in which I was more confident and in touch with God’s love for me. Now that’s a dividend that is hard to beat!

Envision an evening when you and other believers did nothing but articulate passages of Scripture to each other by careful interpretive reading or recitation.

### **19. Personalize the Word**

Personalization of the Word simply has to happen or something ultimately is missing. Whether by reading or recitation, it’s exhilarating to insert your name into a passage. For instance:

- “For God so loved Frank!” (John 3:16)
- “What shall Suzette say? Shall she go on sinning that grace my increase? By no means! Suzette died to sin!” (Romans 6:1)

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"Even Tom grows tired and weary and young men stumble and fall. But as Tom hopes in the Lord, he will renew Tom's strength. He will mount up on wings like eagles!" (Isaiah 40:30-31)

## **20. Sing the Word**

There are those who are musically gifted and there are those who can play the radio. I'm fall into the latter category. However, I don't allow my limited gifting in music to rob me of the richness of God's Word put to music. And I'm a lot less self-conscious with the Lord than I am around others so I enjoying singing Scripture songs to myself. Perhaps you've enjoyed this one like I have:

"O Lord in the morning, will I direct my prayer unto Thee and will look up." (Psalm 5:3)

I even improvise a tune here and there in the privacy of my own car or home. Somehow God has ordained a power in music that, when combined with Scripture, penetrates a heart like nothing else can. The dynamic combination of Scripture and music are two elements that should be brought together as often as possible! Another element to add to a "Concert of Scripture"!

## **21. Hum the Word**

It's not all the time that we can belt out a Scripture song. Sometimes something more subtle is required. Humming Scripture quietly is a nice alternative when greater discretion is required. One of my favorite tunes is from Lamentations 3:

"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning, new every morning. Great is Thy faithfulness O Lord. Great is they faithfulness!"

I've got a number of my favorites and there are more to be discovered. A simple search on Google for "Scripture Songs" will give you ample sites to visit and (legally!) download many songs for singing or humming.

## **22. Display the Word**

Some passages are just so wonderful they are best artistically displayed in some fashion. Such passages might be Bible promises to keep in front of us or reminders in our walk with God, such as Joshua 24:15: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord". One of my very favorite passages is Isaiah 40:30-31 about mounting up with wings like eagles. A dear friend of mine gave me a beautiful Eagle painting with this verse prominently displayed in the frame. Consider commissioning a calligrapher to artistically transcribe your favorite verse in a frameable drawing or painting. Or create a colorful depiction of it yourself in PowerPoint, print it on a color laser printer and have it framed.

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### **23. Share the Word**

What would it do for your own Scripture focus if you were to give away one Bible verse to a different person each of the next 30 days? I encourage you to try. A friend who was studying with me at Wycliffe's Summer Institute of Linguistics caught fire with God's Word and could hardly contain himself. Brian would constantly hand write verses on 3 x 5 cards and leave them in our mail boxes. The personal touch brought these verses to life and I remember feeling like I had received numerous personal messages from God himself. And Brian himself grew deeper as he shared with so many of us. Sharing the Word with others engages us in it more deeply ourselves.

### **24. Teach (or Preach) the Word**

Last week I taught a group of middle schoolers on Acts 10 about Peter's vision and Cornelius's request to hear the gospel. Like I never had before, I comprehended the radical nature of the gospel as God was commanding Jewish Christians to include people they'd excluded from their fellowship for millennia. (Inclusion and Exclusion are hot topics for junior highers, too!)

Standing in front of a group of people with the responsibility of teaching a Bible passage will bond you with that passage like little else. If I were to rank ways of Scripture engagement in terms of their depth of penetration, teaching the Word would be near the top. It forces you to study, comprehend, and handle a passage so that you can speak with confidence and knowledge rather than ignorance. Put another way, teaching a passage has a way of rapidly "purging our ignorance"—if we study faithfully and responsibly, of course. Want to grow deeper in the Word? Sign up to teach it!

### **25. Do the Word!**

Perhaps the most critical of all means of engaging the Word is *doing* it. James laments the vanity of hearing and not doing it (1:23) and Jesus stipulates in Matthew 7 that "putting it into practice" is the requirement for building a house that will withstand the storms of life. Besides, hearing and not doing the Word injures our own soul and robs us of spiritual confidence even in ourselves. Furthermore, it's hearing and not doing the Word that undermines our testimony with those who have yet to believe; it leaves us with no credibility. So, when we engage with the Bible and find ourselves in conflict with it—we must move from where we are to where the Scripture is. Micah 6:8 says that God requires us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with him. What's the last act of justice for the oppressed in our world that you performed? When is the last time you exercised mercy on someone who needed compassion or forgiveness? Is your life marked by humility? Here in this one verse are several opportunities to "do the Word"—your next steps in the adventure of engaging the mind of God and walking with him through life's journey.

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## What about Busy Schedules?

It's all fine and good to identify ways to engage the Bible. However, it begs the question, "What about the fast pace of life and busy schedules?" I think the answer to this lies in the priorities we set. It is possible to spend time in the Word just as it is possible to watch TV, write emails, surf the web, go to ballgames, eat food, sit in traffic, and mow the lawn. Clear thinking, prioritization, and motivation can foster the discipline that leads to consistent Bible engagement. We know that if we fail to eat enough protein and vitamins and simply consume pounds of sugar a day, we'll reap the health consequences. The same is true of our spiritual diet. We need to forego the various forms of "cotton candy" that creep into our schedules like excessive game shows, reality TV, chat rooms, and magazines and choose activities that are best for our souls. Eating junk food makes our bodies ache for nutrition. Do you feel your soul calling out for greater spiritual sustenance?

## Discover the Mind of God!

Engaging in the Bible is the clearest way to take an inside look into the mind of God, discover his thoughts, and join with his heart. Jesus says in John 17:3 that the definition of eternal life is knowing God. For those who believe, it's already started. And there is no better way to know God—and experience life—than through meditation on his Word. Here you have 25 different tools for taking hold of God's thoughts. May God fill your heart with himself as you engage his Word!

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