



HOW TO READ THE BIBLE BETTER

"So much wisdom packed into so few pages!"

- Mark Dever



RICHARD CHIN

Excited? Daunted? Curious? *How do you feel about the Bible?*

No matter how you feel about the world's bestselling book, we can all use a guiding hand to help us make the most of our Bible reading. In this short, readable book, pastor and Bible teacher Richard Chin offers you a step-by-step guide to better Bible reading: how to make sense of the Scriptures, how to avoid the most common pitfalls, and how to let God's word shape your life.



“Richard’s writing is always wonderfully clear and straightforward, and this work is no exception. This is a great resource to put into the hands of disciplers, new Christians, and, really, any church member looking to grow in the faith. Here is a short book to help us read The Book even better.”

– Kevin DeYoung



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ISBN 978-1-875245-83-3



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If the Bible really is “more precious than gold” and “sweeter than honey”, then we should do everything we can to get hold of it, or more importantly let it get hold of us. Richard Chin is someone who loves God’s word and has allowed it to shape his life and ministry. In this short and sweet book, let him help you treasure God’s word as you read it and apply it.

Ben Carswell

National Director, TSCF, New Zealand

Richard Chin has written a great guide to reading the Bible. Is that something you’ve thought of doing this year? Reading this very short book will help you read that longer book—the Bible—better. In this book you’ll find simple, direct help, short and useful, sane, clear, and basic. So much wisdom packed into so few pages! Chin has been reading his Bible for a long time, and can help us do it, too.

Mark Dever

Pastor, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, Washington DC
President, 9Marks.org

One of the most pressing needs we face as evangelicals in Australia today is to read our Bibles more and better. Richard has given us a brilliant resource (which is both a shot in the arm and a kick in the pants!) to throw ourselves into grappling with what God has said to us in his word with fresh energy and focus.

Gary Millar

Principal, Queensland Theological College
Co-author, *Saving Eutychus*

Richard's writing is always wonderfully clear and straightforward, and this work is no exception. This is a great resource to put into the hands of disciples, new Christians, and, really, any church member looking to grow in the faith. Here is a short book to help us read The Book even better.

Kevin DeYoung

Senior Pastor, Christ Covenant Church, Matthews, NC

Reading and living in the light of the written word that God has given is both a challenge and an enormous privilege. All sorts of pressures are trying to fix our attention elsewhere. Yet it is the word of God that shapes lives and builds churches. Richard Chin's little book will encourage you to read and teach the Bible, to listen attentively to these words God has given us, to delight in the Bible as well as to bend every effort to live it to the full. If the Bible seems a strange and threatening word to you, buy this book and be encouraged. If you are tempted to set aside the Bible in order to speak the words our neighbours want to hear and in the tone in which they want to hear them, buy this book and stand firm at this point. If you want to be reminded why the ministry of the word of God is the most important work there is in the world, buy this book and recapture the vision of life lived with and under the word of the living God.

Mark D Thompson

Principal, Moore Theological College, Sydney

Richard Chin packs everything you want in a book about the Bible into this small, accessible volume. This book isn't just a how-to manual for sound interpretation (though it is that!); it's also a glorious meditation on the worth of God's word, an encouragement to humble our hearts before God, and an invitation to see how Jesus fulfils God's promises and how every passage of Scripture unfolds the gospel of our Lord. If you love the Bible, you should get this book. If you love to teach others how to read the Bible better, you should buy multiple copies and give them away.

Sam Emadi

Senior Editor, 9Marks.org

Store up this gem of a book in your spiritual treasure chest! Richard Chin has written a delightful book filled with insight about reading the word of God. Don't let the brevity fool you—it's deep, clever, and fun. In a world that increasingly uses the Bible poorly, every Christian should read this book. It is so full of scriptural insight that, as I read, I found myself not just learning how to read the Bible better, but worshipping the one who gave us the Bible.

Mack Stiles

Pastor, Erbil International Baptist Church, Iraq

Author, *Marks of the Messenger*

The apostle Peter urges his readers, “like newborn babies, crave the wordy milk so that you may grow up in your salvation”. This outstanding book not only helps us to read and understand the Bible better; it also left me longing to study it more. It covers complex material with characteristic clarity and winsome appeal. There are so many good lessons well taught. Reading the book and putting it into practice will leave us craving God’s word and growing to maturity. I wholeheartedly recommend it.

William Taylor

Rector, St Helen’s Bishopsgate, London

This little book contains many big ideas that are massively important. It shows us how and why we should read the Bible so that we meet God and hear him speak. Richard has distilled his vast experience and wisdom as a Bible reader and Bible teacher into a book that will equip you to more faithfully and fruitfully read the Bible yourself and with others.

David Walter

South Pacific Regional Secretary, IFES

HOW TO READ
THE BIBLE
BETTER

RICHARD CHIN

How to Read the Bible Better

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Matthias Media

(St Matthias Press Ltd ACN 067 558 365)

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ISBN 978 1 875245 83 3

Cover design and typesetting by Lankshear Design.

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever found the Bible difficult to read? You sit down with your tea and notebook, eager to hear God speak, but the words seem foreign and distant. What's an 'Asherah'? Who are the 'Amalekites'? How do I even pronounce 'Abiezrites'?¹

It might be tempting to search for something relevant by randomly dipping into the Bible. John Stott tells the story of what it's like for the man who tries this method. He closes his eyes, flicks through the pages, and points blindly to Matthew 27:5: "He [Judas] went and hanged himself". Understandably dismayed, the man tries flicking again, only to land on Luke 10:37: "You go, and do likewise". So he tries one more time and finds John 13:27: "What you are

1 These words all appear in Judges 6.

going to do, do quickly”.² Not exactly what he had hoped for!

Many people have opened the pages of Scripture eager to feast on the word of God, only to end up feeling failed and deflated. But persevere, dear friend. Nothing is more life-giving than God’s word (Ps 119:25). Nothing is more desirable than God’s word (Ps 19:10). Nothing is more deadly than starvation from God’s word (Amos 8:11). Nothing is more deceiving than God’s word distorted (Gen 3:1-5; 2 Pet 3:16).

Rosaria Butterfield straddled two lives for two years: one as a lesbian lover, and the other as a regular Bible reader. This is her story:

After years and years... something happened. The Bible got to be bigger inside me than I. It overflowed into my world. And then one Sunday morning... two years after I started reading the Bible for my research, I left the bed I shared with my lesbian partner and an hour later I showed up in a pew at the Syracuse Reformed Presbyterian Church... I kept going back to church to hear more sermons. I had made friendships with

2 J Stott, *Students of the Word*, IFES, 2013, p. 34.

people in the church by this time and *I had really appreciated the way that they talked about the sermons throughout the week, how the word of God dwelt in them, and how they referenced it in the details of their days.*³

It's a glorious picture of God transforming Rosaria through his powerful word: the Bible "got to be bigger inside [her]"! But did you also see the beautiful image of church members nurturing one another with the word? Teachers of God's word have a particular God-given responsibility in the church.⁴ But the ministry of God's word is the privilege of *every* brother and sister in Christ. When the apostle Paul wrote "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing *one another* in all wisdom" (Col 3:16), it was his instruction to *every* member of the Colossian church.⁵ The apostle's desire was for believers to consider how to stir up *one another* and encourage *one another* from the Scriptures as they saw the Day of Christ's return drawing near (cf. Heb 10:24-25). Isn't this what we long for? This is a key reason we want to read the

3 R Butterfield, *Openness Unhindered*, Crown & Covenant, 2015, p. 22 (emphasis added).

4 See 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 5:17; Titus 1:5-9.

5 I have added any emphasis that appears in Bible passages throughout this book.

Bible better: not just to grow our own understanding of God and our trust in him, but to help others do likewise, so that every preacher, pew sitter and pauper might rise from death to life and help *one another* along this narrow path as we journey to the glory-land together.⁶

But this is not just a book for Christians. If you've picked up this book as someone who doesn't yet follow Jesus, my prayer is that these brief pages will help you delight in hearing the voice of your Creator *in the Bible*. He desires all people, including you, to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). I hope learning why and how to read the Bible will help you find the saving knowledge it conveys.

6 By 'better', I mean reading God's word the way he intended it to be read, on his terms, for his church, for his world, supremely for his glory. As such, the Bible is not just a private charter for his church; "[the Bible] is a total claim on the whole world. God, the creator, owner, and governor of the world, has spoken. His words are valid and binding on all people everywhere. That is what it means to be God" (J Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture*, Crossway, p. 33).

1.

WHY READ THE BIBLE?

How do I read the Bible so that, as Rosaria Butterfield said, it “overflow[s] into my world”? Listening to sermons is (relatively) easy, and songs can lift the soul... but the Bible? Why read it? Is it really worth the effort? Here are seven reasons to get you started.

1. The Bible is God’s revelation of himself

God isn’t hidden. He has spoken. The Lord of heaven and earth “forfeited his own personal privacy” to disclose himself to us—to befriend us—through a book.⁷ Scripture is like an all-access pass into the revealed mind and will of God.

7 CFH Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, vol. II, *God Who Speaks and Shows*, Crossway, 1999, quoted in M Smethurst, ‘8 Things Your Bible Says About Itself’, *The Gospel Coalition*, US edition, 29 July 2020. thegospelcoalition.org/article/bible-says-about-itself

Although the divine glory of God is magnificently seen in the natural world (e.g. Psalm 19; Rom 1:18-20), it is supremely seen in the person of Jesus Christ: “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The Old Testament Scriptures bear witness about Jesus (John 5:39), as do the New Testament Scriptures. What the apostles saw face-to-face in Jesus Christ, they impart to us through the words of Scripture (1 John 1:3). The glory they saw in Christ, we can see through their words in the Bible.⁸

2. The Bible is exposing

As we read the Scriptures, God exposes us. He cuts through our disguises to discern all “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Heb 4:12). Through the Bible, the Holy Spirit convicts the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement (John 16:8-11), so that the Bible uncovers our sin as we read it. Even though this can make Bible reading awkward or even painful on occasion, we come to know our true self. What a gracious act of God!

8 Piper, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, p. 22.

3. The Bible is life-giving

When God put Ezekiel in the middle of the valley full of dry bones, he said, “Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezek 37:4-5). When God commands Ezekiel to prophesy God’s word over the dead bones, God breathes life into them!

So the psalmist writes: “I will never forget your precepts, for by them you have given me life” (Ps 119:93). We too can only find life in the Scriptures. As the disciples knew, only Jesus has “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

4. The Bible is profitable

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

As we’ve seen already, God’s word can rebuke and correct us, but here we see it also trains us to live righteously.

Do also note that God “breathed out” the words of Scripture himself. Just as our breath carries

our words, so God's breath carries his words from within his heart, from inside himself, to the pages of Scripture. Thus, what can be said about God can be said about his word. The way we treat God's word is the way we treat God. How we think and feel about God matches precisely with how we think and feel about his word. That's why the Bible will profitably teach us, rebuke us, correct us, and train us in righteousness.⁹

5. The Bible is our only offensive weapon

As we journey towards Christ's coming kingdom, we're at war. Our ultimate battle is not against flesh and blood, but against "the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph 6:12). By God's grace, he has already won the war by triumphing over the cosmic rulers and authorities at the cross of Christ (Col 2:13-15). Satan is irreversibly defeated. And yet, even as our has-been-defeated enemy, he still

9 Many argue (I think rightly) that the term 'man of God' in 2 Timothy 3:17 refers to those in ministry leadership like Timothy. In the Old Testament, the phrase 'man of God' is used of Moses (Deut 33:1; Psalm 90), angelic beings (Judg 13:6; 1 Sam 2:27), Samuel (1 Sam 9:6 ff.), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:18), Elisha (2 Kgs 4:7), and David (Neh 12:24). In the New Testament, the phrase 'man of God' is *only* used of Timothy, in 1 Timothy 6:11. So the Scriptures are particularly apt to train God's *leaders* for every good work. But, by implication, they will do likewise for *all Christians*.

wages a counteroffensive until Christ returns for final judgement (Revelation 12).

Abraham Kuyper describes this battle as follows:

If once the curtain were pulled back, and the spiritual world behind it came to view, it would expose to our spiritual vision a struggle so intense, so convulsive, sweeping everything within its range, that the fiercest battle fought on earth would seem, by comparison, a mere game.¹⁰

It is in this context that God has graciously given us spiritual armour for protection. God protects us with the armour of truth, righteousness, peace, faith and salvation. But the only offensive weapon needed in our armoury is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph 6:10-20). Just as Christ fought against the flaming arrows of Satan’s temptations with the Scriptures (Matt 4:1-11), so too we fight with our only offensive weapon, the word of God.

10 Quoted in C Brauns, ‘Remember, We’re In A War’, *Chris Brauns’ blog*, September 2008. chrisbrauns.com/2008/09/remember-were-in-a-war

6. The Bible is our supreme authority in living life for God and his glory

I say ‘supreme’ because there are other authorities we ought to acknowledge. The diagram below shows a useful ‘authority quadrilateral’ derived from the ministry of John Wesley.¹¹

Bible	Reason
Tradition	Experience

It is impossible to read the Bible without using your reason, or your experience, and it is always helpful to learn from historical traditions. The question is, which authority will you choose when any of these other authorities conflicts with Scripture? For example, some Christian denominations have chosen to approve same-sex unions by choosing the authority of reason and experience over the plain meaning of Scripture, which clearly teaches that God has designed marriage to be an unbreakable bond between one man and one woman for life.

11 ‘Wesleyan Quadrilateral’ in *Theopedia*. theopedia.com/wesleyan-quadrilateral

Similarly, other denominations choose to pray to other ‘saints’ as well as to God because they have chosen the authority of church tradition over the plain meaning of Scripture. But we mustn’t be deluded by “plausible arguments” (Col 2:4). The word of God is “a lamp to [our] feet and a light to [our] path” (Ps 119:105). Scripture is the supreme authority in all matters of life and conduct.

7. The Bible is sufficient for all that we need to know about God and how to live for him

When life gets confusing, or really tough, we do not need more revelation from God outside of the Bible to navigate these times. The Bible has all the principles we need to make any decision in life. JI Packer writes:

Scripture provides clear and exact guidance for every detail and department of life, and if we come to Scripture teachably and expectantly God himself will seal on our minds and hearts a clear certainty as to how we should behave in each situation that faces us.¹²

12 JI Packer, *A Quest For Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, Crossway, 1994, p. 113.

So why read the Bible?

I love the way John Owen says it:

Scripture is given to make us humble, holy, wise in spiritual things; to direct us in our duties, to relieve us in our temptations, to comfort us under troubles, to make us to love God and to live unto him... Unto this end there is a more glorious power and efficacy in one epistle, one Psalm, one chapter, than in all the writings of men.¹³

Small wonder that the psalmist can describe God's word as "more to be desired... than gold" and "sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb" (Ps 19:10).

13 John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, vol. IV, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Banner of Truth, 1967, pp. 188-90.