

RESOURCES
for a
HOME
built on
GOD'S WORD



The Shortcuts!

If you're simply interested in starting right away, not making any personal choices, but just getting things rolling, here's what to do:

1. **For personal devotion:** Buy *The Lutheran Study Bible*. Open to the Book of John. Read John 1:1-18. Read the footnotes to help you understand it. Try to identify *law* and *gospel*. In the footnotes around v18, you'll find a cross shape marking off verses 1:1-18. Read the summary and pray the prayer. Tomorrow, move on to the next section marked off by the same cross shape (1:19-28). This will take all of 5 to 10 minutes.
2. **For couples devotion:** Buy or get from the church library *Genesis* from *The People's Bible* series. Open to the section for 1:1-2:3, "The Creation of the World." You see that the smaller sections are divided up by the verses of the bible in bold followed by commentary. Read one of these sections a night. Start with the section for Genesis 1:1. The next night move on to Genesis 1:2, etc. Then pray about your day together. This will take all of 5 to 10 minutes.
3. **For family devotions with young kids:** For ages 2 to 5, buy *The Jesus Storybook Bible* (Sally Lloyd-Jones, Zondervan). For ages 5 to 8, buy *The Story Bible* (Concordia Publishing). Simply read a section with your kids every evening. *The Story Bible* has discussion/review questions at the end of each section; definitely ask them to see if your kids understand. Then pray about your day together. This will take all of 5 to 10 minutes.

Principles for Starting a Devotional Routine:

The Following are five simple steps/tips on how to get going with devotional reading. This isn't rocket science. It's simply sitting at your Father's feet and letting him tell you what, in his providence, is exactly what you need to hear for that moment in your life.

1. **Act immediately.** Immediately order or pick up one or two of the devotional materials below.
2. **Schedule it.** Put it in your calendar, set reminders, and commit to making it a non-negotiable.
3. **Make it obvious.** You've heard the adage, "Out of sight, out of mind." It's absolutely true. Make your devotional materials easily accessible and visible. Place your devotional book right on top of your alarm clock. Make an audible notification alert on your phone for right before bed. Put it into your electronic or paper schedule. Whatever it takes, *don't* put your materials on a shelf or in a drawer or think that having an app on your phone will make you remember to do your reading.
4. **Shoot for seven days in a row.** Once you've completed one day, mark it on a calendar. After seven days, you'll feel great. Then shoot for two weeks (you're already halfway there), and then a month. Research suggests after 30 to 45 days of repetition, the habit is formed and carries its own momentum.
5. **Make it enjoyable.** During or immediately after the devotion, do something pleasurable or satisfying. This can be as simple as giving yourself a gold star on your calendar or giving your love a nice long kiss. If you look forward to that morning cup of coffee or that before-bed treat, decide to not take a sip or bite until you've begun or finished your devotion.

Work on Your Conversation Skills: Prayer

Devotion time is really conversation time. It's an opportunity for you to speak to God through prayer, for him to speak back through his Word, and for you to respond to what he has to say in prayer. So, make sure prayer is a part of your devotional routine. Here's one suggested way to go about it.

1. **Begin your devotion with prayer.** Start with a short one minute prayer of thanksgiving and anticipation. To start, follow this simple outline:
 - 1) Thank God for something he's done for you in the past: Creation, forgiveness, faith, etc. Don't overthink it, just pray the first thing that comes to your mind.
 - 2) Thank God for something he's doing right now: Watching over you, caring for or loving you, etc.
 - 3) Thank God for something he promises for your future: Heaven, continual care, etc.
 - 4) Tell God what's weighing on your heart and why you're excited to listen to him. Keep it simple.
2. **Read your devotional material.** (See the next page.) Search for:
 - 1) What is God teaching me?
 - 2) Where is the law? What sin is being revealed?
 - 3) Where is the gospel? What unearned love or promise does God give?
 - 4) What can I give thanks for?
3. **End in ACTS prayer.**

Adoration. Praise God for his awesome qualities, he's done for you, or what he's revealed to you.
Confession. Whether it's weighing you down or not, confess what you need forgiveness for.
Thanksgiving. Simply say thank you to God for specific things he's given you. Start with forgiveness for the sins you've just confessed.
Supplication (Requests). Make any requests you might have to God. End with "but your will be done."

The materials below are suggestions for getting started immediately. But there are way more options. See our church website for dozens of other resources to aid spiritual growth.

Beginner to Intermediate Devotional Resources for Adults

- ***The Lutheran Study Bible*** (Concordia Publishing House) is not just a study bible, but also a devotional. Within the footnotes are devotional summaries of sections of Scripture, followed by a prayer. To use the Lutheran Study Bible as a devotional, simply look in the footnotes for the devotional icon, read the corresponding section (usually 10 to 15 verses), read the devotional (a short paragraph), and then pray the accompanying prayer. For \$70 it provides not only the only Bible you'll need for your whole life, but also devotional resources that will last you years.
- ***Meditations***. If you're looking for short, 5 minute devotional readings written by great pastors applying bible verses to your daily life, NPH's *Meditations* is the best resource out there. Published monthly, we offer free copies in the church sanctuary in the back, or there is an iphone/ipad app available through NPH (search in the App Store).
- ***The People's Bible*** Commentary Series (NPH or CPH) is not only hands down the best resource you can get on helping to understand the bible. It also serves as an excellent devotional way to read through the bible. Simply read one section and it's accompanying commentary as your daily devotion. It will take all of five to ten minutes.
- ***Electronic: WELS Daily Devotions*** are perfect for a moment of daily meditation. To have them emailed, sign up at <https://wels.net/serving-you/devotions/daily-devotions/>. *Meditations* (see above) has an iphone app.
- ***Video: Lumo Project*** is a high-quality filming of all four gospels. All four are available on YouTube for free split into 3 to 6 minute clips, perfect for devotion. Watch a clip, discuss/meditate on it for a couple minutes, then pray.

Devotional Resources for Youth

- ***Zero to 5: The Jesus Storybook Bible*** by Sally Lloyd-Jones (Zondervan Publishing) is our favourite pick for toddler devotions. Kids fall in love with the writing and illustrations, the book covers all of Salvation History, and, most importantly, everything points to Jesus as our Saviour from sins. There are also DVD and audiobook versions, all available in our library for preview.
- ***5 to 8: The Story Bible*** (Concordia Publishing) is massive, easy to read, introduces kids to the language and writing style of the bible, and in its margins provides parents with review questions and prayers.
- ***9 to 12: The Complete Bible Discovery Guide*** (Concordia Publishing) is a Bible handbook where you and your kids can dive into the people, history, culture, and traditions of both the Old and New Testament times. With excellent illustrations, simple explanations, and great maps, this is a wonderful resource to spend 5-10 minutes sharing with your kids. Also, now is a good time to start modelling how *you* do your own devotions.
- ***Teens: Five-Minute Bible Studies for Teens*** (Northwestern Publishing House), written by a WELS high school campus pastor, not only has God's Word at its heart, but also tackles challenging issues for teens.
- ***College-aged:*** They're adults. Treat them like it. Use the materials suggested in the adult section above. Also, check out J. Budziszewski's ***How to Stay Christian in College*** (The Navigators Publishing)

Intentionally Creating the Habit of Reading the Bible

What is a habit?

A habit is a clearly engrained procedure we do regularly, having been established through routine, often through a cue and reward cycle. Researchers today often identify **habit loops**, a neurological cycle of three parts: cue, routine, reward. Breaking a habit requires pin-pointing a routine (such as smoking, eating something at a particular time of day, gambling, etc.), and then identifying the cues that trigger the routine (e.g., boredom, low blood sugar, hunger, socializing, etc.) and the reward that reinforces the routine (a tasty treat, temporary distraction, energy, a feeling of power, etc.). To break old habits, keep the same cues and rewards, but replace the negative routine with something else. (*The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg.) To create new habits, create a new loop by identifying new cues and rewards. (*Sticky Habits*, Barrie Davenport.) We will be looking at the process of doing the latter, creating a new habit loop of reading the Bible daily.

Step One: Take ownership of failure.

We need to do this for two reasons, one psychological, the other spiritual.

“[Motivation] requires an internal (I’m in control of my destiny) rather than external (my destiny is at the mercy of uncontrollable variables) locus of control. The more we believe we’re in control, the more we believe we’re able to get done. The more we believe we’re in control, the better a person feels about being in control.” (Freakonomics podcast, “How to Be More Productive)

First, psychologically, you need an internal locus of control. If you believe your failure to read your Bible is someone or something else’s fault outside of your control, you will never get started because the circumstances can always be interpreted against you. If you believe your failure is your own, then you can get started whenever you decide to simply *do it*.

Ephesians 2:1,4-5,9-10 ¹ *As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins... ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved... ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For you are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*

Second, it is your failure. You are now alive in Christ. You not only *look alive*, covered in the blood of Jesus (justification), but are actually brought back to life and able to serve God (sanctification). God has crafted a life specifically for you to serve him within. And if you have access to the written word of God, then you can be certain part of his plan is that you read his Word. Failure to read God’s word is sin that needs to be addressed and fixed. But the good news is you’re forgiven and have the power to fix it!

Step Two: Make a plan.

Take several days to plan your devotion schedule. “A habit is a formula our brain automatically follows: When I see **cue**, I will do **routine** in order to get a **reward**. To re-engineer that formula, we need to begin making choices again. And the easiest way to do this, according to study after study, is to have a plan. Within psychology, these plans are known as *implementation intentions*.” (Duhigg)

1. ***Begin writing your plan with silent confession.*** Pray: “I confess that my failure to read the Bible regularly is my own fault and is not the result of circumstances in my life. But in your Word you tell me my sins are forgiven, I’m your precious child, and you have given me new life and opportunity to serve you. Thank you for the ability and opportunity to read the Bible. Amen.”
2. ***Start with a five-minute devotion.*** Why five minutes?
 - a. **The objective is clear** and so accomplishing it is easily identifiable. Saying, “I’m going to get healthy,” is not clear and has no way of being objectively measured and so routinized. Saying, “I’m going to lose 5 pounds,” or “I’m going to exercise for 30 minutes, 5 times a week,” is measurable and so easier to routinize.
 - b. **Your habit should start out easy to do** and require the least amount of lifestyle alteration. (Consider what integrating a 30-minute daily habit into your life would require you to do.)
3. ***Clearly identify the new routine.*** “Five-minutes of reading _____ . If I cannot find this or don’t have it at hand, then I am simply picking up my bible and reading it for five minutes.” Then set things up to carry out the habit ahead of time. Have a book mark in your bible ready. Have your *People’s Bible* laid out on your kitchen table for when you sit down for the morning coffee.
4. ***Use a cue or trigger.*** If your habit is to become fully integrated into your life, build it upon or in reference to an already existing daily habit or event, something you already do absolutely every day (or every day that you want the habit). In other words, your new habit will follow *immediately after* or *during* something that already happens every day. This can be as simple as waking up or going to the bathroom. Or it can be an already established habit, like brushing your teeth or showering. It can be a daily event, like sitting down at your desk at work or getting into your car or bus for the commute.
5. ***Set up a reminder*** of the new routine wherever and whenever the cue is. Answer the question, “How will I remind myself to do the routine when the cue presents itself?” Note this reminder is short-term. The goal is to use it for about a month, maybe two, but then the real cue will take over to trigger the routine.
6. ***Reward yourself.*** *During or immediately after* performing your new habit, do something pleasurable or satisfying. This can be as simple as giving yourself a gold star on your workout calendar or getting to watch a TV show. If you look forward to that morning cup of coffee or that before-bed treat, decide to not take a sip or bite until you’ve begun or finished your new habit.
7. ***Be accountable.*** Possibilities include: “Announce your new habit to family and friends. Announce your habit plans, successes, and failures on social media. Ask a friend to be an accountability partner who checks in with you daily. Set up a daily update about your actions on a blog. Have a partner work with you on the habit. Agree to do a difficult chore or task for someone if you don’t follow through. Put a white board in your home for all to see, with your daily habit actions. Work with a personal coach and report daily to him/her.” (Davenport)

Daily Bible Reading Plan Worksheet

This worksheet is to be completed several days before beginning your new devotion routine. The day before you begin your routine, do the actionable steps in point 4 below.

1. Pray: "I confess that my failure to read the Bible regularly is my own fault and is not the result of circumstances in my life. But in your Word you tell me my sins are forgiven, I'm your precious child, and you have given me new life and opportunity to serve you. Thank you for the ability and opportunity to read the Bible. Amen."

2. My bible reading routine will be **five minutes of reading** _____.

3. Cue (when, where, or what preceding event): _____.

4. I will take the following actionable steps to set up reminders to do my devotion:

5. Reward: **After I read / while I read** (circle one) for 5 minutes, I will
_____.

6. Accountability: I will make myself accountable to others in doing this routine by:
_____.

7. If the above does not work, I will experiment with other cues and rewards until I find the habit loop that I can master.

Signed,

____/____/____

Genesis 1:1

1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

“In the beginning God ...” God is the first-named subject in the book of Genesis, and that’s appropriate. The universe in which we live had a beginning. Prior to that starting point, there was no universe. There was no up and no down, no here and no there. Just nothing—except God. He always was. Before creation God alone existed. The Hebrew word translated *God* has been identified as coming from a verb meaning “to fear.” The God who existed from all eternity and who at one point created time and space is awesome and deserves to be held in reverence by his creatures. Everything exists for his sake, including the human race. You and I do not exist of ourselves or for ourselves. We have a right to exist only as we remain in harmony with the majestic Creator and his plan for us.

We humans have birthdays and deathdays, beginnings and endings; God has neither. He alone is eternal; nobody and nothing else is eternal. There was no bubble of gas, no cosmic dust that could have kindled the germ of life. The earliest forms of life did not originate in a blob of slime on some prehistoric pond. The elements, the materials from which our universe is made up, are not eternal. They came into existence only when God so ordered. The word order of this first sentence of the Bible seems perfectly normal in English, but Hebrew sentences normally begin with the verb. Here the word order is inverted, for the sake of emphasis. Moses wants to emphasize that there was a point of absolute beginning, when only God was in existence.

“God created the heavens and the earth.” The Hebrew verb translated *created* is a very special one. In the Bible that verb (1) is used only of God’s activity and (2) always expresses the origin of something extraordinary, absolutely unique. Sometimes God creates by using existing material; when he created Adam, for example, he used the dust of the ground. But if the activity described in this opening verse took place at the beginning, when only God existed, it must have been a creation out of nothing.

The expression “the heavens and the earth” denotes the universe in its initial state. For his own reasons, God did not see fit to make his creation in its completed form. By an act of his will, God created all of the components that would later constitute the universe as we know it, including matter, energy, space, and time. On the first day, God created all of his raw materials, just as a home builder assembles all the building materials at a site before assembling them into a house.

Genesis 1:2

²Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

Once again the order of words in the Hebrew sentence, which normally begins with the verb, is inverted. Moses wants to focus our attention on just one part of the universe—the earth, the home God has designed for the human race.

The piles of concrete block, sand, and lumber that a builder assembles at a construction site aren’t very pretty. Neither was the earth after God’s initial creative act. Moses lists four conditions of the earth that God was going to modify during the creation week. If in subsequent discussion these four conditions are referred to as deficiencies, this is not to be understood as suggesting that God’s original creation was not good. The following are the four conditions that were temporary and that God would modify during the creation week:

- *Formlessness*—The universe was a shapeless blob of material.
- *Emptiness*—The universe lacked the vegetation and the creatures God would later supply.
- *Darkness*—The darkness would be removed only when God announced, “Let there be light!”
- *The deep*—A fluid mass covered everything.

Christians confess that *God the Father Almighty* is the maker of heaven and earth. This is not to be understood as though the other persons of the Trinity had nothing to do with creating the universe. The apostle John says concerning *God the Son*, “Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made” (John 1:3). *God the Holy Spirit* was also active at creation. He is described as “hovering” over the waters. Moses also uses this verb to describe the action of a mother eagle hovering over her nest, providing for her young, and protecting them. The life-giving Spirit of God was active at the creation, preserving what God had created and preparing the universe for what God had in mind. The work of creation, then, is a work in which all the members of the Trinity share.