

A Pastor's Perspective: On Reading the Bible

“Reading, Re-reading, and Reading Again to Build Confidence” by Timothy Sprinkle

For two years, I participated in Life Transformation Groups (LTGs), a simple but powerful mode of biblical accountability. LTGs comprise a few people of the same gender, meeting weekly to share God's work and word. Members of an LTG are expected to read thirty chapters of the Bible between meetings.

In case you missed it, I repeat: members of an LTG are expected to read **thirty chapters** a week.

LTGs assume the transformative power of Scripture and accept no shortcuts in the formation process. They may not suit the legalist or lethargic believer, but for the typical follower of Jesus, they provide a social incentive to read God's word. As further incentive, LTGs include this caveat: *If a single member of the group fails to read the target number (I repeat: thirty chapters), everyone sticks with the same assignment the following week.*

LTGs do not come with a ready-made reading guide; each group selects its **thirty chapters** and gets to work. Members may read thirty consecutive chapters or repeat smaller sections to reach the mark. Missing the chapter goal may lead to another ten cycles through the Sermon on the Mount or another long haul through Exodus.

LTGs granted me numerous opportunities to read, re-read, and read parts of the Bible again. I once read the book of Galatians *five times a week for six weeks straight!* The apostle Paul's voice was lodged in my head screaming “*anathema*” (1:8) to my accountability partner who kept missing our target.

In an age where biblical literacy has given way to verse-of-the-day expediency, confidence in God's word suffers. A commitment akin to the LTG reprioritizes reading (and re-reading) the Bible. *The process of reading, re-reading, and reading again the same portion of Scripture builds biblical confidence by unveiling new observations and encouraging reflection.*

Repetition unveils new observations. Reading (and re-reading) Philippians will surface key words and themes we did not notice on the first run through. Or, perhaps, a third trek through Acts showcases the extensive role women play in the early church. And I am certain after the sixth reading of Haggai we will finally master the book's literary flow. Irony, allusions, and other literary devices we miss during our first few readings will eventually stand out. We gain new insights when we read, re-read, and read again.

Repetition leads to reflection. Of course, every reader is guilty of glossing over certain words and sentences, numbed by familiarity. In the short-term, repetition can breed contempt. However in the long-term, repetition builds muscle memory. Repetition lodges a text in our minds so we cannot help but hear it in our music, see it on our screens, recall it in our crises, and apply it in our lives. After thirty cycles through Galatians, I witnessed fruit of the spirit at every turn. We embody the Scriptures when we read, re-read, and read them again.

God's Word—so rich and so deep—invites multiple readings. Forming a LTG is not a prerequisite for reading, re-reading, and reading again. So pick a book, a goal, and get started.

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