

Here is an illustration from high school. The tremendous pleasure that can come from reading Shakespeare, for instance, was spoiled for generations of high-school students who were forced to go through *Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*, or *Hamlet*, scene by scene, looking up all the strange words in a glossary and studying all the scholarly footnotes. As a result, they never really read a Shakespearean play. By the time they reached the end, they had forgotten the beginning and lost sight of the whole. Instead of being forced to take this approach, they should have been encouraged to read the play at one sitting and discuss what they got out of that first quick reading. Only then would they have been ready to study the play carefully and closely because then they would have understood enough of it to learn more.

This tactic applies with equal force to other kinds of reading. Here, indeed, the best proof of the soundness of the rule-give a book a first superficial reading-is what happens when you do *not* follow it. Take a basic work in economics, such as Adam Smith's classic *The Wealth of Nations*. (A good example because it is more than a textbook or a work for specialists in the field. It is a book for the general reader.) If you insist on understanding everything on every page before you go on to the next, you will not get very far. In your effort to master the fine points, you will miss the big points that Smith makes so clearly about the factors of wages, rents, profits, and interest that enter into the cost of things, the role of the market in determining prices, the evils of monopoly, the reasons for free trade. You will miss the forest for the trees. You will not be reading well on *any* level.

How To Read The Bible Through For The First Time

Adapted by John S. Waldrip

Most people have never been taught how to read the Bible through for the first time, much less reading though a book of any length for the first time. The result is typically frustration and not finishing what you started and failing to meet your goal. This adaptation from a classic book on reading will show you how to do it right the first time, by showing you a strategy and establishing proper expectations.

I challenge you to read the Bible through for the first time by purposely reading the Bible “superficially.” The word “superficial” ordinarily has a negative connotation. I am quite serious, however, in using the term. Better to read the Bible through “superficially” than fail in your first attempt to read the Bible through. Let me explain.

Everyone has experienced the struggle of fruitlessly tackling a difficult book that was picked up with high hopes of enlightenment. It is natural enough to conclude that it was a mistake to try to read it in the first place. But that was not the mistake. Rather it was in expecting too much from the first going over of a difficult book. Approached in the right way, no book intended for the general reader, no matter how difficult, need be a cause for despair.

What is the right approach? The answer lies in an important and helpful rule of reading that is generally overlooked. That rule is simply this: *In tackling an important book for the first time, read it through without ever stopping to look up or ponder the things you do not understand right away.*

Pay attention to what you can understand, and do not be stopped by what you cannot immediately grasp. Go right on reading past the point where you have difficulties in understanding, and you will soon

come to things you do understand. Concentrate on these. Keep on in this way. Read each book of the Bible through, undeterred and undismayed by the impossible to pronounce names, long genealogies, unfamiliar geographical references, and other things that escape you. If you let yourself get stalled, if you allow yourself to be tripped up by any one of these stumbling blocks, you are lost. In most cases, you will not be able to puzzle the thing out by sticking to it. Your understanding of what you read will improve each time you read through the Bible, but that requires you to read the Bible *through* at least once.

What you understand by reading a book of the Bible through to the end—even if it is only fifty percent or less—will help you when you make the additional effort later to go back to the places you passed by on your first reading. This approach with each of the books of the Bible will get you through the entire Bible. Since you will undoubtedly read through the Bible again, understanding half of what you read is much better than not understanding it at all, which will be the case if you allow yourself to be stopped by the first difficult passage you come to. The next time you read it you will understand more.

Most of us were taught to pay attention to the things we did not understand: We were told to go to a dictionary when we met an unfamiliar word. We were told to go to an encyclopedia or some other reference work when we were confronted with figures of speech or statements we did not comprehend. We were told to consult marginal references, study Bible notes, concordances, commentaries, or other secondary sources to get help: But when these things are done *prematurely*, they only impede your reading comprehension instead of helping it.