

BFF387 By Every Word

Scott Moore: Welcome to the "Building Faith Families" podcast with Steve Demme. I'm your host, Scott Moore. Thanks for joining us today. Good morning, Steve.

Steve: Good morning, Scott. If I'm doing the math correctly, this podcast should come out in the early part of December, even though we're recording it in the early part of November. This is to give us a head start on the new year.

Scott: All right.

Steve: What do you do every January that's important? Do you start your Bible over again in January?

Scott: Usually, yes, but this year, I've taken a different approach. I've been going slowly, and not necessarily lackadaisically, but you could call it that. I'm not going to finish by the end of the year. I'm going to keep plodding along at my pace.

Steve: You know who called himself a plodder? William Carey. Many people call him the first missionary. He was from England and he went to India. The amount of things that he accomplished were astounding, and yet when he was asked what he wanted on his tombstone, he said, "I'm a plodder. When I start something, I finish it."

The number of languages that he mastered, the number of translations that he made, it's astounding. He said, "I don't consider myself a fast worker or hard worker. I just am a plodder. I start something and I finish it." You're in good company.

Scott: Awesome.

Steve: We're going to talk about plodding through the scripture. That wasn't the original title, but we've just adapted. Let's pray.

Father, help us today to be plodders. Help us to start something and finish it. I am impressed with Scott. He started something, and he's kept at it. He's kept at it for years. I pray that You'll start a good work in all of our hearts and help us to keep at it for the rest of our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.

Scott: Amen.

Steve: When Jesus was being tempted by the devil in Matthew 4, He answered, "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." There's a whole bunch of thoughts that come with that verse. The main one is that every word comes from the mouth of God.

Of course, we know that his Bible would have been from Genesis to Malachi. The New Testament had not been written yet. I have now read every word of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, many times.

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 8:3. "Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of Jehovah." The habit of reading my Bible every day, began in the fall of 1976, I'm going to talk about that story. This podcast is to encourage us to read the entire Bible.

I'm going to tell my story about how I started this discipline of reading the Bible every day, and I'm going to add, that I think it is the best discipline that God has helped me to establish in my Christian walk.

There are other disciplines that I've established, but this is number one. When I first started thinking about the word "discipline," I thought most people don't like that word "discipline." They would rather say habit or something like that. As a disciple of Jesus, God calls us to do difficult things. He calls us to be disciplined because that's what a disciple is.

A disciple is a lifelong learner who establishes good disciplines. It's not easy to read your Bible. It's not easy to stick with it, but it's worthwhile, and it needs to happen. I'm not going to start off by saying this was a piece of cake. This was hard at first, but it became a part of my regular rhythm, and it's the best one I've ever established.

I began attending Gordon-Conwell Seminary in the fall of 1975, and I wasn't there very long before I heard about a local pastor who was a very godly man. In a few months, I had the opportunity to meet him. In 1976, I started attending church there. I had been only coming to services there for a few months, but I was impressed with the level of understanding of the members of this fellowship.

Several seminary students began attending Sunday evening Bible studies with me because we knew that there was some real meat being taught here. I remember one Sunday evening, several of us seminary students sitting there, and the pastor asked a question about a certain king in Israel.

This humble, white-haired electrician answered, "King Hezekiah." My friends and I looked at each other. We had no clue who the king was. Obviously, this man was never trained for the ministry. This man was not a "professional theologian." He was just a humble attender of church, and he was a godly, quiet man.

I'll never forget him sitting over there with his glasses and his Bible open on his lap, and his godly wife, sitting next to him. He knew the answer right away.

In September 20 of 1976, as I was leaving church, I noticed in the narthex a little shelf which contained little charts for reading the Bible through in one year. They were a half a piece of 8 1/2" by 11" paper trifold. You could fit it in your pocket. I looked at it, and sure enough, January 1st, and then right next to it Genesis 1-3, January 2nd, Genesis 4-6, etc.

When you flip over to the back of the trifold, December 31st, there is Revelation 20-22. They simply started in January in Genesis, and then you finish it in Revelation in December. The average number of chapters was about three a day.

I looked up and down the columns. I found the reading for September 20th. It was the book of Joel. That day I went home and I read all three chapters in Joel, and my new daily rhythm commenced. I'm going to say again, next to asking Jesus to be my savior, reading the Bible every day has proven to be the best decision I've made in growing in my faith.

For 11 years, I followed this schedule, and I'm not saying that I was always consistent. Some days I missed, some days I had to read double, and it was difficult. Some weekends, I had to read a good bit to catch up where I was supposed to be. Eventually I kept at it, and it became a part of the warp and woof of my life.

If I didn't have that schedule, I don't think I would have kept at it as long as I did. I don't think I would have read all 66 books in one year because there would have been some dry times and there'd have been some times when I was on vacation, whatever. Then I'd have been so far behind, I'd have given up, and I would have said, "Well, maybe next year I'll start again." No, I just kept at it. Having that schedule kept me on track.

Another factor which helped me on this quest was knowing that most of the congregation was following the same plan. I don't remember a lot being said about it, but it was assumed. I was a part of a body that valued reading the Bible. I remember one older gentleman telling me that he had read the scriptures through almost 50 times.

Now, I'm the older gentleman. I'm the one encouraging people to do it because I'm almost up to 50 times myself. As much as I liked this original plan, I found that I was spending nine months reading from Genesis to Malachi and three months reading Matthew to Revelation. I was in the Old Testament for three-quarters of the year, and I really wanted to be reading the New Testament all year as well as the Old Testament. I loved them both, but I didn't feel like that was right. The second thing was, at that particular time, after 11 years, God had blessed us with four children. I was wishing there was a chart that would be family-friendly so our growing family could read through the Bible together.

This particular church that I was attending also had a kids version, and it was the New Testament broken up into 365 readings. If I'm reading the Old Testament and they're reading the New Testament, the only day that we overlap is the last day of the year when we're both reading Revelation, the last chapter.

What I did was I divided up the Old Testament into 365 readings, and then I divided the New Testament with the Psalms into another 365 readings. That way, if my readings include an Old Testament and a New Testament, my sons could include just read the New Testament and the Psalms, and we would be reading that together throughout the year.

As a family, my wife and I could read the Old Testament and the New Testament. My kids could read just the New Testament, but all of us would be able to sit around the dinner table and discuss what we'd read in our New Testament reading, which is pretty cool. This system also provides children the opportunity to develop this discipline at an early age.

And it provides accountability for parents because they know, "Hey, our kids are watching us." How do you respond to that, Professor Scott? What do you think about that?

Scott: Well, my first thought was when you went to seminary...this is a sidetrack, but when you went to seminary, did you find that a lot of the guys there, a lot of the people there, had they read their Bibles before then or were they entering seminary having never read the Bible all the way through?

Steve: I would classify it this way. There was a lot of us that had just come out of college. We probably didn't get as much out of seminary as those who had been in the ministry for several years. I'm thinking of one guy who was with Campus Crusade for several years, before he went to seminary.

There was one class that a bunch of us rookies took, and it was designed for youth workers. You had to write a one-page outline for every book in the Bible. I remember asking some of my classmates as we were working on this together, "Why are you taking this class?" They said, "Because I've never read the Bible through, and this forces me to become familiar with the entire scriptures." We still weren't reading the whole Bible. That is difficult to achieve in one semester.

However this assignment was forcing us to page through and make an outline of each book in the Bible to get a better understanding. No, I don't think a lot of my classmates had. When I was graduating, the dean of students took me aside, and he said, "Steve, What advice do you have for us?" I had been the class chaplain that year. I said, "I would not let anybody apply until they've read the Bible through five times, cover to cover." I went on to explain, "Most of us don't even know enough about the Bible to ask good questions to the professors." This one friend of mine who had been in Campus Crusade for several years, would have really interesting and intelligent debates with the professors. He knew enough to ask questions.

Most of us were just writing down notes as fast as we could so we could pass the tests, but I had never even read the whole Bible through. However when I joined that church, and contoured to attend for the next couple years, I was reading my Bible every day and going to these Sunday night Bible studies that were meaty and deep. I got most of my Bible education, you might say, from this church.

When I was in seminary, I had classes on preaching, I had classes on counseling, I had classes on church history, I had classes on systematic theology, I had classes on Hebrew and Greek. You see, not a lot of them were what I needed. I needed to just read the Word of God. The church actually provided something for me that I should have had before I even arrived there. Good question.

Scott: Yeah, I'm always astounded at how many Christians haven't read the Bible. I got hit with that when I was in my youth group in the end of high school, and I stayed with that group. I came back to visit when I was in college for a while and went on a couple of trips with them. That's where I first started falling in love with the Word.

I was helped along when I started going to the navigators in college, because they're all about getting into the Word. To me, it was like, "I want to know what I believe," because I profess to be a Christian and supposedly Christianity is based on the Bible. I've discovered now that there are entire branches of Christianity that really don't see it that way because they've taken bits of the Bible they don't like and leave them aside. We won't talk about them right now.

Anyway, to me, it was like, "What do I really believe?" That was helpful for me because it allowed me to then read the Bible and be challenged by God's word with my own

beliefs because I stumbled upon some things that I believed something that I figured out wasn't scriptural. Then I had to wrestle with that and say, "OK, is the Word right or am I?"

I determined early on that I was going to take God at His word and ask Him to clarify where I was wrong. That makes a big difference in your faith.

Steve: It's huge. My heart burns just listening to you. Like you said, you can't assume that even the people that are teaching the Bible have read the Bible. You need to read the Bible. Yeah.

Scott: Can I just offer one little bit of encouragement if you're struggling with it?

Steve: Sure.

Scott: I had read the Bible a few times all the way through, actually sitting and reading it. There were parts that I've read a lot of times from different Bible studies and stuff. The one I got into a good habit getting through it every year was doing the Daily Audio Bible podcast.

I found a way that I could listen to it while I was shaving or driving around delivering pizzas. I could get into it in the car, wherever I was. That was, I think, 13 years in a row I made it through the whole thing. That was a really helpful habit for me.

There's a part of me that feels like it would be better if I was actually sitting down reading every word with my own eyes. You know what? Either way, you're getting God's word in your heart.

Steve: Absolutely. 13 times, Scott, you realize what a small percentage you're in.

Scott: Yeah.

Steve: I didn't realize how old I was until I started counting up how many I have. I'm going to say it again, this was the best habit I ever started. This was the best discipline. It's become the best rhythm. Just being in the Word has so many perks that I think we can fill up about 10 podcasts on just the benefits of reading the Bible. I'm hoping people will listen.

You will go to buildingfaithfamilies.org, and up in the top, it's going to say "Resources." If you can't find it, email me, spdemme@gmail.com, and I will send you the chart. This chart is a place to start.

Steve: Even if you have to do the New Testament one first, get into the rhythm of doing one chapter a day. Then, by the way, I have a simplified Old Testament, which is just another one-chapter reading a day that goes through all the historical books of the Old Testament to give you a good Old Testament foundation.

Even if you read one or two chapters a day, the whole idea is the discipline, doing the work, making it a priority. You and I know and I believe everybody that will try this will find it does something to you. It does something to your heart, your mind, your spirit.

Man shall not live, we're not going to live just eating real bread. We're going to live when we read every word that comes from the mouth of God. That's what God promises. Let's pray.

Father, I pray for every person listening because I know this is something that is profitable. This is something that's beneficial. This is something that will prepare us to live well here and live well there. This is God's word. It's eternal. It doesn't change. I pray that You will help us to take this next step.

For those that have been reading one chapter a day, help them to read two. For those that have been reading zero chapters, help them to read one. Even if you read one verse a day, we're still living by, not just bread, not just food, but by Your word. Help us, Spirit of God. Inspires us. Give us discipline. In Jesus name, amen.

Scott: Amen. That's our show for this week, folks. Thanks for joining us for the Building Faith Families podcast with Steve Demme. If you have a question for the show, email Steve at spdemme@gmail.com. If you have a question for me, you can reach me at scott@unsocializedmedia.com. Thanks for joining us. Have a great week.