

HOW TO
ENJOY
READING
YOUR BIBLE

KEITH FERRIN



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To Sarah, Caleb, and Hannah

As you grow, may God's beautiful, mysterious, amazing
story continue to engage you as deeply as it does today.
May you read it, trust it, internalize it, live it . . . and enjoy it!
Love, Dad

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Introduction

I didn't always enjoy the Bible. Not that I disliked it. I didn't even think about enjoying it.

I spent the first twenty years I was a Christian believing that the Bible was true. Still do. Believing the Bible was reliable. Still believe that too. Believing that I should read it more, study it more deeply, and memorize more verses.

But the idea of *enjoying* it didn't even enter the conversation. In fact, I still rarely hear people talk about enjoying the Bible. It is almost as if we think that once we convince people it is true, reliable, and valuable, then they will read it every day, sign up for every Bible study, and memorize it from cover to cover. (Okay, I might have just gone a bit too far.)

If you have ever heard me speak—or read one of my other books—you have heard me tell of the night I began to enjoy the Bible. Yes, I can trace it back to a specific night in the spring of 1993.

A friend told me about an actor named Bruce Kuhn who was coming to his church to “perform” the gospel of Luke.

Bruce had memorized Luke. The whole book. And he got up on stage, quoted it, and acted it out at the same time. No sets. No props. No other actors or actresses.

Honestly, I went out of curiosity. I thought it would be a bit fascinating, but I didn't expect to enjoy it. At least not for almost two hours! But that night, the living Word of God went from being a phrase to a reality. It came alive for me like never before. I sincerely enjoyed it. A lot.

Bruce agreed to have lunch with me the next day. We ended up spending about nine hours together. He challenged me to hang out in a book of the Bible. So I did.

That summer I read Philippians. Every day. All summer. It was the first time I could remember enjoying the Bible consistently for a long period. Thank you, Bruce. I am forever grateful.

That was the summer of 1993. Just under three years later—in March of 1996—I did my first dramatic presentation of the gospel of John. I have spent the better part of the last two decades speaking, writing, and doing everything I can to help people fall in love with God's Word.

What you are about to read is my attempt to boil down the lessons, analogies, ideas, and habits people tell me have been the most helpful for them.

Ten tips. Ten tips you can apply today. Ten tips that are simple to understand. Ten tips that are equally practical for the long-time Bible student or the person who is exploring what the big deal is about this old book.

The Bible *is* a big deal. (Check the all-time bestseller list. It's right at the top.)

Yes, the Bible is true. Yes, it is practical. And yes, it is fun!

My goal is simple: to help you enjoy the Bible. That's it. If you enjoy it, you will read it more. If you enjoy it, you will talk

about it. If you enjoy it, you will be more consistent in your time with God. If you enjoy it, you will apply it.

When it comes to the Bible, God never intended you to stop at believing it is true. He also wants you to enjoy it. I do too.

So let's get started.

Alongside,
Keith

Tip 1



Remember Why You Are Doing This

Why do you read the Bible?
Take a moment to answer the question before moving on. (Hint: Your answer is really important.)

Whenever I ask this question—especially to a group of people sitting in a church—I typically get replies like this:

“It is an opportunity to know God’s will.”

“I find encouragement there.”

“It is what I am supposed to do.”

“It reminds me of what is true.”

“It is how I know what God wants me to do.”

“It is God’s Holy Word.”

All of these are true statements. Without a doubt. But once—just once—I would love to hear someone say, “I read it to hang out with God.”

After all, isn’t that the point? Isn’t our time in God’s Word primarily about spending time with Him? Being with Him. Knowing Him. Sitting with Him. Learning from Him. Laughing with Him. Hanging out with Him.

One of My Pet Peeves

It has been bugging me for almost twenty years now. I wish it had bugged me for longer. You see, we talk a lot about having a relationship with Jesus. (That’s not the part that bugs me.) The part that really gets to me is *when* we talk about having a relationship with Jesus. Or even more specifically—when we *don’t* talk about it.

We seem to talk about having a relationship right up to the time when someone actually says, “I’m in.” Once someone is in the relationship, we stop talking about it. Odd, don’t you think?

All too often the conversation moves pretty quickly to church attendance, volunteering, joining a small group, or reading the Bible to learn about God.

Don’t get me wrong. Every one of these is a good and necessary practice. But notice the last three words of the previous paragraph: “learn about God.” Isn’t the goal of a relationship to know someone, not know *about* them?

In John 14–16, we are given a peek into a very intimate scene. Jesus has shared a meal with the twelve guys He has traveled with for the past three years. One of them has left the meal . . . to betray Jesus. The rest have gone out for a walk. This is His last conversation with them before the worst night and day of His life.

As you might expect, He is talking about things that really matter. Bearing fruit. Staying connected. Enduring suffering. Receiving the Holy Spirit. Having peace. Overcoming the world. (You know . . . big stuff.)

Smack-dab in the middle of this conversation, Jesus says these words:

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

Friends. That is what Jesus called them. Not servants. Not partners in business. Not workers or team members or helpers. Friends.

Oh, how our time in the Bible would change if we kept the friendship front and center. If our time in God's Word were primarily relational instead of informational, it would have a significantly higher probability of being transformational!

Is there information in the Bible? *Yes.* Do we learn some things about God in His Word? *Yes.* Does spending time in the Bible lead to a better understanding of God, His will, and His ways? *Yes, yes, and yes.*

But the context of that information is the relationship. The umbrella under which all that information sits is the relationship.

So how do we keep the focus on the relationship? I'm glad you asked. Hopefully, these two pictures will help.

Picture One: You, God, and a Cup of Coffee

Imagine that you recently moved to my hometown near Seattle. Some friends introduce us. We find we have a lot in common.

With a desire to get to know each other better, we decide to meet at a local coffee shop once a week before work.

Over the course of the next several weeks, would you and I learn some information about each other? Absolutely. We would most likely learn about our families, what brought you to Seattle, where we grew up, what we do for work, our likes and dislikes, and a wide range of other information.

Now, rewind just a minute and imagine that I show up the first week with a notepad in hand. I sit down, take a sip of coffee, and pick up my pen, and you notice that across the top of the notepad I have written:

*82 Things I Need to Know About Joe for Him
to Be My Friend*

Then I start asking you questions about your family, job, etc. The information I would get would likely be the same information I would learn if we just sat and talked. But how different would it feel? More importantly, what would be the chance of you showing up the next week? Zero.

But don't we do that to God all the time?

We sit down, open our Bibles, grab whatever devotional book we happen to be reading, and begin looking for the "answers" to today's questions. Once we have read the passage and filled in the answers, we must be done. Right?

Doesn't sound very relational to me. Sometimes, I think we walk away from our time with God without ever having been *with* God at all! I wonder how frequently I check off my Had-a-Quiet-Time check box and God is thinking, *Hey, Keith. I'd still like to hang out with you a bit. I'm not finished.*

Ouch.

Picture Two: Playing With God

Some days God wants you to read the Bible and not learn anything.

That may sound strange coming from someone who writes and speaks about studying the Bible. Stick with me for a few more paragraphs and you'll see what I mean.

My wife, Kari, and I have three kids. There are days—or parts of days—when I need to teach my kids something. Other days I need to discipline them. Still others require that I correct them, encourage them, comfort them, or even inspire them to be more than they would otherwise be on their own.

There are also days when we just play catch. Or ride bikes. Or bake cookies. (Okay . . . Kari does the baking with them. I do the quality assurance testing.)

Here's the deal: Those days when we only play together are not less valuable! In many ways, they are more valuable than the days of instruction and correction.

Could you imagine the expressions on the faces of Sarah, Caleb, and Hannah if Kari and I sat them down, looked them in the eyes, and I said, “Your mother and I have decided there is just too much to teach you. Too much you need to be corrected on, instructed about, and yes, even some occasional comforting. Because of this, we have decided we will do no more playing. You three can play with each other and your friends. But we are here to teach, discipline, and comfort you. Off you go.”

I can hear the thoughts in your head. *No way. That's insane. How can you give up playing with your kids? That's not a relationship at all.*

Aha. Not a relationship at all.

And yet, so often, that is how I tend to view God. When I pick up the Bible, I am supposed to learn something, get corrected, be inspired, or read some comforting words. Of course

there are days when these things happen. But hear this clearly: Sometimes God wants you to pick up His Word and just enjoy the read.

I remember talking to a friend one time who is an actor and director. He told me of a conversation he had years earlier with an older British director. Their conversation was about whether the Bible could hold its own on stage with some of the great theater productions. Not whether it was true, but whether it was *good theater*. After a few minutes, this older man said [insert British accent here]: “Well, you know . . . the Bible is the Word of almighty God. But it also happens to be a jolly good read!”

Amen.

God has much to teach us. We have much to learn. But don’t miss the story. It is such a fantastic story! There are heroes, battles, and villains. There are crazy characters, and yes, some dull ones. There are plot twists, mystery, and intrigue. There is humor. Lots of it. I’m not kidding. (Pun intended. Forgive me.)

One of my favorite things about presenting the gospel of John is watching how frequently the audience laughs. They don’t expect to, but they do. Every time.

After all, what is the *story* of the Gospels? Aren’t they four accounts of thirteen guys on a three-year road trip? Have you ever been on a road trip? Funny stuff happens.

Not only that, but the most serious Bible scholars will tell you that at least a handful of the disciples were teenagers. Have you ever been on a road trip with teenagers?! As someone who spent six years as a youth pastor, I can assure you that laughter is part of the deal.

Even after two decades of telling these stories, it is so easy for me to go back to simply gleaning information from the pages of Scripture rather than being engulfed by the story. I have to constantly remind myself: *It is about the relationship.*

Relationship. Relationship. Relationship.

You *will* be tempted to go back to reading the Bible for information. Don't do it.

Each time you sit down to hang out with God in His Word, get one—or both—of these pictures in your mind: you and God sitting down for a cup of coffee, and God as a daddy who wants to play with you. As your mindset shifts from information to relationship, you will find that you are more likely to be ready on the days when God *does* want to teach you something, inspire you, discipline you, or comfort you.

And you will find that you enjoy the Bible, and the Author, more than ever before.

A Note About the Study Guide

This book comes with a built-in study guide. My prayer is that these chapter-ending discussion questions, additional thoughts, and resource ideas will help you (and hopefully a small group of people you're meeting with) take the next step in applying the tips discussed in the book.

To get the most out of this material:

1. Keep a journal or notepad nearby. Writing down your answers, thoughts, questions, and applications will make your group's conversations much richer.
2. If you prefer, you may also download the study guide questions from www.keithferrin.com/enjoythebiblestudyguide.
3. If you download the study guide, you can electronically "print/send" each chapter's study guide to an online note-keeping program such as OneNote or Evernote. Both are very powerful, super easy, and have free apps for your tablet or phone. They keep everything synchronized so all your notes are always available. Outstanding!

You are probably going to get sick of hearing me say it, but **you need to meet with someone and talk about what you're reading and experiencing.** Preferably four to six people or three to five couples. Weekly works best. Every other week at a minimum. Meet on Skype. Start a Facebook Group or Google Hangout. Something. Just don't try to fly solo.

Now, on to the study guide material for Tip 1 . . .

Study Guide for Tip 1

Remember Why You Are Doing This

Have you lost the *relational* part of your relationship with Jesus? So many people come to know Jesus, and they are so excited, so vibrant, so alive! All too soon the want-to's turn into have-to's, and we get bogged down.

Nowhere is that more true than when it comes to Bible reading. We feel like we should read more. We should know it better. We should memorize more verses. We should enjoy it more than we do. And so many of us practically force ourselves to read instead of spending time with the One who formed us, saved us, redeemed us, restores us, and loves us.

Let's change that. Let's keep the relationship front and center. Let's keep the relationship, well, relational. Oh, and if you're just beginning or exploring a relationship with Jesus, it will be much better if you start relationally and continue relationally. Nourish the want-to's so they don't turn into have-to's.

For the Group

1. When have you felt like you were in a true relationship with Jesus? What were your thoughts, activities, and habits at that time? What changed (if it has)? Describe it.

2. Do you want to be in a true relationship with Jesus? Describe what that would look like for you. Be clear about what you want and need out of your relationship with Jesus. Write it down. (Then put your pen down and talk with Him about it.)

3. How do you feel about the Bible? Do you enjoy it? Did you ever? If so, and you don't now, what changed?

4. Why do you study the Bible? Is your approach more informational or relational?

5. Spend some time sitting in silence, pondering the truth that Jesus calls you “friend.” Meditate on John 15:15 for a good five to ten minutes. Then jot down your thoughts.

I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

John 15:15

6. What is one practical change you can make to approach the Bible more relationally (e.g., where you read, what chair you sit in, what time of day you read, a way to reduce distractions)?
7. Which of the two pictures (*You, God, and a Cup of Coffee* or *Playing with God*) was most helpful for you? Which is the harder one for you to embrace and live out? Why do you think that is?

8. Recall the story of a British director who once said, “Well, you know . . . the Bible is the Word of almighty God. But it also happens to be a jolly good read.” Have you ever thought of the Bible as a “jolly good read”? What are a few stories in the Bible that remind you of that truth?

— Scripture to Soak In —

- John 1:1–18. Read it in your favorite translation. Then read it in *The Message* by Eugene Peterson. He really brings out the relational tone of the text. (Note: If you don’t own a copy of *The Message*, head to www.BibleGateway.com or the YouVersion Bible app. You can read it—and many more translations—there for free.)
- Ephesians 3:12–21
- Romans 5:1–11
- John 10:1–18

SHALL WE PRAY?

Abba Father, Lord Jesus, Great Comforter, the One who created me, knows me, died for me, redeemed me, restores me, and calls me “friend,”

Oh, how I want to know You more. To know Your presence as I read Your Word. To truly meet with You.

I am open to whatever You have for me today. If You want to teach me something, I am here to learn. If You need to correct an error in my thinking or my actions, I am open to Your discipline. If You want to restore something that is broken or needs to be made whole, I admit my brokenness and my need.

And if today Your desire is to simply be together, to laugh, and to enjoy each other's company, I am here, willing and available.

Help me to keep a relational mindset every time I pick up my Bible. Help me to know You more intimately and to follow You more closely. May our relationship be so close and so deep that it transforms every other relationship, motive, thought, and action.

Amen.