

Stretching Exercises

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.
—James 1:22–23, niv

This passage suggests that for the Bible to have application in your life, you need to interact with it as you read it. Here are a couple of ways to do this:

√ Read a passage from the Bible and then ask yourself a question that has five parts. The question and its parts are easy to remember if you think of the acronym SPACE. Here's the question: Does the scripture that I just read bring to mind any

Sins I should confess?

Promises I should claim?

Actions I should take?

Commandments I should obey?

Examples I should follow?

Write your reactions to these questions in your journal. From your responses, identify a specific commandment that you want to follow, attach an action that you plan to take that is based on the commandment, and include an example from the Bible that illustrates the action and the commandment.

Which Bible Do I Use?

√ Personalize a scripture passage by inserting your name into it. For example, slightly alter James 1:22–23 so it advises, "If Mary Jones merely listens to the word, she will deceive herself. Mary needs to do what it says. If Mary listens but does not act, it is as if she looks at her face in the mirror and, after seeing herself, she goes away and immediately forgets what she looks like."

Plan to visit a Christian bookstore or the library at a seminary or Christian college. Take time to thoroughly familiarize yourself with the various translations of the Bible that are available. If you plan to buy a new Bible, you want to make sure that you choose one that is readable and understandable for you. You don't want a version that you will "outgrow"

because it is too simplistic and conversational; at the same time, you don't want a version that is so academic that you constantly must consult footnotes or a commentary to comprehend it.

The International Bible Society suggests a sensible way to determine which Bible is right for you: Choose a couple of scriptures that you know well—perhaps the 23rd Psalm or the first few passages of Genesis—and read several translations of these verses. Notice how some versions are very contemporary, while some rely on ancient word forms. Read the passages out loud. You may find that the modern translations don't flow as well as the traditional translations; you may be distracted or even stumble over the "thee's," and "thou's," and "yea, verily's" of early translations, however.

Now choose a couple of unfamiliar passages and read several versions of them out loud. Are you able to grasp the meaning? Often we understand familiar verses, regardless of the translation, because we have heard them so often. A less familiar text may be a better indicator of readability.

Regardless of the Bible translation that you choose, a good way to begin each reading is by affirming the authority of the scriptures. Among the many verses that will remind you of the power and importance of the Bible is Hebrews 1:1–2. "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ..." (niv).

