

Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

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Hey, Christian, What Do You Actually Do With the Bible?

This is a true statement: “Practically every person who says ‘I’m a Christian’ owns a Bible.” However, recent research by the American Bible Society (reported in the January/February 2023 issue of *Christianity Today* magazine) reflects some interesting revelations:

- “Bible reading dropped dramatically in 2022.”
- “Roughly 50 percent of American adults reported opening Scripture at least three times a year, every year from 2011-2021.”
- “In 2022, that number declined to 39 percent.”
- “That means that amid record inflation, threats of nuclear war in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and ongoing debates about the state of democracy, there were about 26 million Americans who stopped reading the Bible” (page 17).

So, 39 percent of Christians say they read the Bible in 2022, whether it was at least three times a day or every day. Yet, 61 percent did not read the Bible at all. In an age when you can get Scripture from an app on your phone, what does that say to you?

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team has helped hundreds of churches increase their effectiveness to reach their communities for Christ. The Church Doctors are trained and equipped in biblical efforts that increase your congregation’s effectiveness to reach lost people who matter to God.

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As Church Doctors trained to analyze every aspect of a local church, we have interviewed thousands of Christians in 1,700 churches from 78 denominations over the last 40-plus years. So, it's no surprise to us to read the research about the decline in personal reading of the Scripture.

It is easier to analyze the “what” of an issue than to search for the “why.” After focused immersion and analysis of Christians in the context of their churches, our Church Doctors have some thoughts about the relationship between believers and the Bible.

It will come as no surprise to most Christians: The Scripture is a huge book. Add to that the fact that it is written in the context of several cultures throughout the Middle Eastern world. Even more challenging, there are several different styles of writing. Genesis is far different than the Psalms, which is not much like the Gospels. The Book of Acts is somewhat different from Romans, which is not like Revelation. Yet, as we Christians confess, it's all the inspired Word of God. Even more challenging is the fact that some groups of Christianity, like the Roman Catholics, include material not in the Scripture published by Protestants.

What About the Way You Approach Scripture?

The mode of approach to anything in life has a great influence on the results. For example, each year our Church Doctors lead a group of North American church leaders to England to experience—up close and personal—the leaders of the amazing renewal movement among a growing number of churches. (It's a movement that is starting in the US. So, the UK churches are a “classroom” for North American leaders.) The experience in England is the same, no matter how we travel there.

Would the England experience be any different if we chose to travel by boat rather than by flying? In one sense, “No!” Yet, in another sense, “Absolutely.” Since American Christian leaders are very busy, if we took the time to travel by boat, most people wouldn't even make the trip!

The way you approach Scripture, for most people, will impact if you are still doing it six months later. Of course, there are those who will plow through Scripture from cover to cover, no matter what level of discipline it takes. For example, for 50 years, it has been my discipline to read every new translation through at least three times. However, I get it: That's not normal. As a student of churches, it's a constant discipline to know all I can about God's Word in order to do everything possible to help them effectively reach people for Jesus. Think of it this way. Would you want to be seen by a heart surgeon who hasn't learned anything new for 20 years? The Scripture is so rich, every time you read it, every translation approach, provides new insights that apply to life—and the life of your church.

However, for “normal” Christians, the way you approach Scripture has enormous influence for personal insights in your life. By “normal,” I mean perhaps 95 percent.

Think of it this way: If you are active in church, you regularly hear a message preached by a pastor who has put many hours into preparation. What if your preacher simply read Scripture to you—and that was the whole message? Would that be biblical? Yes—and no! **Yes.** A preacher can't add to the truth of Scripture. Nor can a Sunday school teacher. **No.** You'd be “spiritually constipated” without application. And your worship attendance might decrease.

Think about the way Jesus approached the disciples, even the crowds. Consider how the Apostle Paul shared biblical insights with the new converts in young churches. They used the power of engagement. They spoke to the challenges people faced and provided spiritual direction in a practical approach.

Two Approaches to Communication

When we interact with others, there are two choices for our structure of communication. Deductive approaches are “top-down”: lecturing. In my undergraduate years in college and seminary, I got a lot of that. In my doctoral work, however, there was a greater mix of inductive learning. It included more opportunities for dialogue and interaction with the professors.

Ideally, it's the same with raising children. I was blessed to marry a Christian grade school teacher. When our children were small, my wife modeled a great amount of deductive guidance. As they grew, there was more inductive communication in the mix. It was a great education for me, and I didn't become a dictator, in spite of my enthusiastic leadership gifts!

Jesus modeled a great mix of inductive and deductive communication. Remember Jesus with the little children? The disciples had a deductive approach: “Don't bother the Master.” Jesus led inductively with the children, but deductively told the disciples, “Let the little children come to me! That's what the Kingdom is all about” (my paraphrase).

Helping Believers Through Scripture

Years ago, some brilliant business leaders from a church I consulted in northern Michigan pitched a vision to the board of directors of Church Doctor Ministries. It was when Christian radio stations were expanding rapidly across the US, and the format was frequently contemporary Christian music, along with gifted teachers providing short teachings. These business leaders challenged me to go “on air” as the Church Doctor. Further, they provided the finances for the production of short vignettes through the excellent work of Ambassador Advertising Agency in California.

At that point in my life, I had served as the leader of a nonprofit ministry, Christ for Youth Today, and had been a pastor in churches located in South Australia, Florida, Michigan, and Indiana. I had gained experience speaking to large groups of people. Yet, my greatest lesson began through those at Ambassador Advertising.

To get carried by 350 Christian radio stations in the US, Canada, and England required communication at a whole different level. I didn't comprehend it at the time, but the Ambassador discipline turned my speaking from deductive to inductive: Start where people *are* and speak of where God wants to take them. Technically, that meant speaking to the real needs, hurts, and challenges people face. End with biblical content.

As the years went by with the radio program, we were blessed with the demand for larger staff at Church Doctor Ministries along with international invitations to train pastors and a growing number of church consultation requests—so we chose to end the radio program. Our goal was to help local churches reach more people for Jesus in the best ways they could.

Several years later, one of our staff members suggested we repurpose and update the radio scripts to the form of a devotional book. Each reading would take only three to five minutes. It would follow a general theme for seven days. It would begin with a challenge that is common to

most everyone, then it would provide a “prescription” from the Church Doctors. It would end with a Scripture passage that applied to the challenge and reflected the prescription. After several years of work, we had 365 days—52 weeks of material. There was a short lesson for each day of the year. This has just been released as *An Apple a Day: A Daily Dose for Everyday Faith*.

What About the Bible?

Did you ever wonder if more people would engage in Scripture if it was provided—in “small doses”—with the answer to the challenges that we all face? Would that approach help followers grow in comfort with Scripture? Perhaps “baby bites” are better than no personal Bible reading at all. Based on the initial response to *An Apple a Day*, perhaps Christians can take “baby steps” to biblical depth.