

# Why Regular Bible Readers Tend to Become More Progressive

Many people say they believe the Bible should be read “literally.” Whatever that means.

Not everybody reads the Bible literally.

What is significant is not whether you do or do not believe the Bible should be read literally. It’s whether you actually read it.

Actually, reading the Bible is transformative and in significant ways. Those who read the Bible at least weekly, whether literally or not, tend to become more progressive in their views.

So concludes Aaron B. Franzen in his [master’s thesis](#) in sociology at Baylor University, my alma mater.

Franzen’s study is unique in that it is the first to examine the effects of regular Bible reading on a person’s social views.

He found that regular reading of the Bible significantly altered a person’s attitudes in a way that transcends the typical right/left, conservative/liberal stereotypes.

For instance, regular Bible readers tend to be strongly against abortion but also strongly against the death penalty.

In three major areas - social justice, criminal justice and the relationship between science and religion - reading the Bible had a profound effect.

Regular Bible Readers (RBRs from here on) believe that it is important to work toward social and economic justice in order to be a good person, as opposed to

blaming the poor for their poverty and feeling that neither they nor society bears any responsibility.

Interestingly, the more often a person reads the Bible - from a few times a month to once a week to every day - the more strongly this position is held.

With regard to consumerism, RDRs feel that it is important to use and consume fewer natural resources, and, again, this grew the more frequently a person reads the Bible.

RDRs also tend to not support the death penalty and in general favor more humane treatment of prisoners.

And the more one reads the Bible, the less people see a conflict between the findings of science and the teachings of the Bible.

What's interesting is that this shift of viewpoint doesn't hold true among those who believe the Bible should be read literally but don't read the Bible very much.

That is because for many people, saying that they believe the Bible is literally true is a means of belonging.

In other words, not saying it would mean ostracization from their churches or social groups, so they adopt the belief even though they've not really read the Bible for themselves.

But those who read the Bible, even if they hold to some level of biblical literalness - which they often do because the term is usually put as synonymous to believing the Bible is true - find that the Bible shapes their convictions, even if those convictions put them at odds with their churches, pastors or Christian social groups.

More than any other factor, even church attendance, regular reading of the Bible proves to be transformative.

This has certainly been my experience.

I was taught to read the Bible, all of it, all the time. And so, I did.

I found that the Bible itself often got in the way of a literal reading, but since I had been taught to always go with the Bible, that's what I did.

So, instead of fitting the Bible to conform to a literal reading, I moved away from such a way of reading it.

And when I did, I found that the Bible was truer in a deeper and more profound way than I had ever experienced before.

And it changed me. It changed my views on many things, even though that sometimes - OK, often - put me on the outside of my received religious tradition in fundamentalist Christianity.

It didn't matter. Still doesn't. The transformation was real, and it was profound.

But you have to read it. Those people who don't, even if they hold to orthodox beliefs about the Bible, get entrenched in certain ways of thinking they assume the Bible supports because they believe it is literal truth.

But it's their ways of thinking and their positions on certain issues that become authoritative for their lives, not the Bible. And certainly not Jesus.

All evangelical Christians believe that the Bible is transformative, but when less than a quarter of them read it at least weekly, the real problem is that they don't read it enough to truly make a difference.

In which case, what you believe about the Bible is irrelevant.

*Editor's note: A [version](#) of this article first appeared on Eubanks' [website](#). It is used with permission.*