

The Bible Survey, a summary of responses.**Jon Swanson**jswanson@gmail.com**May 2, 2011**

I write a blog called 300wordsaday.com. If you are reading this, you know that already. Because this is the report of a project I started there.

You get up in the morning and read those 300 words. I stay up the evening before to write them.

We have a conversation, I suppose, about following Jesus. We started, some of us, 27 months ago. At the end of the first month, there were about 30 people between Mailchimp and Feedburner who subscribed to 300words. Now, there are about 400.

During the last week of April, 2011, I realized that I haven't asked you much about yourself. I've just been here talking. So I decided to learn a little about you with [a survey about the Bible](#). And more than 70 of you replied.

I suppose there is a lot of processing I could do, trying to correlate responses. But that wasn't what I wanted to do with the project. I wanted to have a better sense of who I am talking to, or, more accurately, what the people who are giving up some time to listen to me each day would like to know about.

So I'm publishing your responses in this way, as an unprocessed set of responses. There are no percentages, no linking of people who read this version with that kind of question. I don't see that as helpful for what I'm doing. About half of you listed email addresses, but I'm not going to tell you who.

Your questions are thoughtful and probing. I know that some of you have asked these questions of others and often. I'm guessing that some of you have never put them outside your head and heart. I am grateful.

Here's the challenge for me: I take the Bible seriously. I look at and for a narrative arc that runs from beginning to end. For example I love the fact that in the second chapter, God talks about marriage. In the next to last chapter, in the last big science fiction image in a science fiction-like book, we see marriage. It's a story that God tells all the way through, as a way to illustrate his love.

A few years ago, as I sat with the committee that would put Rev in front of my name, I was told that I see the big picture, I see how the pieces fit and flow. I like to think that everyone does, but that wouldn't be accurate. So I'll let you read through the responses. And I'll look for ways to explain, to illustrate, to see the big picture, to talk about the forest.

What version of the Bible are you most comfortable with?

New International Version - 35
King James Version - 12
New Century - 1
New American Standard Version - 13
Whatever you use Jon - 1
New Living Translation - 6
The Message - 9
English Standard Bible - 12
I had no idea there were so many- 1
Other:
New English Bible - 2
CEV - 2
New American Catholic - 1
Jewish Publication Society (OT) - 1
Common English Bible - 1
New KJV - 1
New Revised Standard Version - 1
Amplified - 1
Oxford - 1
Lots - 1

What kind of Bible do you use the most?

Paper - 39
On a digital device - 13
Online - 16
It depends - 18

When you pick up a Bible to just read, as opposed to doing research or trying to find some sentence, what do you think you are reading?

(I thought about counting up how many mentions of each. And then I realized that the combinations are part of what's helpful to see. So the numbers reflect how many of that answer or combination of answers was given.)

A book of histories - 3
A book of stories - 11
A collection of principles - 5
A book of histories, A book of stories
A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of principles
A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of rules, A collection of principles
A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of rules, A collection of principles, An anthology of myth, metaphor, history, tradition, poetry, and more
A book of histories, A collection of principles

A book of stories, A collection of principles - 4

A book of stories, A collection of rules, A collection of principles, Recommendations for how to live a peaceful and harmonious life

A collection of love letters, A book of histories

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories -2

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of principles

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of principles, God's Instruction Book for life

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of principles, It depends

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of rules, A collection of principles - 2

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A book of stories, A collection of rules, A collection of principles, God's absolute infallible Word

A collection of love letters, A book of histories, A collection of principles -2

A collection of love letters, A book of stories, A collection of principles, What I marked above, what God has put together so that I can learn about Him and His actions from the beginning of history so that I can see He loves me and I can love Him

A collection of love letters, A collection of rules, A collection of principles

A collection of love letters, God's process of redemption

A collection of love letters, God's words for me

A collection of rules, A collection of principles

A description of God's instruction and praise concerning it followed by Jesus' application of it for living in God's will.

A guide for daily living

a place of encouragement

All of the above

All the above written in the context of time; translated by man and delivered to my soul with either the understanding or wrestling in the moment that only the Holy Spirit can afford.

An anthology containing most of the above (especially 1, 2, and 5))

Answers

Depends where in the word I am

God speaking to me

God's Word - 2

I don't ever pick it up that way - 4

I read for direction, comfort and to refocus my priorities on God vs. self

Inspiration

the inspired word of God

The truth! Jesus the Word

words of comfort

When I don't understand something in the Bible, I usually...

- ask a friend - 5

- ask a friend, give up for another month or year or so
- ask a friend, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
- ask a friend, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them)
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Pray for God to help me understand it.
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary -2
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations - 4
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, discuss with my wife
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Hunt for other answers from rabbis and students who post on the net
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, look at other translations (and sometimes lexicons)
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, pray and research others writings and texts
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, pray about it
- ask a friend, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), Web research
- ask a friend, look in a commentary, ask parents
- ask a friend, look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Search on line for the topic at sites I know and respect.
- ask you, Jon
- figure no one understands, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
- figure no one understands, look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, give up for another month or year or so, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, ask my priest
- figure no one understands, Parallel helps with that, but doesn't solve all the questions.
- give up for another month or year or so
- give up for another month or year or so
- Google
- look at other parts of the Bible for explanations - 7
- look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, meditate and ask Him for clarity
- look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them) - 5
- look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look at other parts of the

- Bible for explanations, google the passage to see what others have written
- look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Look in a concordance or other study tool.
 - look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary - 4
 - look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, ask you, Jon, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
 - look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations
 - look at the notes at the bottom of the page (if I have them), read it again
 - look in a commentary -3
 - look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations -2
 - look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Consult other sources.
 - look in a commentary, look at other parts of the Bible for explanations, Pray and wait
 - Move on - 2
 - Pray for understanding
 - research

Questions for me to answer.

- I think the channel you provide for the subjects as they're delivered through you is perfect. Currently, I'm missing from the pulpit of my home church much discussion about how we're to serve one another...about justice and working toward tolerance. I'm hearing a lot about how lucky we are to be saved (I'm an old-school PC(USA) Presbyterian, so I am a bit uncomfortable with that kind of rhetoric coming from a Presbyterian Pastor...see, I have a lot of mental blocks to get over!) and that Jesus provides everlasting life. There's not much focus on the world here and now. So when your posts prompt me to think in the present and to get out of my comfort zone, I'm grateful. I'm also grateful you're at ease with social media! You are a blessing to many. Keep up the good work!
- what do you do if you don't like to go to church on Sunday mornings? What do you do if every time you try and go to church the service makes you cry so you get embarrassed and don't go back? What do you do if someone at church is giving you unwanted attention?
- coffee...(just kidding)...how about persevering grace(s)...
- I honestly like what you do now. Thanks for being so open with your posts.
- the balance (and balancing) of grace and obedience
- Try asking people who their favorite is> Father, Son or Holy Spirit. That should be fun."
- Trusting Jesus
- Can't say that I have anything to suggest. I find your blog helpful when it needs to be and entertaining the rest of the time.
- The many facets of atonement (the many images of atonement in addition to the Protestant preoccupation with justification).

- Jesus' experience as real man with human brain, feelings, limitations.
- How His understanding grew as He matured.
- How much did He know, and when?
- How to help unbelievers see and believe the first words of the Bible...In the beginning God created...
- conscience
- sight (how one can see something one way, and someone else does not see it)
- Choices
- Ecclesiastes (no, seriously)
- Using the bible in everyday life.
- The Great Commission
- Why Jesus spoke in parables. Why the Old Testament is important to us as Christians.
- How to find someone to intelligently discuss the Bible, maybe how people blindly accept that the Bible says or means something without looking at it for themselves (and sometimes even after being shown it directly contradicts the actual words of the Bible)
- Your own journey to come to know the Lord.
- The fear of God
- What happened at the Council of Nicea and at other Councils ... Or talk a bit about the Orthodox tradition ... Its differences/similarities?
- Why does God allow evil to happen to believers?
- "Coffee. Need more coffee. Or maybe just some context of how the old testament, which feels so different to those new to scripture, hives with the love we see in Jesus. "
- those of us who live 'outside' orthodoxy. the LGBTQ community and how faith can help heal wounds faith has made.
- religious tolerance
- homosexuality, Paul says it's a sin, OT law says it's a sin, so why are so many people born with those feelings and have seemingly no hope for healthy attractions?
- Grief
- Proud of accomplishments vs. humility
- Prayer in busy times
- Managing multiple priorities, and still showing that God is #1 amongst all of them
- Atonement
- Oh... I don't know. I enjoy reading what comes to your head as it comes. I'm not a Christian, but I enjoy learning from the spiritual insights of others no matter what their path. Thank you for sharing your walk with me and the rest of the readers!
- Logos ... also dragons in the pseudepigrapha. ;)
- Having God as the CEO of my business... Including Him as a living partner of your work as well as life. Work as in business or my art
- integrity
- A dear friend of mine has a big problem with total grace. With the idea that even Hitler, truly repentant, would be granted God's forgiveness and eternity in heaven but a pretty decent average person who didn't accept Christ as savior would not. I see that grace as truly amazing because I know I don't deserve anything and am thrilled I don't have to,

but haven't found the words to make it make sense against what he's hung up about. It'd be nice to get your input on that.

The question I struggle most with about the Bible is....

- I have loads of difficulty with the approach that the Bible is the inerrant word of God. It sometimes clouds my appreciation of people who are so convicted in that truth. Yet the whole truth is, that's not what it's all about (my judgment, that is.)
- NOT so much the Bible as a lot of smart people's interpretations about it. Why do so many smart people have different ideas about what it says??
- In the Old Testament, why did God lead the Israelites to devote to destruction so many people, including women and children?
- Most of it is too hard for me to understand and I don't get all the weird stuff in the first part.
- What happened during the life of Christ the years before His earthly ministry?
- I don't really have one.
- How God could forgive me, and why I do such a poor job of being forgiving.
- Why can't I learn from the mistakes of those I read about in the Bible? I know it's the fallen thing, but it is still a sad day when I let God or others down, or because I don't have the right view of things that I allow others around me or situations rob me of that joy.
- Why, in the OT, are the wives and children disciplined with the men who actually did the sinful act? Like in Joshua 7.
- The questions in Revelations
- Why do people use it to judge others?
- How to stop struggling over what it means and how it works and simple concentrate on how I should respond to its truth. not jumping to conclusions based on small parts
- "Is it the literal truth? Every word? Really? Or on a bigger level, accuracy. "
- Why would God do it all for me?
- How to explain to someone else what the Lord showed me through His word.
- understanding
- why people read a command but insist on going their own way.
- Why so many good, well-intentioned people can disagree so violently about the same material...
- How it was compiled and those who compiled it.
- Do the translations and do time change the original intent and meaning of the Word?
- Why did God allow so much death and destruction specifically in Old Testament times?
- that it's not written--or should I say translated--in a way that makes it readable. I mean, the stories in the gospels, for instance, don't include the information that my mind usually looks for--a cultural difference, for sure. It means I approach the Bible as a document from long ago, one that doesn't read anything like other stuff I read to enjoy.
- It isn't so much the Bible, but the way some people use the Bible to demonize gays and lesbians.

- "Why so many people do not believe that God created the world and that Jesus is the only way to heaven. Also pre trib, mid trib, or post trib (guess I will just have to wait)"
- The laws of Leviticus
- How true are the stories or legends in the Old Testament?
- Whether or not it creates the requirement of those that truly believe to devote their life to spreading the gospel and whether or not those who don't believe are going to be separate from God for eternity.
- The fall of mankind was over a piece of fruit being eaten. I feel like God is playing games with people sometimes. He wants people to show our love through obedience, but he comes across as a bit of a tyrant. And yes, I am wondering if he's contemplating striking me dead for even saying such a thing. I wish I felt his love more.
- Not really about the Bible... I struggle with feeling I'm not worthy of forgiveness, and stopping to get the inner quiet that I need.
- What is parable, what is poetry, what is history...
- "Making sure I'm reading what God meant to say. Sometimes other translations take words and replace them with other words that don't have the meaning intended. So I am learning that certain words have different meanings. It makes entire scripture passages have completely new meanings if the words are translated correctly. So my biggest struggle is knowing what God really says sometimes."
- "The fear of God and some of the punishment God imposed That is not my God; my God is a loving, kind, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."
- The ongoing tension around literal interpretation versus literary styles communicating Jesus' saving work.
- The Resurrection; did it actually happen (despite the numerous eye witness accounts post tomb exit)?
- I actually don't have any struggle as such. But Bible is better understood when you meditate a lot about what you've read as opposed to just reading it. So it's kinda struggle for time.
- Why does God allow evil to happen to believers?
- Knowing the difference between cultural restrictions of the time that do and do not apply to us today.
- How to live the principles in today's world and serve as a vessel for God.
- "that it says we may not change it; and yet we are constantly finding new nuances of meaning that change everything (or not?) and it seems frustrating that it can be ""read""/ understood so many ways....
- the Biblical idea I struggle with most is predestination."
- Only one? I don't often find myself struggling with particular questions about the bible (that sounds way more cocky than intended), but more questions of application, especially in the context of avoiding a hypocritical legalism and instead pursuing a blind love that recognizes God desire to see all of humanity returned to him. Much easier to discuss and conceptualize than to live out.
- It's veracity, and it's cultural irrelevance. The bible was written in a very, very different cultural time than the one we live in now. I really struggle with how to make the words

come to have meaning in this day and age.

- ...what was left out...books/writings that didn't make the current "BIBLE
- What was meant by this statement when it was said to those people in those days in that language for that reason
- Not to take the Bible literally
- how much is 'cultural' - ie women covering their heads, no women in church leadership - and how much of that is literal? also the homosexuality issue.
- This is hard. I don't necessarily have "bible" questions as I do faith questions. Like, how do you explain to people when a small child dies, or a mom dies when she still has young children at home.
- Why non salvific items were included that have caused so much division. ie the middle of revelation.
- How to relate the historical context to today.
- how to live out what I already know to be true...
- Free will and predestination and the concept of God's foreknowledge not constituting predestined acts.
- It is not so much a struggle as it is a constant reminder that there is so much more to learn. I will never understand everything, so I keep reading. In doing that, I learn more every time I read the Bible with an open mind.
- Is there a literal, fiery hell.
- How much of it is really from the mouth of G-d and how much is from the hand of Man? (There is a Jewish prayer that we sing before we take the Torah out of the ark. It says, "This is the Torah, that Moses put before Israel, by the mouth of G-d, by the hand of Moses." Some rabbis interpret that to mean that the words of Torah always come through the lens of Moses' writing process - through his own humanity and frailty and errors -- and that part of our job in wrestling with Torah is to come to understand what is human in it and what is truly divine. This is not a fundamentalist approach, but it is the one I hold to.)
- I purposefully stayed away from the Bible for a couple years in order to wash myself from the presuppositions that had been baked into me when I was younger. So no problems at the moment. :)
- Contradictions between differing books.
- When do I take it literally, figuratively or etc...
- how to proclaim the good news with humility
- taking it literally, I just can't
- How to deal with the widely divergent interpretations of the Bible between the Evangelical and "Progressive" wings of the Christian church.
- probably finding the time to really read it. The problem isn't even finding the time, it's making the time and deciding to actually sit down and open God's Word. I pray that God will give me the strength to set other trivial things aside and spend time with the One Who holds the world (and my problems) in His hands.
- I know it's the inspired word of God. But I also know it's 30 or more different translations that don't all say the same thing in English and who knows which one is the best

translation of Hebrew/Greek/Aramaic, and which part of the Hebrew is based on the best oral version handed down? I'm coming down on that's all why it's so critical to know and understand it's a comprehensive whole, and that relying on a single line is risky, even if that single line is "I am THE way, truth and life." Yet I rely on that one anyway because it's in perfect harmony with all the rest.

In the last 30 days, I've knowingly read something from the Bible

not at all - 6
1-3 times - 9
4-8 times - 20
Probably almost every day - 30
15-20 - 1
every other day - 1
every other 2 days - 1

I can tell you the difference between a translation, a paraphrase and an edition

showing off - 4
no - 11
who cares - 2
yes - 48

What's your favorite story from the Bible?

- Either Pentecost or the stories of Esther, Ruth, Rahab and other strong women. Actually, I seem to like best the story that speaks to me in the moment...Job is good sometimes, other times its Paul's letters (though for years, I struggled with Paul as you've struggled with translations.)
- John 15. It is still changing my life
- Favorite as in most meaningful and important: the last week of Jesus' life, Crucifixion, and Resurrection--because I can't comprehend of Jesus loving me so much that He went through all that so I can spend eternity with Him and the Father and Holy Spirit.
- Favorites as in most enjoyable to read: Ruth, Esther, angel appearing to Mary and her willing acceptance
- Sorry I can't choose just one.
- Noah's Ark. I love the animals and how Noah followed his understanding of what God wanted him to do even tho it seemed bizarre to everyone else. I love that Noah saved all the animals all by himself because he believed what God was telling him.
- I also love the story of Jesus telling the children to come to him, and that you have to be like a child to know God.
- Luke 15
- 1st Samuel. I love Davids story and I love reading it to my kids.

- If I had to pick one on the spur of the moment (this morning), I might say Ruth, or Hosea's redemption of his wife, Nathan's confrontation of David, Jesus' three-fold confrontation of Peter, or the "prodigal son". But I don't look at it that way. I see the various stories, sayings, and events as threads in a tapestry that makes up one story that is too big to keep in my head all at once. My understanding of it grows by constantly, repeatedly tracing those threads, seeing how they intertwine, and what they tell me about God and about my own life.
- Prodigal son
- The one God speaks into my life today. Vague huh?
- The birth of Christ. Awesome... Awesome... AWESOME!
- The story of Naomi and Ruth and the story of Esther as well as all the stories about Jesus
- The story of Ruth
- The exodus story and its renewed covenant counterpart of messiah's last passover through the resurrection.
- Jesus walks on the water
- I'm not good at favorites. But ""There was this wedding in New York City"" is a out my grandmother teaching Sunday school in our tiny church with one child in her ""class."" She would have the girl tell the story back, until one day, covering the wedding at Caanan, the retelling started out, ""There was this wedding in New York City."" I know you've heard plenty of kids at church stories, but somehow, this sorta fits today's topic.
- Not possible - too many rich love stories, too many incredible miracles, and way too much forgiveness and grace to pick just one.
- Can I say the whole Bible?
- The life of Moses
- the story of the lost sons
- ahitophel, the wise man determined to get revenge. This is a story that was recently shown to me. It is not obvious, you have to take all the references to ahitophel together to discover the story. It's making me look at many other Bible characters again to see if there are other stories I have missed.
- Joseph and his brothers.
- The story of Martha and Mary. I'm very much Martha and I'd love to learn to be more like Mary.
- Jesus' death and resurrection
- Prodigal Son
- Right now: Second Chronicles 20
- Jesus healing the leper
- The Book of Daniel is my favorite book. Out of that book are several stories I like that show how God protected the captors.
- Prodigal Son
- Tough call. Probably sowing seeds that fall in 4 different places.
- Esther
- Either Moses and three Pharaoh or Jesus feeding the 5000

- Where Jesus displays very human emotions - either his time in Gethsemane or when he runs the merchants from the temple.
- The whole book of Acts as the Lord launches the church and sends the Holy Spirit. We get God living insight of us. Jesus lives inside of me. Still wrapping my head around that one!
- Not really a story but John 3:16; kind of sums up the Bible for me
- The Creation
- I am pro Psalms
- Story of Jesus and Daniel
- the woman at the well
- I do not know ...and that is frustrating because I do not know why I do not know....
- In recent years it's be Gideon. Gideon doubted. He tested god. But then he ran forward with full abandon on a (stupid) impossible mission that kept getting harder and he never blinked.
- I really like the story of the prodigal son. It reminds me that, as a parent would, G-d will always welcome us back into His arms when we chose to return.
- The story of the feeding of the multitudes/ loaves & fish
- Joseph
- Joseph and coat of many colors
- all the ones where Jesus feels compassion for someone & does something, also a lot of the stories of the Jacob/Joseph era.
- In John, during/after Jesus's crucifixion, when because of what the centurion SAW he believed.
- All of Romans...
- Parables of Jesus.
- Probably Gospels in general...
- There are three and they all involve women and interaction with Jesus. The woman at the well, the hemorrhaging woman in the crowd and Jesus protecting the woman from being stoned (always wonder what he was writing in the dirt).
- The Prodigal Son -- his brother who stayed
- The resurrection. Without that, nothing else really matters. But I also love the story of Gideon and his army being whittled away and also the Good Samaritan.
- What, are you kidding? Just one? I guess if I have to pick just one, it would be the creation stories of the first and second chapters of Genesis. There's so much to dig out of there, and so many ways to look at it and understand it all.
- The story of the rich young ruler, it gives me perspective. Also, the story of David outsmarting the King of Gash by acting insane, the man after God's own heart.
- My favorite story changes depending on which one has had the most recent profound effect on me. With that said, my current favorite bible story is where Jesus calms the storm for the other disciples. I love it because Jesus was working so hard, he needed to rest. In many ways, I think this story actually demonstrates the humanity of Jesus. And I love how the disciples were frantic, when all they needed was the faith to believe they would be okay. Plus, why were they worrying, Jesus was there with them this whole

time.

- Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well.
- Ruth, Job, book of James
- several parables: prodigal son, rich man into heaven, unworthy servant, vineyard owner
- The parables from Luke: the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son
- I love the story of Joseph. He is such an example of forgiveness, wisdom, and purity.
- Gideon and the fleece