

To Read, or Not to Read; That is the Question

JOKE: A teenager walks into a library, goes up to the counter and says in a very loud voice, “I want a cheeseburger and fries, please!” The librarian leans forward, looks at the boy and says in a stern, quiet voice, “Young man, this is a library, watch your voice!” The boy takes a step back and then replies, “Oh sorry,” and whispers, “*I want a cheeseburger and fries, please.*”

I have to admit, I have loved reading since I was in first grade. I took out PILES of books from the library every week and was the first one in line when the library opened its doors every Monday morning over the summer. As I grew older, I graduated from “easy-reader” books to adventure, biography and mystery books. If I wasn’t playing the piano at home, I was in my room reading a book. Books helped me to see places other than just where I lived, and many times, learn important lessons of life, like don’t talk to strangers and especially, don’t **ever** go into a dark, abandoned house! The people in the books became like friends to me, and because I often read books that were part of a series, I got to know the characters much better the more I read about them.

I *still* read a lot – often juggling 2 or 3 books at a time (although nowadays I have to make sure that the books are very different from each other, or I’ll get the characters mixed up!)

Maybe this is you as well – maybe *you* read a lot just like me, but then again, maybe you don’t read much at all- it just isn’t your “thing”. But whether you’re a reader or not, there is one book that every Christian should read over and over, even though we know the plot line, the characters, and how it ends. That book is the Bible.

This morning, I’d like to ask you a question:

“What does reading the Bible really do for me?”

And now, I’d like to suggest a few answers to that question.

1. The first and most important benefit from Bible reading is that it reveals God to us and helps us to love our Creator.

Obviously, we can’t just pick up the phone and give God a call and say, ‘Could you please describe yourself to me?’ But as we read the Bible, we are able to learn more about God’s nature. What He is like and what His thoughts are on a variety of subjects. In essence, as we read this “love letter” from God, our Bible, we ourselves end up loving God more, and we are drawn closer to Him, which leads us to have a greater desire to *please* Him, and bring Him glory and honor.

Why do I say that reading the Bible can make us feel a deep love for God? Because God chooses to be *vulnerable* with us. If someone is willing to be vulnerable with you – to open up and show you who they *really* are with no reservations - you *also* begin to trust, and thereby you become more vulnerable with *them* as you grow closer to them in the relationship. So, God not only tells us about Himself, but He introduces us to and teaches us about His Son, Jesus, explaining to us the very reason Jesus came to earth - because of our sinfulness. And He reminds us in **John 3:16-17** that He loves us so much that He did not send Jesus to condemn us, but to save us from our sinfulness so we could have life everlasting . . . a life with God, forever. The Bible also introduces us to the Holy Spirit – a separate but equal person of the 3-in-1-God – in the very first chapter of the book of **Genesis, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2;**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”

The Bible also tells us the story of God’s creativity in His act of creation. He tells us about His love for the people of Israel and their redemption. He gives us the moral, ethical, and Biblical laws which we are to follow in our lives. And although these laws also inform us how we have broken them and moved away from God, the Bible does not end with defeat, because we learn from God how to confess and find His grace. We learn how to live life in a way that is constructive and **not destructive** by the hundreds of examples of real people who followed, and often failed God in their journeys through life.

None of this essential information can be found anywhere else but in the Bible.

The Bible shows us the mind and heart of God.

2. It shows me a more perfect way to live.

Oftentimes, people think the Bible is just some old, ancient book that doesn’t need to be read once you go through it a time or two; that it has no relevance in our lives. The truth is really the opposite. The Word of God is alive and is active in our lives, if only we allow it to take hold.

The writer of Hebrews helps us understand this in **Hebrews 4:12**, that

“The word of God is living and active, and sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”

I can't tell you how many times, when I am reading a Scripture passage that I have read many times before, it literally sounds brand new to me. It's as if I never read it before! And more times than not, I need this verse, and God was making it come alive, as never before in my life. When this happens, it's a reminder that God's word is alive and active with the ability to penetrate deep into us. Perhaps it's affecting us at that moment to give us a greater sense of direction and purpose, or maybe even to help answer a question that we have had. The great passage from Paul to Timothy that we read this morning tells us exactly this, as Paul wrote in **2 Tim. 3:16**;

"All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." God's desire is to equip us to fulfill our life's purpose and calling. And the wonderful thing is, it is NEVER too late to discern what God wants you to do or wants you to know. As long as you can listen to or read the Bible, God can communicate with you, sometimes in unexpected ways.

3. We read the Bible so we can know, for ourselves, the truth about God.

Chances are that when you first heard the gospel message and it finally penetrated your heart, you heard it *from* somebody. Perhaps it was a minister, maybe a family member or maybe even a friend. However you came to know of Jesus's salvation message, you learned certain basic truths that day. But from that day on, your own curiosity about God probably took over. Very few people want to be told *exactly* what to believe, especially when it comes to spiritual things and beliefs about God; they want to read and discover what the truth is *themselves*. I know that I did. When I accepted Christ in 1973, I knew absolutely NOTHING about the most fundamental truths of the Christian faith. What I thought I knew revolved around angels and various saints, Mary-Jesus's mother, Christmas and Easter. I had a lot to learn and had no idea where to start. So..... I prayed that God would teach me what I needed to know and surprisingly, I was able to learn basic Biblical truths quite quickly. And I'm here to tell you 2 things:

- 1) God will honor your desire to learn and find things out about Him and
- 2) He will enable you to learn and *discern* things that will astonish you!

He WANTS you to know as much as you can about Himself – just like you want to learn about someone that you meet and like. You want to spend time with them; you want to know about who they are and what they are like. God will show you what is true, and because of that, He will also show you through the Holy Spirit things that are *not* true. He will give you the ability to discern what is right and what is wrong as a Christian, and He will enable you to understand more complex things about Himself. You just need to pray and *ask*.

4. The Word of God helps me to defend what I believe.

2 Tim 4:3 *“For the time will come when people will NOT put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”*

Doesn't that sound like our world today? There was a time when people were respectful of the beliefs of others, whether it was a different denomination than our own or a totally different philosophy altogether. People may not have agreed with the path that some chose to take religiously, but in general, people weren't hostile and angry with each other because of it. Unfortunately, it's not that way today.

And because of the condition that the world is in, there needs to be compassion and care when presenting the Word of God to others. The Bible equips us to defend our beliefs by *first* teaching and instructing us HOW to live our lives in a manner which brings glory to God. As we read the Bible and learn how we should live our lives, we find ourselves changing more and more into the image of Jesus. As that happens, we become stronger in our faith and bolder in presenting the gospel to others as we realize that time is short and the harvest is ready NOW.

2 Corinthians 5:17, Paul wrote;

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”

In Romans 12:2, Paul wrote,

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Knowing what is in our Bible is vital for us to be able to grow in Christ, and then to let others know WHY we believe the way we do. We become transformed, changed by God, and we become a different person, a *new* person, a *better* person, and that old person that we once were is gone. When we become more like Christ, people begin to notice. And it may be an old adage, but it is true nonetheless;

“You may be the only Bible that an unsaved person will ever read.”

5. Lastly, the Word of God leads and guides us. Many times, when we have difficult decisions to make, we find that the Bible gives us just the right answer at *just* the right time. How many times have we read a short devotional in The Upper Room or Our Daily Bread, or opened the Bible only to read EXACTLY what we needed at that perfect time? We know that Jesus is our Shepherd who calls us by our name. Think of that image in **Psalms 23** ;

“The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, He restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table

*before me in the presence of my enemies. You **anoint** my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."*

Just stop and consider how, just in this one psalm, God tells us that He is *leading* us. He *cares* for us as His children. He *restores and comforts* us. And He gently *calls to us* to know Him more intimately.

So, the next time you open your Bible to study, or to do a short devotional reading, try this experiment...

Ask yourself the "**SO WHAT**" question. It will help you to dig deeper and understand what you are reading, but also how you can **apply the point** of that Scripture that you are reading, specifically to *yourself*. Ask God what He wants you to take from this passage or verse of Scripture that you are reading **right now**.

Does God want me to - - -

STOP doing something?

START doing something?

BELIEVE that He will do something?

Does He want me to **CONFESS** something?

Does He want me to **PRAY** earnestly about something?

Does He want me to **GIVE THANKS** for something?

Or does He want me to **COMMUNICATE** something important **TO SOMEONE ELSE**?

Reading the Bible is essential for Christians for many reasons.

It reveals God to us and helps us to love Him more.

It shows us a better, more perfect way to live.

We read it so we can discern, with God's help, the truth about God.

It helps me to defend what I believe about my faith

It leads and guides me through life.

This week, open God's Book, His letter to you. Get to know Him intimately through a familiarity with what He says in the Bible, and then - celebrate God's love and His grace, written especially with YOU and ME in mind.

References:

[Deutsch](#), Michael; "To Read or Not to Read", Nov 28, 2017