

Reading the Bible

by John Vissers

The Bible is the word of God, and making it a part of your life is essential for becoming a Christian, growing in your faith, and being equipped for every good work.

Duration: 31:31

Scripture: Joshua 1:8, Psalm 119:105, Proverbs 30:5, Matthew 6:33, John 1:1, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Bible Reading"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of engaging with the Word of God. He encourages listeners to not just be tourists, but explorers in the Bible, investing their lives in studying, memorizing, and meditating on it. The preacher acknowledges that it may be discouraging when we feel like we're not retaining what we read, but reminds us that the Word of God still has a transformative power in our lives. He compares reading the Bible to taking vitamins, emphasizing the long-term benefits rather than expecting an immediate jolt of excitement. The sermon concludes with a prayer for God to prepare our hearts to receive His Word and for us to obey His will.

Transcript

Let us turn to our scripture lesson for the morning, and I invite you to turn with me to Paul's second letter to Timothy, 2 Timothy 3, reading at verse 10. 2 Timothy 3, reading at verse 10. Hear the word of God.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, penitence, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings, what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned, and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. Amen.

And may God bless to us this reading from his word this morning. Let us bow together in prayer. Let us pray.

Prepare our hearts, O Lord, to receive your word this morning. Silence within us any voice but your own voice, that hearing your word we may also obey your will for our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

There is a wonderful scene in Shakespeare's play Hamlet, in which Polonius asks Hamlet a question. The question is this, What readest thou, my lord? And Hamlet replies with the well-known response, Words, words, words. And Hamlet's response indicates that the words he read had no real meaning for him.

The words somehow did not grip him. The words did not speak to him. The words made no sense to him.

They were simply words on a page. Words, words, words. They did not shape his thoughts.

They made no impact on his life. The words had no staying power. We live in a culture where words have lost much of their meaning.

Everyday words confront us, in the newspaper, in magazines, in books, on the packages of store shelves, on billboards, on computer screens as we tap into the information highway, and in our conversations. Words fill our lives. But most of the words don't have very much meaning.

Most of the words float right past us. Most of the words simply do not land in our lives. And many of the words have become nothing but a cheap form of communication.

Information without insight. Knowledge without wisdom. And of course, in our culture and in our world today, words themselves are being supplanted by pictures and by images in the media.

Images perhaps worth a thousand words. Words, words, and more words. And that's, I want to suggest to you this morning, that's what makes reading the Bible so difficult today.

And yet also so wonderfully exciting. The Bible is full of words. In fact, by one count, 773,746 words.

And often people feel like Hamlet as they pick up their Bible and begin to read into all of these words. Words, words, and more words. Nothing but words.

The Bible often seems to be a dry and a dusty book. It makes no sense. It's an ancient word in a postmodern world.

An ancient text in the kind of world in which we live in. But it becomes exciting when God in his sovereign grace breaks through the millions of meaningless words of our lives with his powerful, holy word. And that word touches down upon our lives.

It becomes exciting when we begin to experience the Bible as the word of God in our daily lives. It becomes exciting as the Bible draws us up into the story of salvation. By grace, God speaks to us through the written words of the Bible.

And these words, the words of holy scripture, stand above all of our human words and take them up and transform them in our lives. And God's word transforms our words by the power of his spirit. Because you see, my friends, these are living words.

These words are alive and active, sharper than any double-edged sword. They have the power to penetrate to the very heart and the very soul of our being. When you become a Christian, you enter into a

new relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And the basis of that new relationship is the word of God in holy scripture. And reading the Bible not only helps you become a Christian, but it gives you assurance that you are indeed a child of God. Reading the Bible helps you to grow in your faith.

Reading the Bible teaches you how to be a Christian in a non-Christian world. Reading the Bible allows you to enter into the fullness of life. Reading the Bible prepares you for the things that God calls you to do.

And that, my friends, is precisely what our text in 2 Timothy is all about this morning. I want to focus this morning on chapter 3 of 2 Timothy, and particularly verses 14 to 17, because here the apostle Paul writes to Timothy and encourages him about the word of God. These verses occur in the context of Paul's charge to Timothy.

Timothy was a younger leader in the church. He accompanied Paul on some of his missionary work, and now Paul is in prison and he writes to Timothy and he's prepared to pass the torch on to Timothy. But in doing so, he wants to make certain that Timothy's life is rooted and grounded in the word of God.

As he takes up the tasks of apostle, of leader in the church, of an elder, of a man of God who's called to lead the church forward, he wants to make certain that Timothy's life is shaped by the word of God. That Timothy's ministry is grounded in the word of God. And so in the midst of this charge to Timothy, we find help in how to read the Bible.

In what it means to have our own lives rooted in scripture and the significance and the importance of understanding the Bible. And it's this point that I want to focus on this morning. How should we read the Bible? What does Paul say to Timothy? And how does what he says to Timothy shape us and help us as we seek to read the Bible today in a culture of many words, where often words are indeed not particularly valued? The first thing I want us to notice in this passage, and the lesson that we draw from it, is that we ought to make the Bible a part of our lives.

We ought to make the Bible a part of our lives. Paul reminded Timothy that holy scripture was integral to his faith. It was instrumental to his growth.

It was important to his life. Timothy had lived with the word of God, and the word of God had lived with Timothy since Timothy's childhood. Verses 14 and 15.

But as for you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation in Christ Jesus. Now in another place, we learn that Timothy learned the scriptures from his mother and from his grandmother, who were believers. Timothy had been raised with the Bible as a child, as a young man, as a teenager, as he grew up into adulthood.

He had been raised with the Bible so that the Bible had become a part of his life. Now it wasn't the Bible in its final form as we know it today, but it was the scriptures of the Old Testament, and no doubt it included the teaching of the apostles and the letters of Paul and others as they began to circulate in the life of the early church. That Bible, those writings shaped his life.

That Bible had pointed Timothy to Jesus Christ. The Bible had given him assurance, had given him assurance of his salvation. And the first thing I want us to know this morning is simply this, that being a

Christian means making the Bible a part of your life.

It means living with the Bible and allowing the Bible to live with you. Being a Christian means living with the word of God, making it a part of your regular routine, setting aside time daily to read. If you're a new Christian this morning, or perhaps if you're seeking out the Christian faith, I would encourage you to begin with the Gospel of John and simply read a paragraph or a section or even a whole chapter each day.

If you've been a Christian for a while and your Bible reading has become kind of dry and dead, I would encourage you to start with the Psalms and stop at verses that grab your attention and study them and begin to memorize important verses that give you help and comfort and guidance. Think deeply about what you have read and memorize scripture. Read the Bible by yourself and read the Bible with others.

And if reading is a problem, have someone else read to you or get a cassette tape or a CD of Bible passages and listen to them. Listen to the word of God and listen to others teach and preach what the Bible says. Those of you who were in the Christian life and witness classes for Mission Ontario, remember the five-fold hand by which we grasp the hand of God.

What is it? Hear the word of God, read the word of God, study the word of God, memorize the word of God, and meditate on the word of God. And then you can grasp on to the hand of God as you invest your life in the word of God. And may I encourage you over these summer months to try to make the Bible a part of your daily and regular routine.

And don't just be a tourist, but be an explorer. A tourist stops only to notice points of interest, but an explorer seeks to find out all that can be known. And men and women and young people of God, we need Christians who are explorers in the word of God, not just tourists.

Those who will invest themselves in the word of God, not just skimming over the surface. And don't get discouraged. A young believer was discouraged in his attempt to read and remember the Bible.

It's no use, he said. No matter how much I read, I always forget what I have just read. A wise Christian friend encouraged him with these words.

Take heart. When you pour water over a sieve, no matter how much you pour, you don't collect very much. But at least you have a clean sieve.

You see, the word of God does make a difference in your life. And even though you may think you're not learning very much, the power of the word of God is that it begins to change and transform your life. You should not expect that the Bible will hit you like a jolt of adrenaline every time you read it.

Although that may happen occasionally, reading the Bible is more, I suggest to you, like taking vitamins. People who take vitamins do so because of their long-term benefits, not because they get a charge every time they swallow a pill. Vitamins help build strength and resistance to disease on the long haul.

And that's what it's like to read the Bible. At times, the Bible may indeed have a sudden and intense impact on us. But more often, it will be the long-term exposure to the word of God that will begin to shape your life and transform your life and strengthen your life to do the things that God wants you to do.

The Bible is not a drug to make you feel better. It is God's word to instruct us as we move forward in faith. And so, make the Bible a regular part of your life.

And wear your Bible out. I think it was Spurgeon who said this, a Bible which is falling apart usually belongs to someone who isn't. In the midst of the pressures of life, rely on your Bible as an anchor, as a rock of refuge, as a centering point in your life, as a resting place.

The Christian life is a Bible-centered, word-centered life. Make the Bible a part of your life. Secondly, though, as we move on in this text, I want to suggest to you that the second lesson that we need to take from this passage is simply this, that we are invited to read the Bible as the word of God.

First, make the Bible a part of your daily life. Secondly, read the Bible as the word of God. Verse 16, Paul reminded Timothy that all scripture is inspired.

In the older translations, you'll find the word inspiration inspired there. The Greek word is a wonderful word, theopneustos, which literally says and means God-breathed. And that's the way it's translated in the NIV.

You see, the Bible is no ordinary human book. It is not simply a human account of religious experience, but it is God's word to us as human beings. It is the very word of God brought forth by the breath of God.

The Spirit of God used human authors, human writers, prophets, and apostles to set down a record of revelation. And Christians believe that all scripture is inspired. That means you can't pick and choose the parts that you like and the parts that you don't like.

Christians believe that all of scripture is an infallible rule of faith and practice, that these words, the written word of God, are the inspired and infallible word of God given to us so that we might read it and be confident that it is the very word of God. And therefore, this word is to be believed and obeyed. You know, the exciting thing is that the same Holy Spirit who inspired these scriptures is the Holy Spirit who speaks to us through them and illumines our hearts and our lives as we read the word of God.

Now you may say to me, pastor, preacher, you're asking an awful lot of me this morning. You're asking me to accept the Bible as the word of God before I even begin to read it. You're asking me to make a pretty big assumption here, to make a pretty big presupposition to step out in faith.

Well, let me suggest to you that there are really only two ways of reading the Bible. The first is reading it with your mind already made up. And the second is reading it to let it make up your mind.

And I want to invite you this morning to let the Bible make up your mind. God only asks this of you, that you take the words of the Bible at least as seriously as you take your own thoughts and your own words. And as you do so, I suggest to you, you will be opened up in to the word of God.

God invites you to take the world of the Bible seriously, to be absorbed up into God's world and God's story. As you read the Bible, God draws you up into the mind of Christ as you open the scriptures. When asked what arguments he could put forward to defend the inspiration of the Bible, the Princeton theologian of a previous generation, B.B. Warfield, answered as follows.

He said, defend the Bible? It makes more sense to defend a lion. Because you see, the Bible is alive and active. And I invite you to allow the Bible's power into your life.

Someone has said that the Bible is so deep that theologians can never touch the bottom. And yet so shallow that babes cannot drown. Martin Luther said, the Bible is alive.

It speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me.

It has hands. It lays hold of me. When you read the Bible, let the Bible read you.

Kierkegaard said, when you read God's word, you must constantly be saying to yourself, it is talking to me. It is talking about me. When you read the Bible, read it as God's inspired word to you, to your family, to your friends, to this congregation, to the church in Canada at the end of the 20th century, to the people of God around the world.

Read the Bible as the word of God. Make the Bible a part of your life. Read the Bible as the word of God.

And thirdly and finally this morning, I want to suggest to you that we need to read the Bible with a purpose in mind and with a focus before us. Some of us need to read the Bible to become a Christian. Some of us need to read the Bible to be sure that we're Christians.

Some of us need to read the Bible to grow in our Christian lives. And Paul says to Timothy that all scripture is not only inspired, but that it is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that we may be equipped for every good work. In verse 14, Paul has already reminded Timothy that scripture is able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

You see, the Bible tells us how to become a Christian, and we looked at that last week. But the Bible also tells us not just how to trust in Christ alone for salvation, not just what it means to accept Him and to believe in Him so that we might become children of God, but the Bible also teaches us what it is to grow in our Christian faith. The Bible rebukes us when we go astray.

The Bible corrects us when we think and act wrongly. The Bible trains us in righteousness. The Bible is the power of God to make us holy as our Lord and Savior is holy.

And the Bible equips us so that we may love and serve God, and so that we may love and serve others. You see, the purpose of the Bible is not to titillate our intellects. It is not to cater to our curiosities.

The Bible is not some kind of a magical book. Its purpose is not to lead us into some mystical super-experience or to provide us with a list of rules and regulations to dominate our lives and to dictate our actions. The purpose of the Bible is to point us and to lead us to one person and one person alone, our Savior and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The focus of the Bible is Jesus Christ, whom to know is life eternal, whom to serve is joy and peace. And the Bible helps us to know Him and to love Him and to serve Him. The Bible acts in the same way that John the Baptist pointed to Christ, saying, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

My friends, the Bible infallibly reveals the only value, the only purpose, the only standard, the only truth which ought to shape our lives, Jesus and Jesus alone, the one who was crucified for our sin and who was raised for our justification. This book is about Jesus from beginning to end so that we might find the salvation that comes through Him alone. More and more, Jay Adler wrote a book a number of years ago called How to Read a Book.

And in this book he observes that the one time that people read for all of their worth is when they are in love and when they are reading a love letter that they've received from their beloved. And he says when a person receives such a letter they read every word three ways. They read between the lines and they read

in the margins.

They read the whole in terms of the parts and each part in terms of the whole. They grow sensitive to context and ambiguity, to insinuation and implication. They perceive the color of the words, the order of the phrases, the weight of the sentences.

They may even take the punctuation into account. They read carefully and in depth because they want to absorb every thought and every feeling, everything that's possible to receive from those words that are written in that love letter. Those of you who have either written or received love letters will know how true that is.

And that my friends is how we should read the Bible. Because the Bible is a love letter from the eternal lover of our souls. It is written to us so that we might know Christ, so that we might feel his love for us, that we might understand his purposes for us, that we might be made wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Yes, that we might be taught and rebuked and corrected and trained up and equipped in the service of Christ. Have you opened that letter this morning? Have you opened that letter which is addressed to you? Have you read the Bible for your life? Have you been drawn into the Bible's world? Have you let the Bible read you this morning? And most of all, have you received the one to whom all of scripture points, Jesus Christ, the living word of God, who transforms our words, who takes our words, the words of our lives, and transforms them for his glory so that we might live for him. Let us pray.

Gracious and eternal God, we give thanks this morning for the word of God, your holy word, written in scripture. Help us to read it, to hear it, to study it, to meditate upon it, to memorize it, make it a part of our lives. Help us to live in it and to allow it to live in us so that we might be faithful to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray.

Amen.

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