

## Reading the Bible

### Introduction

For this first session I want to look at reading the Bible. In some ways this is the easiest thing that we are going to look at. And yet it is one that I have often found hardest to put into practice. My burden for today, what I feel God wants to do, is to get us excited about the prospect of reading His word.

I want to look at 3 aspects of Bible reading:

- First, *why* should we read the Bible?
- Second, *what* bits of the Bible should we read?
- Third, *how* can we go about reading the Bible?

As we go through, various bits of Scripture and notes will appear on the screen. I'll provide a copy of the notes for everyone next week so don't worry about taking notes as we go along.

### First up then, why do we read the Bible?

In many ways this is the biggie. If we can get our motivation right then in some ways everything else follows.

#### ***The first reason is that God says to.***

This is what Moses said about the kings that would reign in Israel:<sup>1</sup>

*When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.*

Did you notice what the key instruction was?

God's instruction to those who were going to rule Israel was that they should read the Law. That's the first 5 books of the Bible. Kings and Queens had to read the Bible all the days of their lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 17: 18-20

That's an Old Testament instruction, what about the New Testament?

Paul writing to the young pastor, Timothy, specifically instructs him to keep up publicly reading the Scripture.<sup>2</sup>

You may say well that's ok for kings or pastors, but what about me? I'm not a king or a pastor. Really? This is what the Bible says about you:

*If we died with him,  
we will also live with him;  
<sup>12</sup> if we endure,  
we will also reign with him.  
If we disown him,  
he will also disown us;  
<sup>13</sup> if we are faithless,  
he remains faithful,  
for he cannot disown himself.<sup>3</sup>*

You're destined to be a king or a queen reigning with Christ. You need a king or queen's preparation to reign.

So we read because God says to. But is there more? Is there an incentive more than just obedience to a command?

Emphatically, yes.

### ***Reading the Bible shows us what God is like***

Let's look back at Moses again. The first reason Moses gives is that he wants the king to get a proper vision for who God is.

The Bible is basically a book about God. From the very beginning where we learn that God was before everything, that He is the first cause of all creation through to the prophets where He judges injustice, through to the cross where He suffers and dies with and for the world He created.

Reading the Bible gives us the best possible view of God.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. 4: 13

<sup>3</sup> 2 Tim. 2: 12

This is what Jesus thought too. He rebuked the Pharisees in this way:

*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.<sup>4</sup>*

The Scriptures are where we see Jesus most clearly.

Ultimately Jesus is the Word of God. He is the image of God. And He says that it is the Scriptures that testify about Him.

If we want to see what God is like, getting to know the Bible is essential.

***Reading the Bible shows us what we are like***

The Bible is not only a book about God but about men. It shows us what we are really like. It shows us that we are not good, that we do not obey God and love our neighbours as ourselves, and that we need to be transformed.

You get a good example of this in 2 Kings 22 when a priest discovered a copy of the Jewish Law and read it to the young King Josiah. As the law was read Josiah became aware of how he and his people had behaved; he came to realise where they stood before God. It was this realisation that meant the people could get their lives right with God and which saved the kingdom.

There is lots more that we could say.

Jesus Himself uses the Bible to answer ethical questions,<sup>5</sup> to correct wrong teaching,<sup>6</sup> and to define what His mission is.<sup>7</sup>

So that is just a feel for why we should read the Bible.

**But what should we read?**

It is easy to say we should read the Bible. The difficulty often comes when we start to ask exactly what it is we should read. Should we read the extracts in Bible study notes? Or

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<sup>4</sup> John 5: 39

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 19: 4

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 22: 31

<sup>7</sup> Luke 4: 18-19

maybe we should read the gospels? What about Leviticus and all the sacrifices and lists of names?

These are good questions. I want to suggest that we should read the whole Bible, Leviticus and all. This is mainly because of the example of Jesus and what the Bible says about itself.

First of all, what does Jesus say about this?

We've already seen one example:

*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*

Jesus is talking about the Old Testament here. He is saying that it is the Old Testament that speaks about Him.

What did He do Himself?

In Matt. 12 we read Jesus' answer to the Pharisees' criticism of Him:

*At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. <sup>2</sup> When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, "Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath."*

*<sup>3</sup> He answered, "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry?<sup>4</sup> He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. <sup>5</sup> Or haven't you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent?<sup>6</sup> I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. <sup>7</sup> If you had known what these words mean, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the innocent. <sup>8</sup> For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>8</sup>*

In giving His answer Jesus quotes from the history books, the law, that's the first 5 books of the Bible, and the prophets.

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<sup>8</sup> Matt. 12: 3-7

Or how did Jesus explain to people who He was? We have a great example in Luke 24.

*<sup>25</sup> He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! <sup>26</sup> Did not the Messiah have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?"<sup>27</sup> And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

Put simply, Jesus was familiar with the whole Bible, including all of the Old Testament. Jesus used the whole Bible including every bit of the Old Testament in His work. Jesus taught His disciples about Himself using the Old Testament.

To me that seems open and shut. If God Himself believed He ought to get to know the whole of the Scriptures then surely I need to as well.

But in case you still need persuading, Paul wrote this:

*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.*

**All** scripture. If we want to follow the example of Jesus and the apostles, we need to read the Bible and we need to read it all.

Obviously that does not mean that every bit is as significant as every other bit. A list of family names may be less significant than a description of the resurrection. But every word is breathed by God and we should at least have some familiarity with it all.

Finally then, how do we read?

This is really up to you. You may need to be flexible depending on your lifestyle and commitments. How a doctor in 24 hour A&E reads through the Bible will be different from how a retired man does. God knows this. He has a plan for exactly how He wants to speak to you through His word.

But there are some principles that it is good to follow:

1. Be regular in your reading.<sup>9</sup> Try and make it a part of your routine. That way you will keep on being refreshed and you will keep a sense of momentum. Think of it like

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<sup>9</sup> Deut. 17: 18-20

eating a meal. If you start to go for too long, first you get hungry and then you go off food altogether.

2. Read completely. Don't cherry-pick scriptures. Read all of it, at least once.
3. Read systematically. Work your way through complete books. That's how God chose to reveal Himself and that's the only way that we can really understand what He's saying.
4. Read in balance. There's a lot more of the Old Testament than the new. But the New is where you can see Jesus most clearly. I recommend keeping a balance between the Old and New Testaments so that you get to understand the Scripture but you keep rooted in Jesus.
5. Read prayerfully. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit who opens the Scriptures to us. We should always be asking God to speak to us through the Bible.