

Why read the Bible?

By Emma Hodge

Psalm 1

2 TIMOTHY 3:14-17

Bible & Heritage Weekend 2024

Speak Lord your servants are listening, you have the words of eternal life.

Today is both Bible Sunday, and also Heritage weekend.

Later today we will give those children in year 3 at school a bible of their very own, many of us will have our own bibles some brand new and some showing signs of wear with verses underlined and highlighted.

Many of us will have favourite verses, stories and passages that we know and love, some examples could be the beginning of John's gospel "In the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God...", or Psalm 121 "I lift my eyes up until the hills, from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord..." while others will be familiar to lots of people, such as psalm 23, which speaks of comforting us when walking through the valley of death which several people have set to music and created hymns and anthems to, while other passages are less well known but spoke meaningfully to you at a point in your life or perhaps instead of a favourite passage or verse you enjoy finding new gems each time.

You may also be aware that there are different versions of the bible and some may have preferences for their own bible and some may prefer certain passages from one version and others

from another. For example I prefer the Coverdale version for the Psalms, for those who are not aware, the Coverdale psalms are the ones in the Book of Common prayer but prefer the New Revised Standard Version for several passages and if the passage is very familiar then I often also read it in a version such as the Message which gives a new perspective on familiar stories and helps me see it in a new light.

If you have a favourite passage, have you tried reading it in a different version to see what new insights or inspiration or comfort you can find from it?

Each version has its own unique qualities and different ranges of how it has been translated from the original language and during heritage weekend, there is a display of some different versions of the bibles up at the front and I would encourage you after this service and during the weekend to compare some of them, as sometimes that changes how you reflect on the words in them.

While many of us have bibles and if not many of us are able to access bibles through the internet or on our phones, having a bible is not enough. We actually need to read (or listen) to the bible as well as understanding what we read.

So I want us to consider these questions:

- 1) If you read the bible why do you read it and if you don't read the bible why not?
- 2) If you do read the bible, how do you read the bible?

I'm going to give you a few moments to think about these questions.

There will be multiple reasons as to why you read or don't read the bible and many will be deeply personal and I'm not going to list all of them, but some of the reasons could be

some of the reasons why we don't read the bible could be

- 1) Lack of time
- 2) Not knowing what to read
- 3) Not understanding the meaning of the reading and how it fits into our lives which is probably especially true for some of the very challenging and difficult parts of the bible for example all the wars,

While some of the reasons why we read the bible could be

- 1) To develop our relationship with God
- 2) To seek guidance about an issue in my life
- 3) To understand more about God's plan for salvation

In last week's sermon, John talked about the role prayer has in our relationships with God and that prayer is one way we connect to Him, however reading the bible is another way we can connect to God through reading, understanding and contemplating his word regularly.

Praying before you read the bible and afterwards is a great way to engage to seek God's wisdom in understanding His word. In the bible there are several passages about understanding God's law and word and the benefits that it can bring, our psalm has

this verse which tells us that our delight is in God's law and we should consider it at all hours.

“Their delight is in the law of the Lord
and they meditate on his law day and night”

Meditating on God's word also includes praying, as we reflect and open our minds and hearts to what God is saying to us through the passage

However just praying when we are about to read the bible is only one way of reading the bible, if we consider our reading from Timothy, we hear the following three points about the importance about reading the scripture

1. Firstly, scripture should be learned from childhood

There are several instances in the Old Testament which instruct Jewish parents to teach their children the scriptures and faith. The role of the parents is often shared with grandparents, sharing the bible with children also means that the parents and grandparents need to read the stories. It is not as simple as sitting down and reading them the story

The second letter to Timothy starts with his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois had a key role in developing timothy's faith and Paul reminds Timothy that he learned his faith from childhood and that involved reading scripture and sacred writings.

Giving children bibles is one way to help teach them to read the bible but it does not have to be just adults teaching children the bible, a grandparent in our congregation has let us know that her grandchildren have encouraged her to try a new way of engaging with the bible using an online devotional which contains a bible reading, a talk, a written explanation and space for their own reflections. Children and young people can help stimulate adults engaging with scripture and in their faith,

If you look over in the corner you will see a prayer chain, each link on the chain is a separate prayer, and this was started by St. Michael's school so my request to all of you is to add your prayer to the chain and join in with the children in praying this way we come together as a community to explore our faith which grows through studying the bible.

2. Secondly that all scripture is valuable for our learning

If you look carefully at our passage from timothy you will notice that Paul uses two different words to describe the bible, one word is "Scripture" while the other word is "Sacred Writings" And these are different words in Greek and while one of them would have been the Old Testament, Paul is highlighting that all sacred writings including scripture are inspired by God and are useful for us to reflect on and study.

3. Thirdly Paul provides the reasons as to why we should encourage to read and understand the bible, so that we may be

- a) Proficient and
- b) Equipped for every good deed.

Now we have looked at why we should read the bible, I want us to take a few minutes to consider how we should read the bible

The bible is not easy to understand, and in Acts the disciple Philip meets an Ethiopian on the road who is struggling to understand the scripture he had just purchased in Jerusalem and this is true of us,

We need help to understand the bible

There are various ways we can read the bible and understand it

- 1) You can read the lessons for the Sunday and listen to or catch up on sermons.
- 2) Several bibles have footnotes which help to explain some parts of the passages. There are also commentaries, bible notes and other books available all of which can help us to understand the bible.
- 3) House groups are a great way of both sharing in fellowship and understanding the bible if you want to know more about joining them please speak to John.
- 4) You can also simply read the passage and listen to what God is saying to you through the passage, it often helps to read it slowly and sometimes reading it more than once. We start our PCC meetings in this way, a passage

of scripture read twice with a pause in between and a chance for reflections about what speaks to us in that passage.

Whatever challenges we face when reading the bible, persevere in reading them, ask for help – you are not alone, we all find parts challenging; we all need encouragement to read the bible and more importantly to understand it but when you do you

The hymn writer Sir Henry Baker summed it up in these words

Lord, thy word abideth
And our footsteps guideth
Who its truth believeth
Light and joy recieveth

O that we discerning
Its most holy learning
Lord, may love and fear thee
Evermore be near thee!