

THE BIBLE IS IMPORTANT
Nehemiah 8:8, 2 Timothy 3:15-16
By Raymond White

All Christians know, of course, that the Bible is important. It is the foundation of our faith; indeed, without it there would be no Christian faith. But just how important it is is up to the discretion of each person. My point is just to nudge you to pay a bit more attention to the Bible.

[1] NEHEMIAH

We often don't regard the value of something so much as when we lose it. And it was so with the Jews. When they lost their homeland, their national identity, their temple, and their sense of divine purpose, that's when they really understood how important all those things were.

Then, when they returned 70 years later, number one on their list of important things to recovered was that important book, their Bible which defined for them what it meant to be a Jew, both nationally and religiously.

***Nehemiah 8:1** And all the people gathered themselves together as one man...and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses :**3** And he read therein...from morning until midday...and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law :**5** ...and when he opened it, all the people stood up.*

Now that's respect. This law of God is where their passion was. When Ezra read it to them, they stood as we stand for our flag, and they didn't fall asleep.

***Nehemiah 8:8** So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.*

***Nehemiah 8:18** Also day by day, from the first day unto the last, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eight day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.*

This went on for seven days, reading, learning, standing, and doing all that attentively.

[2] PSALMS AND PROVERBS

***Psalms 78:2** I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old :**4** We will not hide them from their children...:**6** That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born... :**7** That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. :**12** Marvellous things did he... :**13** He divided the sea :**14** ...he led them with a cloud, and...with a light of fire :**16** He brought streams also out of the rock :**17** And they sinned yet more against him...*

The reason we believe the Bible is because it reeks with integrity. No other people on earth so diligently and bravely documented their own failures. The Jews, more than another other people, deserve credit for alerting us to the extent of human meanness and exposing its roots

back to birth of civilization. Surely even non-believers can appreciate that value of the Bible and give the Jews the credit they deserve for bravely recording it all. The cost to themselves was great — two millennia of anti-Semitism — but it has also assured their survival.

***Proverbs 30:5** Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. **:6** Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

God protects us in many ways. For one, from accusation. When I teach a class I find myself hiding behind God. When I tell people what I think, I make myself a target. But when I tell people what God said, then my would-be-accusers have to attack God or be silent. My defense is simply, “Hey! God said it, not me. Believe it or not as you wish. But don’t blame me for what the Bible says.” As a teacher, stick to what the word says and you’ll be okay.

[3] JEREMIAH

***Jeremiah 8:8** How do ye say, we are wise, and the law of the LORD is with us? Lo, certainly in vain made he it; the pen of the scribes is in vain. **:9** The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD; and what wisdom is in them?*

You read the Bible, copy it, and preserve it. But you don’t live it, so what good are they?

***Jeremiah 11:3** And say thou unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel; Cursed be the man that obeyeth not the words of this covenant.*

This makes the Bible critically important. Not only does God say it, but he insists that we say it too. We are responsible to quote God.

***Jeremiah 26:2** ...diminish not a word.*

Each and every word of the text is important, as Jesus said, **Matthew 5:18** ... *one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law ...*

***Jeremiah 36:4** ...and Baruch wrot from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. **:5** And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD. **:6** Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people...**:8** And Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD’s house.*

When the written word is read and spoken by a scribe, it is as much God’s word as when spoken by the prophets and carries the same authority. That gives us great power.

[4] EZEKIEL

Ezekiel 9:2 ...and one man among them was clothed with linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side: and they went in... :11 And, behold the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.

This prophet/scribe did as God instructed him: he was an eye witness and wrote it down.

[5] REASONS TO STUDY THE BIBLE

TO LEARN ABOUT GOD: Einstein said, "I want to know what God is thinking."

Romans 11:33 ...how unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out.

Paul and quantum mechanics tell us that discovered truth has limits. We need revelation.

TO DEFEAT SIN:

Ephesians 6:17 ...the sword of the spirit which is the word of God.

Psalms 119:11 Thy word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin ...

1 John 2:14 ...the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome ...

Psalms 119:9 Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed...to thy word.

TO SUCCEED:

Joshua 1:8 The book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but those shall meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success.

TO BE BLESSED:

Psalms 1:1 Blessed is the man that walketh not in the council of the ungodly... :2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord and in the law doth he meditate day and night.

TO SAVE OURSELVES AND OTHERS:

2 Timothy 3:5 ... the holy scripture which is able to make thee wise unto salvation.

2 Timothy 4:2 ...be instant in season, out of season.

James 1:21 ...receive ... the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

1 Peter 3:15 ...be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh...

John 20:31 But these are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

[6] HOW TO STUDY THE BIBLE

Yoggi Berra once said: "You can see a lot just by watching." Sometimes we miss things that are obvious simply because they are obvious. Do you want to understand the Bible? Read it. Put away the commentaries and the church magazines and read the book. There is no wrong way to study the Bible. If you read it at all you are studying it the right way.

Revelation 1:3 *Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this book.*

Some people, rather than reading the Bible, would rather listen to it as someone else reads it out loud. That's fine too. "Hearing the words" is as good as reading the words.

I do suggest that it doesn't hurt to have a plan, if for no other reason than a plan gives you momentum. A stride keeps you going and helps you retain more because you grasp the context.

A study was done on chess grandmasters who could play multiple games blindfolded and win. The study discovered that, yes, these grandmasters could indeed recall board positions far better than the rest of us, but there was this surprise: they could recall board positions easily *only if the board position made sense in the context of an actual game*. If the pieces are arranged haphazardly so that the positions made no sense, grandmasters could not recall those positions any better than anyone else. We see then that it is the dynamic context that enables recall.

Keeping a thought in place is like hanging a hat on a hook on a wall. You can only keep a thought in place if there is a place to keep it. What sort of wall might a thought cling to? Thoughts link together to form a kind of lattice in your brain and that lattice is like a wall.

Isaiah 28:10 *...line upon line; here a little and there a little.*

When you hang a new thought on that thought lattice where it belongs, the thought stays put. And that's why I prefer to study one book of the Bible until I feel like I understand it and what its author is saying. Then, when I want to find a verse in it, I recall where it's *likely* to be because that's where it makes sense to be, and most of the time that's where it is.

Maybe you like your commentaries and prefer to study a single subject. Or maybe you like to open to a random page and start reading. There is no wrong way to read the Bible. I'm just saying that grasping the whole of a book creates a context and facilitates remembering.

A young Catholic woman once asked me how she might understand the Bible better. I suggested that she should read the entire book from Genesis to Revelation. That if she did that once in her life and never again, it could be the greatest learning experience of her life.

An older Catholic woman sitting next to her disagreed with me and said that the younger woman would do better to read just the New Testament only.

I said to them both that if the younger woman was a non-believer looking for a conversion experience, yes, I would agree with that. Start at Matthew and proceed. But the younger woman is not a non-believer, she is a practicing Catholic looking to expand her spiritual experience. And for her, an already believing Christian, I could think of nothing that would be more spiritually enlightening than reading the entire Bible once though anyway.

I also said that the problem with reading just the New Testament is like reading an answer without knowing the problem. The Old Testament is the problem, the human condition, and the New Testament is the answer. If you want to understand the answer, read the problem.

Finally, they both agreed with me. Whether either of them did it, I don't know. I never saw either of them again. I hope they did.

If you never do it again, at least once in your life you should read the entire Bible. It will frustrate you, it will annoy you, it will sadden you, it may even make you angry. Some of it will bore you (Leviticus will make your eyes glaze over, as will Psalms), some of it will frighten you, but all of it will bless you, And the effort will teach you and will give you perspectives on everything that you cannot get any other way. Read it. All of it. Once in your life anyway.