

Three Reasons Why You Don't Read Your Bible

by Daniel Hames

From the earliest years of your Christian life – whether as a child raised in a Christian home, or as somebody brought to faith and disciplined in a church group – you have been told how important it is to read your Bible regularly. You decided to try some sort of Bible read-through and set to reading four chapters a day. Early zeal meant you tore through the Gospels and enjoyed the drama of Genesis, but before long you ran into rock-solid Romans, or life-draining Leviticus. You missed a few days out, and then... well, it's been a while since you found the will to pick up your Bible again.

Every now and then, first thing in the morning and last thing at night, you see your Bible on the bedside table and it stares you out. At these times, other things tend to suddenly grab your attention: "I really ought to mow the lawn!", "I never did write that thank you card to Aunt Daisy!", or "Wouldn't it be lovely to bake some bread?" It's so easy to drop Bible reading down the list of priorities just a little bit, and never get around to it. Why is that? There are three very common reasons, and they all have solutions that aren't so much to do with how well disciplined you are, but more about the way you think about the Bible. The first reason isn't even a proper reason, so we'll start with that one and get it out of the way.

You don't have time

This may be the most common "reason" we give to explain to ourselves why we haven't read the Bible for a while: "Events of the day got on top of me", "My feet have hardly touched the ground", "I overslept" Yet, of course, this isn't a serious reason for missing out on the Scriptures. We all make time for what we believe we need, and we certainly make time to do what we want! Life is rarely too busy to surf the Internet, watch television, or go to the pub. The fact is that our priorities reveal what we truly value, and the "not enough time" excuse is most likely a cover-up for one of the two reasons below. So if this first one is you, admit it's nothing more than an excuse and read on!

You think the Bible is about you

The first reason is that, deep down, you feel your Bible reading isn't "working" - and it's really because you read the Bible with your eyes on yourself. As you read it, you're looking for practical lessons on life, instructions on how to behave, and commands to go away with and do right now. And you find that the Bible doesn't provide these particularly well!

It's hardly the best "how to" guide for life: it's full of ancient history, genealogies, instructions for priests and kings, bizarre-sounding visions, and precious little in the way of direct instructions for you, the reader. Even in the New Testament where things seem a little easier to apply to you, vast chunks go by without a word on how to live! The whole of Acts passes without even one command to go and do evangelism like Paul did; Romans takes 11 long chapters to get to any application.

This can be immensely frustrating for us at times as we often want some moral guidance so we can take whatever nugget of wisdom we need for the day, and get going with life. This leads us to ignore the "boring" bits, allegorize and twist the difficult bits, and generally stick to our favorite bits. We focus on what we think will directly apply to us, and generally avoid instructions about the tabernacle, minor prophets, and anything about numbers of people in tribes.

The solution to this problem is to see that the Bible is about Jesus and not us. The solution is to take our eyes off ourselves and begin to look at Jesus in the Bible. Despite all that our hearts would have us believe, the Bible isn't a book given to dole-out moral lessons, but a book given to us to teach us about Christ so that we can delight in him. If you've found yourself treating the Bible as a moral "how to"

guide, your next move is to start reading it differently. Let the Bible show you the glory and beauty of Jesus, and you will find that, as you do, love for him will bubble-up inside. Believe it or not, you will see him held-out to you in even the obscure passages you've always avoided. You will find that far from dutifully going to the Bible for handy hints for the day, you will gladly run to it so that Christ will conquer your heart afresh; so that you will take your gaze off yourself and obsess over him instead.

You think your Bible reading is for God's benefit

Everyone will be familiar with this situation: you've been going strong with your Bible reading, enjoying it and feeling your love for the Lord grow. But something comes up (perhaps an opportunity for a Saturday morning lie in) and you miss a day. Somehow the next day gets dropped too and, before you know it, it's been a week. Maybe two or three.

The feeling you get isn't a stomach-rumbling or a dry throat; not a spiritual hunger nor a thirst. It's a nagging guilt which tells you that if you really cared about God you would have read the Bible - that you really should have finished Jeremiah by now. The flip-side of this feeling is, of course, a sense of satisfaction (dare you admit it, a smug satisfaction) when you do read the Bible, especially when you manage a whole book in one go. You think, "I'm obviously maturing as a Christian!", and are tempted to drop into conversations that, "Yes, I was in Ezekiel 47 this morning. Marvelous chapter!"

The diagnosis for you is that you imagine your Bible reading to be doing God a favor. The crushing guilt you feel when you miss it is your heart telling you God is displeased, and the slightly haughty contentment you feel when knocking out five chapters instead of your usual four is your heart telling you that God is now smiling on you.

The solution is to recognize and live in God's grace. You are eternally loved and accepted by the Father because of Jesus. He and he alone is the reason that sinful people can relate to God at all; as we find ourselves in him we are adorned with his status and standing before his Father. That is the heart of our salvation and the ongoing reality that dominates the Christian life. To imagine that regularity with which we read our Bible can in any way augment or diminish this is to totally misunderstand our very salvation! Missing a quiet time could never change God's gracious love for us! If you have thought this way, you must realize that you're cheapening what you've been given in Christ and attempting to wrestle back from Jesus the great burden of pleasing God. Give it back and pick up your Bible - it's much lighter!

In this context, the Bible is given to us as a gift to feast on rather than a project to complete before judgment day. We will find we go to it to savor and enjoy, and when we miss a day we might feel hunger pangs, but we could never feel guilt, fear, or condemnation. In the same way that skipping breakfast is more of a missed opportunity than a morally dubious choice; not going to the Scriptures for nourishment is not a matter of calling down the anger of God, but of omitting to take advantage of his good gifts to his children.

Conclusion

The Bible has been given to us to help us know and love Christ. Our Father is generous and loving, and loves to communicate with us; the Spirit has inspired the Scriptures so that they bring life, joy, and fullness to the Christian walk. If you have misunderstood or abused the Bible up until now, making it about you and your efforts, simply look to Jesus instead: the One of whom the Bible speaks, and the One on whom your salvation rests. Read it to love and trust him more.