

Introduction: As we sit here this morning, almost all of us is sitting with a book in our lap. A book. For some that book has through this past week sat on a table in your living room, kitchen, or next to your bed. For some it has been in the seat of your car or in your “church” bag ready to be picked up just before you walked in this morning. But for others, that book has been your daily companion, opened before you in the early morning, during your lunch or mid-afternoon break, or on your knees before you went to bed in the evening as you quietly prayed and communed with God.

There are probably a variety of reasons that book has had, in your lives, such a treatment one way or the other over this last week. To those for whom that book has remained largely unopened, unread, and unsearched it may be that you find reading the Bible difficult, not knowing where to start, not knowing where to go, or finding yourself without the attention or discipline necessary to sit and read. For some, while it may be opened and read, you found yourself dry spiritually, and you are tempted to think that though you have read, you doubt it has done you any real good.

As followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, one of the most fundamental truths that we embrace is the amazing privilege we have is to possess the Bible in our own language. We have something which many in the past, and even in the present day, have never had. If there is anything that is true about those who are students of the Lord, it is that we are to be people of the most important and unique book EVER written in human history. We have in our possession the Book of all books. What you hold in your lap is not first and foremost the words of men, but in Truth the Word of God.

But merely *having* this Book is not enough. Just like *having* medicine is not enough when we are sick. Just like *having* exercise equipment is not enough when we need to get into shape. Just like *having* tools is not enough when something needs fixed. Just like *having* food is not enough when someone is hungry. *Having* and *using* are two different things. We are to be challenged in that we *have*, but do we *use*?

Why is this so important? There are several reasons, but I would like to point out just two:

- 1.) God has spoken in this Book— Hebrews 1:1 Matthew 22:31 John 10:35 2Timothy 3:16
- 2.) We grow by reading this Book – 1Peter 2:2 Psalm 1 Romans 15:4 1Corinthians 10:11

Notwithstanding these truths, which I believe every member of this church would affirm (just limiting it to them), I believe it many have little or no consistency when it comes to their actually reading the Bible for themselves. This concerns me as one of the God-ordained shepherd of this flock. This concerns me not because I believe I get more brownie points in heaven if I get everyone to read the Bible regularly. This does concern me because that means that for 1 or 2 hours a week (assuming you come to both services) you are getting input from the Word, but the rest of the week there is this haunting silence of God’s Word in a person’s life. It concerns me because the Word of God is not beneficial when it is only *had*, but not *used*. It concerns me because this is supposed to be a church which has a high view of the Bible.

For some, I believe it comes down simply to a lack of priority and discipline of life to carve out a specific time and place to do so. If this is so, there is little I feel I can do but pray, for you are making choices and with those choices you will live.

For others, and you are those I primarily want to try to help this morning, the Bible is quite simply a daunting book. This may be for several reasons. You may simply lack, for various other reasons, the skill to read the Bible in a way that is profitable to you. Your struggles may include your attempt to read a book that is not in a “modern” setting, but ancient, with different customs, histories, nations and figures of speech make reading it with profit hard to understand. This book, in one sense, is foreign to us. It is you in particular I want to try to help this morning.

But let me state up front that this is not an easy task for me or for you. Despite such books as “The Bible for Dummies” and “The Bible Made Easy”, there is a big difference between reading books about the Bible and reading the Bible itself.

Nevertheless, I want to invite, entice, and exhort you in our time together this morning to plunge into the Book of books perhaps like never before, so that you may grow in the grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ in this coming year.

To begin this, I would like to point out something quite obvious, but I believe will head us in the right direction. First, **the Bible is a book**. I have already stated it is more than just a book, but it is also true that it is a book. As a book, it is to be read. We are immediately confronted with a problem. Many are not readers. What I don’t mean is that most of us can’t read, but that is different than saying what I mean by the fact that we are not all readers.

Most of us read something on a daily basis. We read the news through the newspaper or web sites. We read the sports scores and write-ups. We read blogs of family or friends. We read recipes, directions on the back of bottles, instruction manuals and safety guides. We read instructions on how to put our new things together. We may even read the TV or cable guide to help us figure out when our favorite programs are being aired. So I’m not talking about mere ability to read.

Even while saying this, I want to point out that our culture is also moving away from reading. Now we can listen or watch, 24/7, news, sports, videos, or even “how to’s” on the radio, TV or Internet. As the popularity of these things increase, at the same time we are losing our skill of reading as a culture.

This is certainly not to say that all of this is bad, or that we’ll fix things by merely turning off or throwing away these modern luxuries turned into necessities. But I believe we should recognize that only doing these things decrease certain skills that make reading better. Even of the things I mentioned, I focused on things that convey mostly “facts” (about the weather, schedules, information). But this is true also about our entertainment.

I enjoy movies. Most of you know of how I take delight in movies such as the Spider-Man and of course the Lord of the Rings. But I think we should soberly realize that there is a difference between watching and reading. When we watch, much of the imaginative capacity is by passed and done for us. The visual elements of elaborate sets, costumes, acting, and musical score remove the necessity of certain things. The fact that movies have movement and, at least when watching it with others, does not encourage assessment and thinking (unless you are willing to make other mad for constantly pausing it).

In contrast, reading literature necessitates the cultivation of **special skills**. For instance, reading requires the ability of **prolonged attention**. I don’t have to tell you that this is something in our culture by-and-large encourages. To read, especially books like the Bible, one’s mind must in a certain sense disengage from “real” life to enter into the world of the word. Another skill necessary is that of **contemplation**. This is the ability to think about something more than in passing. While we thrive on quick and easy solutions to dilemmas, reading necessitates thinking deeply about subjects, especially with certain kinds of literature. This is connected with **self-control**. With normal entertainment, all of the things that are considered non-essential are cut out, and between 1 ½ to 3 hours we have problem and solutions presented to us as we move on to the next thing. The last thing I will mention is the use of the **imagination**. Contrary to images, reading necessitates the stimulation of our minds so that we ourselves create images. That is one reason that reading can be such an effort.

I’ll again say that while images and movies are not something evil in and of itself, the constant intake of them ordinarily hinders, rather than cultivates, the skills needed to read well. (The possible exception would be things that do in fact cultivate our thinking, such as classic debates and in-depth oral teaching). Rather than cultivating the skills of active engagement, modern forms *tend* to create passive receivers. It is no wonder that the statistics are so staggering (both “out there” and “in here”) as to our lack of Bible reading.

Where biblical Christianity has had influence and flourished, there has always been an emphasis on literacy. This I believe was historically demonstrated during the times of the Reformation and Puritans like perhaps no other time. While neither of these were Golden Ages, there is much to be said about the capacity of “ordinary Christians” to read and comprehend, evidenced by the depth of writing in those ages.

The last thing I’ll mention in connection with this point is that, as with much good literature, we should expect to get more out of it through repeated readings. Sometimes the best thing to do is to read something through, especially something difficult, seeking to catch the major features. To get bogged down and try to understand and remember everything is a death blow. This is why reading through something like a Bible-reading schedule is helpful, as we move to catch the highlights. Then as we do that repeatedly, we can more and more understand it.

There is another thing I’ll mention which makes the Bible difficult for us. The Bible **is a book with a variety of genres**. In other words, God has spoken with a wide variety of literary forms. For instance, when we look at the Bible we find such genres as history (Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Acts), genealogies (Numbers), law codes (Exodus, Leviticus), hero stories (Samson), creation poetry (Psalm 104), erotic poetry (Song of Solomon), acrostic poetry (Psalm 119, Lamentations), Apocalyptic (Ezekiel, Revelation), Gospels (its own form), Epistles or letters (to churches or individuals), Sermon (Ecclesiastes), Parables, allegory, battle stories (David and Goliath), hymns (Psalms, selections of the Epistles), doom song (Lamentations), fantasy (prophets), moral instruction (Proverbs, James), and in some books it’s a mixture of various genres. In other words, the Bible is an **anthology** or collection of different kinds of literary pieces. And all of this is set in an ancient culture which we typically know little about.

Our personal preferences for certain kinds of literature can often be seen on what parts of the Bible we are attracted to. Some of us are more attracted to history. Others to poetry. Some don’t want to “fool around” with such trivialities, and want to get right to the practical directions of “what am I supposed to do?” But God has spoken in this wide variety, and I suggest whatever our personal preferences and inclinations, the variety in which God has spoken should encourage us to be interested in all of the various forms.

“The Book of books”

Summary: For now, until faith becomes sight, God has given us a book as the primary way of knowing Him. Our knowledge of and obedience to God is thus tightly connected with our understanding of this piece of literature. This requires certain skills to be cultivated so as to comprehend a broad anthology of God-inspired literature.

As one who was raised in “TV Land”, I understand the struggle. I hope this stirs your interest. I want to help to stir an excitement. However to develop the skill of reading there is one primary thing we must do: spend time reading (both Scripture, and other good books).

What is the heritage we are passing on to the next generation? Are we creating an atmosphere where the love of good books, and especially the Book of books, will be not only cherished as something we have, but something we use daily? If so we will have to make purposeful choices to shift our thinking, and our habits, to emphasize the greatness of the Word written and read. One of the things that will do this above all else is delighting in the Word ourselves, and reading to our children.