

SERMON: 19 June 2016

(Reading: 2 Timothy 3:10 to 2 Timothy 4:8) "All scripture is God breathed"

A few questions.....

What priority do we give to this book in our lives?

Do we take it for granted?

How much time do we spend reading it?

Why do many people find bible reading boring?

Did anyone think to themselves, the bible reading is a bit too long today?

I wonder how many of us reach for our phones first thing in the morning more interested in catching up with what people are saying on Facebook and Twitter than on what God might be saying.

How many of us spend longer each day with the newspaper and the crossword than with the bible?

Think of the last time you read a book that was so good you couldn't put it down and read until the wee hours – it probably wasn't the bible.

Bible reading is something we put off. It is like starting a diet or cleaning the house – "I'll do it tomorrowor I'll do it better tomorrow." We often feel we are too busy to read, we might look forward to a holiday – peace and quiet (unless you have children!) away from the usual routine and think "I'll read my bible more then." But there are as many distractions, if not more, on holiday than at home.

We might like the result of the diet or the house cleaning – but we're not desperate to do it again! We are grateful for what we sometimes read in the bible but we're not always rushing back for more.

We like the idea of reading our bible, we might even like to have one nearby – but it shouldn't gather dust. If someone was in your house and asked to look for something in your bible, asked if your bible was handy, could you find it? Or would you be rummaging around in a panic trying think where you last saw it and blowing the dust off when you do find it.

Or perhaps the bible is pristine because it hasn't been used much! I spent a day with a friend last week helping to sort out her mum's house. Her mum died recently. We came across her dad's bible. He had died about twenty years ago. It was an old tatty, worn out King James bible and my friend simply said "He read it a lot." Will someone come across our bible in years to come and say "He/she read it a lot?"

Some people feel they are “doers” and not readers. They are busy doing things, good things. We might know more “spiritual” people who seem to have a gift for understanding scripture and who read their bibles a lot. But bible reading is not a gift of the spirit. Teaching, preaching, prophecy, speaking in tongues, such things are gifts of the spirit. Bible reading is not. Bible reading is for all Christians, I would say that it is compulsory.

When we make a public profession of faith and join the church, one of the promises we make is to read our bibles. The minister says “Do you promise to be faithful in reading the bible and in prayer?” and the new member says “I do.”

We need to cultivate a passion for God’s word, to cherish it, to value it, to soak ourselves in it.

The psalmist had a passion for God’s word. In Psalm 119 he says he delights in God’s word, it is worth more to him than riches, he meditates on the word, his soul is consumed with longing for God’s word at all times.

If this was translated into 21st century language it might read something like this – **I enjoy reading the bible more than the wealthy enjoy all their houses and cars and possessions and foreign holidays. God, your word will be the first thing I turn to each morning and will be my focus through the day. I will read and re-read the bible so that I do not forget what you say. Help me see more today than I’ve seen before even in passages I know well. I wish I had more hours in the day when I could read more of my bible.**

Why should we take stock of our bible reading and give it greater priority? Because Paul tells us in his letter to Timothy that all scripture is God-breathed. Scripture is the voice of God. Some Christians like to speak of scripture as “God breathing” to emphasise the point that the words are as relevant to us today as they were centuries ago.

This book contains the power of God and the love of God and the wisdom of God. It outlines God’s awesome presence in the world since the beginning of creation. It tells us how God made a covenant with his chosen people in the time of Moses and continued to love them and be patient with them through their disobedience and wilfulness. It tells the story of God’s ultimate pouring out of his love in sending Jesus into the world. Jesus reveals God to us more clearly than anyone else in the history of the world. And we still have access to what Jesus said and did through eye witness accounts, written in this book.

There are verses in the bible that speak into every human condition and every situation we might find ourselves in. As Paul said to Timothy, **all scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.**

Or as The Message puts it - **Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another—showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God’s way. Through the Word we are put together and shaped up for the tasks God has for us.**

The Bible is the inevitable outcome of God's continuous speech. It is the infallible declaration of His mind. (Author: [A.W. Tozer](#))

I found myself wondering what scriptures God wants people to hear this morning.

Some people might be uncertain about what lies ahead. Plans for the future they had have suddenly changed, perhaps because of a bereavement or a broken relationship or unexpected change in finances or in health. God says to you in Jeremiah 29:11 – 13

I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future

Take your disappointments and uncertainty to Jesus in prayer, lay them at the foot of the cross, receive the rest and peace that he gives.

Some people feel worn out by the burdens they carry, perhaps caring for a loved one or struggling to keep going to work or just to get out of bed in the morning or having a responsibility they can’t share

Jesus says in Matthew 11:28 **Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.**

Take your burden to Jesus in prayer, lay it at the foot of the cross and let him help you, receive the rest and the peace that he gives.

Some people might not have accepted Jesus into their lives yet or the faith they did have long ago has become weak and doubts have set in.

Jesus says in Matthew 7:7 **Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.**

Take your doubts and your questions to Jesus in prayer, lay them at the foot of the cross, receive the reassurance and promises that he offers

Someone might be trying to decide whether to go forward in a certain direction, be anxious about whether they are equipped or up to the task, have doubts about their own ability or self worth

Scripture says **“Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1 : 9)**

So seek God in prayer and in reading his word, be strengthened by God’s presence, discern the path God wants you to follow. God might be calling you into something new, something big, something life-changing.

Scripture speaks into every life situation and every circumstance but not always with direct specific answers or lists of things to do and not do. After all, in Jesus’ times there were no televisions, computers, internet, genetic engineering, mass media, cinema, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear power. The list is endless. Instead the bible tells us, particularly through the life and teaching of Jesus, how to live good lives, how to address sin, to acquire the fruit of the spirit so that we are changed more and more towards the likeness of Christ – never achieving that likeness but always aiming in that direction. Then we will be equipped for every good work.

The bible is more accessible now than it has ever been. There are many translations and versions of the bible including highly readable options such as The Message – not recommended as the best source but good to read alongside the more accurate translations to get a modern take on meaning.

Many of us have the bible on tablets and ipads and phones. I gave a minister friend a telling off last year for being caught on camera at the General Assembly texting on his mobile phone and he informed me that he was reading his bible!

If you really can’t settle to read there are audio versions of the bible that can be downloaded onto computers and ipods. Or you can get hold of the entire bible on CDs. I have a complete set in my car and listen to them on longer journeys.

And sometimes on shorter journeys. A few weeks ago I was going to an evening meeting. The journey was less than ten minutes and the few verses of Matthew I listened to on the way were exactly the same verses that the person leading the meeting had chosen as the main reading for that evening. Not a coincidence!

If you don’t know where to start reading the bible, there are many suggestions for reading the bible in a year. Some people prefer daily bible notes and there are various publications.

Perhaps at least once in your life you should read the bible from beginning to end, just like a book. If you do that, you will be amazed at how often what you read in the bible seems totally relevant to something happening in your life, the answer to a question, the solution for a dilemma. It was through reading the bible from beginning to end that God called me to ministry and quite literally pushed me forwards at every stage with verses of encouragement and direction and affirmation.

A couple of quotes -

The Word of God well understood and religiously obeyed is the shortest route to spiritual perfection. And we must not select a few favourite passages to the exclusion of others. Nothing less than a whole Bible can make a whole Christian. (Author: [A.W. Tozer](#))

George Mueller was a leading Christian philanthropist in the 19th century who set up orphanages to look after thousands of children. He became a travelling evangelist and spoke often about the necessity of knowing the love of Jesus through bible reading. He said **The vigour of our spiritual life will be in exact proportion to the place held by the Bible in our life and thoughts.**

As we soak ourselves in the word of God, as we listen for God breathing, we will find ourselves loving Jesus more and more, we will rejoice more and more in our relationship with God, the way we live our lives will flow from that love and joy.

In the words of the Timothy Dudley-Smith hymn –

Lord, for that word, the word of life which fires us
Speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze
Teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise

Amen