

## **Reading:** Psalm 1

**Theme:** How to read your Bible (Part 1).

If I was to hand round large a tin of chocolates, I suspect we would go for our favourite one and if that one was missing, we would go for our next favourite. That is what happens in our house when all the family are up - the least favourite ones are left and our son-in-law James eats them! Many professing Christians, even those who are not, come to the Bible in that sort of way as they read and re-read only their favourite bits, perhaps not bothering with much else. Some people find the Bible hard, too hard to read and understand.

Sometimes preachers, I include myself in that comment, say about things we ought to do, but do not always say **how** to do such. Thinking about that and I feel that it is right to do a short series on "*How to...*" I want to look at basic practical and helpful ways to help us develop our Christian life and Christian life skills as I trying to give practical advice. These things will not be laws or rules that must be followed, but practical advice, suggestions and remarks to help and guide young Christians in particular, but useful for all Christians, to develop and maintain good Christian practices. Hopefully such things will stir us up and challenge us - however long or short we have been Christians.

We can also discuss these things with one another, to further help and encourage each other. There may be things you have personally found helpful which can be shared with others as we have fellowship. This morning I want us to start to consider a most important area in the life of all Christians - How to read the Bible. We are to read the Bible, not to be able

to say that we have done so, or tick it off a list, or merely to gain a lot of knowledge to answer questions in Bible quizzes! Our aim in reading the Bible is to know our God and Saviour better, to know what pleases Him and to live it out.

Although I will use the word ‘read’, I mean by ‘read’ more than just a quick scan over the words, but that we come to understand, appreciate and apply God’s word to our own lives. At times this will involve effort to get to grips with it, to dig out what is meant; other times it will be as if it is only true for us personally, meanings and the like will spring out at us. I suppose I could say I want us to look at “*How to study the Bible*”, but that could put some people off. Hopefully we will develop an appetite for such as we read the Bible, but my use of the word ‘read’ will encompass study and enjoy. Over this and next week’s message, I am going to say many things as we look at this subject together. It is not to guilt trip you into reading your Bibles, but to encourage you, move you to continue to do so with expectation and delight. I pray these messages will be found useful to us all as I try to present these points, helps and encouragements. I want us to note 7 things as we look at this topic:

## **1. Recognise What the Bible Is.**

The Bible is not just the world’s bestselling book. It is not just a collection of Jewish and early Christian religious writings. It is not just a “library” of 66 books put together with the same sort of common religious theme. Yes, it is a great book and includes in it: history, drama, poetry, biography, prophecy, philosophy, science, inspirational reading, laws and religious rules. Yet it is far, far more than that! It claims for itself to be

God's word - from Genesis to Revelation and it reveals God in an accurate and understandable way. It contains all that we *need* to know about God, His ways and standards, the judgement that the whole world faces and wonderfully of the great salvation and Saviour God has provided for us. It tells all people, how we should live, especially for God's people who have come to trust Him as their own Saviour.

The Bible is so important in this dark world, as we go on into a future we do not know. We need God's word - as it is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. (Psalm 119:105), it is a sword for our battles (Ephesian 6:18) and is as a double-edged scalpel like instrument which is living and active (Hebrews 4:14) and is for our healing, benefit and comfort as God's people. King Arthur had his sword Excalibur, but his mythical sword is nothing compared to the calibre of our 'Excalibur' God has provided and given us!

God's word is breathed out by Him and does so much in and for us. Although written down by human writers, the true Author above and beyond these is God Himself. God prepared these writers, chose them, moved and directed them to write exactly what He wanted recorded, but they wrote such in their own style, words with their own personality coming through their writing. Yet these were exactly the things that God wanted written down for people to read and know throughout history. They were carried along by the Holy Spirit - like a sailing boat by the wind and in this way, they were moved and directed to write exactly what God wanted.

We can see this in verses like 2 Timothy 3:16 “*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,*” or 2 Peter 1:20-21 “*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*” This is what makes the Bible such a unique book. Yes, it is very similar to other books - as we now have pages, words, chapters, sections and yet it has been written and preserved under the divine inspiration, guidance and supervision of God Himself.

In the Bible God lets us know the things we need to know about and from Him. In doing so, the Bible deals with questions like “*Where have I come from?*” “*Where am I going?*” “*Why am I here?*” “*Is there any meaning to life?*” As it deals with such questions, our attention is drawn to the most important person - the Lord Jesus; His person, work and office as Saviour. Incredibly we find out that this One is written about in OT as well as NT. One of His titles is “*the Word of God*” and the **word** of God focuses our attention on Him - who He is, His origins, life, work, death and suffering and His resurrection, the salvation He has provided and how we can live right with God and live to please for God and this Saviour.

Once we recognise and understand who Jesus truly is, then we will see the need we have to read God’s word, the Bible, because it is so important to not only know these things, but it is a guidebook for life as we live to please our great God

and Saviour. Above this we are to see the privilege we have to learn about God, His ways and the Saviour He has provided for us.

## **2. Read It Regularly.**

For our health and wellbeing, it is good, vital to daily eat regular and balanced meals. In the same way it is good and vital to daily read and feed on God's word for our spiritual health and wellbeing. We are not to have a hit and miss reading and feeding on God's word. Just as we need regular daily food to maintain our health and growth, so we need to regularly and daily feed on God's word to be spiritually healthy and grow. We are to view it as a treat not a chore! We are to try, as far as we are able, to read God's word on a day by day basis. This involves planning and wanting to do so! If we are serious about growing as a Christian, then we need to make up our mind to come to God's word and read it regularly, even on a daily basis.

I know there are pressures upon us all in so many ways, but I know I can always find time to do something I really want to do. Pray we would have the same attitude as that regarding God's word. View God's word as more precious than our mobiles and what is on them! Now there's a challenge for us all! I have read the following many times, both on my phone and computer:

*“Ever wonder what would happen if we treated our Bible like we treat our mobile phone?*

*What if we carried it around in our purses or pockets?*

*What if we flipped through it several time a day?*

*What if we turned back to go get it if we forgot it?*

*What if we used it to receive messages from the text?*

*What if we treated it like we couldn't live without it?*

*What if we gave it to kids as gifts?*

*What if we used it when we travelled?*

*What if we used it in case of emergency?*

*This is something to make you go.... hmm...where is my Bible?*

*Oh, and one more thing. Unlike our mobile phone, we don't have to worry about our Bible being disconnected because Jesus already paid the bill.*

*Makes you stop and think 'where are my priorities?' And no dropped calls!"*

But honestly there is no comparison between a mobile phone and God's word – it is His living and active word; a love letter to us; a map and light for our life in clear and dark times. It gives us hope and points us to the future; it tells us of our Saviour; it is a mirror; it is milk for young Christians and solid food for mature ones; it is like fire and a hammer (Jeremiah 23:29); a seed sown; a light shining in the darkness and the morning star (2 Peter 2:19); it is as water to clean and refresh us (Ephesians 5:25-26); gold and honey (**Psalm 19:9-10**) and an anchor (Hebrews 6:18-19). The word pictures the Bible uses to describe itself underlines, re-enforces its importance for us all.

Be aware that a daily serious and thoughtful reading of God's word is one of the most beneficial and fruitful things a person, especially a Christian can do. I am not saying it will be easy, for we are to recognise that at times it will not produce great amounts of fruit in our lives *immediately*, but as we read the

Bible it will plant seeds, affect our thoughts, words, actions and such things will produce a crop of good fruit over the years as our Christ-like character will grow and develop - for we will learn what it is to be Christ-like in both our outward lives, as well as our inner motives and thoughts. It is not some sort of magical or mystical experience – read it and zap it works something mystical and magic in your life. We need a thoughtful, prayerful reading and applying of God’s word to our own lives as that will make a difference over time in the way we are and who we become.

I am not going to even suggest or stipulate how long we should read God’s word for. It certainly has to be more than a quick rushed flick over a passage or a hurried scan of a page, but it does not need to be a six-hour, dig out the Hebrew and Greek meanings either! We are to make and then take the time to unhurriedly read God’s word. Those who panned for gold in various parts of the world, had to make the effort and time to do so, but the gold they found made it all worthwhile. God’s word is more precious than gold and really worth the time and effort to read, study and get to know.

We are all of different ages, have been Christians for various lengths of time; we have different abilities and are in different situations of life. Some among us may have the luxury and ability of being able to sit down to read and study for a longer time. Others may be so pressurised or unable to do so and their time to read it is much shorter. Whatever time we can honestly allocate, we are to do so and use it wisely. There should be a growing desire to spend more time with God in His Word as we go on in our Christian lives. As to when is the best time to

have a regular time of reading God's word, that needs to be worked out in our own personal circumstances and according to our abilities.

Personally, I have always found it easier for me to have my Bible reading and main prayer time in the early morning. I am more alert then than later at night, I am not pressurised to do this or that and the phone isn't usually ringing, texting or messaging! Others are better at night time and have their devotions then. Some people I've known have taken time out in their lunchtimes to sit and read quietly in their car, or office or in a park. Some mothers have the school run to do, then the shopping, have to tidy up after the children have gone and then they have had their Bible and prayer time with their mid-morning cuppa. For the young people here, as well as us all, a good tip if we plan to read God's word in the morning - then going to bed at a reasonable time helps in amazing ways!! With a little bit of thought and planning, I hope we can all schedule and plan to have a regular daily time to personally spend time reading and benefiting from God's word.

We regularly keep in touch with our family and friends in so many ways today. Yet we have God's love letter, instructions, guide book in the Bible and we should make as full a use of it as we can. Next week, we will carry on looking at How to read our Bible – hopefully to see more to help and encourage us.