

**Reading:** Psalm 119:1-24

**Theme:** How to read the Bible (part 2)

Last week we started looking at a most important area for the life and well being of any Christian - How to read the Bible. I said I had 7 points to help and encourage us to do so and some people feared the worst, but the main 2 points were dealt with last week:

**1. Recognise What the Bible Is.** - it is God's word from Genesis to Revelation. Inspired, breathed out by Him, written by those who were moved, carried along by the Holy Spirit – using their own personality, words etc. but overseen by God to write exactly what He wanted the world to know – about Him and His ways and especially about the Saviour He has provided.

**2. Read It Regularly.**

Just as we need regular balanced meals for our physical wellbeing, so we need to 'feed on' i.e. read God's word regularly for our spiritual wellbeing. We need to read, know and grasp the great themes and movement in the Bible, as well as its truths in context – i.e. have a balanced Bible reading diet and not just our favourite bits. As we move on to look at the remaining 5 points, we are to realise we need to:

**3. Ask.**

We are to remember it is God's word. To most benefit from it, we need to ask God's help to grasp and understand it. The wonderful privilege of asking God is termed prayer. So, ask for His help as we begin to read His word, for reading the Bible is not merely an academic exercise - like studying for

an exam or qualification, because we need God's help for spiritual understanding and also to apply His word personally to ourselves. We need God to help us, to give us spiritual insights as we apply our minds and hearts to God's word. We could begin by praying Psalm 119:18 *"Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law."*

The Lord Jesus points us to our need of the help of God the Holy Spirit and we see this in John 16:13-15 *"But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you."* While this refers firstly to the unique work of the Holy Spirit in the apostles, it is also applicable to our understanding and living out the revelation the Holy Spirit revealed for all through those apostles and we need His help - ***not for new revelation, but for illumination and clarification*** of what He has already inspired and has recorded in God's word.

So, we ask for God's help as we come to read God's word. We don't have to pretend to be anybody as we do so. We can tell our God that we feel cold, indifferent, or we find it hard or our hearts and minds are sluggish or distracted by... Those of us who are older can remember when cars had chokes and we would use if the engine was cold - to get it started. Sometimes our minds are distracted and our hearts are cold. Perhaps we need a *"spiritual choke"* to warm our hearts and minds up! Read a promise or two from God's word, think on

them for just a few moments; quietly sing a hymn or spiritual song to help in that “*warming up*” process. Then go into reading God’s word in a thoughtful way.

#### **4. Make Notes.**

New or young Christians, as well as older Christians, often find they remember things better if they read, think about and then write something down. Some very helpful Bible notes use this approach for Bible reading notes for children, young people or adults. One such book is “Search the Scriptures” which takes you through the whole Bible in 3 years with notes and helps (*as I wrote this I checked online and you can pick up second-hand copies of this book from as little as £2.80 in paperback, as well as new hardback copies for more than that - based on NIV*). There are other books available and I have some samples here for various age groups for you to look at and handle - ***here are some of them*** and there is also a page on the church website about Bible reading plans – link shown...

You could also make your own notes in a notepad, a journal or on a mobile device (*easier to add to as you think of something else!*) A basic thing could be a summary heading of the chapter e.g. if reading the book of Acts: chapter 1 = Jesus’ ascension; chapter 2 = the Day of Pentecost: chapter 3 = the lame man healed: chapter 4 = on trial: chapter 5 = troubles in the church etc. Doing this and within a month you would have a good grasp and outline of the book of Acts. Also, you could have subheadings how each chapter is divided up - the NIV and other versions have headings

dividing up the chapters, but you could put those in your own words in your notepad etc.

Having read and noted down such things as an outline, it will give you some understanding and flow of the passage. Or you may want to approach the chapter or the passage in a different way and ask it questions to understand it more. Then begin to apply it to your own life. It might sound strange that you talk to your Bible and ask it questions, but it is always useful to do so. Ask questions such as:

- a) What is the main subject of the passage?
- b) Who are the people revealed in the passage, who is speaking and about what or whom? Who is doing what? Etc.
- c) Is there a key verse in the passage?
- d) What does the passage tell me of the Lord Jesus? *Very important!*
- e) Is there any sin for me to confess or forsake in the passage?
- f) Is there any command for me to obey?
- g) Is there a promise to remember?
- h) Is it a principle to follow or an instruction to apply?
- i) Is there a prayer to pray and include in my praying?

Not all these questions will be answered from every passage, nor will be found in every passage, but talking to and asking our Bibles questions will train us to think about the passages we read and not just let the words bounce from the back of our eyes and never pass through our minds!

If we are making notes and not following ready prepared notes; we might have questions about things we read, then there are so many helps online and available in real paper books too! There are Bible reference books, there are concordances that explain the meaning of words, also Bible dictionaries that will explain things we may not know about e.g. tell us what the Bible means when it says Baal, when you read of the design of the Tabernacle or Temple and can't picture it in your head; you could even ask older Christians to explain something and so help you make sense of it.

The word “**WORD**” can be used to help us to read and grasp God's word:

**Wonder** at it - ask questions about the text.

**Observe** it - see what it says and is about.

**Reflect** on it - see how it applies to our lives and our situations.

**Do** it - if it applies to us, so we're not only hearers, but doers of God's word.

While physical notetaking (*paper or electronically*) does not have to be written down, it is useful to do begin to do so as it gets us into the habit of thinking about and chewing over what we are reading. A posh word for this is “meditation” and by this I do not mean transcendental meditation which says that we are to empty our minds, but it is thinking over and chewing on what we read. Some of the Puritans would use the example of cows chewing the cud – often bringing up the things they have eaten and chewing it over repeatedly to get all the nutrients they can from it. This chewing it over is to also be done asking God's help - prayer is important at this point too.

## **5. Learn a Verse or Passage.**

The Navigators - a Christian organisation, encourages people to learn a verse a day. Assuming you will probably miss a number of days and forget some verses, you will have 300 or so verses learned in a year. With those important key verses learned, then you'll be able to chew them over many times as you have opportunity. While that may sound daunting, we can try and learn a verse or 2 a week from what we've read e.g. a promise, an encouragement or a warning and it will reinforce what we have read in our minds and hearts.

## **6. Read ALL the Bible.**

I certainly do not mean sit down and read it all in one go! Not even in a week! One plan on a website suggests an intensive reading of the Bible over 90 days! What I mean is that it is good for us to read all of God's word and not just pick out our favourite bits - the easy bits, but for the difficult bits use notes! I encourage you to aim to read through all of God's word. As I said earlier that the Search the Scriptures book takes you through the Bible in 3 years; other schemes take you through the Bible in 2 years; the Robert Murray M'Cheyne scheme takes you through the OT once, with NT and the Psalms twice in a year - but this was designed to be read with family and on one's own, but it can be used to read for ourselves as an individual and split it over 2 years or read the Bible through in a year. Check out the reading plan links on the church website.

Reading the whole Bible will help us to see how everything fits together, how the OT and NT are related and it helps

clarify things. It helps us check things out as we read not only the Bible, but Christian books and hear things said in sermons in church or online.

## **7. Make It Practical.**

We are not just to know the Bible and about it, but our aim is to be able to apply it to our every area of lives as we see how it relates to us in the real life situations we are in. It is for our day by day living, our Christian life at home, at work, at school, in sport etc. What is it says about our relationships within marriage, about parents and children, about work, or social life, when we are out shopping, use of our time, talents and money, also check out what the Bible says about the use of the internet and social media – there's a challenge for us! The Bible is a very practical, nitty-gritty book that has implications for our day by day lives, attitudes, thoughts, desires and words – apply these life applications to ourselves – whether made on paper, electronically or in our minds. The Bible has something to teach us about our time in the schoolroom, playground, the boardroom and the bedroom.

I pray these two messages on How to read the Bible have been and will be of practical use in our own lives now and in the future. We have a tremendous privilege to have God's word in our own languages. I hope we read it for our own profit and benefit in life, so that the things of God which we learn from His word would do us real good as we live for Him and His glory.