



Why should we study the Bible?

When anyone suggests that Christians ought to study the Bible, someone in the group, maybe several someones, will point out that for most of history, people did not have Bibles to study. They want to know why we need to do it, since even David probably had little or no access to scriptures recorded before his lifetime. Yet the writing of many psalms is attributed to him, and God called David a man after his own heart. If David didn't need to study the Bible, why should we?

The answer is that we all need all the help we can get if we expect to live rich lives of faith. Regardless of what David or Noah or even Adam had to work with, we have the Bible. We ought to be grateful for that blessing, not dismissive. We don't know who first wrote down any of the texts that form our Bible, but we do know that the people who preserved the writings found them invaluable. The people who read what was written found in the writings confirmation of their own experience with God and inspiration for faithful living. The preservers of the texts said of them, "These may be old, but they are for us." People continue to say that of the Bible. It may be thousands of years old, but the truth and the urgency of the message is contemporary. This ancient book is timeless and always contemporary in its value.

How did those without books learn the faith? Sadly, as we know from the biblical record itself, sometimes they didn't learn much. In Josiah's day, for example, the discovery of books in the temple was a shock, and the content of the books was even more shocking. People believed in God, but their faith was poorly informed until the books were read. Then they knew that they needed to know God and serve him in dimensions that had not occurred to them before. The same thing happened when the people returned from the Exile in Babylon. Again, the books were read, and again, the people were mortified to discover how far their lives had drifted from God's standard. People suddenly blindsided by the truth in the books must certainly have wished that these books had been available to them earlier. They wanted to know God. They wanted to serve God. Without the books and faithful leaders, they were deprived of the full richness of a life in relationship with God.

The lesson from these stories is that it is a great blessing for us to live in a literate society with ready access to the Bible. In fact, the accessibility of the Bible in our world leads to another question, one that is usually asked sincerely, but may just as easily become an excuse to avoid reading or studying the Bible: which translation is right for me? For the most part, we don't even think about reading the original languages, and that is fine. There are plenty of translations. Few of the translations have any intent other than the rendering of ancient texts into an honest statement in English of the truth contained in the ancient manuscripts, although each translation works within unique scholarly and theological standards. While individuals with a private agenda make some translations, there is a good supply of translations done by groups of scholars with much broader and deeper skills than any individual could bring to bear. The New Revised Standard Version and the New International Version are two translations that adhere to high standards of both linguistic scholarship and theological honesty. An English-speaking Christian who wants to study the Bible won't go wrong with either of those translations.

The question remains: Why study the Bible? A quick answer might be to avoid the shock and dismay experienced by the ancient Israelites when confronted with the old, forgotten texts and their teachings. However, the best answer is that there are several reasons to study the Bible:

- To know God
- To increase our faith
- To increase our courage
- To encourage our endurance of trouble and our patience with slow outcomes
- To have peace with the world as it really is
- To be ready to tell others when we have opportunity
- To mature in the life of faith

When you think of texts like Psalm 23, John 3:16, Luke 2, Genesis 1-3, Romans 8 and so forth, you will quickly recognize how these Bible texts give us good reasons for reading the Bible. The wonderful thing about the Bible is that these very well-known texts are not unique. The Bible is full of texts with just as much wisdom and just as much value as the ones everybody knows about. Further, the famous texts, despite their use over and over, are still worth studying.

Why study the Bible? Just do it, and then you will be able to write your own book about what you learned from the experience. The best book on the subject is your own life after it begins to be reshaped by Bible study.

Just do it!



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