

Video #2 - Scripture: Read in Community

Ah, the Bible. 9 out of every 10 American households own at least one. On average, American homes own more than 4 Bibles. People from different backgrounds and with different religious affiliations all seem to agree that this book is important. Yet most of us treat reading it a little bit like exercise. Some of us are fanatical about it. We're hooked. We know nothing feels quite as good, so we're up early or we're to bed late just to get our reps in. Others of us are sporadic. We will shred away when something important is coming up, and we are certain it's good for us, we just can't seem to get into the routine. Others of us can't get into it because of an injury. We've torn our spiritual meniscus and just don't have the strength for the steps required to heal.

And it makes sense that some of us may have been hurt. This is a strange book; or really a library of books written by different authors over a span of over a thousand years. It's full of all sorts of styles of writing: narrative, poetry, discourse, symbolism, etc. It tells of sea monsters, angels, demons, humans and gods. of Love stories and wars. Of Dragons and unicorns. Of paradise and paradise lost. It includes the law code of an ancient civilization and the speeches of itinerant teachers and philosophers.

The Bible is written in ancient languages to people in ancient cultures on the other side of the world from us. It's easy to see how the divine beauty and life giving instruction could be lost in translation.

Sometimes well intentioned people get some strange ideas as they try to understand this book. Others twist scripture to manipulate and intentionally cause harm. Scripture says there are those who are always learning, but never able to arrive at the truth. There are those who, regardless of intention, are deceived and go on deceiving others. And there are those left injured in their wake.

Yet, these writings, if taken at their word, are both divine and human. They're inspired by God and written by master storytellers, poets, and linguistic visionaries. God, in his divine power, partnered with humanity to write, arrange, compile and preserve The Bible throughout history so that we could understand His purpose for our lives.

2 Timothy 3:16 says: All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. But we have to ask ourselves, how are the words in this strange book relative in this modern world?

Most of us intuitively realize that we should pay attention to scriptures, that there is life to be found in these pages, but the journey can seem intimidating. Which of these nuggets of truth should get the biggest priority? What about these passages that seemingly contradict? What about teachings that seem outdated or overridden?

It's really been hitting me lately that I'm old. I know you're thinking, Dylan you're only 44 that's not that old... at least that's what I tell myself you're thinking... and you might be right, but so much has changed in these last 35 years that our world is unrecognizable from the world when I was a kid. If my 10 year old self would have had any idea that we could walk around with all the knowledge of the internet in our pockets, my brain would have exploded. I was a complete nerd as a kid... ok, I still am.

Back then, one of my favorite things in the world was the encyclopedia britannica. I wanted a set so badly. Some of you might remember when encyclopedia salesmen would come door to door. They would sell you all the knowledge in the world in 140lbs of books for the price of a decent used car. I begged for a set, but there was no chance my family could afford to buy one. So you can imagine how excited I was when my grandfather updated his set and gave us his old one. I spent hours reading that encyclopedia. If any random question about the world came into my mind, I'd run to the bookshelf, find the index and read all the outdated facts about that random

question and walk away satisfied. It was glorious. I was so full of knowledge, or so I thought. At some point in that journey, my dad realized he didn't need to answer any of my incessant questions anymore. Before I could finish asking he'd interrupt with a loud, "just look it up".

Fast forward a few years and an encounter with Jesus, and I wound up in Springfield at Central Bible College. My life's aim had been switched from engineering to ministry, but I was just as nerdy. For my first Bible class, one of my required books was a massive Bible Concordance. A list of all the words in the Bible and where to find verses that had those words. I was like a kid in a candy store. Now I could nerd out on this Jesus encyclopedia! I remember just thinking up random questions about the world, going to my trusty concordance looking it up. I would read a verse or two and walk away satisfied with my newfound God knowledge. And that's the way I engaged with the Bible for many years. I'm pretty sure my Bible teachers tried to help me learn a better way, but I was too busy looking up verses with my concordance. You can take the nerd out of the library, but you can't take the library out of the nerd.

The problem came when I began to notice some of my concordance cross-referencing was coming up crosswired. I'd go to search up some God fact, or look for some Bible life rule and I'd come up with things that seemed to contradict. Jesus condemns calling someone a

fool but then calls the rich barn builder a fool? That doesn't make sense. Speaking of fools, why does Proverbs simultaneously say not to answer a fool but also to be sure to answer the fool?

Worse yet, my lived experience sometimes didn't seem to make sense in light of scripture. I thought the Bible says "I've never seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging" I'm trying to do right, why is all my money gone? If the steps of the righteous are ordered by God, why did he lead me into this terrible situation? I thought his plans were to prosper me and not to harm me, to give me hope and future. I thought by Jesus' stripes we are healed. I began to be disillusioned, not with Jesus or faith, but with the instruction book, the God encyclopedia must be an outdated version. So my enthusiasm for the Bible waned. I still read it, but it was more of a drudge. I thought there was some secret to understanding it I just couldn't get.

It was years later that a teacher helped me understand the Bible isn't an encyclopedia of the Divine. It is an epic story of God's promise and plan to redeem His creation from the chaos and darkness it was plunged back into as a result of sin. It is the story of God's chosen people who fail to hold up their end of the covenant with God. It's the story of a new heavenly Kingdom that Jesus brought to earth that is here now, but also not yet.

Picking out a fact or rule out of this epic story doesn't make sense. It doesn't do the story justice. It's like picking up a concordance from Lord of the Rings and reading a line or two to understand Frodo, or Sam, or any of the other characters. It would simply be missing the point.

We often quote the verse in 2 Timothy about how profitable scripture is, but sometimes we miss the aim. When you read it in context, you'll see that Paul warns Timothy about those folks we talked about earlier. The ones who are always learning but never knowing the truth, the ones who are deceived and deceive others. And then he tells Timothy what the sacred scriptures do. Let's read it again, but start one verse earlier.

You have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to **make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus**. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God[a] may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The Bible isn't designed to be pulled apart into individual verses where we pick some of our favorites. It's a story to be read, to be studied, to be meditated on. As we do, we begin to see our story in His story. We begin to become wise. The scriptures often give us direct answers to

life's big questions, but more often, over years of reading and meditating, the scriptures make us wise. Wise in the way of Jesus.

Just like exercise is better with a partner, reading and gaining wisdom from the Bible doesn't happen in isolation. We need each other to stir us up out of bed. To encourage us, to spot us when we're doing heavy lifting. The Bible was written to be read together in community. Both the old and new testaments are filled with instructions for large portions to be read aloud together. Our individual reading should be matched with discussion with a few companions along the way. As we approach the Bible in community, the Holy Spirit will speak to us and through us to help guide us into the truth. The same Spirit that breathed-out the scriptures through human partners will breathe life into the pages of the Bible for us as we read. He will guide us into truth. Scripture for us can be a stream of life giving water. Making us wise to faith in Jesus. Along the way God will heal us, and we might begin to understand what it means to delight in his instruction.

Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man

 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;

but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree
planted by streams of water
that yields its fruit in its season,
and its leaf does not wither.
In all that he does, he prospers.

The wicked are not so,
but are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.