

As part of our **5 Reasons Why** series we're trying out different options for Hub discussion. You can either talk through some of the issues and ideas raised by the talk, or take the time to discuss reading the Bible.

Word Up

Getting the most out of the Bible

Where are you coming from?

- What's your experience of the Bible been so far?
- What are the biggest issues you have with reading or understanding the Bible?
- Is the Bible a big part of your life or more of a closed book?

What Gives?

The term Bible comes from the Greek word, 'biblos', which simply means, 'The Book'. But isn't so much one book as it is a library of books. Yet this collection of history, poetry, letters, biography, meditation and song, written by over 40 disparate authors over a period of 16 centuries, comes together remarkably into one whole.

Its claim of itself is that it is penned by humans, but inspired by God. More than that, it's alive, active and able to impact us in fresh ways and lead us deeper into a relationship with God Himself.

For the Jesus follower, the Bible is spiritual sustenance, an essential resource for anyone who wants to live a godly life.

The Key

Read 2 Timothy 3.14-17

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, **15** and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, **17** so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There's nothing magical about the Bible. The words don't necessarily have power in themselves. But if we engage with Scripture 'through faith in Christ Jesus' - that is, in relationship with Jesus and guided by his Spirit - then it can make us wise (skilled and capable) for salvation.

Three things can happen when we engage with Scripture by faith:

1. Meet Up

First off, God-inspired Scripture is useful for teaching. In other words, we meet God in the pages of Scripture. We get to learn about His nature, His character and His heart towards us. In fact, Jesus said that all Scripture was essentially about him (John 5.39). It's foreshadowing, commentary, explanation, illustration, metaphor

and ultimately eye witness accounts about Jesus himself. Reading Scripture is the best way of getting to know God, as revealed in Christ.

But as with all teaching in the Christian life, the emphasis is on obedience and life change, not simply education and understanding. Jesus commanded his followers to help people become disciples by 'teaching them to obey' (Matthew 28.20). Biblical teaching has to impact and inform our real lives.

2. Clean Up

Secondly, Paul told Timothy that the Bible was useful for 'rebuking and correcting'. In other words, it cleans us up. Rebuking happens when Scripture shines a light on our failings and wrongs, and allows us to see them with clarity for what they are. Correcting then helps us change, grow and break free of unhelpful patterns of behaviour.

So rather than a rule book to make us feel bad about our shortcomings, the Bible acts as a powerful agent for change and cleansing, bringing us wholeness and freedom. The Psalmist said this, 'I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you' (Psalm 119.11). Internalising Scripture into our hearts and minds ultimately produces a purity of life and conscience.

3. Grow Up

Finally, Paul says that Scripture is useful for 'training in righteousness'. It's like a spiritual workout that develops skills and patterns of life in us, a regime that pushes us to be the best we can possibly be. The Bible equips us for good works, making us the kind of Christ followers that are able to effect change in the world and bring God's Kingdom to bear.

Without the constant, Spirit-inspired input of Scripture into our lives, it's impossible for us to be anything but weak and immature in our faith. As Peter says:

'Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation' (1 Peter 2.2).

Discussion

- How easy or hard do you find it to get closer to God through Scripture? Have you ever had an experience of understanding Jesus more as you've read the Bible?
- What do you think it means to read Scripture with 'faith in Christ Jesus'?
- Have you ever had the experience of having Scripture come alive to you, suddenly seeming incredibly relevant or powerful?
- What's the biggest barrier to you developing a devotional habit around reading the Bible regularly?

What Next?

Interacting with the Bible is supposed to be a Spiritual experience - alive, personal and transcendent. Jesus promised that, in his physical absence, the Holy Spirit Himself would lead us and guide us into all truth (John 16.13).

Before we ever read a word of Scripture, we should ask the Holy Spirit to guide us into truth and to help us meet Jesus, through faith.

Here are some helpful questions to think through whenever you read the Bible:

- What does this passage say?
- What did it mean there and then?
- What does it mean here and now?
- Why did God include this in the Bible?
- What do I need to **change** in my life?
- What do I need to ask **forgiveness** for?
- What **promise** or truth can I take hold of?
- What do I need to **thank** God for?
- What can I **learn** about God from this?

Goals for the week:

- Make sure you've got hold of a modern translation of the Bible that works for you. Even better, get an app for your phone or tablet. (Check out youversion.com)
- Find a Bible reading plan or a Devotional Guide. (Bible apps are positively great for this). Having a bit of structure for your Bible reading is really helpful.
- Try to set aside a regular time and place where you can read for a few minutes, with as few distractions as possible.
- Before you read, pray and ask God to open your eyes to His truth.
- After you read, pray and ask God to help you apply His truth to your life.
- Try to 'chew over' a particular verse or thought from your reading during the day. We call this, meditation, and it's a way of internalising Scripture.
- Don't sweat it. There's no pressure to read massive chunks of Scripture. Like most things in life, it's consistency, rather than intensity that's the key.
- If you get stuck on something - ask a friend.