

“Read the Bible Because...” // Deuteronomy 30:11–21 // START 2

Big week: Baptism at the end

START series

There was a somewhat popular book that came out a few years ago called *The Year of Living Biblically*. It's not a Christian book—in fact the author is a Jewish-born agnostic, who says, “I'm officially Jewish, but I'm Jewish in the same way that Olive Garden is an Italian restaurant.” He lives in Manhattan, and for an entire year he attempts to follow every rule of the Bible as literally as possible. He reads the entire Bible for a month and writes down every single directive that he finds, big or small... which includes big things like the Ten Commandments but also lesser-known Old Testament laws for diet and dress.

As you can imagine, the outcome is pretty interesting... for example,

- Leviticus says that men should leave the edges of their beards unshaven, so this guy stops shaving and ends up with a massive beard that makes him look like a member of ZZ Top.
- He stops wearing clothes made of any mixed fibers
- He refuses to shake hands with women who might be ceremonially unclean; (awkward: you got on a short skirt, I bet you're unclean)
- And (this was one of my favorites), he tries to fling tiny pebbles at people without them noticing in order to stone adulterers.
- For a whole year: This whole process almost drove his poor wife crazy.

Now, there are, of course, massive problems with his approach... but it epitomizes for me a lot of how people feel about the Bible. They struggle to read and apply it. In a recent article I read, 56% of Americans say that they believe the Bible is inspired and inerrant, yet only 19% read it on a regular basis. In other words: *“Yes, I believe that this book has all I need to guide me in life, and that it comes directly from God! But no, I don't read it.”*¹

Let me play a little bad cop/good cop pastor.

Bad cop:

- *Girls*: Many of you have read the entire Twilight series or Hunger Games series but you have never read the Bible all the way through. Do you really believe it is the Word of God?
- *Guys*: Some of you run 3 fantasy football teams with every stat of every player running through your head—yet you couldn't quote me 5 verses from Scripture on parenting and couldn't find the book of Isaiah in your Bible without a table of contents. How can you possibly look me in the face and tell me you believe it is the Word of God?

That's bad cop. Now, **good cop**. Let me try to understand why many of you don't read it:

- Not interesting
- I forget
- I don't understand it

¹ <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/slices/study-there-are-just-many-bible-skeptics-regular-bible-readers>

- I'm too busy. In a world where everything has to fight for relevance in your life, the Bible doesn't make the cut.
- Pastor will explain to me all that I need to know.
- Some of you feel about it like you do the terms and conditions on the new Apple Software: page after page; accept.

In this sermon I want to show you why it is so important, why you need to read it daily, and how to go about getting the most out of it.

Deut 30: Moses has been preaching a 30-chapter sermon to the people. In chapters 29 and 30, he comes to the climactic conclusion of that sermon, and makes 3 points:

1. Read the Bible as if your life depended on it (30:15–18)

[15] "See, I have set before you today life and death... [16] If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you today, by loving the LORD your God, by walking in his ways.... then you shall live and multiply, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land... [17] But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, [18] I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish.

Two things are being taught here: **the ultimate stability of each part of your life depends on how well you know God's word for that area.**

- Jesus described it like building a house on two different foundations. A solid foundation and one of sand. The houses are the same, but when the storms come, which they inevitably do, the house on the sandy foundation falls apart; the one on the rock survives. Many of you have lives that look great now, in great weather. But you are not equipped to weather the storms of doubt, or tragedy, or death or loneliness and depression... And when those seasons come, you will crumble. For some of you, that's happening right now.
- I think you can extrapolate that principle and apply it into various areas of your life. The stability of each part of your life depend on how well it is founded upon the Word of God. Your vocation. Your attitude toward marriage or dating. Toward your money. Toward retirement. Toward sex. Toward your health and eating and physical fitness. The stability of every part of your life is determined by how well it is anchored into the Word of God.
- I think of it like *Jenga*... My son loves that game. Each block you remove... makes the structure crumble.
- I am raising four children—I want them to learn the Bible. That's one of my greatest passions—is that you parents would take responsibility to teach your kids the Bible.
- And maybe they won't grow up knowing everything there is to know about Timberlake or LeBron, but if they can talk their way through Timothy and Lamentations, I'll be happy.

Here's the second thing: it's more than just stability that is being promised, as if this was just a practical "how to" guide book—the blessing and cursing of God is being offered. Lives that are submitted to God's authority and anchored in God's word are blessed; lives that are not are cursed.

He is even clearer in chapter 29:

[19] "Beware lest there be... one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.'... [20] The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven.
(Deuteronomy 29:18-20 ESV)

Would you reflect for a minute about how important the Bible is to you?

- *If I offered you 500K to never touch the Bible again, hear it, read it, talk about it, or even think about it, would you do it? Why do you not devour it now?*

The problem is not that you don't know it's important, you just don't take steps to *do* anything about that! I think of it like this:

- EBOLA (or Nic Cage)

You have to have the discipline of getting it in!

- When Satan attacked Jesus, he quoted Scripture. *What will your kids come up with when Satan attacks them?* You say, "Well, of course Jesus wrote Scripture, he wrote it..." The NT says that Jesus was not born with Scripture memorized, he had to learn it, like the rest of it. Jesus went to AWANA too... and he finished every book and stuck around afterward for extra credit.

It's not your understanding of how important God's word is that helps you or your kids; it's what you do with that understanding.

2. Read the Bible because God has not hidden what he wants us to know (30:11–14)

[11] "For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. [12] It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' [13] Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' [14] But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it.

A lot of people feel like you can't possibly hope to understand the Bible, there are so many interpretations... And, I agree, there are some verses that are hard to understand:

- Ecc 7:28: not one good woman
- Jer 13:1-2: the Lord told me to buy a loin cloth, put it on, and never wash it
- Nahum 3:5: I will lift up your skirt and show your nakedness to the nations
- Haggai 1:15: "On the four and twentieth day of the six month of Darius the king."
- Ecc. 9:8: always wear nice clothes and a little perfume!

So yes, I understand. But look at what God is saying about his word here. It is "not too hard." The understanding is not way up in heaven, out of your reach, or beyond the sea, in another culture, so that you can't understand it.

- I've heard people say that we are so culturally bound we can't hope to understand it—all we do is use it to affirm our cultural biases. But look at what he says: it's here. It's plain. The meaning is in your mouth and heart.² He's not talking to the priests or the academics when he says that, he's talking to people
- I've heard some say it's so mysterious we can't possibly hope to be certain about its meaning.
 - McLaren: *Clarity is overrated... shock, obscurity, playfulness, and intrigue stimulate more thought than clarity.* He endorses what he calls "the hermeneutics of humility" which means that the humble person says he's never quite sure what it says. To be certain about anything is proud.

² See, for example, Stanley Hauerwas in *Unleashing the Scripture: Freeing the Bible from Captivity to America* or Matthew Paul Turner's approach to our ability to understand the Bible in *America's God*

- Donald Miller at UNC: “That’s what I believe, for now.”³
- *That’s not how the Bible talks about itself.* Moses says that what you need to know is accessible, and clear.
- Jesus was asked a lot of questions during his earthly ministry, and not once did he or the apostles ever say, “You know, I understand why you are confused. The Old Testament is a muddled mess on this issue.” Jesus’ response was always, “Haven’t you read? It’s clear in the Scriptures, and you are responsible to know what’s in there, and what it means.” At least 6 times, in the midst of an argument, Jesus says to his opponents, “Have you not read?” suggesting that if they had just known the Scriptures better, they would not be making the mistake they are making.⁴

Postmodern people say that you can’t know the Scriptures because they are ambiguous--God has not spoken plainly. But, in truth, God *has* spoken plainly; they just don’t like what he said.

3. Don’t just read the Bible; encounter the Person within the Bible (30:19–20)

Right at the end of this sermon, Moses’ takes a surprising turn in his words:

[19] ...Today I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, [20] loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast *to him*, for *he is your life...*” (Deuteronomy 30:19–20 ESV)

- Here is why I say it is an odd turn of the text: Up until this point, Moses has been saying “obedience to the word” will be our life. And then, almost inexplicably, he switches to say “God” is our life. See it? He doesn’t say, “Hold fast to his word,” but “hold fast to *him*.”
- So, which is it, that is “our life”? It is obedience to God’s word, or God?

You say, “I don’t understand the distinction.” Is your life dependent on how well you obey the words of this book?

Well, in one sense, yes... that’s what he’s said.

But here’s the dilemma: do any of us keep it sufficiently to live?

- Paul said, “We have all together become unprofitable. There is none righteous, no not one.”
- David said: “If you marked iniquities, who could stand?”

So, as Moses comes to the conclusion of his sermon, he starts to point to something else. An even greater hope than our obedience. God himself, who will himself be our life and salvation.

Now, ready to have your mind blown? **Romans 10:5–10:**

[5] For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. [6] But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) [7] “or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). [8] But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim);

³ Rob Bell in *Velvet Elvis*: theology is like a trampoline we spring off of into new spiritual experiences.

⁴ See John MacArthur sermon on Matthew 16:16–18 and Kevin DeYoung *Taking God at His Word* 65

[9] because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. [10] For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. [11] For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame." (Romans 10:5-11 ESV)

This word, that Moses keeps talking about, is embodied in the gospel. The gospel that declares that Christ has become our righteousness and our life and offered himself to us to be received as a gift.

The primary purpose of the Scriptures is not to give us a list of assignments, but to tell us about an offer of grace and salvation to be received as a gift. It's not a list of tasks of what he demands that *we* do *for* him, but the glorious good news of what *he* has done *for* us. More than marching orders of what we are supposed to do, it offers us relationship with the living God who is our life and hope.

Most American Christians struggle to read the Bible because they see it like an assignment—another thing we put on a checklist to earn God's favor. And those kinds of things always end up feeling like drudgery; monotonous religious rituals.

Other Christians struggle to understand it because they look at it as a how-to manual. I need to know "how to handle my husband when he annoys me" or "how to decide which job to take." But then you get into it you find a genealogy, or a list of sacrifices, or the dimensions of the Temple, or page after page of histories of characters whose lives are of a dubious moral character and from a time often very much unlike our own... and we throw up our hands and say, "What's this got to do with anything?"

"But when you see that Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, that he is the Word, the Lord, the Son who reveals his Father, the promised Hope, the true Temple, the true Sacrifice, the great High Priest, the ultimate King, then you can read, not so much asking 'What does this mean for me, right now?' but 'What do I learn here of Christ?' Knowing that Bible is about him and not me means that, instead of reading the Bible obsessing about me, I can gaze on him. And as through the pages you get caught up in the wonder of his story, you find your heart strangely pounding for him in a way you never would have if you had treated the Bible as a book about you."⁵

The Bible will give you a lot of practical instructions on marriage, child-raising, the workplace (that's part of why we teach it up here 52 weeks a year) but the main thing you need is a heart change—to be reunited to God and have your heart set aright, back in love to God. The way to life and peace is not to figure out how to do everything exactly right; the way to life and peace is to know him. This is life, Jesus says, "abundant life," to know God.

Learning "five steps to a good marriage" is not going to do you nearly as much good as learning the 10,000 steps God took when he ran toward you to save you at the cross. Learning that, believing that, will break your pride and make you a gracious person, which is the primary problem in your marriage anyway. Feeling the weight of God's love for you will make it so that what happens to you at your job, or with your health, is not devastating to you, because you have something greater than health and a good job, *fellowship with the Almighty God* whom you can call Father and friend!

So, when you read the Bible, don't read it to gain favor with God (you can't get closer to him than he's already made you in Christ); don't read it as a book of "how-to's" for your life, read it as a presentation of a glorious Savior to get to know. Read it as a page after page of declarations of the Father's love for you, and the way he

⁵ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 87–88

came to earth to take live among us, take our sin penalty by dying in our place, and restore us to full fellowship with God.

- C. S. Lewis said that studying the Bible is like staring into a peephole and suddenly having someone stare back at you.
- Or I've heard it described like one of those Magic-Eye puzzles where you try to find the hidden face in the picture of the jungle. Once you find the hidden face, "you can never see that picture the same again. It's not a mass of unconnected dots; it's a Man.
- Lewis says, "Don't just read the Bible; let it read you." Experience in it the living, moving, Son of God.

Conclusion: Two things

A choice

- Will we choose life? A *Choose Your Own Adventure* book
- Act on it—start reading the Bible! Action steps.

A burden:

For us: "It's not across the sea." But for many, it is.

- Friend in a lawsuit with technology that could help people. Trying to milk out every penny. What is frustrating... we're not being prevented! Cure for cancer in our pocket. Do something!

Bullpen:

I've heard it described... Nuclear reactor... every single line. This book is life and death for you, your kids... It's the only thing given from heaven about how to know God and how to build your life on the rock.

Read the Bible as if your life depended on it

Read the Bible because God has not hidden what he wants us to know/made clear what he wants us to know

Don't just read the Bible; let the Bible read you // Read the Bible as Jesus' story

Gives life, like he speaks in Genesis! Life to our death... The ROCK

Not addressed "dear occupant," but the Spirit of God inserts your name and makes it specific to you. It's like a sword. Not dead on the ground, but alive because Somebody's using it.

Reading the Bible is like figuring out one of those puzzles where you try to find the hidden face in the picture of the jungle. Once you find the hidden face, "you can never see that picture the same again. It's not just a jungle; it's a man. It's a little like seeing the 'man in the moon.' But in the case of Scripture, he's really there—though he's not just a man, he's God. Every word becomes part of his face, tells you about *him*. You meet *him* now when you read." ("The Dynamite in Prayer," Peter Kreeft)

- 10% of everything Jesus says is quoted from scripture. At every turn he quotes; whenever he is in pain, he quotes. Whenever he wants to explain something, he quotes. Why? Because he was Scripture. Stab Jesus in the heart and he bleeds Scripture.

God gives his Word with authority

- "In a world that prizes the new, the progressive, and the evolved, we need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever ([Heb. 13:8](#)). And since he remains the same, so does his truth.
- "In order to be a Christian you don't have to believe every word of the Bible. To be a consistent Christian you do, though."⁶

God has made his Word clear

God gives us Jesus in the Word

The Word is sufficient

The Word is accessible

- "But in order to make his charge effective, Moses must demonstrate that he is not asking the people to do something that is impossible. Moses reassures the people that God's word is not beyond them." (62)
- God communicates to reveal, not to obscure.
- "What God wanted from his people was not hidden far off in the sky or stored far away beyond the sea. The law can be on our lips. . . . The word of God is near, not far, right in front of you, ready to be understood and obeyed." (63)

⁶ Tim Keller sermon on 1 Peter 1:10-12

- “Of the four attributes of Scripture, [sufficiency] may be the one that evangelicals forget first. If authority is the liberal problem, clarity the postmodern problem, and necessity the problem for atheists and agnostics, then sufficiency is the attribute most quickly doubted by rank-and-file churchgoing Christians.” (43)
- **Plato** (@ 10:00, Tommy Nelson, Bibliology 1, MP3): *“We must lay hold of the best of human opinion, in order that being born by it as if by a raft, we may sail over the dangerous sea of life...unless we can find a stronger boat, or some sure word of God, which can more surely and safely carry us.”* Actual: (said Simmias to Socrates) *For he should persevere until he has attained one of two things: either he should discover or learn the truth about them; or, if this is impossible, I would have him take the best and most irrefragable of human notions, and let this be the raft upon which he sails through life—not without risk, as I admit, if he cannot find some word of God which will more surely and safely carry him.* Plato in *The Apology, Phaedo and Crito* para 300–399 (<http://www.bartleby.com/2/1/34.html>)

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The Word tells us about Jesus

- Obedience is our life? vs. 20, The Lord is our life.
- Believe it, and then read it as about him.
- Many read it out of guilt; something for which God gives us favor, rather than as a revelation of Jesus Christ our salvation.
- When we read it as quick lessons for us... what we find is a genealogy, or a list of sacrifices, dimensions of the Temple, or page after page of histories of characters whose lives are dubious and troubling from a time often very much unlike our own...
- “But when you see that Christ is the subject of all the Scriptures, that he is the Word, the Lord, the Son who reveals his Father, the promised Hope, the true Temple, the true Sacrifice, the great High Priest, the ultimate King, then you can read, not so much asking ‘What does this mean for me, right now?’ but ‘What do I learn here of Christ?’ Knowing that Bible is about him and not me means that, instead of reading the Bible obsessing about me, I can gaze on him. And as through the pages you get caught up in the wonder of his story, you find your heart strangely pounding for him in a way you never would have if you had treated the Bible as a book about you.”⁷
- Keller, “American Christians read it for a shot in the arm. That’s why the OT doesn’t make sense to them. Better to approach the Bible as one long story about Jesus; the story as a whole nourishes your soul. It’s a story about how there is a great God worthy of great glory that you sinned against and he has come to rescue you.”
- “The moralistic person obeys the law out of fear; the relativistic person is indifferent to the law; the Christian sees the beauty of the One that fulfilled the law and falls in love.” (Keller, message on Psalm 19)
- Mark twain claimed to have a recurring dream about a Bible crushing him under its weight. If you read the Bible moralistically, that’s what you’ll end up like.

The Word is life

- Scripture makes wise the simple! We all look back 15 years and think, “I am a fool.” The Word of God can keep you from that.
- Heart: for Hebrews, seat of memory.⁸

What to do:

⁷ Michael Reeves, *Delighting in the Trinity*, 82–83.

⁸ Paul Barker *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy* 189

- For me, Bible is the first and ultimate of my big rocks. Everything else flows out of it. My relationship with God is the greatest gift I can give my family, my friends, you... People say, "I don't have enough time." It's like eating. If you don't eat, then you'll die, and then you'll really not have the time to get things done. You're too busy not to spend time nourishing your soul in God's word.
- Our new reading plan
- REAP

Video: How tragic that we take for granted the very thing that is life to us?

DeYoung:

We need to hear God's word more than we need to defend God's word

"Defending the doctrine of inerrancy may seem like a fool's errand to some and a divisive shibboleth to others, but, in truth, the doctrine is at the heart of our faith. To deny, disregard, edit, alter, reject, or rule out anything in God's word is to commit the sin of unbelief. . . . Finding a halfway house where some things in the Bible are true and other things (as we have judged them) are not is an impossibility. This kind of compromised Christianity, besides flying in the face of the Bible's own self-understanding, does not satisfy the soul or present to the lost the sort of God they need to meet." (37-38)

"Surely... we are wise to believe about the Scripture whatever Jesus believed about the Scripture" (95).

"The dual authorship of Scripture does not necessitate imperfections any more than the two natures of Christ mean our Savior must have sinned." (35)

"In the Gospels we see Jesus reference Abel, Noah, Abraham, Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaac and Jacob, manna in the wilderness, the serpent in the wilderness, Moses as the lawgiver, David and Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, Elijah and Elisha, the widow of Zerephath, Naaman, Zechariah, and even Jonah, never questioning a single event, a single miracle, or a single historical claim. Jesus clearly believed in the historicity of biblical history." (102)

"You can think too highly of your interpretations of Scripture, but you cannot think too highly of Scripture's interpretation of itself. You can exaggerate your authority in handling the Scriptures, but you cannot exaggerate the Scriptures' authority to handle you. You can use the word of God to come to wrong conclusions, but you cannot find any wrong conclusions in the word of God." (39-40)

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"If we learn to read the Bible down (into our hearts), across (the plot line of Scripture), out (to the end of the story), and up (to the glory of God in the face of Christ), we will find that every bit of Scripture is profitable for us." (52)

"In a world that prizes the new, the progressive, and the evolved, we need to be reminded that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever ([Heb. 13:8](#)). And since he remains the same, so does his truth.

Keller:

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about how there is a great God worthy of great glory that you sinned against and he has come to rescue you."

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Other Notes:

Like Jenga. Each block you remove makes the structure crumble

- Your temper?
- Your dating life?

Ladder with uneven foundation

Tower of Pisa: Pisa means marsh

Unexpected

- Tony Evans tells story about being on a cruiseliner as the guest speaker in the worst storm of his life. Things flying around. Called captain. "This boat was built with this storm in mind." Your salvation was built with this storm in mind.
- Punching bag is because the lead in the bottom is heavier than the air in the top so it always assures that you will come back

Not addressed "dear occupant," but the Spirit of God inserts your name and makes it specific to you. It's like a sword. Not dead on the ground, but alive because Somebody's using it.

Reading the Bible is like figuring out one of those puzzles where you try to find the hidden face in the picture of the jungle. Once you find the hidden face, "you can never see that picture the same again. It's not just a jungle; it's a man. It's a little like seeing the 'man in the moon.' But in the case of Scripture, he's really there—though he's not just a man, he's God. Every word becomes part of his face, tells you about *him*. You meet *him* now when you read." ("The Dynamite in Prayer," Peter Kreeft)

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You might say, 'I am an ardent democrat.' You friend says, 'that's fine, but I want to know you as a republican.' You say, 'that's fine, but you are probably never going to know me.'" If you don't let the bible tell you the bad

news and things you don't want to hear, how will you ever be able to accept it's good news, which you don't want to hear?

The progression in Judges. Just read it as if it is about us... appears like Aesop's fables, teaching somewhat dubious moral lessons

- Deborah got the whole army
 - Gideon only got 300
 - David defeated Goliath as a man who shouldn't even be counted as a whole.
 - Why this progression? It is because the bible isn't simply about judges. Judges is about Jesus.
 - It's about God saying, 'I can deliver not just through many, and not just through few, but through one. Through that weakling's victory I can give you triumph.
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- The Emperor Diocletian tried in 303 to burn every Bible, as did the Emperor Trajan. They failed. As Tertullian said, "The blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church."
 - French skeptic Francois Voltaire said during the so-called "Enlightenment" that within 100 years of his death no one would even remember the Bible. Today in his house sits a Bible-printing press.
 - The Protestant Reformation had as one of its goals getting the Bible into the hands of the people. The Roman church did all they could to prevent that from happening, martyring whole groups of people to stamp out the Reformation. *Today a monument stands in Europe, to a group of persecuted Christians of Reformation called the Huguenots, who at one point were thought to be stomped out: "Pound away you evil hands, the hammer breaks, the anvil stands."*
 - Today... Bart Ehrman says that no honest person can believe the Bible...