



Just Read to Live

by Mike Ashcraft (03.24.13)

BOTTOM LINE:

You can't hide God's word in your heart without getting it in your head.

The Bible defines the most important matters of what it means to be human. It delves into how we should treat each other as well as ourselves. It doesn't shy away from subjects like marriage, money, death, worry, trust and truth, but instead tackles them head on. The Bible deals with the most controversial topics with its cohesive and consistent message regarding sin, judgment, salvation, and redemption. It has the answer to life.

Yet, we hesitate to explore its content. This is where the Just Read series comes into play. It is our hope that over the next few weeks you will gain some insight on the art of reading and understanding the Bible. For those who are unsure or doubt the Bible's claims, right now, all we want you to do is "just read" the Bible and trust the process. For those who wonder if they'll ever experience intimacy with God, we want you to "just read" the Bible and trust the process.

When you read Scripture and you have questions or concerns, you begin to doubt. The time has come to add a new category to doubt. When you read the Bible and find stuff hard to believe, instead of doubting we urge you to think and continue to engage. God is not afraid of your hesitation or doubt. He welcomes the dialogue and pursuit.

There are few things I enjoy more than a cold and rainy Sunday afternoon. Our normal family routine involves cuddling up underneath a few blankets with our hot cocoa and reading a good book. Today is one of those days.

My oldest daughter is memorizing a poem for an upcoming school talent show. She's been studying the lines for the past week or so. When she first attempted to recite the lines there were numerous pauses and plenty of "ums" along the way. We watched as she grew frustrated that the words didn't sink into her brain as quickly as she would've liked.

Yet, she didn't give up. She just kept reading and over time something amazing happened. Eventually, she wasn't just reciting a poem, she was saying each word with the proper emotion. Not only did the words seem to flow from her lips, she understood the heart of the poem. Another form of insight was taking place for my youngest daughter who is in kindergarten. She's learning to read and beginning to put sentences together. You couldn't help but smile as you watched her eyes get big as she began to make sense of the words on the page. A new world was about to open up for her. By just reading, they both gained insight.

Over the past four weeks, we've challenged you to "just read" when it comes to your interactions with the Bible. Instead of keeping God's word at a distance, we desired for you to give it an opportunity and just crack it opened. We trusted that God would speak through this process and your willingness to understand Him

KEY SCRIPTURE

Matthew 4:4

But he answered, "It is written, "'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

2 Timothy 3:16-17

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

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

1 Thessalonians 2:13

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

Psalms 119:11

I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.

Romans 1:28-32

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they *not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.*

better. We didn't want you to just read for information, but rather for transformation.

His Word can't do its work unless it's in your heart. But, you can't hide God's word in your heart without getting it in your head. Reading requires thinking. There is a collision that occurs when our perspective of how things are or should be collides with God's Truth. When we run smack into the Truth and the way we see things gets challenged, we typically do not respond by surrendering. But, when we collide with the Truth, as well as God's love and mercy, it changes us: how we see things, how we respond and how we walk.

However, without placing ourselves in an environment where God can begin the transformation process, our close encounter will never make it to our heart. Formation is the process by which our lives become an increasingly accurate expression of our true identity in Christ. We must allow what we read and experience to sink deeper. We live in a world where every encounter is good for our commentary. We make observations and state opinions about it, but at the end of the day, we actually do nothing about it.

Often we have no vision or plan for our growth. Instead we place our hope in circumstances to shape us into the image of Christ. This simply won't happen. You are either growing into what you were made to be or shrinking from it. We all drift towards becoming something. The choice facing us is whether we will be intentional or not about the formation process. The command in Romans 12:2 is to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. A renewed mind, a new way of seeing, is critical for us to offer ourselves to God and sacrifice our purposes for His. It requires submission to the Truth. In many ways, formation looks like a wrestling match.

Formation happens as a result of encounter. We must learn to surrender to the Truth in order to be shaped by God. This begins when you become increasingly more aware of what you are being formed into. We encounter His truth and love when we begin to see God as God. This shifts our focus off ourselves and towards God. A maturing vision of God shapes our own character, as our heart becomes His very own.

NOTES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Read the quote from John Piper? Would you consider yourself a "thinker"? Why or why not? How does your answer to this question influence your willingness to pursue God's truth and how it applies to your life?
- Read Matthew 4:4. What does it look like to live "on every word that comes from the mouth of God"? What roles does Scripture play in our ability to do so?
- Read Romans 1:28-32. How is our thinking affected by our sin? How does sin suppress the Truth?
- Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13. What is Paul, the author of this passage, wanting his readers to understand about the role of Scripture in their life?
- Read 2 Timothy 3:16-17. According to this passage, what does Scripture do for us? In what ways, does it equip us for every good work?
- Read Hebrews 4:12. Think of a time recently where God used Scripture to help you see your motives in a situation. How did God's Word enable you to discern your heart and its intentions?
- How has your approach to God's word changed over these past four weeks? What is the one thing that has challenged you the most during this series? What have you found to be the most encouraging?