



Peninsula City Church

Anchored

Reading Your Bible

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Reading Your Bible

Introduction

Q. Why do you read the Bible?

In a recent survey on Australian's reading the Bible, they rated the various states and territories. How do you think that Melbourne went? Well, we were sixth overall, with Sydney first and Brisbane second. Although Melbourne is the second-largest city in the country, we are sixth overall. Out of the 20 top cities in the country, Richmond and Cranbourne are one and two most Bible-minded cities in the country. It has been said that Aussies read their Bible less than Christ-followers from the US and the UK. The most popular passages for Aussies to read are the 'Sermon the Mount,' Matt 5-7, and 'Love' 1 Cor 13. Our top verses are Jn 3:16,

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16 NASB).

Plus Jer 29:11,

"For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope'" (Jer 29:11 NASB)."¹

While the essential word or topic is love

1. Biblical Literacy in Australia

Q. Are Aussies becoming biblically illiterate?

If we are talking about biblical literacy, then we need to know what it is all about. The limits of our investigation will be that of the Bible reading of the Australian church. So, what does biblical illiteracy mean? It has been said that,

"It describes the ability and motivation of people to read the Bible with sufficient understanding so that they can explain its basic meaning, having sufficient knowledge and skill to use resources that enable them to discern the basic meaning of a biblical text."²

It could realistically be asked, "Who has time to read the Bible anyway daily?" The reason for asking this is that the number one reason in the western world (Australia included) is that we do not enough time to read it.³ We are too busy to be able to find the time to be able to read it. Or else to be able to read it the way that we would like to.

Have we always had this problem of biblical illiteracy, or is it a recent issue? It has been stated in a survey that we have slipped somewhat in our relationship with biblical literacy as a nation. As a result,

"Biblical literacy is likely lower in Australia today than at any point since the convict era. General levels of familiarity with the Christian Scriptures are difficult to plot precisely. Still, studies of Bible reading habits, and data on various forms of Christian socialisation, indicate a significant decline in Australian's exposure to the Bible over the last half-century.

¹ "Bible Reading Not Dead In Australia." Social Analysis. McCrindle Research, 2014. https://2qean3b1jdd1s87812ool5ji-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/images/Bible-Reading-in-Australia_McCrindle-Research_Blog.pdf (26th February 2021).

² "What is 'Biblical Literacy' and Why is it Important?" <http://biblicalliteracy.nbseminary.ca/what-is-biblical-literacy-and-why-is-it-important/> (6th March 2021).

³ "Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year's Resolution." <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/> (5th March 2021).

A 1960 study found that nine in ten Australians had a Bible at home. It was rivalled only by a cookery book and a dictionary and far outstripped works by Shakespeare. Sixty-one per cent of Bible-owning Australians picked it up at least once a year. Thirty-eight per cent had read it within the previous two weeks. (Mind you, it seems that apart from the most regular churchgoers, most people read the Bible in a cursory manner, if at all.)

A 2002 survey found that 29% of Australian adults still read the Bible at least once a year, with 8% reading it frequently. In 2010, around 10% of Australian secondary students read the Bible weekly or more, and a further 15 to 20% browsed it occasionally.

Overall, though, since 1960, the proportion of annual Bible readers has dropped by half, and regular readers by three-quarters. In less than two generations, the proportion of Australians who never pick up a Bible for themselves has leapt to seven out of ten. The rising use of online Bibles and Bible apps may modify this picture, but 2013 data indicates that Australians read less of the Bible online than their counterparts in the UK or the US.”⁴

On this matter, it has also been said that,

“Biblical literacy is a rising issue in both Australia and the western world. It would seem that parents are not reading the Bible with their children, and in turn, children do not know how to read the Bible and understand it or use it as a vehicle for hearing God speak to them in their everyday life. In a recent survey conducted by Grow Ministries, 24% of all parents responding to the survey indicated that they never read the Bible with their children. 23% read once or twice a year; 22% read once or twice a month; with only 10% reading once or twice a week, and 19% reading most days.”⁵

People say that they are time-poor and so they do not have to read the Bible daily. Is that true for Aussies? It has been pointed out that,

“The Bible Society was saddened by research, which showed that only two in ten Aussie Christians read their Bible daily. Christians are saying they just don’t have the time. While lives are getting busier, attention span is getting shorter, and communication must happen within the span of an SMS, a Facebook post, or a Tweet of 140 characters. So, how can Christians be brought back to a book of over 700,000 words?”⁶

So, what could all this mean? Well, if less than half of all Australians (45%) own a Bible and less than 1 in 3 Generation Y’s (32%) own a Bible, then it is down on the previous generation. It needs to be asked,

- Where are we getting our values for life if we are not reading the Bible like previous generations?
- What are we teaching our children and grandchildren if not biblical truth?
- What does the future of Australia look like in light of what we have seen here?
- Does all of this mean that it is all doom and gloom moving forward?

⁴ “Why our declining biblical literacy matters.” <https://theconversation.com/why-our-declining-biblical-literacy-matters-94724#:~:text=A%202002%20survey%20found%20that,with%208%25%20reading%20it%20frequently.&text=In%20less%20than%20two%20generations,to%20seven%20out%20of%20ten>. (5th March 2021).

⁵ “Biblical literacy is a rising issue.” <https://www.growministries.org.au/2017/08/08/biblical-literacy-is-a-rising-issue/> (5th March 2021).

⁶ “Only 20% Australian Christians read Bible daily, new campaign helps to form better habits.” <https://christiantoday.com.au/news/only-20-australian-christians-read-bible-daily-new-campaign-helps-to-form-better-habits.html> (5th March 2021).

No, it does not. Especially since Jesus said that He would build His church, Matt 16:18, he has been doing that throughout history. He will continue to do so until He is finished. He said that His followers were to make followers of Him, Matt 28:19-20. At times throughout history, this has been done well and other times not so well. During each era, the day's people have had their challenges, and biblical illiteracy is one of ours today. Is the lack of time the real issue in reading our Bible? It has been suggested that,

“For starters, I think there are a lot of illegitimate excuses being thrown around out there. The worst one is: ‘I don't have time to read the Bible every day.’ Let's be honest: we're all busy. We all have a lot going on. The issue is not a lack of time but a lack of priorities.”⁷

“We will often neglect what we don't prioritize.”⁸

So, what can we do about it? Two areas have been suggested (more could be mentioned, but here two will do) that we can address immediately.

- One: Check our motives for reading the Bible.
- Two: See what the Bible has to say on the matter and choose whether we will do it or not.

2. What are your motives for reading the Bible?

Q. So, why bother reading the Bible anyway?

You would have had times when you sat down to read the Bible and honestly just struggled to read it. Or else you have read it and thought, what is it all about then. Maybe you have found that you do not have the time to read it with all that is happening in your day. Perhaps you do not understand what you are reading. It is all from another time and culture, and you simply cannot relate to what you are reading. We have all had times like this, and we have struggled to read it. You are not alone; it sometimes happens when we go to read the Bible. Then we can think, why bother reading it anyway?

I would ask right here, What are your motives for reading the Bible? That is, why do you read the Bible? Let us look at some of the possible motives that people have for reading it

A sobering statement relating to the decline of biblical literacy among Christians suggests,

“Perhaps the most obvious symptom of biblical disengagement is the diminishing level of biblical knowledge which the average Christian possesses today.”⁹

So, think about it for a minute; why do you read the Bible? Do you read the Bible from any of these following motives?

- We are reading it out of a sense of obligation or duty.
- We read from a sense of legalism; it is just what Christ-followers do.
- Out of a sense of fear of God or to make God happy.
- To gain status, respect or to impress others.

⁷ “I Don't Have Time to Read My Bible Every Day.” <https://displaythegospel.com/blog/2016/10/17/i-dont-have-time-to-read-my-bible-everyday> (6th March 2021).

⁸ “How to Prioritize Reading.” <https://www.crossway.org/articles/how-to-prioritize-reading/> (6th March 2021).

⁹ Marshall, Chris. “Re-engaging with the Bible in a Postmodern World”. *Stimulus: The New Zealand Journal of Christian Thought and Practice*, Vol. 15, No. 1, Feb 2007: 5-16. <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/INFORMIT.306481779059028> (5th March 2021).

- To bolster a hobbyhorse because you are a Bible bully and use it as a weapon.
- We read because someone tells us to do so.
- It is just for something to do.
- Etc...

If you read the Bible for any of these reasons, maybe your motives need to be checked. So, if it is not out of a loving relationship with your Heavenly Father, then you may need to recheck your motives. We need to do everything, even read our Bible out of this motivation. So, what does the Bible have to say on the matter of reading your Bible?

3. Some of the points which the Bible makes on the matter.

Q. Do we honestly expect God to speak to us when we read the Bible?

I wonder what we would do if we did not have the Bible. Since reading it is a significant way that we hear from God and see our real selves. Our Heavenly Father speaks to us through the Bible His Word.¹⁰

One of the reasons for reading the Bible is to practice what Jesus said in the greatest commandment to love God and others as we make godly choices in our lives.¹¹

³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And He said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” ³⁸ “This is the great and foremost commandment. ³⁹ The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ ‘On these two commandments depend on the whole Law and the Prophets (*the whole Hebrew Bible*)” (Matt 22:36-40 NASB)

Another reason is that it feeds our spirit. Jesus said on this matter,

“But He answered and said, ‘It is written, “Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God”” (Matt 4:4 NASB; cf. Deut 8:3).

Then there is another reason for reading the Word of God. That is, they are to be within us.

“You shall therefore impress these words of mine on your heart and on your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontals on your forehead” (Deut 11:18 NASB).

But how can we do this if we do not know what these words are and how we know them by reading them.

The Bible talks about His children speaking and meditating on His words. These things are to be put into practice, but if we do not know what they are, how can we do this very thing?

“This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success” (Josh 1:8 NASB).

“But their delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law, they meditate day and night” (Ps 1:2 NASB).

¹⁰ Issler, Klaus. *Living into the Life of Jesus*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 140.

¹¹ Strauss, Mark L. *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011), 53.

"I have more insight than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation" (Ps 119:99 NASB).

His Word can keep us from sin, but if we do not know this sin, how can it do this for us?

"Your word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against You" (Ps 119:11 NASB).

It is our guide to live well in this life.

"Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105 NASB).

One thing that Israel did continually was rebel against the Lord. They mostly chased after other gods of the nations around them; when they were told not to do this thing, He was angry with them. It can be seen in 2 Kings 22. We read that the Word of God had gotten lost with the temple's rubble that was in disarray. Then King Josiah found the Word of God and wanted to put it back into practice and in the life of Israel. It can be seen mostly in 2 Kings 22:10-13,

¹⁰ "Moreover, Shaphan the scribe told the king saying, 'Hilkiah the priest has given me a book.' And Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. ¹¹ And it came about when the king heard the words of the book of the law, that he tore his clothes. ¹² Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Micaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying, ¹³ Go, inquire of the LORD for me and the people and all Judah concerning the words of this book that has been found, for great is the wrath of the LORD that burns against us, because our fathers have not listened to the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us" (2 Kings 22:10-13 NASB).

We are to hear His Words and follow Him, but we are not reading His Words; how do we do this very thing?

"My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (Jn 10:27 NASB).

It was given to His own to make us ready for every good work, but how can we be equipped if it is not being read?

¹⁶ "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ that the person of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17 NASB).

If we are to share our faith, we need to know what the Bible says on various matters. How are we to make disciples and have any spiritual growth if we do not know what the Bible says?

"And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42 NASB).

"But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defence to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence" (1 Pet 3:15 NASB).

Some Concluding Thoughts

Q. Why do you read the Bible?

So, the matter of reading the Bible is an important one for all Christ-followers. However, it would appear to be more of a western issue from my reading on the matter. We seem to spend more time working and doing things that take up our time, and for many, there is no time left to read the Bible. It does not seem to be a priority for many people because if it were, then we would find the

time to read it. Interestingly, according to the Barna Group, most American adults desire to read the Bible more personally, although ironically, they do not do so.¹²

So, what can I do right now to address my Bible reading? As has already been suggested,

“Two areas have been suggested (there could be more mentioned, but here two will do) that we can address immediately.

- One: Check our motives for reading the Bible.
- Two: we have seen what the Bible has to say on the matter, so we need to choose whether we will do it or not.

The Lord, our God, delights in His own. It has been said that,

“The LORD, your God, is in your midst, A victorious warrior. He will exult over you with joy, He will be quiet in His love, He will rejoice over you with shouts of joy” (Zeph 3:17 NASB).

Wow, what a fantastic thing that He rejoices over His own. So, how do we respond to this amazing truth? The following is how we might respond in this loving relationship out of a desire to know him and love Him more.

Although many benefits could be mentioned, only one will be mentioned here. We need to see reading God’s word daily to hear what He has to say to us as a real joy. That is, we are hearing from the unlimited, almighty, immense, and incomprehensible God. Yet, he has given us the privilege to hear from Him daily. That is,

¹⁴ “I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts and regard Your ways. ¹⁶ I shall delight (Lit. *delight myself*) in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word... ¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great spoil.” (Ps 119:14-16,162 NASB).

So, how will we respond to reading His word that He has given us? Will we make it a relational priority to hear from him daily and do His will? It is up to us to choose to do this or not. As Moses said to Israel, listen to what the Word of God says to us today,

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity (Lit. *good*), and death and adversity (Lit. *evil*); ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you will not obey but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing, and the curse. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them” (Deut 30:15-20 NASB).

¹² “Bible Reading in 2017: A New Year’s Resolution.” <https://www.barna.com/research/bible-reading-2017-new-years-resolution/> (5th March 2021).