

The Living Word

By Pastor Alan Utting



'Because I am a Christian, therefore every day in which I do not penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of God's Word is a lost day for me.' Dietrich Bonhoeffer

For me the true heroes of the faith are those who over the centuries were cast into exile or who were burnt at the stake for translating the Bible into local languages. 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:16,17). It is disappointing that so many believers treat the Word lightly and never read it from one month to the next, when it is God's love letter to inspire, give wisdom and resist evil.

Bible Perspective

Psalm 119 gives multiple examples of how we benefit from reading the Word with an open heart.:

It is a blessing to us and empowers us to live a pure life. It preserves our life and gives good judgement. It shows God's unfailing love and provides strength and guidance. It is a refuge and a shield. It is the truth and is thoroughly trustworthy bringing peace and freedom. There is no other book like it!

Observations

1. Early in my ministry, a Senior Pastor often asked me, 'What is the Lord saying to you, Alan?' At first, I was intimidated, but I soon realised anyone can hear from God through prayerfully reading the Bible. Now, I sometimes ask others the same question, remembering that prayer is a two-way conversation.
2. Some surveys suggest that school teachers and pastors who pursue higher education may become less effective in their roles. While intellectual study is important, it should not replace devotional Bible reading. Still, Bible scholars with spiritual insight are a great asset and valuable for guiding others to Jesus.
3. Like many cultures, Jewish communities have a history of practising oral tradition by memorising substantial portions of Scripture. I was also encouraged as a child to commit Scripture to memory and I continue this practice for both spiritual enrichment and discipline. For instance, during my daily reading this morning, I focused on memorising: 'They do not fear bad news; they confidently trust in the Lord to care for them' (Psalm 112:7 NLT). When was the last time you engaged in this activity?
4. George Muller (1805 – 1898), an amazing man of faith states, 'The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul *happy in the Lord*.' (Source unknown). He did that by reading the Bible, mixed with the prayer of faith. No wonder he saw the miraculous hand of God at work. My separate article on 'Meditation' expands this approach. Develop this discipline of reading God's Word before your tasks of the day take over and distract you.
5. When Joshua prepared to conquer the Promised Land, God instructed him to 'Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful' (Josh 1:8). Relying on God's Word was crucial for

victory. Similarly, Paul emphasises the power of Scripture, describing the Word of God as 'the sword of the Spirit' (Ephesians 6:17). When confronted by Satan, Jesus also overcame temptation by referencing Scripture (see Matthew 4:4, 7, and 10).

6. I read the Bible daily, choosing any book in any order, but once a book is read I mark that off in an index. Over time, this covers the entire Bible and ensures a broad perspective beyond my favourite topics. I still find myself subconsciously asking these three questions:
 1. What is this passage saying?
 2. Is there anything I don't understand?
 3. How does it apply to me? I then look for – a command to obey, an example to follow, a promise to claim, a sin to repent off, an action to take, or a response of praise.
7. Journaling is useful to clarify your thoughts and then for reflection and encouragement at a later stage. The exercise of simply writing your thoughts down endorses what's on your mind. If you use digital apps there is usually a notebook for journaling.
8. Reading multiple Bible translations can offer new perspectives.
9. Don't get too 'professional' in sharing God's Word with others. I like Henri Nouwen's approach to living for Christ out of our weakness when he says, 'They (people) are helped, not through our brilliant logic or persuasive speech, but through the sharing of our struggles, and how, with God's help, we have overcome. It is a case of one beggar showing other beggars where to find bread.' As we share with others how God's Word works in our own life, it keeps us humble.
10. Madam Guyon (1648-1717) from her experience makes an important point. 'Reading Scripture is a way into prayer. Remember, too, that what you read may become prayer.... come before the Lord and begin to read. Stop reading just as soon as you feel yourself being drawn inwardly... Now, simply remain in stillness. Stay there for a while. Then, momentarily, proceed with your reading; but read only a little. Always cease reading each time you feel a divine attraction drawing you deeper within....' (and meditate).

'Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked
or stand in the way that sinners take
or sit in the company of mockers,
but whose delight is in the law of the LORD,
and who meditates on his law day and night.
That person is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season
and whose leaf does not wither— whatever they do prospers' (Psalm 1:1-3).

Resources

Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*

Discovery Bible Studies <https://discipleship.org/blog/how-to-lead-a-discovery-bible-study/>