

Why We Should Stop (Just) Reading the Bible

Most people today read the Bible silently. But that's a modern notion. The people 2,000 years ago, who were literate and could read Scripture, almost always read it out loud. It may strike us as strange, but the Bible, though written, was actually intended to be spoken aloud so that people would hear it and be transformed by it.

"Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it" (Revelation 1:3 NIV).

Might that have implications for us? Note the multiple senses involved in reading Scripture aloud: our eyes reading it; our mouths speaking it; our ears hearing it; even our faces and bodies expressing it. And if we read with family and/or friends listening—even if imaginary—we're inclined to read slower and more thoughtfully in order to have the greatest impact. The result: a deeper engagement with the truths of Scripture—for us and for them. It's the very words of God after all. It changes lives!

"Do you have the gift of speaking? Then speak as though God himself were speaking through you!" (1 Peter 4:11 NLT).

Hopefully, no one will read the Bible flat, like a grocery-list. If we're reading the prophets, where they're denouncing the idolatry of the people, or what Jesus said about the Pharisees being whitewashed sepulchers, or Paul's accusations, "You foolish Galatians," or the excitement in the book of Revelation, "I saw a new heaven and new earth," we should read it powerfully and expressively. Scripture is full of emotions, and if we understand the Bible correctly, the emotions should be evident in how we read it.

So let's do more than just read the Bible! We'll understand better how God thinks, what he has spoken, and how it can impact us!

Discipleship 101: Hearing the Words of the Lord

Teaching and preaching, along with believers encouraging one another, are key elements in the process of discipleship. But deeper still, the words of the Lord provide the ultimate foundation, motivation, and destination of the Christian life.

Reflecting on the culture in many churches today, God's words appear to be insufficient on their own. Human expounding of divine truth has become the priority, not reading the words of the Lord so people hear them. But wasn't Bible written to be heard?

The culture of our modern society doesn't help. We are increasingly influenced by what we hear and see on TV, in movies, etc. The means of communication are powerful and evocative. In contrast, for those who read the Bible privately, or hear it read in churches, it's often not vibrant, engaging, transforming.

"Surveys of church members rank the public reading of Scripture as one of the dullest portions of the gathering . . . Yet when the Bible is read well, it can minister as deeply as a Spirit-empowered sermon!"

(Jeff Arthurs, Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture)

Discipleship Jesus-style was speaking the divine truths of the universe in poignant and powerful ways, intending his hearers to be transformed and to tell others. Yet among evangelicals today, fewer are engaging with the Bible, and consequently, biblical literacy is in decline.

What if—rather than the Bible primarily being a code to decode—Scripture readers and/or reading teams were to develop skills for performing God's words powerfully? With people reading the Bible less and less, hearing God's words in church gatherings becomes essential. The potential for discipleship is unlimited.

"Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13 NIV).