

2. Biblical learning that equips all ages for everyday living

Full biblical understanding only happens where Word & World speak to each other by the Spirit. Relevant teaching & study, and personal study, alongside learning how to apply the Bible well, are essential if we are each to grow and retain 'saltiness'

Core Texts

Psalm 119:9-16, 2Timothy 3:14-17, Luke 4:1-13, Hebrews 4:12, Luke 24:27, Proverbs 3:1, 2, 1Thess.2:13

Core Teaching

- ❖ The Bible looks like a book but it's a library and more...
 - 66 books > 39OT + 27NT
 - All kinds of books > care where you start & how you read
 - Word of God > valid, historical, potentially life-changing...
- ❖ What does it say about itself [Ps.119, Heb.4:12, 2Tim.3:16]
 - Origin > 'God breathed' through 40 human authors
 - Object > useful to live right way and equip to do good works
 - For all of life > value 'learning' not 'teaching' [Ps.119:11, 54]
 - Authors expected lives to be changed [eg Jn.20:31]
 - Whole Bible draws us to understand Jesus [Lk.24:27]
- ❖ Jesus valued, knew and understood scripture
 - Satan knows scripture, too, but twists its meaning
 - J used scripture publicly and personally [Lk.4:1-13, Ps.22]
 - If J needed scripture for living > so must we!
 - J promised HS would lead us into truth [Jn.16:13, 1Cor.2:14]
- ❖ Learning begins with regular reading and study... (see below)
- ❖ Modern analogy - Bible as God's Homepage? [Mike Riddell]

Some Initial Questions

- What approach / method are you using to read the Bible?
- Can we re-launch midweek groups to support more people?
- How can we better connect biblical insight and real-life issues?
- How about some of us recording a gospel onto CD to give out?

23rd October 2005 – Value 2

Biblical Learning that equips all ages for everyday living.

- *Part of the difficulty with the Bible is that it looks like a book* [Mike Riddell]. That seems reasonable enough, after all, 'Bible' means simply 'Book', and we've each grown up with books in different ways and developed our own conditioned responses to them. Thus Victoria Beckham who claims never to have read a book (although she's published her autobiography!) presumably won't have looked inside a Bible! Some of us who don't feel comfortable with books, will be also be put off by the Bible.
- Others respond to this book academically. Historians pour over it, scholars analyse its literary qualities, and some study it theologically. None of this implies nor requires any sort of commitment of faith. I met someone this week who is studying Theology at University and neither their key lecturer nor any of the other students claim to be Christians! Some who would claim to be Christians treat the Bible as a talisman or holy relic and almost make it into an idol.
- When I go into schools and we look at the Bible I tell them that its not so much a book as a library [66 – 39 + 27 > 31,101 verses in 1,189 chapters!]. This library has many kinds of books in it: Legal Reference, History, Poetry, Letters, Prophecy, Visions, Stories... So already, those for whom reading a book means starting at page one need to beware. Where you start will depend upon what you are seeking and how you read will depend upon the kind of literature you are reading. You read poetry differently to Law!
- Simply saying, 'I believe the Bible is true' sounds very holy and laudable but the story of the Good Samaritan must be true in a different way to the way the account of Jesus' death is true. They are true in different ways - one contains moral truth while the other is historical truth. This doesn't mean you have to do exams before you read the Bible, just that you need to use some common sense in your approach!
- So although it looks like a book or even a book of books, I want to say that its appearance can be deceptive! Christians believe that the Bible is the Word of God and that when read by someone who

is seeking God, the Bible is alive with His truth. Mark Stibbe has said; *'If you're suffering from tooth decay you should consult your dentist. If you're suffering from truth decay, you should consult your Bible'*. A man who worked on translating the Bible into English in the 1940s said this, *again and again I felt rather like an electrician rewiring an ancient house without being able to turn of the mains off.*

- Perhaps, for all the wrong reasons, that is why when William Tyndale did the first translation of the Bible into English, so that ordinary people could read it for themselves and not just the clergy, the authorities rewarded him, not with a knighthood nor a country estate, but by burning him at the stake!! Even today there are countries and regimes that ban the Bible as dangerous and subversive.
- Today the Bible can be read in many languages and it is still being translated into many more. There's lots of good material around if you want to research the authenticity and accuracy of the Bible and the Alpha talk is a good introduction. Taking the gospel accounts of Jesus as crucial to the Christian faith, let me assure you that those in the Bible are some of the most well attested historical documents around and that, for all Dan Brown says, *The Da Vinci Code* may be a good read but its riddled with inaccuracies. Talk to me later if you want more information!
- But what if you ask the Bible itself what it is and what it is for? If you do that you unearth statements such as: *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path* [Psalm 119:105]; *"Is not my word like fire," declares the LORD, "and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?"* [Jer.23:29] - in the Old Testament. *For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* [Heb.4:12]. *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man or woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.* [2Tim.3:16 & 17] from the New Testament.
- That last verse from 2Timothy tells us that the Bible is God-breathed, so whatever is written in the Bible was God permitted

Sometimes the insight will be right on the nail, but on other occasions the Bible will give us an understanding of God's character that shapes our thinking and guides our actions.

- Are you reading the Bible regularly? If you are not then I suggest your growth as a Christian will not flourish or be healthy. Choose a modern version but don't be afraid of looking at more than one translation. Use Bible notes if that will give you a pattern and help you choose what to read [samples are available]. Or you might read through a book of the Bible, a gospel is a good place to start.
- And it is good to talk with others about what you find. We have homegroups that some people are part of, but sharing with a friend would be good as well. Sharing with someone else and maybe looking in a commentary together will help prevent you taking a piece of scripture out of context and may help you understand it better.
- The Bible has answers to life, but its more than that. The Bible is a handbook of doctrine, but its more than that. The Bible is an instruction manual, but its more than that. The Bible is a collection of moral precepts, but its more than that. The Bible is the story of God's relationship with his creation, and its more than that! I began with Mike Riddell's assertion that, *Part of the difficulty with the Bible is that it looks like a book*. He suggests that an imperfect but interesting analogy is that the Bible works like God's homepage or, for the non-computer literate, God's shoebox of things, events, people etc. that are significant to him.
- Explore the homepage or the shoebox and you will meet real people, warts and all, who encountered God. People who spoke about God and sometimes didn't get it right, events that are exciting, enigmatic, frightening, amazing. A place where those who seek wholeheartedly can encounter God and find God coming to meet them. A place where you can go as deep as you want to and still know there is more. A place where all you are and all you do can become illuminated in a new light. To get online you call upon the Holy Spirit. You logon with faith. However, there is a password if you want to go below the study of literature and theology for their own sakes, and that password is Jesus Christ.

and God inspired. That doesn't mean that God dictated every word. The styles of the individual authors can clearly be seen and the images and metaphors also arise out of the times and cultures in which they were written.

- But if that's the Bible's origin then St Paul says that its object is to be useful to the man or woman of God, enabling them to live in the right way and be equipped to do good works. The Bible is meant to be read with purpose; to be well thumbed like a workshop manual or recipe book. Can St Paul really mean that all of the Bible can be used in that way? What about those lists of who begat whom? > Bible Society example from Matthew's Genealogy.
- For those who are poetic and maybe some who aren't, Psalm 119 is a good place to spend time reflecting upon the value and application of the Bible. It is the longest psalm and each section of 8 verses starts with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet. To me it's as if over 22 days the writer meditated upon the experiences of the day and how God's truth had impacted that day. He then composed a poetic reflection. Try reading it that way sometime, meditating on a section each day, and I think you might find it widens your sense of how much God's truth can impact real life.
- Because that's the key to this value statement. When we first wrote it down we wrote, 'Biblical teaching', but then we realised that however well we may preach or teach, the crunch is how well we all learn. It is the responsibility of each of us to learn from what we read and what we hear. Psalm 119 again; *I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you* [v11]. That implies, as our value statement does, that our learning is not simply head knowledge but must affect our characters and how we live. Psalm 119 again: *Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge* [v54]. So wherever we are, God's word can set the rhythm and key for our lives.
- Whether each author says it or not, they wrote with the expectation that the lives of their readers would be changed. For example, John wrote this near the end of his Gospel; *[this gospel is] written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name* [John 20:31].

Christians believe that the whole Bible draws us to understand Jesus; who he was, and why he came to live and die and rise again. After Jesus' resurrection we read that, *beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself* [Lk.24:27].

- All through his life Jesus himself quoted from the Scriptures. We saw that in our reading about his temptations which also, incidentally, show that Satan knows the Bible as well! On other occasions Jesus used scriptural verses to reinforce teaching or challenge attitudes. The way he used scripture showed that, unlike Satan, he didn't just know the words, he understood their meaning fully and would not twist scripture to suit his purposes. I think it's even possible to discern from his words on the Cross, that Jesus was remembering certain psalms as he suffered and approached death (eg Ps 22).
- For Jesus, knowing Scripture was essential to living as God wanted. If that was so for him, how much more so for us! He criticised the Sadducees once saying, *You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God* [Matt.22:29]. He also spoke to his followers of the Holy Spirit saying, *when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth* [John 16:13].
- St Paul wrote that, *the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned* [1Cor.2:14]. One role of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who inspired the Bible to be written, is to open the minds of those who read it today so that it can come alive and indeed *teach, rebuke, correct and train in righteousness*.
- If a Christian is not engaging with the Bible regularly how can he or she possibly live out the life God wants? By what other means can God speak clearly or by what other means can we check that what we are hearing is of God? Before we can make this Value of biblical learning equip us for everyday living we have to be reading it! We have to be reading it to see what God is saying to us for today, and bringing the experiences and challenges of today under the spotlight of the Bible to make sense of what we are facing.