

THE RICHEST OF FARE

How to Feed on the Bible

App for That (Part 2)

Text: Isaiah 55:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Last week we began a new series of conversations on what the Bible has to say to some of the most common questions and issues with which many of us wrestle in our everyday life. I made the case that when it comes to providing helpful apps, no handheld device comes close to surpassing what THIS one does. In one of his letters to his young protégé, Timothy, the Apostle Paul puts it this way: **"All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work"** (2 Tim 3:16-17). There are three important ideas there worth pondering and they can be summed up in three words.

The Bible is Inspired

The first word is INSPIRED. Paul says, **"All scripture is INSPIRED by God."** Not just the sections about Jesus. Not just the parts we find it easy to agree with or follow. From cover to cover, in a whole variety of literary forms, through a wide range of voices and viewports, in passages that are easy to understand and some that won't be fully unraveled till we stand on the other side of death's door, God is breathing. That's literally what inspiration means. "Spiro" means breath, as in spirit. The Bible is God seeking to breath His life into us.

That is to say that all of what you read here comes from a source infinitely more reliable and insightful than the best writers in Oprah's Book Club, the Wall Street Journal, or your favorite blog. When you flick through the pages of this device you are gaining access to the revealed intelligence of the most magnificent mind in the Universe. Though compiled across centuries by people who never knew each other or read the parts to which their portion would be conjoined, the Bible remains starkly unified in its themes, staggeringly accurate in its telling and foretelling of events, and stunningly relevant to every generation and culture.

While some people have gone overboard trying to find crazy codes and patterns in the Bible, let me share just one fascinating little factoid. Do you know what the shortest chapter in the Bible is? Psalm 117. How about the longest? It is Psalm 119. Can you guess which chapter is in the exact center of the Bible? Psalm 118. There are 594 chapters before Psalm 118. There are 594 chapters after Psalm 118. Add these numbers up and you get 1188. Now, what verse is located at the exact center of the Bible? Psalm 118:8. So, wouldn't it be interesting if that verse had some significant application for human life? Do you know what that verse says? **"It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man."**

Odd how that worked out, isn't it? It's almost as if the contents of this book, though compiled over centuries, was arranged by a single brilliant mind. It is like it was actually breathed by Someone larger than history itself. And it was -- INSPIRED. That's the first word I want you to remember this morning as you think about the Bible.

The Bible Is Useful

Here's the second word I hope you'll take with you: The word is USEFUL. The Bible is incomparably useful in all the ways we need most. Let's face it, every day, you and I are beset by a barrage of information and inputs. It is admittedly nice to be kept abreast of the sports scores. It's interesting to hear the latest report on Lindsey Lohan. It's amusing to watch the latest YouTube curiosity. It may not really be "news" that Congress is still struggling to work things out, yet it gives us something to talk about around the water-cooler nonetheless. But how USEFUL is all this in the deepest sense?

What *would* be useful to most of us is to have a guidebook for **teaching** time-tested values to our kids, coworkers, and even ourselves. It would be useful is to have a voice of truth that gave us the **reproof** or rebuke we need to face our besetting sins, without all the emotional baggage that comes when our family members dish it out to us. What would be useful is to have a reliable source of **correction** when we're veering off the good path degree by degree and can't spot it because everyone else we know is off-track too. We need to know what the **training** disciplines are that will bulk up our moral muscle and enable us to perform rightly when life's intense pressures are on us. *Is there an app for that?* Yes, there is. To an extent we will find nowhere else, the Bible "**is USEFUL for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.**"

The Bible Equips Us for Proficiency

God's Word is inspired like no other authority. It is useful in all the ways we most need help. And, finally, says Paul, God has given us the Scriptures, "**so that everyone who belongs to God may be PROFICIENT.**" Now, I can't speak for you, but when I am ruthlessly honest with myself, I know that I am not there yet. I spend a great deal of my time and energy focused on being efficient or sufficient or omniscient. The world is constantly training me to try to do life with less effort or independently or on the strength of my own wisdom. When I'm thinking most clearly, however, I realize that what I really want is to become more PROFICIENT than I am today. I want to become truly proficient at being a great spouse, wonderfully proficient in my parenting, unusually proficient in the way I handle conflict and manage resources and encourage others and shape this world for the better.

The Bible is the key to building this kind of proficiency. It is God's heart, mind, soul, and strength offered to all of us who belong to God so that we be "**equipped for every good work.**" Sometimes I think, "Oh, if only I had Jesus with me to guide me like those first followers had, I'd do much better work in all the key areas of my life. But God HAS made Himself available to you and me through His written Word. He has made Himself every bit

as powerfully and personally available to us as He did to the original disciples through His Word made flesh. We simply need to take hold of Him more regularly, to take Him into ourselves more fully, and we will be amazed by what a difference He makes.

The great nineteenth century English preacher, C.H. Spurgeon, once observed that “a Bible that’s falling apart is usually owned by someone who isn’t.” On the contrary, the people I’ve known who’ve truly opened the Bible regularly and taken in the grace and truth offered here have been the opposite of falling apart. They have loved, laughed, learned, and lived at a level I still want to get to. How about you? Do you want to go through life just patching and duct-taping yourself as efficiently, sufficiently, and omnisciently as you can. Or would you like God to help you become truly proficient at life, equipped for every good work?

Open Up the App and Feed on It

If your answer to that last question is YES, then I have a confession to make. I am going to be of limited help to you. You can come here most Sundays, stay awake through most of my sermons, and you still won’t get what you really need. I’m like the guy who brings in the appetizers, when what you need is the full cup and the loaded plate of God’s Word. I can whet your appetite for the banquet God wants to serve you. But if you truly want the inspiration, usefulness, and proficiency-equipping power of God’s Word, you need to learn to feed yourself between the snacks I’m offering.

The chief reason most individuals, churches, and indeed our nation itself lack the vision and strength they need to confront the problems and seize the opportunities before us today is because we are Bible Anorexics. We take in so little of God’s Word, and then spit it out before we’ve processed it for ourselves. We put far too much hope in professional Bible-Eaters (people like me) to do the consuming and digesting for us. And then we wonder why we don’t feel better or perform like those first disciples did. This is a problem we can fix.

That’s why I’ve put together the little Soul-Training Resource that you’ll find in your worship folder this morning. If you’re tuning into one of our broadcasts, you can get this resource by consulting our website or by calling Christ Church. I have summarized on that simple sheet everything I know about drawing out the nutrients that God’s Word provides. These are the methods I personally use to feed on God’s Word. If you will take this resource home with you and start consuming the Bible on a regular basis in the variety of ways suggested there, you are going to notice the difference it makes over time.

As we come to the Table of the Word made flesh for our salvation, hear for yourself what He says to you. **“Listen, listen to me,”** says God, **“and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; hear me, that your soul may live”** (Isaiah 55:2-3). Do you want inspiration for your daily life? Do you long for truth that is genuinely useful? Are you eager to become proficient, equipped for every good work? The Word of God is the *app for that*.



How To Study The Bible

Eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. Hear me, that your soul may live. (Isaiah 55:2-3)

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man and woman of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17)

The Bible is Divine Revelation -- God’s own Word to us. It reveals who God is, who we are, and why we are here. Through Bible study we gain insights into God, human nature and God’s will for all creation. Studying the Scripture can equip, guide, and reveal how to live in life-giving ways that deepen our friendship with God and others. Both Old and New Testaments encourage regular study, meditation, contemplation and memorization of God’s Word. The benefits of Bible study are directly related to how open, attentive, and obedient we are to what we read.

Jesus exemplified the love of God’s Word in every area of his life. He used Scripture to: answer those who tested him, resist temptation, find guidance, encourage his heart, comfort others, explain his actions, and, ultimately, face his own death.

Experiment With These Methods

There are many ways to be fed from the Scriptures. Try each of these methods over time and see how God uses them in your life.

☐ The Artist Method

When reading ANY passage of Scripture, considering the following three questions as you read...

1. *What speaks to my heart here?*
Draw a heart next to the word that speaks to your heart.
2. *What new thought or idea comes to me?*
Draw a light bulb next to the new thought or idea.
3. *What does Scripture move me to do?*
Draw a hand next to the action you want to take.

Now, consider how you can live into one of these insights today. Share your insights with a friend.

☐ The Detective Method

When reading a STORY passage, let the narrative take shape in your mind’s eye...

1. *Observe all the facts.* Imagine the scene. Ask the who, when, where, what questions that detail what is going on here.
2. *Interpret the facts.* Ask the why and wherefore questions. What meaning did the words or actions have for the characters?
3. Then *apply your study to your own life.* What meaning do the words or actions have for you? Ask *how* will this change my life? What is my “take-away” here?

☐ The Treasure Seeker Method

When reading ANY passage of Scripture consider the following application questions...

1. Is there an *example* here for me to follow?
2. Is there a *promise* to claim?
3. Is there a *command* to obey?
4. Is there a *truth* to be applied?
5. Is there a *prayer* here for me to pray?
6. Is there a *sin* to be confessed?
7. Is there a *question* God is asking me?

☐ The Student-of-Jesus Method

Before you plunge into the Old Testament, be sure to read one of the Gospels and try to discover all you can about Jesus. Ask yourself the following questions...

1. What seems important to Jesus?
2. What questions does Jesus ask people?
3. What questions do people ask Jesus?
4. What do you admire about Jesus' character?
5. What attitudes/behaviors does Jesus commend?
6. How is Jesus different from other leaders?
7. What claims does Jesus make about himself?
8. What does Jesus say his Father is like?
9. What does Jesus say the kingdom of God/heaven is like?

How does what you discover encourage or challenge you?

Additional Ideas for Bible Study

- ☐ Experiment with different ways of *listening* to Scripture.
 - Read the Bible out loud. Savor the words. Which words stand out for you? Keep these words with you all day.
 - Listen to the Bible on tape or CD while driving or exercising.
 - Print a verse on a card and place it where you will see it throughout the day --or -- put a verse on your screen saver.
- ☐ To enhance your understanding of the Biblical context and the meaning the text may have had to its original audience, invest in a Bible commentary, a Bible Dictionary, or go online and type in places, cultures, and peoples you read about in your Bible study.
- ☐ Visit the Christ Church Bookstore or another Christian resource center and look through the array of Bible study guides available. Does one of the study guides intrigue you? Let your desire guide you in choosing one for further study.
- ☐ If systematic Bible study appeals to you consider joining a Bible study at the church or in your community. Or invite a few other people to begin your own.
- ☐ Write down the questions or difficult issues that arise for you when studying the Bible. Make an appointment with a pastor and talk these through him or her.