

9

TRANSFORMATION

"we are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory." 2 Cor 3:18

STUDY FOR TRANSFORMATION

The Bible is not a book to merely be studied, placed under a microscope and examined forensically. It is first and foremost communication from God, person to person. However, it does come to us in the form of Holy Spirit inspired human literature and for this reason it will require our effort and careful application in order to grasp this communication well. We are to be changed through this personal encounter with God in his word.

Over the years, some have looked at the Bible as an intellectual challenge: language, history, culture, ideas, geography, poetry—you name it, the Bible has it. For those with this interest, there is a danger that God's word will be rationalised, relativised and reduced to an academic interest.

Others come to the Bible with a more practical bent. They want to live well and have their children and neighbours live well. They know the Bible provides sound counsel and trustworthy directions for getting on in the world. For these people, the Bible becomes their compendium of knowledge for dealing with life's problems.

Some folks come to the Bible looking for clear boundaries for right and wrong. It defines true ethical standards that ought to be met by all. For these people, it is their moral reference manual.

And there are others, too, who tend to read the Bible for what is often called inspiration. There are so many beautiful and comforting passages in the Bible. When we are lonely or in grief or wanting some words to get us out of the humdrum, what better place to go than the Bible? Of course, if you're after devotionally cozy Bible reading, you have to pick and choose a good bit—there are huge chunks of it that either put you to sleep or keep you awake at nights!

For brief discussion:

- Do any of these views describe you (at least some of the time)?
- How else might you describe your relationship with the Bible?

Without being too hard on any of the above groups (for we've all been in a few of them at one time or another), whichever of these groups you find yourself, you will likely be *using* the Bible for *your* purposes. You see, it is entirely possible to come to the Bible for the intellectual challenge it gives, or for the moral guidance it offers, or the spiritual uplift it provides, and not in any way have to deal with the personally revealing God who has personal designs on you.

Our aim now is to consider how we might apply ourselves to God's word in ways that strengthen our relationship with him, in ways that transform us; and not so that our interaction with the Bible is reduced to an academic or intellectual exercise.

You are what you eat?

In Revelation 10:9-10 John is told to take a book from an angel and to eat it. The book represented the word of God.

The act of eating God's word means that reading it is not just a matter of looking at the words and ascertaining their meaning. Eating God's word means taking it all in, assimilating it into the tissues of our lives. We chew it. We are nourished by it. We apply ourselves to it with all of our faculties. We, as readers, become what we read.

BIBLE STUDY: READ JOHN 5:33-47

1. What is the source of the conflict in this situation?
2. What seems to be the Jews' problem?
3. Do you think that in this situation, Jesus is opposing and discouraging the serious study of the Bible? Why/why not?
4. How well do you think the following statement sums up Jesus' message here:
"The pre-requisite for all study of God's word is a faith relationship with Jesus Christ"?
5. In relation to verses 39-40, how would you encourage a younger Christian to approach the Bible such that they did not suffer the Jews' problem?

FURTHER REFLECTION: READ LUKE 24:44-49

6. What is it that Jesus talks to the apostles about from the Scriptures?
7. What do we learn here about Jesus' view of the Scriptures, particularly the relationship between the Old and New Testaments?
(note the results of Jesus' teaching in Acts 4:13)
8. How might Jesus' teaching back then encourage and shape your study of the Scriptures?

GROUP REFLECTION

9. Jesus taught clearly and authoritatively about the meaning of the Scriptures (see for example Mk 1:27; 12:24-27 etc). That is to say, their singular meaning and interpretation can be readily understood by people like us. How ought we approach and study the Bible in ways that bring out its true meaning? What might be some of the basic principles of Bible interpretation that will help us?
10. In your opinion, what are the three most helpful tools you have used when studying the Bible?

Over a cuppa:

Each of these questions so far has actually required higher order thinking, comprehension and study skills. You have had to apply yourself to understanding the Bible, first of all in its original context, and then you have considered its meaning and significance for today. How did you acquire these skills and abilities? Where did you learn them? From whom did you learn them? To whom are you passing them on?