

Grant O God that in the written word and through the spoken word we may behold the living word , Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. AMEN

Today on Bible Sunday we focus on the collection of books which have been the foundation stone of our Christian faith for 2,000 years and which contain the word of God and how to apply this to our life. A book translated into 1200 languages and with an estimated 160,000 either bought or given away each day

66 books, written by 44 authors spanning a period of about 1500 years.

A collection of different writing styles - poetry, prose, imagery, history, law, love and prophecy.

The story of God's relationship with His people, - a story of support, guidance and encouragement, even rebuke, whose accuracy is verified by secular historians over the years.

Today - Bible Sunday - gives us the perfect opportunity to reflect again on how we read and interpret the Bible.

Many of you will be familiar with some of these gems which children seemingly remembered from their Bibles:

- Hebrews made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients.

- Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Amendments.
- The Fifth Commandment is to honour thy father and mother. And the seventh is thou shalt not admit adultery.

And I love this one especially – “A Christian should have only one wife. This is called monotony!”.

The point here is that when children can't quite remember, they make it up, and they make it up so that it makes sense to them. There is a certain blissful innocence in doing so

Of course we grown-ups wouldn't fall into such a trap - or would we? In reading our Bible we need to be careful and attentive, and read in a contemplative and prayerful way. And this means sometimes being prepared to hear what we don't want to hear.

27% of churchgoers say they read the Bible at least once per week ; 57% of church goers believe the Bible should shape their daily life. Scripture should have an impact on our whole selves, not just on our heart or mind or soul but on every single part of us intertwined.

The theologian Paula Gooder is said to have held up a bible and declared “This is not the Word of God”. But then, on opening the book, stating “**this** is the Word of God”. The point she was making was that the word of God only comes alive when we read the bible and begin to interpret what it means

That said, we need to be careful because a number of biblical phrases have found their way incorrectly into our language. Take "Money is the root of all evil"? for example which is actually 'the love of money is a root of all evil" - we want to make money the problem, not our love of it. Or "the sun shines on the righteous" where the actual words are 'he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good'. Finding it difficult to accept that God would make the sun shine on evil people we conveniently turn the meaning around to make it more acceptable for us.

So, how can we read the bible and hear God's word without distorting our interpretation?

Well we can read the Bible as we do a novel - nice story, bit of escapism but no impact; or we could read it as a newspaper or historical text – interesting facts but something that doesn't really affect us or make any real impression on our minds or cause us to ask any searching questions of the text.

None of these should sit comfortably for us as Christians.

The clue as to how we should we study the Bible, so that we satisfy our whole selves, is in today's collect - ***May we hear read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the words before us.*** Each passage should not be read superficially but cause us to ask questions such as -

- What did this passage mean to the original audience?

- What links are there between them and us?
- What significance has this passage for us today?

Yes, it will take effort on our part - time set aside to read, to work at the text; we may find some words difficult or phrases that disturb us. And there will be things which we do not understand - that's OK, we shouldn't feel discouraged. After 3 years of theological training, and 11 years of ordained ministry I will be the first to put my hand up and say that there are lots of things in the Bible I don't understand.

As Christians when we read the Bible we should do so not as detached observers but people looking to find out what God is up to , what God was and is saying to his people, in the past, the present and into the future.

We are fortunate in having many resources for studying the scriptures - Bible reading notes, Bible Translations, courses, study groups, others whose opinions we trust - even sermons on occasions believe it or not! Using a combination of these will help to strengthen our relationship with God. Yes we will be challenged, yes we may well come up with questions which we never thought of before but as a people whose worship is centred upon word and sacrament we need to take the Bible seriously in order to grow.

In the Lord's prayer we pray "give us today our daily bread" - that bread is spiritual food as well as physical.

Though written many centuries ago and in a very different context, the Bible can still speak to us afresh today. It has been described as a love letter from God; reading it should be at the heart of our Christian life and worship.

There is a Chinese proverb which says **a Book unopened is just a block of paper**. Are we in danger of seeing our Bibles as big inaccessible heavy tomes which are best left unopened? Or do we see them as something to step into as source of wisdom, a rule to apply to our lives, an adventure of discovering who God is and how he is speaking to us and can use each one of us?

So I encourage you to read your Bible – at home, at church, alone or with others. There is so much to discover, to learn and to think about.

And in conclusion let us remind ourselves why we read the Bible at all with these words from today's epistle ... **“For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.”**
AMEN

