

## Meeting God in the Text



Often one of our New Year (or mid-year) resolutions is to be more consistent in reading our Bible. This is a good thing. There are a lot of helpful Bible reading plans out there. However, often, we have viewed scripture reading like just another thing to check off our “If you were really a good Christian” check list. We say to ourselves, “if that’s what was necessary to prove my devotion to Christ”... (sigh). Most often it’s associated with guilt because so many of us are so bad at sticking to it. And next year we resolve to do better.

For many years I followed a printed reading schedule, which often covered reading the Bible in a year. Over the years this kind of generic format was helpful but often I felt guilt-ridden if I missed a day. Then I had to “make up” the days before I could catch up to the current day’s reading. The motivation simply became “staying on task.” In my efforts to “get it right”, I missed the opportunity to listen...to linger because I had so much catching up to do. What God wanted to say to my heart was pushed aside in tenacious determination and imposed expectations. How often had I been so focused on “getting it done” that I missed God’s presence in the midst of it?

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I believe this could explain why so many people can read God’s Word and remain relatively unchanged by it. Too often we have approached God’s Word as simply a resource for teaching, or as an inspirational handbook for living, or as a mine of proof-texts for defending our dogmas, rather than the revelation of Christ to our hearts. When we approach the biblical text as information that needs to be analyzed or to prove our already presuppositions, we will see only what we want to see. In this way we keep Scripture “safe,” at arm’s

length and we maintain our false assumption that somehow we are in control of the text. It has been reduced to something that is studied, memorized and debated but not “heard” personally. When we do we will miss what God is saying to us, saying about himself, and His Word will have no meaningful connection to our lives.

Biblical faithfulness has to be more than just nailing down the meaning of a text. (Please note: I am not saying there is no place for the in-depth study of scripture. There is. I am addressing our personal devotional engagement with scripture. Yet, even then “exegesis is an act of love. It means loving the one who speaks the words enough to want to get the words right.” Eugene Peterson)

Someone has said, “Alive words must be read in an alive manner.” So perhaps we need to change our approach to scripture. Perhaps to allow the scriptures come alive in our hearts requires that we suspend our preconceived judgments and surrender ourselves to the text. Do you remember the “Magic Eye” that was popular in the 80’s? It required

us to look differently; to see through to the “picture in the picture”. It required we bring our whole self to come to the text with openness, vulnerability, curiosity, and time. It was always exhilarating to “discover” the mysteriously hidden picture that was not obvious to the untrained eye.

To truly allow the text to become Scripture to us we must come with this kind of openness and attentiveness. To truly “hear” will require we put aside our agenda and need to control the text and be willing listen with this same sense of wonder, vulnerability, and curiosity. It will also take time to “sit” with the text; reading, re-reading, pondering and reflecting. When we do, there is so much more than we thought. In this way Colossians 3:16, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...” becomes a reality in our lives.

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When we approach scripture as the living word of God it invites us to pay attention to how God may be speaking to us in a fresh way and we connect with God in ways we never dreamed possible.

Hebrews 4:12, 13 – “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. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account.”

“...judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” – in other words, *it reads us!* It dissects and analyzes us! It speaks to those places in our hearts we’re not even aware of and brings them to light that we might experience healing and wholeness.

“Laid bare” is a picture of a gladiator with knee on his opponent’s chest, head in tilted back position, ready for the final blow...that’s our approach ...absolute submission. It is critical to approach the Bible as living and active and sharper than a two edged sword, not as metaphor but as reality. These words are not merely words on a page, but words that connect to the core of us.

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In other words, because it is living and active, there is always more to discover. “It is a person that we are learning, not a book. We are connecting with God, not words.” We are to experience the mystery of the gospel, not just learn about it.

IT CAN BE SUMMED UP THIS UP LIKE THIS: “The point is meeting God in the text.”

How might you allow the text to settle into your heart today in such way that it becomes holy ground on which you encounter God?