

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF THE COVENANT
Sermon by Virginia L. Jones – Sunday, May 17, 2009

“For the Bible tells me so”
Psalms 19:7-14, Colossians 3:16

Upon completing my OT class at Dubuque, I enrolled in the NT class and continued to become more and more engrossed in God’s Word. The wealth of information in the accompanying textbook readings and the conversations with my fellow CLP classmates made me think about how many - or perhaps I should say how few - people spend time reading and studying the Bible on a regular basis. I began to realize that a good percentage of our population is either unfamiliar with the Bible or, they just aren’t interested! As I discussed this with my classmates, we determined that, “a lot of people don’t read and study the Bible because they are either too busy or they don’t want to”.

Now, its confession time, so let me be the first to admit that there was a period of time when I did not seek out the Word of God on a daily basis – or any kind of a regular basis for that matter. Oh, I read my devotionals, bits of scripture, went to Bible studies and other study groups where we recited from scripture. But I didn’t have a set practice established to read and study the Word of God.

Did you know that the Bible tops the Best Seller’s list year after year – selling over 100 million copies worldwide, over 25 million copies in the US alone? Yet, ironically, the Bible is the most unread best seller of all time. According to a Gallup poll, less than 50% of Americans can name the first book of the Bible. 66% of the American public doesn’t know who delivered the Sermon on the Mount. And, according to a 1997 Barna survey, it was reported that 12% of those questioned thought that Joan of Arc (get ready!) was Noah’s wife. Surveys show that 64% of the American public claim to not read the Bible because they are just too busy. It’s the “unread best seller”.

I recently read a story about a little seven year old who picked up the Bible one day from the coffee table in his home and he asked his mother, “Is this God’s Book?” “Certainly it is,” was her reply. “Well’ continued the boy, “don’t you think we might as well send it back to God because we don’t use it here, do we?” Now while this might cause you to smile, it reveals a sad and vital lack of reading the Bible.

Our OT reading tells us *“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.”* And, *“The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”* Who here does not want to have their souls revived, or have a joyful heart? Psalm 119:16, *“I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.”*

Psalm 119 is the longest of the Psalms with 176 verses alone – it gives us advice, promise and hope; just to name a few. It goes on to say in verses 17 – 20, *“Do good to your servant, and I will live; I will obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth; do not hide your commands from me. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.”* CONSUMED WITH LONGING....

Are we so consumed with the longing for material things – a loving relationship, exceptional children, fancy cars, more money, better jobs, power – and the list goes on. Yet, when it comes to experiencing the power and the love of God’s Word, we don’t have the time?

Friends of ours recently took a road trip and in order to map out their trip, they went to AAA and picked up one of these. Many of you have probably used one of these before, a Trip-Tik. This particular Trip-Tik details the route from Wilmington, DE to Houston, TX and back. Now they could have set out on the trip without any guide, but instead they chose to use a roadmap to highlight the interesting places to see and things to do along the way. It's a daily planner of how to spend these however many days of their trip and without the trip-tik they might have missed out on something really great.

So now, let's think of the Bible as God's Trip-Tik. You begin your journey with a tour of the Garden of Eden and visit with Adam and Eve in Genesis, Chapter 2; you travel on and stop at the seashore in Exodus 14, just as Moses was parting the Red Sea and leading the Israelites to a new land. Next stop, Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5 as Moses is descending from Mt. Sinai with those beautiful stone tablets upon which are written God's Commandments. Imagine stopping in Samaria and overhearing a weary traveler speaking with a woman by a well or, on a mountain side to hear the words of Jesus blessing his people. And one final stop, a place called Golgotha; a hill, an empty cross, an open tomb, and a young man, sitting there dressed in white; He sees you, and He tells you to not be afraid. Matthew 28:5-6. What a journey this "trip-tik" holds for you – this is *His* roadmap of history. Think of the wonders that we would miss if we were to just leave this book on the coffee table.

My friends, this is not a coffee table book! The Bible is the *Word of God*. In the OT, God's Word is spoken to us through his servants and prophets. In the NT, God's Word is lived and breathed through His Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus' word becomes the Living Word of God, alive in us through the Holy Spirit. 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12

66 books, split into two sections; 39 books in the OT and another 27 in the NT. The OT covers a period in history beginning with the creation of the world. It includes poetry, history, prophecy and law and they all tell the story of God's troubled relationship with his people and His continued patience and forgiveness of those very same people. The NT covers the amazing life and the love of Jesus and how His followers carried His message around the world through some amazing predictions about the end of the world and the beginning of something better. This is the greatest "book" ever written! It is as relevant for us today as it was when Moses delivered those tablets with the 10 Commandments.

Just imagine if, instead of "commandments", they had been called "God's 10 Suggestions"! Supposing that God had said, "It's really up to you how you live your life, but I am suggesting that you don't commit murder or steal, and you may not want to cheat on your spouse if you don't want life to get complicated; and as for your father and mother, it would be nice if you would honor them but, that's really your choice. Think it over and do whatever it is you must." But God didn't suggest; he commanded us to live honest, loving and virtuous lives - and it's all right here. The Bible is the original *Life's Little Instruction Book*. It's a self-help guide, a parenting manual, a marriage enrichment brochure; its history, romance, mystery and biography all rolled into one small book.

In my OT class, I used a textbook called *Getting Involved with God, Rediscovering the Old Testament* by Ellen F. Davis. I was intrigued by the way that Davis "dissected" the books of the OT. For example, she explained how to use the Psalms as a model for prayer. A few weeks ago, Pastor Kathi taught us how to pray from the Psalms during her preaching series on prayer – Psalm 4:1. If you struggle finding the words for prayer, there's help right here.

There are Psalms of Lament – Psalm 6:4. And Psalms of Praise – Psalm 30:1. Praise Him daily with thanksgiving. From Proverbs we receive wisdom – Proverbs 10: 28. So much good news and yet people say, “I don’t have time?”

When Jesus was tempted by the devil and He went into the wilderness to fast for forty days and forty nights, Matthew 4:4. In other words, if we want to live life to the fullest as God intended, we must listen to and heed God’s written Word. It is more important than eating! The Bible is the book of Life, “*Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every Word that comes out of the mouth of God*”.

When we try to live by bread alone, we may feed the body, but we will starve the soul. There was a story about a man who died of starvation and after his death it was discovered that he had more than \$35,000 in the bank. He never referred to his money, even as the physicians were seeking to halt the ravages of malnutrition. He let his body starve with more than ample resources on hand to feed him. Dear ones *don’t* let your souls starve; the Word of God is at hand to provide you with life-giving spiritual food. If we neglect to read the Bible, we are missing the best that life has to offer. Earthly things *do not* satisfy the heart. Besides nutrition for the soul, the Bible offers light. Psalm 119:130. The Bible enlightens us to the origin, purpose, problems and destiny of life itself. Like the sun, it shines through the fog and brings light and warmth to those who will openly receive it. It offers salvation - 2 Timothy 3:15. The minute we open the door of our hearts by believing in Him, He *will* come in. If we choose not to yield our hearts to His loving will, we are *lost*. You might as well shoot me now!

The Bible is a book of spiritual feeding. In 1 Peter 2:2, the Bible says, “*Like new born babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation*”. Do you get it? Read it with meaning and purpose. *Feed* on it. God’s Word is the *food* and we, as Christians, cannot grow without it.

God’s Word gives us comfort, and it gives us hope. Romans 15:4. I could go on and on and on, reading one scripture after another but I’m not going to read the entire book for you. I want you to experience it for yourselves. “*When the words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty*”, Jeremiah 15:16.

Many people never have and never will read the Bible. Some people read it but do not study it. Letting the Word of our Lord run through our minds like water running through a sieve won’t do us much good. We need to eat the Word, meaning *meditate* upon it, we need to ponder the message to our own heart, meaning to *digest it*, and then we must apply it to our own lives, meaning to *live it*.

It’s not even necessary to start at the beginning – although if you don’t, you’ll miss that beautiful creation story. A classmate of mine told me that if nothing else, she reads one Psalm and one Proverb each day. The Psalm is for her personal relationship with God, the Proverb is for her relationship with others. Who can’t afford to do at least that much each day?

The Bible is not a book for just reading. It is for studying, so that one can apply it to life. The Bible becomes ours, *not* by owning a copy to lay on our coffee tables, but by reading and studying it, storing it in our minds and in our hearts.

Every piece of information that we need to know about God is contained in one small book. When Pastor Kathi and Pastor Doug say “I don’t make this stuff up”, believe me, they *don’t*. It’s right here. No more excuses about being too busy.

Five minutes a day is a good start – get up five minutes earlier in the morning and pick up His book before you do anything else. Play one less game of Solitaire on the computer, or spend five minutes less on Facebook. It’s a beginning.

And once you spend the first five minutes, you’ll find that you have a hunger for more. It’s like that commercial that says, “bet you can’t eat just one!” You won’t read just one verse; but two, and then three. And soon you will have read an entire chapter, then an entire book. Before long, you will have read 66 books.

Deuteronomy 6: 6-7. What better book of bedtime stories could you find to read to your children and grandchildren when you tuck them in at night? We are never too old, or too young, to develop the practice of spending time *daily* in God’s Word.

I received my very first Bible (one that I could call my very own) from my 2nd grade Sunday school teacher. I still have it – it’s a King James Version. As a child, I learned from scripture that “Jesus Loves Me”. The first hymn I ever learned was *Jesus Loves Me This I Know, For the Bible Tells Me So*. Reading the Bible today, the words are the same as they were when I was seven, but I eat them with new meaning and inspiration. The words in my KJV may sound somewhat different than the NIV that I prefer today, but they say the same thing; “*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer.*” The Bible tells us everything that we need to know in order to live full and enriching lives.

And so, I repeat – just as I began, “*Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*” Colossians 3:16