

Reading the Bible Isn't Enough

You must also live by God's Word.

"Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You. Blessed are You, O Lord! Teach me Your statutes" (Ps. 119:11, 12).

There is an old story about two travelers who needed a place to stay for the night. As they made their way through the forest, one of them noticed an old trapper's cabin with smoke emerging from the chimney. They knocked on the door and inquired about spending the night. The old man warmly invited them in, giving them the use of his only bedroom.

The men didn't sleep well, however, because they were carrying a large sum of money. To keep it secure, they took turns sleeping while the other watched the money. In the wee hours of the morning the man keeping watch noticed a light under the door. Quietly he pulled it open a crack, to discover the trapper sitting at his table, carefully studying a Bible. When the trapper closed the Bible and bowed his head to pray, the man shut the door and woke his companion. "I think we can both sleep now," he said, "because this man is trustworthy."

You've got to wonder: if he'd opened the door to find the trapper perusing Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, would it have created the same level of trust?

Another story: A man is walking home late at night when he hears the sound of many footsteps behind him. He nervously looks over his shoulder to find a group of young men following him. His heart rate quickens, and he picks up his pace, fearing that he is about to be robbed . . . or worse. The gang easily catches up with him—and that's when he notices that most of them are carrying Bibles. They are not thieves; it's a youth group coming home from a Saturday night Bible study. He lets out a quiet sigh of relief.



Trust Shaped by the Word

What is it about serious Bible students that makes us more likely to trust them? Put aside any culture's tendency to mock believers, and think about it. Somehow, even if they ridicule people of faith, most people still instinctively recognize that if someone chooses to *live* by the Scriptures, they are more likely to be morally trustworthy. Daniel, after all, had all sorts of trouble when he was immersed in Babylonian culture, but you'll notice that in chapter 2 the king instinctively trusted him when he made a request for more time.

Ironically, however, many people seem to hate the Bible for the same reason they're prone to trust those who live by it: they realize that it makes high moral demands on humanity. It demonstrates, powerfully, that human beings are accountable to a supreme Creator. When someone chooses—voluntarily—to be accountable to a moral God, we don't mind having them as neighbors. But when it occurs to us that God expects the same moral standard from *us*? Well, that's far too often another story.

From Reading to Living

Merely *reading* the Bible isn't enough. Many universities offer courses that study the Bible as literature. The professors are not believers; they have read the text but remain unchanged by it. To them, it is just another example of good writing, not unlike the works of Dostoevsky, Sun Tzu, or Shakespeare. They do not take the Word of God to heart because they consider it a purely human creation and regard its claims of divine inspiration as a holdover from an ignorant and superstitious age. Many of the students will also read it without absorbing it, coming away completely unchanged.

So how is it different for believers? Christians recognize that it is not enough just to read the Bible; we must also *live* it. Many things in this life cannot be understood until you *do* them. Without ever leaving your home, you can certainly study how skydiving works—learning the science of wind resistance, measuring the canopy, factoring in your weight. Mathematically, you can come to the reliable conclusion that your parachute would save you from fatal impact. But do you really *understand* skydiving? No; that would require *experiencing* it.

That's how it is with the Christian faith: you cannot simply read your way into the kingdom. For the Bible to have its proper effect, you need to exercise enough faith to live by the principles it reveals. Only then, when you choose to believe that God knows what He's talking about, will you discover the sheer life-altering power of His Word.

We are “born again . . . through the word of God,” Peter wrote (1 Peter 1:23), but he didn't mean that you are saved by keeping a copy of the Bible in your

home. There will almost certainly be people in the second resurrection who *owned* a Bible; the difference between them and the crowd inside the Holy City is that the saved are “the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes” (Rev. 14:4).

The prophet Jeremiah famously compared Scripture to food: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your word was to me the joy and rejoicing of my heart” (Jer. 15:16). Jesus used a similar metaphor: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Food enters—and feeds—every cell in your body. The nutrients are applied where they are needed most. Without that nourishment, you will die. Likewise, the Bible must be *ingested*, so that the very thoughts of God can penetrate your own mind, gradually changing who you are. How do you ingest it? By both *reading* it and *living* it.

The Narrow Way

Nothing reveals the power of God's truth like applying it to a life lived in a world that is opposed to Him. God's idea of an authentic human life runs sharply across the groove of our sinful human tendencies, and our lazy fallen nature loves the ease of living in a groove. That, Jesus taught us, is the broad road. Our sinful nature prefers it because it feels easy. It will not seem easy at the end, however, once people discover that it is a toll highway, and the price is higher than any sinner can afford.

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By contrast, those who choose (by faith!) to live the principles in God's Word will find that while *that* path is narrow, the toll has already been paid by a God who came to live among us in human flesh. “I do not pray that You should take them out of the world,” Jesus once prayed, “but that You should keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:15-17).

The devil himself knows what Scripture says, and he even knows it to be truth. If he didn't, Jesus wouldn't be able to accuse him of lying; the devil would simply be misguided. No, he is willfully misrepresenting it, and he doesn't even mind if you read it—as long as you don't *live* it.

That, he knows, would mean that the very character of God—His name—would be etched in your forehead by the Spirit, and you will be found on Mount Zion with the Lamb (Rev. 14:1). **✠**