

Bible Study

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. If you've got a Bible with you, I don't know if you have, you might want to get it out and take some notes to make sure that what I'm speaking about is okay.

And the words will actually be coming up on the screen as well. Let's just pray before I start. Yeah, dear Lord, I just ask now that you're just with us all, Lord, and that you'll speak through me on this challenging subject, Lord.

Amen. Right. So, I've brought mine with me. I've got various versions that I've had to have for studying, but this is my favourite one.

It was given to me about 10 years ago by a really good friend. It's a bit dog-eared. It's got kind of masking tape on it where I've broken it. It's got post-it notes in here, there and everywhere, but it's my favourite one.

And what I'm holding today is something extraordinary. I'm holding a book that's more than 3,000 years old and a book that's illegal in several countries of the world.

[1 : 04] Just possessing a copy of this book a few centuries ago in Europe could have got us killed. And even today, if you've got a Bible, you're liable to arrest and beatings at the very least in some parts of the world.

Yet it is by far a best-selling book worldwide. In all its versions, it is estimated that between two and a half and six billion copies have been sold.

And at least parts of this book are available in over 2,000 languages. So I'm holding a miracle. Something really extraordinary.

And it's something that we can hear God's voice through any time, anywhere. A bit like the martini advert that you said last week. So as you know, our topic this morning is our series on Christian disciplines, is regular Bible study.

And a question, how do we commit to regularly studying God's word? If we go way back to the religious reformation which took place across Europe in the 16th and into the 17th century, the great driving force behind that reformation, I think, can be reviewed as rediscovering the Bible.

[2 : 26] The Bible was taken out of the hands of corrupt people, the elite, and put it into the hands of ordinary people. And it was translated into everyday language. And this availability was made much more wider due to the newly invented printing press and also to ministers committing to preaching the word and explaining what the text meant in a language that people can understand.

And this upheaval utterly changed the social landscape of Europe at that time. But for this sermon, I want to go way back much further to a much earlier rediscovery of the Bible than the time of the Reformation.

I want to have a look at the passage that Cherries just read earlier from 2 Kings chapter 23. And these events took place during the reign of King Josiah in Jerusalem in 622 BC.

So King Josiah at that time was 26 years old and he'd been king since he was eight. And he was well known as being one of the godliest kings Israel ever had.

Which is really lovely because, to be honest, Kings is full of a really bad king, then a really worse king, and then a really evil king. And it's like quite depressing, but actually this is quite a good period of time.

[3 : 48] So praise God for that. So if you look a little bit earlier in chapter 22, verse 2, it talks about him and it says, he did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

So he was a great king. Unfortunately, Josiah's reign followed close behind the terrible reign of King Manasseh, who was known as the evilest king that Israel had ever had.

So he had ruled for 55 years and under him, the whole nation had completely turned away from God. He destroyed the temple in Jerusalem and he built shrines and altars to idols all over the land. And somewhere during that part of his reign, the book of the law, or the Bible that they had at that time, was lost. So when Josiah became king, he decided to restore the temple.

And in the course of that restoration, the book of the law was rediscovered, which you can read about in chapter 22. So Josiah was completely convicted by what he hears, what he's read, and he decides that he must rededicate himself and the people to God.

[4 : 59] And that's what happens here in chapter 23, verses 1 to 3. So can we have that on the screen, Terry, if you can? Brilliant. So, if you have a look through, and if you've listened, one thing you can see is that the word all occurs quite a lot.

And that's really what I want to structure my talk about today. Three points. All the people, all the words, and all the heart and soul. So first of all, all the people.

All the people. First committing to studying God's word involves all of us. In verse 1 it says, Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem.

He went up to the temple of the Lord with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets, all the people from the least to the greatest. And then at the end of verse 3, we find all the people again.

The writer is really trying to get it into our brains that we know that all the people from the least to the greatest were present at the reading of the book.

[6 : 10] This is fundamental to our faith. This Bible that we've got is for all people. Biblical understanding and interpretation of it is never limited just to an elite, top, really clever class of Christian.

All of us as believers have both the great privilege but also the great responsibility of seeking out God's word for him or herself.

Of course, some are better equipped to do this than others. Allegedly. Some are theologically trained. Some are really gifted and called to be teachers. But biblical truth and interpretation is not for an exclusive group of people.

Every single one of us has access to the truth for ourselves. We don't just leave this to the professionals. Because if we don't study the Bible for ourselves, if we just basically come here on a Sunday, listen to what Clive or Russ says, and then we leave it and then we come back next week, we're really missing out.

However, committing to regularly reading the Bible recognises that every one of us has a stake in the understanding of the Bible and hearing God through it.

[7 : 21] And people have died to make this possible again for us. Perhaps you know the story of William Tyndale. It's a very famous Bible, the Tyndale Bible. To take a well-known example, he was burned at the stake in 1536.

Although they did the kindness of actually strangling him first. Tyndale's life work was to translate the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek into common English that everyone could understand.

And he had a passion for placing the word into the ordinary hands of ordinary people. His work wasn't in vain. And his translation makes up about 80% of the authorised version.

Published more than 70 years after his death. And it's widely been available and distributed.

Distributed. So we all need to commit to studying the Bible ourselves.

It's fundamental to us as Christians and our discipleship. There are millions of Christian believers all around the world today. And countries like China, North Korea and many others. Who have very limited or no access to the Bible at all.

[8 : 24] Up to 50 million in China alone. We are so fortunate here to be able to read it freely. There are really great Christian charities such as the Bible Society and Open Doors.

That make sure that people get the copies of the Bible into their hands worldwide. And I would recommend them to you. But I do wonder sometimes if it's easier to support charities getting the word out there.

Than actually committing ourselves to it back here in the UK. So we all need to be committed to the Bible. It involves all the people.

And that means you. And that means me. Whoever we are. Over the centuries God led dozens of his greatest saints through immense persecution and agonising deaths. So that you and I might

have the privilege of hearing and understanding his voice.

So I really think if we neglect this. It's a bit criminal really. So maybe as I'm talking and this week. We can think about what more we can do. To get more of God's word into our lives.

[9 : 32] The second thing. Is all the words. This can be a bit tricky I find. Committing to the Bible. Is being prepared to read the whole thing.

Not just the New Testament. But actually the whole Bible. And all its words. In verse 2 of chapter 3 it said. He read in their hearing all the words of the book of the covenant.

Which had been found in the temple of the Lord. Admittedly. The Bible that Josiah had. Was quite a bit shorter. Than the Bibles that we have today. It may well have just been the first five books of our Bibles.

Or it may have only been. They reckon the book of Deuteronomy. But the writer is keen here. That we know that Josiah read all of them. And read all the words. Now not only is the book of Deuteronomy.

Sorry. A bit heavy going at times. And it's got a bit of a whole bunch of curses. And a few unpleasantnesses. And laws and regulations in there. And frankly. It might have been better.

[10 : 33] We might think. For Josiah to just give them a. Edited highlights. A quick summary maybe. Or some bullet points. On a really exciting PowerPoint slide. But Josiah knows.

That a commitment to the Bible. Is a commitment to all its words. Because they are all God's words. And our Bible reading is deficient. If we just content ourselves. With reading our favourite books.

Or our favourite passages. And not the whole book. Sometimes it can be difficult. To read the whole thing. But we can't just skip it. Because bits of it seem dull.

Or difficult. Or irrelevant to our lives today. Or they teach doctrines. That we struggle with. We need to really read it. To study it. Maybe use study Bibles. And commentaries.

As we seek to really wrestle. With those words. And see what God. Is saying to us today. So to help. It's really helpful. To have a Bible reading plan.

[11 : 28] As individuals. And as a church. Something that over time. Takes us through. The whole range. Of Bible material. We don't need to read it all. At once of course. But over time. We should be aiming.

For something deeper. Than a few little verses. It's all God's word to us. Not just our favourite. Or well-known ones. He has so much more. To say to us.

And there's plenty of help available. Including apps you can get now. On your phone. As well as books. And finally. All the heart. And all the soul. Committing.

To studying God's word. We have to do it. With all of our heart. And all of our soul. So again. If we look at verse 3. It says. The king stood by the pillar.

And renewed the covenant. In the presence of the Lord. To follow the Lord. And keep his commands. Regulations. And decrees. With all his heart. And all his soul. So this is about application.

[12 : 24] Applying God's word. To our daily lives. Committing to the Bible. Means that we seek to apply. What it says. To our lives. Not just letting God's living word. Enter into our head.

But actually into our heart. And into our soul. So that it's life changing. And transformational. Josiah. Maybe had only read Deuteronomy. Which is widely regarded.

Along with Leviticus. As being one of the least exciting parts. Of the Bible. Yet as he read it. It caused him. To tear his clothes. And weep in anguish. It turned his life.

Upside down. So how much more. The complete Bible. That we've got. Should speak to our hearts. And souls. How should it change our lives. We have in our hands.

The whole story. Of God's plan to save us. Not just a little snapshot. Or a glimpse. But the whole thing. Culminating in Jesus. His own son. Who died for us.

[13 : 18] And if our Bible reading. Is not causing us. To weep. Or rejoice. Or actually change. Any parts of our lives. Then we're not doing it right. It should engage.

Our heart and our soul. No part of our life. Is out of scope. For God's word. And the same goes together. For. Sorry. The same goes. For our life together. As a church.

God's word. It should inform us. Word and spirit. To guide every aspect. Of our lives together.

Therefore. If we all commit. To the Bible. As a church.

Those who are any kind. Of leadership. Or ministry here. Whether you're paid. Or voluntary. We all need to have. An understanding. Of the Bible. What God's saying to us. And to obey it.

So a radical commitment. To the Bible. Is with all our heart. And all our soul. So as I finish. I remember. A few years ago. David Cramoran. Describing his Christian faith.

[14:14] Like this. My own faith is there. It's not always a rock. That perhaps it should be. I've got a sort of. Fairly classical. Church of England faith. A faith that grows hotter.

And cold by moments. So I wonder what he meant. By a classic. Church of England faith. I think it's a caricature. It's not necessarily.

Not necessarily representative. Of quite a few of the churches. I know. Maybe it is of some. But quite a few. It's not. But I expect he means. An unthreatening.

Sort of faith. A faith that maybe. We just kind of keep God. At arm's length. It kind of. We keep it in a box. It doesn't really change. Our behaviours.

Or our thoughts. And we confine it. To Sunday mornings. A faith that doesn't really. Make any demands. On the rest of our life. And above all. A faith that is deeply. Suspicious. Of anything.

[15:07] That looks a bit radical. Of course. This is a terrible stereotype. Some of my best friends. Are vicars. No really they are. But I suspect. That's what meant. By a classic.

Church of England faith. Is that. So my question to you. And perhaps a question to ponder. Is do we want to be. That sort of church. Or a church that makes a difference.

In the world. If we just want to be. Kind of a nice. Comfort blanket. Kind of a church. Then we can just leave. The bible study. And the bible reading. To a few.

If we just stick to a few. Bible sound bites. In our reading. And our preaching. We can just forget. Making a difference. But if we want to be a church. That truly hears God's word.

And does his work. In the world. A radical church. Then let's be like Josiah. And like the reformers. Let's commit ourselves. Every one of us. To hearing God's world.

[16:01] God's word. Sorry. All the people. All the words. And with our heart. And soul. Some examples. That you might want to use.

Some of you may have some really great ones already. I've just noticed. We've got cover to cover. Bible in one year. Unlocking the bible. The gospel coalition. They've got a brilliant reading plan. You can just google and download. Which goes through weeks. And books to read. Which is really helpful. And please do come and chat. To Clive or myself. Or Russ. If you want any more information.

So yeah. So that's what it will look like. So I think it'll be just good. To finish off with a prayer. As we think about this. And see how we can. Commit ourselves to this. Just close your eyes.

Come Holy Spirit. So dear Lord. We're sorry that in this busy world. We often don't spend enough time with you.

[17:01] And your words. And listening to you. So first of all Lord. I pray. That you would want us to want to. Commit to you Lord. And commit to reading your word.

I pray for a hunger. For your word. As it says in Psalm 103. How sweet are your words to my taste. Sweeter than honey to my mouth. So help us with this Lord.

Maybe just ask him now. To give you that hunger. And Lord.

Help us to think of. How this might work. To set some kind of time in our day. That works for us. Maybe in the morning.

Before the busyness of the day begins. Or maybe in the evening. When we can review our day. And talk to you. And also Lord.

[18:02] Give us a good strategy. To regularly and consistently. Read your word. And that we may be open. To what you've got to say to us.

Help us turn our hearts to you Lord. Each day. And help God against other distractions. Ask this in your name Jesus.

Amen.