

Enjoying the Bible

by Mark Roberts

Grisham. Clancy. The Oprah book club. Hillerman. Amazon. com. Rowling. Barnes & Noble. Homework.

What do all these have in common? Whether it is Clancy's latest techno-thriller, Grisham and his lawyers, Hillerman's Navajo mysteries or Rowling's wizards they can all be found (with a good cup of coffee!) at Barnes & Noble, ordered online at Amazon.com, or maybe even recommended by Oprah in her book club — and they all show how Americans love to read.

Many Christians enjoy reading the latest bestseller but have never thought of enjoying the reading of Scripture. Yet if we want to spend more time in the Bible the issue isn't willpower or time management but "want to." We do what we want to do. When we learn to enjoy the Bible we will want to read the Bible. Do you know how to enjoy the Bible?

First, appreciate your Bible. For some Bible reading is the Christian's homework. With heavy hearts they open the Bible ready for the drudgery of reading. Of course, with such expectations, it is drudgery! Yet David praises God's word, announcing "Oh, how I love Your law!" (Psalm 119:97). Perhaps we should realize we don't "have to" study, but by the grace of God we have this wonderful privilege.

Throughout history many have given their lives that we might have the freedom to read the Scriptures in our own homes, in our language. Recently I read Alister E. McGrath's book, **The Story of the King James Bible**. His book reminded me that at one time owning the Bible was against law. Possessing a Bible was punishable by imprisonment or even death!

Have we forgotten what a blessing it is to have a Bible, and with it, the education to read it? Even now a large majority of the world's population either cannot afford a Bible, is not allowed to own one, or could not read it if they could get one. We need to see this freshly: it is a blessing to read the Word of God!

Second, focus on benefits. It is true that we read Clancy and Grisham for enjoyment. Thus, you may be thinking "The Bible isn't to be read for entertainment---so how can it be enjoyable?" Yet we enjoy many things that are not purely fun or entertaining. For example, I run. That is not always enjoyable, but I love the benefits that come to me from doing it. Focusing on those benefits gets me out there to make my runs.

Similarly, the Bible provides notable and significant benefits to every Christian. For example, the Bible teaches us about our God. We can learn some things about our Creator from creation, but we can never know God as He would have us without the written word

(I Cor. 2:11ff). Further, reading Scripture equips me to deal with temptation. Jesus answered every temptation with Scripture (Luke 4:4ff), and if I read Scripture I will know Scripture and can do the same. It is the Word that teaches us right from wrong, and shows us the consequences of wrong so we will want to do right (2 Tim. 3: 16-17). Those two benefits just scratch the surface of the value the Bible has for us. Perhaps we would enjoy reading more if we made a list, as we read, of all the good things the Bible does. Try it and see — you'll be surprised at how often you have to stop and note that God's word is working for you!

Third, read what connects. All Scripture has value but not every passage speaks to my situation and circumstances equally well. Someone who works in government and is trying to make a difference for the Lord will read Esther differently than I will, won't they? The Bible is a wondrous book, full of poetry and law and history and songs. In all of that you can find something that dramatically speaks to you, that has immediate force in your life. That material connects with you — and you will enjoy reading it again and again.

Certainly, there is a place for deeper study and for taking in the “whole counsel of God.” There is, however, also a place for returning to familiar ground, passages that always seem to contain something new and potent for our walk with God. For me, it is the Psalms. I love them. They have variety, color, and depth. I never have a “ho hum” attitude with the Psalms. When I am preparing a sermon from the Psalms I will look forward all week to the time I get to spend in that psalm. I enjoy it! Find the parts of the Bible you like and you will enjoy them too.

Fourth, reflect on your reading. Reading novels may be interesting but that kind of reading doesn't necessarily change us. Even reading history, like Stephen Ambrose writes, can be a profound experience but it doesn't compare to what happens when we read the word of God. Some of the greatest enjoyment we will ever gain from the Scriptures will come after we have closed the Book and we are thinking about what we have read. That is the process of reflection spoken of in Psalm 119:97: “Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.” Meditation has come to mean something esoteric or bizarre but in the Bible it simply means deep thought about the text. This is the key to making the Bible part of everything we do. I must think about the context of the passages I have read, and who the characters are and where they are geographically — all the fact parts of the text. Yet beyond that I must then prayerfully ask God to bless my reading so I can see from this text what I need to change, repent of, or even do more of. I must think about how this reading changes me. That is what separates reading the Bible from reading a bestseller.

— Preceptor
Oct., 2002

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