



Knowing Scripture (Expanded Edition)

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"The Bible excites him and his excitement is infectious."

—J. I. Packer

The Vital Importance of Immersion in Scripture

The Christian faith has enormous content. Our faith in Christ is not based on speculation but finds its foundation in the truth of what God himself reveals in sacred Scripture. When we talk about being “saved by faith,” we’re talking about faith that is grounded in information, in content, in truth. We’re talking about faith in the reality of the person and work of Christ, faith in the God whose character we know from the Bible, faith based on the actual history of God’s redeeming his people from Adam to the present day.

Because our faith depends on specific content — the content of Scripture — it’s vitally important that the Christian be immersed in the study of sacred Scripture. Notice that I use the word *study*. Reading the Bible is important, but we must do more than read it. We must study it. We must make a concerted effort to understand what we’re reading. For if our faith is grounded in the content of Scripture, we must understand the meaning of its content — its teaching — if we are going to have an informed faith in what God has actually said. We’re saved by Jesus, but not by just any Jesus. It’s not the Muslim Jesus or the Mormon Jesus. It’s the biblical Jesus. And we can’t know or trust in the biblical Jesus if we don’t understand what Scripture says about him, from Genesis to Revelation.

Martin Luther said that every Christian ought to read the Bible from cover to cover every year. But, likening the Bible to a forest, he also said that reading the Bible doesn’t become really enjoyable until you see not only the forest but examine each tree, each branch, and, finally, each leaf. Every little leaf of sacred Scripture must be turned over and studied in order to see the intricate truths that are revealed in God’s Word. To study the Bible is to look at every branch and leaf of Scripture so that we can find those intricate truths and know how they relate to one another. And just as there is a science to studying plants so that we can draw the correct conclusions (botany), there’s a science to studying the Bible so that we can make the right deductions from God’s revelation. It’s called *hermeneutics*, and it’s what this little book that you’re holding in your hands is all about.

I was converted to Christ during my freshman year in college, and from the very first day I trusted in Jesus I read the Bible. In only a few weeks’ time, I read the Bible from cover to cover. I had never read it before, but when I was converted and I started reading the Bible, I was absolutely astonished to discover the nature and character of God. I remember walking in the freshman boys’ dormitory at three o’clock in the morning, pacing like a caged lion in those hallways, and realizing from my reading of Scripture that the God of the Bible is a God who plays for keeps. If I was going to follow him, to be devoted to him, to worship him, I would have to take seriously that he could, just like that, take my life because of a transgression, like he killed Uzzah (2 Sam 6:5–15) and swallowed up Korah (Num 16).

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What came across to me in my reading was the otherness of God, the holiness of God, the difference between who God is and who I am. And I grew in my initial conviction that led to my conversion, the conviction that I am a sinner and unworthy of the love and tender mercy of God. So I kept reading the history of radical rebellion against God that is described in Scripture, a history of which we are all a part, and I kept seeing not only his power and strength but also his tender mercy and his grace toward unworthy creatures. I realized that if I was going to follow him, I would have to follow all that he is, and all that he reveals of himself.

Over time, I not only learned about God but I learned the proper rules for reading his Word so that I could understand correctly who this God is, what he demands, and what he has done for sinners. Learning how to read Scripture, I dare say, was as important as reading the Bible itself. My reading of sacred Scripture from cover to cover and growth in understanding of how to read the Bible correctly—how to apply the proper rules of hermeneutics to Scripture—is what has defined my theology and my entire career of teaching and preaching the Word of God.

Four decades ago, I wrote this book, *Knowing Scripture*, because I wanted to help people know how to read the Bible so that they would be impacted by the same truths that changed my life and set the course for my life and ministry. I wanted them to understand how to read the Scriptures properly so that they could apply God's truth to their lives and see the central theme of the kingdom of God that ties the Bible together. I wanted them to see all those tiny, intricate details in Scripture that show us how God fulfills every aspect of every promise that he's ever given. I wanted them to be able to identify and interpret every vein of every leaf of Scripture so that they would grow stronger in the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ. Many people have told me over the years that this book has helped them do just that. By God's grace, I pray that it would assist you as well.

— Taken from the preface to the expanded edition

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