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Now
I study
the Bible for
one reason
above all
others.



God saved me when I read the New Testament through for the first time. From that moment when the Scriptures met my desperate need for peace with God, the Bible became my life. I browsed through it on the bus to work, and read it on my lunch breaks while fellow workers snickered. I studied it in my attic bedroom after work. At the end of the next academic year, I left the University of Washington in order to pursue a ministry in teaching it. My love for the Bible continued unabated for 18 years. I never had any trouble making time for the Scriptures. I puzzled over why my friends struggled to read the Word on a daily basis.

Then suddenly my interest in the Bible evaporated. I continued to read and study the scriptures because my responsibilities demanded it, but the internal motivation was gone. Needless to say, as a pastor and missionary, this caused me no little consternation and a great deal of reflection. The more I analyzed what had sustained my interest for 18 years and why it “didn’t work any more,” the more I became dismayed over the selfishness of my own heart.

I was a senior in high school when I had begun reading the Bible, and I read it then out of fear. I was afraid for the future. I was afraid of the draft and going to Viet Nam. I was afraid of moving away from home and working my way through college. I was afraid of choices I would have to make about relationships and careers. I was afraid of having my magnificent plans cut short by a nuclear holocaust. And beneath it all, I was afraid of burning in hell for my sins. My heart cried out in desperation for some answers to my problems. I knew that the answers were in the Bible, and that’s why I read it.

Why I Lost Interest In The Bible © 1996 Timothy Ministries

After I found Christ and finished reading the New Testament, I had the profound sense of having discovered El Dorado. I had read the New Testament and it had changed my life. “What treasures still await me in the Old Testament?” I wondered, and so I plowed in. As healthy as it was for my nascent spiritual life, I read the Bible from cover to cover essentially to see what I could get out of it.

What I got out of it was a sense of the Bible’s magnificence as a fountain of enlightenment. In high school, my closest friends and I had styled ourselves “intellectuals,” and I remember saying to myself, “Man, there couldn’t be any book more intellectually satisfying than this Bible!” *I had so many questions.* I’d learned how to gain assurance of salvation, and what the answer was for sin; now I wanted to know whether the rapture was coming before the tribulation and whether speaking in tongues and healing was for today. When I was introduced to the world of doctrinal debates, my list of questions lengthened and I waded into the exegetical arguments with delight. What an exercise for the mind! I searched the Bible for wisdom and understanding—and for intellectual stimulation—for the next 17 years.

Then what happened? I finally realized, as I contemplated my recent malaise, that regardless of how far I was from a total knowledge of the Bible, I was familiar enough with its contents that it took a lot of wading through Greek and Hebrew reference books to get the same intellectual euphoria I used to get before. I’d mined the Bible dry of its more accessible treasures and didn’t want to do the work of digging deeper. I still craved cognitive growth and challenge, but I was weary of the Bible and ready to go on to something else!

Something wasn’t right. After so many years, my very identity was tied up with God’s book! I couldn’t just “go on to something else.” I had to stay with the Bible, but it was becoming a drudgery, a duty. At last I could empathize with the struggle of so many of my friends. But what was I to do? I worried over this before the Lord for some time, and finally my eyes opened to the selfishness that had been at the root of my relationship with the Bible for so long. From the beginning I had been reading the Bible for me. Even when I studied it in order to minister to others, I was reading the Bible so *I* could do *MY* job. *But if this was wrong,* what was the right motive for studying the Scriptures?

The answer came slowly, but it came with great conviction. I got to thinking about eternity and what I would be doing for that long while. I got to thinking about Romans 8.28 and what kind of good could come out of all the struggles and tragedies of life. I thought of John 17.3, where Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” I thought of Jeremiah 9.24, where God says, “‘let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,’ declares the Lord.” What would I be doing for eternity? Getting to know the Infinite One. What good comes out of life’s trials for the elect? The opportunity to watch Him demonstrate His faithfulness and the other wonders of His character. What is the right motive for studying the Bible? The answer is: *to know God.*

My heart broke over my sinfulness as I came to this realization. I am so ashamed of ever having read the Bible out of duty. I thought about how absurd it would have been for me to have communed with my wife Kaaren “out of duty” during our engagement—how rejected she would have felt as I checked my watch to see if I’d spent an adequate “quiet time” with her. What sorry immaturity it is to plateau at a level where we read the Bible out of duty or habit, and what an affront to the One who sacrificed His Son in order to enter into relationship with us. God has revealed Himself in other ways besides the Bible, but not currently in any that are more certain. How foolish I had been to mine the scriptures and miss the greatest treasure of all, God Himself.

Suddenly my hunger for the Word resurrected. Now I study the Bible more than ever, but now its a different experience. I’m no longer reading just to find out the eschatological role of Iraq or the nature of spiritual gifts. Sure, I’m learning about things like that as I go along, but finding answers to such questions is no longer my deepest motive. Sure I still study the Bible for various reasons, but I study the Bible for one reason ahead of all others now: to know God and to fellowship with Him (1 John 1.3). Whatever else I pick up along the way is extra. Now as I read I make notes in my margins that say things like, “God is one who grieves” (Isaiah 17), or “God is a teacher” (Isaiah 28), or “God wants our hearts” (Isaiah 29.13), or “God is burdened by our sins” (Isaiah 43.24). Rejoice with me, for the ardor I had lost I have found again. 🍷