

September 27, 2020

A Walk With the Word
Rev. Meredith Kemp-Pappan

If you grew up going to church Vacation Bible School, you may have learned this song:

*The B-I-B-L-E, yeah that's the book for me
I stand alone on the word of God
The B-I-B-L-E*

I sang that song. And I grew up going to Sunday School and VBS and other activities at my Presbyterian Church. But for most of my upbringing, that is all I really knew about the Bible: that it was a Book, and that it was the word of God. In 4th grade, my congregation presented me with my very own Bible, and I have it in my church office: it's burgundy red, Revised Standard Version, my name embossed in gold letters on the front cover. I'd often bring it to church, but I was always told that it was a church bible, and that it was not intended for rigorous study. My mom bought me my own "study bible," one that I could highlight and make notes in the margins. I have that Bible, too: it's wrinkled and worn, and it has passages highlighted.

This week is our second in a series called "The Walk." Each week, we are exploring a new spiritual discipline to incorporate into our daily lives. Last Sunday, we reminded ourselves about the importance of regular worship attendance and participation. Worship is a response of gratitude for all God has done for us. Our challenge was to attend worship (in person, online, or through television) weekly for the next few months.

You cannot have Christian worship without Holy Scripture. The Bible is not only essential for worship, the reading and studying of scripture is vital to our Spiritual health. What I have found is that the Bible, for as important as it is, often becomes an afterthought for church-goers. I remember showing my new iPhone to my grandfather: I held it out and explained: "See Pawpaw, it can take pictures, and has GPS and Facebook. I can text people! I can even watch movies!" He looked at it and asked, "That's great, but does it make phone calls?" All the bells and whistles on my snazzy new phone almost obfuscated the phone's original purpose, which is, of course, to call people.

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The Bible is one of the most famous books in the world and it is the Best Selling Book with over 5 BILLION copies sold. A recent study found that 87 percent of all Americans own a Bible. But owning a Bible does not equate reading one. Of the Americans who own a Bible, a majority of these had read little or none of it.¹ Another poll found that only 35 percent of Christians read their Bible weekly.¹ So clearly there is a disconnect between owning and having access to a Bible and actually reading what is in the Bible. It is as if the majority of us still have our burgundy Bibles from 4th grade and are too afraid, or overwhelmed, or skeptical, or intimidated to know where to begin.

I think that sometimes, church can become like a new iPhone. We get so excited and enthralled by all the bells and whistles of being church that we forget some of the essential purposes of church. Social events, small groups, technology, marketing, all are important to church, but they are not the founding principle

Let's start, though, with an important question: *Why Do We Need to Read the Bible?* This question goes hand in glove with *Why do I need to Go to Worship?* Reading the Bible and Attending Worship are essential to one's spiritual growth because it is by studying the Bible and hearing it read and interpreted that we learn a little more about who God is and what God does. We can experience God when we gaze at the night sky or when we sit in a concert hall and hear transcendent music. The Bible also gives us an important lens through which to "see God." Because God is infinite and beyond our comprehension, we will never fully understand God. The Bible offers small glimpses into the nature and character of God. We meet a God who creates, who sustains, and who redeems. These days I have found myself overcoming with grief and anxiety and anger. This is not the first time in human history that there has been an extraordinarily bad year. So lately I have found comfort in many of the Psalms of lament. I also find hope in Mary's Magnificat, or in any of Paul's epistles to a struggling new church. The United Church of Christ has a slogan: God is still speaking. Regular reading of the Bible is like a telephone call to the past. We hear how God has walked alongside God's people, even intervening on their

¹ Hamilton, Adam. *The Walk* (p. 49). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

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behalf. God is still speaking, and speaks through the same prophets, and through Jesus, with words for today.

My dad is one of those faithful Presbyterians who, every morning, reads his daily Bible scripture and a devotional over his morning cup of coffee. If you are an early riser, then carve out some time before the hustle and bustle of the day. Or maybe you are the person who reads the Bible and then goes to bed at night. (I tried that, but I always fall asleep during my prayers.)

But maybe, for instance, mornings are just not feasible. If you have to get kiddos dressed and fed and out the door, or logged onto virtual school, then a quiet morning virtual is probably out of reach. (Real talk: if reading the Bible wasn't a requirement for my job, then I doubt I'd get much reading in!) Or maybe sitting down with a devotional is not your style. That's ok. We live in a golden age of Bible accessibility. If you have a smart phone or tablet, then you can download the Bible. There are dozens of daily Bible reading apps, and I am happy to make recommendations to you. If you are a podcast person, they have Bible reading podcasts, too. It may take some trial and error, but there are so many more avenues these days to incorporate reading the Bible into a daily routine. And no--you do not need to buy a special Bible, but there are several good journaling and studying Bibles on the shelves these days. Translations are a matter of preference, but we tend to you the New Revised Standard Version around these parts, and the Common English Bible is a helpful and more accessible translation.

The B I B L E

Yes, that's the book for me.

But we do not stand alone--we stand with each other on the Word of God. And together, we listen to what God has to say. Amen.