

INTRODUCTION

Many of you were kind enough to fill out the survey on Bible reading that we sent out to the congregation. The results were of a nature to delight a pastor's heart—which they certainly did. About ninety percent of you read the Bible either daily or multiple times weekly. That's a good business, and it means that this message will not be packed with fulminations and blue ruination. You are doing well, and so the message will be to exhort you as Paul did the Thessalonians. You are doing well, but I want to urge you to do so more and more (1 Thess. 4:10). And this exhortation is particularly addressed to the young people. This is not something to rest on, but rather something to grow up into.

THE TEXT:

“And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Dt. 8:3).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXT:

Moses reminded the people that God humbled them in the wilderness, and brought them to the point of hunger. He gave them hunger so that He might give them food. The food was unexpected—from a source that they “knew not.” Their fathers didn't know anything about it either. He did this so that they would be made to know that man does not live by bread alone, but rather by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. That is our life.

THE FACT OF FOOD:

The Scriptures refer to the words of God repeatedly under the heading of food. We have this passage from Deuteronomy, of course, but there are many others. Jesus says that He is the true manna, and that His words must be eaten (John 6:63). Peter tells us that we should, like newborn infants, sincerely desire the milk of the Word, so that we might grow. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2).

But a young boy of six, who is eager to contend with his older brother in basketball, might push himself away from the table and complain, “I ate two helpings. Why am I not taller yet?” But that's not how food works.

SOME BASIC POINTERS:

It should not be a great surprise that there are ways to read the Bible that turn out to be less than helpful. So . . .

- Walk, don't run. It would be far better to read a chapter a day for several months—at which point it will be a habit—than to read half the New Testament over the course of three frenzied days, and then to quit in exhaustion. Scripture is food, but you are not to eat like a python, gorging occasionally.
- Don't wring the text out like a washcloth. Just read normally. Don't panic if you think you missed something. You are a Bible reader—you will drive this stretch of road again.
- Some of your meals will be filet mignon. But lots of them will be a spiri-

tual bowl of Cheerios. Don't create a set of false expectations. And some of the genealogies are Grape Nuts. But you are to live by every word—it is not just sola Scriptura, but also tota et sola Scriptura. All of Scripture and only Scripture.

- Don't be intimidated. The Bible can look imposing, but a little at a time adds up. The Bible has 1,189 chapters in it, with 260 of them from the New Testament. If you read a chapter a day, you would get through the entire Bible in just over three years. If you read that pace in the New Testament you would have read it twice in just over a year.

SOME INTERMEDIATE POINTERS:

Half of you read the King James or New King James. Another quarter use the ESV. Happily, you are not going in for the versions that have the angel of the Lord greeting people with, "Hey, guys! Chill!" Using the translations you are using is not the barrier to understanding that it is often pretended to be. A recent study found that 9% of all Americans read the Bible daily, and that the King James was still the top translation used, and that by a wide margin—55% use the King James, with the next runner-up being the NIV at 19%. You might not be one of the hep cats, but you should still do all right.

Secondly, 75% you still read from a printed Bible—which I am not at all trying to discourage. About 16% of you read on an e-device, and 6% of you listen to audio. But I would encourage those of you who are still paper-and-ink-friendly to make a point of supplementing that with many of the electronic helps that are available now. And for those of you who use e-devices, I would like to give a blessing for you to bring them here. Some of you may have been holding back because you were afraid that people would think you were playing Angry Birds in church. Used rightly, you have many more options with much less ostentation.

OBEDIENCE OPENS EYES:

The point is not to pack the head, but to fill the heart. Read with a spirit of openness. Ask the Lord to use the Word as a mirror that will show you how to escape from the snares of self-delusion.

ORIENTED IN JOY:

We live in a dark generation. We live in a time of great confusion. But when we read the Scriptures, we know what we are supposed to do, and we are equipped with the strength to do it. "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Ps. 119:105). We read and therefore we understand. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Ps. 119:11). We are kept in the way by the Word. And this overflows naturally into joy.

"And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them" (Neh. 8:12).