

# Bible Reading in Isolation (Growing in Isolation Week 4)

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Hi, everybody. My name is Jesse, one of the pastors at One Harbor. Thanks for tuning in and watching as we continue on in our video series called Growing in Isolation. And our hope is that on the other side of this pandemic, actually we'll end up with a better relationship with Jesus and even grow in relationship to each other as well. Now, that may seem like a pipe dream at this point because all the typical church stuff that we get to do has been taken away, right? But the reality is that we still have everything we need to grow as disciples. All the essentials are still there. We still get to pray. We still get to have a form of community, right? It may not be in person all the time. It might be through Zoom calls or FaceTime and phone and text and all that, but we still get to do community. And then, of course, we also still have the Bible. And that's what I want to talk about today. And that's Bible reading in isolation.

And I want to remind us that the Bible is what our faith is built upon. At the end of Luke's gospel, Jesus rises from the dead and he meets with his disciples. And before he sends them out into the world, what he spent some time with them, it says he opened up all of the scriptures to show them that they were all about him. And you know what these disciples then did is they went to all the world and preached the good news of the gospel of Jesus. And guess what they used? Those same scriptures.

They opened them up to other people. And that's what Christianity is about and following Jesus is about. We receive the good news of the gospel, receive it through the preaching and teaching of the word. And we take it in. We're people of the word and we study it. And then we turn around and we give it to others. And this repeats generation upon generation upon generation. And this has been happening for 2,000 years of church history. Romans 10, 17 says, faith comes from hearing and hearing from the word of Christ. Ephesians 2, 20 says this, the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, the scriptures, and Jesus being the cornerstone. See, the Bible isn't a Christian fashion accessory we tote around. No, it's what our faith is built on. And too often we forget that or we just miss the Bible for what it really is. The Bible is a gift from God that builds our faith.

Now, I want us to dwell on that. I want us to chew on that for a little bit. Think about that. Think about this. God had all of those words in all of those books written down at various times compiled together for our benefit. Romans 15, 4 says this, for whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction that through endurance and through the encouragement of the scriptures, we might have hope. If someone was to come up to you and say, hey, I have this gift for you. And it is going to be a source of encouragement and it is going to be a source of hope every time you use it. Man, I would think that most of us wouldn't be a little more than just interested to open that gift. We want to know. We don't want to look inside. We want to access that as much as possible. And with the Bible, that's what we have. We have this gift carefully crafted, intentionally compiled so that we can be built up in our faith. It's God's written words to us. But so often we don't see the Bible as a gift. If you're like me, man, for most of my Christian life, I saw the Bible as a textbook. See, I went to a trade school out of high school and one of my classes, I had to read a 500 page book on computer technology. That book was not a gift. That was something I had to read.

I did not enjoy it. It was dull. It was boring, but I had to read it to pass a class. And to be honest, many of us approach God's word that way. We're stuck in legalism. We're stuck in performance.

[ 4 : 09 ] We read the Bible to impress God or other Christians or think we have to, you know, pass a class or some kind of test to stay in God's grace. But that misses the point that the Bible is a gift. And you know what? You and I, we give our best gifts to those we love the most. God does the same thing. God didn't give us the Bible to punish us or to spoil our fun. He gave it to us so we can see and know how much He loves us. The Bible is where we learn how deep the Father's love for us really is. You know, before I was a pastor, I used to travel to Costa Rica for business weeks at a time sometimes. And you know what? In those moments, it doesn't take long to miss your family during those trips. And amidst all the craziness, amidst all the business emails I would read and look at, and a lot of them, hey, you need to do X, Y, Z. Hey, man, you got this wrong. You need to fix this. Jesse, you're late on this. Can you please get that to us? You know, sometimes I would see an email come in from my wife, Haley. Now, which email do you think I wanted to read the most? Of course. I'd want to go to the one. I wanted to open the one that came from Haley. It's a letter from home. It's a letter from her, and her reminding me how much she misses me and loves me and what's going on. But that's how Satan wants us. That's not how

Satan wants us to read the Bible. He would rather us believe that opening the Bible is going to read like one more thing we need to do, one more problem we have to fix, and one more way we've disappointed God and let him down. But the Bible is not that at all. It is a love letter from our Father in Heaven who loves us. We are his kids. And this is why the Bible is a gift and not a burden. But even if we're convinced of this, we don't always experience God's amazing love when we read it, right? Wouldn't it be nice if every time we read the Bible, it was this amazing spiritual experience? Unfortunately, that's not reality. That isn't how it works all the time. But I want to encourage you, instead of giving up, what we really need to do is read the Bible with the right expectations. You know, sometimes reading the Bible is like eating a reverse-seared, slowly-smoked, medium-rare ribeye. It's amazing. It's delicious. And other times, it's like eating boiled cauliflower. But you know what? Both do our bodies good. See, we never know what God is doing with his word when we read it. We may feel in a moment its effect, like right then, right? It's like a 4th of July firework show is going on inside of our hearts. It's amazing. God's doing something. But at other times, it's like a seed. It's like a tiny little seed that's just getting dropped into some soil. We don't feel it. We don't notice it. It's not earth-shattering. But still,

God's word is being put into our soul. And that little seed, even though nothing major happened in that moment, that's something planted. God waters that and causes it to grow. And it may be quiet, and it may take some time to see anything happening. But trust me, God is doing something with that. So guys, read the Bible with an expectation that God can meet you in that moment in a significant way. However, remember that even when it feels like nothing is happening, God is always doing something. Sometimes we can go for weeks or months where Bible reading is about as fun as eating rice cakes, right? That can get you down for sure, because let's be honest, no one likes eating rice cakes. But this is one important reason why we should also practice reading the Bible with others, not just by ourselves. And we should do that by ourselves, but we should also practice reading it with others, which brings me to my next tip. Use the buddy system. There is an amazing faith-multiplying impact that happens when we read the Bible with others. It works like the law of sympathetic resonance. I'm about to nerd out on y'all with some science. Just bear with me.

Hopefully it makes sense. So this is what sympathetic resonance is. See, I can't even say it myself. You can put two tuning forks real close to each other, right? And if you strike one, what happens is this one starts shaking and vibrating, but this one, because it's in harmony, it gets excited too, and it begins ringing as well. And when both of those tuning forks begin ringing, the sound gets amplified. And this is often what happens when we get together and read the Bible.

The Holy Spirit starts working on one of our hearts. It gets excited. It starts ringing with his love and his joy and amazement and wonder. And as that person begins to share what God's doing in their heart, our own hearts begin to pick it up, right? Our own hearts get excited and harmonize with that truth that they're telling us. And sometimes God makes all of our hearts ring at that same time with different stuff. But as we share why our hearts are ringing with this truth, our collective faith joins together and gets amplified and built up. It's an amazing thing.

[ 9 : 09 ] There is definitely a benefit to private study and Bible reading, but there is also an amplified benefit when we get to read it with others. And in addition to having a multiplying effect on our faith, it is a practical way of making disciples. Bible reading is a key way to make and mature disciples.

I was a Christian for 15 years before I started enjoying Bible reading. And you know what it took? It took someone coming alongside me, spending time with me and showing me what to do. But that is discipleship 101. It's teaching, it's modeling, it's training. You know, when I first started playing basketball, I needed a coach. I needed a coach to come and show me the fundamentals of the game. But then it wasn't enough for him to just teach me those fundamentals. He needed to demonstrate them. He modeled for me and my teammates what he was teaching. And so this drove home a better understanding. But then we had to put it into practice. We had to train ourselves. He trained us with drills to practice proper dribbling and passing and shooting. So our learning was then lived out.

We embodied and exemplified the truth we had been taught about basketball. And the more we practiced, the more we grew as basketball players. And that's the essence of discipleship. We hear how to do it through teaching. We see how to do it through somebody showing us, modeling it for us. And we practice how to do it through training. And too often, as Christians, what we do is we tell people, hey, you should read the Bible. And we hand them a Bible and we say, good luck. I remember back in 2010, Ryan Bates, he's a guy that goes to our Moorhead site. He reached out and asked me to teach him how to study the Bible. And my initial thought was just to send him some internet links to some articles that could help him. But man, I just couldn't do that. God just wouldn't let me do that. Because that's not discipling. And that's delegating, that's abdicating my role as someone who could help another brother out, you know. So for the next three days, what we did is we met for one I taught him a Bible study method. And then I modeled it for him. I showed him how to put it into practice. And then we practiced it together. And you know what? By the end of the third day, he was ready to go on his own. In a few months' time, Ryan was leading a Bible study with about 20 guys on his own. See, a disciple became a disciple maker. He received it and he passed it on.

Let me close with a Tolkien quote from Lord of the Rings. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given to us. Friends, God has allowed this time of isolation.

We're experiencing a stripped down version of the church. We don't get to do a lot of the stuff we're used to, but we still have everything we need. And one of those is the amazing gift of the Bible. Let's not waste this time. Let's grow in our relationship with Jesus and with each other.

[ 11 : 54 ] Thank you for watching. There's going to be some questions that come up at the end of this video for you to discuss with your community group online or at home with your family and friends. Thank you. You're welcome.

Thank you.