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The Bishop Speaks

People of the Book

All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

(2Ti 3:16-17 NRSV)

Several years ago I was at a meeting where there were several ministers discussing how to study God's Word. Because I was an Anglican, some expressed surprise that I was there. When I inquired as to why they were surprised, their reply was that Anglicans normally do not read their Bibles. Defensively, I said that our whole service is based on God's Word, and much of it was straight scripture. Besides that we have four portions of the bible read each service. (These are an Old Testament, Gospel, Epistle and a Psalm). Though when I was asked how many Anglicans would engage in daily Bible reading I had to admit that I thought only a small amount would.

This got me to thinking about the importance of God's Word and our need to read it regularly. The following are some thoughts and suggestions that I hope would be of benefit to us.

Why Read the Bible?

In addition to the verses at the beginning I would add the following:

Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

(Heb 4:12 NRSV)

From these short verses we learn

1. The Bible provides us with the instructions of how to live a Godly life. From the bible we learn what is good and evil and how to distinguish one from another. We learn how to follow Jesus. As Christians we say that we enter into the Family of God by faith through the grace of God. Once there we need to learn how to live as members of God's Family. The bible is our guide. If we do not know what is in it, we will not know how to live as a member of God's family.

2. From Hebrews 4:12 we learn that God works through the Bible to speak to us. As members of God family we meet with God through His word. God can guide us in the way He wants us to go, He can convict us when we are wrong and He can change and mold us into the people He wants us to be. If we do not read the Bible we limit God in how He speaks to us. We often will not know His will because it is in the Bible and we do not read it. God chooses to work through His Word and we must read it to learn what He wants to say to us.

Corporate Bible Reading

I cannot stress enough what an advantage it is to use the Revised Common Lectionary in our services. If we follow it every year we will hear and learn all the major themes of the Bible. The lectionary is based on the life of Jesus Christ so that in regular worship we will learn about our Lord and Saviour, the center of our faith and our relationship with God the Father.

As a Minister in the Church using the lectionary gives me a discipline that forces me to teach and preach about the whole word of God and not just my favorite parts. As a Bishop I know that the major themes of the Bible are being taught and when I visit I am able to blend my messages with the themes that are taught in the parish.

Individual Reading

The reading of the Bible in worship is very good and well rounded as I have already said. If a person attends church regularly then he or she will hear a good portion of God's Word. The problem with limiting the reading of the Bible only while in Church is two-fold: Firstly in this modern age we live in we normally do not attend church as regularly as our parents and grandparents. 70 years ago, not only would you be in church on Sunday but you would often be there during the week for special days such as Ascension Day, Christmas Day or a Saint's day.

Today this is not the case. The numbers who attend church are dropping and those that do attend, not as often as they once did. Secondly and realistically, hearing God's word spoken once a week is not enough. Every day you are flooded with the world's values and we need to counteract it with flooding our lives with God's values. 10 – 15 minutes a day of God's word will go a long way to preventing the world's values from taking over our lives. Find a time of the day that is best for you and take 15 minutes to read God's Holy Word. You will find it time well spent.

A Suggested Format to Read God's Word

1. Begin with a short prayer asking God's guidance such as the following: Dear God, as I read your word today, help me to receive the message you want me to learn from it. In Jesus' name. Amen.
2. Use a reading program to help you with your reading. This is not necessary, but I find having a few comments from a learned person helps us to understand the reading better. Two possible programs that I like are "Our Daily Bread" which is given out free in many Churches; the other program is Scripture Union – Daily Bread, "Words for Life". This program costs a bit of money but is very good in helping you to read the Bible in an orderly way. Most churches will help you to order a subscription that can be sent to your home.
3. Read the passage
4. Read the comments if you are using a program or ask "what is God saying in this reading?"
5. Say a short prayer thanking God for his word such as "Dear God, may what I have learned in this reading help me to live a better life and may it help me to love others. Thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Listening to God's word in Church and spending a few minutes every day to read God's way will help us to live better lives and will help us to know God's will for us.