

A PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Biblically Literacy: Increasing a congregation's Bible knowledge

by Timothy Sprankle

My daughter asked me the other day if she could underline in her Bible. I said an emphatic, "Yes."

Unprompted, she added, "Samuel is my favorite book. I like reading about David." And I liked hearing that she likes reading.

Claire is ten, and a year ago I weaned her and her sister Margot off picture bibles to the actual text. I started reading through the gospel of Mark with them to give them a ground floor picture of Jesus. They already knew he was mighty and divine. Now they're seeing he is enigmatic, secretive, and purposeful. They ask far more questions now, not only to extend their bedtime, but also because the Scriptures have piqued their imagination.

I want the Word of God to captivate my children. I want their Bibles filled with personal notes, highlights, and bookmarks. I want them to understand the text.

Biblical literacy stands near the top of my list of qualities I desire for all believers—eight-year old children and eighty-year old congregants. However, as most Christians have discovered, biblical literacy does not come easily. Sometimes it's a Bible problem: the text is confusing, complex, or boring. Sometimes it's an Us problem: we are busy, tired, or undisciplined.

Biblical literacy comes when we overcome both personal obstacles and lack of understanding.

To overcome personal obstacles, it helps to have a reading plan and accountability. The plan should include when you will read, where you will read, and how much you plan to read. A journal may be helpful for tracking thoughts and keeping them on track. But do not confuse a plan for a law: a reading plan should to prompt us, not shame us.

Fortunately, we live in an age where resources for understanding abound. Great sermons and articles flood the Internet. Study Bibles and reading guides give practical helps. As a pastor, I provide weekly exhortation in my sermons, boosted by classroom materials and discussion questions.

However, I also realize the importance of exposing my congregation to a range of great teachers. Not only do I point them to particular pastors, authors, and speakers who have shaped me, I encourage them to learn with me.

The Let's Know the Bible Conference has become one such opportunity for my church. Attending with several other local congregations, we spend the day with our Bibles open, highlighters ready, and questions bubbling to the surface. This year we will get a ground floor picture of Isaiah from Dr. Bob Chisholm. My interest is already piqued. Perhaps I'll even bring my children.

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