

A PASTOR'S PERSPECTIVE — On Reading the Bible

“Building Confidence by Reading the Bible with Others” by Lee Compson

One of my favorite classes in college focused on C.S. Lewis' writings. I was familiar with his famous works, but wasn't ready for the immersion this course would provide. The imagination and symbolism of many of his writings proved difficult to keep up with. Thus each class session became critical because our professor emphasized group discussion as we processed the latest reading. The class dynamic always stimulated and helped piece together Lewis's stories.

I realize many Christians have a similar experience with the Bible. Even long time churchgoers sometimes feel inadequate when reading and trying to understand the Bible for themselves. While the Bible applies to our modern lives, it is filled with strange terms, strange names, and strange stories that can sidetrack us from fully grasping the message. And though a good study Bible may offer helpful notes, even they can interrupt the flow of reading through a passage.

To overcome these difficulties, reading the Bible with others offers meaningful insights. This can be done in two ways and will boost our confidence in knowing and applying God's Word.

1. Reading *with* others: By this I mean reading the same passages on a planned schedule with others. A small discipleship or accountability group can follow a reading plan where all read identical passages during the week and come back to share what they learned.
2. Reading *alongside* others: This approach involves the basic reading aloud of a passage within a small group or Sunday School. Not all people are extremely adept at reading hard names and words, but having different voices and styles can actually bring out more of the text than if just one person does all the reading. Scripture was intended to be read aloud and heard, and there are aspects of God's Word that are missed if they are only read silently.

In the end, group efforts can boost our confidence in handling God's Word in at least three ways.

1. Different perspectives can enrich our understanding of the text. When we study the Bible in groups, diversity will emerge that benefits all involved. Different people of different genders and different experiences will read passages differently. Those unique observations can help highlight more truth, especially in a context where questions and insights are welcomed.
2. Tricky concepts are better handled in community. Bible studies can be fertile ground for ignorance or mediocre interpretations. However, the “two heads are better than one” principle still applies. When hard issues and questions rise out of the text, it's better to have more resources at your disposal than just your own limited viewpoint.
3. It takes the pressure off. Every so often, I hear people express embarrassment that “I should know that,” feeling inadequate about their basic knowledge of the faith. Studying the Bible within a group setting can be a “rising tides lift all ships” situation, where we all benefit from each other's contributions.

Let me put in one final word about this idea. We have created the *Let's Know the Bible Conference* for this very issue. We desire to build people's confidence in their Bible knowledge and application one book at a time. We hope you will attend this year's event as we seek to be equipped to better handle the book of Hebrews.

© March 8, 2017
Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies

For any copying and distribution of this material please contact hwbatemaniv@gmail.com