

If You Read 1 Book This Year, This Should Be It

I have never called any book a “must-read” except one, the Bible. I suppose that’s because I take the word “must” so seriously. I mean, “Must,” or you perish. “Must,” in order to make it to heaven.

Now there you go, turning salvation by grace into salvation by works. Salvation by Bible reading!

Probably anyone who responds like that is not very saturated with the Bible. For the Bible makes plain that there is a practical, ongoing “holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14), and that this holiness is produced by the Holy Spirit *through the Word of God*. Hence Jesus prays for us, “Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

This is how we confirm that we are truly His disciples, “If you remain in My word, then you are truly My disciples” (John 8:31). And if we are not found to be His holy disciples in the end, we will perish. This is what Paul meant when he said, “I warn you ... that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21).

The truth of God, rising continually through the roots of faith planted in God’s Word, is the way God keeps Christians alive and enables them to bear the faith-authenticating fruit of love so that they will not be castaways in the last day. This is the essence of why I say the Bible is a “must-read”—the only must-read.

But there is more. Infinitely more. So, to lure you onto this happiest of all paths to heaven, let me hold out to you seven reasons to read and meditate on the Bible every day next year.

1. God, the Creator of the universe, the one who holds all things in being, and who therefore knows everything there is to know, and who is infinitely wise, and full of grace and truth—this God inspired the writers of the Bible in such a way that the Christian Scriptures are the infallible Word of God.

All Scripture is breathed out by God (2 Tim. 3:16).

No prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21).

Pause. Let this sink in. There is a book that is unlike every other book because it is the very Word of God. You have this book. Or you have access to it. Many do not. But if you are reading this, you do. It is astonishing. Absolutely astonishing. You can hold in your hand a book whose words are the very words of God. God! Do you hear this? Really hear it?

There are no emotions of thankfulness or wonder or adoration that come close to what we ought to feel because of this book. This is why the psalmist cries out in desperation: “Incline my heart unto your testimonies” (Ps. 119:36)—because our hearts cannot delight in this book as we ought without omnipotent help from God. The book is so great, we need great help to see it and savor it for what it is. Let this sink in. God gave us a book of complete truthfulness about Himself, His saving work and His will for us. This alone is enough to make a wise person read it and savor it deeply every day.

2. Jesus, the incarnate Word of God, who was with God and was God from all eternity, stands at the central hinge of history and pledges His absolute allegiance to the Old Testament as the inerrant Word of God, and pledges His absolute commitment to bring the fullness of God’s written revelation to completion in the New Testament.

“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one dot or one mark will pass from the law until all be

fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18).

"Scripture cannot be broken." (John 10:35).

"Do you not err, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?" (Mark 12:24).

"I have yet many things to tell you, but you cannot bear them now. But when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. For He will not speak on His own authority. But He will speak whatever He hears, and He will tell you things that are to come" (John 16:12-13).

This is how most people come to trust the Bible. They meet the living Jesus in its pages. Jesus wins them. He wins their trust. His glory—"glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14)—cannot be denied. It is self-authenticating, like the glory of the sun. And there He stands, full of grace and truth, witnessing irresistibly to the infallible Scriptures.

Is this circular—seeing the glory of Christ in the Scriptures, and believing the Scriptures because of Christ? It is no more circular than seeing the sun rise in the east and knowing infallibly that this universe is the creation of God. The material sun testifies to the glory of God in the creation of the world (Ps. 19:1), as the incarnate Son testifies to the glory of God in the inspiration of the Word.

3. The Word of God to us in the Bible is complete. "I found it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend for the faith which was once delivered to the saints" (Jude 1:3).

So then you are members of the household of God, built on the *foundation of the apostles and prophets* (Eph. 2:19-20).

Jesus delegated His authority to a generation of apostolic spokesmen. Their charge was to record the foundational truths of the church. When they were done, the faith had been delivered—once for all—and the foundation was laid.

The Scriptures are sufficient. That is, in order to see God and know God and love God and be transformed into Christ-exalting images of God, we do not need any more infallible revelation from God. What we have is inexhaustible and unfathomable. But we desperately need the ongoing ministry of God's Spirit, inclining us to His Word and opening the eyes of our hearts to see its wonders and bow joyfully in obedience to its authority.

The ongoing ministry of the Spirit, in gifts of wisdom and knowledge and prophecy, are not an extension of infallible Scripture (1 Cor. 14:37-38). They are humanly fallible expressions of things God may have brought to mind, and as such, are in the same category as spiritual wisdom shaped and tested by the Scriptures. We need no more infallible revelation from God to know Him and please Him. What we hold in our hands is complete.

4. In the Bible, we see God—more surely and more clearly than anywhere else. This is what we were made for—to see God, and know Him, love Him and be changed by Him into radiant images of Him. Here is the way it happened for Samuel:

“And the Lord appeared again in Shiloh. For the Lord revealed Himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord” (1 Sam. 3:21).

He revealed *Himself*. By the *Word*. This is how it happens for *all* believers. In the Word of God, the glory of God Himself stands forth. When God opens the eyes of our hearts (Eph. 1:18), we behold the Lord Himself.

“But we all, seeing the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces, as in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18).

And how do we know this happens by the Word of God? Because four verses later, Paul describes this beholding as “seeing the light of the *gospel* of the glory of Christ, who is the

image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). The glory of Christ reaches through "the light of the gospel"—the narrative of God's saving work in His Word—and breaks into our hearts as a sight of Christ, and thus a sight of God.

Do not pass over this too quickly. God has designed us to see Him and know Him and love Him and be changed by Him into images of Him—and this transaction of glory happens through daily sightings of God in His Word. Would anyone really call this happy, supernatural quest *legalism*? If they do, they probably have not tasted the reality of this encounter.

5. By the Word, God gave us life. Life from spiritual deadness. Life that lives by union with His life. Life that will last forever.

"For you have been born again, not from perishable seed, but imperishable, through the word of God which lives and abides forever. ... This is the word that was preached to you" (1 Pet. 1:23-25).

Of His own will, He brought us forth by the Word of truth (James 1:18).

Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

If this is not enough to make you love the Word of God and want to read it every day—because God used it to give you life—then ponder what comes immediately after Peter tells us that we were born again through the Word:

"As newborn babies, desire the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow, if it is true that you have experienced that the Lord is good" (1 Pet. 2:2-3).

In the new birth—through the Word—we tasted the goodness of the Lord. Really tasted it, with new and living spiritual taste buds that had once been dead. And, Peter says, if that

has happened, then you will “long for the pure spiritual milk”—that is, you will long for the Word, where we go on tasting the goodness of the Lord, and so grow up into salvation. We are born again by the Word. And we grow by the Word. Long for it. Long for it. Every day this next year.

6. The warfare against soul-destroying sin is won by the Word of God. If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if *by the Spirit* you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live (Rom. 8:13).

“Take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Eph. 6:17).

“Your word I have hidden in my heart, that I might not sin against You” (Ps. 119:11).

“Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth” (John 17:17).

How do *you* take up the sword of the Spirit in this mortal daily warfare? We are not playing games. If you don’t fight, you die. If you fight by the Spirit—wielding his sword—you live. Everything is at stake. And by God’s grace, with God’s Spirit, the Word is enough. God will keep us (1 Pet. 1:5)—by this Word. Take it up. Take it up every day. Don’t walk out into the battle unarmed.

7. By the Word, God imparts to us the very joy that His Son has in Himself. “I have spoken these things to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full” (John 15:11).

“But now I am coming to You, and I say these things in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

“I have spoken.” “These things I speak.” Why? Why did Jesus speak? Why were His words taken down? Why did John and the

others put them in a book? For our joy.

No, not just our joy. But our joy as the very joy of the Son of God in us. We do not have the spiritual strength to enjoy God with the reality and intensity with which He was meant to be enjoyed. So Jesus promises that *His* enjoyment of the Father will be in us. Do you hear this: His enjoyment of God, becoming our enjoyment of God? How? By His words! “I have *spoken* that my joy may be in you.”

As I complete this article, I am praying for you. Thousands of you—that this next year will be a year of consistent Christ-exalting miracles in your life. I pray that every day will start with the miracle of desiring, seeing and savoring the glory of God. I pray that God will incline your heart to His testimonies, that He will open the eyes of your hearts to see wonders and that you will store them up so that you do not sin, but are filled with joy—the very joy of Christ.

John Piper (@JohnPiper) is founder and teacher of and chancellor of Bethlehem College & Seminary. For 33 years, he served as pastor of Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is author of more than 50 books.

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