

Michael Youssef Alerts Americans on the Dangers of Biblical Illiteracy

In a clip heard 'round the western Christian world, Andy Stanley seemed to suggest in 2018 that believers ought to “unhitch” themselves from the Old Testament. While the megachurch preacher later claimed the widely condemned statement was stripped of its context, the criticism—and subsequent conversation—was already unfolding in Christian communities around the country.

Egyptian-born theologian and Christian author Dr. Michael Youssef, pastor of the Church of the Apostles in Atlanta and the executive president of Leading the Way, recently spoke with CBN Digital about the necessity of the Old Testament, offering a warning to believers in the West, many of whom, he asserted, suffer from serious “biblical illiteracy.”

To make his case, Youssef referenced the American Bible Society’s latest State of the Bible survey, which revealed a mere 9% of Americans read their Bibles on a daily basis. Only a quarter of respondents said they open the Scriptures each week. Thirty-eight percent said they never use their Bibles.

That same study found a stunning 26 million Americans stopped turning to Scripture regularly during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when routines and norms were profoundly upended.

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“This is grieving to me,” said Youssef. “And we are surprised at what’s happening in our culture and our society? Are we

surprised when we have neglected the measuring stick? ... In fact, when they were forming the [biblical] canon – the word ‘canon’ actually is an Arabic word, believe it or not, and it comes from the [phrase] ‘measuring stick.’ ... How do we know what is right and what is wrong and what is deceptive and what is false and what is right and what’s truth, unless we have that measuring stick?”

The preacher, author of the new book “How to Read the Bible (As If Your Life Depends on It),” briefly addressed statements Stanley made about the Old Testament and its importance to the Christian faith.

Youssef likened the Old Testament to the foundation of a building—a necessity for any sound structure.

“Get ‘unhitched’ from the Old Testament?” he asked. “This would be like saying, ‘I love this big, beautiful, tall building, but the foundation is not really necessary. Let’s get rid of it.’ You get rid of the foundation, the building will not stand for very long. And I often say if you understand the Bible ... if you understand the unity of that book, it is one book—not two books.”

“I often liken it to a house,” the author continued. “The Old Testament is that house—the foundation and the walls—but it’s lacking a roof. The New Testament is that roof. And therefore, together, you have one building, one house. Or like a play that has two acts, act one and act two. One without the other does not really make a lot of sense.”

The books of the Old Testament, Youssef instructed, constantly declare “Christ is coming,” which comes to fruition in the pages of the New Testament, written after Jesus’ resurrection.
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