God, In the Gospel of His Son

Benjamin Beddome (1717–1795)

God, in the gospel of his Son,
makes his eternal counsels known;
where love in all its glory shines,
and truth is drawn in fairest lines.

Here sinners of a humble frame
may taste his grace, and learn his name;
may read, in characters of blood,
the wisdom, pow'r, and grace of God.

The pris'ner here may break his chains;
the weary rest from all his pains;
the captive feel his bondage cease;
the mourner find the way of peace.

Here faith reveals to mortal eyes
a brighter world beyond the skies;
here shines the light which guides our way
from earth to realms of endless day.

O grant us grace, almighty Lord,
to read and mark your holy Word;
its truths with meekness to receive,
and by its holy precepts live.

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In the Nick of Time

A Call to Read the Bible

Jon Pratt

No one tells a king what to do. Kings have power, prestige, possessions, and people who do their bidding. True, kings do have advisors, but advisors can be ignored and even dismissed if the king doesn't like what they have to say.

So no one tells a king what to do—no one, that is, except for Yahweh. Deuteronomy 17:14–20 gives Israel God's instructions about the kings who would rule their nation. First, He gives three prohibitions to kings: 1) they should not acquire horses or go back to Egypt to get them; 2) they should not marry multiple wives; and 3) they should not obtain excessive wealth.

Second, Yahweh gives two positive commands for the king: 1) he should write out a copy of the law (the Pentateuch) for himself, and 2) he should read the law every day (or all the days of his life). God gives four results that will come from the king's daily reading in verses 19–20: a) "he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them"; b) "his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers"; c) "he may not turn aside from the commandment"; and d) "he may continue long in his kingdom."

If God commended daily Bible reading for the most important individual in the theocratic kingdom of the OT, certainly He commends the same for all believers today. The Bible is filled with calls to read, meditate upon, and memorize the words of our divinely inspired book, so I want to encourage the reader to be engaged in personal Bible reading on a daily, or nearly every day, basis.

Sadly, many Christians do not make the spiritual discipline of daily Bible reading a priority in their lives. People offer many and sundry reasons for this failure: "I'm too busy"; "I'm not a reader and the Bible is so long"; "I don't understand what I'm reading"; "I read it once and that's good enough"; "I'm too tired"; "I already study the Bible at church and small group studies" and so on.

But these are poor excuses for avoiding the most basic need that every believer has: to feed on the truth that God's Word provides.

Every fall the full-time faculty of Central Seminary gather at a beautiful cabin on Grindstone Lake in Hayward, WI, to prepare for the upcoming school year. We sing, pray, laugh, and eat together while considering the important academic and student life issues of the seminary. Mealtimes provide a good opportunity to consider personal questions that help us build unity and give us glimpses into each other's lives.

One question we answered this year related to our personal practices of reading the Bible. Some seminary professors might argue that they already know their Bibles so well that they don't need to read it devotionally. And no one denies that people with PhDs in systematic theology, church history, or biblical languages, who have spent years and years reading thousands and thousands of pages and listening to thousands of sermons, do not already know the Bible inside and out. But I was encouraged to hear each of my colleagues explain how he approached his personal Bible study each day.

One man read a psalm, a chapter from Proverbs, and a chapter from the NT. Another followed a plan that had him read through the Bible in a calendar year. Another explained how he concentrated on a particular book of the Scripture for a lengthy period of time. In short, every man is in the practice of reading his Bible, not just to prepare for a lecture or essay or sermon, but to learn and hear from God. Indeed, we cannot know and love God if we do not spend time daily soaking in the words He has inspired and preserved for us.

Many have written books on how to read the Bible, and I recommend that Christians become aware of the various Bible study methods these books suggest. But I would like to offer my own practice as one of many good options. Perhaps the reader will want to give it a try or perhaps will try one of many others on offer. But no matter what method you choose, be sure to be a Bible reader.

For many years I have followed a simple practice of daily reading one chapter from the New Testament and two to three chapters from the Old Testament. This allows me to read through the NT a little over four times every three years, and to read through the OT at least once per year.

I love reading the Bible more than any other book (Ps 119:97)! Occasionally, I will make a journal entry regarding an interpretive question to pursue or an extended meditation or a prayer. Additionally, I may read a devotional, and there are many excellent works that have been written for this purpose. But my time in the Word is my priority, and I have always found this hungering and thirsting after righteousness to be entirely satisfying (Matt 5:6), sweeter than honey (Ps 119:103), and far better than gold (Ps 19:10).

Many years ago someone suggested that reading different translations would be a good way to enhance my Bible reading experience, and so I took up the challenge. This advice was excellent, and I want to encourage the reader to consider doing this as well.

We English readers have been blessed with an embarrassment of riches when it comes to Bible translations, and I believe that you will be blessed as I have to take advantage of this privilege. After reading other versions, you will also be able to offer good counsel to any others who ask you about another translation they might be considering.

In God's providential kindness I have now read through (in order of the date of publication) the KJV, ASV, RSV, JB, NEB, NASB (1971, 1995, 2020—all three!), TEV (Good News Bible), NIV (1978 and 2011), NKJV, NRSV, NLT, the Message (reading right now), NET Bible (2001; the 2019 revision is next on my list), ESV, HCSB, CSB, and LSB.

In the next *Nick of Time* I will make some comments on each of these translations as well as offer some suggestions about the use of study Bibles for personal reading. But please take away two essential points from this essay: read your Bible daily and read different translations.

This essay is by Jon Pratt, Vice President of Academics and Professor of New Testament at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
