

Volume 2, Day 18: You Create Your Own Quiet

One of my favorite passages in the message is in Matthew chapter 9, verses 28 through 30. Jesus is talking to His disciples. “Are you tired? Are you worn out? Are you burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest, walk with me and work with me. Watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't put anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.”

I can't emphasize enough how much God and you need to find a quiet place in your heart and life because that's where He makes Himself known. It's then that we're more open to hearing His still small voice, feeling that nudge and being drawn into that quiet place. You make time for everything you really want to do. This journey requires that you make some time to learn, make time to live freely and lightly. Find a place just to sit in silence. Even if you don't think of anything or hear anything, just sit for a moment at rest in His presence. Enjoy what God is bringing into your experience in this moment.

The more you think about Him you'll be less drawn into what the world is frenzied about. The more you feel His unconditional love for you, the less you will be tempted to find love in unseemly places. The more you love God the more you will trust Him and want to serve His purposes. Abraham's perfect trust in God put him in the Hall of Fame of Faith!

ENGAGING God -- Bob Clarkson

Volume 2, Day 19: Why the Bible Is Boring

I received an email from Angela. This is what she wrote, “I was brought up in a school led by nuns, and they really made the Bible boring to me. Now I'm starting to live in God's love and I sometimes feel like I have to read the Bible. But it turns me off to God. The Psalms are okay. The gospels are okay. But to be honest, reading them does not teach me anything and I find them uninspiring. Don't get me wrong, I sense God's love a lot of the time, and often I feel his love for people around me. So I'm not saying that I don't feel a connection to God. I'm just bored by the Bible. It does nothing for me.”

Angela, you're probably not alone. Whether it's from some nuns or Sunday school somewhere, sometimes people trying to help us love this book may have bored us to death with it. Or they may have turned it into a rule book that makes it intimidating to read. Or maybe we hear the voices from the pulpit telling us how evil and horrible we are. And we read it like this. All we see is that man falls so short of God's expectations. And for many, this book either becomes boring or at least not helpful to their journey of life or their affections for God.

I meet more and more believers who tell me they really don't need the Bible. They have the Holy Spirit. Well, you know what? We get both. We get this incredible book written over thousands of years, by a variety of men who see God making Himself known, over a great span of time, as God's revelation unfolded in the world. Nope, this isn't a rule book. This isn't the owner's manual to the human machine. This is God, who **is** love, revealing His life, His purpose and His wisdom in the world. But you have to read it in a way where that stuff unpacks for you.

Vol 2, Day 20: The Bible Is the Greatest Love Story

The Bible has been misused for a long time. Boy, a lot of religionists have used this to beat people to death, to make us feel unworthy of the God who loves us. Instead of this poor view, see it as the story of the living, loving God breaking through our misery and brokenness. It reflects how we have lost sight of Him. We thought of Him as being this angry taskmaster waiting to strike us when we misbehave. But the Bible was written so that we could discover, in Jesus, that He is a God of great love and mercy. It's that story that you want to capture.

If you don't know that story, you might want to check out the “Jesus lens” videos at thelivestream.org website. These and other resources help people view this book through the eyes of Jesus. These videos present God, interpreting the Bible in a lovely way. They help people to come to know God as he is, ‘love itself in all of its glory.’

The Bible, when properly understood, grounds us in His love. I'd say this to Angela, “You don't have to read this. We get to! When you're ready to be invited into this book, not because someone says you must, but because the Holy Spirit is inviting you to discover God here, then He's will lead you through it in a way that will be transforming to you.” Otherwise, we're just left to following our own impressions, and though I love that the Spirit of God speaks to us, and we've been talking about how God makes Himself known in a variety of ways, that's still never complete, never full, never absolutely clear. Neither are our interpretations of scripture. Sometimes we can interpret things very wrongly, but when you put the voice of the Spirit alongside the revelation of scripture, you have two things that confirm that “God **IS** love!”

Volume 2, Day 21: How to Read the Bible

So how do you find a life of love for God in the Bible if it's boring to you or if you feel like it's just a condemning book? Well, I'd say first of all, don't rush into it. Learning how to read this book, learning how to draw life from it, is a journey for me too. It is the most important book I own. I look at it almost every day and every time I'm reading a scripture, I'm listening to see, is there something in here God's revealing to me about His unconditional love?

Here are some things that might help you. Begin reading the gospels. You might read them for two or three years. The more you know and feel the love of Jesus, by reading about how he treats people, the more you believe that God's love to us is most certainly unconditional. His love is never based on our behaviors or motives. He loves us because He made for the expressed purpose! And then maybe move on to Acts and then maybe the epistles, and then eventually go back to the Old Testament and see how the stage was set. The Old Testament no longer governs how we approach God, but it helps us appreciate grace and how magnificent it is.

I like saying this about the Old Testament. I think it's the story of God's rescue, oftentimes through the eyes of people who were scared of God, who regarded him as mean and doing horrible things to his people. We find out in Jesus that God's not the cause of destruction in the story. Occasionally, he intervenes in history to further the purpose of salvation, but he's the God whose loving kindness is better than life. He's the God whose mercies never end. He's the God who wants to reveal himself every day to us.

Volume 2, Day 22: Value in Both Testaments

The Old Testament is historical evidence that something more than law was needed to rescue men from their own propensity to selfishly destroy those who would get in their way. The Old Testament makes it abundantly clear that mankind needs a savior because we could never save ourselves. Further, it reveals that every man in every generation has committed sin (relationship crimes). And in it, God declares repeatedly, “You do good, I’ll be good to you. But if you do bad, I’ll make you pay a dear price.” This was God’s way for several thousand years.

It would not be possible to appreciate grace, as expressed in the New Testament, which is the by-product of unconditional love, without understanding the Old Testament governance of God. And, since all have sinned, the only fair and just way to accomplish redemption, is to make it accessible to every person. So, one valuable revelation of the Old Testament is that no one can merit their own salvation. The New Testament offers life with God by way of forgiveness and grace. The message of the New Testament is that you can do bad and get good!?!?

Salvation is provided by God, while serving justice to all, both the victims and the villains, by means of the highest price which any man can pay. He must sacrifice every bit of his pride on the altar of Christ’s sacrifice. The only thing that keeps a person from entering the kingdom of God is their insolent insistence on maintaining rebellious independence from God, just like Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. In other words, you cannot appreciate unconditional love without understanding the true nature of mankind as revealed in both Testaments.

Volume 2, Day 23: Look for the Love in Every Verse

I think the Old Testament is the story of love told from the abused dog's perspective. When abused we end up hiding in the bushes. And the New Testament describes those who have come to know God's love through the revelation of the cross. They're kind of like the dogs who have finally come inside the house. They look at God in a whole different way since they have been exposed to His unconditional love. Once rescued, these dogs no longer see their masters through the eyes of shame or fear, but through the eyes of affection.

Don't take the difficult words of scripture as commands. Take them as promises. When Jesus tells us to love our enemies, he knows there's no way we can do it without Him. That's a promise. I'll teach you how to love your enemies the way my Father does. When you find things that are too difficult to understand, you know what I like to encourage people to do? Take what's here that you understand clearly and what makes sense to you. Fully enjoy what you do understand. You might have a lot of questions about things that don't make sense. Don't worry about those. You can sort those out down the road.

Instead, focus on what is clear. Look for the love in every passage. Listen for the voice that speaks to you. If it is not audible, it will be thoughts or sensations in your soul. Look for something you're doing that invites you to live a little more loving. That's the Holy Spirit opening you up, helping you see what God's doing to change your life. And maybe someday this book won't be boring to you. This will be encouragement to all the wisdom and knowledge that God wants to pour into your life.

Volume 2, Day 24: The Cart Before the Horse

Sin seems to be the focus of almost everything we do in Christianity. The idea that our sin separates us from God, and even though He forgives us, we are still obsessed with sin, plagues us. We teach each other that we have to stop sinning. We must repent every time we sin if we are good Christians, And that doesn't work very well. Unfortunately, we have succumbed to the lie that our testimony is our better behavior. That is not what Jesus told His disciples about their testimony.

But I do get the question a lot. What do I do about my sins, my mistakes, my failures, the bitterness I have in my heart, the unforgiveness towards somebody? Do I have to fix that for Jesus to be close to me and for this journey to work? I actually want to say it works the other way around. That's why we haven't talked about sin a whole lot. Our sin is forgiven at the cross. God is no longer holding sin against us. That's not just the sins we committed before we came to know him. That's also true about the sins we still struggle with today.

How do we deal with that? The Old Testament, I think, left us with this idea that the more righteous we could be, the more relationship with God we could have. But Jesus says in the New Testament that isn't actually the way it works. He says, apart from me, you can do nothing, which would mean that until we know Him, we can't be changed. That what's actually true is this. The more relationship with God, we'll have, the more righteous He'll make us to be. The transformation comes from Him, not from us. Our testimony is the transformation to be lovers like Jesus. We love without conditions of behavior or motive, just like Jesus loves. "Love Like Jesus Loves!"