

The Bible and discipleship

Andy Twilley

It's not rocket science, in fact it is so obvious it is hard to believe that anyone would ignore the fact, yet so many do: if you remove the main ingredient from something, it will not work. Your car with no engine will go nowhere, so too, remove the Bible from the heart of Christian discipleship and growth will not be experienced.

The Bible is the foundation of Christian understanding, Christian life, and Christian experience. At a personal level it acts as a light; to guide, to highlight right and wrong, to illuminate our path as we journey through life. It acts as a sword, to clean up our lives and to defend us against the attacks of the devil. But fundamentally it acts as milk and meat; it is basic nourishment enabling growth in our understanding of God, as well as growth in our relationship with God. No one can grow and mature in their faith without drawing on this source of nourishment. And at every stage of our Christian journey, from first entering into the family of God, right through to the day we die, we will only grow into the men and women God intended us to be, through regular engagement with his Word. Failure to do so means we grow older, but don't mature properly, we won't grow up as God intends.

It's no new problem. The writer of Hebrews in chapter 5 wrote of the people being spiritually lazy, unwilling to grapple with the tougher issues of faith, content with the "elementary teachings". Unless we encourage and enable Christians to engage effectively with the Bible for themselves, the growth God intends will simply not happen... no matter how good our exposition of God's word is on a Sunday. As the well known illustration says: "Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach them how to fish, and they are fed for life".

Why has this become such a problem? A core reason is how we have come to handle the Bible. We live in an age of anecdote, which often leads to the Bible being portrayed as superfluous, fulfilling a very secondary role in church life. It is used very superficially, being tagged on to sermons which have jokes and illustrations at their heart, and it is used selectively, simply using verses or concepts which are safe and comfortable.

Such abuse of the Bible has its consequences. First for the individual themselves, but secondly for the church as a whole. Just think about the tensions and problems which occur in local church life; many are the result of spiritual immaturity, a failure to build lives on the Bible's teaching. We can never become biblically functioning communities without such a foundation. But the consequences go further still. This failure means we don't clearly understand our *raison d'être* to be salt and light in a dark and tasteless society, so the consequences spill over into the communities within which God has placed us, as we fail to be the people he intends us to be.

What can be done to correct this imbalance?

1. People need to understand that engaging with the Bible is for information and transformation: The Bible changes us.
2. We need to model positive connections with the Bible, through sermons, in our worship and in other conversations with those in our churches.
3. We need to provide people with the skills to handle God's word appropriately and effectively. Different people with different learning styles inevitably need models of engagement suitable to them. We have a responsibility to provide such training.
4. We must help people to see how the Bible all connects together. It is all too easy for people to conclude that parts of the Bible are irrelevant. We should be helping people to see how it all fits together, under God's wonderful plan of salvation from Genesis through to Revelation.

As we do this, I believe we will see a transformation taking place: the building of mature disciples; the establishing of biblically based churches; and a significant impact on the communities within which God has placed us.

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The Nationwide Christian Trust is committed to supporting people in their journey of faith. We produce Living Light, daily Bible reading notes which treat the Bible with integrity, and make it accessible to ordinary people. Copies are available free of charge. And we provide training seminars for local churches, covering different aspects of Church life. Two of the areas covered are:

- 1. Looking at issues surrounding Bible engagement, including one entitled the Word in One... understanding the Bible's Big Picture.*
- 2. Training for small group leaders.*

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