

HNTRTB

I ran into a great article in the April 2009 Christianity Today magazine while browsing around at the Newman Library. It was based on a book by Scot McKnight called, "The Blue Parakeet: Re-Thinking How You Read the Bible". So, under the heading "How Not To Read the Bible", here are five "no-no's".

1. ***The Morsels of Law Approach***. The Old Testament alone contains 613 commands. Some people see the book basically as God's rule book for life. After all, he made the world, didn't he? Reading the book as a set of rules to be followed leads us into legalism though, and if we are honest, we are all selective when it comes to the rules we follow from the Bible. (for a hilarious take on this, check out, "The Year of Living Biblically" by A. J Jacobs.)

2. ***The Morsels of Blessing Approach*** Some see the Bible as a book full of God's promises and blessings. They lift out blessings or promises and claim or apply them to their lives today. God does promise much in the Bible, but to lift those promises out of their contexts distorts them. McKnight complains of receiving "Daily Blessings Calendars" from Christian publishers. He once wrote to a company suggesting they produce a "Wrath of God Calendar of Blessings". (I don't think he heard back from them)

3. ***The Rorschach Approach*** For those who avoided college psych courses, the Rorschach Inkblot test is commonly used by psychologists to try to examine the personality characteristics and emotional functioning of their patients. The patient is invited to look at a pretty ambiguous inkblot and tell what they see in it. Some people read the Bible as if it were an inkblot and project their own ideas onto it. (Actually, this is a danger for all of us)

4. ***The Systematic Theology Approach*** Some see the Bible as a giant, disorganized puzzle that needs to be put together into categories. Positively, this approach can help us to see the major themes of the Bible. The danger here though, is that we risk putting a system together that works for us and our crowd. Each major Christian tradition has its own way of organizing Scripture, and each highlights some portions while largely ignoring other passages, themes or emphases.

5. ***The Maestro Approach*** This approach takes the view that one particular book of the Bible interprets the rest. For example, Liberation Theologians use Exodus, Reformed pastors use Romans, especially Romans through the lens of

Luther. The danger of the Maestro approach is that we do violence to other passages or we render them ineffective of speaking to us because we only hear them through the voice of our favourite book.

Well....

So, how do we read the Bible? I would suggest that we first think of **hearing** the Bible. The Bible was written to be read aloud with other people. Reading a book of the Bible a bit at a time is a great to do with family or friends. (Use what works for the youngest person present). Something different happens when we listen instead of trying to analyze the Bible. Use a translation that leans in the "literal" direction. (New American Standard is a personal favourite) The stories are meant to be read from beginning to end. Recently at our church some of us gathered to hear the entire gospel of Mark and heard it in a way we never had before. McKnight suggests that we think of the Bible as a STORY that contains within it stories. I like that and would add that the STORY and the stories are always about God, his creation and their relation, and what God is doing in and through Jesus the Christ.

Grace and peace,
John