



Wednesday, May 16, 2018
6:30pm
St. Mary's Episcopal Church

The Bible: Relevant or Let Down?

"21 Books You Don't Have to Read"

The Editors of *GQ*
April 19, 2018

The Holy Bible is rated very highly by all the people who supposedly live by it but who in actuality have not read it. Those who *have* read it know there are some good parts, but overall it is certainly not the finest thing that man has ever produced. It is repetitive, self-contradictory, sententious, foolish, and even at times ill-intentioned. If the thing you heard was good about the Bible was the nasty bits, then I propose Agota Kristof's *The Notebook*, a marvelous tale of two brothers who have to get along when things get rough. The subtlety and cruelty of this story is like that famous sword stroke (from below the boat) that plunged upward through the bowels, the lungs, and the throat and into the brain of the rower.
— *Jesse Ball, 'Census'*

Among Christians, there are those who take the Bible literally and there are those who, while not taking it all literally, still take it seriously, but according to the *GQ* article, you now have the option of taking it not at all.

Let's give Ball a point: some people who are supposed to live by the Bible haven't read it. To be sure - the Bible is not easy reading, and it takes at least as much work to stay with it as it does to read any long and complex book, or to learn some of today's software.

Nonetheless, even Christians who don't read it usually hear stories from it while growing up in Sunday school, and hear it read today in worship services.

Here is one writer's opinion-

Tim Swarens, *Indystar* (April 24, 2018)

In the news business, it's known as click-bait -- a deliberately provocative, often sensational and always shallow article that's written solely to attract page views and in turn drive advertising revenue.

Which brings me to *GQ* magazine's recent hey-click-this list of "21 Books You Don't Have to Read." The lineup of supposedly not-worth-your-time literature includes the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, *The Catcher in the Rye*, *The Old Man and the Sea*, *Lonesome Dove* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

But the book on the list that's generated the most media attention and the strongest push-back is the Bible, which author Jesse Ball dismisses, in all of three sentences, as "repetitive and foolish."

Still, let's meet Ball and others like him where they are. If you reject the idea that God, even if you do believe in a deity, would communicate to humanity through a book, why would reading the Bible be worth while?

In the best tradition of click-bait, here are four reasons, none of which address the spiritual value of the Scriptures:

1. To understand western culture
2. To understand history
3. To understand current events
4. To understand your neighbors

Question: Does the fact that you find some readings from the Bible boring mean there's something wrong with your faith, something wrong with the Bible, something wrong with you as a reader or none of the above? What do you think are the most important or most interesting books of the Bible?

I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed. (Luke 1:3-4)

This is from the opening verses of Luke's gospel. One of the things it tells us is that Luke's original audience was a highly placed (implied by "most excellent") person named Theophilus. We don't know any more about him, but it seems likely that he was a new follower of Jesus. On the other hand, it's possible that he commissioned Luke to write this account of Jesus. More likely, Luke was independently moved (inspired) to tell Jesus' story to this new convert.

Question: What does it mean that we today are not the audience the writers of Scripture had in mind when they composed the works that came to be included in the Bible? How do we become the intended audience?

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth. (2 Timothy 2:15)

Here the apostle Paul writes to Timothy, who was giving oversight to a church. Paul tells Timothy to work hard at understanding scripture so that he might "rightly explain" it. In other words, it was important that the Bible not be used to mean whatever Timothy's biases might want it to mean, but that he might seek to understand what the Bible actually says and actually means.

Questions: When have you discovered that a passage of scripture meant something more than or different from what you first took it to mean? When has the Bible been a life force for you? Are you more likely to gain deeper insight into the scriptures in group settings or individually?

For Further Discussion

- What role, if any, did the Bible play in your coming to faith to begin with? What role, if any, does it play in your ongoing Christian journey?
- Comment on this: J.B. Phillips, a British scholar and Bible translator, once said that while paraphrasing some Old Testament books, it sometimes seemed to him as if he were working with bare wires without the electricity being turned off!