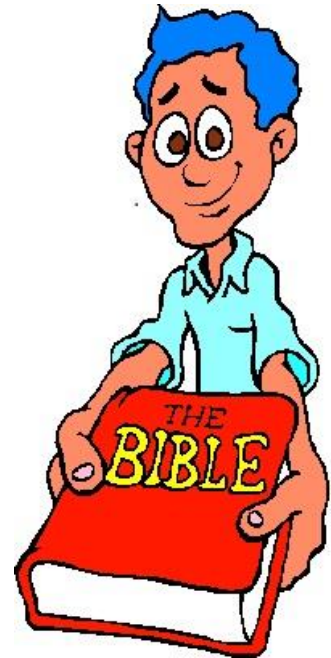


# The Bible – Dead or Alive.

Sometime ago we shared some of the questions in the old classic, “Spiritual Check Up”. Perhaps another good question is, “How much does the Bible mean to us?” Does it really live for us? Do we look forward, with anticipation, to reading it? Or has it gone dead on us?

There are a few things that don’t help, such as small print, two columns and the way it is read in many churches. We will add that St Mary’s, our church, is an exception. Recently, in another church, we had the misfortune to stand next to someone who said the responses asked for in the service, in a clear, sepulchral voice. Our hearts sank when he did the reading in the same tone of voice. To add to the irony of the situation the reading was from 1 Corinthians about God choosing the weak and foolish! We knew one thing for certain, that if some, shall we say, ordinary person



had wandered in with no church background, they would have been slightly baffled as to why anyone should read anything in that tone of voice. If someone had been seeking God, as one recent convert to Christian said to us, he would have thought, “I can never be like that”, and would have turned away. He would have turned away from the church but no doubt Christian Scripture, as well. Yes, there are many things that don’t make the Bible attractive. This is very sad as it is the most wonderful book in the entire world.

Even with Christians, there can be a lack of desire to read the Bible. This is not necessarily solved by forcing ourselves to read it because we ought. It can be quite difficult to confess that, (a) we never stop to read it or, (b) we can’t understand it when we do read it. Perhaps some would say buy a good commentary, or use Bible Reading Notes. Both of these suggestions are good but there is another way. The Bible, despite what some may have us believe, was not written for scholars but for ordinary folk like you and us. We come back to the fundamental question - what turns this book from a dead, rather boring one, to being alive and our most precious possession?

A love for our Bibles begins with prayer and asking the aid of the Lord, such as, “Please help me to understand and love your Bible”. He will answer that prayer. It is the Holy Spirit that makes the Bible alive for us; unless he illuminates the pages then they will be dead and meaningless. We can read and read Scripture (and some of us have experience of this) but then one wonderful day we meet Jesus and suddenly we realise what this book is saying. We literally see it with new eyes and the eyes are those of the Spirit. This gift is there for the simplest among us and the most intelligent. It is the latter who sometimes have the most difficulty. We have known youngsters who have left school with very little ability to read. Then the Holy Spirit has given them a desire to read the Bible. Suddenly they have taken huge strides in literacy and moreover, understood what they read.

Open the gospels, or the letters, in the New Testament and read with the Holy Spirit. It is possible to read the Bible in a year but it may not be advisable! In our experience it is better

to linger over a short passage than to go at speed through several chapters. Often the Holy Spirit will light up a phrase or a sentence. Linger with that until, as the old saints would have said, it goes from the head to the heart. The Lord through his living word may sometimes give us directions in a sticky situation but every day the Bible will tell us how to live as Christians. In this day and age when our minds are bombarded by the culture around us and inevitably we absorb it, then we need more than ever to realise that our citizenship is not in this world but in the Kingdom of God. Day by day, as we read God's word, his values will become embedded within us. We will develop a longing to be like Jesus, patient, kind, longsuffering, loving - and as Christians, we will be different, not because of our judgemental attitudes, which are all too prevalent, but by the quality of our lives.

We may be tempted to read some beloved passages over and over again, which isn't wrong, but alongside this, begin one book in the Bible and read it through slowly to the end. We need the fullness of the Word of God. Some may be conscious that we have not mentioned the Old Testament? We love the Old Testament and read in the same way; it too will speak. If there are verses that are incomprehensible, then leave them for the moment, move on.

This month, why not read in the Gospels about our loving Lord who suffered and died for us and his appearing again, after death, to his amazed disciples – as you read, through His Spirit he will come to you, too.