

BIBLE HELPS

Some Ways Not to Read the Bible

While the literature about *how to read the Bible* is ample (using a good translation, reading carefully and prayerfully, using appropriate study aids and helps, applying what we read to ourselves, etc.) little is said about things we should *avoid* when we read the Holy Scriptures.

There is a well-known story which will illustrate my point: Once there was a man who wanted to find out God's will in a decision he had to make. He took the Bible, opened it at random, and dropped his finger on to the page, believing that the verse on which it landed would express God's will for him and tell him what to do. But to his chagrin, his finger fell on Matthew 27:5, which reports that Judas "went out and hanged himself." The man thought that he had better try again. This time his finger came to rest on the admonition of Luke 10:37: "Go and do likewise." This began to really worry him, so he sought direction from Scripture a third time and his finger fell on the words of John 13:27: "Be quick about what you are to do." This method of randomly opening the Bible and expecting to find the answers or message directly from God in whatever verse our finger falls upon is sometimes referred to as "Bible roulette." Sometimes it seems to work, and the assurance or comfort we receive from a given verse does indeed seem like a message from God. But more often the one playing Bible roulette comes up with something totally ridiculous and irrelevant. And as a method of making decisions it is positively dangerous. God offers no guarantees that verses we find at random in the Bible will contain his specific direction to us.

The Bible does indeed contain God's word to us, but it is not a book of magic. It is a book whose meaning we unlock with our minds as well as our hearts. And, more importantly, it is a book that is given to the entire Church, as well as to us individually. Because God has created us with minds that can think, and because he has given us salvation *in and through his Church*, he expects us to use our minds when we read his word and to understand the Bible in light of the living tradition of the Church. Playing Bible roulette short circuits all this, and treats the Bible as if it were a magical book whose words have meaning completely apart from their context in Scripture and the Church. Further, seeking direction from passages chosen at random is not only a dangerous way of making decisions; it also warps the very nature of God's word to us in Scripture.

A second way not to read the Bible is to take verses or passages out of their context in Scripture and use

them to prove a point, treating them as if they were all God had to say on the matter. This is sometimes called "proof-texting"; that is, using a verse to prove the point we are trying to make. This is often used by fundamentalists, and others very familiar with their Bibles, and awes those of us who do not have such a close acquaintance with the Bible text. Those who use proof-texting don't select verses at random, but rather carefully search for verses that will prove their point. This method too lifts verses out of the context in which they appear in the Bible, or imparts a meaning different than what the inspired author intends, to settle questions or make a point.

To be continued next month



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FIGURE 1

Case Study: The Case of...

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The first part of the case study describes the background of the organization and the context in which the intervention was implemented. It also outlines the objectives of the intervention and the methods used to evaluate its effectiveness. The second part of the case study provides a detailed description of the intervention itself, including the specific activities and materials used. The third part of the case study presents the results of the evaluation, including the findings from the pre-test and post-test surveys, as well as the focus group discussions. The final part of the case study discusses the implications of the findings for practice and policy, and offers some suggestions for future research.

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The final part of the case study discusses the implications of the findings for practice and policy, and offers some suggestions for future research. The findings suggest that the intervention was effective in improving the knowledge and skills of the participants, and that it had a positive impact on their attitudes and behaviors. The implications of these findings are discussed in more detail in the next section.

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