

I read the Bible— every word



by Micah Ward

I set out a few years ago to read the entire Bible. That's right, everything from "In the beginning" to "Amen". I have finally finished that quest, every single word. Since I am not a scholar, I am going out on a limb here, but bear with me and let's see if I can make sense of what I read.

Reading the entire Bible isn't something you decide to do over a rainy weekend. It took me two years to read from cover to cover. This isn't like binge watching the *Tiger King*. I began by reading two chapters a day, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The New Testament is much shorter, so when I finished it, I simply started it again while I toiled on through Numbers, Deuteronomy, both Samuels, both Kings, both Chronicles. (I have to be honest. It

was tough getting through certain parts of the Old Testament.) I admit skimming through the sections which outlined who begat whom and who they begat after that. Then after finishing the New Testament a second time I decided to concentrate on the Old Testament, and by then I was into the prophets who, in line with their titles, prophesied. A lot. Now I can see where the old-time fire and brimstone preachers got their sermons. But I also realised that each one of these books contained the message that God would rather forgive us and have us reach out to him than rain down all that destruction upon us. Love and forgiveness. That is what really stuck with me from my trip through the Bible.

Another favourite from the Old Testament, and not just because we share the same name, is the prophet Micah. In the sixth chapter of his book, the prophet

is expounding on what it is that God wants from us. The answer starting with verse eight is: "to be fair and just and merciful, and to walk humbly with your God". As far as being a template for how to live life, that's a pretty good one.

As templates for life go, though, it is hard to beat the teachings of Jesus. The New Testament is the story of Jesus and the beginning of Christianity. There are some confusing thoughts about Jesus. Some believe he is the son of God and a separate entity from God. Others believe he is God in human form and, even more confusingly, that Jesus is both. I don't know, and I'm not going to worry about it. I just like what the New Testament says: that Jesus is "the Way". It is simple to say, as many Christians do, that the way to get to heaven is to believe in him. And that brings up two questions: what is that

way of Jesus, and what exactly is heaven?

The Bible isn't really detailed about what heaven will be like. I tend to think of it as a state of being completely in the presence of God. How will that manifest itself? Will it be streets of gold and angels playing harps? Will it be ten-mile runs on beautiful trails where no one gets tired, and calorie-free pizza and beer are in endless supply at the end? I have no idea. I just trust that it will be more wonderful than we can ever imagine. And hell? I guess that would be the opposite. An existence totally devoid of the presence of God and all that such an existence would imply. So, how do you get to heaven? The Gospel of John says that Jesus is the Way.

The first four books of the New Testament are known as the gospels. They are the eye-witness accounts of the life and teachings of Jesus written by some of his best friends. I have read these four books several times and paid particular attention to what Jesus

says. You and I and the lady on the next barstool can all read the same passage and come up with different interpretations. But to me there are three main points that Jesus makes in his teachings.

Point 1 is love. When Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he said it is to love God with all your heart and soul, but he went on to point out that the second greatest commandment is love others as yourself. Then he said that nothing else in the whole Bible is more important.

Point 2 is forgiveness. Jesus was asked if we should forgive those who sin against us seven times. Jesus said to forgive seven times 70. He was making the point that you ought to forgive an endless number of times. It should also be pointed out that in the Lord's prayer Jesus taught us, there is the line where we ask God to forgive our mistakes as we forgive the mistakes others make. In other words, we are asking God to forgive us only to the same extent as we are willing to forgive others. Wow! Think about the implications...

Point 3 is judgment. Jesus was not too keen on hypocrites and those who were quick to judge. Consider the passage where he cautions us to remove the log from our own eye before we help our brother remove the speck from his. Or the story of the woman about to be stoned to death and Jesus responding to her accusers by saying the one without sin should cast the first stone. No stones were cast and Jesus declined to judge the woman. Instead, he forgave her sins and told her to sin no more. What does this tell me? That our actions should be guided with love and forgiveness. Those are my quick and short impressions from reading the entire Bible.

I will continue to read it and try to gain additional insight and understanding. But the Bible does, without a doubt, say some very basic things that we should never forget.

We should love others as ourselves. There are no exceptions to that, by the way. We should forgive others who have done us wrong, no matter how hard it is to do so. And, finally, we should go easy on how we judge people. We never know what is going on in someone's life. So, give them the benefit of the doubt.

Our actions should be guided with love and forgiveness.

