

Reading and Inhabiting the Drama of Scripture

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by David Schrock

For the first few years of my Christian life Our Daily Bread served as a vital part of my personal devotions. Each month or two, I'd pick up the short devotional in the church foyer, and each day I'd read it with accompanying Scripture references. About the same time, I began memorizing Bible verses. Behind my desk today is an index box full of the Scriptures I sought to memorize from that period.

Scripture tells us that the way a man keeps his way pure is to hide the word of God in our heart (Psalm 119:9). Truly, the practice of Scripture memory and devotional reading is life-giving for the Christian. At the same time, such Bible memory and devotional nuggets can be lost on the Christian if they are not tied to the larger storyline of the Bible. Indeed, remembering the work of God in history is foundational for any abiding faith in Christ. And without it, we risk adding knowledge without heart change.

To combat that we are hosting a Women's Breakfast and Bible Study tomorrow morning. See below for more details.

Recalling the Story of the Bible

Throughout the Old Testament Israel rehearses its history. In Deuteronomy, Moses begins by recounting God's covenant faithfulness to Israel (ch. 1–4). In Psalms 78, 104–106, and 136, the Psalter retells the events of redemptive history, so that future generations might trust God to work on their behalf. Likewise, the Prophets regularly pick up God's work in Exodus in order to say: The God who split the Red Sea to save his people can do it again (see Isaiah 41:8–20; 43:1–21). Even Nehemiah, when leading the people of Israel to restore covenant with God, starts not with their profession or recommitment, but with Yahweh's history of covenant faithfulness (9:6–34).

In short, God's people are not only a people of the book, but a people who identify themselves by the wondrous story of God's salvation. Anyone who reads the Bible piecemeal, therefore, will only be able to lift bits from the Bible that may have no life-altering effect. Like throwing sugar packets into the Great Salt Lake, we cannot sweeten our brackish souls with individual precepts and disjointed principles. What is needed is an ever-widening story of God's redeeming love that lifts us out of our personal tragedies and unites us to his divine comedy.

Yes, we need biblical truths. But even more we need to know the grand narrative of God which has power to recreate the way we look at the world. Because we are created to inhabit a particular story, each of us interprets life through a grid informed by certain stories—it could be the American Dream, the feminist agenda, a childhood tragedy, or the impending fear of death or insignificance. Yet, unless the story that most defines us is the story of God in Christ, we will not be conformed into the image of our Maker.

This is the reason why we must read the Bible not as a collection of spiritual truths, but as Eugene Peterson puts it, as one “immense, sprawling, capacious narrative.” The key word is *narrative*. As story shape lives and create culture, so the Bible is larger in its epic scope than Star Wars, Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, and all the works of William Shakespeare and Marvel Comics combined. But unless we read it like this, we should not be surprised when Scripture memory and devotional reading lacks transformative power.

Why We Need More Than Bible Bits

In their book, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen make this same powerful observation,

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits—theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author’s intention to shape our loves through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives.

If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should. Idolatry has twisted the dominant cultural story of the secular Western world. If as believers we allow this story (rather than the Bible) to become the foundation of our thought and action, then our lives will manifest not the truths of Scripture, but the lies of an idolatrous culture. Hence, the unity of Scripture is no minor matter: a fragmented Bible may actually produce theologically orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshipers! (12)

What a sober warning—that we who fill our minds with Bible words might actually remain ensnared to idols, because the larger, liberating story of the Bible has not been seen, adored, or embraced.

The point these authors make is that if we continue to live our lives according to the secular humanist story, a mega-narrative that bombards us from every direction, and only fight back with individual verses, we will lose every time. Why are so many AWANA graduates and youth group leaders failing to resist the hedonistic onslaught of the world? Perhaps it is because they have only sprinkled Scripture into a worldview shaped by another anti-Christian story.

To combat the world and everything in it, we must lay hold of the gospel, the storyline of Scripture which has the power to capture our hearts and renew our minds. We must cry out for the Spirit to protect us from the false stories of the devil, and we must give ourselves to rehearsing the sweet story of God’s redeeming love. This story planned in eternity past, prepared through Israel’s history, purchased on the cross of Calvary, and now perfected through the gift of the Spirit and the Word is the one we find in Scripture. And it is the only one that has power to combat the hedonistic devices of the world.

For His Glory and your joy,

Pastor David