

2 Timothy 3 :14- 4:5

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, ¹⁵and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Chapter 4

¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather round them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. ⁵But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

I read that while there were never any written rules about women not entering the Boston Marathon, it was always understood that this was the case. In 1967 Katherine Switzer registered for the marathon under her initials and got a number to start. But even as she was running, the race organiser realised that she was among the many men, and tried to stop her. He tried to barge her to the ground, and take her number from her! Her trainer, and her boyfriend were also in the race, and they defended her. Eventually she finished, and so became a pioneer for women to run the Boston and other marathons.

Sometimes there are all sorts of forces trying to put you off what you set out to do. Running a marathon is off-putting enough to most people! The training is gruelling, and takes some dedication. But being told you're not welcome is very hard.

It can be quite as difficult to engage in the marathon effort of reading the whole Bible. There are lots of reasons *not* to do it, not least a world full of people who will tell you this is all outdated and irrelevant. But there are lots of reasons to do it. Last year, Beth, who lives in Sibton, read the Bible through the course of the year. I asked for her thoughts on this experience, and she said this:

“Growing up in a non religious household, and with a scientific degree, I discovered the Bible last year. I wanted to read the whole Bible before I formed an opinion regarding religion and Christianity.

I learnt a lot from reading the Bible: what stood out the most was the different styles of writing throughout the book — as time went on the language and style of writing changed, but the strong message of faith ran through. The Old Testament I have to say was a hard read at times, especially the book of Numbers, but I did find it still important book to have read. There are many stories in the Old Testament that are important to read, such as Jonah and Job as stand alone stories. But it also sets out a foundation for Christianity, especially in the books of Genesis — where it all began! — into Exodus, to Samuel and Kings. I have to admit I do struggle with Psalms and Wisdom, but I think that's the style of writing!

The New Testament and the Gospels are obviously a very big part of Christianity, and it's interesting to read the same story through the writing of four different people. From first reading I prefer the book of John, but I am sure the more I read in different times in my life this could change.

I have only read through the Bible once, and I think if I read through it again I will learn more and it will throw up more questions — to ask Tim! It is a book that you can pick up at any time in your life and gain comfort from it.

I read it by using the app 'Bible in a year', giving a passage from the Old Testament, New Testament and a psalm/wisdom for daily reading. Breaking up some of the harder and heavier books over a few days! This I would recommend!"

I think Beth did really well in this: she wanted to learn about Christianity, so she went to the book, or collection of books that is at the heart of all we say about it, and read it cover to cover. Along the way she did ask me questions, which I did my best to answer. She also attended the 'Bible course' that I ran last summer, which I hope helped her on the journey. I think I would add that while I love very many aspects of being a vicar, the thing I enjoy most is teaching people about the Bible and our faith. I have another asker of taxing questions — Beatrice who comes to family at church — who recently asked me, 'how do we know what happened in Genesis when God made the world?' And for a fun follow up, 'if God made everything, did God make the devil, and does he love him?' And I answered these questions the best I could, while remembering that I was talking to an inquisitive 8 year old.

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul exhorts Timothy, his helper in Ephesus, to keep on keeping on, and to do that well through knowing the scriptures that he has known since childhood. God's word is the strength by which Timothy will hold his faith and hope during tough times.

And Paul famously goes on to say that all scripture is useful for teaching, rebuking error, correcting and training in righteousness. In other words, if you want to be the best person you can be, in Christ, you're going to need familiarity with these words. And if you are going to help others in this, you are going to need familiarity with these words.

When Paul says this he's arguing that you should be familiar with the whole of the Old Testament. That, for him was scripture. He didn't know that he was writing scripture himself, nor that the Gospels, and Revelation, and other letters, would be counted as scripture later, but if it is true of the Old Testament generally, it is even more true for the New Testament, which is the final revelation of Jesus, and thus of God, in all his fullness.

This is our wisdom for life. This is the written source for our knowing the fullness of life we have in Jesus Christ and his salvation.

Paul goes on to urge Timothy to go on preaching the truth, in season and out, because the time is coming when people won't put up with truth, but will want teachers who say whatever their itching ears want to hear. Paul recognises that what we believe was, and is, and will be countercultural — we will always be swimming against the flow.

But if we have the truth, we have the truth, and we should know it, understand it, love it, and share it.

Those people I know who read the Bible each day usually pray each day. And those people who do both build up a strong foundation of knowing God, and trusting God, and hearing God, and recognising his call in their life, and responding to it, and finding fulfilment in that life in God.

And those who don't, usually don't have quite the same level of faith, nor prayer, nor goodness. We could argue about the exceptions, but that's not the point. Dwelling in God's word is transformational.

So whether you are a Bible reading veteran or if you've hardly scratched the surface, I'd like to challenge you to pick up this book again, and start reading it more regularly. It's pretty good you know. The ending is brilliant! I bet that if you do this enough, God will speak to you. And you will build confidence in your speaking to God.

Marathon's *are* worthwhile. The marathon of reading the Bible is worthwhile. It can be life changing. There are coaches, like me, who are there to help you and encourage you. and, like a marathon, you will discover things about yourself. So why not give it a go?

Amen.