

Reading for Life

HAVE you ever considered how fortunate you are, to be able to read this magazine? That is not intended as a boast – although we hope *Glad Tidings* is helpful – but to highlight how great it is, to be able to read.

It means we can learn, develop ourselves or simply get pleasure from books and other written material. Some of us can immerse ourselves in other worlds, or escape the pressures of this one, in this way.

Being able to read helps our learning as a child, increases our ability to study and gain qualifications in whatever field we choose, and affords better job prospects. In fact, literacy agencies have linked illiteracy with poor mental health, social deprivation and even shorter life expectancy. This is why so many countries around the world have made it a priority to teach children to read – both for learning and for pleasure.

Literacy has been on the increase, especially in the last hundred years, and UNESCO now estimates 90% of men and 83% of women in the world can read. Despite the obvious inequality, this shows great progress. 200 years ago, the proportions were inverted, and barely 15% of the world could read.

What to Read?

Reading is generally a good thing, but of course **what** we read is really important.

There are plenty of books and internet content which are very unhelpful and can damage our well-being. Choosing wisely is vital.

The Bible is a first-class choice for reading, in so many ways. If we like action stories, then the books of Judges and Acts provide lots of excitement. For advice and self-help, then Proverbs and Ecclesiastes have guidance that remains valid today. If you like poetry, then the Psalms provide all the emotional highs and lows that you could want. For character studies, the Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus are unsurpassed. The list goes on.

But the Bible is different, because none of its 66 books are fiction. The stories are real and the messages it contains are meaningful. Above all this, the Bible's single author is God; the people who wrote it down were doing so under His inspiration. There is plenty of evidence for this – prophecies which have been fulfilled, and scientific and other knowledge which could have come from no other source, to name but a few. *Glad Tidings* regularly deals with this evidence.

The impact of this is amazing. Look how the Psalmist put it:

Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they



are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts (Psalm 119:97-100).

Reading and meditating on God's word – recorded in the Bible – gave him wisdom and knowledge beyond his peers.

Life-Giving Words

The writer continued, explaining how his adherence to God's word gave him great spiritual advantages too.

I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word. I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me. How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (v101-105).

After thinking about God's word, he was able to please God better, to obey His laws and to avoid doing things that would displease God. This clearly gave him great

pleasure. God promises a wonderful future to those who love His word and try to please Him.

This was the message that the apostle Paul wrote to a young man who was trying to please God:

From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (2 Timothy 3:15-17).

The Bible gives us everything we need to make us spiritually complete, equipped to please God. It teaches us about faith, the belief that through Jesus we can be 'saved' – brought into a relationship with God with the prospect of sharing the future He has planned. Jesus summarised it like this:

Your word is truth (John 17:17).

Words into Action

Now none of this is any use to us if we leave the words on the page and do not act upon what we read. The future Kingdom of God will be a real, perfect world, here on earth, where we can live in peace and joy for ever.

This means we need to take real steps based on what we read. Believe God. Be baptised. Live as His people, trying to please Him. That is how reading God's word can get us eternal life!