

Sermon for Sunday, February 12, 1978, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor  
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"IS THE GOOD BOOK ANY GOOD?"

II Timothy 3:10-17

Text: "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." II Timothy 3:16,17

Do you ever catch yourself humming or singing some jingle to a commercial? I do. Lately, the one I catch myself humming is, "Weekends were made for Michelob." And that really "ticks" me off! Weekends were made for God. That jingle represents everything I am against. Yet, I catch myself humming it. Do you know why that is? It is because advertising is aimed at the emotional and unconsciously I am being shaped and moulded against my will by the things that are being fed into my mind. I am told that if you are watching T.V. pictures of food could be flashed on the screen at such a rapid rate of speed that you would not even be conscious that you had seen it; yet, shortly you would begin to get hungry. There has even been talk of the Russians being able to influence the American mind by flashing pictures on our television screen so quickly that we would not be consciously aware that you had seen them, yet those pictures would have been comprehended by the mind and would begin to shape and mould us.

Now, the question I want to raise is this: to what extent is God influencing you--shaping and moulding your mind? What are you putting into your brain that influences you? You see, most of us think that we are controlled by our conscious mind. We think that we make decisions by a rational process. Yet, the fact is, two-thirds of our mental life is at the unconscious level. We like to think that we are rational creatures whose lives are guided by some rational, cognitive process. Actually, however, most of our decisions are made subconsciously and emotionally and then we rationalize as to why we made the decision we did.

So, what things are influencing your life, the decisions you make, the actions you take? Well, psychologists tell us that we are being tremendously influenced by what we see on television and in the movies; we are being shaped by what we read and by what we hear. For example, violence on television has become a national issue today because psychologists tell us that America is becoming more violent, more hardened to brutality, more calloused to killing and murder because we are being influenced by what we see and read and hear.

If that is true, isn't it appropriate for Christians to ask themselves, "What is being fed into our unconscious emotional/mental lives?" That's a question I would like to ask you. What are you putting into your soul? It will determine in large measure who and what you are.

The other side of the question is this: Is God being permitted to make an impact on your unconscious life? Is God being permitted to have a share in shaping who and what you are? How much of God is at work in your life? Now, our text for this morning says that the Bible--that scripture--is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, in order that the man of God might be complete. Are you complete this morning? Are you satisfied with who and what you are as a human being? Are you satisfied with who and what you are as a Christian?

How can God speak to you? What are the ways in which the Lord can communicate with you? Well, he could speak through a piece of music, he could speak through a friend, he could even speak through a sermon. Yet, isn't it true that the most effective and reliable way that God can speak to us is through scripture.

Do you read your Bible? Most of us don't--at least, not much. Yet, there is a learning process going on that may be largely unconscious. There is an influence being brought to bear that we may not be consciously aware of. For example, when our four older children were young, I always (well, nearly always!) had family devotion that included scripture. One of the children, when almost grown, remarked that in Sunday School he was amazed that he always knew the answers to the questions that the teachers asked. Why was that so? Because a learning process was going on, even though largely unconscious, that was shaping and moulding his life and which was putting information into his mental computer.

So, when you are reading the Bible, with your conscious mind you feel you are not learning much or that the Bible isn't having much impact on your life. Yet, the fact is a process is going on--largely unconscious--that is having a far greater impact on your life than you could imagine. That means that a process of reprogramming is going on to help me become what God wants me to be. And that is going to become a part of me. In that sense, you don't have to worry whether or not you get some immediate benefit from reading the Bible that helps you in your conscious life. As you read day by day, you are engaged in a long-range process of reprogramming. Do you remember how Jesus once put it? He said, "The good man out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil man out of his evil treasure produces evil; for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." (St. Luke 6:45)

Do you want good in your life? Do you want to be the kind of person God wants you to be? Then you will have to read your Bible. As the Psalmist once put it, "I have laid up thy word in my heart that I might not sin against thee." (Psalm 119:11) So the first point I want to make this morning is this: If you want to be complete as a Christian, you must read the Bible. The Good Book is good for shaping your unconscious life. As St. James once put it, "...receive the implanted word which is able to save your souls." (St. James 1:21) Yes, the implanted word. What you are planting in your soul will one day bear fruit. If you are watching bad television going to dirty movies, reading filthy books, that implanted word will bear dreadful fruit in your life. But if you are reading God's word, what you implant will also bear wonderful spiritual fruit in your life.

Back when I was a pastor in Lubbock, Texas, they had a fighter pilot base there. Many of the young pilots who were being trained attended my church. They told me that they were drilled in emergency procedures over and over and over. Then, when an emergency arose when they were so frightened they couldn't think, they found themselves doing automatically and unconsciously those things they had been taught to do. One of the young men, whom I had gotten to know well, one day had an accident occur and he had a flame out. It was necessary for him to bale out of the airplane. He told me later, "you know, I remember when I flamed out, I was so terrified that I don't remember a thing. The next thing I knew I was floating down in my parachute." Now, he had gone through all those procedures unconsciously. He had been programmed. So with the Bible. When sin and temptation rob you of your ability to think reasonably and rationally, if you have been programmed by the word of God, you will find yourself responding automatically and unconsciously to what God wants you to do. Do you have those sorts of reflexes in your spiritual life?

Now, let me give you three words as keys to help you read the Bible. Here are the three words: stand, sweat and serve. Let's start with the word "stand". Jesus once said, "abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." (St. John 15:4) To abide means to say, to stand, in God's word. Do you do that? Are you standing on God's word? This is something you do with your conscious mind. You see, not only do I need to program my unconscious life, I also need to program my conscious, my rational, life. I do that when I know God's word and I stand on it. Now, let me ask if you do that--do you take your stand on what you know of God's word?

For example, God's word says not to steal. Do you stand on that when you are tempted? Or again, the Bible says not to commit adultery. When you are tempted to lust, do you consciously and deliberately take your stand on God's word? There are a lot of things the Bible tells you to do--to be kind, loving, forgiving, and so on. But do you stand on God's word when you feel angry, or unloving, or vindictive? So in reading the Bible, you need to begin to stand on that part of God's word that you already know.

The second word to remember is sweat. Jesus once said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." (St. John 8:31) Most of us start trying to read the Bible and then in a few days we begin to put it off. But Jesus says to sweat at it, to continue, to keep on keeping on. One day you will get bored with the whole thing and feel that what you are reading is not relevant. You would rather read a novel or watch television. But remember that it takes sweat to read the Bible, to keep on keeping on.

Then, on another day, you will find yourself tempted to do something. You will think, "well, this won't matter. It isn't that important." and then you will do it. Or another time, you will think, "Well, just this once won't make that much difference so I'll do this thing." And in the process you are destroying your relationship to God. But what if you sweat at it--what if you continue, no matter how hard, to live out God's word in your life? So to be a Christian means not only to be reading the Bible, but to be sweating at living it out in your life.

And that brings me to the third word, "serve". Over in Revelation we read, "Blessed are they who hear, and who keep what is written therein." (Revelation 1:3) Are you doing God's word? That's the ultimate test, isn't it? You read the Bible every day, memorize passage after passage. But ultimately you must live out that word in your life. Let me make a little suggestion to you that I try to practice in my own life. When you read your Bible every day, find a passage that is relevant to you or which speaks to some quality you want to have in your life. Then serve that passage that day. Make it your marching order for the day. Consciously and deliberately try to act out that scripture in your life for that day.

You see, ultimately you have to ask yourself, "who am I serving?" Are you serving--yourself--your crowd? Who are you serving with your life? The man who takes a marching order for the day and tries to live it out in his life is a man who is serving the Lord. So there it is, stand--sweat--serve.

So, is the Good Book any good? Not for you--not unless you are reading it--not unless you are standing and sweating and serving the word. Is it any good? Let me ask you a question. Suppose you fall madly in love with some person and this person went away. Then in a couple of days there was an envelope in the mail and you recognized the handwriting. It is from the loved one. What would you do? Would you read it? You bet you would. Do you love Jesus? The Bible is God's letter to you. Do you love him enough that you want to read it?

Have you invited Jesus into your life? If you have then you will be hungry to hear what he has to say to you in the Bible. And when you hear it, when God is programming your life, you will--because you love him--want to stand in His word, continue in His word and be obedient to His word.

for example, God's word says not to be angry. Do you stand on that when you are tempted? Or again, the Bible says not to commit adultery. When you are tempted to do that, do you consciously and deliberately take your stand on God's word? There are a lot of things the Bible tells you to do--to be kind, loving, forgiving, and so on. But do you stand on God's word when you feel angry, or unloving, or unkindly? In reading the Bible, you need to begin to stand on that part of God's word that you already know.

The second word to remember is sweet. Jesus once said, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples." (St. John 8:31) Most of us start trying to read the Bible and then in a few days we begin to put it off. But Jesus says to sweeten it, to continue, to keep on keeping on. One day you will get bored with the whole thing and feel that you are reading it not relevant. You would rather read a novel or watch television. But remember that it takes sweet to read the Bible, to keep on keeping on.

Then, on another day, you will find yourself tempted to do something. You will think, "Well, this isn't that important," and then you will do it. Or another time, you will think, "Well, just this once won't make that much difference so I'll do this thing." And in the process you are destroying your relationship to God. But what if you swear at it--what if you continue, no matter how hard, to live out God's word in your life? So to be a Christian means not only to be reading the Bible, but to be swearing at living it out in your life.

And that brings me to the third word, "serve". Over in Revelation we read, "Blessed are they who hear, and who keep what is written in this book." (Revelation 1:3) Are you doing God's words? That's the ultimate test, isn't it? You read the Bible every day, memorize passages after passages. But ultimately you must live out that word in your life. When you read your Bible every day, find a passage that is relevant to your life. Which speaks to some quality you want to have in your life. Then serve that passage that day. Make it your guiding order for the day. Consciously and deliberately try to act out that scripture in your life for that day.

You see, ultimately you have to ask yourself, "Who am I serving?" Are you serving yourself--your crowd? Who are you serving with your life? The man who takes a guiding order for the day and says to live it out in his life is a man who is serving the Lord. So there is a stand--sweet--serve.

So, is the God back any good? Not for you--not unless you are reading it--not unless you are standing and sweetening and serving the word. Is it any good, let me ask you a question. Suppose you fall really in love with some person and that person went away. Then in a couple of days there was an envelope in the mail and you recognized the handwriting. It is from the loved one. What would you do? Would you read it? Yes, of course. Do you love Jesus? The Bible is God's letter to you. Do you love him enough that you want to read it?

Have you invited Jesus into your life? If you have, you will be hungry to hear what he has to say to you in the Bible. And when you hear it, what do you do? What will you do? You will--because you love him--want to stand in his word, continue in his word and be obedient to his word.