

How to Read, Understand, and Use the Bible

Part 1: How do I make sense of the bible?

IN: “Listen, The Bible clearly says...”

Ever heard that? Maybe heard it right before someone tried to tell you why you’re wrong, sinful, not accepted?

And how can you even respond... they are obviously right b/c they also say it’s the word of God? Right?

But what does that even mean? Word of God? And how does such an eclectic collection of ancient writings clearly say anything?

But for almost 2000 years reading and teaching what is in this collection of writings has been at the heart of Xianity and what it means to follow Jesus.

So what do we do? How can these writings make any sense to us now? How can they, and do they even, apply to us now thousands of years after they were first written?

And if they do, how do we even understand what they are saying?

Good/fair questions... and questions that deserve honest answers... So let’s talk about it together.

WE:

Say the phrase “The Bible” and almost everyone has their own thoughts/feelings/memories that come to the surface.

Many positive and many not.

No other collection of writings has so shaped western civilization/world history as the Bible... love it or hate it, whether you’ve ever read it or not... It has had an incredible impact on your life.

The Bible is the most read, impactful, misunderstood, and misused set of writings in history.

These writing were quoted to argue for the abolition of slavery... while at the same time were quoted to argue for slavery.

They’ve been used to argue against going to war... while at the same time quoted to argue for going to war.

They’ve been quoted in arguing for communism while at the same time quoted to condemn communism and promote capitalism.

Quoted to say we shouldn't wear masks... quoted to say we should wear masks

Passages have been quoted by almost every major politician including Donald trump, Joe Biden, Vladimir Putin.

What is going on? How can such widely different ideas come from the same writings?

It comes down to what we think they are and what we think they are for...

The problem is... **many of us don't understand what the biblical writings actually are.**

Some people use the biblical writings to find a list of rules... usually rules that benefit them/their position/power/ego

Some use them as a collection of true religious doctrines in order to discern who should be in and who should be out... they are usually the ones who are in.

First and foremost the biblical writings are a story.

And **when we discover and understand the story of the Bible we discover and understand our own story.**

TEACHING:

To help us understand what the Bible is and how to read this collection of writings in it I want to start with sharing an idea from Professor/Theologian/Author/Anglican Bishop NT Wright...

Explains the narrative of the biblical writings as acts of a play. A lot of what follows has been gathered from his writings.

Talked about this analogy before... but one of most helpful model/lenses through which to see the overarching narrative/story of these texts.

The story of the BW's is the story of how Creator God has broken into our existence to offer a way to be truly human, eradicate evil and its effects forever, and to ultimately renew all of creation.

But this story is not just something we understand, study, retell... it is a story we as individuals and communities are invited into.

The story of the bible IS our story.

But to know where we fit in we have to understand the whole story...

This framework is not a hard and fast doctrine you have to believe in order to be JF(not much is actually)... but it is extremely helpful...

Wright describes as 5 acts of a play. I've added a sixth at the end.

This play/narrative starts at the beginning, **Act 1: Creation (Gen 1-2)**

- The very poetic story of God creating everything out of nothing perfect and good, and ultimately creating humanity as his pinnacle creation.
- Innocent, pure, to enjoy and take care of the rest of creation... to ultimately live in and enjoy a perfect face-to-face relationship of love and trust with Creator God.

But as soon as we have a chance to imagine/wonder what that could be like... we are moved dramatically to **Act 2: The Fall (Gen 3-11)**

Where we see humanity's representatives choose to reject this relationship, refuse to trust the goodness of God, and try to invent their own independent idea of what it means to be human apart from their relationship w/ God.

We see sin enter the story and watch as the results of this sin wreak havoc in God's once perfect creation.

But all is not lost... a spark of hope foreshadowed at the beginning of the 2nd Act (God defeating sin) is renewed and initiated by God creating a family/nation that will usher in his ultimate answer for all of creation... **Act 3: Israel. (Gen 12- the rest of OT to Malachi)**

In this Act we see **God's purpose throughout the biblical story is to rescue his people through whom he will restore and complete his purpose for all people and all creation.**

In this Act we watch as God initiates a new relationship with a man (Abraham) based solely on Trust.

And in this he renews his promise from Act 1... he is going to bless/save all of humanity and he's going to use Abraham to make it happen.

Abraham becomes the patriarch of a family that becomes the nation of Israel.

This nation is rescued from slavery and given laws that set them apart as God's people chosen to show the world who he is and prepare the world for renewal and ultimately ushering in the promised offspring/Messiah who will bring God's restoration.

We watch as different generations grapple with understanding who this God is and how to live out their part of the narrative.

This act ends with a promise that something new is coming... God's purpose will soon be fulfilled...

The Climactic/Decisive/Central 4th Act is ushered in as God breaks into our humanity becoming one of us... the hidden main character throughout the whole narrative is now revealed... Jesus of Nazareth. **Act 4: Jesus (Gospels)**

The storyline of the earlier Acts are fulfilled through and in Jesus. We see evil confronted and judged... forgiveness and renewal ushered in and a new creation begun.

This pivotal 4th Act carries into **Act 5: The Church (Acts-Epistles)**, where Jesus continues his restoration and new creation through his people the Church. As described in Romans 8, 1 Cor 15.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, is renewing individual minds/hearts making them into a renewing community of all ethnicities that renews the world by telling and living out the story that the previous acts (culminating in Jesus) have told.

This is the Act we are in now... in roles we don't necessarily have a script for but must improvise as we go... based on Jesus' command of love and informed by what that love looked like in the 1st century as seen in the NT.

And understanding THIS is what can make such a difference. What clears so much up. What answers so many questions people have about the Bible.

For example... Why do we say the OT is part of our scriptures but don't follow the rules in it? Why don't we stone our disobedient children? Why do Xians eat pork?

B/c when you are part of a play you don't play out your role in the next act by simply repeating the script from the earlier acts...

No, you play out the story of your current act but use the previous acts to inform your character and role in the play as a whole.

We don't simply repeat earlier acts but, through the Holy Spirit and prayer, use what came before to help inform what our role is now.... what are the appropriate ways for each of us as individuals and communities of JF's to improvise the script using what came before and the final act when the play is concluded to guide us.

We use the beginning of the story to inform us how to play our unique role in the rest of the story.

What Paul meant when said... **2 Tim 3:16-17**

And as we play out our role now in the 5th Act we look forward to what I'm calling the 6th Act as glimpsed in parts of Revelation... the ultimate culmination of the narrative and the beginning of a new eternal storyline. **Act 6: New Creation (Revelation)**

Rev 21:1-5a

YOU:

We are all invited to play our unique role in God's story of renewal.

Individually and as a Community. To use what has come before us to improvise our own scenes in this grand story.

But it's not a free for all... we aren't all acting off of different scripts (more next ep)... so as we learn our role inside this one story... encourage you to...

Read and Pray: Psalm 119:73

Ask: What does it look like to play my role in your story today?

WE:

It's no small thing to be invited to play a part of this divine, all-encompassing story.

But God has invited and chosen each of us to add a unique storyline, unique role.

The Bible doesn't have to be divisive, it doesn't have to be boring, dry... It wasn't written to be oppressive and used against anyone...

The story it presents is the only story that can truly bring life and renewal to our souls, our neighbors, and our world.

So read it. Discover the divine story and your place in it... b/c

When we allow God's story to become our story we find our true purpose and role

Summary

The Bible is the most read, impactful, misunderstood, and misused set of writings in history. But for almost 2000 years reading and teaching what is in this collection of writings has been at the heart of what it means to follow Jesus. So what's the deal? Do they even apply to us now thousands of years after they were first written and if so, how can we make any sense of them?

Main Points:

The Bible is the most read, impactful, misunderstood, and misused set of writings in history.

Many of us don't understand what the BW's actually are.

When we discover and understand the story of the Bible we discover and understand our own story.

The story of the Bible is our story.

God's purpose throughout the biblical story is to rescue his people through whom he will restore and complete his purpose for all people and all creation.

We use the beginning of the story to inform us how to play our unique role in the rest of the story.

We are all invited to play our unique role in God's story of renewal.

When we allow God's story to become our story we find our true purpose and role

The 6 Acts:

Act 1: Creation (Gen 1-2)

Act 2: The Fall (Gen 3-11)

Act 3: Israel (Gen 12- the rest of OT to Malachi)

Act 4: Jesus (Gospels)

Act 5: The Church (Acts-Epistles)

Act 6: New Creation (Revelation)

Weekly Challenge

Read and Pray: Psalm 119:73

Ask: God, what does it look like to play my role in your story today?

Discussion Questions

1. Where have you seen God's love this week?
2. When you hear the phrase "The Bible" what thoughts or feelings immediately come up? Why do you think that is?
3. Do you think the 6 Act Play Analogy is helpful or not? Why do you think this?
4. Read Exodus 23:1-13. How do you think we can use this passage written to help the Israelites play their roles to inform us as we play our own role in God's story?
5. What do you think it looks like for you to "play your role" this week? How can your group pray for you?

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SHOW NOTES

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 | READ THE TRANSCRIPT → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/media/2022-06-12.pdf>

 | SAY HELLO, ASK A QUESTION → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/welcome/>

 | JOIN A GROUP → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/#connect>

 | FOR SALEM JUNE → Simonka Place Food Drive

Donate non perishable items for Simonka Place. Find out more: (LINK). Bring needed items to a gathering: canned veggies, tomatoes and beans, brown sugar, cooking oil, pasta, and tomato sauce.

You can also donate directly to UGM Salem here:

<https://ugmsalem.org/ugm-is-experiencing-food-shortages-you-can-help>

 | GATHER TOGETHER → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/#gathering> |

Upcoming Dates: June 12, June 26 (Calendar online)

 | GIVE TO CROSSCREEK → <https://www.yourcrosscreek.com/donate/>

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