



PRESBY-NOTES

September 2024

It is the mission of First Presbyterian Church of Beatrice to know Christ, to make Christ known and to exhibit Christ's love through worship, education, and service.

PASTOR'S PEN

There used to be a good excuse, but not anymore



*The following article is taken from **Homiletics Online**. I think it is a good look at the importance of reading the Bible and how to best do it.*

In *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small-Town America*, travel writer Bill Bryson tells of visiting Hannibal, Missouri, Mark Twain's hometown. The house where the great writer grew up is still there. It's a modest white clapboard house, tucked into the middle of Hannibal's downtown. Next to it is the famous white-washed picket fence from the novel, *Tom Sawyer*.

While he was visiting this historic home, Bryson fell into conversation with a fellow tourist. "What do you think of the place?" he asked.

"Oh, I think it's great," replied the man. "I always come here when I'm in Hannibal — two or three times a year. Sometimes I go out of my way to come here."

"Really?" asked Bryson.

"Oh yes," the man said. "I must have been here 20 or 30 times by now. This is a real shrine, you know."

Bryson replied, "You must be a real fan and follower of Mark Twain. Would you say the house is just like he described it in his books?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the tourist. "I wouldn't have the foggiest notion. I've never read any of his books!"

Well, how does that happen, do you suppose? How does a man become a fan of a writer — enough to visit his home 20 or 30 times — without reading a single one of his books?

Maybe the guy saw a few movie adaptations — Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court. Or maybe he had the chance to watch the late Hal Holbrook impersonate the great raconteur in his one-man show, *Mark Twain Tonight*. Back in the day, Twain's lecture tours were the closest thing 19th-century America had to stand-up comedy.

Even if the man did encounter Twain's stories secondhand, it still doesn't explain his enthusiasm. It seems very strange, indeed. No stranger, though, than the legions of Christians — even passionate, enthusiastic Christians — who only rarely pick up a Bible and read it!

The Puzzling Strangeness of the Bible

Once upon a time, there was a good excuse for not reading the Bible. Back before Herr Gutenberg's invention of the printing press that made mass-produced books possible, Bibles were rare as hens' teeth. They had to be laboriously copied out by hand. What most people knew of Bible stories — in medieval times, or even earlier — was based on sermons they'd heard in church, or maybe images they'd seen in stained glass.

That's hardly true today! Stop by a bookstore or do an Amazon search, and you'll see dozens of Bibles to choose from — different translations and all manner of special editions. Why, the Bible's probably more accessible today, to a greater number of people on this planet, than it has ever been in human history.

So, why is it that we still live in a culture that reveres the very idea of the Bible, but knows so little about what's in it?

In case you doubt that suggestion, consider this familiar quotation: "God helps those who help themselves." Does the quotation come from the Bible or from some other place?

If you answered, "the Bible," you're wrong. "God helps those who help themselves" occurs nowhere in the Bible. It was written by Benjamin Franklin and published in his *Poor Richard's Almanac*.

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Another example was given by Yale University religion professor Stephen Prothero. There was a controversial court case a few years back involving a death penalty verdict in Colorado. A judge overturned the sentence on appeal because, at the original trial, members of the jury had brought Bibles with them into the jury room. They'd done so because they wanted to read and discuss the biblical phrase, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."

The Christian-right group Focus on the Family — which favors the death penalty — was outraged by the judge's ruling. They blew up the incident into national news. They lambasted the judge for turning away from what they consider America's core biblical values. "It is a sad day," said their spokesperson, "when the Bible is banned from the jury room."

The only problem is, the one place Jesus mentions "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" is in Matthew 5:38, from the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus begins, "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth ...'" But he doesn't stop there. In the very next sentence Jesus goes on to reject that ancient Babylonian legal code — known as the Code of Hammurabi. He tells his followers not to follow "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." Instead, he teaches them to "turn the other cheek."

Professor Prothero points out that both the jury members and the Focus on the Family lobbyists completely misrepresented what Jesus says.² What Jesus means is, "That ancient law is bogus! Don't seek revenge. It goes against my teachings of compassion and mercy."

Rip that Scripture verse out of context, and it may seem, to proponents of the death penalty, that it helps their case. Yet, examine the phrase in its full context, paying attention to how Jesus uses it, and you'll see it's completely opposite to what he's saying.

Biblical illiteracy is everywhere!

God's Living Word

In the book of John Jesus says: "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63).

Jesus is introducing a way to read the Scriptures that's different from the fundamentalism of today. Rather than focusing on static, unchanging, uninterpreted words on a page, Jesus describes his own words as alive, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Notice how he says, "the words that I have spoken to you." Jesus isn't talking about the written word. He's talking about his own spoken word — and that word his church continues to receive, by the grace of God, as we faithfully and prayerfully read the Scriptures, pondering what the Lord may be saying to us through them.

So, how do we do that? How do we open ourselves to the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit? Here are five tips to jumpstart your Bible reading:

1. Don't Begin at the Beginning

The first thing you must do is know where to begin reading.

"Well, that's easy," you may say to yourself. The only place to begin is at the beginning: Genesis, Chapter 1: "When God began to create the heavens and the earth ..."

Those early chapters of Genesis do make pretty good reading. Stories like Adam and Eve in the garden, the Tower of Babel, Noah and the ark. Here you'll find the lives of the patriarchs: Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah and Rachel. Right after that comes the thrilling set of stories known as the Joseph cycle: Joseph and his coat of many colors, sold into slavery, given up for dead, rising to the highest level of authority short of the Pharaoh — but deciding to use his powers for grace and forgiveness, rather than revenge.

You don't get too far, though, in those first books of the Bible, before you come upon chapter after chapter of dreary, ancient laws. Then you come upon historical accounts of wars and conquests. Those stories fairly

drip with blood. Some of them meet the contemporary definition of genocide — and it's God's people doing the killing! The Hebrew Scriptures not only mention such horrors, at times they even revel in them, claiming that such slaughter was carried out with the expert technical assistance of none other than God.

No doubt there's something to be gained from every part of the Bible, but it takes an awful lot of interpretation to boil certain biblical stories down into food that nourishes our spirits today. Don't begin there, is all we need to say. Or if you do happen upon one of those blood-soaked histories, feel free to skip over it. No sense getting bogged down before you even begin!

If you're looking for a place to begin a daily Bible-reading discipline, choose a simple book like the gospel of Mark. It shares the essential message of Jesus' life, death and resurrection in elegantly simple fashion. Better to start there than in the gospel of John. That book's laden with some pretty heavy-duty theology, served up in the form of long discourses that can seem tedious and repetitious.

If you're looking to delve into Paul's letters, don't start with the long ones like Romans and Corinthians, with their complex, sometimes ponderous, sentences. Try, instead, the beautiful little letter to the Philippians, that explores the subject of Christian love in some truly engaging ways.

2. Don't Forget It's a Library

Try to remember this bit of common knowledge that always bears repeating: The Bible is not a book. It's a library.

That may sound obvious to anyone who's ever tried — perhaps in Sunday school — to memorize the order of the books of the Bible. Most of us know, on some level, that the Bible's a collection of individual books, written over the course of many centuries. Some of those books are history, some poetry, some philosophy, some

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letters sent by apostles like Paul to various churches. Then there are the strange, apocalyptic books like Daniel and Revelation. Those are something else altogether! Yet, because all those books are gathered together, encased in an elegant leather cover or keyword-searchable on a website, we tend to forget this blazingly obvious fact. Unconsciously, we fall back into treating the Bible as a single book — which is not at all helpful.

That single-book approach plays havoc with our understanding of what we're reading. Why? Because we simply have to know what sort of literature we're dealing with, as we open any biblical book.

If you go down to your local public library looking for an automotive book to tell you how to change the oil in your car, but you end up in the poetry section instead, you're not going to find what you're looking for. By the same token, if you're looking for a good biography and end up in the biology section by mistake, the only title that looks at all promising is one called, *The Lives of a Cell*. But when you open that one up, you'll find it's like no biography you've ever read!

The essential first step in letting a book of the Bible speak to you is determining what category the book belongs to. If you have the good fortune of owning a study Bible — offering a short introduction to each book, written by scholars who've translated the ancient Hebrew or Greek into English — you'll go a long way towards finding God's word to you in its pages.

3. Understand What's Truly Holy

If your Bible has the word "Holy" gold-stamped on the cover, try to understand what that word really means. What it doesn't mean is that the book itself — its cover, its pages, its bookmarks, whatever — is somehow a holy object, in and of itself.

In its physical reality, the Bible is just an ordinary book, like any other.

One of our Homiletics contributors explains it this way:

"I think back to my second-grade Sunday school teacher. That silver-haired grandmother taught us kids —



with a true sense of joy in her heart — about what it means to be Christian believers. One thing that pious lady used to tell us, bless her heart, was to make sure that, in a stack of books, the Bible is always on top.

"I understand the piety out of which that teaching came, and I appreciate my old teacher's sense of devotion, but on that point, I have to say she was completely wrong. It's wrong to treat the physical Bible differently from any other book, just because it's got the word "Holy" printed on the cover."

If you're the sort of person who likes to underline or highlight passages from books, there's absolutely no reason why you shouldn't do so with a Bible you're using for study. And, if you happen to accidentally drop your Bible or lay another book on top of it, don't give it a second thought. It's no sacrilege! Bibles aren't meant to be adored. They're meant to be read, re-read, bookmarked, underlined — whatever you need to do to get deeply into the message.

4. Take Your Time

Silent meditation and prayer are critical when reading the Bible. Don't bite off huge chunks of the Scriptures. Focus instead on small, manageable pieces — a paragraph or two is about right. Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide your understanding, then read a passage, pause for reflection and read it again. Maybe even pause again, emp-

tying your mind of stray thoughts, then read it a third time, concentrating on insights different from those you picked up earlier.

Think of yourself as being in conversation with the Lord as you read. "Lord, what do you want me to know or feel today?"

One pastor leading group Bible studies likes to encourage people to talk of what "shimmers" for them as they read the passage. You may find it helps to keep a journal or notebook close at hand and write down, in just a few words, what shimmering treasures you've uncovered. You'll find it meaningful to go back and review those notes later.

5. Read It Together

Finally, it can be immensely helpful to read the Bible with others. A close friend or two, a family member or someone else you trust. The insights that arise from several different people, each one bringing their own unique perspectives, can truly be enriching. As with any other discipline in life, having someone else to keep us accountable is not a bad thing!

But far more important than getting any methodology just right is to go home, set aside a block of time, turn off your phone and open your Bible. A certain sportswear company has the motto, "Just do it!" When it come to the Bible, the best motto is, "Just read it!"

On August 18th, the Homestead Harmonizers led worship with 90 people attending the service. The catered picnic following went well and the food was good.

Sunday School starts on September 8th.

The youth had a good time in Colorado. Vacation Bible School had an Olympic theme.

Doris is looking to start an evening Bible study for women.

Warren's Table served 112 on July 23rd. We serve next on September 3rd.

We are participating in the Big Give Gage on September 12th fund going to the Sweet Dreams Ministry. The theme is a book and a blanket.

The next stated meeting is September 16th at 6:45pm.



Prayer Concerns
This past month

PRAYERS: Bruce Greenwell; Ellen Greenwell; Connie Dake; Diane Mayer; Norma Jean McNamee; and Gayle Eskra.

Also: Shannon Fanning; Steve Arneal; Hope Johns (Maxie Arneal's great granddaughter); Imogene Johnson (Connie Dake's sister); Norma Mitschler (Frank's sister); Janet Parde and Alyssa Lock (Kristin Jurgens' granddaughter).

Our sympathy is with the family and friends of Judy Prebyl who passed away on August 6.



Shirley Mitschler	4
Barbara Harrison	10
Andy Carothers	14
Savannah Bolli	20
Shirley Haner	26



Westminster Guild



Westminster Guild will meet Monday, September 9th, at 4:30 p.m. in the church parlor for a pot-luck supper and fellowship. All women of the church and friends are welcome.



PW will meet the 3rd Thursday of each month starting on September 19. The business meeting will be at 9:30 a.m. and Bible Study at 10:00 a.m.

The Lunch Bunch will meet in October, the Christmas tea in December, February, April, and June (birthday offering). Time and place to be announced.



Sunday School for children and youth will begin Sunday, September 8, at 9:30 a.m. Meet in Fellowship Hall.



What a great response from our church members who answered a call to help with picking up and carrying groceries into the Little Pantry storage room. Members that helped were Julie Hay, Renee Jones, Don Harmon, Doris Martin, Neil McConnell, Gene and Fran Martin. Renee Jones, Julie Hay, and Rita McGuire spent time in the afternoon checking off the items and putting them on the shelves. Thank you because it is a tedious job (they do it with a smile)!

A special shoutout to Gene Martin for helping fill the Little Pantry on Saturdays and Sundays!
Thank you to all the members that continue to donate to the Little Pantry!



“Sleep is important for everyone, but especially children,” says Dr. Steve Paulmeyer.

“The evidence is clear that a good night’s rest is important for everyone. It allows our bodies to recover, build muscle, store knowledge, and prepare ourselves to perform at a high level the next day. These same functions related to sleep are ever so more important to a child with a rapidly developing brain trying to soak up knowledge and experiences like a sponge. Their continued growth and resilience depend on it.”

Dr. Steve Paulmeyer and his family attend First Presbyterian Church and support Sweet Dreams Bed Ministry

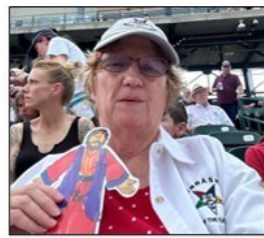
Sweet Dreams * Donate on Sept. 12 and help a child get a good night’s sleep with **A Book and A Blanket**



biggive
GAGE COUNTY
PRE-GIVE PERIOD
OPENS SEPTEMBER 5TH

Can't wait to support your favorite non-profit?!
Starting September 5th, you can visit biggivegagc.org and pledge your gift to the non-profit of your choice! All gifts will be processed when you hit submit! Plan to give early!

Flat Jesus travels near and far this summer



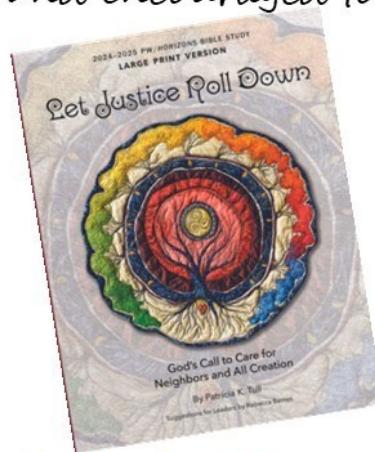


PRESBYTERIAN WOMEN'S CALENDAR

2024-2025 YEAR

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, BEATRICE

*All FPC women are Presbyterian Women
and encouraged to participate*



September 19

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

October 17

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

November 21

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

December (TBD)

Holiday Tea

January 16

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

February 20

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

March 20

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

April 17

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

May 15

9:30 a.m PW Business Meeting 10 a.m.— Bible Study in the parlor

June (TBD)

Presbyterian Women Brunch, Location TBD

A collection will be taken for the Presbyterian Women's Birthday Offering