

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BEAUTIFUL BOOK SERIES

INTRODUCTION - PART 1 OF 3

1. What is the goal of this series?

It is to enable us to see the Bible as a beautiful book, the most beautiful and greatest masterpiece that God has given to us, placed in our hands.

2. Who is this course designed for?

- a) For Christians, regardless of their level of maturity in Christ, who have not read through the entire Bible at least once before.
- b) For Christians, who have read through the entire Bible (either through a reading plan or an ad-hoc method) but were not able to see how all 66 books of the Bible are perfectly and beautifully connected.
- c) For Christians who struggle to read the Bible. They do not mind listening to sermons, attending seminars, etc. but there seem to be a barrier for them to open and read the Bible itself. They find reading the Bible difficult and hence they have never really gone into reading the Bible.

3. What this series is NOT?

- a) This is not a reading plan to help you develop the discipline you need to read through the entire Bible. This series aims not to help you become disciplined but to help you become delighted in reading the Bible.
- b) It is also not an overview, not an Old Testament or New Testament survey. It does not give you head knowledge about Bible facts, but this course is designed to fill your heart with love for the Bible.
- c) It is definitely not a commentary to go deep into the Bible which can be easily found elsewhere.

4. What does the course hope to achieve at the end of the series?

We hope that:

- a) You will be able to say, "Wow the Bible is so amazingly connected, I have never knew that each book is so wonderfully placed in the right position within the Bible." With such an appreciation of the Bible, you will no longer say that you like a particular book of the Bible because it is very good but that you will see all the 66 books coming together as one beautiful book.

- i. It is common for Christians to have their favourite books, chapters or verses of the Bible. However, such selective fondness of the different parts of God's Word may cause us to build our Christianity around those verses we love, e.g.

- The love of some Christians on verses about blessings caused them to develop a whole new theology of the Prosperity gospel.
- New denominations had also arisen based on a few verses about a particular subject such as baptism.
- Some Christians focus on spiritual gifts and build a church around these verses.

- ii. This resulted in over 40,000 denominations in Christianity today. Each view is probably not wrong but Christians may end up building their

whole life or church around selected verses and just one aspect of the Bible.

- iii. It is our hope that by the end of this series, we will be careful to not take a verse out of its context and we will be able to see each verse not only in the context of that chapter or book but of the entire Bible. The Bible is one Book.

b) You will not only say, “What a wonderful book!” but also “What a wonderful and amazing God!”

- i. Through this series, you will see that He is not only a providing God, a judging God but a wonderful God. You will then be able to see Him in all His beauty because you have read through the entire Bible and come to know the God behind the Bible.
- ii. It is our hope that you will no longer open the Bible, seeking to see yourself or finding verses that can bless you or help you. You will no longer treat Bible reading like a lucky dip for you to find one verse that is helpful to you for the situation you are in.
- iii. At the end of the series, we hope that you will be able to read the Bible with your focus on God, asking “What can I find out about God?” rather than “What can I find from God, for me?” Many Christians read the Bible with the wrong focus and motive, asking, “What can I get from God?” rather than “How can I know about this wonderful God?”

c) You will know how to walk in the will of God always.

- i. This is because knowing God well will help you know what God likes, hence enabling you to know and do His will.
- ii. Hopefully, this will help us become Christians who continuously live in the will of God.
 - This confidence of being in God’s will should not be a result of a particular verse, or having to ponder each time trying to find verses to support our decision; but a sureness of knowing God’s will that stems from knowing God personally.
 - This is similar to how, if we know our earthly father, we will not have to explicitly ask our father whether he approves of our particular action (e.g. whether he is happy with the kind of friends I have, the movies I watch, etc.). You no longer need to ask your father because you know what he likes and can instinctively do what pleases him.
 - In the same way, if you know God well, you will know what to do that is in obedience to Him and please Him.

INTRODUCTION – PART 2 OF 3

What makes the beautiful book so beautiful and unique?

1. It is the only book that God has left for all of us as Christians.

- a) This means that this is a perfect book regardless of whether you are a “baby” Christian or a scholarly Christian, a young boy or an old man, a highly educated or an illiterate person.
 - b) Being the only book left by God, it suits all spectra of Christians.
 - i. It is so unique in that it suits Christians of all levels of maturity unlike school text books which are graded to different level of difficulty. Each text book is written for a particular level of understanding and failure to understand a text book for your level would mean that there is something wrong with you.
 - ii. The Bible is not graded and hence if we do not understand a particular passage, we should not be troubled and think we are failures. The difficult passage in the Bible may be meant for a more matured Christian.
 - iii. Instead we should just trust that one day, you will be able to understand it when you reach that level of maturity.
 - c) Similarly, you may wonder why your preacher is able to see so much more than you, in the same Bible passage. You should not worry about this as you will be able to gain more insights as you dig more into the Bible and mature in your faith.
 - d) Therefore, you should not feel frustrated or discouraged when you cannot understand a particular verse or passage or when you are unable to understand as much as someone else after reading the same passage. Do not read the Bible, expecting to know and understand everything you read.
2. What makes the Bible beautiful is that **70% of the Bible is made up of stories.**
- a) Hence there many layers of learning we can glean from a story, at different levels of maturity and understanding.
 - b) For instance, for the Genesis story, as a child, you may only learn about how God created the world, but as you mature, you may be able to glean new insights about God from the same story.
 - c) As you dig deeper into the Bible, you may be able to see many fine details that you have not noticed before or what most people may also have missed.
 - d) Therefore, we are able to see the wisdom of God in the use of stories in the Bible as stories can be bottomless pits of truth in which you can find more and more treasures as you dig deeper into the same story.
 - e) The high percentage of stories in the Bible is unique, setting it apart from other religious books, which typically contain statements about who their god is, etc.
 - f) Unlike fables which are unreal, the stories found in the Bible are about real people in history who lived in towns found in a real land that are mostly still present to this day.
3. Everything in the Bible is important but not everything in the Bible is equally important.
- a) For example, most of the Old Testament were written for the Israelites and even though there are many truths in them, they might not be meant specifically for us. Some of these Old Testament writings were meant specifically for the priests (e.g. how they were to kill and sacrifice a lamb).

However, since we are not Old Testament priests, we do not need to know such details.

- b) This means that not all parts of this beautiful book are relevant for us to directly observe or obey; but we can still read them to draw principles and truths that may be helpful to us in knowing the God behind the Bible.
 - c) On the other hand, parts of the Bible that are specifically addressed to us (e.g. how we should take the Lord's Supper) must be carefully read and observed them.
 - d) Therefore, be careful not to accord the same importance or focus to every passage. Otherwise, you may be stumped and spend too much time on books that are not specifically meant for us, e.g. pondering over writings about all the detailed descriptions of the Tabernacle or judgements on certain nations, etc. when all we need to know is that God is holy and will judge evil people.
4. The Bible is written in different styles, often in the form of stories or poeties.
- a) Poetries and stories are better to be listened to. If you read them in a scholarly fashion, analysing every verse, you will lose the intent and beauty of the passage. Hence, listening to the Bible can be one way to enjoy it.
 - b) This can be seen in the practice of the Jews for 1,500 years where they went into the synagogue to listen to the Scriptures that were read to them from scrolls (kept in the synagogues). They did not possess the printed copies and hence did not even have a chance to read the Scriptures.
 - c) Furthermore, in the first 1,500 years of Christian history, it was rare to possess a copy of the Bible because they were handwritten. It was only after the invention of the printing press that people managed to get hold of the Bible to read it themselves.
 - d) Therefore, listening to the audio Bible is not wrong as God had designed much of the Bible to be enjoyed through listening. The Bible is meant to be heard because faith comes by hearing (See Rom 10:17). Hence, we should not feel guilty when we do not read the Bible or analyse it word by word.
 - e) Bear in mind that up to about 100 years ago, most Christians neither owned nor knew how to read a Bible. From the high percentage of stories and poeties in the Bible, we can conclude that the Bible was designed to be listened to and enjoyed.
5. Lastly, we hope that you will realise that the Bible is a spiritual book, not an academic book. Due to its spiritual nature, it is important for you to open the Bible and expect God to work His Word in you. Instead of reading the Bible like a scholar, go to God as a child, asking God to speak to you as your Father. Much of today's Bible study and reading have become a scholarly matter as we have forgotten that Bible reading is a spiritual exercise.

INTRODUCTION – PART 3 OF 3

What is the Structure of this Beautiful Book of the Bible?

The Bible has only two main sections.

1. The first section tells us how this beautiful world had gone wrong. It is not hard for most of us to agree that while there is great beauty in this world, yet things are not what they should be. Deforestation of the beautiful mountains, depletion of the beautiful land and pollution of beautiful rivers signal to us that something had gone wrong. This can be seen in the first 1% of the Bible, from Genesis Chapters 1 to 11.
2. The remaining 99% of the Bible tells us how God would right that wrong. He does this not by fixing the messed up world or making a new world but God will fix man and create a new creature. Therefore, the majority of the Bible (99%) depicts a redemption drama of how God rescues man from himself and not from this broken world. The world is in such a messed-up state because of man.
3. Hence, we can see a two-part drama in the Bible. God, in the unfolding of this redemption drama to rescue us, reveals Himself (His power, patience, wisdom, mercy and judgement).

What are the Two Key Books in the Bible?

1. Like any well written book, the two most important chapters of any book are its first and last chapters. This is also the same for the Bible.
2. The two key books in the Bible are the first book of Genesis and the last book of Revelation.
 - a) Therefore, it is important for us to know the book of Genesis well otherwise we will not be able to understand the rest of the story. You must also bear in mind the goal of the whole story or book, i.e. what is the ending?
 - b) Hence as Christians, we must be very conversant in these two books. However, most Christians do not know these two books well.
 - c) It is a common misconception amongst many Christians that the book of Genesis is a myth. This is because they have been indoctrinated by the Theory (or hypothesis) of Evolution and had thus concluded that God could not have created the world in 6 literal days, causing many to write off the book of Genesis as a myth.
 - d) On the other hand, many Christians perceive the book of Revelation as a mystery which they will not be able to understand.
 - e) The culprit behind these misperceptions is Satan!
 - i. Satan hates these two books because he is being exposed in these two books.
 - ii. In the book of Genesis, Satan is identified as the troublemaker who brought problems into this beautiful creation.
 - iii. Satan likes to work behind the scenes, hiding himself from the view of men. This can be seen in the book of Genesis where Satan disguised himself as a serpent to tempt Eve.
 - iv. Even today, many people do not believe that Satan is real. Instead of believing that there is a Devil, they think that this is only a figurative representation.
 - v. Satan, the great deceiver, does not want people to know he exists.

- vi. In the book of Revelation, Satan is shown to be totally conquered and captured, he does not like this either.
3. Hence, Satan attacks these two books, causing Christians to have the perception of Genesis as myth and Revelation as mystery so that they will not know these two books well.
4. As a result, Christians are unable to have a foundation or goal. Due to the lack of a good grasp of the beginning and the end of the Bible, they do not know the beginning and the end of the world.
5. It is important for Christians to have a strong foundation in the book of Genesis as it contains all the important truths of Christian living.
 - a) These truths are in the form of seed truths (embryonic form) in the book of Genesis which are later expanded or elaborated in the different parts of the Bible with clearer explanation. Therefore, it is crucial for us to know Genesis Chapter 1 very well, as it forms the foundation of Christian living.
 - b) It is impossible for you to believe in the rest of the Bible if you do not believe in Genesis Chapter 1. How do you expect to believe in the rest of the Bible if you begin to doubt the very first page of it?
 - c) Genesis Chapter 1 is the easiest chapter to understand in the Bible and was written in a way that even a child can learn and understand the story. Bible translators also confirmed that Genesis Chapter 1 is the easiest chapter of the Bible to translate to all the different languages because every native or tribe on Earth will be able to understand terms like the Sun, the Moon, fish, birds, or plants, etc. This is unlike other parts of the Bible which are more difficult to translate, e.g. the phrase, "grape vine" is very difficult to explain to someone who has not seen one before.
 - d) God has designed Genesis Chapter 1 to be easily understood so that a strong foundation can be laid.