

Being Shaped and Transformed by Scripture

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When I was growing up, I used to believe all sorts of crazy stuff. I grew up in the bush on a private nature reserve attached to the Kruger National park. When I was about 4 years old I would happily wonder off into the bush and spend the day playing, collecting insects and living in my imaginary world. My brothers were at school, my father was busy at work and I had no mother. So I spent a lot of that time on my own.

A child left on his own, with limited understanding of the world can really start to develop quite an imagination. I remember thinking that I could fly; I would have dreams about flying on a regular basis. It became so real that I was convinced I could fly.

One day I tried, I climbed to the top of a wild fig tree with an umbrella and jumped off. When I connected the ground I was so shocked that I could not fly that it almost distracted me from the pain. I was not seriously injured and I never told anybody about it because it shook my limited understanding of reality. A lot of things have happened since then that have grounded that reality in me that I can't fly but some part of me even today can't fully let go of that thought.

I think we all do that, we build up a reality based on our limited life experience and as we discover more, face challenges and disappointments our view on the world and our understanding of what is real shifts and changes.

- I want to discuss how my reality has been shaped over the years with regards to my understanding of the bible.
- Essentially, I want to discuss how I have been shaped and transformed by the bible story which is part of our first value.

We seek to root everything we do in scripture

As Christians we are a "people of the book" and hold the Bible to be authoritative for everything we do and everything we believe. We are shaped and transformed by the Bible's story.

- I can clearly remember 4 things that have happened that have shaped and broadened my world view with regards to scripture.
- These 4 things have got me to the point that I can read 2 Tim 3:16-17 and know in my heart that it is true.

¹⁶All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

My World View (Biblical understanding)



1. The first thing is this; I needed to believe in the accuracy and authenticity of the Bible as a historical document.
 - a. Without this, it makes no sense to read it as it is not the most riveting novel. In fact it can be quite boring and difficult to understand.
 - b. If for example I do not believe the theory of gravity, then it is perfectly acceptable to believe that a 4 year old boy can fly.
- When I had just left university, I was an atheist. I loved conspiracy theories and was convinced that the bible had been put together by a bunch of grumpy old men. Men who were insecure, un-loving and un-loved.
- This view of the bible was somehow shaped by my semi catholic upbringing, in that I was forced to go to the Catholic Church because my dad did not know what else to put on the school document that requested, denomination.
- The priest who led the church was an old boring single guy who did not like children and would shout a lot.
- This idea continued to grow as I came across Christians who reinforced this view – grumpy people with a chip on their shoulders, defensive, insecure individuals.
- Many theories about what was left out of the bible and why certain stuff was included etc. are floating around and I loved that stuff. It strengthened my view.
- Until I started my first job as an Occupational Therapist in Nelspruit about. I somehow found myself surrounded by peculiar Christians who did not fit into my world view.
- They were happy, non defensive and seemed to really enjoy life.
- Once I became a Christian, I remember the first birthday present Rachel bought me was a bible. I was not quite sure what to make of this gift because I still did not really accept it as an accurate document. (I still have this bible, it has turned out to be the best gift I have ever received)
- Shortly after this though, I went on an Alpha course. On the Alpha course, Nicky Gumble goes into the authenticity of the Bible which really blew my limited understanding of the bible apart.
- These were the key statements...

2. The next point is this; we need to develop the discipline of reading the bible on a regular basis.
 - a. Now that I believed the historical relevance of the Bible, I almost become forced to read it. Because all the reasons why I would not previously read it have been taken away.
 - b. It's like a like the boy who discovers gravity and is now forced to walk. It is a new reality, not as exciting as the other reality but more real. It is what you are left with; best you learn to walk well.
 - I read the bible like this for years.
 - At first I tried to read it from cover to cover but gave up at Leviticus.
 - Then I tried to read the New Testament but could not make sense of acts.
 - So I started randomly opening the bible and started reading the first verse my eyes came upon. It's not ideal but I think it was still better than not reading it at all.
 - What I realised is that although I believed in God; I still did not believe that the bible was the word of God.
 - I moved on to daily devotionals which were better because they somehow started to link the scriptures to my daily life and walk.
 - The truth is though that up until fairly recently, reading the bible remained a chore. It was boring, irrelevant but somehow necessary to fulfil the legalistic requirements that I thought God required of me.
 - What I realise now is that even just reading the bible like this influenced my world view.
 - I learnt a new language
 - I came to understand a little bit more about God
 - His character, The character of Jesus
 - I found that as a result I could start making sense of things that happened to me
 - And I could understand Christians and their jargon a bit better.
3. I don't think that it is possible to truly hear and understand the word of God without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 2:9-13**

⁹However, as it is written: "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"¹⁰but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹²We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.

- b. When I was a student, I used to sometimes listen to MNet because we did not have a decoder and I could not bear to watch what was on SABC. You could hear the

words but you got a blurred picture. It made quite a difference though when you watched the same programme with a decoder. The words are the same but it becomes richer, more alive. The words start to make more sense. I think that the Bible without the Holy Spirit is the same, you can read the words but you miss the richness of it.

- I remember coming back from India after the Tsunami, seeing people healed, receiving and using spiritual gifts and being reminded that we serve a living God who is involved in our day to day lives.
 - Not a distant God, who spoke distant words in an old fashioned book.
 - I remember trying to read the Bible and becoming truly dissatisfied with it. I literally cried out God, please speak to me. (It was the same way I cried out “God if you exist, show me”)
 - When I started reading the Bible again, the words started jumping out of the page at me.
 - I read and read and ate up ever word. I could not put it down.
 - Every time I picked it up it did the same, to the point that I had to start being careful about when I read because it would cut into work time. I became consumed.
 - Suddenly the Bible became relevant to me personally, here in JHB today.
 - It was great but it came with a downside.
 - Steve spoke a little bit about fundamentalists last week.
 - I became one of those; the Bible is absolutely the word of God, word for word as you read it.
 - What I did not understand was that my Frame work was still limited. A 4 year old child who thinks he can fly as long as he is holding onto an umbrella.
 - I became irritated with people who would caution my understanding based on theology.
 - I started seeing theologians as having got it wrong, trying to put human understanding on God’s word, thus missing what God is actually trying to reveal through his Holy Spirit.
 - I came to realise that although I understood so much more, my understanding was still flawed and open to doubt.
 - No amount of decoding can help me make sense of a Levite chopping up his concubine into 12 pieces and sending them to the 12 tribes of Israel to call them to war.
4. We need to be those who study the Bible
- a. The Bible is made up of stories, letters, laws, poems, songs etc. They were inspired through the Holy Spirit thousands of years ago through different people in different cultures for different reasons. It is naïve of me to think that I understand the complexity of the Bible because the Holy Spirit has made it alive. If God wanted us to simply understand the Bible, He would have hard wired it into our system. At the same time, He would have taken away our free will and turned us into robots. It goes against His very nature as He revealed to us through Jesus. We see this in Luke 24, The road to Emmaus. After his resurrection, Jesus appears to 2 people on the road. He does not reveal himself to them but walks all the way listening to there story. Only around the dinner table do they realise it is Jesus when He breaks the bread. It seems to be about the Journey, the discovery and the relationship.

- b. I would find it hard to believe that a 1st century Palestinian would be able to understand a movie on MNet even with translation and a decoder.
- I started studying the Bible with an easy Guide called How to Read the Bible for all its worth, Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart.
- I use commentaries, e-sword, different translations etc.
- I have started going to Bible college
- The more I learn, the more I feel equipped to understand and hear Gods word.
- I now realise that I believe this about the bible:

It is the word of God, every word is in there for a reasons. I am naïve to think that I will ever be able to understand the reason for everything. The Spirit inspired the Bible and can reveal things to us but it takes time and effort to gain deeper understanding. God is Sovereign enough to ensure that the books included and exclude from the Bible are in accordance with His will. God transforms and shapes an entire Universe with his words. The more time we spend reading and understanding the bible, the more our lives will be transformed by His words.

- There is a lot of difficult questions about the bible, social, historical.....
- Its ok not to know the answers, but don't be fooled into thinking/ believing that it is anything but the word of God.
- Everything that we believe, we believe because it is written in this book.
- If you doubt the book, then you doubt Jesus, his birth, death, resurrection and what that means to us today.
- The only reason we believe it is because we have read about it. All of scripture points towards Jesus. It reveals Gods story and His character.
- If you take away the Bible, you take away everything you believe.
- 2 Tim 3:16-17

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- so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- As I come to study the bible I realise that I become more like the words, they transform me from within.
- They don't remain in a separate part of my sub conscience that I can draw on when I need it.
- No, I become what I am reading and am thus changed.