

Christian Perspectives

It is now the fourth week of the new year. How are you coming with your resolutions? There is always a flurry of interest in New Year's resolutions in early January accompanied by media features which tend to emphasize that we are doomed to fail. People pay out 'big bucks' for gym memberships and by March, one third drop out. We promise ourselves that we will avoid sweets after we finish up the Christmas goodies but revert to treating ourselves as a compensation for putting up with cold weather. (Bring on the cocoa and marshmallows!) Similar pledges to eat healthier, walk more often, turn off the TV and read more may also be abandoned before they can be established as a new habit.

A common resolution for people seeking spiritual development is to decide to read from the Bible regularly. If this is something you have considered you may be wondering what to read or how to organize your reading. Some readers choose to begin at the beginning to read straight through. Hence, the parts of the Old Testament read most often are the Book of Genesis and about half of Exodus. The narratives of Creation, Noah and the great flood, Abraham's adventure of moving to a new land and becoming a father at an advanced age can hold our attention quite well. As we move on it is easy to be drawn in by Jacob's travels to find a wife and the acquisition of two. The story of his son, a novelette with the book, has become enchanting musical theatre in 'Joseph and the Technicolor Dream Coat.'

Once into Exodus, we catch up with Jacob's descendants, now enslaved in the land of Egypt. Moses, one of their own but raised by an Egyptian princess, in obedience to God's prompting takes on the Pharaoh of Egypt with the cry, 'Let my people go.' With signs and mighty wonders of God's doing, Moses leads the people out of Egypt towards the land first offered to Abraham hundreds of years before. Of course most of us remember Cecil B. DeMille's version of the Red Sea parting, the people passing through while Pharaoh's chariot drivers drown in the waters as they rush back into place. Then the page turning excitement dwindles and the reader finds him or herself, just like the people of Israel, wandering in the desert for forty years and soon falters in the resolve to read the whole Bible. Or if they persist longer with this linear plan of reading, get bogged down in learning all the rules and regulations of Torah law in the books of Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy.

Perhaps this is why many who read the Bible choose a daily reading guide or lectionary which gives them short passages to read and ponder. Still, there is something to be said about reading a full book. A group of people at St. Paul's Church in Shelburne decided that was just what they wanted to do to become more familiar with the Bible. Participants of the 'Bible Book of the Month' group choose the books they want to read. Each month a full book is read. Sometimes this means reading two to four chapters a day, for other books an hour of reading is enough to cover the whole piece. Some use a study Bible with extra resources to aid in understanding, others 'google' unfamiliar terms for answers. When the group meets for an hour and a half, once a month, they talk about the highlights of the book, sections that provoke reaction, what they have learned about the ancient peoples and their ways and how the narrative or the teaching fits into the message of God in general. Most important, they talk about how they can relate the writing to their own lives, to our society today and share how it can guide their Christian lifestyle. To date, the group has fearlessly chosen the books of Ruth, Job, Ezekiel, the Letter of James, Revelation, Acts of the Apostles and Deuteronomy with Proverbs to follow in February. This resolution to read the Bible has been easy to keep because each is responsible for the sharing and the learning as they gather to focus on the 'Book of the Month.' A journey is always more fruitful and enjoyable in the company of other travelers.

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