

Knowing Jesus

In today's world, an individual who needs information and has access to the internet searches the World Wide Web. In a fraction of a second, the individual is overwhelmed with endless pages of references: lack of information is replaced by information overload! Who has the time or patience to methodically process all this information? And I continue to be amazed at the diversity of opinions expressed about any subject. Pity the poor man who just wants to buy a toaster! Add to this reality the knowledge that the rank order of references is not a random event but has been carefully crafted by sellers through optimization of internet search engines. This means that the most important reference to you may be buried many pages deep in the search results. So it is for the individual who searches the World Wide Web about Jesus; the outcome is an overwhelming abundance of diverse and polarized information. You will find exactly what you expected to find; there are people who love and hate Jesus.

As a person who loves Jesus, my original intent was to add the definitive apology for believing in Jesus to the content of the World Wide Web. I came to the realization that my words will not cause you to believe in Jesus; however, I can offer you advice about how to come to know Jesus. I believe the desire to know Jesus is hardwired into our being, and I wholeheartedly agree with Augustine of Hippo when he writes in his book, Confessions, "Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee." Godspeed as you begin your journey to find Jesus.

Ever ask someone if they have read a book and hear the reply, "I did not read the book but I saw the movie." I laugh every time I hear that response. Sadly, so much of what folks know about Jesus is like a movie based on a book; it is second hand information, and may not be true to the book or author's intent. Your journey to know Jesus begins with deciding to read the Bible. As the psalmist writes in Psalms 119: 105, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." Reading the Bible is like turning on a light in a dark place; everything is more clearly seen.

The next decision is choosing a translation of the Scriptures. Unless you read and write Hebrew and Greek, you are going to need a translation of the Scriptures into your native language. Some readers may have one or more translations to consider. If you read and write English, you have many choices. I have first-hand experience with the King James Version (KJV), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASB), and English Standard Version (ESV). For example, let's take a look at John 3: 16 in the four versions I mentioned:

¹⁶ For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. (KJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (NIV)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that He gave His ^[a]only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. (NASB)

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, ^[a] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (ESV)

You can immediately see that two versions, KJV and NASB, use the word, "begotten," which is not a commonly used word in every day conversation today. The ESV uses "only Son" compared to "one and

only Son" in the NIV. The ESV is the newest, literal translation of the Scriptures into English, and is my current favorite translation. I recommend the ESV because it is a literal translation of the Scriptures into English, and is written more closely to how we write and speak in the 21st century. What is important; however, is that you can understand what you are reading. The website, Bible Gateway (URL: www.biblegateway.com) has many translations of the Scriptures, and you can compare one translation with another to see what works best for you. One inexpensive option for reading the Bible is to load the Kindle app on your smart phone or tablet. If you have an account with Amazon (URL: www.amazon.com), you can purchase the Bible (English Standard Version) for free, and it will automatically synch with your smart phone or tablet. I like the way the Kindle App displays the pages, and you can use the highlighter for favorite passages.

The Bible (NASB) has 2374 pages. The typical time to read estimated by the publisher is 58 hours and 54 minutes. Reading the Bible is no small undertaking! By comparison, War and Peace (Penguin Classics) (Paperback) by Leo Tolstoy has 1440 pages. You need a schedule. I recommend using a daily schedule like the one published by The Gideons International (URL: www.gideons.org). The schedule includes daily readings from the Old and New Testament. The reader has several options including going to the website for Today's Reading or downloading a Daily Bible Reading calendar. If you look at the Daily Bible Reading calendar, you discover that with a modest investment of 15-20 minutes/day, you will read through the Gospel of Matthew in the New Testament over the timeframe of 45 days (01/01-02/15) in addition to Genesis, Exodus, and a portion of Leviticus from the Old Testament. In the gospels of the New Testament, you will meet Jesus. In His own words, He will declare to you God's will for your life.

I encourage you to stay committed to your goal to read the Scriptures. I encourage you to read the entire Bible in one year! In Hawaii, the ulua fisherman who catches a 100 pound ulua is honored by having his name added to the list, The 100-pound Ulua Club. For some ulua fishermen, this accomplishment is a lifelong goal. Imagine having your name added to the list of those folks who have read through the entire Bible! One potential source of discouragement is not understanding what you are reading. I laugh every time I read 2 Peter 3: 15-16 (ESV):

¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures.

Even the apostle Peter relates a hard time understanding some of the writings of the apostle Paul! Be like the psalmist, who wrote in Psalms 119: 18, "Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law." Ask God to help you understand the Bible.

You need to be in community with others who have the same goal. As you read the Bible, you will want to discuss what you are reading with others. You will not find a sympathetic ear among unbelievers. As a matter of fact, I suspect friends and family will wonder why you are wasting time with such a fruitless endeavor. The apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 4: 4, "In *all* this, they are surprised that you do not run with *them* into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign *you*;" Times change but, unfortunately, people do not; darkness still opposes the light! So to be candid, this means finding a church, and not all churches are created equal. I am and have been a member of the Churches of Christ/Christian Churches all my life, and I encourage you to find Church of Christ or Christian Church and join with them. The web site, Christian Church Today (URL: www.christianchurchtoday.com) maintains a directory of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

My prayer is that you will indeed come to know Jesus, not from a literary perspective through a study of the text of the Bible, but in a personal way as Lord and Savior.