

## HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 10/21/2022

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

The Bible is the first language of faith. That sounds pretty profound, but it is true. Like those first words a child learns and speaks, “mama,” “dada,” and “no,” from the Bible we first learn words like “grace,” “faith,” “forgiveness,” and “salvation.” Children love to have books read to them and, when old enough, to read books themselves. It allows them to expand their vocabulary, to better communicate with others, and to discover more about the world. The Bible, too, gives us the opportunity to grow in our faith language so that we can discuss what we believe with others.

Yet, many people avoid Bible study and only hear the Bible when it is read in church. Others may read a daily devotional, too. But the real growth in faith happens in Bible study. Again, many people avoid it and I think there are several reasons why:

First, people are afraid to let other know that they are not well-versed in the Bible. They believe that all Christians should know the Bible and are self-conscious because they feel that they don't. Well, they are correct in that Christians should be familiar with the Bible. But remember, like a child, everyone starts out with no or limited knowledge of the Bible. It is in Bible study that we grow in our knowledge and understanding of what the Bible says and what it is about. I've heard it said that, “there are no dumb questions.” I disagree. There is one. If you say, “Can I ask a question?” you obviously can because you just did. But beyond that, there aren't any dumb questions and that is especially true in Bible study. It is from our questions that we learn and grow, but unless you ask them, you can't get the answers you desire. Much of the time, the question you ask is one that others also may be considering or had not thought of but are glad you asked it, or have asked it before themselves, and are pleased that you are learning just as they did.

Others avoid Bible study because they think the Bible is boring. Some parts are, that's true. But there is so much more that is interesting and also exciting. You probably have some awareness that the Bible includes angels, and demons, and miracles, but did you know that in the Bible there are also chases, and sibling rivalry, and spies, and romance, and betrayal, and love, and hatred, and the rich, and the poor, and heroic acts, and so much more? There is poetry, and story, and history, and law, and census (okay those last two are kind of boring), and wisdom, and prophecy. But until you dig in, you're going to miss a lot of this.

Still others think that what they hear in church is enough. Clearly, GOD gave us so much in the Bible that we can't possibly know all that it has to offer just by going to church. Generally, our practice in worship is to read a portion of scripture each week. Consider just the gospels. First, we divide the gospels into three parts: the year of Matthew, the year of Mark, and the year of Luke. The Gospel of John is interspersed into those three years. But that leaves us reading only about a third of the gospels in three years. Many years ago, I discovered that there are 260 chapters in the New Testament. Maybe that doesn't seem significant until I mention that there are 260 weekdays in a year. I don't think that's coincidence. You can read a chapter of the New Testament every weekday, use the weekend to catch up if you miss a day, and in a year read the entire New Testament. Reading is not the same as studying, but it's a good start. But when you consider that there are twenty-seven books in the New Testament and thirty-nine more in the Old Testament, you can see that there is a whole lot that we don't hear just coming to church.

Studying the Bible helps us stay connected to GOD as we read GOD's word. It reveals to us truths about GOD and GOD'S relationship to us. Studying the Bible helps to strengthen your faith as you increasingly understand GOD'S will for you and for all people and recognize GOD'S activity in the world. Studying the Bible helps to protect us from those who might twist or misinterpret the Bible. The more we know, the better we can identify what is true and what is false. Studying the Bible helps and encourages us in living as GOD would have us live and guides us into our service in GOD'S name. Studying the Bible will equip you to talk to others about faith and perhaps even guide them to a closer relationship with GOD.

There are plenty of times and ways one can find to study GOD'S word. We offer several Bible study opportunities at St. Andrew each week. You can also purchase Bible studies to do at home. Or you can listen to radio programs or pod casts that can assist you in going deeper into the Bible. In any case, we all need to be finding time to be with GOD through GOD'S word and we should rejoice that we have been blessed to have such a wonderful resource for our faith life available to us.

In CHRIST'S love,  
Pastor Jeffrey