



PETER M. PHILLIPS

Engaging the Word

BIBLICAL LITERACY and **CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP**

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Introduction

This book is about the relationship between reading the Bible and following Jesus. I think. Or, in bigger words, it is about the relationship between biblical literacy and Christian discipleship. Both terms are complicated by different definitions and different emphases within different church contexts and within different academic communities. But the point of this book is not to get bogged down in academic theorising but to tackle an issue which affects us all: how might an improvement in our biblical literacy impact the way we follow Jesus? Can we be better Christians by engaging more with the Bible?

This book starts out with an exploration of what we mean by the Bible, or the Word of God. It sets the theological agenda of everything else – proposing my fundamental point that the Word of God, the Bible, is the engine of Christian discipleship. So in Chapter 1, ‘The Bible and the Word of God’, we look at the nature of the Bible as scripture, as the word of God.

That exploration will put us in a good place to examine what we mean by biblical literacy. It is quite a technical term, has received some recent attention through surveys and studies, and needs some unpacking. So in Chapter 2, ‘Biblical literacy’, we’ll look at what we mean by biblical literacy and how various people have measured it or decided that we can’t measure it. We’ll look at biblical literacy within the contemporary church and in wider society. Spoiler alert: the news is patchy!

People can be scared of the Bible perhaps because they have been told it is a problematic book; or because lived Christianity is what they are all about; or simply because other things seem more

important for the task at hand. I once saw a poll in which pastors were asked if they used the Bible to prepare their sermons; 65% said they did. I've always been a little bamboozled by that figure. Why isn't it closer to 100%? If a sermon is preaching the Word of God, how can you do it without the Word of God? I suppose the pastors in question used other things to enlighten their preparation – and we've all heard those sermons!

In Chapter 3, 'The mediated Bible', we'll take a sweep through the past 2,000 years, stopping briefly now and then to look at specific examples of how the church has worked hard to maintain the umbilical link between the Bible and Christian discipleship within a largely non-book culture. This has meant, and still does mean, making the most of every form of communication available. We must not limit biblical literacy to be about reading ink on paper. Biblical literacy, in all its majesty, is a full-blown multimedia extravaganza of biblical engagement.

Bibles are everywhere and in so many different formats. At the same time, we are surrounded by biblically inspired art, sculpture, theatre and film and the media is full of biblical motifs and ideas. We can become complacent about our engagement with the Bible – if the Bible is everywhere, can't I just soak it up automatically?

At the heart of this book is a plea to rethink our own Bible engagement. At the end of the 19th century, J.C. Ryle celebrated the abundance of Bibles of every type, at every price, for every audience. But at the same time he warned, 'I fear we are in danger of forgetting that to *have* the Bible is one thing and to *read* it quite another.' Ryle's point was that you can lead a horse to as much water as you like, but it is up to the horse to drink. However many Bibles we provide, however many allusions to the Bible surround us in contemporary society, however many apps we have on our phones and tablets, without a conscious decision to engage with the Bible, Christian discipleship can remain a Bible-free zone.

In Chapter 4, 'Discipleship and the Bible', we'll take a closer look at the interrelationship between these two pivotal ideas at the heart of any lived expression of Christianity. Although some Christians want to see the Bible as an instruction manual for Christian living, others see it as an old-fashioned text which misses out so much of what contemporary Christian experience is telling us about God's love for the world. But the truth is that reading the Bible and Christian discipleship have always gone hand-in-hand. The Christian faith (and Judaism before it) has always been a mixture of embodying the Word and living faithfully within God's covenant relationship with his people: walking the covenant (*halakha*) parallels telling the covenant (*haggadah*). In Jeremiah 31, the two are so close in meaning that when the new covenant comes, the law will be written in our hearts – fully internalised within us.

So the last few chapters of this book explore different aspects of discipleship and biblical literacy: Chapter 5, 'Reaching up', explores our relationship with God through the Bible; Chapter 6, 'Reaching in', explores how we learn about ourselves and our neighbours through the Bible, and how we might engage more with the Bible to build the church; and Chapter 7, 'Reaching out', explores how we might use biblical literacy to empower our pastoral, missional and evangelistic presence.

A call to action

Before we move on, it is worth noting that this book does not sit on the fence and offer a dry academic exercise in objective research. This book is a challenge to both churches and individuals to take seriously the role of the Bible in Christian discipleship, in following Jesus. When a whole host of organisations came together some years ago to form the Biblefresh campaign, one of the metaphors we used was healthy eating. For our bodies to be healthy, we need to eat well and regularly. We need to have a balanced diet of nutrients, protein, fibre, vitamins and fluids. We cannot live by bread alone!

Likewise with healthy discipleship – we need a balanced diet, which includes fellowship with other Christians, prayer in all its different forms, worship and celebration, and undergirding all of this a connection with the word of God. But at the same time, we need to put that relationship with God’s word into action in the rest of our lives.

In his letter to the early church, James, probably the brother of Jesus, talks about people who don’t act on God’s word which they have listened to in worship. He compares such people to those who look in the mirror and then, as soon as they move away, they forget what they look like (James 1:23–24). It’s an interesting text in an interesting book. James seems to be using an everyday image to make a theological point, a bit like Jesus did. But what is the theological point? Read on. In the next verse, he points out that blessing will come to ‘whoever looks intently into [literally, stoops over] the perfect law that gives freedom and continues in it’. In other words, to look into the mirror is to look into the Bible, to study the Bible, to remember the Bible, but then to put the Bible into action in our lives. To enact what we have heard, what we have read, what has been spoken to us. In a way, the Bible, as a mirror, reflects back to us not just our reflection but our identity in God. It is not that we look at the Bible to see ourselves, but rather that we look at the Bible to allow it to change us, to perfect us, to set us free.

At the same time, James reminds us again and again that the Bible is not just a thing to think about. The Bible is a call to action. The Bible has to be put into practice rather than left undone. Don’t read it and then forget it, James argues; read it and do it. The Danish theologian Kierkegaard told some great parables about faith. I learned this one many years ago from Mike Riddell, the great missiologist:

Once upon a time, there lived a flock of geese in a farmyard surrounded by high walls. Life was fine: the corn was good, the walls were high. So, the geese never took a risk. One day a philosopher goose arrived and began to teach them.

Every week they listened and he taught them. He said: Fellow travellers on the way of life, do you think this barnyard is all there is? No, there is a whole world beyond these walls. Our ancestors once flew across this land – across oceans and deserts, green valleys and wooded hills. But we are content to puddle in the mud, never lifting our eyes to the heavens which should be our home.

The geese loved the teaching and called it poetical and existential and a flawless summary of the mystery of life. The philosopher goose pointed to their wings, tucked away at their sides, and told them of the freedom of the skies, the beauty of the life beyond the walls of the farmyard.

The geese listened. They were devoted, uplifted, inspired. They studied his words for weeks, months and wrote their own versions of his ideas and developed learned treatises on the ethics of flight, the spirituality of flying.

But they never flew. The corn was good. The walls were high. This was enough for them.

This book is not about learned treatises about the Bible. Nor is it a theoretical discussion of the benefits of biblical literacy. It's a call to action. This book will argue that engaging the Bible will transform our understanding of our walk with God, the pursuit of holiness. Indeed, it will argue that the Bible talks of itself not as a rule book nor as an instruction manual for life but as the implanted word, the engine of the Christian life, the driving force for Christian discipleship.

1

The Bible and the word of God

What do we mean when we talk about the Bible? Or when we talk about the ‘word of God’ or the ‘Word of God’ or ‘The Word of God’. Or how about ‘scripture’ or ‘Holy Scripture’ or ‘The Holy Scriptures’? Are all these things the same thing? Even if they are, do they suggest different things about what we are talking about? Does ‘Bible’ emphasise the book we might carry to church or have on our smartphones or be given to swear upon in court? Does ‘scripture’ emphasise the use of that object in church, when we explore our faith with it, when we quote it in hymns and prayers? Does ‘word of God’ refer to God’s part in bringing the Bible into being, inspiring it, breathing into the words written (scripted) by the various authors? And does the Bible *contain* scripture or *is* it scripture? Does the Bible mean the same as the word of God or is the word of God just the nice bits of the Bible that we all agree with? And what about Jesus as the Word?

Words are really important. But one of the joys of human speech is that we often blur distinctions. We might want to talk about the same thing but use different words in different situations. We might talk about the Bible in an academic setting, the scriptures in a Catholic Church and the word of God when we are talking about preaching or Bible study. It’s interesting that whereas John uses ‘the Word’ to talk about the second person of the Trinity at the beginning of John’s Gospel (John 1:1), elsewhere in the New Testament that same word often means the message preached about Jesus. In parallel passages, different Gospel authors use other words that make this clearer (‘teaching’ or ‘spoken word’). In fact, in the other 15 times the word is used in John’s Gospel outside the first verses, the word

means ‘teaching’ or ‘message’, and twice that includes references to God’s word in the Torah (the Law). But this ‘word’ or ‘message’ about Jesus is separate from Jesus as the ‘Word of God’. Gradually, the early Christians merged the message about Jesus, Jesus as the word, and the word of God as the Torah (and gradually the Christian scriptures) into the same thing and the ‘Word of God’ became a kind of catch-all phrase for them. And then we begin to ask questions about whether all of the Bible was the same as the Word of God!

Moreover, how do we interpret this *word*? There are countless methods of interpretation: a whole science called hermeneutics. In a recent book, *Searching for Meaning*, Paula Gooder marshals 23 different methodologies trying to bring out different aspects of the meaning of the Bible, and points out in the introduction there could have been many more. When the Methodist Church wrote a report on how to handle the Bible, *A Lamp Unto Our Feet*, it proposed a whole range of different possibilities, some totally contradicting others. The conclusion to the report said that faithful Methodists followed some or all of those possibilities and advocated acceptance of them all.¹

To some extent all this diversity and ambiguity could lead to confusion and the sound of ordinary Christian people running for the doors! But authoritarian approaches to the Bible are just as scary. Why do we give power to one person (usually a man) to interpret the text for us, to tell us how we must read it? The Reformation was about destroying that kind of power and about us being able to read and interpret the word for ourselves and to allow God to speak to us through his word. Why ever do we hand that gift to someone else to unwrap?

So let’s be sensible. Let’s limit our exploration to five aspects of the Bible that might help us understand biblical literacy a little better.

- 1 The Bible as a sacred text or sacred artefact – as *biblia sacra* (sacred books) or simply as *hē graphē* (scripture).
- 2 The Bible as an object of study.

- 3 The Bible as the engine of discipleship, full of examples of how to respond to our engagement with God or how to live our lives as disciples.
- 4 The Bible as God's drama.
- 5 The Bible as word of God.

At the end of the chapter, for this fifth aspect, introduced so innocently above, I want to do a bit of theology about the Bible – to look at the Bible as having characteristics that are both divine and human and to ask whether the Bible is a different kind of text to the other books we may put on the bookshelf, physical or virtual, alongside it. I want to argue that the Bible is not the same as a Dickens novel or a C.S. Lewis paperback or Marx's *Das Kapital*. I think this will help us to understand why we need to treat the Bible a whole lot differently to all other texts around in our world.

1 A sacred artefact

The Bible is one of humanity's greatest treasures: a collection of ancient writings sacred for millennia within the Judeo-Christian tradition and given high esteem in many others. They are sacred texts, documenting a history of encounter between Yahweh and his people over all of time: from the garden of Eden; through the nomadic wanderings of the early Jewish tribes; the establishment of an Israelite state in Syria–Palestine and its political and military engagement with its powerful neighbours; the prophets and priests, in high places and temples; the birth, ministry, life, death and resurrection of Jesus; the establishment of the early church; and then on to the second coming of Christ and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth.

These texts, these *biblia sacra*, were gathered together into collections of codices, an early form of the book developed especially by the church in the first century. In turn, these were eventually wrestled into two testaments: a canonical list of texts – the Bible.

But that was really only the beginning. The Bible and the Christian faith became foundational to European culture during the decline of the Roman empire and was also foundational through other streams of ancient Christian tradition in Armenia, Syria, Libya, Egypt, Ethiopia, Russia and across swathes of western and southern Asia. The Bible became the source book for so much of society, especially in the West, from legal codes to social interaction and to political engagement – just as Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* had been for Greece and Virgil’s *Aeneid* had been for Rome (and which TV culture may well be assuming for the contemporary age).

The Bible is so embedded in our culture that it has become a kind of totem, a symbol representing the whole of a culture. In a groundbreaking book, *Rethinking Biblical Literacy*,² a number of scholars explore how the Bible has become part and parcel of our society – its images, words and ideas embedded within every aspect of our lives – visual, textual, aural, artistic, political, sacred. We live in a society infused with the Bible. In courts and in official ceremonies, people still give oaths on the Bible. We maintain blasphemy laws. The Bible remains a bestseller. Moreover, the Bible acts as a connection back into the tradition, into the bedrock of our civilisation. The Bible takes on both the sacred status of a religious text, but also the privilege of an ancient authority within the realm. It is a symbol of power and importance; a symbol, even, of the presence of God.

That totemic role of the Bible can be seen in the private realm as well. In biblical literacy research, we find that many more people own a Bible than those who read it. In fact, most people in the UK own a Bible, but very few actually read it at all. People still gift Bibles – at christenings and baptisms, at school or as a family heirloom. But the book is then left on the shelf, perhaps to be brought out for family weddings and funerals. The Bible takes on a kind of totemic presence in the house, perhaps a kind of amulet of protection. It remains important and takes on some sense of sacredness – a holy book for those who know where it is and what it means; more

precious perhaps than those old cookery books that sit alongside it. This sacredness is not because of the words it contains but because it is a symbol of tradition; a symbol of the civilisation's code of practice; a passport to that civilisation's past and possibly into its future.

But the Bible easily becomes a symbolic artefact rather than a living text. In 2013 the Lindisfarne Gospels came back to the north-east of England. The Lindisfarne Gospels is a beautifully illustrated manuscript of the four Gospels in Latin with an Anglo-Saxon interlinear gloss created on Holy Island, Northumberland, over 1,300 years ago. It is a national treasure, one of the best surviving examples of Anglo-Saxon Insular art. As part of the exhibition, visitors were allowed to see the manuscript itself – open on different days on different pages – as well as lots of other artefacts of the northern Celtic saints and Anglo-Saxon spirituality. Everything was carefully laid out under glass, in carefully controlled atmospheric conditions. In various rooms in the gallery, you could see how the manuscript was made and marvel at the craftsmanship of Eadfrith's textual work, Aethelwold's binding and Billfrith's ornamentation. You could even try writing your own version of the Gospels. *But nothing in the exhibition told you what the Gospels said, nowhere was the Latin translated into contemporary English.* The Gospels had become a jewel to be seen rather than a text to be read.

After all, few modern readers can read illuminated Latin or any other form of Latin. Even back in the tenth century, there seemed to have been a problem with reading Latin, as between the lines Anglo-Saxon words have been scrawled. The Lindisfarne monks, settled for a time at Chester-le-Street as refugees from the Vikings, turned this sacred artefact into a little piece of biblical literacy. They realised that this beautiful manuscript needed to be more than just a jewel; it needed to be engaged with, read, understood. It was not just a sacred relic to increase the holiness of the place where it was kept, but the very living word of God which needed to be set free into the lives of the believers.

2 An object of study

I want to push this idea of the Bible as an artefact a bit further. We've explored the idea of the Bible as a totem, something we regard as holy often without really understanding why – a kind of amulet to ward off evil or attract good. I think this is the way many people still think of the Bible today: something which is good to have in the house, a kind of spiritual insurance certificate.

But as a sacred object, as an artefact, the Bible affects the wider society. Its historical importance to art, architecture, legal codes and literature has meant that it is far more active than a mere amulet in affecting the whole of society, in infusing contemporary culture with biblical ideas and principles. It is as if the Bible were living and active. It is almost as if, straight from a fantasy novel or comic book, the Bible emanates a sense of its own presence, seeping its tendrils out into the world, oozing sacredness even while it remains passive on the bookshelf, on the altar or in the vaults of the national library. Perhaps that's just mythological language, metaphorical language. Post-Enlightenment culture prefers to be governed by rationalism rather than concepts of the sacred or myth. For many in our society, the Bible is just an object. It is something we can pick up and handle. It can be touched and held and read; part of the material culture of our day.

Indeed, the Judeo-Christian tradition has created this object. Ever since God wrote on those tablets of stone, the Bible has been shaped into a written text: inscribed on stone, etched on vellum, printed on paper. Indeed, although the Torah has a whole unwritten, oral component, it is the written Torah – the written account of God's encounter – which has become so important.

The Bible has become a historical artefact, part and parcel of the material culture of Judaism and Christianity. It was originally plural objects, scrolls and papyri, such as the scroll which Jesus was asked to read from in the synagogue (Luke 4), the scroll which Ezekiel was

told to eat (Ezekiel 3:3), the Book of the Law found by Hilkiah and given to King Josiah (2 Kings 22) or the collections of Paul's letters gathered in the early church (as suggested in 2 Peter 3:15–16). These pieces were gradually bound together into the earliest copies of the whole Bible, such as *Codex Vaticanus*, from the fourth century, and *Codex Amiatinus*, probably produced in the north-east of England in the eighth century. Miniaturised, illuminated, gilded and eventually printed, the Bible has been a bestselling book ever since.

But the gradual process of development left lots of loose ends, and so Erasmus and many other scholars began a process of interrogation into those texts. Historical-critical research of the Bible began. Texts were categorised into family groups and traditions (Western, Alexandrian, Byzantine), patterns noted in the development of the text, and assumptions reached about how the text had arrived in its present condition and how it could be improved. Historical-critical research of the Bible has become quite an industry over the years and had an immense impact on the way that we engage with the Bible.

Of course, it was never meant to be negative. In the introduction to his first edition of the new Greek text, Erasmus argued for the importance of widespread access to the text – everyone could now read it, everyone could be a doctor of theology, for now the Bible's presence to us was more secure than the sun in the sky! He saw his research as enabling more biblical engagement rather than less. But the increasing complexity of biblical interpretation has sometimes led to the Bible being seen as an inaccessible text, a place where only experts can go. In fact, the whole Reformation process of making scripture the only place to find our assurance of salvation (*sola scriptura*) rather than in the offices of the church – bolstered by John Wycliffe's insistence that everyone needed to have access to the Bible in their own language – both opened up the text but at the same time made it a highly contested place, a place of division, disagreement and intellectual competition.

By creating a scientific, rational approach to textual criticism, Erasmus was part of a process of objectifying the text, of making the text a passive object to be studied and eventually dissected. It became like a patient on an operating table – waiting for the specially skilled surgeon to make it better. In such conditions, the Bible remained a closed text to so many because of the increasing complexity of the hermeneutical process. Better to let the experts engage and leave the Bible to Sunday services than to try to engage with it from our own relative inexperience.

Do we come under scripture or do we stand over scripture? It's about a power balance. As mentioned earlier, James uses the image of us stooping over scripture, but in the sense of studying it rather than controlling it (James 1:25). The word for James is still the implanted word which can save us: we are the object of the Bible rather than the Bible being the object of our investigation. But in biblical studies, we tend to come to decisions about the Bible from the outside. We tend to make an evaluation about different ideas and theories that see the Bible as the object of our reflections.

There were other ways to interpret the text. For example, to be so infused with scripture that our minds made scriptural decisions, through scriptural thoughts spoken in the language and concepts of the scriptures. This is what the early theologian Origen thought. Brought up in a deeply religious family, Origen was taught to memorise scripture from an early age. He was soaked in the text. His mind was full of scripture – an almost encyclopedic knowledge. As such, when he came to think about a passage, he was able to draw from all of that knowledge to make common-sense interpretations as well as allegorical readings that he justified by his knowledge of scripture elsewhere.

But rationalism, the Enlightenment approach to the text, works in different ways. It not only makes the Bible the object of a historical-critical approach, a quasi-scientific approach to the text, but it also encourages us to see the Bible as a repository of data, which in turn

needs to be handled factually and scientifically. So, while the artefact model has the Bible oozing sacredness, the object model creates a Bible as a sourcebook for information about God, the world and our encounter with him. Rather than the Bible being a mirror in which we look to see ourselves, the mirror becomes a window through which we look to see the world of biblical times.

Some Christians take this so seriously that they mould the real world around that data, pointing to six days of creation or a world that is only a few thousand years old. How do we deal with the evidence of dinosaurs when the Bible doesn't mention them, or theories of human evolution when the Bible talks of God creating Adam and Eve directly? Our objectification of the Bible into data points can have a profound effect even on the most evangelical of readings.

Moreover, if the Bible is a source of data then it becomes one of a number of data sources that compete with one another for supremacy. Do the sciences of cosmology, palaeontology, geology, biology, archaeology and so on destroy the concept of biblical truth because they talk of the world in different ways to the Bible? Or is it simply that there are different languages at play here: different ways of constructing world views, different ways of talking about the meaning of life? Do we always need to see data being in conflict? Could there be a way of fusing the language of Genesis with the language of cosmology and palaeontology?

Of course, to some extent the Bible *is* an object of research. It is a data repository. It contains sociological data which span millennia, the narrative histories of a rather undocumented part of the world and the historical theological reflections of two of the contemporary world's most important religions. It would be ludicrous not to make use of all that data. Lots of people have written lots of books making lots of proposals about how some of that data might be interpreted. Of course, given the contested nature of intellectual enquiry, not everyone is in agreement on most things. Human beings like to fashion the world in their own image and to come to their own

conclusions about things. After all, saying something different is often a good way to sell a book! But Kierkegaard worried that such study ‘makes God’s word into something impersonal, objective... instead of it being the voice of God that you shall hear’.³ Again, what is the Bible? Is it an object, displaying data for study? Or is it an artefact, oozing sacredness? Or, perhaps, is it really the engine of discipleship?

Oozing sacredness is radically different from being a data source. Indeed, the latter sometimes gets in the way of the former and vice versa. Historical–critical methodology teaches us that we need to be radically objective to handle an object of study. We are told to stand apart from the Bible, suppress our beliefs and world view, and hold an appropriate critical distance, and to make that criticality the world view for our research. But, in itself, that imposes another set of beliefs: viewing the text through the so-called hermeneutic of suspicion or reading the text against the grain. Such processes can be as subjective as any faith-based stance. So, in turn, radical objectivity itself is now questioned, with some scholars asking whether it is perhaps better to acknowledge our faith and to handle the information rigorously from within that tradition than to pretend that we are objective secularists.

Awkwardly, the Bible as an object provides a few problems to those who want extreme objectivity. The Bible seems consistently to challenge the concept of objectivity and the use of the biblical narrative as a data repository. Perhaps even the alleged historical inaccuracies in the text become part of this process, challenging our concepts of history and our ideas of how stories provide data for analysis. It’s interesting that so much has been written about the Bible and so many new ideas come forth all the time. We seem, after centuries of historical–critical methodology, to be nowhere near the objective consensus that it first offered. This text oozes subjectivity as much as it oozes sacredness. But subjectivity, sacredness and intellectual study perhaps need to be seen as different modes of engagement with the text rather than mutually exclusive.

A case in point is the placement of the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53–8:11) in our current Bibles. The story does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. In the several manuscripts in which it does eventually appear, it is placed at various points in Luke. Most commentators argue that it has been imported from a non-canonical gospel, such as the gospel of the Hebrews, or that it was a free-floating Gospel story – perhaps Johannine but probably not. There is little agreement about where the story originated. Despite the ambiguity, this quasi-Johannine passage seems to have ended up in scripture because it witnesses to a sense of what Jesus was really about; its message is clearly Christian, reflecting a Lukan sense of social justice and a Johannine ambiguity about conversion. So although it introduces a word – ‘scribes’ – that doesn’t appear anywhere else in John’s Gospel, and although it breaks up the narrative sequences around it, the passage fits so well into the Johannine picture of Jesus that it has stuck. Despite contemporary commentators ignoring it, over the centuries Jerome, Augustine, Bede and Erasmus each added their weight to its inclusion. It would be interesting to do some research about whether the presence of the square brackets around the story is gradually decreasing, and acceptance of the text as scripture is gradually increasing. The text oozes something of the historical Jesus and perhaps that’s why it is included, rather than because it is a repository of historical fact.

Of all the Gospel writers, John is keenest to see the Gospel as a place to do that theological reflection rather than to (re)produce history. For example, while the synoptic Gospels place the account of the cleansing of the temple in the week before Jesus’ death (Matthew 21:12–17; Mark 11:15–19; Luke 19:45–48), John has it near the beginning of his story (John 2:13–16). It’s not that John wants to assert two cleansings and the other Gospel writers have missed one out. Instead it seems clear that John wants to link the cleansing to his own discussion of Jesus’ identity among the calling of the first disciples and the wedding at Cana, rather than to leave it at the end. This is where the story is needed, in order to illustrate so powerfully John’s understanding that Jesus, particularly his resurrected

presence, will become the relocation of both the temple's function and importance as the presence of the living God. The narrator thus reminds us that the temple, which Jesus said he would rebuild in three days, was in fact Jesus' own body. Jesus himself becomes the place of worship for the new community, the place where God's presence among his people is known.

Notes

- 1 Paula Gooder, *Searching for Meaning* (SPCK, 2008); *A Lamp Unto Our Feet*, Report to the Methodist Conference 1998, available at www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-a-lamp-to-my-feet-1998.pdf
- 2 Katie B. Edwards (ed.), *Rethinking Biblical Literacy* (T&T Clark, 2015).
- 3 Søren Kierkegaard, *Kierkegaard's Writings, XXI: For self-examination/judge for yourself!* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 39.

Peter Phillips is convinced that the church in the West is not devouring the Bible or meditating on the word as it should, and therefore is spiritually malnourished and failing to thrive. *Engaging the Word* will transform the Bible engagement habits of Christian disciples, improving the health of the church by opening up new opportunities for drawing on God's word and new life as a result.

Engaging the Word sets out what biblical literacy means and what it looks like in our contemporary culture, exploring the benefits of biblical literacy for those who follow Jesus and for Christian leaders as local theologians and preachers. It also presents a series of practical explorations of the role of the Bible, which help us to reach up to God, reach in to develop our own identity in Christ and reach out to others.

Revd Dr Peter Phillips is a Methodist minister and Director of CODEC, a research centre housed at St John's College, Durham University. For many years he served as New Testament Tutor on the staff of Cliff College. He has a great interest in the New Testament and in communicating the faith in a digital age.



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