

Pastor Stef's Book Review – October 2016

Glenn R. Paauw's book *Saving the Bible from Ourselves: Learning to Read & Live the Bible Well* (2016) is one of the best books I've read in the past couple of years. Its message is one I have grown passionate about, and I know the effect it has made on my life. It's the reason I've spent the last couple of years teaching through the big ideas in each of the books of the Bible in adult Sunday school. It's the reason I taught a Friday night "How to Read your Bible" class. It's the reason I'm planning to do a sermon series on the themes of this book for the months of October and November. And it's the reason I will be leading us through a 40 day read through the New Testament in the New Year. Learning to read the Bible well is vital to the health of the church, and this book shows us why this is so and how we can do it well.

Paauw's point is that, though well intentioned, the Bible has been made almost impenetrable with all of its added "helps." Those verse numbers after every few words, chapter breaks, small text sizes, columns, ultrathin paper, study notes and boxes of "life application." None of this was in the original and, in addition to adding to its bulk, it changes the way we read the Bible, which is basically to *not* read it. The Bible has become more like a dictionary or reference manual in which we look up "verses" as "nuggets of truth" to apply as "principles for life." But in doing this we've lost the story of the Bible and an understanding of what the God behind this story is like. This causes us to rip out "nuggets of truth", devoid of any context, and therefore, interpreted with our own ideas rather than Biblical ideas. Paauw gives us numerous examples of how this is being done, even by those who "market" the Bible to us.

The answer to this is to return to the story of the Bible, and this will only happen when we start to read it again like a storybook. This means reading large sections of it to catch its development, flow and plot. In order to do this Paauw has become part of an organization called *Biblica* which has produced a version of the NIV Bible that has taken out all of the verse numbers, chapter breaks, columns and notes so that the text is presented in the way that you would find the text of a novel, and closer to how it was originally written. They also put the books of the Bible in chronological order so that the story holds together better. It is this New Testament we are going to be using for our 40 day read through in the New Year. And the purpose of doing it in 40 days is so that we will read large chunks at a time so that we can better see the story. *Biblica* also has short, one minute long, video clips that go with each day's reading to help you understand the background of what you are reading.

In addition to this, *Biblica* talks about the importance of reading in community and not reading, and interpreting, in isolation. In order to do this we will be encouraging everybody reading the New Testament in the New Year to become part of a small book club that will meet on a weekly basis to discuss what they are reading.

In the meantime, read this book! If you engage with its message it will change the way you read the Bible, which, in turn, will change your life. If you were to only read one book this year, besides the Bible, this should be the one. It is that good and its message is that important.