



READING THE BIBLE SUPERNATURALLY: SEEING AND SAVORING THE GLORY OF GOD IN SCRIPTURE

BY JOHN PIPER

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“Is Google Making Us Stupid?”...that was the title of an article by NY Times best-selling author Nicholas Carr that caught my attention just over a decade ago. He would write a book titled *The Shallows*, which delved into the way the Digital Age was rewiring the way we interact with the great volume of information that’s out there today.

As a pastor, few things could be more concerning to me than the prospect that the people of God are becoming “shallow” readers since reading the Bible sits at the center of our walk with God.

A Book about Reading

Into this moment, John Piper has written a rather important book for our times, *Reading the Bible Supernaturally: Seeing and Savoring the Glory of God in Scripture*. Do we really need a book on “reading the Bible”? After all, we live in the Information Age—we’re always reading! Well, in an age that is teaching us to click through our Google searches and thumb through our newsfeeds, Piper’s book is going to help us go from “skimming” to “seeing and savoring.”

Piper divides the book into three sections. The first section sets the trajectory for why we read with the answer, “that God’s infinite worth and beauty would be exalted in the everlasting, white-hot worship of the blood brought bride of Christ from every people, language, tribe, and nation”

(56). More than an interaction with words, Piper helps us have a living exchange with God.

This is very much a book about reading—but reading a most unique book. Piper reminds us that a book with supernatural origins “calls for more than your natural kind of reading. Not less. But more. In fact, it calls for the very best of natural reading. But also for more—something beyond what is merely human” (19).

The last two sections of the book explore the dynamics of natural reading and supernatural reading.

Natural Reading

Piper devotes multiple chapters to helping us do the natural act of reading at a much greater level than what Google has been teaching us to do. I remember John Piper introducing me to an old book with a simple title—*How to Read a Book* by Mortimer Adler. In *Reading the Bible Supernaturally*, Piper effectively reminds us how to understand the meaning and the author’s intent; he informs us that reading takes “patience” and “aggressive attentiveness,” he takes a few chapters to teach us how “active reading” means asking questions about words and phrases and also taking time to ponder things like propositions and paradoxes in Scripture.

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Don’t worry. If you’re not very good at any of that, Piper’s book will be a helpful guide!

If you’ve heard John Piper “cross-examine” a biblical text and lift it off the page to be displayed in three dimensions, then you’ve been exposed to someone who understands that reading the Bible takes the very best of natural reading. While I get that John Piper brings a bit more than the average reader to the act of reading a text, there is so much more to be seen by us all if we will intentionally and aggressively learn to read well.

Supernatural Reading

A critical emphasis of the book is focused on our need to engage the Holy Spirit and to more deeply discover what Jesus meant when He said, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13).

Paul said that “we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God” (1 Cor. 2:12). This is the way God intended us to engage His Word, but in a modern life that is over-scheduled and relentless, this might be our greatest loss in how today’s Christian reads the Bible.

In the natural act of reading, a supernatural revealing is available that is being done by the Holy Spirit (“something beyond what is merely human”). Still, in the same way, that practice of “skimming” may make us miss out on

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much that is in the text, the practice of not learning to engage the Spirit may be keeping us from the wonder and power and transformation and hope and faith and awe that is in the text.

In a world that has found a way to give us unending access to information, it may be harder than ever to be attracted to the Bible—especially if our experience of reading it is dry, distant, and unabsorbing. Piper’s book will be a massive aid in giving us Jeremiah-like-encounters: “Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts” (Jer. 15:16).

Piper emphasizes that the intention of God in His living Word is that we encounter His Word in ways that create exchanges and transformation and impartation to our souls—encounters that are like Jeremiah’s “joy and delight” in our hearts.

From Gutenberg to Google

With the invention of Gutenberg’s printing press came a fresh need for instruction on how to read the Bible...and with the invention of the digital age with its super-abundance of things to read has come a fresh need for instruction on how to read the Bible—supernaturally!

This book will pay dividends every time you pick up your Bible and read it. Whether you read this book in sections or from cover to cover, you will be helped, bad habits will be broken, and fresh encounters with the living God will ensue. May we be people who read the Bible often and do so supernaturally.

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