

So many books, so little time

BRIDGE BUILDERS

“Reading good books lately?” There were no other takers, so I volunteered and held high the book I had placed on the desk in front of me. The presenter, who—quickly learned—asked his question as a lead-in to his own readings, responded, “So, Geir, which book is that?” “It’s the Bible!” This was a gathering of Salvationists, and the issues on the day’s agenda dealt with seeking God’s direction for our lives and for our organization.

Since this exchange took place first thing in the morning I hadn’t gathered my thinking sufficiently to determine whether his was a rhetorical question or mine was a smart-aleck answer. I don’t think either one of us acted based on the intention which actually played out. Anyway, everybody else in the room saw the humorous side of this and we all had a good laugh.

If it is true that we are what we eat, (fast food may be quickly prepared and consumed, but it stays with me longer and takes more advantage of gravity than healthier foods...) it is no less true that we are what we read. The kinds of material and ideas contained in books affect the ways we approach things and how we live life. Some of us do this on purpose by frequently consulting the self-help section in bookstores: “Umpteen Ways to Maximize Your Income Potential,” “A Step by Step Guide to Climbing Mt. Everest in a Day,” “How to Tell Someone to *Get A Life!*”.

I couldn’t think of a new cliché (!), so I’ll use an old one (and maybe look for a book on that subject next time I go to the bookstore!): ‘We Christians are the Bible that the unbelievers read.’ Does that statement make you content or uneasy? Do you feel a little weak on the genealogies or the minor prophets? How about the spelling of Quirinius, who was the governor of Syria? OK, so that isn’t the point.

If we are the Bible that pre-Christians read, that seems to indicate that the message is contained in us. It is personal. It means that God didn’t want to simply present us with some good ideas or a list of religious tenets we should try to follow. The message is life, and, as Dr. Charles Kraft says, “There is a sense in which we can say communicators are the message that they seek to communicate...and those messages are expected to affect lives. And life is affected by rubbing against other life.” If it is reduced to mere words of information, the message will be changed and less than what God intended for it to be.

Consider the literary food you eat and recall the prophet Ezekiel. Following God’s instructions to eat the scroll (Ezek.3:1-3), the words of the scroll literally became part of him; he was the message, physically, verbally, literally. This columnist is certainly not encouraging anyone to eat your favorite book of the Bible, or even the Sermon on the Mount or the Ten Commandments, but by illustration Ezekiel helps us very well. When our souls are refreshed and our minds are filled with God’s dealings in human situations our thoughts and actions will start falling in line with his.

We will start to identify with real flesh-and-blood men and women of God in the biblical record. We will see how God is still present and active today. We will be challenged to feed on the Word and increasingly become a fuller expression of the



message God intends to convey to those in our spheres of influence.

Large segments of the world's peoples are illiterate. Their ability to decipher messages hidden in letters and signs in books is limited, but they know how to "read" situations, other people, and the presence of God in their environment. You don't need to travel to a far-away country for your life to "rub against other life" for the message to be conveyed. People are reading us right where we are. Are they getting the message? Are we?

So, have you read any good books lately?