



WOODROW KROLL MINISTRIES

“The Impact of Bible Illiteracy”

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In my opinion, Bible illiteracy is not a problem; it’s a plague. The present impact of Bible illiteracy on society, on the church, and on the family is both subtle and substantial. In this white paper I want to explore the far reaches of the plague of Bible illiteracy, especially in the United States and Canada. For nearly 50 years I have enjoyed a unique window on the Christian world both in education and in the media. I have traveled to 109 countries and have observed that countries that once would have been considered Christian are now secular or post-Christian. I see that in America too. Here are my firsthand observations.

1. Bible Illiteracy Has Hastened the Dumbing Down of the Church

In every area of Christian endeavor we can see the impact of Bible illiteracy. Christians simply know less about their Bible and consequently practice less of its teachings. They have a weakened interest in reading the Bible for spiritual profit and this is reflected in their lifestyle choices. Here are some glaring examples.

Christian Media

Until my retirement in 2013, I had been on the radio almost continuously since 1973. In fact, in the late 1950s I began doing a live radio program on a local station at age 15. I know the medium very well and have watched with sadness Christian radio slide from being an educational medium to purely an entertainment medium. For decades Christians sat by their radio listening to some of the finest Bible teaching available to them. But with time comes change. With the electronic age came the age of music-only radio, even for Christian stations. Not that there’s anything wrong with Christian radio playing Christian music, there isn’t. But let’s be honest. Being entertained with your favorite tunes is no substitute for being instructed by your favorite Bible teacher when it comes to spiritual growth. The less teaching a Christian receives naturally means the less understanding that Christian has and the result is Bible illiteracy.

Christian Publishing

This is also true with Christian publishing. Publishers are in business to make money and that’s certainly legitimate. But in order to make money in publishing these days you have to pander to the wishes of the reading public, a public that is suffering from Bible illiteracy. So, enter a Christian bookstore and take a good look around. Most have become “resource centers” but they are filled with less than genuine resources for spiritual growth and Bible knowledge. Christian publishers know their audience well and they know their audience is thinking more like the world than ever before, so to provide product to this audience they match the audience’s mind-set. Titles like *“All the Women of the Bible”* have been replaced with *“Bad Girls of the Bible.”* Not that the content of the book is any less biblical, but the title and cover must appeal to a more dumbed-down Christian reader. And you really cannot blame the publishing industry or the local bookstore for these things. They are simply providing what the Christian public wants. If they don’t carry what dumbed-down Christians demand, they’ll go out of business and someone else will give biblically-illiterate Christians what they want.

“There is more holy hardware and Jesus junk in most Christian resource centers than there is in the kind of resource that will be steroids for your soul.”

– Woodrow Kroll

The Local Church

The local church has also suffered severely from Bible illiteracy. To a large degree the electronic age has created less of a need to, for example, bring a Bible to church. I love to see people in the pews following their pastor on their smart phone as he reads Scripture. I love to hear the rustling of the pages as people in the pews turn to the passage the pastor will read. What I don't love is the person in the pew who has no form of God's Word that he or she can refer to.

It's no secret that, on average, people in church today know far, far less about God's Word than their parents or grandparents did. That has been proven scientifically and statistically over and over again. There is no debate about it. But less Bible reading, less trust in the authority of the Bible, less knowledge of what's in the Bible and how it impacts our lives all have created, on average, a more dumbed-down church than a generation or two ago. I take no pleasure in saying that, but I have no hesitation in saying it either. It's true and every honest person must admit it.

Thus, for many local churches, the pastor has been forced to become the entertainer of the church as opposed to the teacher of the church or shepherd of the church. He knows that his audience is less capable of handling biblical truth in a straight-forward manner so he must improvise. He must be more entertaining than the pastor across the street or down the road or that pastor will siphon off people from his church every week. The result, of course, is that his sermons are, to use a very sketchy analogy, *“more taste, less filling.”* The problem is that when dumbed-down people in church get more meringue and less meat, they become even more dumbed-down. And when they get less this week, they want less next week. This causes a real dilemma for the local pastor and necessitates more commitment on the pastor's part to *“rightly divide the Word”* and not be guilty of spiritual starvation when feeding his flock.

“Preaching is hazy; heads are muddled; hearts fret; doubts drain strength; uncertainly paralyzes action. For generations our churches have suffered from a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.”

– J. I. Packer

2. Bible Illiteracy Has Caused Moral Apathy among Christians

Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, *“Apathy is our biggest problem, but who cares”*? Well, apathy is a big problem, a very big problem, when it comes to Bible literacy. Christians know far less about God and His Word than they think they do. In fact, most Christians don't know enough about God to know how He feels about societal matters. Often we vote along party lines because we don't

where God stands on the issues of our day. We can't raise our voice against immorality because we have lost the moral authority the prophets of the Bible had. The world doesn't even give the Christian position the time of day because we have allowed Bible illiteracy to rob us of that *"Thus saith the Lord"* authority.

We can't answer our critics when they accuse us of bigotry or hate speech because we don't have a handle on God's responses to such bogus charges. We remain silent while millions of unborn children are destroyed. We allow greedy Wall Street types to get filthy rich while the homeless on our streets remain filthy dirty. We place our voices in silent mode when ISIS and other ruthless jihadists brutally murder Christians in Syria and Iraq just because these people are Christians. And when our government is silent about such atrocities, rather than vote by our spiritual conscience, we tend to vote with our pocketbook. We cannot take the moral high road because we have largely lost sight of where that road is. Our knowledge of God, His Word, His will and way are clouded by our stubborn refusal to read, reflect and respond based on the Word of God. Bible illiteracy is the silent killer of a moral America.

"Biblical illiteracy presents not only a spiritual or religious problem in this nation, but a cultural one as well."
– George Gallup Jr.

3. Bible Illiteracy Has Robbed Us of the Answers to Life's Key Questions

When I was growing up I remember people saying, *"The Bible has the answer to every question."* But numerous times I have read the Bible from cover to cover and have yet to find the answer to the question *"What is the square root of 13?"* That's just not a question the Bible concerns itself with. No, the Bible is not a question and answer book, not written to address every issue or question of mankind. But the big questions, the key questions, the eternal questions, the questions about life and death issues, answers to those kinds of questions you will find in the Bible, if you know where to look. The problem is, Bible illiteracy has caused the vast majority, even among Evangelical Christians, not to know where to look in the Bible for answers.

"The sacred page is not meant to be the end, but only the means toward the end, which is knowing God Himself."
– A. W. Tozer

If you have questions about the family, about what God considers a family, about what kind of family God smiles upon and blesses, you'll find the answers in the Bible. If you have questions about the presence of evil in the world, even in your own life and experience, you'll find the answers in the Bible. If you have questions about the future and your eternal destiny, about heaven and hell, about how to go to heaven when you die, you'll find the answers in the Bible. If you want to know about forgiveness, how to get it and how to give it, or about healing personal relationships or restoring a prodigal member of your family, you'll find the answers in the Bible.

If you have questions about the value and sanctity of life, about when life begins and about how God feels about you even before you are born, you'll find the answers in the Bible. The Bible has the answers to all the key questions of life. But if we do not know our Bible's well enough to know where to look for those answers, we rob ourselves because of our own Bible illiteracy. This is a serious problem because often the people of the world look to Christians for answers to these key questions and when they learn we don't have answers, even though the Bible does, we let them down horrifically. Bible illiteracy robs us of answers to life's key questions, and of the ability to provide others with those answers. It is a thief and must be stopped if we are to be the kind of Christian God saved us to be.

4. Bible Illiteracy Has Caused a Lack of Intimacy with God

Intimacy with our Heavenly Father is not just for the super saints around us; it's for all of us. But intimacy with God requires we get to know God well enough to know what pleases Him most, what He wants and expects from us, what He appreciates in our relationship with Him. Now, no one has ever achieved this intimacy perfectly except God the Son Himself. In His high priestly prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane just hours before He was crucified, Jesus prayed for us to the Father and said, *"Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth . . . I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one . . . that they also may be one in Us . . . that they may be one just as We are one"* (John 17:17-22). Perfect intimacy is not possible as long as we are sinful and are attempting to have an intimate relationship with a holy God. But more intimacy than we now enjoy can be ours if we are willing to admit that our Bible illiteracy is a roadblock to that intimacy and do something about it.

Remember how David said he thirsted for God? He admitted in Psalm 42:1-2, *"As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."* That was the key to David's intimacy with God, to him being called *"a man after God's own heart."* He wanted to be intimate with God; he wanted it badly; he wanted it badly enough to seek it out, to pant after God, to thirst for Him. Do you want to have an intimate relationship with God that badly? Not if you lack the will to read and reflect on His Word you don't. The Scriptures is where we become intimate with God.

But if we can't find even a little time in our day to read, reflect and respond to God's Word, why would we ever think we could become intimate with Him? If we think God is silent, distant, and uninterested in us, we will never achieve an intimate relationship with Him. If we can't find fulfillment for our deepest longings, maybe it's because our longing for God isn't deep enough. Bible illiteracy is a significant roadblock to an intimate relationship with our Heavenly Father. But at least you know what you can do about it. God wants to be intimate with you far more than you want to be intimate with Him. Don't disappoint Him.

5. Bible Illiteracy Had Decreased the Value of Christianity among Other Religions

Today, most people simply view the Bible as a religious text for Christians and Jews, similar to the Qur'an for Muslims or the Vedas for Hindus. It has no greater weight or authority than any other sacred text. It's just the text of one religious group, not to be taken seriously by others. Unfortunately, many Christians [at least in name] have come to believe this as well. They have a Bible, but they can't find it. They see it on the shelf under a stack of other books, but they never take it down and read it. Maybe they even drag it to church with them, but it is as if its pages are glued shut the rest of the week. There was a day when the average Christian knew what the Bible said because they read it daily. They

knew what they believed because they found that belief in the Bible. They could speak boldly about their beliefs because they believed in the authority of the Bible over all other sacred texts or traditions. But for a very wide swath of Christians today, all that is gone. Bible illiteracy has taken away the value of the Christian religion. How?

“A scientific survey called PISA (Program for International Student Assessment) tested the knowledge of people in 32 industrialized countries. The results of the study show an ‘insidious biblical illiteracy’ even in Christian circles.”
– Volker Gaeckle

When we don't know what we believe or why we believe it, we know our Bible illiteracy has decreased the value of Christianity both in our minds and in those who believe other sacred writings. When we cannot adequately address questions like, *“Aren't all religions pretty much the same?”* we know Bible illiteracy has decreased the value of Christianity. When someone insists that there is more than one way to get to God and we have to sit by silently because we know that isn't true but we can't put our finger on any verse in the Bible to refute this false claim, we know Bible illiteracy has decreased the value of Christianity. When we have lost the uniqueness of Jesus Christ, when we have demeaned Him to being an equal with Mohammed, Buddha, L. Ron Hubbard or other religious leaders, we know Bible illiteracy has decreased the value of Christianity. When we can't guide a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or agnostic from error into truth because we don't know the truth ourselves, we know Bible illiteracy has decreased the value of Christianity. Bible illiteracy is not a surface issue; its roots run deep and its results are calamitous for the Christian and for the Christian religion.

6. Bible Illiteracy Has Diminished the Urgency of Evangelism

What will happen to your siblings, your mother or father, your friends and pals if Christ returns and they aren't prepared to meet Him? What is Hell really like? Will it be a big party with all the beer you can drink? And what will Heaven be like? Why would God sacrifice His own Son for people He knew would mistreat Him, reject Him and ultimately crucify Him? What does knowing God through His Word have to do with any of these questions? Well, in a word, plenty.

Do you believe that witnessing to your friends and family will be an urgent matter if you're not certain that you are saved and safe in the hand of God yourself? If you aren't convinced that Hell is real, if you're not sure that it is a literal place, or if you don't think that a loving God would allow people to suffer in Hell forever, do you really believe that evangelism will be a priority in your life? If you don't know that the Bible teaches the wages of sin is death and that means Hell for all eternity, do you really think you can be urgent about evangelism? Stop fooling yourself.

Bible illiteracy, not knowing for sure about how you are saved or being uncertain about the existence of a real Hell, will dampen your urgency for evangelism quicker than anything. If you cannot right now pick up a Bible and show the FedEx delivery guy how to go to Heaven when he dies, then your ignorance of the Bible will squash your urgency to help the FedEx guy find his way to Heaven. Let's not

kid ourselves; there is a direct and detrimental relationship between ignorance of the Bible and urgency for evangelism.

“The Christians who have turned the world upside down have been men and women with a vision in their hearts and the Bible in their hands.”

– T. B. Maston

7. Bible Illiteracy Has Demeaned the Author of the Bible

I’m an author. When I was a boy I always dreamed about writing a book. I thought I could do it. But as a boy, that’s all it was – a dream. However, as someone involved in international ministry, God may my dream a reality. I have written more than 50 books over the years and as an author I know one thing for certain. Authors want you to read their books. That’s why they wrote them. The kindest thing you can say to an author is, *“I read your book.”* You don’t even have to say you liked it; read it is enough for most of us.

May I gently remind you that God wrote a book? And He only wrote one. God has not been silent. He has communicated with us through the pages of His Word. Everything you need to know to enjoy God is found in His Book. Everything you need to believe to have an accurate portrait of God and His world you’ll find in His Word. No, the Bible doesn’t tell us everything. But the Bible does tell us the most important things in life. And just as important, the Bible tells us the most important things about eternal life, the life to come.

“God only wrote one book; I think He’d be pleased to have us read it.”

– Woodrow Kroll

For God to have selected holy men and moved them by the Holy Spirit to insure they accurately wrote what He had on His mind, after that kind of care, it would be a terrible insult not to read God’s book. Not only did God write a book—the Bible—He preserved it down through the years as well. Copyists devoted years, even their entire lifetime, copying the pages of God’s Word so it could spread all over the world. God preserved copies of the Bible so you and I would have one to read. Not to read the only book God ever wrote would signal to God that we had no interest in what He had to say to us. Additionally, you have a copy of God’s Word in a language you understand. That’s not true for everyone.

Men like John Wycliffe and William Tyndale risked their lives so you would have a Bible in English. In fact, after Wycliffe was dead and buried, the high church authorities dug up his bones and burned them. That’s how despised he was by the Roman church for espousing that the Bible be translated into English, the language of the common people. William Tyndale was strangled to death while tied at the stake, and then his dead body was burned. But because of his efforts, the English-speaking world has a Bible in its own language. It would be an insult to their sacrifice not to read your Bible in English.

I could go on and on, but my point is that with all God did to insure you would have a Bible in your own language, that you could read what was on His mind and the plans and promises He has for you, to allow Bible illiteracy to thrive in your life is the ultimate smack across God's face. It's a reproach, an insult. It demeans the Author of the only book that can claim to be eternal (Psalm 119:89). Failing to read your Bible not only robs you of God's wisdom, His will and His ways, but it is the ultimate form of rejecting God's wisdom, His will and His ways.

Bible illiteracy is real. It is like a leech that sucks the spiritual blood out of your life. Not reading the owner's manual is a high insult to the Creator of all things. Don't let Bible illiteracy take root in your life. Ask God for the will to do something about increasing your Bible literacy. He will help you. Follow the steps for recovering Bible literacy that I will outline in the next white paper and "*Give to the Lord the glory due His name*" [Psalm 96:8].

"If the Bible really is God's Word and His only communication with us, to fail to read it and live by it is not only infinitely stupid, it is the most shameful disrespect to God imaginable."

– Woodrow Kroll