

Column

“When you read the Bible, the Bible reads you.” These are not words of a theologian but of a woman who has had her life transformed by the God of the Bible. Her name is Tina. Her testimony was shared in a video series we are using as part of our Lenten studies at church.

Tina’s story was not beautiful, at least in the beginning. She was born into a family where pornography and abusive relationships were all around her. She did not know what real love looked like, and when she became a teenager, she found what she had experienced as a child being replicated in her own life.

But her story did not end there – thank goodness. Somehow, she got hold of a Bible, and it really did begin ‘reading’ her, showing her not only what was wrong in her life but also a better way. Like a piercing light, it pointed her to the One who could set her free from shame and addictions.

“Through exploring, through coming to church, through reading the Bible, I became clean,” she went on to say. “I am no longer the person I was. God has made me beautiful on the inside. I am free.”

Tina, of course, is not the only one with such a testimony. Perhaps you have known people who have had equally dramatic turnabouts, and these came about at least partially through the influence of the Bible.

What such experiences tell us is that the Bible is more than the record of people’s religious experiences in times past: it’s a living book. No one has said it better than the writer of Hebrews:

“For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and *is* a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (4:12).

The Bible really does read us. But for transformation to happen there must be a personal engagement with it. That personal engagement, I want to suggest, often comes through the lives of those whose lives have already been transformed by the God it proclaims.

It is not enough just to hand a person a Bible – though sure that is a good thing to do. A better way is to follow the lead of the 17th century philosopher

Blaise Pascal who said: “Make [it] attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is.”

Going back to Tina, she mentioned that her path to freedom included exploring and going to church. God’s people, members of the parish church, had a vital role in her transformation. That is the calling of Jesus’ followers everywhere. They often are the first ‘Bibles’ people read, to paraphrase a quote by William Thoms.

“If the Son . . . shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed,” says Jesus (John 8:36). Men and women living out God’s freedom take His call off the printed page and send it out into the world.

Are you doing your part? Am I?

BLESSED Lord, who hast caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience and comfort of thy holy Word, we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which thou hast given us in our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen. (Book of Common Prayer).

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