

March 10/11, 2001

## **Dust on the Bible**

**Dr. Woodrow Kroll**

Amos 8:11

I hold today in my hand my Bible. It's *red*, you notice. Every Bible should be *read*, don't you think? In fact, that's what I'm here to talk with you about. We're going to do something a little different this morning, because last year I had the unique opportunity of having three books published. The middle of those three is a book entitled *Back to the Bible*. It has nothing to do with our ministry. The publisher just thought it would be clever to title it related to me somehow. It's actually about what we know about God's Word: how well we understand the Bible, how much we read this Book.

I sent a copy to Pastor Clark, and he read it and called me one day and said, "Would you come to the church sometime next year to talk about the Bible and Bible literacy and how much we, as Christians, know about the Bible?" So I'm going to do a very unique thing today. I'm not going to open this Book and teach you from God's Word. I want to open this Book and talk to you about this Book, about the Bible itself.

The Bible is the most unique book of all time. But there was a prophet back in the Old Testament whose name was Amos. In Amos 8:11 he gives a wonderful prophecy, which is found in a simple verse, one verse only. The prophecy says this: "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord GOD, 'in which I will send a famine into the land, not a famine of food, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD.' "

It's that famine I want to talk with you about today. When Amos gave that prophecy back about 760 or 762 B.C., he was living in Israel at a time when Israel was engaged in significant prosperity. In fact, there are many parallels between Israel in those days and America today. And everything was going well for them in Israel—they'd had a king for a long time, and it was a prosperous period of time (the "Dow" was up, the "Nikkei" was up, the "NASDAQ" was only off a couple hundred points). Things were doing very, very well in Israel at that time. As a result, God called this prophet to step up and say, "Listen, friends, there's a famine coming. But in our prosperity it's not a famine of food. It's a famine of hearing the Word of God."

I think we're back to that famine today. Amazon.com is the largest retail online seller in the world. If you went to them today and tried to buy a Bible, do you know how many different kinds of Bibles you could find listed on Amazon.com? They have 1,035 different kinds of Bibles available for you to purchase online today—1,035! George Barna says that 91 percent of all Americans own three different versions of the Bible. I was going to bring a table today and just stack up all the Bibles I own, and I'm not sure one table would hold them all.

Having a Bible is not our problem in America. But reading the ones we have is our problem, because while we're comfortable with the Word, and while we have it and we bring it to church, and we hear it preached week after week here in church, sometimes we get all of our spiritual vitamins in one shot – on Sunday morning for one hour. Then 167 hours of the week we try to live on the vitamins we got at that one occasion.

That's why Bible illiteracy is a significant problem in the church today. Bible sales are booming. They're up 50 percent this last year over the year before. Having a Bible is *not* the problem. Reading the ones we have *is* the problem.

As I was doing some research for this book, I made several acquaintances as a result of this, just trying to find out what kind of information I could put together to see whether or not we're really as bad off as people say we are. Let me give you some anecdotal evidence for Bible illiteracy in America. Are you ready to play "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire"? Now supposing the categories of "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" were all Bible categories. How high do you suppose the average person would go? The \$100 question? Make it a \$1,000 maybe?

Long before "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire," back when I was a teenager, there was a program called "The Battle of the Brains" (horrible name for a program, but nonetheless, it was a good program). What they would do is they'd take four students from one university, put them on a team, and pit them against four students from another university. The moderator would ask questions. They had a bell they could hit, and when they knew the answer, they'd hit the bell. The first one to hit the bell got to answer the question. If they missed it, it went to the other team. You get the scenario.

When they asked these eight university students, four on each team (happened to be two schools from the state of Virginia) to name the element whose symbol is W, immediately both of them hit the bell. All of them knew the element whose symbol is W. (It's tungsten, by the way, just thought I'd throw that in.) The element whose symbol is W—everyone knew it. The next question was: From the Bible, can you name the person who was considered to be "the doubter"? There was deafening silence, because none of these knew the answer was Thomas from the Bible.

I don't recommend you do this necessarily, but if you are up late some night because you can't sleep, and you happen to turn on the Jay Leno show, you would see him do what he calls "jaywalking." He goes out into the street, sticks a microphone in the face of some people and asks them very, very simple questions. Then they record the answers, and of course you only see the really stupid ones. So they play these answers to questions that everybody, you think, ought to know. And it would be a scream when he asks Bible questions if it weren't so tragic.

For example, Jay Leno says, "Name one of the Ten Commandments." The answer comes back immediately, "God helps those who help themselves." He says, "Can you name any one of the apostles?" "*No, can't name a single one of the apostles.*" "All right then, can you name any one of the Beatles?" "*John, Paul, George, Ringo*"—just like that. Can't name any of the apostles but can name all four Beatles immediately. Jay Leno asks them this, "According to the Bible, who was swallowed by a great fish?" The confident answer comes back, "Pinnochio." Now listen, you laugh at that and you say, "Well, that's the kind of people that would appear on Jay Leno."

I wonder if we took a poll in the average church in America today, how well we would do in our understanding of the Bible. In fact, George Gallup has done that. During the course of research for this book, I made a friendship with George Gallup Jr., the pollster fellow. (In fact, he offered to do a poll specifically for *Back to the Bible* so that we could put the results into the book; the timeframe wasn't right, so we didn't actually do that.)

George Gallup told me that they have what they call The Biblical Knowledge Quiz and you can take it anytime. One of the questions in the quiz is, "What is the first book of the Bible?" Now you have the answer squared away in your mind, and you'll be happy to know in The Biblical Knowledge Quiz by George Gallup, 49 percent of Americans can answer that question—49 percent of Americans knew the first book of the Bible is Genesis. That, of course, means 51 percent did not know that Genesis is the first book of the Bible. When Gallup asked to name any one of the Old Testament prophets, only 21 percent of the public could name one—just one. And when he asked who delivered the Sermon on the Mount, 34 percent knew that Jesus delivered the Sermon on the Mount. Well, that's George Gallup.

Some of you are familiar with the name George Barna—he's the new researcher on the block these days. George Barna claims that 10 percent of all Americans believe the Bible is a book of fiction and a book of myths—that you can't believe anything you read in this Book. And yet we're a Christian nation.

George Barna says that when they asked adults how many of them knew that Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem, only two out of three were aware of that—66 percent. What happened to the other third last Christmas? Where were they? Well, maybe they were Jewish or Muslim or something else. When you ask them what is it that we celebrate on Easter, only 75 percent of the population knew that Easter has something to do with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A quarter of our population did not know Easter relates to the resurrection of the Lord.

We say, "Well, all right, we expect that, don't we? That's Jay Leno. That's the American population in general. That's not talking about us, we chickens in here. We are the ones who really know our Bibles. Oh, don't kid yourself, friends. The closer we get to the church, the numbers don't change that dramatically.

Let me give you an example. Just two years ago a fellow by the name of Gary Burga (Gary Burga is the New Testament professor at Wheaton College—you know Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois... bastion of Christian evangelicalism... wonderful school... has been for many, many years) was interested in the students who came to Wheaton and how well they knew the Bible. So he devised an entrance exam for Wheaton students. Now Wheaton kids are kids that come from good churches, like this one. They're solidly evangelical people. They are people who perhaps grew up in Christian schools—people who are turned on to missions—these are good kids. He asked Wheaton college freshmen two years ago if they could put these events—Abraham, the Old Testament prophets, the death of Christ, and Pentecost—in biblical sequence, chronological sequence. One third of the freshmen class entering Wheaton two years ago could not do it. They came out of good solid churches, but did not know enough Bible to put those major Bible events in biblical, chronological sequence.

When he gave a list of names to the Wheaton college students entering that year (one of the names in the list was Matthew) and said, "Can you pick out an apostle in this list?" a third of the students entering Wheaton could not pick Matthew out of that list. When he asked them if they knew whether or not the Christmas story is recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, a third of them did not know that either. And these are kids who grew up through the church, perhaps grew up in Awana. Some of them went to Christian schools and had every advantage that we give our kids. What happened was they just did not absorb enough of this Book to pass that exam.

Let me give you one final anecdotal evidence for why I believe we don't know the Bible the way we think we do. I began to believe this 21 years ago, nearly a quarter of a century ago (sounds so long if you say it that way). A few years ago I was the chairman of the Division of Religion at Liberty University. Most of you know that institution in Virginia. The kids who come to Liberty are like the kids who come to Wheaton. They grew up in Christian homes, in solid Bible-teaching churches. Most of them went through Awana or Boys Brigade. A lot of them went to Christian school. They had every advantage we could possibly give our kids. Yet when they came to us at Liberty, they didn't know a great deal more about the Bible than kids who had none of those advantages.

My responsibility was to give the incoming freshman class a Bible comprehensive exam. There were 150 questions on this exam, and it was a standardized test we bought. We would decide that if they got half of the questions right, they would pass the exam. Now any teacher here knows 50 percent is not a passing grade. But we wanted to be lenient. If they got 75 questions out of 150 correct, we put them in the upper-level Bible 101 classes. If they got less than 75 percent, our intention was to put them in kind of remedial Bible, you know, just to help them along and teach them some of the things we thought they would know when they came to us. The last year I gave this exam was 21 years ago, when I gave it to 1,100 freshmen. Out of 1,100 freshmen who took the exam, to get half the questions right and pass, only 40 students passed that exam—not 40 percent, but only 40 students. It was that day that I began to believe that there is something wrong in the way we are learning God's Word. We are relying on too little to learn too little.

Two years ago the publishers at Multnomah came to me and asked me if I would write a book on Bible illiteracy. I said, "You've got to be kidding. Nobody wants to read a book on Bible illiteracy." And I said, "Besides that, if I write a book on Bible illiteracy, I have to talk about you publishers." They said, "That's okay, go ahead." So I did. The book is called *Back to the Bible*.

This is a book that traces the impact of the Bible on early American education and early American history, and how it waned over the years and is now entirely separated from our society. How we've taken God out of the public square. How little we actually do know about God's Word, and what we can do to turn that around—to stamp out Bible illiteracy in America. It examines the question: How did we get to where we are today and what are the primary causes for Bible illiteracy in America today? I have listed six causes in this book, and I want to talk about a couple of those today.

I think one of the reasons why we don't know the Bible as well as we think we do is because, generally, we live in a dumbed-down society. We have lived off soap operas and commercials for so long it's difficult for us to think. So we live in a dumbed-down world. You see it in education. You see it in everything that's a part of our lives.

Right now we're in the middle of a national debate about the SATs. I just enjoy this debate so much. In 1962 the average SAT score—the mean score on the verbal part of the SATs—was 478. And in 1994 it was 423, down 55 points. Now, if the SATs bear the message that we're not learning as much as we were at one point, I find it interesting that the proposed answer to that problem is to just get rid of the SATs. It's also interesting that during the time in which SAT scores were plummeting, the college boards say that the number of students who enter college with an "A" average is up from 28 percent to 32 percent. That is for the same period of time that the SATs are going through the floor. Now what does that tell us? It tells

us that we are compensating more for learning less. We're giving higher scores for less understanding. This is not the teachers' fault, by the way. This is the fault of society that dumbs down everything.

You and I live in what is called the postmodern world. Every time I talk about postmodernism, people kind of get a glaze over their eyes: "Postmodernism—what is that?" Well, we hear a lot about it today, don't we? We live in it, and because we live in it, we really don't understand it so much. It's hard to define postmodernism, but I think postmodernism has a direct impact on what Amos said in Amos 8:11. There is a very significant famine of the Word of God today because of postmodernism.

Now postmodernism is hard to define, but it's not difficult to describe. Let me give you some descriptors of postmodernism in America today, and you see if you think we're living in a postmodern world. In a postmodern world there are no rules. All rules are valid; do whatever you want—which gives rise to road rage and trashing the boss and doing whatever else you want—because there are no valid rules in postmodernism.

In postmodernism the cardinal virtue is tolerance. We have to tolerate *everything*. And when your pastor stands up and opens this Book and says, "Thus saith the Lord," people don't like it, because they live in a postmodern world. They don't want to tolerate a Book that says this is the way it's supposed to be.

In a postmodern world, outward appearance is everything, and inward importance is nothing. That's why substance is gone and style is here to stay. Inwardly what you believe is absolutely immaterial. Outwardly how you present yourself—now that's important. That's why we have "spin doctors" in Washington, so when the president says something, immediately the spin doctors can come to you on the evening news and say, "This is what he meant to say."

In preaching today, substance is not important. Style is important. We want our preachers to have...style. We're there often for the entertainment value of what the pastor has to say. And he knows he's against the wall, because there's a church down the road just a couple of miles that's scoffing up 200 people a week because the style is better down there. That's a postmodern world, friends, and you and I live in it.

In a postmodern world, words do not have any inherent meaning. You cannot use a word and communicate a thought with that word—because the way I use the word may be different from the way you use the word. You use the word however you want to. Now see, this is why we have dictionaries, so we all understand what the word means. But in a postmodern world you don't need a dictionary. You use the words the way you choose to use the words; I'll use them the way I choose to use them.

Let me give you a classic example, now behind us. The first postmodern president in history will be forever remembered for this wonderful quote: "It all depends on what your definition of 'is' is." Come on, folks. We know what "is" is.

But in a postmodern world, words have no inherent meaning. That makes it difficult for you to say this is what the word says, this is what it means—because it may mean that to you. To us it means something different than it means to the church down the road. That's a postmodern world.

In a postmodern world, we blur the lines between truth and entertainment. What is history and what's in the movies—sometimes nobody can tell anymore. Let me give you a classic example. I have bad news for you. Forrest Gump never stood on the same platform with John F. Kennedy. Never happened. It's only the movies, friends. It didn't happen. But our kids, who do not know anything about John F. Kennedy, are going to watch that movie, and they're going to tell their kids that Forrest Gump was one of the people on the platform with JFK. What has become truth was entertainment, because in a postmodern world we blur the lines between truth and entertainment.

So if this Book is not entertaining, it isn't true. And if it's true, it has to be entertaining. But listen, Amos had no intention of entertaining people. He was there to say, "There's a famine coming, and it's a famine of hearing the words of the Lord." That's Bible's illiteracy.

One last thing about a postmodern world: you know you're living in a postmodern world when there are rapid-fire movements in the world. Just watch TV today. Back to the Bible first started doing videos on location about 10 years ago. In fact, the first video we ever did was premiered in this church. And about 10 years ago I remember our cameramen always hearing the words "smooth and imperceptible." What that meant was if they were on a tight shot of me and they were going to a wide shot, your eye would never know that you had moved from one shot to the other. It was smooth and imperceptible. That's the way it was supposed to be.

Then I remember the first time I saw "NYPD Blue." I thought, *Is this cameraman sick, or afflicted with the rickets, or what's his problem?* I mean, the camera was everywhere. I couldn't follow that camera at all. "The Blair Witch Project" is a good example of that. I love Dave Barry's column in the newspaper about The Blair Witch Project. He says, "It looks like it was filmed by an energetic rabbit with a camera on its head." That's postmodernism.

Now I belabor this point, obviously, for this reason: I want you to understand that you and I did not cause this problem of Bible illiteracy. We are a product of our times. But our times dictate what we know and how much we want to know about God's Word. So let me suggest to you that, while you and I are not the primary causes of Bible illiteracy, we may also not be the primary cure to the problem as well—because the church, though it is not the problem, is impacted by the problem. So today in the Christian world, the church is impacted by a low morality quotient. The church is impacted by being dumbed down. We appeal to that which is more entertainment than that which is substance. We appeal more to style than we do to substance.

The low morality quotient that I speak of is pervasive in America today. Let me introduce to you a woman by the name of Dr. Gertrude Himmelfarb (now with a name like that, you know it's got to be good). Gertrude Himmelfarb is now retired. She is professor emerita at New York City College. Listen to what she says:

So long as morality was couched in the language of 'virtue,' it had a firm resolute character. Values do not have to be virtues; they can be beliefs, opinions, feelings, preferences, even idiosyncrasies—whatever any individual, group, or society happens to value, at any time, for any reason. One cannot say of virtues that anyone's virtues are as good as anyone else's, or that everyone has a right to his own virtues.

Now you have got to see the distinction she's making, because it has a lot to do with how much we know about God's Word. What Gertrude Himmelfarb is saying is we used to

be into virtues. Virtues are grounded in something. They come from the Ten Commandments, or in Greek society they came from the ideal that Plato had, or in the New Testament they come from the teachings of Jesus. There is a bedrock for virtues. You draw your virtues out of something you're sure of.

Values, on the other hand, are anything that you value at any time for any reason. So your values may be different from mine, because you value something differently than I do. Your values, then, are as good as my values. Why should I force my values on you? I should not have the opportunity—that's what the world teaches us today. We are into family values. We are into personal values. We are into the Adams Family values.

But the Word of God is not into values. The Word of God is into virtue that is ironclad and unchangeable—just like God is ironclad and unchangeable. The more we know about value in the world, and the less we know about virtue in God's Word, the more we live by values rather than by virtues.

Now are we impacted by this? You bet your life we are. Because the Christian church today is living in a postmodern world, where the morality quotient is very low, and all the other things that cause us to be dumbed down today. You see it in every facet of the Christian church.

As I said, when I started writing this book, I asked Don Jacobsen, the publisher at Multnomah, "Are you sure you want me to write this book?" He said, "Why?" I said, "If I write a book about dumbing down the church, I have to talk about publishers." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Just think about this. You go to your shelf and you look at the books you have on your shelf. I go to my shelf and I have a lot of books that have been there a while, and they're awful colors (they're blues and whites and grays and cream colors, not very interesting at all). And I look at the titles of those books, titles like: *The History of Israel, The Sovereignty of God, All the Women of the Bible.*"

You can't sell a book with titles like that today. So instead of *All the Women of the Bible*, what do we have? *Bad Girls of the Bible*. You can buy it in a bookstore. *Really Bad Girls of the Bible*—worse bad girls of the Bible...bad girls of the Bible meet bad boys of the Bible. The only way you can sell a book in publishing today is to give it a title that's going to attract a dumbed-down society.

And you and I, although we aren't the problem, we also are not part of the solution. We only go to publishers to buy what we want to buy. Walk into any Christian bookstore today. Bless their hearts, Christian bookstores are having a tough time, because they have to make a living too. They have to have on their shelves the kinds of things that you will buy. So you make your way through a myriad of Jesus junk before you get to anything else—you have all this "holy hardware" hanging there. And if you do find a book, it's *Bad Girls of the Bible*. Now why do they do that? Not because they want to. They do that because that's what you asked them to do.

What about Christian radio and Christian television? When I start talking about Christian radio, it's kind of like shooting my own foot. Christian radio is a medium that originally was designed to help you be literate in God's Word—designed to teach you God's Word. But over the course of the years, our lives changed, didn't they? We don't have time to sit down around the Bible. When Theodore Epp began our broadcast in 1939, people would

gather around the Bible at night, and that was how they spent their evening.

Nobody gathers around the Bible at night. They don't sit around the radio anymore. We're fast-paced people. So the radio has become a background medium. We turn it on—we leave it on. We do our house chores in the kitchen or wherever else with the radio on. We have it in the car on the way to work. It's kind of entertainment for us. In fact, that's what Christian radio has become—a medium of entertainment for us. We enjoy the music we hear on Christian radio—at least I do—you probably do, too. We enjoy the banter that we hear on Christian radio. We enjoy the talk programs we hear on Christian radio. And while we enjoy all of that, we have gotten no smarter in this Book than before we ever listened to Christian radio.

How do I know that? Because I give exams to people all the time. Back to the Bible devised something called The Bible Challenge a couple of years ago. It's just a way for people to come online at Back to the Bible, take The Bible Challenge, and find out how much they know about God's Word. In fact, I would encourage all of you to come online sometime today, tomorrow, or the next day at our website: [backtothebible.org](http://backtothebible.org). Or you can go directly into [biblechallenge.com](http://biblechallenge.com) and take The Bible Challenge. It is set up in three levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. There are five different categories. You come in at one level in one category and you have 20 questions to answer. When you answer the questions (in the privacy of your own room, by the way), if you happen to miss a question, you get the answer immediately. And you also find your rank among the other thousands of people who have taken that same exam. You know the neat thing about this? You don't have to tell your wife, unless of course your rank was high, then you can tell whoever you would like. We have used The Bible Challenge to help people understand that perhaps they don't understand the Bible as much as they thought they did.

All right, so what are we going to do about this? I want to suggest to you today that we love this Book (good churches like ours). We bring our Bibles to church (I'm glad to see yours here). I don't mind singing off the wall; I don't want to get my Bible off the wall. You know, when you have an off-the-wall Bible, that's a problem. This Book is important to us. I've often said on radio that if all we Christians blew the dust off our Bibles at the same time, we'd all get killed in a dust storm—because while it's important to us, this has become the world's best-selling coffee table book in most Christian homes. And while we love the Book, and we love the Author, we don't often read this Book. I want to suggest to you some things to help encourage you to get to know this Book better, not just one hour a week but every day of the week.

First, let me encourage you to get into a reading program and stick with it—some sort of Bible-reading program. Now we've taken the liberty to put one of our "Read-Me Guides" from Back to the Bible in your bulletin today. This one happens to be the Start Anytime guide. You could start today and read through the Bible in a year. This is only one. We have ten different kinds of reading programs. One of the most popular is the Chronological Reading program, where you start in Genesis 1 and read to chapter 11. Then you go to the Book of Job. After you're done with Job, you come back to Genesis and finish that up. When you get to 1 Samuel, all those psalms that David wrote are woven into 1 Samuel, so you can read the psalms as he wrote them. When you get to the New Testament book of Acts, all the epistles of Paul and Peter and the others are woven into Acts, so you read them in chronological order. It's just a new way to read through your Bible. We have a Weekender plan for those who can't get to it during the week, and a Two-Year plan for those who can't get through it in one year.

See, I don't care *how* you read your Bible. My concern is that we aren't reading it enough, because we don't know it well enough. I want to encourage you today to get into some plan, whether it's this one, or one in the back of your Bible, or somewhere else. Get into a reading plan and stick with it. I am absolutely convinced the reason most people don't know their Bible is not because we're stupid. We don't know our Bibles because we've never read them. We just have never read God's Word all the way through.

Secondly, in addition to getting into a reading plan, let me encourage you always when you're looking for teaching of God's Word (Bible teaching)—whether it's from the pulpit, or a small group, or television, radio, whatever—always seek substance over style. You'll be so much better off in the long run if you seek out someone who opens the Word and teaches the Word. Now you and I are very fortunate in this church to have a church that's committed to that, and a pastor who studies his Bible, who opens the Bible and teaches you the Word. We can be thankful that is true here, but that's not enough.

Number three, if you want to prevent "truth decay" in your life, get involved in a study group in which study is the key word. I'm grateful that this is a church that has a lot of small groups. But small groups sometimes are more social than they are study, and I pray yours isn't like that.

I was in a small group in North Carolina just last year, with all these people sitting around in a circle with their Bibles. The woman who led this group opened her Bible, she read a verse, and then this is what she said: "We're going to go around in a circle now, and I want to ask every one of you what this verse means to you." When we had finished going around the circle, we closed our Bibles and went home. You know what we accomplished that day, my friends? Pooled ignorance. We did not learn a thing—it was all affective—it wasn't cognitive at all. We didn't pick up any additional information that would help us get to know the Author of this Book any better.

I would encourage all of you to get involved in a study group—whether it's one person, two, or a group—but make sure study is the key word in that group.

Then, if you want to prevent truth decay in your life, don't expect one hour in church once a week to adequately feed you. Can you imagine what it would be like if you gorged yourself on hamburgers for an hour once a week and then went 167 hours and never ate anything else? You would never think of doing that. Yet we Christians do that all the time. You need daily provision for spiritual growth, and you find that only in God's Word.

Finally, if you want to prevent truth decay in your life, every time you pick up this Book—whether it's to read it or to study it in church—ask yourself three questions.

#1: What does the Bible say? What is in here? What does God say to us in His Book? What is He saying when we open this Book? What is He saying to you and me? What is in the Bible? That's one way to stamp out Bible illiteracy.

#2: What does He mean by what He says? What does He mean by that? I've read that verse before, and I remember a New Testament verse like that. What does He mean by that? See, that's interpretation. That's understanding what God says. Ask, "What does it say?" Ask, "What does it mean?"

And then question #3 is: What does it mean to me? How do I apply this to my life? How can I use this in my walk with the Lord next week?

The problem in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century church is that we're bottom-liners. We want to get right to the bottom line—we want to go right to step three: What does it mean to me? Quick, tell me. I'll watch a two-minute video if you'll give me the opportunity. Help me to grow spiritually. Give me 60 seconds of spiritual nourishment. What does it mean to me? Tell me.

You can never adequately know what it means to you until you know what it means. You can never know what it means until you know what it says. And you can never, get this, know what it says until you *read* it. Every Bible ought to be read, including the Bibles of those of us who have the great joy of being in a church like this.

In Hosea 4:6 God says, "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge." The Bible tells us in the Book of Amos (8:11) there's a day coming when there will be a famine of the words of God.

In Psalm 19:10, speaking of the Word of God, David says, "More to be desired are they [*the words of God*] than gold, yes, than much pure gold, sweeter than honey out of the honeycomb." Now think about that. David says the words of this Book are to be desired by you and by me more than we desire gold. Now be honest with me. If you knew there was gold buried out in the parking lot, would you wait until I was finished speaking to go out and start digging? In fact, if I knew there was gold buried out there.... We don't have a problem with gold, do we? And yet God says, "You ought to want what I have to say to you in this Book more than you want gold."

Listen, friends, God only wrote *one* Book. And I wonder what you and I will say to Him should He ask us at the Judgement Seat of Christ, "Did you read My Book? One time in your life, did you ever read My Book?" We'll say, "Uh, Lord, I only lived to be 80, if I had lived a little longer...." "You know, God, I started in Genesis and I got to chapter 11 where there are all those names and it was tough, so I skipped over to the New Testament in Matthew chapter 1 (wasn't any better, more names)." "I would've read your Book, Lord, if...." Friends, He only wrote one Book—and this is it!

A cynical man picked up a Bible after dinner one night (he had never read it before). For whatever reason, he went in and sat down on his easy chair, and he began to read. He read for two hours. At the end of two hours, with a bit of irritation in his voice, he raised his eyes to his wife and said, "If this Book is right, we are wrong." He went on to reading a little more. After another hour or so, with a little more tenderness in his voice, he looked up a second time and said, "If this Book is right, we are lost." He went back to reading some more. After another hour or more, with tears in his eyes, he looked up and said to his wife, "If this Book is right, we can be saved!"

There is only one Book, friends. It's God's Word. Read it...and weep.