

More than useful (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

Why read the Bible?

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A few days ago I heard a sentence that started with this phrase: “the Bible says.”

I am not sure exactly why this phrase grates on me so much. I am not uninterested in what the Bible says. And I believe that the Bible says things. Lots of things, as it turns out. The Bible makes pronouncements, but the Bible also tells stories, counts tribes of Israel, laments, and asks questions.

This particular sentence, I remember, was “The Bible says . . . that life begins at conception.” So, there’s that. I think that the phrase bothers me because it seems meant to end a discussion rather than to begin one.

The writer of this letter seems to say something similar when he tells Timothy that “all Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.”

This sounds like a rationale: this is why you should read the Bible. Because it’s useful. Because it’s good for you, like eating your vegetables. Because you will be trained in righteousness, and you will be equipped for every good work. The Bible will also correct you (which may or may not sound appealing to you).

All well and good, but I long for a fuller list. All Scripture is inspired by God—and is useful—for: What do you think? For getting to know your ancestors, for dreaming

about the future, for asking better questions. All scripture is inspired by God and useful for encountering God. Here *useful* seems to be a pale word to use.

The Bible says a lot of things, that is for sure. But I want it to be more than useful. I want it to be a door into another world. I want it to be stars to reach for, a secret revealed. Not just good for you, like vegetables, but a seven-course meal, including dessert.