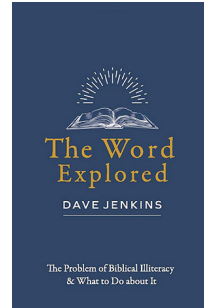


Book Review

David Jenkins,
*The Word Explored:
The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy & What to Do about It*
Ontario: House to House Press, 2021.
pb. pp.100, \$16.99. ISBN 978-1-989174-86-9.

Reviewed by, Charles Schmitz. Liberty University, Lynchburg, Virginia



Jenkin's concern centers on resolving the problem of biblical illiteracy and lack of biblical authority in the church. With over 60% of Christians unable to name five of the Ten Commandments, the problem of biblical illiteracy is indeed grave. Jenkins begins with a story of William Tyndale and how he gave his life so that people could have access to God's Word to remind readers of how others sacrificed to give us access to God's Word. Jenkins shares how the Holy Spirit's ministry works to stifle biblical illiteracy. Jenkins argues that the first step in resolving biblical illiteracy is to recognize there is a problem.

In the first chapter, Jenkins explores the importance of hearing the Word of God. Hearing and reading God's Word continually adds to discernment of His Word and what He expects of Christians. Delight in the duty of personal Bible study is the way God's Word is understood and acted upon. The second chapter emphasizes how good Bible doctrine leads to Christ-like living that can be read and emulated from the Bible. The lack of good Bible doctrine, can cause Christians to miss Christ's example even if they are reading the Bible. Therefore, reading the Bible alone doesn't assure that the reader will capture Christ's example within. Jenkins includes this comprehension facet, by using examples of the supposed biblically learned

Pharisees that ignored the myriad of signs for Christ's Incarnation in the Old Testament, as evidence of the same aforementioned illiteracy that is happening today in the Church. The third chapter emphasizes the importance of memorizing and meditating on Scripture. Indicative of Christ's Own exhortation and application is the action of applying Scripture to memory that leads to meditation of Scripture, then ultimately quoting Scripture at the appropriate time to give God glory. The fourth chapter expresses or explains how to be a doer of the Word by daily using the Bible in the Christian walk. Practically using the principles of the Bible, helps readers appreciate it and crave it more. Jenkins is careful to emphasize that changes to our hearts and behavior, not just gaining intellectual information, is the goal. Jenkins kindly lists various behaviors that are readily practiced by those living the Word, as It flows out of their hearts into daily life.

Chapter five transitions from individual use of scripture to corporate use. Scripture is a treasure that must be unearthed by a community of believers in Christ. Christ followers should also frequently share in love, personal findings from the Bible. Chapter six focuses on the proper preaching of God's Word, starting with Jesus, who used Scripture in His teaching. Expository preaching is promoted as the best preaching style, because God's Word is the foundation. Jenkins states, good preaching from the Word, stimulates a

congregation to learn more, from the Word. The seventh chapter delves into the advantages of a distinctive small group in the local church to trounce biblical illiteracy. Growth, accountability, prayer, fellowship, and insight come from gathering with believers regularly to study the Bible, by putting context to what was preached in the pastor's sermon. The last chapter looks at Jesus' directives from the Great Commission in Matthew 28. What Jesus said is analyzed from previous chapters and next steps are given. Inferred is the true mission of a believing Body, to go into the world ministering or discipling with Jesus presence and guidance, bringing glory to Him, for His name's sake.

Jenkins' writing benefits from the fact that few scholars have discussed the problem of biblical illiteracy amongst Christians. The material on biblical illiteracy is scarce, as there were only a handful books or articles available for emphasis or support when researching this topic. Readers will appreciate Jenkins' succinctness, and dedication not to stray from the subject of the problem of biblical illiteracy and its solutions. Jenkins uses appropriate rhetorical tools to grab the readers' attention even those not familiar with the problem of biblical illiteracy, by using known stories of the historic church fathers and Bible characters whose ministry was devoted to overcoming biblical illiteracy. The proposed process to solving biblical illiteracy may deduce that Jenkins should take to penning organized Bible reading plans to make time in God's Word efficient or looking at various ways to help the reader engage and be more excited about the Scriptures read, but Jenkins does neither to make his case. Jenkins' thesis is argued unpretentiously by simply advising to read God's Word and hear it, with no specially

designed or specific way, except to be in God's Word continually and looking for Jesus Christ throughout. Jenkins additionally shows how the Holy Spirit will exponentially open the Word to our hearts when it is heard or read.

Memorization and meditation of the Bible, are not common practices in the contemporary American church. Jenkins goes against this modern thought, by promoting the initiation of biblical literacy, through memorization and meditation on single Scripture verses or passages. A person can delight in God's Word and also begin to be biblically literate, even if a single passage is memorized and thought upon. Literacy of the Word, starts with a single verse and builds to more reading, memorization, meditation, and thus eventual knowledge, becoming truly literate of the Word, as a life lived studying it progresses. Jenkins then takes the logical next step of promoting application of what has been memorized and meditated. Being a doer of the Word is what Jenkins states is what creates true biblical literacy in the Christian. Jenkins' main point is that God the Father, gave Jesus to instill Salvation and to reveal His Word to the believer, then through the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit, a Christian armed with the revealed Word can live it out daily, thus glorifying Jesus, according to the will of God the Father (John 14:26).

Having addressed the role of scripture with the individual, Jenkins' transitions to the corporate reading of the Bible for congregational unity, along with the necessity of biblical preaching, to encourage going deeper into God's Word. Jenkins' then moves to the benefits of a weekly small group Bible study, to study Scripture contextually for accenting personal study. Jenkins takes traditional view of what a local body looks like in his chapters on congregational reading and biblical preaching.

Liturgical practices such as responsive reading or reading aloud the Bible, though reasonable in my opinion, overlooks that there are other styles of worship in multitudes of churches. Jenkins' prefers his traditional Protestant-like view that he describes in the book over other views. Jenkins does not take into account various church cultures or members that grow non-traditionally and maybe even turned away from his emphasized formation of church services. Jenkins also does stress that Christ's community using what God's Word says about loving each other and working together as a community, can fulfill what many people crave from the church. The definition of biblical preaching also could be expanded upon versus Jenkins narrowly recommending the single or few verse expository preaching, as there are several styles of biblical preaching that do cover chapter context or topics from various Scriptures.

Jenkins' weight on small groups properly acknowledged, how a community of Christ followers interacts with one another, using the Bible. He could have emphasized more the individual growth aspect in the Lord, from Scriptural interaction with others though. Lastly, Jenkins focuses on the Great Commission and its various misunderstood aspects that distract from Christ's original vision. His points on the Great Commission are valid, but can be precocious, as the point of the thesis implies to subside biblical illiteracy first. Hence, if the chapters, are ordered sequentially, then the final chapter is well-placed. If the chapters are ala carte, then I would rather not have someone biblically illiterate, attempting to fulfill the Great Commission before they knew its purpose.

Jenkins' book is recommended since works on biblical literacy are rare, additionally

Jenkins, as an author, handles the processes and material in his book well. Save for remarks on the concluding chapters, Jenkins' work is a great addition for a personal library or to reference recent studies and solutions to guide Christians to be biblically literate. The book is strongest at its start when it shares what to do personally in God's Word, such as how to manage our attitudes and passion. The latter chapters, though helpful for the thesis overall, tend not take into account the various types of local church cultures potentially in the scope of its thesis perspective. This author would recommend that a follow up volume be written that would focus on the subjects of local church, biblical preaching, and the Great Commission, that Jenkins' didn't handle adequately.

