



It truly is remarkable that the written Word of God is now in your hands. It is something we often take for granted. The Bible has been translated into every known language on the planet. Most Christian homes contain at least one of them. Almost every major bookstore sells Bibles. You'll find them in most Catholic schools or in religious education classrooms and youth rooms. You can't even escape them when you take a trip cross-country; there will probably be one in your hotel room nightstand, just waiting for you to flip through it.

If you're like most teenagers, you're probably holding this book because, whether you realize it or not, you're looking for answers. Maybe you're looking for meaning in life. Maybe your youth group is using them for study. Maybe it was given to you as a Confirmation gift and you're ready to dive into it. Or maybe you noticed it on the shelf, felt moved to open it, and here you are... searching for *something*. Whatever the reason, the good news is that there is a lot of grace happening right now. Don't underestimate the power or importance of this moment. God is doing something very special in your life. Make no mistake; you might not be able to "feel it," but it's true.

The Word of God is not a thing. The Word of God is a person.

The very fact that you have picked up this Bible and are preparing to read it means that God is having a powerful effect on your life. He is moving; God is active. You may not sense it — there may be no lightning, thunder, "tingly feelings," or singing angels — but trust us: you are receiving a lot of grace right now.

Why is that? Well, the Word of God is holy. And whenever we come in contact with something holy, we can't help but be affected by it. Now, you might be wondering how a book, a bunch of inked-up paper bound together with glue, string, and a cover, can affect you on such a profound level. The answer is simple: the Word of God is not just a book. The Word of God is not just letters on a page. The Word of God is not a thing. The Word of God is a person.

That's right — the Word of God is much more than this Bible, not dead or lifeless, but fundamentally incarnate and living. (CCC 108) The reason for this is simple: the Word of God is nothing less than



WHY THE OLD TESTAMENT IS SO DIFFERENT AND IMPORTANT

AN OVERVIEW OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

Why the Old Testament Is So Different and Important

A lot of people groan when they are asked to open the pages of the Old Testament (also called the Hebrew Scriptures). Things considered old are not very popular in today's world. We prefer the new, the fun, the exciting. In our minds, calling something "old" or "ancient" is often just another way of saying that something is boring.

Why is the Old Testament worth our time anyway? We've got the New Testament. Why focus on something so "out of date"? The answer is very simple: because it, too, is God's inspired Word. God's revelation didn't just unfold during Christ's life on earth. God's plan of salvation had already been unfolding for thousands of years. The Old Testament is foundational and prophetic. It reminds us that the Father sent the Son into the world at an appointed time, for our salvation. People were waiting for the Messiah. Because of Jesus we

How to Read and Pray the Scriptures

Many well-intentioned teens (and adults) have committed to "getting into Scripture." Maybe for Lent or after a powerful retreat they resolve before God and others to read Scripture every day. On day one, they open to Genesis 1:1 and begin to read. The first couple of days (maybe even the first week) go pretty well. But then they hit Leviticus and they get very confused. They put the Bible down until their next resolution to reading it comes along. Does this sound familiar?

Since the Bible is not like other books, we cannot expect to read it like other books — moving from the front to the back. The Bible is a collection of books that together reveal God's loving relationship with and saving plan for His people.



"The Gospels are the heart of all the Scriptures 'because they are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Savior.'" (CCC 125) Why not start with the heart? The four Gospels give a well-rounded portrait of Jesus and account of His ministry. Using their introductions and footnotes as references, take time to pray and read through the Gospels.

It is vital that you commit to making Scripture part of your prayer life. Find someone who will hold you accountable to studying the Scriptures. Once you have made a commitment to praying with Scripture, there are several ways you can stay committed. Some of them are described on the next few pages.

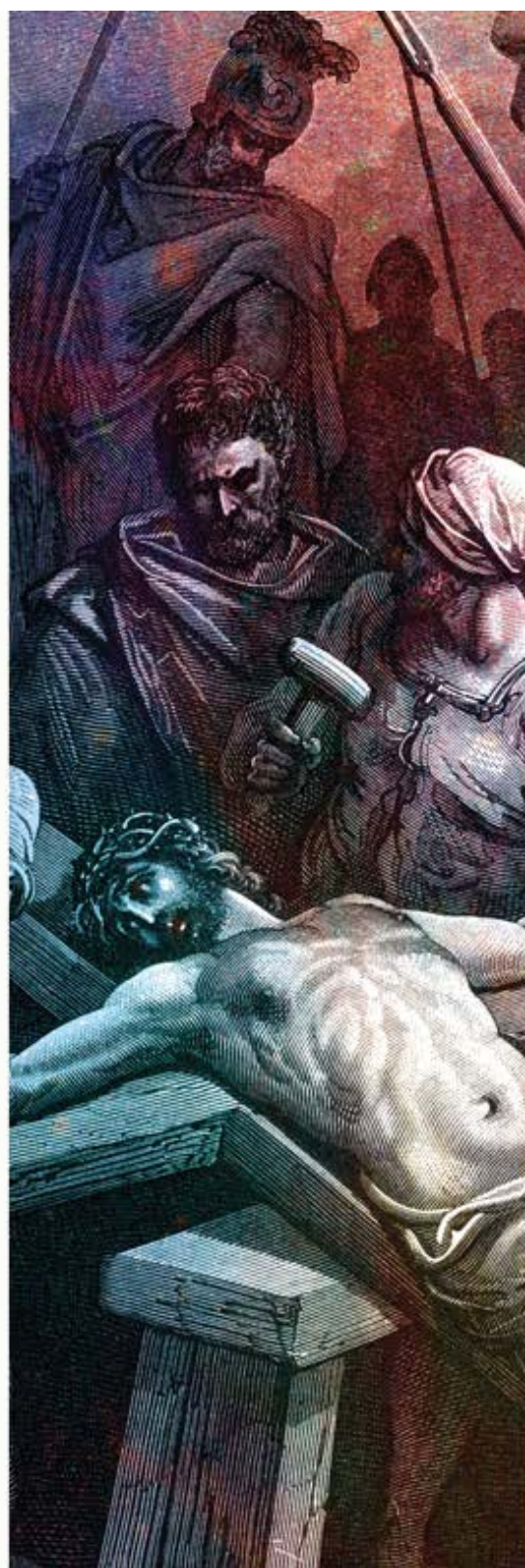


Jesus Teaches Us That Death Is Necessary

MATTHEW 16:21-23

QUESTIONS

1. Jesus died for the purpose of rising from the dead and opening up heaven for all of us. As Christians, God calls us to "die" to ourselves. List ways that you can die to yourself and live for Christ.
2. Would you be willing to die for your faith? Why or why not?
3. List people you know who set an example of dying to self for the sake of others.



REFLECTION

Plain and simple, Jesus had to die. Jesus' death on the cross defeated death and opened the gates to heaven. He died for you and me so that we could receive eternal life and salvation through Him. We will all die physically one day, but Jesus is calling you and me to willingly die every day – to ourselves. To "die to self" is to sacrifice something you desire or enjoy as a way of denying yourself. A small emotional or physical "death" can remind us of the death Jesus suffered on the cross for our sake. Now, death to self can be very, very difficult. Turning the other cheek, not talking back, swallowing our pride, not arguing with someone, letting others go first... these are ways that we can die to ourselves. These little self-denials help join us closer to Christ and His cross. Step it up and try it out.

PRAYER

*Give me the grace to die to my own desires, Jesus.
Remove my pride and hold me as I carry the crosses, big or small,
in my life.
Amen.*

PRACTICAL APOLOGETICS

In your life you'll have troubles; this doesn't mean God doesn't love you.

(John 16:33)

Bad times don't mean that God doesn't care. Jesus never promised that once you follow God you'll never struggle again. He promised that God will never abandon you.

The Eucharist is Christ's true flesh and blood.

(Matthew 26:26; John 6:32-59)

It's not a symbol. It's not a simple memorial. It's so much more than that. The Eucharist is how Christ ensures that He is with us forever. (Matthew 28:20) The apostles didn't misunderstand. The Church didn't "make it up." Saint Paul believed in the real presence, too. (1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

God's Word is truth. Read it. Learn it. Know it. Share it.

