

Words of Grace

Not everyone reads the Bible in the same way. For some, it is a history book or set of instructions. Others see it as a theological puzzle to be analysed, or perhaps a source of secret knowledge.

For me, the times when God's Word has the most power is when it reads like a message He has sent to me, *personally*. When it speaks just the words I need to hear, at that particular time.

I first properly heard of God's love for me when I was 14. I worried about many things – I even worried about my worrying! This was coupled with a deep sense of irrelevance: that I wasn't worth bothering about. To hear that God could truly love me, for myself, was an astonishing revelation.

A couple months after committing my life to Him, I was reading the Bible. I came across these words in Luke, and it was almost as if they stood out from the page in a glowing box:

"Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life ... Consider the ravens... God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a cubit to his span of life?" (Luke 12:22-24, RSV)

Wow. I read on in the chapter – and was brought back to this passage again, and again. He needed me to understand this! That was the start of a long journey of healing and of learning to trust.

I am not a deep and consistent student of the Bible – I mean to read more, but don't read as much as I might. Yet often during periods of challenge and growth, I have found myself drawn to John 15:

"I am the Vine, you are the branches... Remain in Me and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine... If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4, NIV)

Stunned, again – it seems so simple! Simple, but sometimes obscured by a crowded life in need of pruning. It is a picture to hold in my mind, and allow to transform and renew my thinking. A branch does not *work* at staying attached to the vine, nor do I need to *work* at staying in Jesus – I *simply am* part of Him, and trusting that grace is the basis of any fruitfulness in my life.

I still struggle to find regular times to spend time with God and read His word. Fairly recently, I have discovered a version of the Bible called *The Message*. And suddenly the old familiar words come fresh and new to me again, and are full of exciting discoveries which draw me in. Can you recognise this passage?

"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me — watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace." (Matthew 11:28 – 30, The Message)

When I am pressured, I turn these words over in my mind, returning to this passage like a warm hug, and to Jesus Who is the only source of real rest.

Go on - try an unfamiliar translation. And read... explore... discover that special verse or phrase that rings in your heart, resonates in your mind, and becomes a refrain for your life.