



GOSPEL *for* LIFE

Eating Your Bible with Nate Pickowicz

Season 1, Episode 2 Transcript

[00:00:00] Announcer: Welcome to the Gospel for life podcast. We help churches make disciples. And now, here's your host, Darryl Dash.

[00:00:21] Darryl: Well, welcome. We're really glad to have you back today and today. I'm pleased to have as a guest Nate Pickowicz. He is pastor of Harvest Bible Church in New Hampshire, and he's the author and editor of several books, including *Reviving New England*, *Why We're Protestant*, *The American Puritans*, and his most recent book, *How to Eat Your Bible: A Simple Approach to Learning and Loving the Word of God*. And he and his wife Jess have three children. Welcome, Nate. It's good to have you with us today.

[00:00:51] Nate: Thank you, Darryl. I appreciate it.

[00:00:53] Darryl: I've just finished reading your book, *How to Eat Your Bible*, and I really appreciated it. One of the great threats facing us today is that even when Christians, many are not reading the Word of God, I was reading some statistics today that say that Bible engagement is at an all-time low. So why do you think that is? Why do you think that so many people are struggling to read their Bibles?

[00:01:17] Nate: Yeah, I think there's a couple of reasons for it. A lot of people have asked me about this, and I think the biggest issue is that we struggle with a sin nature. As believers, we don't want to do the things that we know we should do. And so we're always going to fight. The enemy of our souls wants us to stay out of the Bible, so that's going to be a huge struggle for us. But I think even more so, increasing, we're living in a culture that is antithetical. Certainly where you are, where I am, where the Western culture right now is not, does not look favorably on Christianity. And whereas maybe 50 or 100 years ago and certainly longer, it was at least culturally advantageous to be aware of the Bible, it seemed like a good thing to do. But now we're completely post-Christian, and culture does not accept any things in the Bible. So you have to work against the tide of culture to really know the Bible. And I think just even as a culture that's addicted to distraction, and we want everything instant, we want fast

information, we want to be on the move. So to stop and quiet your mind and sit and read and meditate and ponder and pray, all those things really go against the grain of technology, really, as it is today. So we have a lot of factors working against us. But the Bible says that greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world. So we have hope.

[00:02:36] Darryl: I really appreciated the honesty of your book and that you shared some of your own struggles in reading the Bible in the past. And yet there was a change at some point. What led to that change? What made you want to start reading and trusting Scripture more?

[00:02:51] Nate: Yeah. No, that's in the book itself. I do talk a little bit about it. Obviously, there's always more to a story. But, you know, I was in a place in my life when I was going to church. My wife and I were faithfully attending a church. I was doing all the stuff, you know, we were there regularly. We were giving and serving. And, you know, I was on the worship team, so I was playing music. So all the things that are the right things we were doing. But the one thing that was lacking was I wasn't in my Bible, and I just I felt such guilt and shame over that I knew I supposed to be, but I just didn't love it. And one day I was sitting at my office at my desk — I worked for a financial services company — and I just really just was hanging my head in shame and really struggling not just as a believer, but just really feeling down in my job, feeling just down in life. And I just didn't know what to do. And I remember praying and saying, "Lord, I need help, like, talk to me, you know?" So I looked up on my shelf when there's a Bible that I pulled it off the shelf, I kind of skimmed a couple of verses and nothing really came. Then I flip to the front of the book, and there was a section in the beginning of the study Bible on how to read the Bible, how to study the Bible.

[00:04:01] Darryl: Well, that's amazing, because a lot of Bibles don't even have a section on how to read the Bible. So what happened then? You read that introduction? Did that begin to inspire you to take a different approach to the Bible?

[00:04:13] Nate: Yeah. So in the introduction, it was encouraging a slower process of reading each book of the Bible multiple times. And so it was encouraging a single Bible study approach. And, so I went, and I found the shortest book of the Bible I was aware of when that was Titus. I just thought to myself, "If I can get through one book of the Bible, I could at least build on that." So Titus is 46 verses. I'm thinking I could do that. So I spent the first month just reading through Titus every day for the whole 30 days. And I just began to ask questions and listen to sermons. And I just made my whole world about that one book, and it kind of began a pattern of doing that sequentially through other books of the Bible. So I think what really changed. The Lord sort of opened the door. And it was almost as if he was saying, this is possible. You can do this and all of a sudden I just felt a weight lifted off my shoulders. I'm like, "Wow, I really can know the Word of God," and I got excited. So I just wanted to share that excitement with other people and encourage other people that this is possible. You can get into your Bible and learn it and love it.

[00:05:18] Darryl: I typically have followed a one-year Bible reading plan, and there's nothing wrong with that. I remember one year I decided to adopt the program of reading it over two years, and I was amazed the difference it made. It just felt like I wasn't rushing as much. I had the time to stop and really think about what I was reading. So I know you're not opposed to reading the Bible in one year. But could you explain some of the benefits of taking a slower approach to reading through Scripture?

[00:05:47] Nate: Yeah, no, I'm glad you made the point that you did, because I definitely don't want to disparage anybody who wants to read the Bible in a year. That's worked for a lot of believers for years. But I think like you said before you think sometimes we can feel pressure if something happens, and we say we get sick one day, and we can't get into our Bible, or we get lost in the process that somehow it destroys the whole thing for us, and we get frustrated very easily. So the whole idea is to change our approach and to say it's not just a matter of getting through the Bible. The whole point is to understand it and really begin to, I use the phrase, wrap your arms around it, really get comfortable with what's there and begin to enjoy it. And I figure if we're going to be Christians and have the Word of God say, you have 50 more years left in your life, why not get to know the Bible and really enjoy the process? So I'm just advocating for a longer term approach. It doesn't have to be the plan that I set out. But I'm just advocating for people to slow down, take their time and really enjoy the process.

[00:06:48] Darryl: Well, let's talk about the plan that you've created. I know you're not saying that we need to follow it necessarily, but what have you done in the seven-year Bible plan. And are you tweaking it as you go along? Tell us about it.

[00:07:01] Nate: Yeah, sure. It's a seven-year plan. I built it on the back of the MacArthur study plan, which is in the MacArthur Study Bible. And that was the idea of going through each book over the course of about three years in the New Testament. And when I researched, he had actually borrowed something like that from a different plan. So this kind of study has been around for a while. But then, when I was applying the day-by-day plan, I had a hard time trying to grab the Old Testament and do the same thing, I didn't want to be doing that for a decade. So I modified that. I shortened the number of times I would read in the Old Testament, just so I could get through it in four years. So three years in the New Testament and in four years in the Old Testament. And I think I took a couple extra month somewhere in there, but it was really just to try to work my way through it at a comfortable, but you had kind of aggressive pace. I just wanted to understand it just came out of a desire to want to know the Bible for myself. So that's kind of the plan I built. But certainly it could be modified by the reader.

[00:08:01] Darryl: I don't know your personality. We've never met. I'd love to meet you one day, but I don't know if you're the more disciplined kind I know as I talk to people. A lot of the people who write books on spiritual disciplines tend to be more disciplined to begin with. So I'm not assuming maybe you are, maybe or not. Could you talk to maybe somebody who struggles to maintain a discipline of Bible reading And what can

they do to set themselves up that they can begin to succeed at this?

[00:08:29] Nate: Sure, that's a great question. So I would say on some things I am disciplined. Other things I'm really not, But I'm a busy dad. I have a young family. I got three young kids under the age of 10, a busy pastor, busy life, all that fun stuff. So even before I was in ministry, I was working crazy hours for financial companies, so I'm definitely accustomed to just the craziness of life. But it's really, I think, a matter of setting priorities. I tell people if I were to give you a million dollars to be in your Bible every single day for a year and say I was going to say, "Find 30 minutes in your day to give you a million dollars," I guarantee people would move mountains to try to figure out how to do it, and I think that's really the big idea. It's not that you have to sit down and force yourself in the hours and hours of study, but really, if it's a priority for you, if you or if you're desiring to make it a priority, then you'll find ways. You will get up a little bit earlier. Maybe you'll do your reading at night or on your lunch break, or you'll be creative. If that's something that you want to do, you'll find a way to do it, and you might have to make some sacrifices here and there. But this is the Word of God. I mean, he promises to bless that, So certainly it's its worth striving after to do it.

[00:09:46] Darryl: That's great. I appreciate your counsel there. Now you've been in the marketplace, and now you're in pastoral ministry. I want you to maybe speak to some of the pastors who love the Word of God. They preach the Word of God, and yet maybe they're beginning to see it more as a source for preparing sermons. And they don't have the rich devotional life that they would like. So could you speak to them and just even counsel them on what they could do to deepen their love for the Word of God? Not just is a preaching resource, but to feed their own souls.

[00:10:19] Nate: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, I struggle with that myself. I mean, that's every single day. You have to sharpen yourself as a pastor, because, yeah, you can very easily fall into using the Bible as a resource book. But, you know, honestly, you're going to go through seasons where it's more of a struggle than other times. But I've just tried to make it more enjoyable lately. And ever since I completed that that study plan, I've sort of slowed back down a bit because I don't want to just keep burning myself out on aggressive plans. But I've slowed down, and I've really tried to take a different approach. Even in this season of life, where might do more of a topical study, or I'll focus back in on one book, or I'll go back to a book that I wish I could have spent more time. I think the big thing is just challenging yourself to do something that has nothing to do with your ministry. We ask a burning question, like right now I'm reading about Elijah. I just really want to know more about him. I want to know about him as a model of faith. So I'm spending a couple of weeks just in 1 Kings 17 and 18, just trying to get his story and have some fun. I think that's the big thing is to remind ourselves that this is enjoyable and be creative with how you do that. So it is a challenge, but I think it's a challenge we can overcome.

[00:11:34] Darryl: That's great. I also wanted to ask you as a pastor, you know, you're a pastor, I'm a pastor. It really is our heart that all of our people are in the Word of God. And I want to ask you to speak to a local church. Pastors trying to encourage figure out

how to encourages people to read the Bible. What advice would you give to stimulate an appetite for the Word of God among his congregation?

[00:11:57] Nate: Yeah. I mean, that was the reason that I wrote the book is, I mean, when people were my own congregation were coming to me and saying, "Hey, do you have any tips on how to study better, or do you have any plans?" And I would try to give them good resource is, but everything I was finding was either really dense theological or hermeneutics textbook, or it was something that was just too light, and I just wasn't tracking with it. So that resource that I put together that was for that purpose to try to reach those people. But I think on a broader scale, I think how we preach is going to dictate and even help how they study and learn. If we're pastors who are committed to the faithful exposition and teaching of Scripture, if we make our whole ministry about giving the truth of the Scriptures to our people and really helping them. Not that you have to labor for weeks and weeks and weeks on one little verse, but to give them the whole counsel of God. If we do that faithfully, that's going to open up an appetite for them. And then just pray for them, "Lord, give these people an appetite for your Word." But I really do think that what you do in the pulpit sets the tone for what people are going to do at home. I think it's a huge part of it.

[00:13:09] Darryl: Well, I think your book is going to be a valuable resource that pastors can use and even have available to give out within the congregation. So I hope it serves that purpose. I want to ask you a couple of more general questions not to do with your book. And the first question is this. What are you learning right now? It doesn't have to be spiritual necessarily. What are you learning right now?

[00:13:30] Nate: Sure, that's a great question. Right now, I'm actually writing a biography on R. C. Sproul. I'm hoping to finish it up sometime in the next year. So my whole world right now is just getting to read R. C. Sproul, trying to read all of this stuff and listen to his lectures. So it's really been a joy. A very fruitful season. I'm having a lot of fun, so I try to write books that are also fun books for me to research. I don't want to just do academic work that I don't like to do. I want to do things I enjoy. So whenever I get to do research like that, I love biography. I love history. So any chance I get to learn more about church history is just a real joy for me. So that will be coming out hopefully sometime in the next year or two.

[00:14:15] Darryl: Did you ever have the privilege of meeting R.C.?

[00:14:18] Nate: I did not, unfortunately. I followed his ministry for about 10 years and never really got to meet him. But then once I started reading all of this stuff, I was just blown away. What a gift to the church he was. And I'm just thankful that his ministry through Ligonier is still continuing, and they've just been really wonderful. I've been in contact with them. They've been so supportive and so generous and God leading just what an amazing legacy that he has with that ministry.

[00:14:43] Darryl: He had an unusual ability to communicate truth in a way that people could understand, and not just shallow stuff. He really taught theology in all of its riches

and help people understand it. So very grateful for him.

[00:14:56] Nate: Yeah, me too. Very good.

[00:14:58] Darryl: And what's encouraging you right now?

[00:15:01] Nate: Um, I would say that's where I'm at right now. I think what's been the most encouraging is just the opportunity to learn, taking great encouragement from our church. Right now, we're in a pretty remarkable season. We're just seeing things change the landscape of our ministry in Gilmanton. I'm a new dad again. I've got a five-month-old baby, so to be 41 with a brand-new baby is a different kind of a thing. But it's been such a joy. So really, I'm just enjoying the simple graces of life right now and trying to learn how to do that better. I think it's very easy for us to power through and miss the small things. But I'm just trying to learn to be thankful for what God gives me in the normal moments of life. So that's been a real encouragement.

[00:15:49] Darryl: Praise God. And no doubt like me, you're looking forward to Spring coming and be able to enjoy being outside a bit more.

[00:15:57] Nate: Yeah. I mean, I'm sure that you guys probably have snow up there. I mean, we've got probably about a foot on the ground right now. Something like that.

[00:16:03] Darryl: Yeah. We have a dusting. We're in the city, and it always melts. I wish we had more, actually. But it is so good to talk to you, Nate. I am deeply appreciative of your book. And now that I know you, I'm going to be following you and looking for your other books. So really appreciate this one. I think it's going to be a gift to the church, So thank you for joining us today.

[00:16:25] Nate: Thank you, Darryl. Really appreciate it, brother. God bless.