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More than a Book

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Rachel Yates

My eldest sister – I won't say how eldest – just got a new cell phone. The manufacturer of her last phone no longer supported the old technology, so she was forced to “upgrade.” Still, she assured me, she could only make/receive calls and text. It wasn't a *smart phone*. And of course, she could use it to take photos, but it wasn't a *smart phone*. We discovered she could change the background settings to show one of those photos, but gladly this wasn't a *smart phone* that would complicate her life.

A couple weeks into her time with this new device, she called me flustered. Emails were popping up on her screen, and her photo album was populated with old photos she'd saved on her laptop. I broke the bad news to her: “You have a smart phone.”

Since then, we've had several fun calls for me to explain roaming and WiFi and hot spots. I've been glad for the chance to share my experiences and mistakes (roaming on a limited plan). We speak regularly now and laugh and wonder and try things out.

My sister and I have talked about the shift in the last, oh, decade, I suppose, in how people learn. It used to be we read manuals. Now, our technology doesn't even come with a manual – though my sister did find one for her new phone after searching the internet. Instead we are expected to experiment and crowd source what we need to know. Ask a friend or another user. It's not just phones. I've been watching homemade videos to improve my Zooming skills. My husband and son-in-law regularly check YouTube on how to do home repairs. We crowd source ideas, options, and recommendations.

How we learn has changed. “Book learn'n” is taking a back seat to experiential learning, coupled with reliance on sharing with others. That has its pitfalls but can't be denied.

So now, contrast that shift with this language from the Westminster Shorter Catechism, one of the Confessions of the church, in which we read:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?

A. The Word of God which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

Putting aside the gender bias of the 17th century, we have been taught that to glorify and enjoy God, we must resort to the instruction manual – the Bible. In this Confession, it is the only rule – the only path – to direct us.

It makes me wonder how our faithful devotion to reading the Bible meshes with the more common way we encounter the world, its problems, and opportunities. So often, Scripture will speak directly into a situation with which we're wrestling, providing clear direction. However, that's not the way the world learns, and it's not the way even we, as Christians, typically learn nowadays.



Before the Scriptures were written down, the stories were recounted from one person to another. Followers encountered Christ or experienced the power of grace and redemption in their lives and shared this amazing experience with others. When someone faced a problem, disciples crowd sourced the solution through speaking the Word and in prayer.

The Bible will always be our foundation, but it can take more forms than a book to be read aloud on Sunday mornings or in the privacy of our homes. It is more than an instruction manual kept on the shelf. The Good News is meant to be shared from person to person, as a lived experience. As we open ourselves to this new way of learning, I pray we will be eager and joyful teachers, rooted in Scripture and public in how we share the depth of God's love for us.