

Pop Christianity and Bible Study: Reflecting on the Current State of Christianity

By Bob Young

I want to go deeper. I seek spiritual depth. I want to understand. I also like being surprised. I enjoy reading, being challenged, thinking, analyzing, learning. I am fascinated with the Word of God. It is ever new, I encounter things previously unseen, it is surprising.

In my earlier ministry, I spent a lot of time in Christian bookstores. If the store carried used books—even better! For a time in my early ministry, I received a used book catalog from England. The bargains made the extra shipping costs worth it. When I lived in Michigan, I could hardly go to Grand Rapids without spending some time at Kregel's, Eerdmans, and Baker Books. I amassed a sizeable collection of resources, commentaries, and various academic works related to Bible studies and Christianity. One day when our sons were out of school for a snow day, I took them to work with me. They spent the day quietly in my office (to my surprise!), but I thought little about it. Toward the end of the day, they asked me a question, "Dad, do you know how many books you have?" When I answered no, they gleefully announced that there were 3400+ books on my shelves. (After some 30+ years, I do not remember the exact number they gave.)

The world has changed. Now many of the book "bargains" come by Internet and some days it seems my inbox is flooded with them. I still get a few book circulars by mail. And I have access to a media outlet that constantly reminds me of various offerings. As a result, I don't spend as much time in bookstores these days. But I also discard most of the Internet offerings without looking at them. Why? I am frustrated with the "pop Christianity" that is reflected in many of today's contemporary Christian book offerings, videos, and other media. Bookstores carry pop Christian books, publishers print them, and media outlets push them because they sell! Who wants to read a book with spiritual depth? Almost no one. The idea that Christians might actually study the Bible instead of books about the Bible seems like something from the distant past.

Pop Christianity is in vogue—look at what Christians are reading, look at what small groups use for study materials. Ask other Christians what they are reading. Ask which are their favorite books? Look at the speakers who regularly "ride the circuit"—who offers a serious in-depth study of God's Word? Religious symbolism and biblical images are absent from our vocabulary, our sermons, and our conversations. Christianity is "dumbed down." The Christian faith is tweaked to address the materialism and pop-culture of the contemporary world. The church is plagued by the "issue of the year" and this month's "faith fad."

Who wants to read eternal writings? Who is writing something that will matter and make some difference ten or twenty years from now? Most of the contemporary books and videos are here today and forgotten tomorrow.

I can think of few things that would make a greater difference in the health and spiritual life of the contemporary church that the restoration of genuine Bible study and a renewed desire to wrestle with deep ideas and concepts. What if the small groups in our churches became Christian "mastermind" groups? What if Christians really studied and knew the Bible? What would be the result? Just asking!