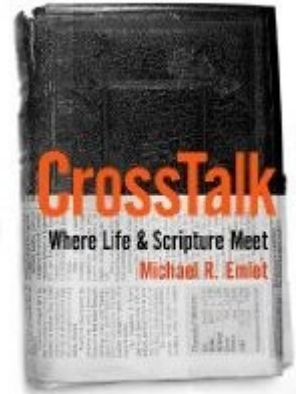


CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet

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In today's world, Biblical illiteracy is becoming widespread. Even in America, one will find people without any knowledge of even the most basic Bible stories. The evangelical church doesn't fare much better, unfortunately. While the average church-goer is familiar with Bible stories and even Bible trivia, they are often unable to connect the Bible's message to the real, every-day problems life throws their way. As a result, the Bible stays tucked away on a dusty shelf, while the latest self-help book lies half-read on the nightstand.

Michael Emlet addresses this problem head on in his new book, *CrossTalk: Where Life and Scripture Meet*. The book explains how to understand and apply the Bible to the problems of life. Along the way it deals with questions of nature and interpretation: What is the Bible all about? How do we interpret the Bible? What are the real nature of life's many problems? How should we understand these real life situations?

The book opens by explaining the concept of ditches and canyons in relation to the Bible. Some passages have a relatively simple connection to our modern day life. The separation from the original world and context of the Bible to today is comparable to a shallow ditch. Other passages seem, in contrast, like canyons. It is hard to visualize any kind of contemporary application from the endless genealogies of 1 Chronicles or the bloody conquest of Canaan. Functionally, this leaves many Christians with an abridged Bible. Ditch passages resonate with us and: "In practical terms, we end up ministering with an embarrassingly thinner but supposedly more relevant Bible." (pg. 16) Of course, the Bible wasn't given to us in such an abridged manner. In fact, upon closer examination of several passages, Emlet shows how the ditches are actually wider than they seem, and canyons may not be quite so deep.

The next 2 chapters discuss what the Bible is and what it isn't. For me, this was the best part of the book. Emlet confronts several popular misconceptions of Scripture. The Bible is not primarily a book of Do's and Don'ts. It is not a book of timeless principles for the problems of life. The Bible is not primarily a casebook of characters to imitate or avoid. It is not primarily a system of doctrines. In all of this, Emlet emphasizes that for too many, the Bible has become Gospel-deficient! "You could talk about how to discipline your child..., draw encouragement from God's presence as you start a demanding new job..., emulate David's courage..., and discuss predestination..., without ever referring to the coming of the kingdom in Jesus Christ *or* encountering him yourself! Shouldn't the life, death and resurrection of Christ have some practical connection to disciplining children, God's presence, living with courage, and the doctrine of predestination?" (pg. 37-38) The Bible is a story – The Story. It's chapters include creation, fall, and redemption. It's main character is Jesus. It is all about Him!

Emlet draws important implications from this understanding of what the Bible is. We should read it back to front and front to back. Using a bigger Bible, results in a richer ministry. God's mission is central. Our lives should be lived bidirectionally. Interpretation and application should be a community (church) affair.

The next few chapters address the story aspect of life. The bits and pieces of life, which are so easy to diagnose and correct, actually have a "narrative skeleton" on which they hang. These pieces "add up to a cohesive whole". "Despite (their) diversity... certain patterns can be discerned. Life histories are going somewhere." (pg. 65-66) In light of the True Story, our lives are a combination of competing stories. Focusing too narrowly on individual aspects of one's life may ignore the larger picture of what God is doing, and where the real battle is.

We are fallen people. But created in God's image, and redeemed by Christ, we are simultaneously saints, sufferers and sinners. It is important to provide hope to those we minister to. "Ministry to others is much more than correction or reproof. It is also encouragement..., vision-casting, and hope-building." (pg. 95)

The final chapters of the book apply the approach to two case studies. "Tom" and "Natalie" present challenging life situations and varying degrees of understanding Scripture. Michael Emlet models how to apply Scripture carefully from a variety of texts (both ditches and canyons) to their life stories. This fleshes out the book's message and offers a practical explanation for how this perspective to the Bible and people works out. Emlet takes pains to emphasize that this isn't an exact science, nor is ministry only to be performed by people who have everything figured out. You will learn and grow, and the more you do, the better able you will be to connect the Bible to life, and the more impact you will have on people's lives.

The book covers a lot of ground as it seeks to explain how to approach Scripture and how to approach people. Both skills are needed. "In ministry we are reading two 'texts' simultaneously, the story of Scripture and the story of the person we serve.... Reading the person without reading the Bible is a recipe for ministry lacking the life-changing power of the Spirit working through his Word." (pg. 90)

I appreciated the immense practical value of this book. I can't think of a more important topic for Christians to study. We need to minister to our own selves and speak the Word into the lives of those around us. Readers will find the book laid out in a helpful way, and very easy to read. Discussion questions after each chapter make the book ideal for group studies.

I can't recommend this book more highly. The "whole Bible", redemptive-historical approach to Scripture that is explained is life changing. The pattern for personal application of Scripture for use in ministry to others will multiply that change exponentially. You need to get this book!

Michael R. Emlet, practiced as a family physician for twelve years before becoming a counselor and faculty member at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation. His responsibilities for CCEF include counseling, teaching, directing the CCEF Counseling Internship program, writing, and speaking. He is the author of many counseling articles and the booklets, Asperger Syndrome, Angry Children: Understanding and Helping Your Child Regain Control, Help for the Caregiver: Facing the Challenges with Understanding and Strength, and OCD: Freedom for the Obsessive Compulsive. Dr. Emlet received a M.D. From the University of Pennsylvania and a M.Div. From Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA. He resides near Philadelphia with his wife and two children..

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