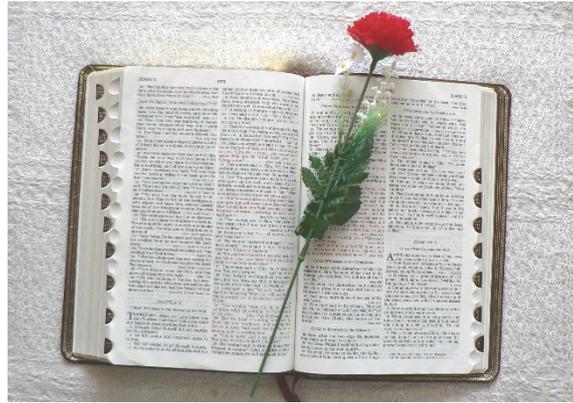


God's Gifts and User Manual



The gift couldn't have been more timely and appropriate. After the last class before the break, Mohammed, one of his students gave my husband a second-hand mobile phone with enough money on it to last at least a month or two. It felt like God was providing for our needs in a country where public phones were practically non-existent and up to that point, Alex didn't have the time to call Telecom to request a landline connection at home. Coming to the office every day, he was managing without a phone and internet at home. But during the break, it would have been difficult.

Being new in the country, having to wait for his residency ID necessary to get the phone connection at home, and not even exactly knowing what to do to get it - it is not unusual to be given three or more different answers for any "how to" question - all these factors made that little mobile precious.

The phone helped in numerous ways. Getting the landline and internet connected, calling the maintenance department to solve a water problem, and being able to be contacted are just a few examples. However, not having received an instruction manual with the phone and lacking experience with mobile phones caused us a few, thankfully not too serious, problems.

A few weeks after receiving the phone, we visited a mobile phone shop and asked a few questions about the mobile. The attendant kindly gave us an instruction manual for a similar model. Though not identical to ours, it was close enough to figure out most of the functions of our phone. But being busy with work, we didn't read the manual till about four months later after struggling with writing text messages, getting tangled up in the various options, and experiencing more than one frustration. This brought to mind the following analogy.

God has given us the gift of life with marvellous bodies, minds and abilities. We are able to walk, run, see, hear, smell, feel, think, and perform countless other functions. Without our consciousness, our brain and body perform millions of tasks far surpassing the abilities of the most sophisticated computer. There are built-in warning systems (pain), back-up systems (compensation by another organ), defence systems (immunity), repair systems (healing), information processing (nerve paths and energy flow to the brain and back to other organs), input (receiving stimuli through the five senses), output (response to stimuli) -

the list could go on and on. Like a sophisticated device, do we also come with an instruction manual?

I believe that, yes, God has also given us a manual on how to use and maintain this special gift in good working order with the minimum of frustration. The manual is for a slightly different model, but close enough to ours. But unfortunately, like my husband and I have left our phone manual on the shelf for months before reading it and finding more specifically how the phone works, many people have also not read and applied God's instruction manual in a way that would have saved them much suffering.

The instruction manual that God has provided is the Bible. It was written specifically for people at a different time and place, but there is much that is universally applicable to all humans, no matter when and where they live. Despite errors and inaccuracies, it gives us principles and guidelines on how to relate to our Creator, how to get on with fellow human beings, how to think correctly, what emotions are beneficial and which ones are harmful, and how to achieve eternal life. Below are some specific examples:

Relating to God: You shall love your God with all your mind, heart and soul sums up the first four of the Ten Commandments - put God first in your life, avoid worshipping idols, use God's name reverently, and set aside time to worship Him. Other verses exhort us to willing service and obedience, thereby not grieving the Holy Spirit. (See Matthew 22:37; Exodus 20:1-11.)

Relating to others: Love your neighbour as yourself, do not commit murder, do not lie, do not steal, do not covet, strive to give rather than take, and show kindness and compassion. (See James 2:8-11; Exodus 20:13-17; Acts 20:35.)

Marriage and family: Love your partner, submit to one another, husbands give yourselves to your wives, wives submit to and respect your husbands, children obey and honour parents, parents don't exasperate and frustrate children. (See Ephesians 5:21-28, 6:1-4.)

Thinking and emotions: Think on what is good and edifying, maintain hope, avoid prolonged anger and bitterness, don't bear grudges, but rather forgive. (See Philippians 4:7-8; Ephesians 4:29-32, 5:4.)

Like us with our mobile phone, without the know-how and understanding, we manage to function and survive, albeit with many frustrations, breakdowns, and unnecessary struggles. However, if we study God's instruction manual, we will be able to better use the gifts so abundantly given to us and find a fuller, more satisfying life. In addition, there is also the promise of a glorious eternal life beyond death. (See Mark 10:29-30.)