

Bob Ekblad, *Reading the Bible with the Damned*, John Knox Press: Louisville, 2005.

In the United States, Christian circles seem to exist primarily in middle class Americans. Perhaps instead of Christian circles, I should say religious circles, or weekly church goers. The sad reality is that if these church goers are approached by someone of a different skin color, or with legal troubles, that individual may sadly be turned away. Bob Ekblad embraces the chance to talk to everyday people, including those who are incarcerated. Ekblad's book examines his discussions with these so-called "jailbirds."

*Reading the Bible with the Damned*, at the very least, allows readers to see how prison ministry should be done, although it was not Ekblad's original purpose for writing. Rather, Ekblad communicates that loving people who are not quite middle-class is especially profitable.

Ekblad presents word and action as the first main idea. In discussing ways to liberate people to understand Scripture, he says, "Monologuing educators who effectively deposit information to alien people's daily lives into passive-recipient students keep people dependent, passive and uncritical of the authorities" (5). By this he means that information overload does not speak well to the majority of people on the streets. Believers must meet them where they are currently, not where they could be. Ekblad begins in Genesis and works his way through key texts in Scripture and invites numerous people from off the streets or from jail cells.

Chapter two displays where believers must begin when ministering to people in places like prisons or low-income areas. Oftentimes these people are looking for their identity, so Ekblad begins by reading Genesis 1:26-28 to show them their Creator. Once the men understand who they are in the eyes of God, then and only then does Ekblad tell them about sin and its effect on the world. Ekblad makes a subtle suggestion to those sharing their faith. If someone does not fully understand who they are in the eyes of God, which would imply that they may not know

who God is other than a powerful being, how would they begin to understand that they are sinners?

All of this occurs within the first half of *Reading the Bible with the Damned*. In ministering to someone, one must give that person a sense of identity, show him the importance of sinning along with its effects on mankind, and perhaps empower that person so that he may feel encouraged. The rest of the book walks through Scripture (primarily the Old Testament) to help minister to these people. The final couple of chapters addresses Christ's involvement with sinners.

Ekblad makes understanding Jesus his main goal, if people do not know who Jesus is, they will not understand the gospel message. He uses the accounts of who Jesus interacts to on a frequent basis, as well as the locations where Jesus taught. Ekblad's study of John's gospel is a good example for those attempting to minister to anyone and everyone (164-166).

Essentially, Ekblad gives believers a four step suggestion to ministering to not-yet Christians. We must show them their identity in Christ, explain the reality of sin and its effects on the world, encourage that person, and show them who Jesus really is, apart from myths that exist about him. Though this may not lead to salvation experience every time, it will allow anyone to think clearly about Christ. Also, this type of ministry allows the language to be simple. The best kind of evangelism happens when we love one another and build relationships with those who are, at least for the time being, condemned to hell. We must read the Bible with them, offering clear interpretation while allowing them to think out loud for themselves.