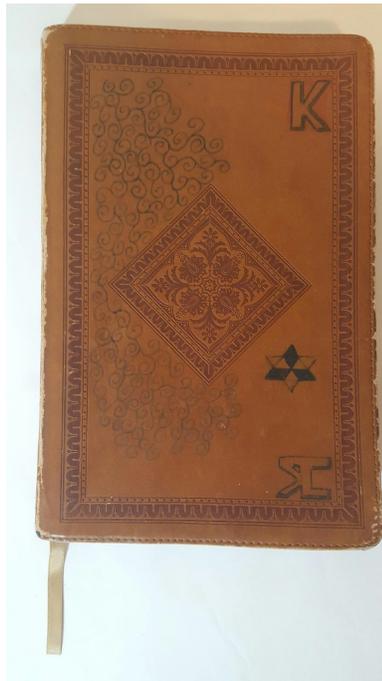


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My Bible



If there is one thing I have searched for throughout my life, it is identity. In this search, I have found that within my possessions, whether digital or analogue, there is nothing that quite describes my identity like my Bible. Received on my 13th birthday, this book represents who I was, what I did, and conversations with friends because of the memories and etchings within and on my Bible.

There are different ways this book functions as an evocative object, and each way is likely to interconnect with another in some manner. The first thing that someone might notice about my Bible is the physical appearance. The leather cover still has its original design, but several shapes and letters, drawn in pen, have been added over the years.

These doodles, drawn with little thought, were a byproduct of boredom experienced in my High School Bible class. Anybody who has attended a private Christian High School will likely know of this boredom. Not to say that Bible class was purely boring, however, I had much grander things to focus on than stories from over 2000 years ago, like sports and NBC's television show *The Office*.

Although these doodles were meaningless at the time, I can see now that this was me laying a claim to this book. I wanted this book to appear a certain way, a way that someone would know that this is Tom's Bible. But more than this, I wanted it to seem like this was a book that I used. At a youth camp I attended in middle school, there was a mentor who told us how proud he was of his worn out Bible, and then explained how this correlated to the amount he used the book. Growing up in a "Christian" environment, there is a certain pressure to know the Bible inside and out, and so I was jealous of this guy's worn out Bible because this was something I did not have. I did not read my Bible and had no desire or intention to, but I certainly had the urge for it to appear like I did. This resulted in spending hours creating "false aging". The edges of the cover can be seen to be ripped, caused by my old pocket-knife. The pages are worn and wrinkled from constantly flipping through them as a nervous tick. It is clear that this reflected who I was: I cared more about how the cover of the book looked than its content.

Generally speaking, in High School I did not read my Bible, or have the desire to. However, possessing the book for over eight years, there were bound to be times where it was read out of requirement or out of the occasional curiosity. If there is one way to motivate me to read something, it is to grade it, and a major part of Bible class was to

memorize a passage of scripture each week. Thus, my Bible has quite a few underlined verses, particularly in the New Testament and the Psalms, where all the “classic” Christian verses are located. These annotations were made only out of obligation. When I saw which verses I needed to memorize, I simply underlined them and then waited until the day of the quiz to quickly memorize the verse (usually done in the period right before Bible class). These annotations are the easiest to recognize because of the fact that I have no recollection of ever reading the text.

Fast-forward three or four years later, to when I began to have a genuine interest in reading my Bible. This interest has also resulted in certain passages being underlined and annotated, but for a different reason. This time I was actually studying the content while rarely memorizing it. However, no dates are marked next to the annotations, and they are not made in any particular order, thus it becomes a curious case when trying to determine which Tom made them: the High School Tom who had no interest in the content; or the more recent Tom who is a little more curious. Sometimes a specific memory of when I made the annotations is triggered and the puzzle is solved. But when this does not happen, different pieces of evidence are needed to determine which stage of my life I made the annotation in. In specific stages, different writing utensils were used, whether it be a pencil, pen, or highlighter. The text may be another clue, due to the fact that often times they reflect what I was experiencing in that stage. If none of the clues add up to a concrete answer, the annotation is simply left without any context and meaning. For example, at the top of page 901 of my Bible there is a note written “Chapter 14 Mainpoints”, and to this very day, the meaning has not been found. All this is to say that

this book has become a representation of a non-linear timeline, a puzzle to be solved, and in many cases leaves me to ponder what I was thinking. Perhaps the difficulty in solving the puzzle is that the meaning of the text is dynamic, and it changes when seen from different perspectives and added experiences.

In the first few pages of my Bible, there are places where marriages, births, and deaths may be recorded. As a thirteen year old who had not experienced much of any of these things, it was a mystery as to what this should be used for. Thus, out of confusion, marriages, births, and deaths, that had happened years before I received the Bible, were recorded. For example, the births of all my siblings and even my parents were recorded. Although now I look back on this as a clear misunderstanding of how to use this part of my Bible, I cannot help but think about the relationships I have with the recorded names and how they have changed over time. Memories of the fights and feelings of indifference I had with my mom are followed by memories of our relationship healing when seeing her name. For the section on deaths, there is only one spot filled in. This leads to a “future” memory of when I think of a person, close to me, who I will likely fill into the next slot. In particular, I think of my grandparents and of the sadness that will be experienced when they eventually pass. I am then reminded of all the nostalgic memories we have shared. Thus, the sight of current and future names, that are and will be recorded into this section of my Bible, evoke deep memories and emotions.

I have experienced recently, that reading through certain passages in my Bible will induce memories, not only from the text, but also from any marks or creases that have been made. For any type of memory, I tend to not remember the “when”, but

instead, I remember the “where”, “how”, and “why”. This is also true for memories induced by my Bible. Memories of the places I visited, people I was with, and conversations I had are evoked by simply noticing a specific defect in the book. This is especially true with significant turning points in my life. One them was to travel to Ecuador this past summer. On page 843 of my Bible, there is a tear at the base of the page that was made while I was in Ecuador. By observing this, the memory of actually creating the tear may come to mind, but also numerous memories from the entire trip. I made the tear in early morning, and then I remember the cold morning showers, all the bugs in the bathroom, and the cool morning breeze. Thus, reading from a certain text or page evokes a chain of memories about major turning points and even relationships in my life. When reading from a different Bible, the same emotions cannot be induced because it does not contain the same rips, creases, bend, and other imperfections.

So far, memories of the past have been mentioned, but how does my Bible reflect my view of the future. When watching the movie *Back to the Future Part II*, it is like remembering the future. What I mean to say is that people are reminded of what they (or others) imagined the future to be. To go even further, if someone were to watch the movie in 2014, the movie would still be about the future, however, their picture of the world in 2015 will be entirely different from what they imagined in 1989 (when the movie came out). In a similar way, I always have a view on what the future holds for myself. Whether it is short or long-term, the future is always pondered upon. The Bible is filled with various commandments: things that I thought would bring me happiness and peace if I could just get myself to fulfill them. Ultimately I envisioned myself to be a

happy person in the future, I just needed to follow the commands so that I could pursue my desires. My desires (among other things) were to obtain a stable job, family, and community, and my fear was the failure in obtaining them. After realizing that I could never fulfill the commandments, my perspective changed to viewing them as opportunities: opportunities to serve and learn. The desire was then to follow these commands even after failure, and the fear was allowing anything to change this desire. Consequently, this also changed how I now envisioned my future self to be: a servant. Whether or not these desires are true is one question, but the point is, that by reading the same text at different times, I am reminded of who I wanted to be and how fears and desires have changed over time. Although this has to do with the text of the pages, reading from another Bible would not be the same. For the memory to be evoked, the little details such as the weight, feel, or even smell of the book come into play.

I am not sure if the search and molding of my identity will ever have a completion, but the best representation of it, in a single object, is my Bible. This is not some self-righteous claim of being “holy” or above anyone else. Whether it is an annotation, marking, tearing, or recording, I am simply saying that *my* Bible, as an object, represents who I have been. One day, this book will no longer be usable and will need to be replaced. I imagine this day to be sad because reading from another Bible will not be the same. It will not evoke the memories of who I was, who I am, and who I want to be because it does not have me inside it.