

## BIBLE STUDY

The Bible is the best selling book in the world. Most of us probably have several Bibles in our homes yet still there are many Christians who are biblically illiterate. A few years ago George Barna wrote *The State of the Church*. He conducted a survey of self-proclaimed Christians and here's what he found about their knowledge of the Bible. Now, remember these are Christians.. 48% could not name the four Gospels. 52% cannot identify more than two or three of Jesus' disciples. 60% can't name even five of the 10 Commandments. When asking graduating high school "born again Christians" over 50% of them thought Sodom and Gomorrah were husband and wife. 61% of them think the Sermon on the Mount was preached by Billy Graham. 71% of them think the expression "God helps those who help themselves" (Ben Franklin) is a Bible verse. No wonder George Barna summed up his book by saying that "Americans revere the Bible but, by and large they don't know what it says. And because they don't know it, they have become a nation of Biblical illiterates."

Today we are continuing in our series on Discipleship: Developing Healthy Heart Habits. Last week we looked at the discipline of prayer. Today I want us to look at the second discipline which is Bible Study. Like prayer this is a discipline, it requires effort. You have to work hard at it.

As a human being, one of the marks of maturity is you learn how to feed yourself. This is true of spiritual growth as well.

Heb 5:11 We have much to say about this, but it is hard to explain because you are slow to learn. 12 In fact, though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the elementary truths of God's word all over again. You need milk, not solid food! 13 Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

We have to learn to feed ourselves on the word of God. Growing up I heard that it was important to study the Bible. The problem is that nobody ever taught me how.

1. I must ACCEPT it – acknowledge its authority

Attitude is important. How you approach the Bible will determine how much you get out of it. If you approach the Bible as a skeptic it is going to be a closed book to you. If you approach the Bible with reverence and humility and you say "God, I want to learn from Your word," you will find it opening up like a flower and it's got enormous truth in it. You will never reach the bottom of the truth in the word of God if you're open and you're willing to let God teach you.

I heard about a high school teacher who was saying to his class, "I read the Bible and I just don't get anything out of it." One girl in the class raised her hand and she said, "Sir, the Bible is God's love letter to His children. That's what you get for reading somebody else's mail." If you don't "get it" it's because you're not in tune with the Author. This is the only book ever written that you can actually talk to the author, the Holy Spirit, while you're reading it. When you do that you're going to get a lot more out of it.

1 Thess 2:13 And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.

John Stott wrote: "We need to repent of the haughty way in which we sometimes stand in judgment upon Scripture and must learn to sit humbly under its judgments instead. If we come to Scripture with our minds made up, expecting to hear from it only an echo of our own thoughts and never the thunderclap of God's, then indeed he will not speak to us and we shall only be confirmed in our own prejudices. We must allow the Word of God to confront us, to disturb our security, to undermine our complacency and to overthrow our patterns of thought and behavior."

I see so many people today that say they are Christians but do not believe the Bible. You cannot claim to be a Christian and reject the Bible. The word Christian literally means 'a little Christ'. Being a Christian means that you are an imitator of Jesus. The Bible tells us who Jesus was and what he was like. Therefore you cannot claim to be a Christian without knowing and doing what the Bible says.

I hear others who say 'Well, I only follow the teaching of Jesus. I don't place the same value on the teachings of Paul or the other apostles.' What about this scripture;

2Tim 3:16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

There are lots of great books you can read but then there's *the* book. This book is God's word and it is inspired in a way that no other book is inspired. John Wesley once said "I am a man of one Book" which should be true for all of us. The Bible is God-breathed. Every word of it came from God and was inspired by Him. Yes, human individuals wrote it down but it's source was God Himself.

Before you can study the Bible you have to accept its authority. You are going to have to decide this issue – what is the authority in my life? What is my measure between truth and error. What is true, right, and good.

2. I must ANALYZE it – learn to study

A closed Bible doesn't do any good. It could sit here on the shelf and it will never help me. It could sit on my coffee table and gather dust. It can have all the authority in the world but if I don't study this book it doesn't do me any good.

Jerry Vines said, "An unread Bible is like food uneaten, a love letter never read, a buried sword, a road map unstudied, gold never mined"

2 Tim 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

Martin Luther wrote, "I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb – study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings."

Maybe you are thinking that you know you should study the Bible but you don't know how. Let me give you some tips that have helped me and hopefully will help you as well.

- a. You need to PRAY – ask for guidance

All Bible study starts and ends with prayer. To get the most out of the Bible you need the Holy Spirit to help illuminate God's word in your heart. Ask God for insight and He will give it.

Psalm 119:18 Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law

At the turn of the century the world's most distinguished astronomer was Sir Percival Lowell. He was esteemed for his study of the solar system and had a particular fascination with Mars. He was certain that he had determined that there were CANALS on the surface of the Red Planet and that these canals were proof of intelligent life there. The balance of his life was spent squinting through a giant telescope in Arizona mapping the channels and canals he saw. He was so esteemed his teachings gained wide acceptance. Since that time our space probes have orbited Mars and even landed on its surface. The entire planet has been mapped and no one has seen even one canal. It is now assumed that Percival Lowell had a rare eye disease which is now called 'Lowell's syndrome' which makes a person see the bulging blood vessels in their own eyeballs. Part of Bible study is asking that the Holy Spirit reveal God's truth to us and pray we are not led into error by our own limited perspective and foolishness.

- b. You need a PENCIL – take notes

Bible study is different than your personal quiet time. Bible reading is good and the Bible tells us we are to read the word of God on a consistent regular basis. However, study and reading are two different things. If you don't write things down it is not Bible study. The shortest pencil is longer than the longest memory. This is also true in church. The difference between hearing God's word and interacting with it is often as easy as just taking notes.

During one Super Bowl, FedEx ran a commercial that spoofed the movie Castaway, in which Tom Hanks played a FedEx worker whose company plane went down, stranding him on a desert island for years. Looking like the bedraggled Hanks in the movie, the FedEx employee in the commercial goes up to the door of a suburban home, package in hand.

SHOW VIDEO – FedEx.mpg

- c. You need to PONDER – meditate on it

Meditation means giving serious thought to something. It is when you take a passage of scripture and you go over and over and over it in your mind. If you were to look the word "meditation" up in a dictionary you would find the synonym is the word "rumination." What's rumination? Rumination is what a cow does when it chews its cud. It swallows the grass which sits in the stomach for a time until it is burped back up to get chewed some more. It does this so that it can digest every ounce of nourishment and nutrition out of the grass that it possibly can. Meditation is simply thought digestion - seriously thinking about what you are reading.

Some expect the Word of God to hit them like a jolt of adrenaline each time they read or study it. Although the "jolt" may hit us periodically, the benefits of the Word of God act more like vitamins. People who regularly take vitamins do so because of their long-term benefits, not because every time they swallow one of the pills, they feel new strength surging through their bodies. They know that, in the long haul, vitamin supplements are going to have a beneficial effect on their physical health, resistance to disease and, general well-being.

The same is true of reading the Bible. At times it will have a sudden and intense impact on us. However, the real value lies in the cumulative effects that long-term exposure to God's Word will bring to our lives.

So how do you meditate on a passage of scripture?

**PICTURE IT** – visualize the scene

If you are reading about Jesus talking to the woman at the well, try picturing what it would have been like to have been there on that day. How would you act if Jesus came up and started talking to you? What would I feel if He started asking me questions? What would I say back to Him? Picture the scene in your mind. This is a great reason to visit Israel some time!

**PRONOUNCE IT** – say it aloud emphasizing different words

What you do in pronouncing a passage of scripture is you pronounce each word. You say the verse aloud each time emphasizing a different word. Try that with the verse "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Every time you emphasize a different word you get a little bit of a different meaning and see a little bit more depth in that verse.

A wealthy woman who was traveling overseas saw a bracelet she thought was irresistible, so she sent her husband this cable: "Have found wonderful bracelet. Price \$75,000. May I buy it?" Her husband promptly wired back this response: "No, price too high." But the cable operator omitted the comma, so the woman received this message: "No price too high." Elated, she purchased the bracelet. Needless to say, at her return her husband was dismayed. It was just a little thing -- a comma -- but what a difference it made!

**PARAPHRASE IT** – rewrite it in your own words

To paraphrase it just means to put it in your own words. One of the ways you do that is you read the verse and a good way to meditate is to just write out the verse in your own words. Many of the paraphrase translations that we get today, like the Living Bible and the Message paraphrase were by people who were scholars, read the word of God and then paraphrased it in modern language.

**PERSONALIZE IT** – put your name in it

To personalize it means you put your own name in the scripture. For instance, you know the famous verse John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Try saying the verse like this – For God so loved STEVE that he gave STEVE his one and only Son, that if STEVE believes in him then STEVE shall not perish but have everlasting life.

**PROBE IT** – ask questions

Probing it just means asking a lot of questions about the passage. You ask what the passage is about. Who are the main characters? Where is it taking place? Ask if in the passage there is a **SIN** to confess, **PROMISE** to claim, **ATTITUDE** to change, **COMMAND** to obey, **EXAMPLE** to follow, **PRAYER** to pray, **ERROR** to avoid, **TRUTH** to believe, or **SOMETHING** to thank God for.

Nobody ever outgrows Scripture; the book widens and deepens with our years. — CH Spurgeon

PRAY IT – pray the verse back to God

One last thing you can do is take the verse and pray it back to God. This is a way of taking the verse and making it real in your life. Ask if there is something in your life that has to change and then pray that God would give you the courage and strength to change it.

3. I must APPLY it – live it out

Someone once said that you only know the parts of the Bible that you put into practice. The last thing you do in Bible study is to take the message and truths you have studied and then live them out. They have to become a part of your everyday life. Life transformation should be the end result or fruit of study.

James 1:22-25 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it--he will be blessed in what he does.

J. Robertson McQuilkin said, "The goal of all Bible study is to apply the truth of Scripture to life. If that application is not made, all the work put into making sure of the author's intended meaning will have gone for naught. In fact, to know and not do, doubles the offense of disobedience"

Consider the difference between a strong and a weak cup of tea. The same ingredients water and tea are used for both. The difference is that the strong cup of tea results from the tea leaves' immersion in the water longer, allowing the water more time to get into the tea and the tea into the water. The longer the steeping process, the stronger the cup of tea. In the same way, the length of time we spend in God's Word determines how deeply we get into it and it gets into us. Just like the tea, the longer we are in the Word, the "stronger" we become.

Where are you at today in terms of growing in God's word? Do you have a regular time when you sit down and study it in detail? I don't just mean reading it but really meditating on it. I encourage you to learn to feed yourself from the Bible.

Four ministers were discussing the pros and cons of various Bible translations. Eventually each stated which version, in his opinion, was the best. The first minister said he used the King James because he liked the Old English and it was what he grew up on. The second said he preferred the New American Standard Bible because he felt it came nearer to the original Greek and Hebrew texts. The third minister said his favorite was the paraphrased Living Bible because his congregation was young, and it related to them in a practical way. All three men waited while the fourth minister sat silently. Finally he said, "I guess when it comes to translations of the Bible, I like my Dad's translation best. He put the Word of God into practice every day. It was the most convincing translation I've ever seen."

The Bible has often been described as 'Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth' (B.I.B.L.E.) The Word of God is a road map of how to live life correctly. However, it will do you not good sitting on your shelf. If you want to grow spiritually you need to become a student of God's word. It is God's love letter to you waiting to be read. Take some time today and study it. You will be glad you did.

As we close the service today, I would like to remind you of an exciting opportunity we have as a church this coming fall. We are launching a brand new ministry called H2O. It is an exciting and provocative 9 week. The course starts Wednesday, October 2<sup>nd</sup> and will continue every Wednesday until it winds up on Wednesday, December 4<sup>th</sup>. To make it easier for people to attend, evenings will begin at 6:30 pm with dinner. Following dinner, there will be a 25 minute video presentation each week. The videos are very well done. Let's watch a clip:

SHOW VIDEO – H2O 90 sec Promo Trailer.mpg

The videos will be followed by a one hour discussion time in smaller groups where people will have a chance to share their thoughts or questions about the topic for the week. Dismissal each week will be at 8:30 sharp. Kids are welcome and there is no charge for childcare.

This is an excellent course for people you know who do not know Jesus or perhaps have been turned off by the church at some point. I would recommend it to everyone.