

CHAPTER 7

LET'S STUDY THE BIBLE

Every parent desires to have healthy strong children. God, our heavenly Father, desires also to have spiritually healthy, strong children. Our spiritual health is reflected directly proportionate to our relationship to the truth of God's Word. If we read and study the Word of God and we conscientiously bring our lives into conformity to it, we will be changed into healthy, spiritual Christians.

The leisurely life of nomads and villagers we find in the Bible does not seem too remote from the horse and buggy days of the last century. Now our knowledge of the universe has exploded and our globe has shrunk into a community, only hours apart. We have grown up in a world of automation, television, atomic energy, computers and space travel.

Against this background, the question has been raised: "Is the Bible relevant to the needs of modern man?" To answer this question briefly, let me say that even though we live in a very different world than Biblical times, we are still the same sort of people as they were in Biblical times. Human nature had not changed even though our environment has changed. We are still the same sort of people as they were in Biblical times. Human nature has not changed even though our environment has changed. We still have a sinful nature. We still have neighbors and friends. We still fall in love, get married, and raise families. We still must find some means of earning a living. We still need to find a meaning and a purpose for life as much as they did in Biblical times. This does not come any easier because we have many inventions and the use of more gadgets.

In fact, there would be those who contend that the gadgets of the twenty first century obscure the most intimate needs of man. It is the Bible which deals with these basic needs. It is this Book which has become the compass and guide to millions to help them find their way through the storms and challenges of life. It gives direction to those who do not know what to do. It gives encouragement to those who have been defeated. It gives comfort to those who have been hurt. It gives strength to those who are weak.

More than once, the Scriptures compare the spiritual needs to the physical needs of the body. The Word of God is active in our spiritual birth. For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding Word of God." (NASV)

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It compares itself to the milk which is needed by newborn babes. "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow by it, if so be you have tasted that the Lord is gracious." It reprimands Christians who have been believers for some time that they should move from the diet of milk to one of solid foods.

"For when for the time you ought to be teachers, you have need that one teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God, and are become such as have need of milk, and not of solid food. For everyone that uses milk is unskillful in the Word of righteousness; for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."

It implies that the continual growth of the believer comes through the continual growth of the knowledge of our Lord. It says, "But grow in grace and in the knowledge of Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

Reference Group Number 1

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|-----------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Spiritual Birth | 1 Peter 1:23 |
| 2. Growth of Newborn | 1 Peter 2:2 & 3 |
| 3. Spiritual Maturity | Hebrews 5:12-14 |
| 4. Continual Growth | 2 Peter 3:18 |

Now we come to the reason for studying the Scriptures. There are at least four reasons.

First of all, God has commanded that we read the scriptures. In the Old Testament, God commanded the people of Israel as follows:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shall talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the post of they house, and on they gates."

The reason God wanted the people to teach the law to the children and talk about it in the home and everywhere they might be, was so that these words might be indelibly written on the heart.

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Again, Joshua was promised success if he would follow the instruction of the law. He was commanded:

"Be thou strong and very courageous that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses, my servant, commanded thee; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper wherever thou goest. This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth, but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein; for then thou shall make thy way prosperous, and then thou shall have good success."

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul admonishes the young man Timothy to "Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth." The same verse is translated in another version "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the Word of truth." The word translated "study" in the King James Bible means "to exert oneself." So we are admonished "to exert" ourselves to see that we handle the Word of truth correctly.

When God commands, it is the highest authority there could be to man. All other words; all other authorities must bow before Him. His Word must be read and studied worshipfully. When the believer comes to the Word of God in worship, he is placing himself in the position where God can speak to his heart.

God has commanded us to read His Word for it is God-breathed. The Bible says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." The words "by inspiration of God" are simply one word in the "Greek text of the New Testament. It is a compound word simply meaning "God-breathed" This Book is a "God-breathed" Book.

All creation sprang into being through the spoken Word of God, and since His sovereign Word still sustains all that He created, it is fitting that we should bow humbly before His written Word and seek to conform our lives to what is written.

Secondly, we should read and study the scriptures for it is in them we learn of Christ Himself. In 2 Peter 3:18, it states we are to "grow...in the

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knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." This was the Apostle Paul's ambition as he wrote, "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection."

We have the example of the Old Testament prophets recorded for us in 1 Peter when it speaks of our salvation. There it says:

"Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you, searching what, or what manner of the time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when he testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."

These men prophesied of Christ and the salvation He should bring, and then they had to go back to the very scriptures they had written and search and study about the time of the sufferings and the glories of Christ. If these men had to study the Scriptures, how much more should we!

Without the revelation of Jesus Christ through the Word of God, we would be devoid of an accurate understanding concerning Him, His works, or His ways, As we learn of our sovereign Lord and His ways we grow in our own wisdom and spiritual perception.

The apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian believers "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory" might give unto them "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of their understanding being enlightened; that they "may know what is the hope of His calling, and what is the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward those who believe."

In our physical life, we build relationships with people by spending time with them and getting to know them. So, in the spiritual life, we must spend time with Christ as revealed through the Word. We need to let Him speak to us through His Word and to deepen our knowledge of Him and the relationship we began when we first received Him as our Savior.

This brings us to the third reason for reading and studying the Bible. We need to be transformed into His likeness.

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In 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul speaks of the veil being upon the eyes of the people of Israel when the Law of Moses is read, but we who have given our hearts have unveiled faces. When we look into the Word of God which is represented as a "mirror" in this passage of Scripture, we see the glory of the Lord and "are changed into the same image." Thus, we should be moving from glory to glory in the Christian life as we are changed into the image of Christ.

In Romans 12, we are told to present our bodies to God "and be not conformed to this world, but be...transformed by the renewing of our minds." "The word "transformed" comes from the Greek word which is transliterated "metamorphosis" in English. The word means "to change into another form." In Romans 12, the obligation indicates a complete change which "under the power of God, will find expression in character and conduct." (Vine) This stresses the inward change that is necessary. The inward change will come as we renew our minds.

The Scriptures are sometimes referred to as the "canon" of scriptures. The word canon is derived from Hebrew word meaning "reed." In primitive societies, the reed could be used as a level, a plumb-line, but particularly as a ruler for drawing a straight line. In English, the "rule" has two meanings. It can mean an instrument for drawing a straight line or it can mean a law for leading a straight life.

What better "ruler" or "canon" could we have than the Bible? It gives us a straight line of action to follow in every major relationship of life. We are to bring our lives into conformity to it. In so doing, we would be renewing our minds and changing our lives to conform to the image of Christ.

Last of all, the Bible will equip the child of God for the work of the ministry and direct him as he carries out this work. In Ephesians 4, the apostle states that God gave evangelists, pastors, teachers, and others for the "equipping" of the saints for the work of the ministry. (NASV) But these men have nothing to impart that will build up the saint besides the Word of God. In the 15th verse of this chapter, it directs the child of God to speak "the truth in love," John's gospel tells us "Thy word is truth." It is the impartation of the truth through these men of God that will cause the believer to grow up in Christ and become a functioning part of the body of Christ.

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Look up these verses in Reference Group Number 2

1. Reasons for Bible Reading and study.
 - A. God commands it
 1. People of Israel. Deuteronomy 6:6-9
 2. Joshua promised prosperity. Joshua 1:7-8
 3. Timothy admonished to exert himself to study
2 Timothy 2:15
 - a. We are to come humbly to Word
 - b. Scriptures are God-breathed. 2 Timothy 3:16
 - B. We learn of Christ.
 1. Grow... in knowledge of Christ." 2 Peter 3:18
 2. Old Testament prophets searched Scriptures. 1 Peter 1:10-11
 3. Scriptures enlighten believer's eyes Ephesians 1:17-19
 4. We build relationships as we get to know people.
Philippians 3:10
 - C. We need to change our lives.
 1. Word of God reveals "glory" of the Lord.
(Israel could not see for veiled face.) 2 Corinthians 3:18 cf. v. 14
 2. Metamorphosis should take place Romans 12:1,2
 - a. Inward change necessary
 - b. "canon" of Scriptures is the standard
to which we are to conform.
 - D. We need to be equipped for our ministry.
 1. Saints are equipped as the truth of God is taught.
Ephesians 4:11-16 cf. v. 15
 2. "Truth" of God revealed through Word of God
John 17:17

Often, I am asked, "Where should I start to read or study the Bible?"
Should I start reading at Genesis and read the Bible straight through?
Should I forget the Old Testament and read the New Testament only?"

The answers to questions like this are not always "yes" and "no" answers. Sometimes you should start at Genesis and read it right through. However, I would discourage this if you do not have much Biblical background. I would generally suggest that a person begin reading in the New Testament but not to the exclusion of the Old Testament forever.

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Usually, I suggest that people begin by reading and studying the Gospel of John. There are several reasons for this. First, the Gospel of John has a good balance of historical data and doctrinal teaching. The pattern John follows in his record of Christ's life and ministry is to give a historical account and then the doctrinal truths that arose from the incident.

Also, in the Gospel of John the language is very clear and simple. That is, John usually states a truth more than one way. He carefully explains what he is talking about. The only exception to this rule is when he starts the book, he refers to Christ as the "Word of God." Though he identifies him as such the explanation for calling Him "the Word" escapes any explanation in the Scripture.

We should first of all, discover what the Holy Spirit is endeavoring to convey through the human author as he originally wrote the book. This is interpretation. We should understand the particular setting of the experiences of a particular people; written at a particular time in history. Fortunately, there are unlimited aids to help one understand these historical truths. There are books on archeology, Bible dictionaries, Bible atlases, and Bible handbooks. All of these are designed to help the student to come to a better understanding of the background of the Bible.

The Holy Spirit does not lead independently of the truths of the Scripture. To the contrary, He always leads in accord with Scripture. The promise is given that when He "The Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth." Of course, this applies to truth in the sphere of the Christian doctrine and practice. This is a wonderful principle revealed here. He promises to guide us into all truth. The fact that He "guides" suggests process--a pilgrimage. He reveals truths to us as we are able to bear the revelation. The more you learn of God and His works, the more He will open up your understanding in relation to His Word. I am continually amazed with this principle in my own life. I have often read and studied a passage of Scripture only to see some new truth later as I mature in my Christian experience.

Interpret the Bible literally. Don't try to read in anything that is not there. Jerusalem is a real place. Israel is a real nation. Judgment is a real event that will take place. If God is speaking about a mountain understand it to be a mountain don't try to spiritualize places, events or things.

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When the Word of God is to be interpreted symbolically, it usually uses symbolic language. Look for words "like" or "as." If it is symbolic language, look for the literal meaning of the symbolic language.

Next, remember the Bible is a unit. It is broken up into sixty-six books which are inter-related. They are all attached to the truth of redemption for this is the theme of the Bible. Each of the books then relates to the whole. Each book is divided up into chapters and verses. This was not true in the original documents. This convenience did not happen until 1250 and 1551 A.D. respectively. This certainly helps us to find the various passages we want. However, the divisions are not always best. If you do not have a Bible that gives the paragraph division, which are the thought units, make your next purchase a Bible with this help. The New American Standard Version divides the Bible into verses but the paragraphs or thought units are designated by bold-faced number or letters. These thought units are divided into sentences and phrases, and then finally into the words themselves.

Try to form the habit of always looking to the context before interpreting a word, a verse, a thought unit, chapter or a book. The more we learn the great sweep of the whole of Scripture, the more we shall grow in discernment in understanding its details. It is also true that as we study the details, we shall better understand the great sweep of the whole Scripture.

Avoid the trap of looking for new truths without personally applying the truth to our own lives. This will lead to a legalistic and dead orthodoxy. What good would it be to know all of the truths about the Bible and what it teaches and yet not have any inward peace or conformity to what God wants of us.

We must then apply the truths to our life. This is the reflection of a proper attitude. We cannot approach the Scriptures with the attitude that we have not had the proper education in a Bible school or that we lack the outstanding mental ability that is needed to help us understand. We need to approach the Bible with the assurance that the Holy Spirit will guide us into all truth. We need to believe God has something to give us from His Word each time we open it. There needs to be a spirit of expectancy and receptivity.

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We must be obedient to the truths the Holy Spirit draws to our attention. On many manufactured products, the directions are given clearly and in detail yet we often charge ahead "doing it our own way," After much frustration, we often dig out the "directions" and try to follow them after all else has failed. The believer often does not follow the Biblical instructions any better. We try to figure out the best way to go in a particular situation and then, when our human wisdom fails, we fall back on the Biblical instructions to see what we should have done. We should search the truths of Scripture first and be obedient to what it says.

We are disobedient at times because we neglect to give the Scripture the proper place in our daily lives; but if we are willfully disobedient to its truths, then God must deal severely. God will discipline the children He loves to bring them into conformity to His standard. He wants us to be "partakers of His holiness." Therefore, we should be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Look up Reference Group Number 3

The Word of God and what it will do:

- a. It is eternal. Mark 13:31; 1 Peter 1:24-25
- b. It brings blessing. Luke 11:28
- c. It brings truth and freedom. John 8:31-32
- d. It has cleansing ability. John 15:3; Ephesians 5:26
- e. It brings faith. Romans 10:17
- f. It gives hope. Romans 15:4
- g. It brings honor. 2 Timothy 2:15
- h. It gives wisdom and salvation. 2 Timothy 3:15-17
- i. It discerns intents of heart. Hebrews 4:12
- j. It aids spiritual growth. 1 Peter 2:2
- k. It brings joy. 1 John 1:4
- l. It brings victory over Satan. 1 John 2:14
- m. It aids in answers to prayer. 1 John 3:22
- n. It gives assurance. 1 John 5:13

There needs to be a method of Bible study adopted. One man has listed seventeen different methods of studying the Scripture. I want to simply suggest a few methods which have been helpful to me.

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One method would be to choose a book like the Gospel of John and read it through at least three times. This may take a week or two to complete. Then after getting an overview, break it down by chapters. Read no more than a chapter a day and write down those truths and practical applications you find from your study. This could be followed up by reading a good devotional commentary. You could ask your pastor for some suggestions.

Another method of study would be to take a subject such as redemption, justification, sanctification, the second coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead or any of the many subjects in which you might be interested. Get a good concordance or topical index and follow that one subject through Scripture. List every verse and briefly state what that verse is saying about that subject. After you have exhausted the verses, try to organize the passages of Scripture into topical groupings so that you understand what God says about the subject of study.

One of the most rewarding times I had in my daily devotional time was when I was facing a time of severe testing in my ministry. During that entire year, I simply read a Psalm and related my personal thoughts in a notebook of the Psalm under consideration. I have often re-read these Psalms and the notes. The assurance God gave during those days have been a rich blessing to me.

It is good just to read the Bible through. On a number of occasions over the years since I have been a believer, I have endeavored to read the Bible through in a year's time. A person must read between three or four chapters a day to completely read the Bible through in a year. One of the best benefits besides getting an overview of the Scriptures is the daily discipline it takes to do it every day. If you miss a day, you're seven chapters behind and if you miss two days, you have over ten chapters to make up. When you are trying to catch up, you don't get as much out of what you read. Therefore, if you start a project like this, you must daily discipline yourself.

Remember the story of the tortoise and the hare. A little faithful reading or studying every day will get you further in the end than sudden spurts of study intermingled with days of no reading or study. You may ask when you are going to find time every day to read or study a little. Every week night may be taken up with committee or board meetings, bowling, socials, and all sorts of engagements. Some have faced this problem and

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have concluded that they must find a time in the morning before the day's activities begin. Then they are ready for the challenges of the day. Personally, I would suggest this quiet time for the Lord and His Word.

When you study is not as important as the doing of it. If you have so many activities that they crowd out your Bible time, then as a believer, you are too busy! There may need to be a re-alignment of your priorities.

If you are dependent upon the Sunday services only, you are destined to be a weak Christian. Banquets are nice but if you ate at one, only one, banquet a week, you would be a very weak person. Some people depend upon the church services for the pastor to spoon-feed them their weekly spiritual rations. You need more than that. Nothing will help you grow and mature more as a believer than the daily consistent reading and studying of the scriptures.

I encourage you to be faithful to this Book. God will richly bless your life if you are.

Do this Exercise:

1. Read Luke 8:4-15 and list the four types of soil:

2. What does the seed represent? _____
3. Write out what each soil represents, spiritually:

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

4. In the future, what type of soil do you wish to have represented in your life? _____

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